



Social Policy Issues

ISSN: 1640-1808
E-ISSN: 2719-7328

2/2023 vol. 61

Problemy Polityki Społecznej



Faculty of Political Science
and International Studies
University of Warsaw

Published thanks to the support of the University of Warsaw under the Excellence Initiative – Research University programme and the Faculty of Social Science and International Studies

EDITORIAL BOARD

Maria Theiss, University of Warsaw, Poland: Editor-in-Chief;
Anna Kurowska, University of Warsaw, Poland: Deputy Editor-in-Chief;
Justyna Łukaszewska-Bezulska, University of Warsaw, Poland: Editorial Office Assistant;
Michał Nadziak, University of Warsaw, Poland: Editorial Office Secretary;
Ewa Bacia, Technische Universität Berlin, Germany: Editor;
Łukasz Krzyżowski, University of Western Australia, Australia: Editor

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Maciej Duszczyk, University of Warsaw, Poland: Chairman of the Council;
Jolanta Aidukaite, Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Lithuania;
Zdenko Babić, Zagreb University, Croatia; Marsela Dauti, Uppsala University, Sweden;
Lenka Formankova, Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic;
Marianna Fotaki, University of Warwick, United Kingdom;
Hanna Marikova, Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic;
Nermin Oruc, Centre for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research Sarajevo,
Bosnia-Herzegovina;
Martin Potůček, Charles University, Czech Republic;
Malina Voicu, Romanian Academy, Romania

COOPERATING EDITORS

Barbara Szatur-Jaworska, University of Warsaw, Poland;
Piotr Błędowski, Warsaw School of Economics, Poland;
Ryszard Szarfenberg, University of Warsaw, Poland;
Cezary Żołędowski, University of Warsaw, Poland;
Justyna Godlewska-Szyrkowa, University of Warsaw, Poland;
Mirosław Księżopolski, University of Warsaw, Poland;
Bartosz Pielniński, University of Warsaw, Poland;
Stanisława Golinowska, Jagiellonian University,
Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, Warsaw, Poland;
Lutz Bellmann, Friedrich-Alexander University in Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany;
Tomasz Inglot, Minnesota State University, USA;
Józef Orczyk, Poznań University of Economics, Poland;
Jeja-Pekka Roos, University of Helsinki, Finland;
Piotr Pysz, University of Finance and Management in Białystok, Poland;
Julian Auleytner, Janusz Korczak Pedagogical College in Warsaw, Poland

GUEST EDITORS

Małgorzata Sikorska, University of Warsaw, Poland;
Paula Pustulka, SWPS University, Warsaw, Poland

LANGUAGE EDITOR

Joanna Bilmin-Odrowąż

Copyright by
WNPiSM UW
ISSN 1640-1808
e-ISSN 2719-7328

PUBLISHING PARTNER

Scholar Publishing House Ltd.
ul. Oboźna 1, 00-340 Warsaw, Poland
phone: + (48) 22 692 41 18; e-mail: info@scholar.com.pl
www.scholar.com.pl

Corresponding address:
Nowy Świat 67, room 110
00-927 Warszawa
Tel./fax 0-22 826-66-52
www.problemypolitykispolecznej.pl; problemy.ps@uw.edu.pl

The reference version of the journal is the online version

Contents

Paula Pustulka, Małgorzata Sikorska, <i>Familial pragmatism: modern families navigating the private/public junction</i>	1–10
---	------

Studies

<u>Maria Reimann</u> , <i>At mum's place, at dad's place, at home. How children "do family" in joint physical custody arrangements</i>	1–15
Piotr Binder, <i>Remote work, Polish families with children and inequalities in the division of labour. A qualitative longitudinal research perspective</i> . .	1–23
Justyna Kajta, <i>Moving between the fields. On the role of family in the experiences of intergenerational upward mobility</i>	1–22
Małgorzata Sikorska, <i>"We are so hermetic" – families' social isolation as an essential feature of family life in contemporary Poland</i>	1–19

Paula Pustulka¹

ORCID: 0000-0001-6679-0365

Institute of Social Sciences, SWPS University, Warsaw, Poland

Małgorzata Sikorska

ORCID: 0000-0002-6854-8393

Faculty of Sociology, University of Warsaw, Poland

Familial pragmatism: modern families navigating the private/public junction

This double-volume *Special Issue* (SI) aims at mapping the tensions that shape families and family life at the junction of what is private and personal about families and for their members, on the one hand, and how families are rendered public and political through external actors and agendas, on the other hand. As per the SI's title – *The privacy and politicisation of parenting in Europe: family as a set of practices and as an object of external influence* – we specifically foreground the clashes and mutual interdependencies between the two – private and public – domains of family life in the European perspective.

As the main argument, we stipulate that lasting tensions and the need to either reconcile, or, at least, successfully navigate between what is private and public about the family, can be tracked not only to scholarly debates and theorisation of families (see: Bridges, 2011; Hao, 2003; Hartman, 1996), but is also inherent in the experiences that families and their members enjoy and endure across private and public domains. In this *Guest Editorial* to the double volume of *Social Policy Issues*, we recapitulate some of the main points in the debates within the private/public lenses for studying families, as well as propose a navigating concept of **familial pragmatism** as our contribution to the means of observing the private/political junction in family life.

¹ **Corresponding author:** Paula Pustulka, Institute of Social Sciences, SWPS University, ul. Chodakowska 19/31, 03-815, Warsaw, Poland; email: ppustulka@swps.edu.pl.

Private and public spheres in the context of family

Acknowledging fast social changes and shifts in societal values (see: Inglehart, 1997), two seemingly opposing arguments have been presented concerning the relationship between private and public spheres in the context of family. In essence, the first approach assumes a postmodern condition of the private sphere being increasingly present in the public domain, whereas the second suggests that the public sphere is increasingly interfering in private life. Drawing on past work (see: Sikorska, 2016), we will now briefly discuss these approaches and their respective relevance in the context of SI.

When diagnosing societies of “liquid modernity”, Bauman emphasises that [...] *the concerns and preoccupations of individuals qua individuals fill the public space to the brim, claiming to be its only legitimate occupants, and elbow out from public discourse everything else. The “public” is colonised by the “private”; “public interest” is reduced to curiosity about the private lives of public figures, and the art of public life is narrowed to the public display of private affairs and public confessions of private sentiments (the more intimate the better). “Public issues” which resist such reduction become all but incomprehensible* (Bauman, 2000, p. 37). To give just one example of this claim for the realm of parenthood and family, the colonisation of the public sphere with private matters can be seen in the vast industry built around parenting expertise (Lee, 2014). Once contained in intergenerational transmission and family networks, today’s understanding of optimal ways for raising a child hinges on the hyped parenting decisions and practices of public figures. Famous mommy bloggers, parent-influencers, and self-proclaimed experts who issue public, “expert” recommendations do so on the basis of their personal experiences (see: Lee, 2014; Hardyment, 2007), which ultimately become included in the public sphere and guide public interest.

Sennett (1977) holds a similar view to Bauman (2000), showing how the public sphere is corroded by the “tyranny of intimacy” and the widespread narcissistic attitude, which leads to the fact that a mysterious, dangerous force, namely the *Self*, began to define social relationships and became a social ruler. An emanation of this is a societal, romanticised idyll of love mediated for the public sphere by popular culture (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). By including specific but unattainable prescriptions of love, the public sphere ill-prepares subsequent generations for the realities of marriages that intrinsically entail tensions when their love is pursued as a private endeavour (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2013, Gattrell, 2005). Recent spectacles of celebrity divorce court proceedings as well as prominent transitions of influencers from the love-centred TV formats like *The Bachelor* and *Bachelorette* emanate this “colonisation” of the public sphere by the private one from a postfeminist perspective in the media landscape (Psarras et al., 2023).

In sum, the public space “is not much more than a giant screen on which private worries are projected without ceasing to be private or acquiring new collective qualities in the course of magnification: public space is where public confession of private secrets and intimacies is made” (Bauman, 2010, pp. 39–40). Privacy “spreads out”, becoming increasingly visible and public, and “private matters” become the focus of public life (see: Sikorska, 2016).

Moving to the opposite argumentation, Schilling (2003) points out that the increased level of control that states and the medical community exercise over the bodies of their citizens is one of the many effects of modernity. Lasch sums it up as follows: *The history of modern society, from one point of view, is the assertion of social control over activities once left to individuals or their families. During the first stage of the industrial revolution, capitalists took production out of the household and collectivised it, under their own supervision, in the factory. Then they proceeded to appropriate the workers' skills and technical knowledge, by means of "scientific management", and to bring these skills together under managerial direction* (1977, pp. XVI, XV). Lash also points to the expansion of control over the private lives of individuals as a result of doctors, psychiatrists, teachers, child guidance experts, juvenile court officials, and other specialists overseeing the upbringing of children, which was previously a family issue.

Middle-class parents, particularly mothers (Douglas & Michaels, 2005), became the beacon of this corporatisation within family life, as they used their professional skills to navigate the process of expert child-raising management (Bieńko, 2020). Not much different from a professional setting, their organisation of the parenting environment follows the rules of externalised expertise from many publicly recognised sources. As mothers aspire to amass substantial expertise in parenting their children across all domains (see: Miller, 2005), they allow various influences from the public sphere to transform their individual lives, forcing them to become educational advisors, health consultants, sports trainers, talent managers, chauffeurs, dieticians, and teachers (Douglas & Michaels, 2005). In the same vein, Foucault (1998, 2000) asserted the dominance of what is public (power and knowledge) over the private sphere about disciplining sexuality or increased control over "socially unfit" individuals, such as prisoners or the mentally ill placed in isolation, objectified, and categorised as "others". Foucault demonstrated that, with the shift to modern societies, the reach of control over individuals expanded and the means of control changed.

Pertinently, Giza-Poleszczuk emphasises that family became an increasingly public institution (2009, p. 19) through both the increased state's generalised interest in control and greater government intervention in private life. Several interconnections between family and other realms of public life demonstrate this. First, there is the massification of education, through which virtually all members of contemporary young generations are "educated" by the state. In addition to increasing access to education for underprivileged children, compulsory state schooling also removed children from wealthier families from home-based education (i.e., instruction by carefully chosen and vetted governesses or private tutors; cf. Pustulka & Sarnowska, 2021).

Second, combined advances in medical, statistical, and technological fields are used by nation-states for demographic analysis and resultant population control (Giza-Poleszczuk, 2009), as seen in the politicisation of reproduction in many countries. Connected to this is an overall wider policing of the body. In a manner consistent with Foucault's claims (1998), as a corollary to the commendable efforts towards ending domestic violence, the state dictates relational boundaries in the law as well as supervises the health of family members through public health programs like mandatory vaccinations and similar (see: Attwell et al. 2017),

Third, families benefit from the greater economic security guaranteed by a liberal welfare state, yet the bureaucratisation and controlling nature of the policies mean that family members – usually parents – offer unprecedented access to their private matters – like finances, accommodation, and leisure – to the state emissaries (Giza-Poleszczuk, 2009). This is perhaps best illustrated by studies that show family welfare cultures (Dahl et al., 2014), which demonstrate that members from subsequent generations within one family “inherit” a high probability of participation in welfare state programmes, becoming their *de facto* anticipated clients.

Familial pragmatism

In our view, less attention is needed to identify the “culprit” in the blurriness and tensions between private and public spheres of family life. Instead, it is necessary to take the discussions to the next step of questioning what people do with the realisation that mutual entanglements of private and public spheres exist and have a bearing on their family life. Exploring familial pragmatism (Chang, 1997), as demonstrated by the papers in this SI, may provide one solution to framing individual reactions to the public sphere encroaching on families.

In the paper published in the *International Review of Sociology* in 1997, Kyung-Sup Chang mentioned familial pragmatism in passing to pinpoint the distinctive choices that young parents in Korea were making at the crossroads of public and private. Specifically, the studied group was trying to escape the pressures stemming from the confusion that the external West-inspired state policies caused for the Confucian heritage of family-centred daily life. It parallels, in some ways, to viewing pragmatism (Smith, 1990) as an answer to how family members choose to act in the most expedient way when faced with difficulties between agency and structure (Pfeffer, 2012; Sarnowska et al., 2020). Taking these works as inspiration, we argue that the studies in this volume demonstrate, albeit non-explicit, familial pragmatism as a suitable conceptual link for navigating and eluding the one-sided private vs. political framings of family.

Pragmatism has a long-standing interest in sociological theorising, with seminal works within symbolic interactionism of Blumer and Goffman hinging on reconciling and managing tensions between the self and society. However, familial pragmatism can specifically be traced to the works of Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990), who looked at social institutions, including family, that are experienced by individuals in their everyday lives. Echoing Hanisch’s essay (1970) on personal being political, Smith’s feminist sociology (1987, 1990) directly investigates how institutions and systems – such as healthcare, education, workplace – affect individuals at the micro-level of their everyday gendered and familial experiences. Her institutional ethnography debunks the fixedness of the social worlds, instead underscoring people’s pragmatic judgement of public institutions’ directives through the filter of personal experiences and circumstances. Women in particular – according to Smith – need to adapt their practices dynamically, as their position in the public sphere is typically intertwined with their private lives, gender orders, and family obligations.

In simple terms, familial pragmatism showcases what people do – privately and personally – when they encounter tensions in their family life. More than that, it places their actions in the context of the political, state-engendered opportunity structures. As such, familial pragmatism is a family-centred orientation and choice of family practices that are pragmatic in nature. To a degree, it compliments what we have elsewhere explained through the concept of social solvation (Sarnowska et al., 2020), as the process during which even best-intended policies are filtered through people's beliefs about instability and weakness of institutions (see also Sikorska – in this volume). In the previous study (Sarnowska et al., 2020), we have shown that parents' strategies of operating within families, i.e., in the private sphere, were largely microrational in nature and reflected not what was written in the law, but rather what they saw as “feasible” and “optimal” despite the law, in the context of both state policy and the interviewees' employers being perceived by them as unreliable. Developing on this notion, familial pragmatism is explicitly located as a practical response to the unreliability or incompatibility of norms, values, and institutions. The arguments for familial pragmatism, though made in a different context (Chang, 1997), yield themselves well to the revival and usage in broader debates on the tensions inscribed in the construction of the public/private contrariety.

To illustrate the fittingness of familial pragmatism, we can go back to the underpinnings of the private and public – including political – as the two sides of the same coin in the central debates on gender and family (see: Bridges, 2011; Hao, 2003; Hartman, 1996). In this vein, individual and practical realisations of “doing family” happen largely in the private and affective space, focused on relationships between the individuals who comprise families and are guided by their emotions, family rituals, and enactments of intimacy (see: Morgan, 1996, 2011; Jamieson, 1998; Gawrońska & Sikorska, 2022; Radzińska & Pustulka, 2023). As an opposite to this private realm, the family as a social institution is an “object” of external and public influences. These include, but are not limited to, political agendas (e.g., social policies; laws pertaining to family domain, family members as voters), social references (e.g., public discourses, social norms, values), and economic aspects (e.g., the situation on the labour market influencing family life, gendered division of duties) (see: Hantrais, 2004; Kotowska, 2019; Meardi & Guardiancich, 2022).

A prime example of this can be seen in relation to parenthood: becoming a mother/father and caring for children is a biographical turning point that warrants redefinitions of identity (see: Miller, 2005, Thomson et al., 2011; Pustulka, 2023). From a personal standpoint, it typically signals not only changes and renegotiations in a couple's relationship, but it also contributes to altering bonds with other family members like the child's grandparents (see: Pustulka & Buler, 2022). As for broader social relations, specifically in terms of state interests, the birth of a child ultimately transforms the couple into “a family” as an institution of socialisation for the new generation of citizens (see: Schnittker et al., 2003; Peltola et al., 2004). The family becomes composed of “policy subjects”, as mothers and fathers may be simultaneously guided towards and restricted in their access to benefits (see: Orloff, 1996; Meardi & Guardiancich, 2022; Suwada, 2017), repositioned in their roles on the labour market through motherhood penalties

and fatherhood premiums (see: Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Wojnicka & Kubisa, 2023) or regulated in their parenting by the legal system, for instance if it so happens that their coupledness dissolves (see: Zartler & Hierzer, 2015).

In sum, pragmatism generally emphasises practical consequences and the utility of ideas, policies or beliefs as the primary criteria for evaluating their validity, then causing a fitting action response. In that sense, familial pragmatism signifies negotiations between structure and agency (Pfeffer, 2012), aware of both (state) policy and one's own fallibilism (see: Sarnowska et al., 2020). On the one hand, members of the kinship unit would have specific goals they would like to achieve for their family across different realms of values, relationships, resources and capitals, status, leisure, and so on (see: Tach, 2015). On the other hand, in trying to achieve these aims, families face real-life problems, which often span both private and public components.

Structure of the first volume of the Special Issue

While focusing on the papers in both parts of this double-volume SI, it is important to note that contributions to the SI are primarily concerned with individuals attempting to understand or resolve tensions between private family life and the exteriorised institutional views, or framings of family. The authors map out several areas of private family practices on which the public realm encroaches, doing so through rigorous qualitative analyses. The first part of the double issue contains four papers by Maria Reimann, Piotr Binder, Justyna Kajta, and Małgorzata Sikorska. We will now trace familial pragmatism as a response to tensions in these four contributions and discuss them more broadly.

In her article, “At mum’s place, at dad’s place, at home. How children do family in joint physical custody arrangements”, Maria Reimann has given voice to children who must navigate joint physical custody arrangements after parental separation or divorce. In this sense, the Polish legal system determines the spatio-temporal dimension of practices that are recognised via the arrangements established during the parents’ legal proceedings. Contrarily, the interviewed children become self-driven creators of family practices in their everyday lives. Thus, they are pragmatically making sense of their family lives anew, in consideration of, but also through contesting, the more exteriorised family court agendas. In a novel way, the article can help us recognise that not only adults are grappling with the public/private divide in their family lives. Children, like their parents, are affected by the state’s interest in and framing of “optimal” family living, but they can also pragmatically and creatively cross the pre-established boundaries to find new meanings of “home”.

Directly looking at the mediating effect of remote work on family/work tensions, Piotr Binder addresses the choices of family models that Polish families with children have made in the face of remote work caused by the structural crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the state and employers’ regulations of remote work, men and women had to reestablish boundaries between the competing family (private) and work (public) spheres as parents. Given the new interplay of private and public, Binder argues, gender equality can increase or decrease, as well as evolve over time. Reading

through the qualitative data presented in the article, it becomes clear that the interviewees were making pragmatic choices, regardless of their family models. On the one hand, in the more egalitarian models, the parents' stories underlined adaptation and the promotion of flexibility over rigidity as a way to resolve tensions. On the other hand, economic pragmatism that supported family welfare was similarly evident in families where double-shift prevailed. Here, men and women, to ease the challenges of family life, especially childcare, would discredit the practicality of women's engagement in the public sphere, for instance, when talking about the unavailability of ECEC, which is a political failure translating into private choices.

As for the article by Justyna Kajta, which explores family influences within the process of intergenerational upward mobility, more tacit undertones of pragmatic reactions to atypical educational and career choices can be traced in the narratives of first-generation academics, artists, and businesspeople. Among the four scenarios of parental involvement, the author indirectly evidences parental framing of "suitable" pathways, which are often a reflection of observations they made in regard to the existing, external social structures. In particular, the notion of capitals points to the possible incompatibility between what is private within family capitals, and the professionally recognised capitals amassed in respective fields of public activity. Ranging from general encouragement through ambition-driven guidance and multifaceted withdrawal to hesitant observations, parents can be perceived as social actors rattled by tensions. In addition, the paper pointedly illustrates Giza-Poleszczuk's points (2000) on the invasion of the state into private life, showing the possible consequences thereof, in this case via education, for intergenerational matrices and bonds.

Last but not least, Małgorzata Sikorska's article poignantly showcases how family members see institutions in Poland. In this country-case study on amoral familism and sociological vacuum, Sikorska argues that family social isolation is the key concept for understanding familial reasons behind the dominant perception of institutions and the public sphere as dangerous. Based on their beliefs and lack of trust in the stability of the state and its potentially untrustworthy efforts to regulate family, the author's interlocutors have chosen hermetic strategies in their familial pragmatism or, perhaps, pragmatic familism. Sikorska's study also suggests that no end to the public/private tensions is in sight, given the dichotomy – as evident in the narrative excerpts – between the family as the only safe space, standing in stark opposition to institutions as the "danger zone" from which family life should better be protected. In essence, social relations between families and their external surroundings are not likely to become less tense, at least in the studied context of Poland.

Teaser for the second volume of the Special Issue

Foreshadowing the upcoming second part of this SI, the discussion started here will be continued, with the emphasis on private/public debate, disentangled through familial pragmatism as the navigating concept. The continuation will focus on the methodological reflections on approaches that can illuminate the tensions between the personal and political dynamics, among others, with two papers – by Budginaitė-Mačkinė and

Kaźmierczak-Kałużna – zooming in on the political framings of personal issues. While the first contribution clarifies the tropes and trends in the media discourses pertinent to transnational childhood and childhood abroad in the Lithuanian context, the second one focuses on fertility policy in Poland. Adding the life-course perspective to the changing notions about private roles and their exteriorised framings, Herzberg-Kurasz proposes new insights into motherhood at the empty-nest stage of the family cycle. Finally, intergenerational transmission of parenting as a value is tracked through multi-perspective approaches in the paper by Pustulka. A more detailed introduction to the second part of this double SI will follow in the subsequent volume of the *Social Policy Issues* journal.

