Małgorzata Izabela Słomczyńska
PEDAGOGIUM Warsaw School of Education and Social Sciences

Social pathologies in the context of crisis of the modern family

The Polish family is a strong force of inertia, a speed which it gathered no one knows when. It is based on harmful stereotypes, but which are not subject to discussion. The family is not strong nor is it God, or faith, or the law or state. The family can become a strong will of all the people belonging to it. Effort is needed for this. Daily effort for love, friendship, camaraderie, truth, sincerity.

Mirosława Kątna

Abstract: The problems of the modern family threaten its stability and aid the occurrence of the crisis. The pedagogical environment such as a family in the context of the crisis and accompanying social pathology is no longer the source of safety and pattern of social norms. Dysfunctional family is not able to fulfil its fundamental functions, therefore, it requires identifying the problem and appropriate support adjusted to its needs. This working paper tries to define functions of the modern Polish family as a basic pedagogical environment testifying that it is a source of experience, cultural patterns and social norms. The paper presents factors which disorganize and weaken its functions and destabilize family ties. The crisis of the family is shown as a result of appearing pathologic determinants. It points out that the family which is affected by pathology experiences the crisis of traditional values. The result of this is lack of favorable conditions for development of children. Reproducing deviant behaviours by children in the family enviroment causes not only the threat of lack of social adjustment, but also it may determinate generational dysfunctionality as a result of relaid norms and system
of values. The aim of this working paper is to point out social pathologies accompanying the crisis of the modern Polish family. Identifying broadly defined violence and alcoholism as factors threatening its stability. Defining the magnitude of the problem by analyzing selected family pathology research. The presentation of the system of preventative actions, forms of help, remedial models and social support which aim at countering the social exclusion of families in crisis. Key words: family, crisis, pathology, social support, pedagogic environment, dysfunctionality, social group.

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Very often family is considered to be the basic and most primary educational environment due to its significant impact on the development of a child, which, in its vulnerability is totally dependent on it. The observed and experienced violence in the family being a manifestation of its pathology, is undoubtedly of a primal nature. Family patterns are often reproduced by its members, particularly children, who through imprinting take certain behaviours that are observed, experienced, imitating them intentionally as a form of coping in social situations or unintentional forms of behaviour, which independently become the norm for them.

August Comte believed family to be the most important, the basic social group, on which all of society is based. Also today, the family is considered to be one of the smallest social groups. Thanks to studies in the field of sociology and psychology, the major functions of the family have been characterized, which it fulfills in the life of an individual and various types of communities. From the sociological point of view, as it has been mentioned previously, the family is recognized as the original, small social group.

Psychology and pedagogy define family as a social and educational environment of the individual. Currently, researchers put forward the conclusion that the truism is to say that family is the primary and natural environment of a human life. From birth, the individual experiences important situations in life for his development and social functioning. Therefore, its value as a social and cultural environment cannot be overestimated, as a place in which a person grows and forms his personality. Recognizing this primary thesis as a truism is probably related to the numerous changes in family systems that have been made over the decades and led to the creation of new formations (cohabitation, reconstructed family, single parenting, free relationships, homosexual relationships). They are different from those previously accepted and widely recognized.

When considering the family in the context of social pathology, and taking into account the family crisis as a consequence of the occurrence of pathological

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determinants, it can be recognized as a set of environmental and educational conditions affecting the educational development of the individual4.

Literature also indicates that the family may have an impact on the development of individuals in two ways. Creating conditions to acquire experiences and signify their character, and passing on patterns to the individual, cultural tools and ways to develop experiences in cognitive terms, emotional terms and in terms of values. Not every type of interpersonal relations in the family is a sound system from the point of view of the functioning of the family as an environment of development of its individual members. Living and growing in a healthy system of family relationships, with a clear division of roles, clear intergenerational boundaries, but with a clear communication and mutual sense of community, while giving freedom to each individual of the group, is conducive to individual development of family members5.