References

- Attwell, K., Leask, J., Meyer, S.B., Rokkas P., & Ward, P. (2017). Vaccine rejecting parents' engagement with expert systems that inform vaccination programs. *Journal of bioethical inquiry*, 14(1), 65–76. DOI: 10.1007/s11673-016-9756-7
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Polity Press.
- Beck, U. & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2013). *Distant love*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bieńko, M. (2020). Wyrafinowane projekty, dawniej znane pod nazwą dzieci. In M. Bieńko, M. Rosochacka-Gmitrzak and E. Widel (eds.), *Obrazy życia rodzinnego i intymności. Książka dedykowana Profesor Annie Kwak*. (167–182). Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Bridges, K.M. (2011). Privacy rights and public families. *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender*, 34(113), 11–39. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1926757>
- Pustulka, P. & Buler, M. (2022). First-time motherhood and intergenerational solidarities during COVID-19. *Journal of Family Research*, 34(1), 16–40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-705>
- Chang, K.S. (1997). Modernity through the family: familial foundations of Korean society. *International Review of Sociology*, 7(1), 51–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.1997.9971221>
- Dahl, G.B., Kostøl, A.R., & Mogstad, M. (2014). Family welfare cultures. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 129(4), 1711–1752. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qju019>
- Douglas, S. & Michaels, M. (2005). *The mommy myth: The idealization of motherhood and how it has undermined all women*. Free Press.
- Foucault, M. (1998). *Nadzorować i karać. Narodziny więzienia* (T. Komendant, Trans.). Wydawnictwo Aletheia.
- Foucault, M. (2000). Seksualność i władza. In *Filozofia, historia, polityka. Wybór pism* (D. Leszczyński & L. Rasiński, Trans.). Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Gattrell, C. (2005). *Hard labour: the sociology of parenthood*. Open University Press.
- Gawrońska, M. & Sikorska, M. (2022). Rodziny na widoku – koncepcja demonstrowania rodzinności jako narzędzie użyteczne do analizowania życia rodzinnego. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 1(244), 137–164.
- Giza-Poleszczuk, A. (2005). *Rodzina a system społeczny. Reprodukacja i kooperacja w perspektywie interdyscyplinarnej*. Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

- Grimshaw, D. & Rubery, J. (2015). The motherhood pay gap: A review of the issues, theory and international evidence. *Conditions of Work and Employment Series*, 57.
- Hanisch, C. (1970). The personal is political. In S. Firestone and A. Koedt (eds.), *Notes from the second year: women's liberation*. Women's Liberation Movement.
- Hao, L. (2003). Private support and public assistance for immigrant families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65(1), 36–51.
- Hantrais, L. (2004). *Family policy matters. Responding to family change in Europe*. Bristol University Press.
- Hartman, A. (1996). Social policy as a context for lesbian and gay families: The political is personal. In J. Laird and R.-J. Green (eds.), *Lesbians and gays in couples and families: a handbook for therapists*. (69–85). Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hardyment, C. (2007). *Dream babies: childcare advice from John Locke to Gina Ford*. Frances Lincoln.
- Hefner, V. & Wilson, B.J. (2013). From love at first sight to soul mate: the influence of romantic ideals in popular films on young people's beliefs about relationships. *Communication Monographs*, 80(2), 150–175. DOI: 10.1080/03637751.2013.776697
- Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton University Press.
- Jamieson, L. (1998). *Intimacy: personal relationships in modern societies*. Polity Press.
- Kotowska, I.E. (2019). Uwagi o urodzeniach i niskiej dzietności w Polsce oraz polityce rodzinnej wspierającej prokreację. *Studia Demograficzne*, 2(176), 11–29. <https://doi.org/10.33119/SD.2019.2.1>
- Lasch, C. (1977). *Haven in a heartless world: the family besieged*. Basic Books.
- Lee, E. (2014). Experts and parenting culture. In E. Lee, *Parenting culture studies*. (51–75). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Meardi, G. & Guardiancich, I. (2022). Back to the familialist future: the rise of social policy for ruling populist radical right parties in Italy and Poland. *West European Politics*, 45(1), 129–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1916720>
- Miller, T. (2005). *Making sense of motherhood: a narrative approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Morgan, D.H.J. (1996). *Family connections*. Polity Press.
- Morgan, D.H.J. (2011). *Rethinking family practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Orloff, A. (1996). Gender in the welfare state. *Annual review of sociology*, 22(1), 51–78.
- Peltola, P., Milkie, M.A., & Presser, S. (2004). The “feminist” mystique: Feminist identity in three generations of women. *Gender and Society*, 18(1), 122–144.
- Pfeffer, C.A. (2012). Normative resistance and inventive pragmatism: negotiating structure and agency in transgender families. *Gender and Society*, 26(4), 574–602.
- Psarras, E., Stein, K., & Shah, P. (2023). “You’re not here for the right reasons!” From *The Bachelorette* to Instagram influencer. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(2), 571–587. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1984276>
- Pustulka, P. (2023). “Since having a child, I finally feel like an adult”: exploring intersections of contemporary transitions-to-motherhood and transitions-to-adulthood. *Emerging Adulthood*, 11(3), 581–596. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968221143814>

- Radzińska, J. & Pustulka, P. (2022). Pandemiczne święta: typologia postaw Polek i Polaków wobec zmian w praktykach rodzinnych w kryzysie w świetle danych jakościowych. *Roczniki Nauk Społecznych*, 14(50), 63–81. <https://doi.org/10.18290/rns.22503.7>
- Sarnowska, J., Pustulka, P., & Wermińska-Wiśnicka, I. (2020). Słabe państwo i solwatacja społeczna w obszarze łączenia pracy z rodzicielstwem. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 2(237), 135–162.
- Schilling, C. (2003). *The body and the social theory*. Sage.
- Schnittker, J., Freese, J., & Powell, B. (2003). Who are feminists and what do they believe? The role of generations. *American Sociological Review*, 68(4), 607–622.
- Sennett, R. (1977). *The fall of public man*. Knopf.
- Sikorska, M. (2016). „Prywatne” i „publiczne” konteksty macierzyństwa oraz rozrodczości – analiza dyskursu publicznego. *Societas/Communitas*, 21(1), 137–156.
- Smith, D.E. (1987). *The everyday world as problematic: a feminist sociology*. Northeastern University Press.
- Smith, D.E. (1990). *The conceptual practices of power: a feminist sociology of knowledge*. Northeastern University Press.
- Suwada, K. (2017). *Men, fathering and the gender trap: Sweden and Poland compared*. Springer International Publishing.
- Tach, L. (2015). Social mobility in an era of family instability and complexity. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 657(1), 83–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214547854>
- Thomson R, Kehily, M. Hadfield L., & Sharpe, S. (2011). *Making modern mothers*. Policy Press.
- Wojnicka, K., & Kubisa, J. (2023). The COVID-19 pandemic and caring masculinity: New prospects or a wasted opportunity? *Gender, Work & Organization*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13007>
- Zartler, U. & Hierzer, J. (2015). Efforts to cut the Gordian knot: a sociological analysis regarding legal aspects of post-divorce parental responsibility. *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*, 10, 219–237. DOI:10.2307/J.CTVDDZMHT.15

Maria Reimann¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-7583-4988

Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology,
University of Warsaw, Poland

At mum’s place, at dad’s place, at home. How children “do family” in joint physical custody arrangements

Abstract

Joint physical custody of children (JPC) after parental separation or divorce is a new phenomenon both in the Polish legal system and in the everyday practices of Polish families. While the number of couples who decide to share childcare equally after separation is growing, there is still no definition of JPC in Polish law and children who live in two homes are considered at risk of harm. The article presents findings of ethnographic research conducted with Polish children and teenagers who live in joint physical custody. It discusses how children who live in two homes do family and how they make sense of the efforts needed to successfully navigate frequent movement between their two homes. The article focuses on the practices and everyday life of children. It shows that children are not helpless subjects of their parents’ choices but competent actors who creatively navigate and make sense of their family lives.

Keywords: joint shared custody, childhood studies, post-divorce family

¹ Maria Reimann tragically died on 20.07.2023. Editorial board has decided to publish this submitted article in unrevised version. Contact details: problemy.ps@uw.edu.pl.

Introduction

In Poland, children of divorced parents are conceptualised as at risk of harm – as many as 64% of Poles believe that parental divorce has harmful consequences for the children (CBOS, 2019) and 43% believe that “divorces wreak havoc in children’s lives, which is why even if parents cannot agree, they should remain in a relationship for the sake of the children’s well-being” (CBOS, 2019, p. 5). Postdivorce families are often referred to as broken (Pol. *rodziny rozbite*) or incomplete (Pol. *rodziny niepełne*) not only in popular media but also by psychologists, pedagogists, family judges, and academics.

Joint physical custody of children (JPC) means that after parental separation/divorce, children spend an equal or near equal amount of time living with each of the parents. In Poland, this model of sharing childcare after separation is still new (it is not yet defined in the Family Code), and as such it raises controversies. Both supporters and opponents of the JPC claim that their main concern is the “best interest of the child”. The advocates of JPC are convinced that a child needs to be cared for by both parents. The opponents of JPC claim that for mental health and security, a child needs to have one home. The voices of children are absent in the debate.

This article focuses on children’s experiences and insights by presenting findings of ethnographic research conducted with 24 Polish children who have lived in JPC for at least a year. It examines children’s everyday practices to shed light on what – according to children – is important in the experience of living in two homes and how children who live in JPC experience and “do family”.

Joint physical custody and the well-being of children

The number of children who live in joint physical custody (JPC) in Europe, North America, and Australia has been growing for several decades. However, there is a lack of a single definition of JPC: in some studies, JPC is assumed to be an equal division of care, while in others it is a 30 by 70 division. Therefore, it is difficult to accurately determine how many children live this way. Generally, it is assumed that about 15% of divorced parents’ children live in JPC in Spain (Solsona & Spiker, 2016), approximately 25% in Norway (Nieuwenhuis, 2020), approximately 20% in Denmark (Bergström et al., 2013, 2021), approximately 30% in the Netherlands (Poortman & van Gaalen, 2017), and about 40% in Belgium (Vanassche et al., 2017), and Sweden (Bergström et al., 2015).

Numerous studies have shown that parental separation has a harmful impact on children’s well-being (Amato, 2001; Amato & Booth, 1997; Bjarnason et al., 2021; Carslund et al., 2013), which resulted in conceptualising a child of divorced parents as being especially at risk. In recent years, researchers have increasingly pointed out that it is not the separation itself but the circumstances and consequences that accompany it – such as involvement in parental conflict, deterioration in the child’s material situation, and loss of contact with one of the parents – that are the cause of the poorer well-being among children of divorced parents (Lansford, 2009; Smart, 2006). Many studies have shown that children who live in JPC are less affected by the negative ef-

fects of parental separation than children who live in the sole custody of one of the parents (Bauserman, 2002; Carlsund et al., 2013; Nielsen, 2011, 2013). Such results are attributed to the fact that JPC allows children to maintain close relationships with both parents and benefit from their resources.

In a recent review of research on children's well-being in JPC, Anja Steinbach (2019) writes, "There is largely consensus among researchers, practitioners, and law professionals that joint physical custody arrangements after parental separation or divorce benefit most children if parents cooperate and have low levels of conflict" (Steinbach, p. 357). In the same article, Steinbach quotes Poortman (2018) who stated that "It is not so much the frequency of contact per se that benefits children but, rather, the extent to which postdivorce residence arrangements reflect predivorce parenting arrangements" (Poortman, 2018, p. 11). In other words, an equal division of care after separation is definitely beneficial for children whose parents shared childcare equally before the dissolution of the relationship.

All the countries mentioned in the first paragraph of this section are in the top 10 of the Gender Equality Index 2021 measured by the European Institute for Gender Equality. Sweden is ranked first, while Belgium, the lowest ranked of the mentioned countries, is still in a high 8th place (for comparison, Poland is 24th). In all of them, a high percentage of women work part-time: 75% of employed women work part-time in the Netherlands, 58% in Norway, 56% in Sweden, 55% in Denmark, 52% in Belgium, and 40% in Spain (compared to 32% in Poland) (World Bank, 2019). In most of these countries, there is also a high percentage of men who work part-time: 41% in Norway, 40% in Sweden, 39% in the Netherlands, and 35% in Denmark (in Poland – 20%). The opportunity for flexible employment is one of the factors that enable primarily women, but also men, to combine professional work with caring for children from the beginning of their lives (Grunow & Evertsson, 2019). Therefore, supporting gender equality and enabling parents to combine professional work with childcare seems to result not only in a more equal division of roles (including childcare) during a relationship, but also after its possible end. Bearing this in mind, I would like to move the focus to Poland where gender equality has not been the goal of the legislator and where JPC is still debated.

JPC in Poland

The Polish Family Code does not provide a definition for joint shared custody. The last amendment to the code was made in 2015, and since then, courts may award joint legal custody to both parents, even when one of them objects to such a decision. Joint legal custody does not imply that childcare is equally shared after parental separation, but it is a condition that enables such a division.

There is no data on the number of children who live in JPC in Poland. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that this number is growing by looking at the court's rulings on the legal custody of children after divorce. According to the Central Statistical Office (GUS), in 2003, out of a total of 30,197 divorces of couples raising children, parental authority was granted to only one of the parents in 67% of cases (in 63.1% of cases to the mother,

in 3.6% of cases to the father), and in 31% of cases – to both parents. In 2017, for a total of 38,262 cases, parental authority was granted in 45% of cases to one of the parents (41% – to the mother, 3.7% – to the father), and in 53% of cases – to both parents. In 2022, for a total of 35,272 cases, parental authority was granted to one of the parents in 30% of cases (27% to the mother, 2.7% to the father) and in 68% of cases to both parents.

In the majority of cases, the court's ruling concerning child custody is consistent with the preferences of the parents (Jezierski & Rostek, 2019). The increase in the number of cases where both parents are granted custody reflects the shift in gender norms and attitudes that have taken place in Poland in the last three decades (Sikorska, 2009; Slany & Ratecka, 2018). For what is called “new parents”, gender equality is an important value. Nonetheless, the Polish government has not implemented policies aimed at deconstructing gendered norms surrounding caregiving, resulting in mothers continuing to shoulder the primary responsibility for childcare (Szelewa, 2015). Compared to countries with a high number of children in JPC, Poland stands out as traditional and gender essentialist, both in attitudes towards gender equality and in everyday practices regarding work and family life (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016; Edlund & Öun, 2016; Grunow & Evertsson, 2019).

Poland is also not part of the “largely consensus” on JPC that Anja Steinbach writes about. The main concern of the legislator, and the one that can be derived from specific courts' rulings, is the best interest of the child (Domański, 2016). As Czech (2011) points out, protecting a child's best interest has become, in recent years, the basic and largely accepted ground rule of Polish family law. However, what is considered to be “in the best interest of the child” is very contextual and often used by adults to reproduce power relations (Monk, 2010). Hence, it is not unexpected that both advocates and adversaries of JPC employ the welfare of the child as the predominant justification (see, e.g., the negative opinion on JPC formulated by the Polish Judges Association “Iusticia” in 2014 and the positive opinions written at the request of the Senate of the Republic of Poland by the “Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę” Foundation or by Professor Elżbieta Trzęsowska-Greszta in 2017). Polish courts and policymakers are rather reluctant to seek the expertise and opinion of children, regardless of the fact that both the Constitution of Poland (in Article 72) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (in Article 12) grant children the right to express their opinion in all matters that concern them (Cieśliński, 2015; Maciejewska-Mroczek & Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2017).

It is safe to assume that despite this rather unsupportive institutional context (both legislative and normative), the number of Polish children living in JPC is growing. Most adults (policymakers, judges, teachers, and family members) consider these children to be at a double risk: first, because their parents divorced and second because they live in two homes.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical background of this study is twofold. Firstly, it is rooted in the so-called new childhood studies in which a child is conceptualised as an agnatic social actor who both shapes and attaches meaning to social life (Christensen & Prout, 2002;

Greene & Hill, 2005; James, 2007; James & James, 2008). Secondly, it is rooted in the studies of family and kinship, which were in the heart of anthropologists' interests since the beginning of the discipline. In recent years, the sociology and anthropology of the family have experienced a paradigm shift, transitioning from perceiving the family in fixed categories ("being family") to understanding it as an active process of "doing family" (Finch, 2007; Morgan, 2011; Sikorska, 2019; Stanisz, 2014). Family is conceptualised as fluid and in a process of constant change, a set of practices, decisions, and rituals. This shift, as Jon Bernandes emphasises, moves away from normative models and allows for an exploration of the meanings individuals attach to their family lives (Bernandes, 1987). Children, as active participants in the "doing family" process, also possess agency and the ability to make sense of their experiences and practices.

Methodology

The article is based on ethnographic research I was conducting since the spring of 2021, mostly in Warsaw, Poland. I interviewed 24 children (13 boys and 11 girls), who have been living in JPC for at least one year. Three girls and two boys were the only children while all the rest of the interviewees were either siblings or had siblings (who did not want to take part in the research). It happened twice that two brothers wanted to be interviewed together, but except for this one case, siblings always said they wanted to speak to me individually. Depending on the interviewee's age and mood, I was prepared to use different, age-tailored qualitative research methods used in doing research with children (like drawing, making collages, storytelling). In childhood studies, children's artwork is not analysed as such. Rather, it serves as a starting point for the encounter of the child and the researcher. To use Clark's (Clark, 2011) metaphor, I thought of drawings as verbs – something that is happening – not as nouns – an item that becomes a subject of my analysis.

While my main focus was on children's perspective, I also conducted interviews with adults (10 parents, two family mediators, three lawyers, five family judges) to understand the context in which the children lived. In total, I conducted 24 interviews with children, and 18 interviews with adults.

I reached out to the children via their parents. Most of the parents found an invitation to take part in my research on the Facebook page of Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę, the largest Polish NGO that helps maltreated children. The parents emailed me saying their children would like to participate in the project and – in response – they received a flier for the children, in which I described the purpose of the research and what an interview would look like if they agreed to take part. Only with the children's explicit consent, I made appointments for the interviews. Polish law only demands parental consent for a child's participation in the research, but I had consent forms for both parents and children (about the meaning of children's consent see: Maciejewska-Mroczek & Reimann, 2016).

I asked the non-adult interviewees about their everyday experience of home and belonging, and their relationships with parents, siblings, parents' new partners etc. I also asked their opinions on how custody should be divided and about advantages,

and disadvantages of living in joint shared custody. Some of the research participants drew their homes or things that come to their mind when they think “home”. Two of the interviews were done via phone, because the interviewed person preferred to take part in the research in such a way. Most of the interviews lasted about 40 minutes. Except for one child, all the interviewees agreed for the interviews to be recorded.

I kept a field journal where I made notes after each interview. I wrote down the details about the interaction (Was the atmosphere rather cheerful or serious? How did the child’s/teenager’s room look like? Was the child sitting or constantly moving during the interview?). I also made notes from the small talks I had with the parents before and after interviewing their children. I wrote down how I felt after the interview and my first thoughts about what I saw and heard. I read experts’ recommendations, Ombudsmen’s addresses, press articles and discussions on social media. I conducted dozens of informal conversations with parents whose children are being raised in shared custody and with parents who are currently going through a separation and considering this custody model.

I analysed all the narratives (transcribed interviews, field journal, articles, social media posts) using thematic analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010). I identified reoccurring themes and searched for patterns, but also paid attention to what seemed singular and not fitting. During regular meetings, I shared my thoughts with [anonymity] and allowed my colleagues to question and challenge my interpretations.

Ethical considerations

Engaging in research with children presents a greater array of ethical considerations compared to research involving adults (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). These concerns arise from the inherent power imbalance between child participants and adult researchers. When delving into sensitive topics like family dynamics, especially within the context of parental separation, the potential risks are further magnified.

To ensure the utmost ethical standards in my research, I implemented several measures that go beyond getting informed consent from children and notifying them that they can withdraw at any time (see: *Kodeks dobrych praktyk...*). First, I decided to only interview children whose both parents agreed to the interview. I wanted to avoid putting interviewees in a potentially stressful situation of feeling disloyal towards one of the parents. Second, I decided not to interview the parents of my interviewees (the adults I interviewed were not related to the interviewed children). I wanted the children to be sure they could trust me and that I would not speak about them or their situation with the parents. I also wanted to empower children by not seeking a second opinion about what they told me. In my previous research with children and parents, I have learned that parents tend to reveal things that children have kept silent about. I, therefore, believe not interviewing parents is a way of protecting the child-interviewee’s secrets and the child-researcher alliance.

The decision to interview only children whose both parents gave consent to the child’s participation resulted in not being able to reach out to children whose parents are in open conflict. I made an exception from this rule once and interviewed a 12-year-old

boy who had already agreed to talk to me and was waiting for me to call when I found out that his mother did not know about the interview. I was told that because of the conflict between the parents, she might not agree to it. I decided to conduct the interview because it did not seem right to me to tell the boy that he was not eligible for the research because his parents were in conflict. For reasons of anonymity, I cannot elaborate on what the boy said (he was the only child that I spoke to whose parents' relationship was hostile, therefore, I will only say that his experience of joint physical custody, which was a solution forced upon his parents by the court, was very different than the experience of other participants of my research). The children of conflicted parents also deserve to be heard. The encounter with the boy made me reconsider the ethical choice I made and in future projects, I will not restrict myself to children whose both parents consent to the child's participation.

Results

In this section, I delve into the various practices that encompass living in two homes in order to show how children "do family" in JPC arrangements and what they consider important and beneficial forms themselves. The categories I employ have emerged from the interviews. It is, however, important to bear in mind that these practices are intertwined and impossible to disentangle in the lives of my interviewees.

1. Commuting

The most evident aspect of living in two homes is the process of commuting. The children I interviewed switch between homes on a weekly or biweekly basis. The act of commuting involves various smaller practices such as packing and unpacking bags, deciding what to bring, remembering (and sometimes forgetting) essential items for the week, carrying the bags, and driving between the two locations. All of the interviewed children expressed their dislike for the commuting practice. They found the frequent moving, including packing, carrying, and unpacking their bags, tiresome and frustrating. Many of them mentioned instances when they forgot to bring something they either needed or wanted to have with them. In most cases, children felt that they carried most of the burden of moving themselves. In one of the families, the father would pack and move the bags between the homes while the children were at school, so they did not have to deal with the inconvenience of moving. In all other families, the children travelled between two homes with their – bigger or smaller – bags. A few children told me that one of the parents would be upset with the other parent if something did not come back with the child (e.g., a piece of clothing that the first parent bought the child).

Furthermore, in addition to the cumbersome practicality of commuting, there is also an emotional distance between the two homes, which is even more difficult to overcome.

Sometimes I just feel that I don't want to separate from one of the homes... because when I am here for some time there is this weird feeling that you want to stay in this home. But then you go to the other one, and then you just keep changing them. I don't have this often, only sometimes, and it is a weird feeling.

(Boy, 9 years old, interview 9)

Usually on the "moving day" I am all stressed out and I cannot focus on anything. Usually, for the whole day, I am unstable, as you can put it.

(Girl, 11 years old, interview 12)

Children commute with their mobile phones, laptops, clothes, and books, but also stories and emotions. Sometimes, like in the case of Zuzia (16 years old) and Zenek (14 years old), the subjective experience of the distance between homes varies between siblings. Zenek did not seem to feel it as much as his sister did, which she found very annoying (and thought he was insensitive not to feel it).

For example, it is difficult for me to speak at my mum's place about life at my dad's place. Because with my mum we live in a much bigger house and we also travel a lot (...) and I think my father is sometimes sad he cannot afford either of them. And my brother, after we return from holiday abroad, goes like "so, dad, when will we go together?". I really don't think it's cool.

(Girl, 16 years old, interview 3)

Zuzia's decision not to speak to her father about the holiday is a way of protecting him from feeling inferior (poorer, unable to afford expensive trips).

2. Decision-making

The children and teenagers I interviewed often said that the children should have a say when it comes to deciding who the child would live with after parental separation. They also frequently emphasised that parents should be honest with children, talk to them, and decide about the details of joint physical custody arrangements together.

Living in two homes requires making many bigger and smaller decisions concerning the practicalities of such an arrangement. For how long should a child stay at each of the parent's places? Which day should be the day on which the child moves between places? What if the child feels like seeing the parent she currently does not live with? The children I interviewed were very clear about their desire to take part in the decision-making process. They demanded that the parents remain flexible when it comes to the details of moving between homes, allowing for minor changes in schedules depending on the children's needs. For example, in one family Tuesday was always "mother's day" regardless of whom the children lived during the week, in another – one of the siblings came to the mother's place for lunch every day after school. The children I interviewed knew that the parents (in those two cases, the fathers) might be more content if the child did not go to the mother's place on the "father's week" but they believed this is something the fathers should accept.

Living in a reorganised family requires reflecting on things that in an intact family can be taken for granted, like where home is and who belongs to the family. Those questions become a matter of symbolic decision-making and while the children I spoke to did not explicitly speak about it, they did make such decisions by, e.g., drawing or not drawing their parent's new partners on the picture, or just speaking or not speaking about them in the interview.

3. Getting along

It is important for children that there is no strong conflict between the inhabitants of both homes. A nine-year-old boy told me, *I had this one problem – I don't have it anymore – that my second father [stepfather] does not tolerate the first one (...). But mum explained it to me, and now it's okay.* The boy had lived in joint physical custody since he was two years old. His two homes are physically far from each other. From the boy's 18-year-old brother, I know that the relationship between the parents is very dry and that the father told the older son that the only occasion at which he could stand being together with the boy's mother is the son's wedding. And still, for the younger brother the idea that the "second father" does not like "the first one" was difficult to handle. The older brother told me, he did not care so much anymore and that he felt quite far from both homes already, and tried to spend as much time as he could at his girlfriend's place.

Children and teenagers know it is not always easy for the parents to stay in a good relationship, but they seem to demand that the parents make the effort. As one of the interviewed girls put it:

When the [divorced] parents don't get along, well, it's a bit of a problem, and maybe they should really do something about it.

(Girl, 16 years old, interview 3)

There is something funny in the way the girl said, "it's a bit of a problem" and "they should really do something about it", but there also is a conviction that the parents are obliged to get along and some trust in that they are able to do that. Another interviewee, a 17-year-old girl, appreciated her parents for not involving children in any of their conflicts:

They had never... when I was younger there was zero bitching about the other side. When I was 11, or 13, I never heard anything like that. Then when I was older, I became interested in it and started asking, so they started to say some things, but they were still stepping very carefully.

(Girl, 17 years old, interview 16)

The interviewed children were conscious of the fact that being in a good relationship is not always effortless for the parents. What is maybe more interesting is that the children themselves also felt at times that maintaining good relationships is demanding for them.

On birthdays, yes, we meet [both parents and children]. We also spend the Christmas Eve together. But... to be honest, I don't like it so much when we are all together. It's just uncomfortable and I feel tension all the time. I don't know if it is really there, or it's just me. But I think usually it is there. Quite often it ends with a misunderstanding or a fight. But I still think it is nice that we meet for birthdays. It's just that I don't always feel good then.

(Boy, 16 years old, interview 21)

For the teenager quoted above, the fact that the family is together for big celebrations is more important than his “feeling good”. The same teenager told me that he thinks his parents made the right decision by divorcing and that it was better for children to have separated parents than parents who were unhappy together. Therefore, his appreciation of the reunions does not mean he hopes or wishes that the parents become a couple again, but rather that he appreciates the fact that they can still be a family.

Somehow similarly, a nine-year-old girl, when I asked her to draw things that she associates with home, drew her mother and father standing next to each other (each of them with a dog of their own). The parents separated when the girl was five years old, they live a 30-minute drive away from each other, each of them has a new partner (whom she did not draw in her picture). The girl often spoke about them as one (“my parents”). For example, she said: *the normal face of my parents is like that* (and made an unhappy face) almost as if they had one face. As if, regardless of the fact that they are not together, she still saw herself vis-à-vis two parents, not vis-à-vis each of them separately.

4. *Staying close to both parents*

All of the children I interviewed were convinced that joint physical custody was a superior solution compared to sole custody. Their conviction stemmed from the fact that joint custody allowed them to maintain an equal level of closeness with both parents. Even a 13 year-old girl who – after 8 years in joint physical custody – decided to live solely with the mother because of a tense relationship with the father's new partner, believed that JPC was the best way for a child to learn what her or his preferred way of living was.

When I imagine that I would only go to my dad's, or mum's, whatever, every second weekend, it makes me feel sad. I don't know. Like, it's too little.

(Boy, 14 years old, interview 14)

The children and teenagers, judging from their peers' experience know that most children of divorced parents in Poland live with the mother and see the father on weekends (or every other weekend). According to my interviewees, such a situation might lead to the dissolution of the relationship between the father and the child, and in consequence, have a negative influence on the child's well-being.

I think that having a home is much less important than having a parent. It's the lack of a parent that can later result in serious problems in life.

(Boy, 18 years old, interview 8)

The children I interviewed believed that both their mothers and fathers were equally capable and equipped in terms of caring for them. A few children spoke about the parents providing different kinds of care – one girl told me the father was more open to her friends visiting, another girl said her father was too strict, and one of the boys said that for a reason he did not understand, he missed the mother more than he missed the father during the week at the other parent's place. Despite those differences and difficult feelings (like being angry with the strict father or missing the mother during the father's week), the interviewed children were very explicit about it being a price worth paying for being able to stay close to both parents.

One of the interviewees, a 13-year-old girl, told me that at first all children should live with both parents interchangeably in order to decide if this is their preferred way of living, or *they would like to live with mum or with dad more*. I quote this sentence to highlight that in the narratives of the children I interviewed mothers and fathers are considered equally good carers. It might be, as the quoted girl suggests, that the child *likes to live with one of the parents more*, but it is not predetermined which of the parents it would be. Similarly, in a few cases, when the child told me she or he felt “a bit more at home” in one of the parent's places, it was not attributed to the parent's gender, but to the fact that one of the parents stayed in the apartment where the family lived before the separation.

5. Living everyday life

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the children might not consider the fact that their parents had divorced to be defining of their identity. As one of the interviewees, a 10-year-old boy told me: *not much had changed in my life* [after the parents separated a couple of years earlier]. *It's just that I live differently now* [in two homes instead of one]. The things that were important to him – like school, friends, playing sports – stayed the same. Another interviewee, a 12-year-old girl, told me that for the JPC to be a good solution for children: [everything] *should be like it used to be* [before the separation]. *There should still be a fish every Friday*. The girl has lived in JPC for almost two years. She told me that at first, when the parents had just separated, she felt sad about it but now she feels happy in both homes. When she speaks about things being the same as before the separation, she does not mean that the parents should get back together, she means all the other aspects of life which are important and constitute who she is and what the family is. For this particular family, closeness is built by going for long cycling trips, watching movies together, baking cakes, and eating fish on Fridays. Doing all these things in two homes can be interpreted as things being like they used to be.

Concluding remarks

According to the children I interviewed, joint physical custody is a preferable model of family life after parental divorce. While the children admit that frequent moving between two homes is organisationally and emotionally demanding and, especially for the smaller children, sometimes saddening, they still consider JPC the preferable solution because it allows children to stay equally close to both parents. What they considered a threat to the well-being of children of divorced parents was losing a close relationship with the non-residential parent.

The children and teenagers I interviewed did not use the term “gender equality” but it was clear from the way they spoke about their parents they consider them equally capable of providing care and creating a place that the child can call home and where she or he feels secure and taken care of. They also considered both parents equally important and necessary for the child’s development and well-being.

The interviewees did not consider themselves helpless subjects of their parents’ decisions, but rather competent family members who – by moving between two homes – made the close relationships with both parents possible. I argue that with the awareness of how important their contribution to those relationships was, children gained extra bargaining power vis-à-vis their parents and felt that the parents should also make some effort in order for the family life to be satisfying for all family members. According to the interviewees, the parents whose children live in joint physical custody should stay in a good relationship with each other, be flexible about the details of the arrangement, be honest with the children and allow their participation in decisions that consider them.

Seen from the perspective of my interviewees, their families are neither “broken”, “incomplete”, nor a threat to the children’s well-being. They are a network of relationships in which all involved parties act for the common good. Children see their role in the family as active and influential. They are reflexive about both their own and their parents’ efforts to make the post-separation life work for the benefit of all family members. I argue that being conscious of their own contribution to the welfare of the family – the act of children’s moving between the places creates JPC families – empowers them vis-à-vis the parents and allows them to say, in a slightly bossy and impatient way that if the parents do not get along “they should really do something about it”. Because family is a set of practices, things that people do with and for other people, and if the children can move between places every week, the parents should be able to get along after separation.

Acknowledgements

The project was funded by the National Science Center (research grant UMO-020/37/B/HS3/01114).

References

- Altintas, E. & Sullivan, O. (2016). Fifty years of change updated: cross-national gender convergence in housework. *Demographic Research*, 35, 455–70. DOI: 10.4054/DemRes.2016.35.16
- Amato, P.R. (2001). Children of divorce in the 1990s. An update of the Amato & Keith (1991) meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15(3), 355–370. DOI:10.1037/0893-3200.15.3.355
- Amato, P.R. & Booth, A. (1997). *A generation at risk: growing up in an era of family upheaval*. Harvard University Press.
- Bauserman, R. (2002). Child adjustment in joint-custody versus sole-custody arrangements. A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 16(1), 91–102. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0893-3200.16.1.91>
- Bergström, M., Fransson, E., Modin, B., Berlin, M., Gustafsson, P.A., & Hjern, A. (2015). Fifty moves a year: Is there an association between joint physical custody and psychosomatic problems in children? *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 69(8), 769–774. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech-2014-205058>
- Bergström, M., Salari, R., Hjern, A., Hognäs, R., Bergqvist, K., & Fransson, E. (2021). Importance of living arrangements and coparenting quality for young children's mental health after parental divorce. A cross-sectional parental survey. *BMJ Paediatrics Open*, 5(1), e000657. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2020-000657>
- Bernandes, J. (1987). Doing things with words. Sociology and “Family Policy” debates. *Sociological Review*, 35(4), 679–702. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1987.tb00561>
- Bjarnason, T. & Arnarsson, A. (2011). Joint physical custody and communication with parents. A cross-national study of children in 36 Western Countries. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 42, 871–890. DOI:10.2307/41604494
- Carlsund A., Erikson U., & Sellström, E. (2013). Shared physical custody after family split-up: implications for health and well-being in Swedish schoolchildren. *Acta Paediatrica*, 102(3), 318–323.
- CBOS. (2019). *Stosunek Polaków do rozwodów*.
- Christensen P. & Prout, A. (2002). Working with ethical symmetry in social research with children. *Childhood*, 9(4), 477–497. <https://doi.org/10.1177/090756820200900400>
- Cieśliński, M. (2015). Praktyka sądowa wysłuchiwanie małoletnich w postępowaniach cywilnych w kontekście idei przyjaznego wysłuchiwanie dziecka (komunikat o wynikach badania). [*Prawo w działaniu. Sprawy cywilne*, 24, 221–236.
- Clark, C.D. (2011). *In a younger voice. Doing child-centered qualitative research*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195376593.001.0001>
- Czech, B. (2011). Pojęcie dobra dziecka. In K. Piasecki (Ed.). *Kodeks rodzinny i opiekuńczy. Komentarz*. LexisNexis Polska.
- Domański, M. (2016). Orzekanie o pieczy naprzemiennej w wyrokach rozwodowych. *Prawo w działaniu sprawy cywilne*, 25, 97–148. <https://iws.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Maciej-Doma%C5%84ski-Orzekanie-o-pieczy-naprzemiennej-w-wyrokach-rozwodowych.pdf>

- Edlund E. & Öun, I. (2016). Who should work and who should care? Attitudes towards the desired division of labour between mothers and fathers in five European countries. *Acta Sociologica*, 59(2), 151–169.
- Finch, J. (2007). Displaying families. *Sociology*, 41(1), 65–81. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038507072284>
- Greene, S. & Hill, M. (2005). Researching children's experience: methods and methodological issues. In S. Greene and D. Hogan (eds.), *Researching children's experience*. SAGE.
- Grunow, D. & Evertsson, M. (2019). *New parents in Europe. Work-care practices, gender norms, and family policies*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- James, A. (2007). Voice to children's voices: practices and problems, pitfalls and potentials. *American Anthropologist*, 109(2), 261–272. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2007.109.2.261>
- James, A. & James, A.L. (2008). *Key concepts in childhood studies*. SAGE.
- Jezierski, K. & Rostek, I. (2019). Wspólne wychowanie po rozwodzie jako wyzwanie współczesności. *Horyzonty Wychowania*, 18(48), 23–32. DOI: 10.35765/HW.2019.1848.02
- Lansford, J. (2009). Parental divorce and children's adjustment. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4(2), 140–152. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2009.01114.x>
- Maciejewska-Mroczeek, E. & Reimann, M. (2016). Jak zgadzają i nie zgadzają się dzieci. O (nie)równowadze sił i świadomej zgodzie w badaniach z dziećmi. *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*, 12(4), 42–55.
- Monk, D. (2008). Dzieciństwo i prawo. W czym „najlepiej pojętym interesie”? In M.J. Kehily (Ed.), *Wprowadzenie do badań nad dzieciństwem*. Wydawnictwo WAM.
- Morgan, D.H.J. (2011). *Rethinking family practices*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nieuwenhuis, R. (2020). *The situation of single parents in the EU*. Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs Directorate-General for Internal Policies.
- Neale, B., Wade, A., & Smart, C. (1995). “I just get on with it”. *Children's experiences of family life following parental separation or divorce*. Centre for Research on Family, Kinship, and Childhood.
- Nielsen, L. (2011). Shared parenting after divorce: a review of shared residential parenting research. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 52(8), 586–609. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/10502556.2011.619913>
- Nielsen, L. (2013). Shared residential custody: review of the research (Part II of II). *American Journal of Family Law*, 27, 123–137.
- Poortman, A.-R. & van Gaalen, R. (2018). Shared residence after separation. A review and new findings from the Netherlands. *Family Court Review*, 55(4), 531–544.
- Radkowska-Walkowicz, M. & Maciejewska-Mroczeek E. (2017). ‘O nas się mówi, ale z nami się nie rozmawia’. Dziecko w kulturze współczesnej i badaniach społeczno-kulturowych w kontekście polskiej debaty na temat technologii reprodukcyjnych. *Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica*, 18(4), 178–193.
- Sikorska, M. (2009). *Nowa matka, nowy ojciec, nowe dziecko. O nowym układzie sił w polskich rodzinach*. Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne.

- Sikorska, M. (2019). *Praktyki rodzinne i rodzicielskie we współczesnej Polsce – rekonstrukcja codzienności*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Smart, C. (2006). Children's narratives of post-divorce family life. From an individual experience to an ethical disposition. *The Sociological Review*, 54(1), 155–170. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2006.00606.x>
- Solsona, M. & Spijker J. (2016). Influence du Code civil catalan (2010) sur les décisions de garde partagée. Comparaisons entre la Catalogne et le reste de Espagne. *Population*, 71(2), 313–343. <https://doi.org/10.3917/popu.1602.0313>
- Steinbach, A. (2019). Children's and parent's wellbeing in joint physical custody. A literature review. *Family Process*, 58(2), 353–396. doi: 10.1111/famp.12372
- Szelewa, D. (2015). Polityka rodzinna w Polsce po 1989 roku: od familiaryzmu prywatnego do publicznego. In R. Hryciuk R. and E. Korolczuk (eds.), *Niebezpieczne związki. Macierzyństwo, ojcostwo i polityka*. (105–132). Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Vanassche, S., Sodermans, A.K., Declerck, C., & Matthijs, K. (2017). Alternating residence for children after parental separation. Recent findings from Belgium. *Family Court Review*, 55(4), 545–555. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12303>

Piotr Binder¹

ORCID: 0000-0001-8081-5274

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

***Remote work, Polish families with children
and inequalities in the division of labour.
A qualitative longitudinal research perspective***

Abstract

The text is devoted to the long-term implications of remote work. It addresses the question of whether remote work deepens or balances inequalities between women and men. The theoretical framework is inspired by boundary theory and considers work performed outside the professional context. A typology of remote work models was developed based on analysing 48 online interviews collected as part of qualitative longitudinal research. Analyses indicate that, depending on the configuration in the family, remote work can consolidate or deepen inequalities (double-shift model), lead to slight and reversible changes (second shift model), and enable more balanced relationships (flexible family model). Including a quasi-control group (participants who worked remotely periodically) allowed for assessing the role played by the durability of remote work experience and analysing the spectrum of sources of satisfaction with it. The text offers a twofold contribution to the literature. Firstly, the analyses confirm that it is necessary to consider who works remotely in the family. Model solutions imply a differentiated approach to the division of labour and the boundaries between

¹ **Corresponding author:** Piotr Binder, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Nowy Świat 72, 00-330, Warsaw, Poland; email: piotr.binder@ifispan.edu.pl.

work and the non-professional context. Secondly, the research confirms that access to a flexible work mode may support forming more egalitarian relationships and reduce the tension between the public and private spheres.

Keywords: remote work, family, boundary theory, online interviews, qualitative longitudinal research

Introduction

Remote work was popularised globally during the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurofund, 2022; GUS, 2021). Although in many professional contexts, its scale is smaller than in the first two years of the pandemic, work in this mode has become more accessible (CBOS, 2021; ZPP, 2022). Moving work to home during the pandemic restrictions and the unavailability of educational institutions resulted in challenging experiences, especially for parents (Alon et al., 2021; Binder, 2022b). Nevertheless, this work mode gained social acceptance and generally positive assessments (Eurofund, 2022; ZPP, 2022).

This article discusses the social implications of the pandemic observed at the intersection of remote work and the lives of families. It is devoted to the impact of long-term remote work experience on gendered inequalities in the labour division. The analyses reflect on the transformation of family patterns and associated tension between the private and public spheres (Česnuitytė et al., 2017; Ciabattari, 2021). They were accompanied by a thesis about the incompatibility of labour market solutions and contemporary family responsibilities, strengthening the culturally accepted neo-traditional division of labour (Moen & Yu, 2000; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015; Shockley & Allen, 2018).

Theoretically, the presented analyses are inspired by the boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). At the same time, they consider the role of work performed in a non-professional context for the inequality in its division between women and men (Sullivan, 2013; Suwada, 2021). The empirical basis was two waves of longitudinal qualitative research (Neale, 2019; Saldaña, 2003) conducted in the years 2020–2021. In total, 48 qualitative online interviews with 24 parents were analysed. The thematic analysis focused on remote work models, emphasising three dimensions of work, i.e., professional duties, unpaid work at home, and care work, as well as their impact on the functioning of families (Gerson, 2010).

The first part of the article reflects on the tension between the public sphere of paid work and the private sphere of home for gendered inequalities, the potential of remote work in mitigating them, and the Polish context. Then, the adopted theoretical and methodological solutions are presented. The empirical part focuses on the developed typology of remote work models in families with children, followed by characteristics of the models and a discussion of the results. The paper closes with conclusions, comments on limitations, and suggestions for further research.

Remote work and the mismatch between work and home

Changes in family patterns in the work context are related to the tension between the private and public spheres. In Western countries, such as European nations and the US, the traditional division between the public sphere of paid work and the private sphere of the home was rooted in the consequences of the industrialisation period (Česnuitytė et al., 2017; Ciabattari, 2021). They were the basis of the separate spheres ideology (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). Due to their interdependencies, separating paid work and home duties was an illusion in historical terms and remains so today. Families would be unable to function without either of the two components. Nevertheless, even at present, it is difficult to ignore the impact of this perspective on the organisation of the labour market and the functioning of families, including the ideas about how labour in families should be divided (Ciabattari, 2021; Gerson, 2010; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015).

The consequence of perceiving home and paid work as separate domains is the mismatch between parental obligations and the professional sphere. A successful career requires long working hours, availability, and not being constrained by family commitments (Benard & Correll, 2010). The growing participation of women in the labour market, also in Poland (GUS, 2021), is not balanced by the sufficient involvement of men in unpaid work at home (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). Fathers increase their share, e.g., in childcare but mothers still adjust their working hours to the family's needs or resign from professional activity (Sikorska, 2019; Suwada, 2021; Szlendak, 2010). These gendered differences are reinforced by evolving cultural norms associating successful parenting with long hours devoted to children (Casper & Bianchi, 2002; Sikorska, 2019; Suwada, 2021). Also, the work related to managing a household is consistently identified with the private sphere and remains largely "invisible" (Ciabattari, 2021). Expectations steaming from traditional gender roles result in a gendered specialisation in housework, as some of it is perceived as typically feminine (mainly routine chores and childcare) and some as typically masculine (such as technical and physically heavy work) (Sullivan, 2013). The culturally accepted way to meet the demands of families with children is often a neotraditional division of labour in which both partners are involved in paid work and family domains, but women still devote more time to childcare and household tasks while men spend more time in paid employment (Moen & Yu, 2000; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015; Shockley & Allen, 2018).