Growing and functioning in a family of dysfunctional, pathological interpersonal relations is not conducive to individual development and in extreme cases leads to different developmental disorders with severe psychoses included6. So what kind of family is one that ineptly realizes its entrusted tasks and where should cause for this be found?

A pathological family can be considered one that is not able to carry out its tasks in terms of each of its member. The cause of this failure is sought in itself as a certain type of structure of inter-dependencies. There are numerous factors that may contribute to the weakening of the functioning of the family or its disorganization. Instability can be experienced by families regardless of their material, cultural, social or generational status. Family stability largely depends on the dynamics of bonds and an internal sense of community, needs, personality traits, aspirations and expectations of its members.

Global society, along with hierarchical social systems therein affects the family, respectively modifying its structure, functioning, the mentality of its members. Better or worse existence of the family is associated directly with the quality of life of its members and greatly determines the degree of efficiency of functioning of society7. Any type of pathology in a family significantly interferes with its functionality.

The modern family satisfies the sense of security necessary for the fundamental and proper development of the human being. The deficit of higher feelings in the family, such as: love, friendship, kindness, joy, empathy and mutual under-

5 Ibidem.
standing, becomes a source of social maladjustment in children and adolescents growing up in it\(^8\). Noteworthy is also the fact that the lack of sufficient sexual satisfaction of one or both spouses is now much more likely to cause a conflict than in the past\(^9\). This situation very often leads to a breakdown and disruption of family life. The desire to meet individual needs of its members outside the family contributes to its decline as a system, shaping new standards and affecting the mutual relationships between spouses and even the children.

Also the socio-educational function of the family in times of civilization has made significant transformations. Its scope has narrowed due to the area of functioning of other institutions, at the same time, due to complicated social conditions of the modern world educational requirements that are imposed on the family have increased\(^10\). It should be noted that despite the many changes, incorrect behaviours of individuals are still primarily rooted in the family, which may interfere with its functioning or pathologize it\(^11\).

In the modern family there is a clear emancipation of children, the scope of their freedom and independence has increased, especially in the case of young people. The conscious influence of parents on children has relatively decreased, also influences of intrafamilial spontaneous socialization have reduced. A major concern of society is that the development of modern civilization having a strong impact on the family and the individual also generates negative phenomena from the point of view of eufunctionality (maintenance function) of the family and individuals in relation to family and society. Currently, the family as an independent variable influences the personality, functioning of individuals, and also significantly shapes their fates\(^12\).

If the functioning of families, their condition worsens, this has a negative effect on the functioning of both individuals and society\(^13\).

In literature, the assumption is adopted in accordance to which the family system constitutes a complex, integrated whole, marked in organized patterns of mutual interaction. The family as an environment of development of each individual forming it, at the same time is subject to changes under the influence of the development of these individuals\(^14\).

Factors are being observed which are conducive to the family carrying out its function or substantially impede them. A factor that has an adverse effect on

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\(^8\) B. M. Nowak, *Rodzina w kryzysie...*

\(^9\) Z. Tyszka, *Rodzina w świecie współczesnym...*

\(^10\) Ibidem.


\(^12\) Z. Tyszka, *Rodzina w świecie współczesnym...*

\(^13\) Ibidem.

the functioning of families is paucity, especially poverty. Life on the border of satisfying the basic domestic, health, educational needs or the inability to satisfy them due to financial constraints, significantly affects relations within the family, bringing tension and anxiety, it also often tends to cause conflicts.

Many families experience difficult, sometimes traumatic experiences, which put the ties between its members to the test, but also affect its stability. Death, long-term illness, disability can become the cause of shock, cause injury that will condition the atmosphere in the family, interfere with its sense of security and stability.

A threat to the stability of the family appears when we are dealing with the accumulation of problems and a visible lack of motivation to engage in constructively solving them, as well as defence against their destructive influence. For many Polish families, a solution to this state is e.g.: alcoholism. However, it causes even greater conflicts, interferes with relationships, leading to a breakdown of the family. It becomes the cause of social orphanhood of children, crime and degradation of the family as the educational environment, which should be a source of security and a model of standards.

The most dangerous manifestations of pathologies affecting the family include violence. We observe it with varying degrees of severity, and in different forms in all types of families, regardless of social and environmental status. The victims of violence are most commonly women, children, people with disabilities and older people. Violence can be physical (beating), psychological, economic, sexual (mostly concerns women and children).

Growing up in a family affected by pathology in the case of many children is a prerequisite for reproducing the deviant behaviour of the parents in adult life.

The dysfunction of a family contributes to the incidence of learning difficulties in children, upbringing problems at school and the peer environment. Due to the specificity of educational norms and the environment of growing up these are children manifesting behavioural disorders, socially maladjusted or threatened by social maladjustment.

The identification of the problems of a modern family is an important element in determining the presence of pathology in its area, which leads to family crisis.

The family functions properly when all its members cooperate to meet individual and collective needs. Strong bonds are created and identity forms in such an environment. The family is a place in which the individual socializes, builds an image of one’s own self, satisfying his emotional needs, grows and develops. Currently, some families more strongly feel the effects of the global economic crisis, which substantially contributes to the growing marginalization and social exclusion of those that are not coping in this situation. Modernity has generated a crisis of traditional values, the manifestation of which is the human being's con-

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15 B.M. Nowak, *Rodzina w kryzysie*...
centration on material goods. The attitude “have” dominates over “be”, and there is a secularization of the personal and social life. Progressive anomy is increasingly permeating family communities, the stability of which violates unemployment, widely understood social maladjustment and pathologization of the family social life (abuse, prostitution, various addictions e.g.: to psychoactive substances, the Internet, alcohol, sex, television)\(^{16}\). All of these events in a family environment, to varying degrees, have a negative effect on the durability of its relationships, destructively violating the entire family system.

In literature on the subject, “crisis” is referred to as an obstacle in achieving life goals, which cannot be removed using conventional methods\(^ {17}\). According to literature, from the multiple attempts to define the essence of crisis, a common axis of reasoning can be deduced. A crisis situation is coupled with the emotional or cognitive reaction to its appearance. A response to a traumatic event, a problem or difficult situation is always a subjective response. Crisis in this context is perceived as the experience of loss of control over one's life in the absence of any possible remedies\(^ {18}\).

The perception of personal gridlock is generally the result of an unrealistic perception of one's own situation dictated by stressful circumstances. It is most commonly also accompanied by negative emotional reactions. Such a way of perceiving one's own reality often does not allow one to see the objective possibilities of countermeasures to the pathology appearing in the family.

At this point, it might be worth considering to define what pathology in the family is and what are its determinants and manifestations.

The term social pathology was formulated at the beginning of the 20th century and popularized in American and English sociological literature\(^ {19}\). Today, there are many attempts to define this phenomenon. Difficulties in establishing a definition occur on account of problems with regard to the criteria and classification resulting from pluralism and moral relativism\(^ {20}\).

The founder and populariser of the Polish school of social pathology is believed to be Adam Podgórecki\(^ {21}\). He defines social pathology as “the kind of behaviour, the type of institution, the type of functioning of some social system or the type of structure, which is essentially irreconcilable with the world views which are accepted in a given community”\(^ {22}\). Currently, social pathology is defined as “a negative social phenomenon, which must take into account the violations of norms and values, the presence of destructive behaviours measured by a scale of

\(^{16}\) Ibidem.
\(^{17}\) Ibidem.
\(^{18}\) Ibidem.
\(^{19}\) L. Pytka, B.M. Nowak (red.), Problemy współczesnej resocjalizacji, Warszawa 2010.
\(^{20}\) Ibidem.
\(^{22}\) A. Podgórecki, Patologia życia społecznego, Warsaw 1969.
social condemnation, occur in a larger population or in mass scale. It is necessary to use collective force to stand up to these kinds of problems.\(^{23}\)