The persistence of gender norms in the workplace is also a significant obstacle to creating egalitarian gender relations in the family. At the macro level, the reality of employment is organised according to the ideal worker norm (Acker, 1990; Gerson, 2010). Mothers still face the phenomenon of the motherhood penalty, earning significantly less based on the assumption that they are less competent, committed, and dependable than non-mothers (Benard & Correll, 2010; Kleven et al., 2019; PARP, 2020). In reverse, fathers who are expected to provide can often expect a fatherhood bonus, i.e., they make more money because they are perceived as more engaged, valuable, and promotable employees (Ciabattari, 2021; Williams et al., 2013). Therefore, even if couples prefer well-balanced relationships, their choices are often limited by how

workplaces are organised (Gerson, 2010). Consequently, the male partner's career will likely be prioritised over that of the female if institutional demands push egalitarian ideals out of reach (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015; Shockley & Allen, 2018).

One of the possible solutions in such a situation may be various forms of remote work. Even before the pandemic, access to flexible work options was considered beneficial for forming more egalitarian relationships (Gerson, 2010; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). Nonetheless, despite the prolonged availability of appropriate infrastructure, even in the EU and the US, solutions of this kind were spreading relatively slowly before the COVID-19 pandemic, which can also be associated with the attachment to a clear distinction between the sphere of paid work and the home (Barrero et al., 2021; Sostero et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2013).

Polish context

In Poland, “telework” was introduced into the Labour Code in 2007, and it was replaced with “remote work” only in 2023 (The Act of December 1..., 2023). Until the pandemic outbreak, this solution was practised minimally and rarely the subject of original research². According to Eurostat, in 2019, the share of employees working from home in Poland was 8%, of which only 1% “usually” worked remotely and 7% “sometimes” (Sostero, 2020). It placed Poland at the forefront of the CEE region and slightly below the EU-27 average. In professional contexts where remote work was possible, almost all (95%) who had the opportunity to use it were satisfied with their experience (Kantar TNS, 2018).

Working from home via ICT has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. With differences in measurements³, there is a consensus regarding the trends. A sharp increase took place in the spring of 2020. Later, it was subject to fluctuations, after which a decrease in the scale was observed in the second year of the pandemic (CBOS, 2021; GUS, 2021). The scale of this phenomenon in Poland and most CEE countries levelled above 10%, but the distance to the EU average (over 20%) increased (Eurofund, 2022). Although employees partially returned to their offices, this work mode has become generally more available than before the pandemic (CBOS, 2021, 2022; GUS, 2021; ZPP, 2022). Many researchers assume that the popularisation of this solution would cause permanent changes in labour markets globally (Aksoy et al., 2022; Barreiro et al., 2021; Felstead, 2022). In Poland, its inclusion in the Labour Code also facilitates this process.

Pandemic remote work experiences were primarily positive for employees across the EU (Eurofund, 2022). Poland was no exception in this regard. Most Polish employees (63%) would happily work remotely, at least to some extent (ZPP, 2022), and parents tended to put a higher value on working from home than people without parental obligations (Aksoy et al., 2022). Intriguingly, women more often than men

² An overview of the pre-pandemic literature on tele- and remote work was presented elsewhere (Binder, 2021).

³ Studies conducted in Q2 2020 indicated 10.2% (GUS, 2020), 21% (CBOS, 2020), and over 31% (Eurostat in Sostero et al., 2020) of remote workers in total employment.

emphasised that remote work made it easier to reconcile parental duties with professional careers (CBOS, 2022). It was even though the transfer of work to the home resulted in women performing a disproportionate share of unpaid work at home (Binder, 2022b; Szczudlińska-Kanoś & Marzec, 2021). Mothers, more often than fathers, simultaneously dealt with care and professional work (Eurofund, 2022). It often resulted in a particularly unfavourable arrangement, undermining their professional performance and creating potential risks for career development (Alon et al., 2021; Binder, 2022b; Eurofund, 2022; Lyttelton et al., 2020). Nevertheless, women significantly more often than men favoured remote work for anyone interested when the nature of the work allowed it (ZPP, 2022). What is more, women also would be willing to sacrifice a higher share of earnings than men to be able to work remotely (Lewandowski et al., 2022). These ambiguities prompt an in-depth analysis of the reasons for satisfaction with remote work and, more broadly, the implications of its long-term experience for families with children.

Theoretical inspirations

The boundary theory inspired the theoretical framework of the presented analyses (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). It sensitises the consequences of moving professional work to the home space and the related shift of spatial and temporal boundaries separating these spheres. In the context of families, effective management of work from home requires ongoing negotiation between partners to maintain boundaries and create transitions between worker and other social roles (Felstead, 2022; Felstead et al., 2005). The range of possible solutions conventionally falls between a clear separation of work and home spheres (segmentation) and their full integration (Ashforth et al., 2000; Felstead et al., 2005). Both maintaining boundaries and accepting their blurring are associated with specific costs, affecting the subjects' well-being and relationships with others. Switching between roles becomes more manageable with time as well as the development of individual scripts and conduct strategies, which emphasises the role of cumulating experiences and tracking these phenomena long-term (Felstead, 2022; Felstead et al., 2005).

The tensions between the public sphere (related to paid work) and the private sphere (related to family life) manifest themselves at the junction of professional and non-professional life. It was the reason for adopting a general assumption about the incompatibility of labour market solutions and contemporary family responsibilities, for which the popular remedy is the neo-traditional division of family responsibilities and gendered specialisation in housework (Moen & Yu, 2000; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015; Shockley & Allen, 2018). Therefore, in the empirical part, work is analysed in its three dimensions: professional (paid) work, unpaid work at home (chores), and care work (childcare). While drawing a clear line between routine chores and childcare may be difficult, the distinction was clear to study participants. This conceptualisation helps better understand the processes underlying the gender division of labour (Sullivan, 2013; Suwada, 2021). It also allows for the recognition of work performed outside the professional environment, reflection on the ambiguity of satisfaction with remote

work, and comprehension of the implications of remote work for the functioning of families with children (Barrero et al., 2021; Bloom, 2020; Ellison, 1999).

Methodology

The presented longitudinal analysis is based on two waves of qualitative longitudinal research (Neale, 2019; Saldaña, 2003). The first one was conducted in the spring and summer of 2020, and a year later, data collection was continued with the same participants⁴. The purposeful sample included four recruitment criteria: gender, type of life situation (young adults, parents, and seniors), place of residence (city, town, village), and macro-region (northern, central, southern). Due to the pandemic, the project was conducted remotely. The primary research technique was individual online video interviews. At the same time, in the event of technical difficulties or lack of appropriate digital infrastructure, the respondents were also allowed to participate in the study by telephone⁵.

In total, 48 interviews were analysed. A group of 24 parents (12 women and 12 men), who experienced remote work in their families due to the pandemic and participated in the study twice, was selected for the analysis from a wider group of interviewees. The selection included people whose work was permanently or temporarily moved to their homes, taking into account its varied scope (from partial to fully remote). In addition, in 13 out of 24 cases, the partners of the research participants also experienced remote work in the analysed period.

Parents were defined as persons living with dependent children. Marriage or the fact of having a partner was not a recruitment criterion. Nevertheless, in the analysed group, all respondents were in heterosexual relationships, and only in two cases were unmarried. Participants were primarily parents of children in pre-school and early school age. All respondents had tertiary education. Professionally, the respondents fit into a broad category of specialists, including areas of IT, finance, administration (business and public), sales, education, and others. Detailed information on the participants is presented in the annexe.

The collected interviews were transcribed (verbatim) and subjected to reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This process included familiarising with

⁴ The selected interviews were part of a larger dataset collected under two projects: (1) *Determinants of change in social attitudes and lifestyle in the context of current challenges related to climate change. Example of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland* (n=150) was conducted in the spring and summer of 2020 by the team of Piotr Binder, Hanna Bojar and Dariusz Wojakowski, at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and commissioned by the Institute of Environmental Protection – National Research Institute (Contract no. PZ. 022.19.2020.CC-CD); (2) *Social impacts of the pandemic. Selected socio-demographic categories in the lifestyle perspective – a longitudinal study* (n=109) was conducted a year later, by the team of Piotr Binder, Hanna Bojar, Marta Karkowska, Dariusz Wojakowski and Kinga Zawadzka, at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and supported by this institution as part of the internal order No. 16.

⁵ More on the research methodology (Binder, 2022a).

the dataset, coding, and generating initial themes, followed by developing and refining them (Braun & Clarke, 2021, pp. 35–36). The longitudinal character of the dataset required taking into account not only intensive case analysis but also both the synchronic perspective (cross-analysis within the waves of the study) and the diachronic perspective (tracking changes between the waves) (Neale, 2019; Saldaña, 2003). The collected data was organised, coded, and then analysed with the support of MAXQDA (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019).

Models of remote work in families with children

The empirical part presents the evolution of remote work models in families with children. These were conceptualised based on the analysis of two waves of collected interviews, which allowed for recognising the features of the proposed models and reaching beyond the participants' experiences. The initial version of the typology was offered based on the analysis of interviews collected in the first weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic (Binder, 2022b). Implementing the second wave of the study created the possibility of diachronic data analysis. Returning to the same people gave grounds for reflection on the proposed models' changes during the research. The new and expanded version of the typology presented below includes three basic configurations of remote work in the family, i.e., when: (1) a woman works remotely (double shift model), (2) when a man works remotely (second shift model), and (3) when both partners work in this mode (flexible family model)⁶. The dynamic professional situation of the respondents was the reason for including in the analysis also people who worked remotely temporarily. Parents who stopped working online between the waves of the study created (4) a quasi-control group (temporary disturbance model), which impacted the final shape of the analyses. Despite the uniqueness of each participant and the differences between their families, respondents gravitated toward one of the presented models. At the same time, due to the volatility of the professional situation during the pandemic, some of the study participants experienced various changes in how their work was organised (often multiple times) and, as a result, changes in the models practised in their families. Lastly, due to the nature of the publication (limited size) and the fact that an extensive analysis of the initial versions of models was presented elsewhere (Binder, 2022b), the characteristics given below are illustrated only with excerpts from the second wave of the interviews.

⁶ The names of the models refer to the concepts functioning in the literature on issues at the interface between work and home, i.e., “double duty” (Alon et al., 2021), “second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 2012), and “flexible families” (Gerson, 2010).

Table 1. Models of remote work in families with children

Double-shift model	Second shift model	Flexible family model	Temporary disturbance model
Professional work			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Female (F) remotely, Male (M) on-site – F discontinuous (flexible boundaries) – M continuous work, regardless of the care situation (rigid boundaries) – M prioritisation of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – M remotely, F on-site – F continuous, outside the home – M continuity depending on care situation (rigid boundaries) – M prioritisation of work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F and M remotely – continuity depending on the care situation – a less clear division of work/non-work spheres (flexible boundaries) – lower prioritisation of M's work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F and/or M temporarily remotely – chaotic organisation of paid work – on-site mode of work as a return to “normality” – F openness to remote work in the future
Unpaid work at home			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F leading role (low priority) – M as before the pandemic or less – F/M inequality preserved/deepened – gendered specialisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F leading role – M as before the pandemic/ slightly more – M less involvement in new activities, partial reversal of changes – gendered specialisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F/M more egalitarian division (flexible arrangements) – M more involvement in new activities – more work together – less gendered specialisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F leading role (low priority) – M no changes or temporary modifications – fast return to the pre-pandemic setting – gendered specialisation
Care work (childcare)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F's priority, including working hours – M less involved, typically after work – more involvement of M as an exception – the growing role of external support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F's priority after work – M more involved when institutions unavailable – otherwise, M involved after work – the growing role of external support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F/M more balanced involvement – more time devoted to children – more attention to children's needs – the growing role of external support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – F's priority, including working hours – M less involved, typically after work – emergency setups when institutions unavailable – the growing role of external support
Impact on the family			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – lasting reorganisation of life's rhythm – deepening of the F/M inequalities – less family time, negative impact on family – remote mode as support for F work overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – lasting reorganisation of life's rhythm – limited impact on F/M inequalities – limited impact on family – remote work resulting in M's more time at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – persistent lifestyle modifications – reduction of the F/M inequalities – more family time, positive impact on family – positive assessment of the pandemic period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a temporary disturbance of life's rhythm – no impact on F/M inequalities – no lasting impact on the family – memories of the “pandemic holidays”

The double-shift model

Within this model, women worked remotely, while men worked on-site. The men's paid work thus had clear boundaries, was located outside the home, and performed continuously. This model enabled men to concentrate on professional duties as their primary activity. They prioritised this sphere, which was reflected in the interviews because they talked about paid work more willingly. Narratives of women were holistic and included a full spectrum of their duties. Their statements about employment were intertwined with threads referring to other life dimensions: *I traded an eight-hour job for a more flexible one. Sometimes I have to work in the afternoons and evenings, so I don't have that afternoon for my family and home* (F, 2_JT_32)⁷. They perceived a flexible approach to the issue of boundaries between paid work and home as a must. Remote work facilitated coping with non-professional duties: *The possibility of working online is a massive plus in this situation, which allows me to embrace it somehow logistically* (F, 2_PB_64). In the long view, discontinuity in the professional duties performance also generated backlogs and the need to make up for them later: *I have constant shortages at work, constant shortages at home* (F, 2_JT_33). Professional work performed in such conditions was losing quality and did not satisfy women as before the pandemic.

It was primarily women who were burdened with unpaid work at home. Nevertheless, with the number of duties, it gained a relatively low priority, which resulted in a sense of home neglect and discomfort. A recurring topic was involving children in these activities: *At the beginning, there was a plan to share the cleaning with my husband, but it absolutely did not work out. So I knew I was alone with this. So I started cleaning with my children* (F, KZ_102). Normalising the pandemic and the availability of care institutions has eased the situation and created better conditions for women working online. However, it did not help to solve the issue of the "second shift": *I'm just slowly starting to clean the house because such a mess as we have after this pandemic was rarely at my place* (F, 2_JT_33). The situation of men was different. The range of changes they experienced was much lesser: *My husband would come home from work and do what he had been doing* (F, 2_PB_64). Their involvement in unpaid work at home was happening exclusively after working hours and was limited to their specialisation, which primarily included physically heavy work and technical work: *You can say that I don't have household duties except that I keep a budget in my hand and pay the bills [...] I also had duties related to building our house, but that's probably all* (M, 2_ES_141). Compared to the pre-pandemic period, the only change was their frequent involvement in shopping. However, the gradual return to earlier consumption practices eliminated this element.

Care work was also primarily the women's task: *It is either the kindergarten or me. There are no other options* (F, 2_JT_33). Participants' narratives indicated a generally low involvement of men in the study group. They stayed home less often than women and spent little time with their children after work: *I try to spend my free time with my*

⁷ The cited fragments of interviews are marked with codes consisting of gender (F – female or M – male) and the interview reference number.

son, which I don't have much (M, 2_ES_141). A change observed in the second year of the pandemic was the greater importance of various forms of support, from family members to babysitters: *Our parents are basically retired, so we were able to organise care with their involvement* (M, 2_ES_141). Progressive adaptation to the pandemic made assistance more available, especially from older family members. The possibility of resorting to support, even to a limited extent, improved the situation of women within this model. In addition, such solutions at least partly filled the gap in care work related to the fairly low involvement of men. Their more active participation under this model was an exception. It required a more flexible organisation of professional duties, which would enable them to support their female partner and synchronise with the rhythm of care institutions: *Since I don't have a job with fixed working hours, I adjust it to be able to drive children to kindergarten and bring them back* (M, 2_KZ_91).

In the long run, entering the double-shift model meant a permanent reorganisation of the previous rhythm of family life. The direction of changes indicated consolidation or deepening of inequalities between partners. Overburdening women with housework and childcare, and orientation of men to professional duties resulted in less family time. It was emphasised by the fact that opportunities to spend time together appeared in these families when they went beyond the framework of the model: *My husband and I were able to watch several seasons of series [...] but only because my husband had orders cancelled due to the pandemic, so he had more time. When we are busier, he has no time to rest, let alone spend some time with his family* (F, 2_JT_33). The female participants also repeatedly emphasised their fundamental problem of the lack of time for their needs: *I want to have this time for myself, in which I can only take care of myself. It is what I miss* (F, KC_21). The perspective of the second year of the pandemic confirmed that practising this model, despite the greater availability of institutions and external support, was mainly at the expense of women. The possibility of remote work was organisational facilitation, allowing them to cope with their duties more effectively. However, paradoxically, it could also worsen their situation and deepen inequalities.

The second shift model

Under the second shift model, the roles of women and men were reversed. Women could leave home and perform their paid work on-site continuously. Men performed their professional duties online, resulting in periods of combining paid work from home and care work. However, men's professional activities did not consume less time than before the pandemic: *I have much more of this job. It turned out that everyone wants to do something, and I have many orders* (M, 2_JZ_120). What distinguished their narratives was prioritising professional work. Duties related to employment were presented in the first place as more important: *I mark the hours when I am going to finish, usually at 4 pm. Then I turn off the computer and move to household activities* (M, 2_AND_14). Also, men tended to set rigid and impermeable boundaries. They preferred the segmentation of paid work and home duties: *There must be discipline in determining when it is work and when it is the rest [...] I have been able to maintain such a strict working time* (M, 2_ES_143). Unlike women in a similar situation, men

appreciated the calmer pace of their paid work: *I'm not in a hurry, I'm not chasing anything, because I can plan everything* (M, 2_AND_14). Their satisfaction also generated the spillover effect to other aspects of their lives: *I have such a slow life thanks to the pandemic* (M, 2_OD_134).

The fact that men spent more time at home created the possibility of greater involvement in unpaid work. It was partially observed in the first year. However, this tendency has not continued: *Even in a way, let's say a little less because my wife took over more chores* (M, 2_ES_143). Thus, women were mainly burdened with unpaid work at home, which formed their “second shift”. As in the previous model, men willingly devoted their time to activities they were accustomed to and specialised in. These were more often related to physically heavy tasks and non-routine technical maintenance than everyday household duties. Normalisation of the pandemic could also lead to a reversal of previous changes towards a more balanced division of labour: *My wife does the cooking. In my case, I completely turned it off. While on Sunday, I used to cook because I liked it, but now we rather pack in the car and go somewhere to a restaurant* (M, 2_JZ_120). There were few clear indications of men's openness to new duties, and they were primarily concerned with what is called “helping” female partners perform tasks rather than taking over some of their work. In addition, these situations mainly involved couples relatively well-balanced before the pandemic: *Ordinary household chores are what they used to be. They are not all permanent. Sometimes we exchange, nothing has changed here* (M, 2_KC_19).

The study's first wave indicated that remote work also created conditions for more intense contact between fathers and children. In the long term, these phenomena did not deepen. If possible, men were delegating care work to their female partners: *My wife took over taking care of the children because she had such opportunity [...] they play downstairs, I'm upstairs* (M, 2_JZ_120). As a result, men's care work was also presented in terms of “help” provided in free time: *I have a little son [...], he takes much time. Playing with him is probably the main way of spending my free time* (M, 2_KC_19). Men could indicate specific activities related to the children they perform. However, none of the participants in this model showed that they perform all children-related activities interchangeably with their female partner: *I clean the bathrooms, I bathe the children, these are certainly two things I do* (M, 2_ES_143). Moving men's professional work home did not stimulate a greater balance in care work, and the change observed at the beginning of the pandemic was unstable. Paradoxically, this was also related to the general improvement of the parents' care situation. Returning children to institutions meant fathers working from home could no longer pay attention to children during working hours. Similarly, the growing availability of support in care work (primarily grandparents) was a mechanism that allowed limiting contact with children.

As in the previous model, consolidating men's remote work resulted in the reorganisation of family life. Changes, however, concerned men mainly. Contrary to the holistic approach of women working remotely, men primarily emphasised the professional aspects. From their perspective, the rhythm of family functioning did not change significantly: *Essentially, little has changed when it comes to family matters* (M, 2_KC_19). The potential for change brought by the transfer of men's professional work to the

home materialised only to a small extent. A clear shift in the emphasis towards greater balance usually did not take place. The intensified presence of men at home created the opportunity for more interactions with household members, including children. However, this effect seemed to be offset by the tendency to set rigid boundaries between paid work and home duties, the availability of institutions, and external support. Only some participants indicated spending more time with their families and engaging in new activities. At the same time, these were usually families whose members were already very close to each other before the pandemic: *We already spent much time together. When it comes to a choice between professional and family work, we have always been very focused on family life* (M, 2_ES_143). In families where the tendency to prioritise a man's position and paid work was firmly rooted, the changes were only subtle in the long run.

The flexible family model

The remote work of both partners was the basis of a model that differed from the remaining two due to the symmetrical nature and the distinct internal dynamics. A longer perspective deepened this pattern. Although for such families the initial period of the pandemic was the most challenging, from a professional standpoint, the respondents expressed satisfaction with the new solution: *It works, generally over the year, at least in our team, there was no failure* (F, 2_PB_63). Partners developed a consensus regarding joint work from home and internal (home) rules for its organisation: *At the beginning, we had some tensions that someone was too loud [...]. Later it all worked out, and we had no major problems working next to each other* (F, 2_OD_124). Although the arrangements were diverse, their general feature was a flexible approach to the boundaries between paid work and home duties: *I don't have to work from eight to four, but I can take a longer break during the day* (M, 2_LK_50). It was also related to more time spent at home and greater accessibility for household members. The less clear-cut division between different types of work disturbed the continuity of work, and its fragmentation intensified, especially during periods of unavailability of care and education institutions. In turn, the symmetrical nature of this model also stimulated more egalitarian solutions and less emphasis on prioritising men's work.