As it has already been mentioned, numerous changes and the progress of civilization contribute to significant transformations in family environments. The economic status, level of education and family structure are subject to fundamental changes. On the one hand, this situation contributes to the development of these communities in terms of ambition, aspiration and welfare and, on the other hand, becomes the cause of threats to individuals and vulnerable groups of reduced activity. Unresolved or neglected social problems generate pathological phenomena, posing a real threat not only to the individuals and groups affected by them, but also for the whole functioning of a given community.\(^{24}\)

Alcoholism, as one of the forms of social pathology, is an important predictor of social poverty, domestic violence, homelessness, legal problems. At the same time, it is a consequence of earlier social problems.\(^{25}\) For many families it is a form of escape or coping with the present problems resulting from the economic status (loss of a job), traumatizing situation in the family and even disability.

Another manifestation of pathology is domestic violence that can occur in multiple forms as physical, psychological, sexual, but also economic. In every aspect, it significantly violates the rights and personal goods of the victim. It causes physical and mental suffering. It contributes to pain and often coexists with other pathologies (e.g. alcoholism). This is a fully intended response, using the intrafamilial weakness of its victims. Violence is generally experienced by individuals who are weaker than the perpetrator (spouse, child, elderly or handicapped person). Most commonly the partner uses violence, less commonly parents, siblings, guardians or friends.\(^{26}\) Any type of pathology occurring in the family speaks of its crisis and requires to take special remedial action.

The circumstances, which are also associated with the onset of a crisis in a family and could lead to its pathology, are mainly: a situation of deprivation of basic needs, intrafamilial conflicts occurring on the grounds of non-compliance or conflict of values, objectives and interests of its members.\(^{27}\)

The balance of the family system is also affected by life-, health- or safety-threatening situations, loss of values, property, social position or privileges. They can lead to disturbances in its functioning. Family life is also disorganized by functional overloads in the scope of social roles performed, becoming a source of physical and mental exhaustion. Families affected by pathology and in crisis are not able to independently create a favourable environment for comprehensive develop-

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23 I. Pospiszyl, op. cit.
24 L. Pytka, B.M. Nowak (red.), op. cit.
25 B.M. Nowak, Rodzina w kryzysie..., Ibidem.
26 Ibidem.
27 Ibidem.
opment of offspring. They do not equip the children with competences necessary for independent adult functioning. They do not pass on model strategies helpful in coping with stress. They don’t teach flexible way of thinking and creative problem-solving. Deep parenting deficits directly translate into a phenomenon of inheriting pathology, growth of the area of social maladjustment and crime.

Today, we are dealing with a multiplicity of crisis-generating situations of families. Family dysfunctions are treated as shameful matters, which should not be made public due to the fact that they lead to social stigma of the family. A consequence of the stereotypical perception of the problems of families is its members taking up masking measures, which leads to the strengthening of the pathology. The dysfunction of a family marked by the presence of a pathological phenomenon (crime, alcoholism, domestic violence, prostitution, drug addiction) is manifested in the creation of family life on the basis of behavioural patterns, norms and values that are socially unaccepted. Children being brought up in it internalize faulty attitudes and behaviours of other family members, while badly adjusting socially, and in adulthood they build their own dysfunctional families.

The source of deep psychological crisis (individual and family) is when the family suddenly, and often unexpectedly, must face the loss of a close relative. A similar impact on its functioning is a serious illness or disability of one of the members.

Especially difficult for families is a situation in which the disability or serious illness touches a child, e.g.: it is born sick or with a disability. The health or developmental dysfunction in a child is a huge mental load for parents. It is a source of anxiety, unpleasant sensations. Both in the case of the parents, who are expecting healthy offspring, as well as those who enjoy a healthy child, a diagnosis of e.g.: a heart defect, Down Syndrome or joined disability violates their supreme value, which is the health of their child. This could cause them emotional shock, resulting in disorders of mental balance, confusion and a sense of helplessness. The process of treatment and rehabilitation of a sick/disabled child is a very aggravating situation for the parents, mentally and emotionally; therefore, it may lead to seeking alternative means of coping with stress and generate different types of conflicts being the result of overburdens associated with caring for it.

For many modern families, the original source of the crisis is also social maladjustment of children brought up in it. The limited educational capacity of many families often becomes a cause of its internal conflicts, leads to a disturbance of norms and values adopted in it, causing the loss of members of the entire system.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{28} Ibidem.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{29} Ibidem.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{30} Ibidem.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{31} Ibidem.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{32} Ibidem.}\]
Social pathologies as the factor of crisis of the modern family
A review of selected studies

In 2012, studies were carried out concerning violence in the family. On the basis of the report from studies carried out on the order of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy by the Research Institute Millward Brown SMK/KRC in December 2012, characteristics have been made of people touched by domestic violence. According to the data contained in the report, among people affected by domestic violence were most frequently persons from 31 to 50 years old – 83%, from 19 to 30 years old – 62%, from 51 to 60 years old – 64%, from 61 to 70 years old – 37%. In the case of children and adolescents, persons indicated were from 6 to 14 years old – 46%, and from 15 to 18 years old – 42%. Children at preschool age from 3 to 5 years old – 19%. The youngest children – up to 2 years old – 9%. Among the largest group of people experiencing abuse were people with vocational education – 86% and primary education – 82%, and with high school education – 70% of this population. People with higher education were indicated least frequently – 32%. Domestic violence touched unemployed persons – 90%, casually employed persons – 75%, persons employed full-time – 69%. In the case of 63%, the persons using violence were men.

Among the total number of adult Poles, who were included in the study on domestic violence 44% of them said they had experienced violence on the part of someone in the family/household (38% – psychological abuse, 27% – physical abuse, and 5% – sexual abuse). Among the surveyed Poles, 32% admitted that it had occurred for them to use violence towards a family/household member (including: 26% – psychological abuse, 16% – physical abuse, and 1% – sexual abuse). In the opinion of the majority of surveyed Poles (59%) domestic violence in Poland concerns between 20% and 59% of families. Close to one quarter (23%) of surveyed Poles say that domestic violence in Poland concerns more than 60% of families. According to the remaining respondents (12% of the population), there is around 19% of families affected by the problem of violence.

Similar studies were carried out in 2010 by TNS OBOP commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Most frequently indicated forms of domestic violence was physical, psychological, economic and sexual abuse. They also

concerned violence in the family. “The phenomenon of domestic violence towards women and men” was studied. Respondents also pointed to negligence and omission as a form of abuse associated with dependency in the family, which mainly concerns children, the elderly and the handicapped\textsuperscript{35}. This probably has to do with a strong dependence in this group in various spheres of life, conditioned by their current psychophysical state.

The report from the studies indicated that the most common victims of physical abuse in the family are women. At the same time, they most often use psychological abuse. While men most commonly commit sexual abuse. According to the respondents, this is associated with the stereotype of marital obligation. It occurs in the family in a situation where a breakdown of the marriage has occurred, and ex-spouses share a flat together. Frequently cited were cases of using economic abuse in relation to the elderly. Social groups, in which there is a difficulty in helping families touched by violence, in the light of the report, those in which the perpetrator is a “uniformed” employee or person connected with the judiciary system. In these cases, as the report indicates, the victim is subject to additional coercion and loses hope for reliable help. Respondents indicated several factors conditioning the increased likelihood of violence occurring. These included: unemployment, trouble at work, housing problems, addictions (mainly alcoholism), sickness and disability of a family member, emotional problems (betrayal, suspicion of betrayal). According to some respondents, the occurrence of domestic violence may be conditioned by the model of the family, the division of roles and responsibilities between its individual members.

The conclusions which arise after the analysis of the results of these studies confirm the theoretical considerations on the occurrence, etiology and scale of pathology in the family.

\section*{Counteracting pathology in the family and recovery models}

\textit{...there are no simple and clear recipes for life. Anyone who says otherwise simply wants to deceive you. Nothing is good enough to introduce into your own family, between you and the children, without consideration. But also, nothing is bad in itself, that it does not deserve consideration”.