Under this model, involvement in unpaid work at home differed. The fact that the partners spend time together fostered openness to flexible solutions: *We have it pretty well divided. It's not a rigid arrangement that I do "this", and my husband does "that". It's just intertwined, and none of us feels overburdened* (F, 2_OD_124). This model did not eliminate inequalities in the division of work. However, it created the conditions for levelling the differences: *Before the pandemic, I would just leave at eight and come back at six. All that time was taken out of home life. Now, I can do many things during the day* (M, 2_LK_50). The participants understood a more "egalitarian" approach differently, and gendered specialisation also appeared in this model. Some claimed they lack a clear division: *Maybe I put the laundry in more often, and my husband cooks and cleans more?* (F, 2_OD_124). Also, only within this group, shifts of duties to the male partner were observed: *Because my wife has been promoted [...]* she

works really long hours. Therefore, I took over some of the duties (M, 2_KC_50). Nonetheless, these arrangements were the most effective in families where balance was valued even before the partners changed the working mode: *Generally, it hasn't changed [...] we take turns doing everything from cooking, laundry, bathing the children, and so on* (M, 2_KZ_92).

The remote work of both parents also changed the sphere of care work. This area also required the close cooperation of parents: *Simultaneous work and caring for the children were out of the question, so we divided the time* (F, 2_PB_63). Even if involvement was far from equal, women emphasised that the close presence of a partner positively impacted their well-being, especially in the case of young children. Long-term experience with remote work allowed parents to develop many scenarios for care work. What they had in common was that parents paid more attention to their children than before the pandemic: *I spend more time with my children because working time is a bit more flexible now* (F, 2_KC_21). A manifestation of this was, e.g., shortening the length of their stay in institutions: *It seems that a child shouldn't stay in the facility for so long, these ten hours* (F, 2_JZ_109). Time devoted to children allowed parents to get to know them better and respond to their needs. A particular example was the decision of parents to transfer children to homeschooling: *I just decided to enrol my children in home education* (F, 2_KC_21). It was a challenge that took the flexible approach to the boundaries to the next level. Simultaneously, external support in care work became more available. Once again, these were primarily family members, predominantly grandparents.

Participants indicated that the changes in their family lives became permanent: *Now it's hard to remember what it was like before the pandemic* (F, 2_OD_124). The reorganisation of their lives was associated with a shift in emphasis on the family sphere: *I think that the fact that now we spend much time together as a family is something worth cherishing* (F, 2_JZ_109). The progressive normalisation of the pandemic has not altered it. A recurring theme was strengthening family ties: *The pandemic has united us as a family* (M, KZ_91). Relationship changes coexisted with modifying everyday practices. They could concern daily rituals (e.g., sharing breakfast) but also include lifestyle elements such as diet, sports, or the possibility of finding time for oneself: *Practically every day, I have an hour of yoga, run, or functional workout. I owe it to the pandemic and remote work* (F, 2_PB_63). Unique for this model were plans for further life modifications, e.g., moving to the countryside or even decisions about profound life reorientations: *For a longer period, we want to live on a boat and explore the world* (F, 2_KC_21). What connected participants was their satisfaction with the direction of changes, which led the respondents to an upbeat assessment of the pandemic period as a whole: *For us, the pandemic meant benefits in terms of lifestyle, its organisation, and psychologically [...] it is a very positive period* (F, 2_PB_63).

Temporary disturbance model (quasi-control group)

The basis of the last model was that remote work was only a temporary experience. Due to the fragmentary nature of these experiences, interviews with participants who

fit into this model were analysed together, regardless of who in the family worked remotely. The common element for them was the feeling that their professional situation was normalised after a disturbance. The return to the on-site work was perceived as positive and expected: *Generally, going from home to work is great* (M, 2_AND_4). The assessments of remote work were complex. Some of them were critical, primarily in the first months of the pandemic when their paid work was often poorly organised: *We had no idea what awaited us, what was ruining our efforts* (F, 2_PB_71). Such statements also evaluated an extraordinary period, which was difficult to separate from the work mode. However, participants also saw the positive aspects of performing professional tasks from home. Especially women repeatedly claimed it was supportive and facilitated coping with everyday home duties. It also made them interested in remote work in the future: *I hope that employers will start to think about this form of work because it makes it easier to combine family and professional life* (F, 2_PB_71). It was especially the case when women could work remotely without caring for children simultaneously: *When the kids went to school and kindergarten, and we worked at home, it was great* (F, 2_OD_127).

When remote work was temporary, families implemented one of the models proposed earlier. Due to the short-term nature of the experience, those who worked remotely in the family played less of a role, as women did most of the unpaid work at home regardless of the scenario. If a female partner worked from home, household chores usually fell on her shoulders: *I do everything. [...] If you tell my husband bluntly that he has to do something, he will do it. But, most of the housework is my responsibility* (F, 2_AND_1). Some changes were observed when the male partner worked remotely. However, even then, the modifications were temporary and reversible: *When I had the opportunity to work from home, I took care of the house more. I took over some things from my wife. I was there and cared for cooking, cleaning, and such basic things. Now we're back again* (M, 2_AND_4). Also, when both partners worked online, there was no shift toward a more balanced division of labour: *At first, I was glad that there was someone else at home and that we would try to share responsibilities. It turned out that when my husband is at home, he doesn't help. He only works* (F, 2_OD_127). Regardless of the implemented model, the participants agreed that periodic changes did not affect the division of duties at home in the long term.

Childcare was the main challenge also for parents who worked remotely only temporarily. A sudden disturbance of the life rhythm triggered solutions developed in emergencies. These were based primarily on women's work: *When the kindergartens were closed in March, it was clear that I was the one who had to stay home with our daughter* (F, 2_AND_1). Even if male partners took on some care work, the women emphasised an asymmetry of commitment: *After a while, I had the feeling that I was on maternity leave all over again* (F, 2_OD_127). However, the extra time spent with the children intensified the bond with mothers: *My relationship with my son became stronger because I was at home with him while working remotely* (F, 2_PB_71). Men's involvement was limited. It was the highest when the male partners worked remotely. At the same time, care work was then presented primarily as an obstacle to paid work: *For some time, my four-year-old daughter did not go to kindergarten. Well, it was quite a hindrance [...] she enjoyed the fact that she could disturb me* (M, 2_AND_4). Within the other two models, fathers' involvement was limited to the time after work, emphasising fun and recrea-

tion: *My husband took our children a lot for walks and trips* (F, 2_OD_127). As within other scenarios, the disproportionate burden on women was mitigated over time by the availability of institutions and external help.

From the perspective of the impact on the family, the interviewees shared a narrative about overcoming temporary disruption: *I think we have returned to the old ways* (F, 2_OD_127). A retrospective look at remote work sometimes evoked emotional memories of women, which were related to work overload or a personal crisis. Men paid much less attention to this period. In one of the cases, the participant even forgot that he periodically worked from home a year earlier and shared his experiences: *My job was not suspended, it was not locked down in any way, so I went to it quite normally* (M, 2_KZ_105). Respondents often spontaneously mentioned family and its importance when asked about their reflections on their lives in the context of the pandemic. They also shared observations about a turn towards the family they notice: *While following friends on Facebook, unlike earlier, there are more pictures of whole families, not just individuals* (F, 2_PB_71). However, the changes in their families were temporary: *Just a year ago I thought that yes; that somehow we spend more time together and we are closer to each other. It seems to be back to normal now* (F, 2_AND_1). The period of remote work in family life was associated with ordinary memories of shared time and watching TV shows. However, if any changes in family rituals were consolidated, they were minor.

Discussion

The two waves of interviews created a basis for reflection on the implications of the long-term remote work experience for families with children and the remote work models practised within them. The results of the analyses focus on the six issues discussed below.

Firstly, the longitudinal analysis confirms that the fact who worked remotely in the family impacted the division of labour and the functioning of families as a whole. The experience of the study participants indicated that the answer to whether remote work contributes to deepening or reducing inequalities in the division of labour is complex. The double-shift model, under which women worked remotely, created conditions for consolidating or deepening the asymmetry in the division of labour. It was the most unfavourable solution for women, implemented mainly at the expense of various dimensions of their work. The model of the second shift, i.e., the reverse situation, impacted how the work of men who performed their professional duties remotely was organised. Although this solution created the conditions for their greater involvement in household duties and childcare, it led to relatively small changes in the long run. In turn, the flexible family model, i.e., a situation in which both the work of a woman and a man was transferred to the home, favoured changes towards more balance in the division of labour. Moreover, these changes were accompanied by modifications of lifestyles and, in some cases, plans for comprehensive life reorientations.

The second issue concerns the durability of the conceptualised models. A systematic data comparison led to the conclusion that the models based on the work of one

of the partners (double shift and second shift models) retained their durability and clarity primarily during the strictest epidemic restrictions. From the perspective of the division of labour in the family, these models became partly similar as an adaptation to the pandemic progressed, restrictions were eased, and the availability of care, and education facilities increased. In other words, if only one of the partners worked remotely in the second year of the pandemic, it began to play a lesser role, whether it was a woman or a man. In both these cases, families gravitated towards a neo-traditional division of duties. Apart from professional work, women performed most of the unpaid work at home and care work. The main difference was that the “second shift” was distinctly separated from the “first” for women working on-site. However, even if they worked from home, men focused primarily on professional work and engaged only in selected household duties, usually following their specialisation. In turn, the model based on the remote work of both partners was characterised by far-reaching stability. The gradual easing of pandemic restrictions changed the context of its functioning, but it retained its specificity.

The third point involves gender specificity regarding the approach to boundaries. Under all the proposed scenarios, transferring professional duties to the home required a confrontation with the frontiers between professional work and other life dimensions (Felstead, 2022; Felstead et al., 2005). The research indicates that the specificity of models was related to the practised approach to boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). There was also an apparent gender effect consistent with the literature on the subject (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). Women working remotely, also in the long term, preferred a flexible approach, which allowed them to cope with professional work, unpaid work at home, and childcare. Despite being more open to household duties at the pandemic’s beginning, men working from home tended to segment these spheres as consistently as possible, allowing them to concentrate on professional tasks during conventional hours. However, both partners’ remote work resulted in a more flexible approach to the existing boundaries, roles, and responsibilities. Men’s attachment to segmentation indicated that they were the ones who had to do more adaptation work. At the same time, this change in the flexible family model enabled the shift towards a more egalitarian division of labour.

Fourthly, in the long run, most respondents working in remote mode were satisfied with the remote work and the changes it brings. Thus, it went beyond the “honeymoon” phase (Barrero et al., 2021; Bloom, 2020; Ellison, 1999). The reasons for this varied depending on the model. For women working remotely, it was primarily a possibility of more effective time management when overloaded with various work dimensions. The “facilitation” by enabling women to alternate professional work and household duties perpetuated the existing inequalities, creating conditions for their deepening. Men working remotely appreciated a slower pace of professional work and, thus, life. They prioritised professional work, which in the long term, limited the impact of moving their work home on the functioning of the family. Both partners working from home created different conditions. In the flexible family model, lifestyle modifications, including reducing inequalities in the division of labour, were the source of satisfaction. Also, the positive impact of changes in the organisation of professional work on the functioning of the family as a whole was emphasised (Gerson, 2010).

It was reflected in the general orientation towards family, a sense of strengthening the bond, and plans for further changes.

The fifth issue concerns the role of the durability of remote work experiences. The possibility of including a quasi-control group indicated that the respondents working remotely only temporarily fitted into one of the three proposed models. In their narratives, however, the main emphasis was on the issue of returning to normality. Temporary experiences of remote work did not have a lasting impact on the division of duties in families or their functioning in the long term. Nevertheless, this working mode met with generally positive opinions among the participants working from home only periodically. Experiences related to remote work were attractive enough to stimulate the respondents' interest in continuing it in the future. It mainly concerned women who appreciated time-saving and the possibility of more effective time management, as in the double-shift model. Once again, although this solution "facilitated" coping with different dimensions of work, at the same time, it perpetuated inequalities in the division of labour. These observations underscore the diverse meanings behind remote work satisfaction and readiness to continue it. They also remain essential in the context of new Labour Code regulations and the increasing availability of remote work, especially for parents of young children.

The last point concerns a broader socio-cultural background. Practices rooted in the separate spheres of ideology and social expectations of gender roles are enduring. The narratives of people who worked remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that they may be susceptible to change. The study concludes that changes towards a more egalitarian division of labour in families with children required a redefinition of the relationship between professional life and home responsibilities at the family level. The reorganisation of the professional life of both partners required research participants to be more open to flexible solutions, which were the key to increasing the balance in the division of labour between women and men (Gerson, 2010). It was associated with a more effective matching of professional and family commitments (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015; Williams et al., 2013). Therefore, on the one hand, this research is a partial empirical confirmation that in the Polish context, the neotraditional division of labour in families is associated with limitations resulting from how workplaces are organised (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). On the other hand, flexible working arrangements can support reducing gendered inequalities by allowing parents to practice a more balanced distribution of duties (Gerson, 2010; Williams et al., 2013).

Conclusions

The paper reflects on the long-term implications of remote work for families with children. Since the analyses were accompanied by the assumption that contemporary workplaces are incompatible with parental obligations (Gerson, 2010; Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015), it was investigated how the solution of remote work would be filled with social practices. The adopted theoretical solutions, i.e., boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) and considering

work performed in a non-professional context (Sullivan, 2013; Suwada, 2021), enabled the presentation of a multidimensional impact of remote work and a fuller picture of gendered inequalities. The answer to whether remote work deepens or balances inequalities in families is complex and has been discussed based on the developed typology of remote work models. The analyses suggest that it depends primarily on who works remotely in the family, indicating that remote work reflects the tension between the private and public spheres (Česnuitytė et al., 2017; Ciabattari, 2021). However, the research displays that modifications of the neotraditional model of the division of labour are possible (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). It confirms that access to remote work can support forming more egalitarian relationships (Williams et al., 2013), as it enables more flexible approaches to roles and responsibilities, which also positively affect the functioning of families (Gerson, 2010). The longitudinal perspective (Neale, 2019; Saldaña, 2003) allowed tracking changes in remote work models and enabled comparing them with a quasi-control group of those who worked remotely temporarily, which uncovered the variety of the meanings behind satisfaction with remote work (Barrero et al., 2021; CBOS, 2022; Eurofund, 2022). These conclusions contribute to the literature on the subject. They may be vital for quantitative research on remote work, which rarely considers remote work models implemented in families (Alon et al., 2020) or the durability of the experience (Bloom, 2020; Ellison, 1999).

Limitations and future research

Although the study was nationwide, it is based on the analysis of a limited number of cases and is devoid of representativeness. The respondents raised their children in cohabiting couples, most of whom were married, which means that the conducted analyses do not consider numerous different scenarios, including the situation of single parents. In addition, the study participants were forced to change their working mode by restrictions related to the epidemic threat in conditions when remote work was a known but still not very popular solution. The popularisation of this solution during the pandemic, followed by the amendment of the Labour Code facilitating access to this mode of work, created a new context in which the phenomenon of remote work will require further research. It will be necessary to examine a more comprehensive range of remote work models in families and extend the analyses to include the perspective of employers tasked with organising work in new, different conditions. Finally, although the processes underpinning the popularisation of remote work are global, the questions about national and regional (including CEE) specificities remain open. The answers will require systematic international comparisons.

*Annexe***Table 2.** Details of participants included in the presented analyses

No	Interview code	Gender	Born	Profession	Partner's profession	Partner worked remotely	Number of children (age)	Place
1.	AND_1	F	1990	city clerk	mining engineer	No	1 (5)	town
2.	AND_4	M	1985	school teacher	civil servant	No	1 (4)	town
3.	AND_14	M	1973	merchant	beautician	No	3 (8, 21, 26)	town
4.	KC_17	M	1969	veterinarian	civil servant	Yes	2 (11, 22)	town
5.	KC_19	M	1987	tutor	housewife	No	1 (3)	village
6.	KC_21	F	1985	therapist	office (not specified)	Yes	2 (5, 8)	city
7.	JT_32	F	1992	insurance agent	business co-owner	No	1 (2)	village
8.	JT_33	F	1980	bank analyst	contractor	No	2 (3, 12)	town
9.	JT_36	F	1982	academic teacher	academic teacher	Yes	1 (3)	city
10.	LK_50	M	1980	marketer	manager	Yes	2 (11, 13)	city
11.	PB_63	F	1981	HR specialist	IT specialist	Yes	2 (2, 6)	town
12.	PB_64	F	1980	project manager	lighting engineer	No	2 (3, 5)	town
13.	PB_71	F	1977	civil servant	business owner	No	1 (9)	town
14.	KZ_91	M	1982	event manager	corporate employee	Yes	2 (3, 4)	town
15.	KZ_92	M	1977	interior designer	English teacher	Yes	2 (3, 10)	city
16.	KZ_102	F	1980	project coordinator	corporate employee	Yes	3 (4, 6, 7)	town
17.	KZ_105	M	1977	electrical engineer	sociologist	Yes	2 (7, 12)	village
18.	JZ_109	F	1988	presentation designer	workflow coordinator	Yes	2 (1, 3)	city

19.	JZ_120	M	1984	software engineer	preschool teacher	No	2 (1, 5)	village
20.	OD_124	F	1985	marketer	IT specialist	Yes	1 (1)	city
21.	OD_127	F	1978	school teacher	market researcher	Yes	2 (5, 8)	city
22.	OD_134	M	1960	sales representative	nurse	No	3 (20 ⁸ , 25, 27)	village
23.	ES_141	M	1986	paramedic	manager	Yes	1 (2)	town
24.	ES_143	M	1991	academic teacher	housemaker	No	2 (1, 3)	town

References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002>
- Aksoy, C.G., Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N., Davis, S., Dolls, M., & Zarate, P. (2022). Working from home around the world. *NBER Working Paper Series*, 30446 (September 2022). <https://doi.org/10.3386/w30446>
- Alon, T., Coskun, S., Doepke, M., Koll, D., & Tertilt, M. (2021). From mancession to shecession: women's employment in regular and pandemic recessions. *NBER Working Paper Series*, 28632 (April 2021). <https://doi.org/10.3386/w28632>
- Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality. *NBER Working Paper Series*, 26947 (April 2020). <https://doi.org/10.3386/w26947>
- Ashforth, B.E., Kreiner, G.E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(3), 472–491. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.3363315>
- Binder, P. (2021). The social experiment of remote work forced by the pandemic from a qualitative research perspective. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 65(1), 65–86. <https://doi.org/10.35757/kis.2021.65.1.2>
- Binder, P. (2022a). Wywiady online w badaniach jakościowych okresu pandemii: inkluzynywny potencjał, zagrożenie wykluczeniem i jakość gromadzonych danych. *Kultura i Edukacja*, 137(3), 38–62. DOI: 10.15804/kie.2022.03.03
- Binder, P. (2022b). Praca zdalna w czasie pandemii i jej implikacje dla rodzin z dziećmi – badanie jakościowe. *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*, 18(1), 82–110. <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.18.1.05>
- Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N., & Davis, S. (2021). Why working from home will stick. *NBER Working Paper Series*, 28731 (April 2021). <https://doi.org/10.3386/w28731>

⁸ In the analysed period, the youngest child of the respondent returned home, studied remotely, and was dependent on her parents.