Mirosława Kątna

\textsuperscript{35} http://www.mpips.gov.pl/gfx/mpips/userfiles/_public/3_2010_Raport%20z%20badania%20jakosciowego_01-03-11.pdf [access: 11.11.2013].}
Helping a family affected by pathology can be considered as a kind of a continuum between the formal assistance procedures and involvement and human sensitivity. Objectification of procedural-legal effects is necessary, correlated with sensitivity, individualized approach and openness to other people's problems. As it can be seen from the cited report of studies, most respondents regarded therapy as the most desirable form of assistance to families affected by pathology, and within counteraction – prevention. Prevention is aimed at undertaking measures directed at counteracting the factors disorganizing the life of families and leading it to its pathologization, such as: unemployment, addictions (alcoholism, psychoactive substances, the Internet), violence. Its purpose is also activities limiting social exclusion of families affected by different types of pathology. As part of widely-understood prevention, the state undertakes information, educational and intervention measures aimed to help the family in crisis, resulting from pathological factors occurring in its structures. In the face of these threats, activation of the social environment is essential in order to provide assistance to families at risk or affected by pathology.

Counteracting various pathologies in the family and helping families in difficult, crisis situations is dealt with by various types of organizations. Extremely important in the field of prevention of domestic violence are activities of associations and foundations operating in favour of counteracting family pathology. In a situation where a family or individual functioning in it cannot see and overcome their own difficult (pathological) situation, at the same time becoming unable to function further, it is necessary to provide it with the proper support from the outside. Depending on the needs, it may take many forms. The nature of assistance provided to a family might have an emotional dimension, instrumental, material or be in the form of intervention in a crisis situation36. The consistency of the family is a crucial condition for its proper functioning and stability, but also for the success of the preventive and support actions taken.

In Poland, there are several systems of social policy, aimed at the comprehensive settlement of the painful social problems of families. Their strategy is based, among others, on supporting families in incurring the costs of living and upbringing children through a system of family benefits and allowances, equalizing the opportunities of children and adolescents through the development of socio-educational services, family and psycho-pedagogical counselling, facilitating access to education and various forms of leisure time for children and adolescents from families at risk of social exclusion, undertaking activities for the social inclusion of the elderly and handicapped, assisting families in overcoming a crisis by expanding the forms of social work, professional counselling, and crisis intervention.

36 B.M. Nowak, Rodzina w kryzysie...
Priority action is to build a comprehensive system of prophylaxis in preventing crime, demoralization and addiction, the support of NGOs acting against the phenomena of social maladjustment in children and adolescents, to create a comprehensive system of probation\textsuperscript{37}. An important element of the support system for families in difficult situations is undertaking measures for professional and social rehabilitation of the handicapped and post-penitentiary support. Such preventive activity is particularly significant for the activation of people belonging to groups at risk of social exclusion.

The effectiveness of the preventive actions taken is conditioned by the adequacy of chosen forms of work to the type and degree of threat\textsuperscript{38}. Most prevention programmes implemented in local communities, however, are not bringing the expected results. They are focused mainly on the prevention of addiction and do not take into account the many other problems. The effectiveness of supporting the family in crisis and the efficiency of assistance forms applied to it depends on the level of its independence with coping in difficult situations\textsuperscript{39}. The currently applicable laws clearly define the scope and forms of support for families affected by pathology (in a crisis situation). Social welfare centres can provide financial assistance in the case of documented poverty of a family, orphanhood, homelessness, diagnosed alcoholism, drug addiction and helplessness in care and educational matters.

A family that experiences pathology should receive broad support from the organizational structures of the state and obtain consultancy support from people involved in social education and prevention\textsuperscript{40}. The pathological structure of the family is one of the greatest threats to the existence and proper functioning of society. A well functioning family is the best way to keep social order based on fixed values\textsuperscript{41}.

These values, passed down from generation to generation, create social order. The standards developed by strong families of an undisturbed identity are a strong foundation for building constructive relationships in the future. They become a model not only for its descendants, but also for other families threatened by pathology.

**Literature**

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