- Benard, S. & Correll, S.J. (2010). Normative discrimination and the motherhood penalty. *Gender & Society*, 24(5), 616–646. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243210383142>
- Bloom, N. (2020). How working from home works out. *SIEPR Policy Brief*. <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/how-working-home-works-out>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis. A practical guide*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Casper, L.M. & Bianchi, S.M. (2002). *Continuity & change in the American family*. SAGE Publications.
- CBOS. (2020). *Skutki epidemii koronawirusa w życiu zawodowym i budżetach domowych*. 56(2020). https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2020/K_056_20.PDF
- CBOS. (2021). *Sytuacja zawodowa Polaków i gotowość zmiany zatrudnienia*. 152(2021). https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2021/K_152_21.PDF
- CBOS. (2022). *Regulacja pracy zdalnej w kontekście godzenia obowiązków rodzicielskich z pracą zarobkową*. 32(2022). https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2022/K_032_22.PDF
- Česnuitytė, V., Lück, D., & Widmer, E.D. (eds.). (2017). *Family continuity and change*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Ciabattari, T. (2021). *Sociology of families: change, continuity, and diversity*. SAGE Publications Inc.
- Dalton, M., Dey, M., & Loewenstein, M. (2022). The impact of remote work on local employment, business relocation, and local home costs. *BLS Working Papers*, 553. <https://www.bls.gov/osmr/research-papers/2022/pdf/ec220080.pdf>
- Dalton, M. & Groen, J. (2022). Telework during the COVID-19 pandemic: estimates using the 2021 Business Response Survey. *Monthly Labor Review*. <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2022.8>
- Ellison, N.B. (1999). Social impacts. New perspectives on telework. *Social Science Computer Review*, 17(3), 338–356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089443939901700308>
- Eurofund. (2022). *The rise in telework. Impact on working conditions and regulations*. <https://doi.org/10.2806/956428>
- Felstead, A. (2022). *Remote working. A research overview*. Routledge.
- Felstead, A., Jewson, N., & Walters, S. (2005). *Changing places of work*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gerson, K. (2010). *The unfinished revolution. How a new generation is reshaping family, Work, and gender in America*. Oxford University Press.
- GUS. (2020). *Wpływ epidemii COVID-19 na wybrane elementy rynku pracy w Polsce w II kwartale 2020 r.* https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5820/4/2/1/wplyw_epidemii_covid-19_na_wybrane_elementy_ryнку_pracy_w_polsce_w_drugim_kwartale_2020.pdf
- GUS. (2021). *Wybrane aspekty rynku pracy w Polsce. Aktywność ekonomiczna ludności przed i w czasie pandemii COVID-19*. https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5818/11/1/1/wybrane_aspekty_ryнку_pracy_w_polsce_aktywnosc_ekonomiczna_ludnosci_przed_i_w_czasie_pandemii_covid-19.pdf
- Hochschild, A.R. & Machung, A. (2012). *The second shift. Working families and the revolution at home*. Penguin Books.
- Kantar TNS. (2018). *The remote future. Rynek pracy zdalnej a oczekiwania pracowników*. <http://branden.biz/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/The-Remote-Rynek-pracy-zdanej.pdf>

- Kleven, H., Landais, C., Posch, J., Steinhauer, A., & Zweimüller, J. (2019). Child penalties across countries. *NBER Working Paper Series*, 25524 (February 2019). https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w25524/w25524.pdf
- Kuckartz, U. & Rädiker, S. (2019). *Analyzing qualitative data with MAXQDA*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15671-8>
- Lewandowski, P., Lipowska, K., & Smoter, M. (2022). Working from home during a pandemic – a discrete choice experiment in Poland. *IZA Discussion Paper Series*, 15251. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4114827>
- Lyttelton, T., Zang, E., & Musick, K. (2020). Gender differences in telecommuting and implications for inequality at home and work. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3645561>
- Moen, P. & Yu, Y. (2000). Effective work/life strategies: working couples, work conditions, gender, and life quality. *Social Problems*, 47(3), 291–326. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3097233>
- Neale, B. (2019). *What is qualitative longitudinal research?* Bloomsbury Academic.
- Nippert-Eng, C.E. (1996). *Home and work. Negotiating boundaries through everyday life*. The University of Chicago Press.
- PARP. (2020). *Analiza luki zatrudnienia oraz wynagrodzeń kobiet i mężczyzn*. https://www.parp.gov.pl/storage/publications/pdf/Raport-Analiza-luki-zatrudnienia-oraz-wynagrodzenia_8_05_2020_2.pdf
- Pedulla, D.S. & Thébaud, S. (2015). Can we finish the revolution? Gender, work-family ideals, and institutional constraint. *American Sociological Review*, 80(1), 116–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122414564008>
- Saldaña, J. (2003). *Longitudinal qualitative research: analyzing change through time*. AltaMira Press.
- Shockley, K.M. & Allen, T.D. (2018). It's not what I expected: The association between dual-earner couples' met expectations for the division of paid and family labor and well-being. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 104, 240–260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2017.11.009>
- Sikorska, M. (2019). *Praktyki rodzinne i rodzicielskie we współczesnej Polsce – rekonstrukcja codzienności*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Sostero, M., Milasi, S., Hurley, J., Fernandez-Macías, E., & Bisello, M. (2020). *Teleworkability and the COVID-19 crisis: a new digital divide?* <https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-07/jrc121193.pdf>
- Sullivan, O. (2013). What do we learn about gender by analyzing housework separately from child care? Some considerations from time-use evidence. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 5(2), 72–84. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12007>
- Suwada, K. (2021). *Parenting and work in Poland. A Gender Studies perspective*. Springer International Publishing.
- Szczudlińska-Kanoś, A. & Marzec, M. (2021). *RAPORT. Diagnoza sytuacji pracujących rodziców w czasie pandemii COVID-19*. https://files.librus.pl/art/21/05/4/Raport_UJ_Diagnoza_pracujacych_rodzicow_w_czasie_pandemii_Librus.pdf
- Szlendak, T. (2010). *Socjologia rodziny: ewolucja, historia, zróżnicowanie*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

- The Act of December 1, 2022 on the Act amendment – Labour Code and some other acts. (2023). [Polish] Journal of Laws, item 240. <https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/DU/2023/240>
- Williams, J.C., Blair-Loy, M., & Berdahl, J.L. (2013). Cultural schemas, social class, and the flexibility stigma. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(2), 209–234. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12012>
- ZPP. (2022). *Oczekiwania, potrzeby i postawy pracowników dotyczące pracy zdalnej*. https://zpp.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/MP_dla-ZPP_Praca-zdalna_pracownicy_czesc-ilosciowa_0811.pdf

Justyna Kajta¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-2428-8876

Institute of Social Sciences, SWPS University, Poland

Moving between the fields. On the role of family in the experiences of intergenerational upward mobility

Abstract

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984; 1987) conceptual toolkit of capital, fields, and habitus, this paper examines intergenerational upward mobility experiences in Poland focusing on the family's role. Specifically, this study uses grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) and biographical method (Schütze, 2012) to investigate the life stories of individuals in their thirties and forties who have experienced upward mobility and entered one of three prestigious professional fields: academic, artistic, or business. The analysis of 30 biographical-narrative interviews reveals four main scenarios of parental involvement in upward mobility processes: (a) general encouragement, (b) ambition-driven guidance, (c) multifaceted withdrawal, and (d) hesitant observation. To illustrate the complexity of these scenarios, each one is accompanied by a biographical case study highlighting the interplay between various public and private factors that shape upward mobility paths. These cases also demonstrate the role of family capital and their potential (mis)match with recognised capital in specific professional fields.

Keywords: family, biographical method, upward mobility, capital, parent-child relationships

¹ **Corresponding author:** Justyna Kajta, Institute of Social Sciences, SWPS University, Chodakowska 19/31, 03-815, Warszawa, Poland; email: jkajta@swps.edu.pl.

Introduction

Similarly to other countries, we observe a growing interest in cultural approaches to class analysis in Poland (see: Cebula, 2022; Domański et al., 2022; Gdula & Sadura, 2012; Świrek, 2022). However, unlike the studies conducted in the UK, France or the US (cf. Crew, 2020; Friedman, 2016; Hanley, 2017; Reay, 2018), in Poland, there is still relatively little research dedicated to the biographical experiences of crossing class boundaries (Łuczaj, 2023; Rek-Woźniak, 2016). Simultaneously, such an approach enables the acquisition of deeper insights into social mobility. Firstly, it lets us analyse the interplay between public and private, and explore how structural conditions translate into family and individual lives (cf. Mallman, 2018; Pustulka & Sarnowska, 2021). Secondly, it makes it possible to unpack the complexity of potential experiences of social mobility. While upward mobility is usually framed as a success, this meritocratic discourse overlooks other aspects of the process, e.g., challenges resulting from navigating between different (sometimes conflictual) dispositions of the class habitus (Bourdieu, 1999; Friedman, 2016).

Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit of capital, fields, and habitus, this paper explores the intergenerational upward mobility experiences by focusing on the relation between parents' class position, including parents' portfolio of capital, and the individuals' educational, and professional paths. More specifically, it enfolds the life stories of people in their thirties and forties who had experienced intergenerational upward mobility in Poland. It encompasses the situations where an individual (highly educated academic, artist, top manager/business owner) was brought up by parents without tertiary education. Moreover, the study focuses on the individuals who entered one of the three prestigious professional fields chosen for this study, namely, academic, artistic, and business careers. The selected fields can be perceived as holding (publicly recognised) symbolic capital, which is, however, defined differently depending on the field. Both academic and artistic fields can be seen as the spaces of cultural production (and cultural capital), while business is believed to be governed mostly by market-economic logic, hence, being aligned with economic capital flows (Bourdieu, 1984).

Importantly, the post-1989 transition in Poland constitutes a relevant context here as it has created various opportunities and challenges in terms of social mobility, both for narrators and their parents. Firstly, the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy had a significant impact on the class structure in Poland: manual workers and farmers experienced a decline in their status, whereas managers, experts, and supervisors continued to enjoy advantages. Additionally, new professional categories (e.g., entrepreneurs) became a part of the emerging middle class (Słomczyński et al., 2007). Against this backdrop, metaphors such as “winners” and “losers” are frequently used to describe the contrasting situations of different social groups or individuals resulting from their varied situations and opportunities for adjustment to the post-communist transition (cf. Jarosz, 2005; Słomczyński et al., 2007).

Secondly, the accessibility of higher education has increased. Already earlier, in the 1950s and 1960s, there were attempts aimed at making higher education in Poland more attainable, e.g., by introducing points for certain class origins (Sadura, 2017; Zysiak, 2016). It corresponded with the assumption that “higher education is the main

channel of upward social intergenerational mobility” (Kwiek, 2013, p. 245). The post-1989 changes, including the increase in the number of private higher education institutions and the spread of meritocratic discourse, effectively influenced the growth in the number of students (cf. Kwiek, 2013; Sadura, 2017). Due to the popularisation of higher education, non-tertiary-educated parents also shared aspirations towards their children’s educational paths (cf. Pustulka & Sarnowska, 2021). Eventually, despite expectations, the barriers to social mobility in Poland, including educational inequalities, remain relatively stable, and the level of inheritance of parental educational and occupational status is high (Domański et al., 2019; Kwiek, 2013; Lessky et al., 2021; Sadura, 2017). Neither the importance of the (cultural, economic, social) capital associated with the class position, nor social inequalities have diminished, and they influence the individual and collective experiences.

Against this backdrop, this paper focuses on the experience of those who – in post-1989 Poland – experienced intergenerational upward mobility. Drawing on the analysis of biographical-narrative interviews, this paper seeks to answer the research questions as follows: How do upwardly mobile narrators present their social advancement experiences in the context of their parents’ role in this process? If and what family capital was employed to make it happen? What capital was needed in the new field they missed? What other (public or private) factors structured their social mobility paths?

The article proceeds as follows: the first part outlines the theoretical framework, including a discussion on the relationship between social background and educational path, and a conceptual model of relations between structural conditions, social fields, and individuals’ upward mobility. Subsequently, the presentation of the methodological approach is followed by the findings organised into four distinct scenarios of the parents’ involvement in the upward mobility processes. Four biographical cases are used as illustrations. The main outcomes of the empirical inquiry are summarised and discussed in the concluding part.

Moving between fields and shuffling with capital: intergenerational upward mobility

The relationship between individuals’ educational and professional paths and their social background is widely discussed in the literature (Helemäe et al., 2021; Hanley, 2017; Lareau, 2011; Mallman, 2018; Pustulka & Sarnowska, 2021; Ule et al., 2015). In general, both qualitative and quantitative studies confirm that the capital held by parents significantly shapes the opportunities their children have. Assuming that classes are “reproduced through a wide range of relations and processes: economic, cultural, social, including more specific educational and linguistic processes” (Sayer, 2005, p. 224), “the horizons are inevitably wider for some than for others” (Reay, 2018, p. 2). Thus, parents’ economic resources as well as cultural, and social capital, translate into (limited/expanded) abilities to navigate their children in their educational or career-oriented decisions. Taking into account the neoliberal logic of “shifting the burden for the reproduction of society to the shoulders of individuals” (Ule et al., 2015, p. 339), family capital seem to be one of the sources of the reproduction of social inequalities.

It is argued that primary school can be potentially the most accessible for all parents, regardless of their social background. Contrary, knowledge about secondary and higher education as well as access to and navigation within these educational levels require more social and cultural resources that are unevenly distributed (Seghers et al., 2021). Especially the transition to university seems to be more challenging for first-in-family students than for those whose parents had tertiary education (see: Crew, 2021; Pustulka & Sarnowska, 2021; Reay, 2018). Although working-class parents have educational aspirations for their children, they often lack recognition of educational fields and the prospective notion of the labour market, and simply accept children’s (sometimes random) choices, or derive their advice from their own experiences and popular discourses (Pustulka & Sarnowska, 2021).

While exploring relations between parents’ structural position and the upwardly mobile paths, this study draws on Bourdieu’s (1984; 1987) crucial concepts (capital, habitus, field). The approach is summarised as a conceptual model of relations between structural (public) conditions, (family-related and professional) fields and individuals’ mobility between these fields (see: Figure 1).

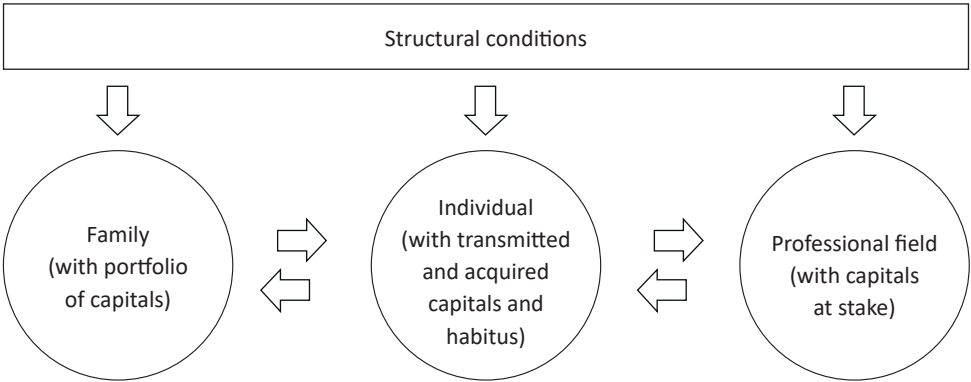


Figure 1. Conceptual model of relations between structural conditions, social fields, and individuals’ upward mobility

Source: Own elaboration of Bourdieu’s approach

Both family background (encompassing the totality of social relations and capital with which family members are endowed), and professional milieu can be perceived as fields with different rules, habitus, and capital at stake. While understanding habitus as schemes of perception related to a specific field, the article adopts its dynamic character (Atkinson, 2021). Thus, it is assumed that with the life experiences and relationships within various fields, the individual’s dispositions transform. As Atkinson argues, “[t]he individual starts with a (‘primary’) habitus forged within the familial field, which then, with progressive entry into the social space and other fields, is translated and transformed into field-specific (‘secondary’) habitus. Familial habitus persists and mutates over time, in line with the evolving state of play in the family, but

now, as a component part of the social surface, it plays off the schemes of perception adapted to the new fields too" (2021, p. 205). While gaining new experiences, the individual's situation no longer depends only on the family transmitted capital, but also on those she or he acquires and converts.

As the studies show, "moving between" the fields can be a challenging experience. The upward mobility pathways to a professional field can prompt a "clash" of (familial) and (profession-related) habitus, which might result in the experience of cleft habitus (*habitus clivé*). It is a state of dislocation resulting from the incoherence of previous dispositions and experiences with the "new" life conditions (Bourdieu, 1999; Friedman, 2016). While the meritocratic narrative enables people to leave their class origin, it simultaneously places them in a complicated position, creating feelings of cultural discontinuity (Jin & Ball, 2020; Mallman, 2018). Therefore, social mobility involves much biographical work, including coping with emotions such as uncertainty, anxiety, dislocation, impostor syndrome, and guilt over leaving one's "old" class (Crew, 2020; Friedman, 2016; Hanley, 2017; Łuczaj, 2023). Also, achieving middle-class status is based on uncertainty since upwardly mobile individuals often possess only limited resources to rise into the upper class and continue to fear degradation back to a lower class position (cf. Świrek, 2022). Importantly, cleft habitus (Bourdieu, 2000; Friedman, 2016) is not a necessary result of upward mobility, and it can depend, e.g., on the type of mobility (Mallman, 2018), including its range.

As regards capital, Bourdieu focuses on three main types: economic, cultural, and social. The former is most obvious and refers to material assets that can be "convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights" (1986, p. 242). In turn, social capital encompasses both actual or potential resources connected with more or less institutionalised networks an individual has, and the portfolio of capital possessed by all those network agents to whom the individual is connected. Finally, cultural capital means an accumulation of symbolic elements "linking" the individual with a particular social class, but simultaneously it is used mostly in reference to legitimate or high culture. As Bourdieu states, cultural capital can exist in three forms: embodied (long-lasting dispositions, competencies, tastes, manners); objectified (possessed cultural goods, such as books, pictures, instruments), and institutionalised (educational credentials and qualifications). Although Bourdieu states that cultural capital can be – to a varying extent – acquired, it is assumed that "embodied capital is necessary for objectified capital to be effectively used for enhancing institutionalized capital" (Helemäe et al., 2021, p. 5).

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept, other scholars discuss and modify the types and understanding of particular capital. Based on these arguments, this article takes into consideration two other types of capital as potentially relevant in the upward biographies. Firstly, Lessky et al. (2021) introduce a notion of informational capital which combines social and cultural capital, referring to "the link between a student's study-related information resources and their ability to use them to successfully navigate transitioning to university". As expected, having a higher level of education, and thus cultural and social capital, provides relatively more "opportunities" to navigate children's journeys through the system: it can concern the opportunity to attend extra-curricular activities, including foreign language classes, choosing a good school, having

a home library, or just urging offspring to work hard (Ule et al., 2015, p. 331; Domański et al., 2022, p. 144; Helemäe et al., 2021). Secondly, in line with other scholars (see: Nowotny, 1981; Reay, 2005), the analysis includes emotional capital, which “can be understood as the stock of emotional resources built up over time within families and which children could draw upon” (Reay, 2005, p. 572). As Reay (2005) summarises, support, attention, patience, concern, care, expenditure of time or commitment can constitute such resources. Crucially, the authors highlight the gendered character of emotional capital and state that it is more represented by women (mothers) than men.

Taking into consideration the literature discussed above and the conceptual model, the analysis in this paper tracks the individuals’ mobility paths between family and professional fields. Importantly, it needs to be analysed in reference to (a) the structural conditions within which the family life and an individual’s educational and professional paths happen, and (b) the relation between capital possessed by family and this recognised/needed in the “new” field. As entering university constitutes one of the elements of upward mobility, it is crucial to explore how the individuals find themselves during and after their studies – both in terms of career-oriented decisions, gaining recognition in a professional field, and further relationships with family.

Methodology

The findings are based on the analysis of 30 biographical-narrative interviews (Schütze, 2012) carried out in 2021 in the framework of the author’s exploratory research project *Crossing (in)visible boundaries. Experiencing upward mobility in the individuals’ biographies*² with individuals who had experienced intergenerational upward mobility and are now academics (14), artists (8) or business managers/owners (8)³.

In line with the theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the initial categories taken into account in the sampling process were: parents’ educational status, the narrator’s professional field, and age. The narrators were born between 1975 and 1990. Firstly, as 30- and 40-year-olds, they already have experience in their respective professional fields. Secondly, their (primary and secondary) education happened mostly in the post-1989 socio-economic context in Poland. Hence, their opportunities could depend on their parents’ portfolio of different forms of capital. Moreover, as a result of fieldwork, both heterogeneity and balance guided the sampling process for gender and parents’ occupations. As regards gender, 17 of the narrators were women, and 13

² The work was supported by the National Science Center, Poland under the Miniatura grant number 2020/04/X/HS6/00399.

³ As the project was a pilot, 18 interviews were planned (6 in each professional field). However, thanks to social media recruitment (Facebook), more people signed up for the study than planned, and I decided to conduct more interviews. Taking into account that – as an academic – I had easier access to this professional field, this category of interviews is slightly larger.

were men. The detailed socio-demographic information about the narrators is presented in Appendix 1.

Empirical data were collected with the use of modified Schütze's (2012) biographical-narrative interviews method (cf. Mrozowski, 2011). The interviews had three parts: the first, narrative part, started with an open question to tell the narrator's life history; the second part included additional biographical questions about issues not covered in the first part; and the third part was dedicated to such topics as relations with co-workers, definition of success, concept of good life, perception of inequalities in Poland, or class self-identification. Due to the pandemic and the restrictions it imposed, six interviews were conducted online, whereas 24 were carried out in person. The interviews lasted two and half hours on average. They were audio-recorded, then transcribed and anonymised.

The analysis followed the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). The data were coded with the support of the MAXQDA software. First, it was open coding, which involved reading the interview in detail and coding it line by line. The codes created in this process were intended to initially categorise the data. At this stage, each case was supplemented by analytical memos. The second stage was selective coding, during which the initial codes were sorted, synthesised, and integrated to develop the relevant categories. A key element in the coding was a "constant comparative method" as it enabled seeing analytical similarities and differences between the cases (Charmaz, 2009, p. 74). Based on the analysis of 30 life stories tracking the educational and professional paths, and narrating the role of family, four main scenarios of the parents' involvement in upward mobility processes have been identified and discussed below.

Results: parents' involvement in upward mobility processes

Following the analysis, four main scenarios pertaining to parents' role in upward mobility processes have been identified: (a) general encouragement; (b) ambition-driven guidance; (c) multifaceted withdrawal; and (d) hesitant observation. These scenarios have been categorised according to two key dimensions. The first one refers to the initial sources of higher education aspirations: parents (the idea of going to university was obvious at the family home from the very beginning) or non-parents (applying for the studies was an idea emerging outside the parental context). The second dimension pertains to the parents' reaction to their children's specific educational and professional choices, which could either be non-interfering or questioning.

To better understand the complexity of these scenarios, each one is accompanied by a biographical case study that highlights the interplay between various public and private factors that shape upward mobility paths. These cases also demonstrate the role of family capital and their potential (mis)match with the recognised capital in specific professional fields.

Table 1. Scenarios of the parents’ involvement in upward mobility processes

		initial sources of HE aspirations	
		parents	non-parents
parents’ attitudes towards individual’s chosen educational and professional path	non-interfering	general encouragement	multifaceted withdrawal
	questioning	ambition-driven guidance	hesitant observation

*“They simply thought it was a great choice”:
general encouragement*

The first scenario pertains to cases where parents held general educational aspirations for their children and encouraged them to pursue studies from an early age. However, due to their limited social and cultural capital⁴, they were unable to provide more specific guidance. While these parents employed all available capital to support their children, their portfolio was often dominated by emotional capital.

This scenario is exemplified by Radek, a 38-year-old associate professor. He highlighted the relationship between structural conditions – such as living in a medium-sized town during the 1990s transformation and rising unemployment – and his family’s economic situation. Radek depicted his parents as *hardworking* and *honest* individuals who faced numerous challenges due to post-1989 changes. His mother worked as a nurse for most of her life, while his father’s situation was more complex, starting from a stable working-class position before the 1990s, then moving to failed small business and episodes of working abroad, and ultimately facing precarious work conditions.

In terms of education, Radek excelled as a student from a young age as *learning came naturally to him*. He realised the importance of meeting others’ expectations, particularly, those of his parents (who held high hopes for his academic performance) and teachers. He liked being appreciated by them. After completing primary school, Radek made the decision to apply to a better secondary school in a larger city, a pivotal turning point in his life. While he adapted well to the new environment, it also influenced his leisure activities, with a focus on artistic classes and cultural events.

When it came to higher education, Radek chose a beleaguered and seemingly prestigious major that aligned with his interests in social issues. However, he had no clear career path in mind and received no guidance in this regard. His entrance to universi-

⁴ This does not suggest that representatives of the working class do not have social or cultural capital. Such phrases as “limited” or “scarce” refer to specific types and amounts of capital needed and recognised in the educational/professional fields chosen by the narrators.

ty was another crucial turning point in his life, and a time he became acutely aware of the significance of social inequalities. Notably, prior to attending secondary school, Radek's mother had attempted to prepare him for the challenges he might face in a more demanding and ambitious environment. However, it was only during his university studies that he fully grasped the magnitude of the obstacles he faced, including a sense of class-related clash with the more demanding reality and his own shortcomings in the required capital needed to succeed. Specifically, he came to understand the power of cultural and economic capital in translating into vastly different life chances:

Well, and that's when it hit me what a difference there was between me and many of the people I met here, with whom I attended classes: not only material, financial, class-wise differences, but also such a cultural difference and they were, well, so much ahead, that even if I were aware that maybe, I don't know, they weren't more capable or somehow particularly different from me in the sense of... intellectually, they certainly had already better baggage with them. They were well-versed in some, you know, various socio-political issues and scientifically... In my case it was all the time, you know, just reading newspapers, well, without any spectacularly great thinking [while doing it].

During his studies, Radek's encounter with reality dampened his ambition and he focused solely on performing well enough to receive a scholarship. Only as a result of meeting colleagues who were already interested in pursuing a PhD path, he was inspired to do the same. Spending time with them allowed him to acquire his own social capital and opened new doors for him, providing an escape from uncertainty about his post-studies future. Radek utilised his ability to learn quickly and focused on his academic performance, *accelerating the acquisition of competencies and knowledge*. Despite facing economic and institutional challenges, he was determined to complete his PhD and secure a job at a university. At the time of the interview, Radek held two PhDs, a habilitation, and worked as an assistant professor.

Radek expressed confidence in his agency and acknowledged the significant role of his determination and efforts in achieving his current position. However, he also discussed his lack of navigation and informational capital as well as the enormous tone of effort he had to employ to achieve today's position. His decisions were made *blindly* since his parents were not able to provide guidance, and his teachers were not interested in advising him. Additionally, the internet was not easily accessible during his formative years, which limited his access to information:

It seems to me, from my parents' points of view... well [my ideas] were indisputable in the sense that they thought [my choice] was a great choice, right? I mean when I'm going to high school, to [a bigger city], well this is already higher than the ambitions of everyone, everyone around, so well, it satisfied them. In a situation where I said I was going to [study this major] since my parents didn't have the ability to evaluate it [...] whether it's a good major or it's a bad major [...]. First of all, I decided to go to university at all, I was the first generation in this family that went to university. Secondly, well for them the indicator was that oh... that it's hard to get there. That means that it's

a good major, well, because if nine people are rejected and one is accepted, well, that means that it's something important. But they didn't have such an awareness of how important this choice probably was.

Although Radek's parents encouraged him to study, they mainly provided emotional support and trusted his choices, without being able to offer merit-based or financial assistance. Radek understood their limited capacity in this regard, which he linked to their structural position. He acknowledged the emotional capital he received from them but recognised that their approach did not provide him with the resources to start from a more advantageous position. He attributed any potentially lost opportunities or the immense efforts he made to overcome this disadvantage to systemic conditions.

During the interview, Radek highlighted how economic inequalities can limit students' opportunities, as happened in his case. His limited financial resources prevented him from participating in paid extra-curricular activities (e.g., English lessons) or studying abroad (Erasmus), and made it necessary for him to work while studying and worry about the housing situation. This financial insecurity remained a concern for him, despite having achieved stability in his job and personal life. His story illustrates what can be called the fragility of achieving a middle-class position (cf. Świrek, 2022) as he experienced a constant need to secure for the future and have a plan B.

Such a talented girl and you're going to [be a craftsman]? ambition-driven guidance

The second scenario encompasses the cases in which parents expressed educational aspirations for their children and wanted them to pursue higher education. However, in contrast to the first scenario, these parents had more specific ideas about their children's professional paths, which may not always align with their children's interests and plans. Importantly, in this case, parents often had more economic capital at their disposal, which they could use to provide their children with language lessons and other opportunities.

The interviewee, Karolina, is a 38-year-old artist who grew up in a medium-sized town with her parents and an older brother. She described her mother as *smart, strong-willed*, and *entrepreneurial*, while her father was characterised as a *reckless "Peter Pan"*. The family dynamics appeared to be complicated, with Karolina expressing feelings of growing up alone and experiencing strict parental (mother's) control, particularly in relation to education. Importantly, Karolina's mother had become pregnant by completing technician school, which prevented her from pursuing further education, and it seemed that she projected her unrealised ambitions onto her children. As a result, good academic performance was highly valued in Karolina's home from an early age:

[...] actually, in terms of school, I remember very well that there was a very big push to study in my case, my mother pushed us very hard to study... it stressed me tremendously, well, for me it was a hardcore. I was a good student, even a very good one, but

it was just such a terrible effort for me. [Laughs]. Well, that [stress] I wouldn't be able to cope, that I wasn't good enough and so on.

It is crucial to note that Karolina's parents' economic situation underwent a significant transformation during her lifetime, shifting from reliance on church food support to a state of relative affluence. This shift was a direct result of Karolina's mother's establishing her own successful company in the early 1990s. The newfound financial stability enabled Karolina's mother to provide her daughter with substantial economic capital, including the purchase of an apartment in the city in which she commenced her studies. The narrator expressed gratitude for these safe and privileged financial circumstances.

As for Karolina's educational path, she discovered her attraction to the artistic world relatively early on. This interest was further strengthened during a school trip where she was introduced to craft art and became tempted by it:

When I saw [it]...it was my greatest intuition in life, really, but so strong [...] I couldn't move at all. I didn't know at all what [this craftsman] was doing, this guy, but I knew I was going to do exactly the same thing.

Significantly, Karolina's mother disapproved of her daughter attending a secondary artistic school and instead compelled her to choose a different high school. Consequently, Karolina was quite rebellious during this period. She also coped with some psychological difficulties then. Drawing on this uneasy experience, Karolina's mother stopped objecting to her daughter's passion for art and applied to the Academy of Fine Arts. In fact, she even supported Karolina in this pursuit by finding her a teacher to prepare her for the entrance exam. However, the initial attempt to gain admission was unsuccessful and thanks to her mother's financial support, Karolina began extra-mural studies there. Importantly, her mother felt ashamed of this failure and urged Karolina to deceive others into thinking that she had succeeded. Instead of providing emotional support, Karolina's mother reinforced her feelings of being not enough.

Despite the initial difficulties, Karolina found her time at the academy to be highly rewarding, working tirelessly and immersing herself in self-development. She also took part in numerous study exchanges abroad during this time. Her final artwork was highly successful, and this experience encouraged her to apply for studies at a prestigious, *brilliant* artistic university abroad. As a result, she spent several years studying there. Upon her return to Poland, she began her PhD, which was near completion at the time of the interview. Despite receiving many objective indicators of her artistic abilities such as exhibitions, scholarships, and awards, Karolina continued to experience uncertainties and an inability to acknowledge her own success.

Karolina felt that her parents did not regard her choice of career as a serious pursuit for a significant time period:

I also remember such a conversation with [my mother], that she said something like this – "Karola, such a talented girl and you're going to [be a craftsman]?" [Laughs] [...] for a long time my parents didn't believe at all that what I was doing was serious. When I was coming home during the first years [of studies] I remember, I hated going

back there, because [...] I was getting such messages – “Listen, if you don’t succeed there, you can always, you know, you can come back, right? You’re so communicative, you’ll be great running the [family] company. And you’ll be able to keep this [crafting tool] in the basement, right?”. Well, it was a total lack of understanding.

Their attitude only changed when they saw her discussing her project on a TV programme. Although they started to express more pride in Karolina’s achievements, she presented a hesitant approach towards it. Despite their expressions of pride, years of not receiving compliments from her parents have left her unable to fully believe in their praise, which she found somewhat *kind of strange*.

Like Radek, Karolina also spoke at length about the limited cultural and informational resources available in her family home. According to her, art and *intellectual conversations* were nonexistent in her household, so she had to *forge her own path*. She regrets not growing up in an intellectually stimulating environment that could have provided her with the assets highly valued in the artistic field: exposure to art and social capital, leading to entirely different opportunities for recognition. Moreover, she also criticised the lack of guidance coming from school and university teachers. Therefore, she felt that while studying and working abroad, she had to put a lot of effort into working, learning of the “new field” and acquiring social capital that she can now capitalise on.

“Nobody was suggesting such things to me”: multifaceted withdrawal

Another identified scenario encompasses the stories in which parents did not encourage their children to pursue higher education, nor did they have any specific plans for their children’s educational and professional paths. At the same time, the family had limited resources available. Consequently, the narrators had little to no economic or emotional resources at the outset of their educational journey. Additionally, in some cases, parents’ withdrawal was combined with more general relational difficulties, including addictions. This often led to the narrators being forced to rely on themselves or to feel motivated to “escape” from the family home.

Zuza’s story serves as an example of the aforementioned scenario. She is a 41-year-old artist residing in a large city with her partner. The context of the post-1989 transition in Poland and her life in a medium-sized town during her adolescence were significant to Zuza. During this time, she lived with her parents, older brother, and grandmother. Post-1989 changes resulted in her mother losing her job, which caused financial difficulties in their lives. Her mother was never able to find another job, and, like Zuza’s father, struggled with alcohol addiction. This, in turn, affected Zuza’s situation at school:

I don’t know, [I had] big absences from school, because I also, I don’t know, I was a truant or my mum, when she was still working, then I don’t know, due to her different problems, when she wasn’t able or didn’t want to go to work, for example, she would take me or my brother to the doctor to get sick leave, of course then, as a child, I was happy about that, [laughs] but well... it wasn’t a good situation.

Regarding her school experiences, Zuza was known to be a rebellious troublemaker, but she also had a natural talent for art and was a quick learner. This artistic talent was *the only thing* she excelled at, according to her narration. Zuza's interest in art as well as the encouragement and support of significant others led her to pursue an art class in high school, and later, make the decision to study an arts-related field. As regards the high school, she was initially afraid of not getting in, but with the help of her teacher and aunt who provided her with math tutoring, she gave herself a chance. Against the backdrop of limited informational capital, Zuza's studying cousin was helpful in making a non-obvious decision to study:

Indeed, if I'd never had this cousin who started studying or something, I don't even know whether I would have been interested in it, because I might not even have thought it was for me, because, you know, well nobody was suggesting such things to me either, right? And then also the access to information wasn't so, you know, seamless, I couldn't go to the Internet to see where I could go to school, right? [...] I think it's more difficult, that it's just, like, well, I don't know, like you've just got an educated family and they all graduated from university, it's natural for you to go to university.

Leaving home was an ambiguous experience for Zuza. On one hand, she felt a sense of stress and responsibility for what was happening at home without her presence. Even before commencing her studies, she showed signs of psychological distress related to growing up in an alcoholic household. However, she did not receive appropriate professional support. On the other hand, living in a dormitory and attending university *gave her a boost*. Her inspirational and supportive peers and the knowledge she gained in her classes made her feel at ease, empowered and presented new opportunities. Following the example of her colleagues, she decided to apply to the Academy of Fine Arts, and she succeeded the third time.

Zuza's parents were not involved in her educational choices, and she made the decision independently, only informing them afterwards. Despite the overall sense of self-reliance, the interviewee remembered her parents expressing pride in her going to high school, and then – university. She also appreciated the freedom of choice she had – although her parents *were not very supportive* and she felt self-relied, they also did not question her choices, so she could follow her own path. As regards economic capital, she received minimal financial support during her studies, so she was eager to get scholarships and worked abroad during holidays to finance her education, including all materials needed during artistic studies.

In terms of financial deficits, these caused Zuza to be heavily involved in working hard. She was diligent in her studies, driven by her artistic passion, as well as the ongoing financial uncertainty, and fear of falling behind:

For example, during my studies, I really had this pressure that I'm going to finish it, I'm going to get my diploma right away, I didn't even want to postpone it, even though I thought that if I had more time I could do it differently, better, more, and so on, I just couldn't, right? [...] Precisely for financial reasons [...] Well, it's more difficult if you don't have some kind of background, for sure.

After acquiring various work experiences, receiving some artistic scholarships, and having her own exhibitions, Zuza embarked on her own arts-related business activity. This mirrors the complex situation artists often face, where they frequently hold multiple jobs. At the time of the interview, Zuza was in the process of redefining her artistic identity. Although art was her passion, due to overworking and having to take up other professional activities for financial reasons, she had let go of painting a few years earlier and was afraid to return to it. Additionally, she struggled with a lack of self-confidence and difficulty with recognising her achievements.

Regarding her current family relations, only through her life experiences and therapy has Zuza been able to work through her family issues and give herself the freedom from responsibility for her parents (as since childhood she *had this feeling that [she] had to shoulder it all*). Her father passed away a few years ago, and she had limited contact with her mother and brother:

My mum doesn't know where I live. [Laughs] [...] I don't even inform them anymore [about my life], because they also [...] haven't manifested that kind of, well, I don't know, for example, [...] until now I feel terribly sorry [...] when I had that diploma, there was such a huge diploma defence, we just all had this huge exhibition [...] Well, and I was the only person nobody came to at that time, for example.

In Zuza's case, we observe a gradual and mutual withdrawal from family relationships. For her, it does not necessarily result from the experiences of upward mobility. Rather, it is strongly connected with the psychological and relational challenges she has experienced since childhood. As a result of feeling unsupported by her family, she stopped having any expectations and found a safer space in her relationship with her partner and his family.

***“I don't think anyone was interested in it”:
hesitant observation***

The final scenario pertains to situations where parents possess limited or no expectations regarding their children's pursuit of higher education. Although they permitted them to decide on their own paths, they often offered advice based on their own biographical experiences. Consequently, when it comes to choices that were not “rooted” in family experiences, parents sometimes expressed doubt or incomprehension, resulting in general misunderstandings and disappointment.

The scenario is illustrated by Dariusz who is a 46-year-old esteemed scholar residing in a large urban centre. He was raised in a traditional working-class family. With the exception of his aunt (who completed high school), none of his relatives had received education beyond vocational schools. Nevertheless, he appeared to seek some form of biographical continuity by drawing upon his father's literary abilities. Although his father eventually attended a vocational school, their household remained filled with books. For Darek, both the home library and his friendship with a middle-class peer were associated with him acquiring various forms of cultural capital:

Being in kindergarten, I had a friend [...] he was from a doctor's family. And I used to go in to see them, it was so, like again, when I think about it like that, very important socially. They had a microscope, they taught me to play chess. I remember, already in kindergarten, and [I started] to read then, too, some basic things, right. I was already reading then. When I went to the first grade, I was already reading, I was even writing there. So that was important.

In terms of Darek's educational journey, it was rather turbulent. Initially, he followed his family's pragmatic advice that emphasised the importance of acquiring a trade and getting enrolled in a vocational-technical school. Importantly, Darek's family guidance was based on their own experiences (*we all have a trade*), pragmatism (continuation of education prolonged him getting social benefits), and the gendered notion of education (*high school is for girls*). However, he never liked the technical school and desired a change after completing it. Another factor that influenced his decision to modify his educational path was the increasing unemployment rate in his trade resulting from the post-1989 restructuring. Still, the idea of pursuing higher education was foreign to Darek and his family. Although his mature exam went very well, his mother discouraged him from the idea of university:

My mother said something like this and this is also what I remembered: "You're definitely not going to do well in higher education. There is no one [in our family] in higher education, after all. Well, maybe a post-secondary college?". [...] Well, and so, I thought, I can't do it, what higher education!

Therefore, he started a two-year post-secondary college. Simultaneously, owing to his interest in music and the new friends (coming from *intelligentsia*) he made through this passion, broadened his horizons, and made previously unattainable options more feasible. His increasing social and informational capital translated into a decision to apply for studies. Although he failed the first time, he was pretty eager to try again and succeeded. This new stage was presented as finding the right place for himself:

I felt like in one's element, eh, in this world. [...] I got so interested that I went to the library every day. Every day, until it closed. After class. Every day. And I read [...]. Passionately. All the time. [...] And later on, when I was studying for my Master's degree, I got completely absorbed in it and met people who were more scientifically oriented. [I met a friend who] was from a typically intellectual family [...] he was very inclined scientifically to stay at university, I wasn't yet, and well, he introduced me to this, to this world.

Due to a lack of self-confidence, Darek chose to combine his extramural PhD studies with non-academic work. Only his aforementioned colleague served as a guide for him in the academic field. Along with the social capital that he gained, Darek also enhanced his self-confidence and recognition in academia. After completing his PhD, he began working in an academic institution and sought out opportunities for international collaborations. What mattered most to him was how his work was perceived and

recognised by others. Thus, as he felt undervalued in his current job, he sought to change it. He found himself to be well-suited to the academic world: he enjoyed teaching, discussing, and reading, and did not experience impostor syndrome in terms of scientific knowledge. His insecurities, however, stemmed from his difficulty with the English language and a lack of embodied capital revealed during informal academic gatherings.

In terms of recognition, Darek did not receive it from his family and felt undervalued in that context. While he has a clear understanding of class differences and his mother's position in social structure, he expressed disappointment with both lost chances resulting from his mother's lack of understanding (e.g., his desire to attend language classes) and her current disinterest in his work:

Nobody [in my family] seemed to be interested in [my studies]. [...] Well my mum to this day doesn't know what it is. Well, "Today you have a day off". Well, I don't have classes [with students] today. [For her] it's a day off. She doesn't grasp it at all, she doesn't understand, and I don't think she wants to understand what it is, what scientific work is. It's so far from the working-class experience that they don't even want to think about it.

As he stated, social background has a *fundamental meaning* for one's findings in an academic field. First of all, he emphasised cultural and informational capital that he had to acquire on his own and it *was really difficult*. Against this backdrop, his friend coming from a family of intellectuals was narrated as a significant guide here.

The issue of cleft habitus is a crucial element in Darek's life story. He distanced himself from the working-class habitus and sought to break free from it. Instead, he associated more with his wife's upper-middle-class family. As he stated, compared to his parents, his parents-in-law understood the academic world, and thus, supported him, and were proud of his accomplishments. It appears that Darek felt more at ease in his "new class world" than in the old one. Furthermore, he has never truly felt at home in the working-class milieu, as he has always been searching for something different.

Discussion and conclusions

This article posed a question about the upwardly mobile individuals' experiences regarding their parents' roles in the processes related to educationally and professionally advancing paths. The key contribution is the identification of the parent's position in light of the potential mismatches between "inherited" capital and those recognised in educational and professional fields that the interviewees have chosen. The analysis draws on a sample of 30 biographical-narrative interviews with individuals who have experienced intergenerational social advancement and work in three selected professional fields: academic, artistic, and business. Four biographical cases were selected to illustrate the main scenarios of parental involvement in upward mobility processes, including general encouragement, ambition-driven guidance, multifaceted withdrawal, and hesitant observation.

This analysis contributes to previous research on the challenges of educational and professional paths of young people in Poland, and beyond, particularly, in terms of the difficulties resulting from limited capital in families of origin (cf. Lareau, 2011; Łuczaj, 2023; Mallman, 2018; Pustulka & Sarnowska, 2021; Reay, 2004; Ule et al., 2015). Unlike the typology developed by Pustulka and Sarnowska (2021), which explores inter-generational flows of capital and parental impact on educational pathways in differently positioned young adulthood more generally, this paper focuses specifically on upwardly mobile individuals whose parents were assumed to possess a relatively limited portfolio of capital. Additionally, this paper tracks not only the initial entrance into higher education but also subsequent, longer-term biographical processes, considering retrospective outlooks on both experiences of studying and gaining recognition in professional fields.

Although none of the interviewees' parents had higher education, their career paths varied. It is worth taking into account the post-1989 transformation and its influence on their professional and economic situation. For some parents (e.g., Zuza's mother or Radek's father), transformation-driven restructuring was followed by unemployment which affected the later family's economic situation. Others, such as Karolina's mother, "benefited" from the new economic opportunities and succeeded in new businesses (cf. Jarosz, 2005; Słomczyński et al., 2007). As successful business ventures or temporary labour migration converted into greater economic capital, the family's "stocks" of capital were reshuffled, which could restructure their children's opportunities. Another structural condition that needs to be taken into account is the place of living. Importantly, all narrators presented in this article grew up in middle-sized towns, which influenced their (limited) access to a variety of educational or cultural institutions. Compared to interviewees living in the bigger cities, the distance from the universities made them leave their parental home and pay for a room or apartment relatively soon.

Importantly, in the majority of cases, the interviewees' families acknowledged the significance of education. However, in the cases where parents provided general encouragement or pushed their children to pursue higher education based on their ambitions, the desire to attend university was evident. Conversely, for the other two scenarios, the notion of attending university, or even completing high school, was not within the realm of the narrators' parents' consideration. Another dimension concerns the parents' attitudes towards their children's educational choices: questioning and non-interfering. The latter one seems to be more ambiguous. The space for own choice often given by parents could be seen as a freedom to construct life in their own way as well as a kind of burden, and a source of uncertainty. Noteworthy, the scenario of hesitant observation is the most gendered one: working-class families presented rather pragmatic expectations towards sons and hesitation about their choice of (non-technician) academic or artistic fields (cf. Pustulka & Sarnowska, 2021).

As regards the capital, the narrators were aware of the relations between (post-1989) structural conditions and their families' opportunities. Thus, they rather expressed an understanding of (usually) scarce economic resources and limited informational capital. As for the former, except for those coming from families benefiting from the transformation changes, economic shortages have created numerous limita-

tions: from lack of participation in extra-curriculum language classes to the necessity of work during studies. In some cases, a sense of economic insecurity still accompanies the narrators. It reveals that upward mobility does not necessarily go hand in hand with economic capital. As for the informational capital, resulting from limited cultural and social capital (Helemäe et al., 2021; Lessky et al., 2021), it was translated into parents' inability to navigate their children within the educational system. Therefore, the narrators' paths were sometimes quite shattered, and constructed *blindly*. Against this backdrop, the narrators highlighted the sense of lost chances or random choices resulting from being non-navigated. In some cases (mostly in general encouragement scenario) emotional capital (Nowotny, 1981; Reay, 2005) was the one which, to some extent, compensated for other shortages and gave the narrators a sense of relational backup.

Moving between fields was "easier" or more possible with the significant others' (other family members, teachers, or peers) presence in the narrators' lives (cf. Lessky et al., 2021). For instance, colleagues equipped with more informational capital "opened" new life options and "guided" within new fields. It illustrates the assumption that young people do not depend only on family capital, but with years, acquire their own ones (Atkinson, 2021) which makes their upward mobility path feasible. However, although institutionalised and objectified forms of cultural capital can be acquired, the embodied one is harder to catch up (cf. Bourdieu, 1986).

As regards gaining the knowledge of rules of the game (Lessky et al., 2021) and navigating between two social fields (family-related and professional), the selected narratives confirmed that habitus cleft (Mallman, 2018; Friedman, 2016) is not a necessary outcome of upward mobility. On the one hand, some of the collected interviews presented stories of experiencing cultural discontinuity, impostor syndrome or anxiety (Crew, 2020; Friedman, 2016; Hanley, 2017; Łuczaj, 2023). On the other hand, there were also narratives on being self-confident and feeling of fitting in. In some interviews, these two experiences intersected as the narrator felt very confident regarding their knowledge/skills, and simultaneously, struggled with the lack of embodied cultural capital or difficulties with recognition of own achievements.

Drawing on the proposed conceptual model, in further studies it would be important to investigate additional potential flows of capital. Firstly, it is essential to determine if and how the acquired capital of narrators are transferred to their families of origin. Secondly, it is necessary to explore if and how upwardly mobile individuals (can) modify the capital at stake in their respective professional fields. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine the relationship between upward mobility experiences and the type of selected professional fields more comprehensively.

Appendix 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees

	Pseudonym	Gender & age	Professional field	Mother's occupation	Father's occupation
1.	Magda	woman, 40	academic	clerical support worker	electrical engineer
2.	Natalia	woman, 44	academic	entrepreneur	entrepreneur
3.	Radek	man, 38	academic	nurse	technician
4.	Agata	woman, 38	artistic	salesperson	driver/salesperson
5.	Dominika	woman, 32	(own) business	homemaker	construction worker/entrepreneur
6.	Kamil	man, 34	academic	nurse	mechanical engineer
7.	Damian	man, 42	(own) business	clerical support worker	electrical engineer
8.	Bartek	man, 32	academic	clerical support worker/cleaner/salesperson	security guard
9.	Karolina	woman, 38	artistic	farmer/ entrepreneur	technician/service worker
10.	Darek	man, 46	academic	various occupations in service/manual jobs	driver
11.	Iga	woman, 31	business	salesperson	construction worker
12.	Nina	woman, 32	business	dressmaker	driver
13.	Grzegorz	man, 37	academic	homemaker	health associate professional
14.	Agnieszka	woman, 35	business	nurse	construction worker/salesperson/entrepreneur
15.	Beata	woman, 46	academic	salesperson	driver

16.	Miłosz	man, 33	business	clerical support worker	toolmaker
17.	Hanna	woman, 31	academic	entrepreneur	construction worker
18.	Eliza	woman, 37	business	clerical support worker	driver
19.	Anna	woman, 46	academic	nurse	farmer/technician
20.	Tomasz	man, 37	academic	cook	electrical engineer
21.	Elias	man, 35	artistic	clerical support worker	security guard
22.	Antek	man, 41	artistic	stock clerk	toolmaker
23.	Daria	woman, 38	artistic	teacher	miner
24.	Filip	man, 32	artistic	farmer	farmer/construction worker
25.	Jagoda	woman, 43	academic	clerical support worker	mechanical engineer
26.	Kamila	woman, 34	artistic	cleaner and help	mechanical engineer/ armed forces occupation
27.	Dagmara	woman, 34	academic	clerical support worker	vocational teacher
28.	Aleksandra	woman, 35	business/ academic	farmer/cook	mechanical engineer/ driver
29.	Marcin	man, 43	academic	clerical support worker	driver/electrical engineer
30.	Zuza	woman, 41	artistic	metal working machine tool setter/ unemployed	electrical engineer

References

- Atkinson, W. (2021). Fields and individuals: from Bourdieu to Lahire and back again. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 24(2), 195–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431020923281>
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. (241–258). Greenwood.
- Bourdieu, P. (1987). What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 32(1984), 1–17.
- Bourdieu, P. (1999). The contradictions of inheritance. In P. Bourdieu et al. (eds.), *The Weight of the Worlds. Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. (507–513). Stanford University Press.
- Cebula, M. (2022). Inequality in social capital: assessing the importance of structural factors and cultural consumption for social advantage. A case from Poland. *International Review of Sociology*, 32(3), 501–528.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory. A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.
- Crew, T. (2020). *Higher Education and Working-Class Academics*. Palgrave Pivot.
- Domański, H., Mach B.W., & Przybysz, D. (2019). Otwartość polskiej struktury społecznej: 1982–2016. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 1(232), 25–63.
- Domański, H., Przybysz, D., Wyrzykowska K.M., & Zawadzka, K. (2022). Praktyki wychowawcze a transmisja wzorów kulturowych. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 66(1), 123–148. <https://doi.org/10.35757/KiS.2022.66.1.6>
- Friedman, S. (2016). Habitus clivè and the emotional imprint of social mobility. *Sociological Review*, 64(1), 129–147. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12280>
- Gdula, M. & Sadura, P. (eds.). (2012). *Style życia i porządek klasowy w Polsce*. Scholar.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory. Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine Publishing Company.
- Hanley, L. (2017). *Respectable. Crossing the class divide*. Penguin Books.
- Helemäe, J., Saar, E., & Lauri, T. (2021). How educational, economic, and cultural resources do matter: cohort differences in the impact of parental resources on educational attainment in the socialist and post-socialist contexts. *International Journal of Sociology*, 51(2), 105–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2020.1856543>
- Jarosz, M. (2005). *Wygrani i przegrani polskiej transformacji*. Oficyna Naukowa, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN.
- Jin, J. & Ball, S.J. (2020). Meritocracy, social mobility and new form of class domination. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 41(1), 64–79.
- Kwiek, M. (2013). From system expansion to system contraction: access to higher education in Poland. *Comparative Education Review*, 57(3), 553–576.
- Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: class, race, and family life*. University of California Press.
- Lessky, F., Nairz-Wirth, E., & Feldmann, K. (2021). Informational capital and the transition to university: First-in-family students' experiences in Austrian higher educa-

- tion. *European Journal of Education*, 56(1), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12437>
- Łuczaj, K. (2023). Upwardly mobile biographies. An analysis of turning points in the careers of working-class faculty. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 56, 100545. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2023.100545>
- Mallman, M. (2018). Disruption in the working-class family: the early origins of social mobility and habitus clivé. In S. Lawler and G. Payne (eds.), *Social mobility for the 21st century: Everyone a winner?*. Routledge.
- Mrozowski, A. (2011). *Coping with social change. Life strategies of workers in Poland's new capitalism*. Leuven University Press.
- Nowotny, H. (1981). Women in public life in Austria. In C.F. Epstein, R.L. Coser (eds.), *Access to power: cross-national studies of women and elites*. George Allen and Unwin.
- Pustulka, P. & Sarnowska, J. (2021). Educational choices of Polish youth in an inter-generational perspective. *Journal of Education and Work*, 34(4), 414–428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2021.1943332>
- Reay, D. (2005). Gendering Bourdieu's concept of capitals? Emotional capital, women and social class. *The Sociological Review*, 52(s2), 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2005.00524.x>
- Reay D. (2018). Working class educational transitions to university: the limits of success. *European Journal of Education*, 53(4), 528–540. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12298>
- Rek-Woźniak, M. (2016). *Młodzi dorośli. Wzory ruchliwości społecznej w okresie transformacji systemowej*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Sadura, P. (2017). *Państwo, szkoła, klasy*. Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej.
- Sayer, A. (2005). *The moral significance of class*. Cambridge University Press.
- Schütze, F. (2012). Analiza biograficzna ugruntowana empirycznie w autobiograficznym wywiadzie narracyjnym. Jak analizować autobiograficzne wywiady narracyjne. In K. Kaźmierska (ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii: analiza tekstów*. (141–278). Zakład Wydawniczy „Nomos”.
- Seghers, M., Boone, S., & Van Avermaet, P. (2021). Classed patterns in the course and outcome of parent-teacher interactions regarding educational decision-making. *Educational Review*, 73(4), 417–435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2019.1662771>
- Słomczyński, K.M., Janicka, K., Shabad, G., & Tomescu-Dubrow, I. (2007). Changes in class structure in Poland, 1988–2003: crystallization of the winners-losers' divide. *Polish Sociological Review*, 1(157), 45–64
- Świrek, K. (2022). Klasa średnia i „choroba braku granic”. *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, 3(45), 339–359. DOI: 10.19195/prt.2022.3.14
- Ule, M., Živoder, A., & du Bois-Reymond, M. (2015). “Simply the best for my children”: patterns of parental involvement in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(3), 329–348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2014.987852>
- Zysiak, A. (2016). *Punkty za pochodzenie. Powojenna modernizacja i uniwersytet w robotniczym mieście*. Zakład Wydawniczy „Nomos”

Małgorzata Sikorska¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-6854-8393

Faculty of Sociology, University of Warsaw, Poland

“We are so hermetic” – families’ social isolation as an essential feature of family life in contemporary Poland

Abstract

The paper reconstructs relationships between families with children and their social environment consisting of both individuals and institutions. The relationships are identified from the perspective of families. I posit the following research questions: (1) What individuals and what institutions compose the social environment around families and have influence over them? (2) Which individuals and institutions do families trust, and which do they distrust? (3) Which individuals or institutions, in the eyes of interviewees, support their families, and which go against them?

Edward C. Banfield’s concept of amoral familism and Stefan Nowak’s notion of sociological vacuum – both linked to social trust – provide a theoretical framework and serve as starting points for my study. The article is based on qualitative research findings. The study applied an inductive approach.

I argue that families’ isolation from institutions – I propose the term “families’ social isolation” – is one of the most significant aspects of family life in contemporary Poland. I identify three key components of Polish families’ social isolation: the absence of social institutions that families can trust, families’ disposition to cut themselves off

¹ **Corresponding author:** Małgorzata Sikorska, Faculty of Sociology, University of Warsaw, ul. Karowa 18, 00-324, Warsaw, Poland; email: me.sikorska@uw.edu.pl.

from institutions, and a perception of the family as a safe space as opposed to a “dangerous area” outside.

Keywords: amoral familism, sociological vacuum, families’ social isolation, social trust, qualitative research

Introduction

Opinion polls conducted in Poland since the beginning of the 21st century have consistently demonstrated a high level of distrust in institutions, especially those related to politics. Currently, political parties are distrusted by 70% of respondents, Parliament by 65%, the Government by 62%, and the Constitutional Tribunal² by 60% (CBOS, 2022). In this respect, Poland and other post-communist countries differ from the rest of Europe, where confidence in political institutions is ordinarily higher³. Moreover, the majority of the Poles do not trust people they do not know. In 2022, 77% of respondents selected the statement: *when interacting with other people, you have to be very careful*, while 19% agreed that *generally speaking, most people can be trusted* (CBOS, 2022). Only 30% of respondents reported that they trusted strangers, 58% claimed they did not (of which: 11% strongly distrusted), and 12% chose the answer: difficult to say (CBOS, 2022). Poland (along with other post-communist countries, as well as Portugal and Greece) is among the European states with a low level of “trust in people”⁴. Furthermore, the results of the European Social Survey conducted in 2020–2021 show that in Poland, compared to other post-communist countries, the group of respondents who chose the edge answer on a 10-point scale: *you can’t be too careful when dealing with other people* is extremely large, reaching 32%. In Slovakia, 14% of respondents chose this option; in Lithuania 8%; in Czechia 7%; and in Hungary 6%⁵. At the same time, Poles have a significantly high amount of confidence in people considered as “close”: 98% trust their immediate family (parents, children, spouse), 95% trust their friends, and 89% trust their extended family (CBOS, 2020).

The coexistence of distrust towards institutions and strangers together with high levels of trust in family members and other intimates lends itself to analysis involving the notions of amoral familism (Banfield, 1958; Tarkowska & Tarkowski, 1990; Ferragina, 2009; Alesina & Giuliano, 2011; Reay, 2014; Herreros, 2015; Foschi & Lauriola, 2016; Bigoni et al. 2016; Huyseune, 2019; Jhang, 2021) and sociological vacuum

² Due to its victory in the 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections in Poland, the Law and Justice (Pol. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) party started to control the Constitutional Tribunal (Sadurski, 2019). Therefore, the Constitutional Tribunal is mentioned here among other political institutions.

³ The following categories were taken into consideration: confidence in Parliament, political parties, and Government (Evalue, n.d.).

⁴ Two categories: *feeling that people can be trusted* and *trust completely or somewhat: people you meet the first time* were examined (Evalue, n.d.).

⁵ European Social Survey (2020–2021).

(Nowak, 1979; Pawlak, 2015; Woźniak et al., 2020). These two concepts, both linked to social trust, constitute the theoretical framework and starting points for my study.

The main objective of the paper is to reconstruct the relationships between families raising children and their social environment, which consists of both individuals and institutions. I answer three questions: (1) What individuals and what institutions compose the social environment around families and have influence over them? (2) Which individuals and institutions do families trust, and which do they distrust? (3) Which individuals or institutions, in the eyes of interviewees, support their families, and which go against them? In effect, I offer a qualitative analysis and an in-depth, multidimensional reconstruction of how families perceive their social environment or “psychosocial living space” (Pol. *psychospołeczna przestrzeń życiowa*, a notion proposed by Nowak, 1979). My analysis of the interviewers’ responses leads to the diagnosis of the families’ isolation from institutions – I propose the term “families’ social isolation” – as one of the most significant aspects of family life in contemporary Poland. Combining families’ social perceptions of individuals and institutions is an example of how family life has clashed with what is public and political. It can be assumed that a high level of trust in social institutions (including political ones) serves as a “link” between the spheres of the private (which involves family life) and public domains. In contrast, a low level of trust indicates a separation of the two spheres, a separation of the “world of individuals” from the “world of institutions” (to use Nowak’s terminology).

The paper is divided into the following sections. Initially, I present the key notions of the theoretical framework: amoral familism and the sociological vacuum. This is complemented by a brief overview of the relationships between families and institutions in Poland before the systemic transformation. Then, I detail how the qualitative data were gathered and analysed. The main body of the paper is devoted to presenting the results. In this section, I begin by describing the individuals who were indicated by interviewees as having an impact on their families, then I characterise the respondents’ perception of influential institutions. In the discussion of the results, I address three essential components of families’ social isolation identified through my analysis. The research’s and paper’s limitations are also discussed in that part. Finally, in closing remarks, I combine a reflection on the notions of amoral familism and sociological vacuum with the findings of my study.

Theoretical framework

The concept of amoral familism was developed by Edward C. Banfield (1958) in his analysis of the social and political backwardness of the southern Italian region in the late 1950s. Stefan Nowak (1979) offered the concept of a sociological vacuum in the social context of the Polish People’s Republic, particularly, in the 1970s. Both concepts were developed more than a half-century ago, focused on the poor and rural society in the first case, and the society under a communist regime in the second. Thus, it is reasonable to ask why these concepts are still useful in a liberal-democratic Poland in the second decade of the 21st century. After presenting and discussing the findings of my research, I will be back to this question in the closing remarks. Now, I concen-

trate on the main assumptions of both Banfield's and Nowak's conceptions and provide a brief overview of the links between families and social institutions in Poland before the systemic transformation.

Banfield's main claim is that individuals in a society consisting of "amoral familists" follow the rule: *maximise the material, short-run advantage of the nuclear family; assume that all others will do likewise* (1958, p. 85). Amoral familists will not support the interests of a social group or society unless it benefits them personally. Expressing genuine concern about public issues by amoral familists would be considered strange, if not inappropriate, given that any group in power is likely to be corrupt and care only about itself. Alesina and Giuliano sum up: *amoral familism leads to low civic engagement, low political participation, low generalised trust, and a lack of confidence in political institutions. As a result, amoral familism prevents the development of well-functioning political institutions, creates a situation where politics is simply a private affair of those who control it, common goods are completely disregarded and there is very little interest in participating in public affairs* (2011, pp. 817–818). In this type of society, a family is a provider of services, insurance, and transfer of resources (Alesina & Giuliano, 2011). With their trust in family members only, the amoral familists do not believe that the democratic structure based on rules and institutions can serve the family's interests (Foschi & Lauriola, 2016). Reay (2014), after John Rodger, emphasises that amoral familism is the antithesis of social solidarity and commitment to the common good because it is based on the family as opposed to the community. Ferragina (2009) claims that the general context of non-cooperation in amoral familism society makes the law (which can be treated as a social institution) difficult to uphold and easy to disregard unless it is enforced by the prospect of punishment.

Banfield's concept has been criticised for its unconvincing methodology (see: Ferragina, 2009). Also, the thesis that familism, strong family ties, and low levels of social trust are mutually linked has been disputed (see: Herreros, 2015). Nevertheless, in the 21st century, Banfield's thought has been brought back to light in the context of interest in social capital (Ferragina, 2009), most notably prominent in Putnam's (1993) and Fukuyama's (1995) theories. Moreover, the concept of amoral familism still remains intellectually inspiring, especially in research on high-trust and low-trust societies (see: Füzér, 2020).

Tarkowska and Tarkowski (1990) rely on the concept of amoral familism to describe social reality in the Polish People's Republic throughout the 1970s and 1980s. They contend that the separation of the private from the public, the "world of individuals" from the "world of institutions" (Nowak's terminology) was a transparent feature of Polish social life at the time. The private sphere and informal networks centred around family and other small groups (colleagues, neighbours, friends, acquaintances, etc.) were perceived as intensive, authentic, and vivid, while the public, official, and institutional sphere was distinguished chiefly by appearances and facades. Tarkowska and Tarkowski (1990) emphasise the distinction between "insiders" – those who are familiar, recognised, comprehended, and who create a social environment ruled by defined and obvious norms, and "outsiders/strangers" – individuals and institutions who are unknown, unpredictable, disruptive for the existing order, and sometimes even threatening or scary.

Wnuk-Lipiński (1982) proposes the notion of "dimorphism of values" to demonstrate the duality of moral attitudes and values depending on whether the possible partners are familiar individuals or social institutions. Koralewicz and Wnuk-Lipiński (1987) as well as Bojar (1991) claim that small groups (particularly family and friends) have a compensatory function against malfunctioning public institutions. These authors stress that strong emotional connections within small groups were one of the essential features of the Polish People's Republic. Individuals not only particularly valued the opinions of those close to them, but also were ready to sacrifice health and peace of mind, should that prove beneficial to their family and friends.

Nowak (1979) postulates the existence of a sociological vacuum between the level of primary groups and that of the national community. Nowak's concept clearly and strongly distinguishes a "nation" and a "state". The nation, as seen by the Poles, was a kind of moral community with an autotelic value, while the state as a system of organisation evaluated exclusively in instrumental terms. Nowak writes: *If we wished to draw a gigantic "sociogram" based on people's bonds and identifications, the social structure of our society perceived in those terms would appear as a "federation" of primary groups, families and circles of friends united in a national community, with rather insignificant other types of bonds between those two levels* (Nowak, 1979, p. 266)⁶. Nowak argues that institutions were often perceived as unfriendly, uncooperative, unreliable, and sometimes even threatening, and he emphasises that these perceptions were significantly linked to the strength of the relationships in primary groups.

Among the reasons for the existence of a sociological vacuum, Nowak enumerates a perceived lack of influence over institutions, a sense of "alienation", and a perception of the "institutional system" as a bureaucratic obstacle rather than a means of support. Woźniak et al. (2020) favourably refer to Nowak's noticing: *the growing sense of alienation among the masses and the subsequent loss of identification with the existing institutions owing to the decline of social trust in the 21st century. The bonds between primary groups and individuals on the one hand and the institutions on the other are weakened or broken* (2020, p. 519). Pawlak (2015) stresses that Nowak describes sociological vacuum as a Polish peculiarity. According to Nowak, the "objective" social structure in Poland and the institutional structure are as complex as in many other industrialised countries, but the "subjective" social structure, based on individuals' identifications, is different.

To summarise, there are three attributes that Banfield's and Nowak's conceptions have in common. Firstly, they have to do with the relationship between families (or primary groups consisting of related individuals) and broadly defined social institutions, which include, e.g., the law, the workplace, political institutions of the State, and the Church (in both cases, the Catholic Church). Second, they both assume that the strength of family ties (and bonds in other primary groups) can stimulate, and be stimulated by families' proclivity to distance themselves from institutions. Finally, both notions have been employed as starting points for examining the issue of social trust, even though Nowak, unlike Benfield, did not explicitly use the terms "trust" and "distrust" in his essay on the technicalities of sociological vacuum.

⁶ Translated by Pawlak (2015, p. 7).

Data and research method

The data was gathered through the realisation of the project: “Parenting practices in modern Polish families: daily routine reconstruction”⁷ (see: Sikorska, 2019). The study employed qualitative methodologies. Two rounds of in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 parent couples (regarding dyadic interviews; see: Żadkowska et al., 2018) and six single parents. A total of 54 respondents were interviewed in 2016 and 2017. Each participating family had at least one child under the age of six. There were 13 families with two children, and in five of them, the oldest child was older than six (9 to 15 years old). The respondents were aged from 25 to 45, the average age was 35. All respondents stated that they were heterosexual. Including an additional sampling criterion (sexual orientation) with such a small sample size (30 households) was not methodologically justified.

The sample consisted of 30 families: 15 interviews were conducted with middle-class families in Warsaw, while the remaining 15 interviews were conducted with working-class families in a medium-sized town (approx. 45,000 inhabitants). Quotes from the first group were marked from 1 to 15; from the second group: from 16 to 30. However, because the empirical data analysis did not reveal any significant or compelling differences in the relationship between families and social actors with regard to social class, this element is not examined further in the research. The interviewed couples jointly created lists of individuals and institutions and then together answered the specific questions outlined below. The respondents often supplemented each other's statements and added new examples. Therefore, gender was assessed as an important factor for only a very few topics (highlighted in the description of the results below), where differences between the comments of male and female respondents were clearly evident.

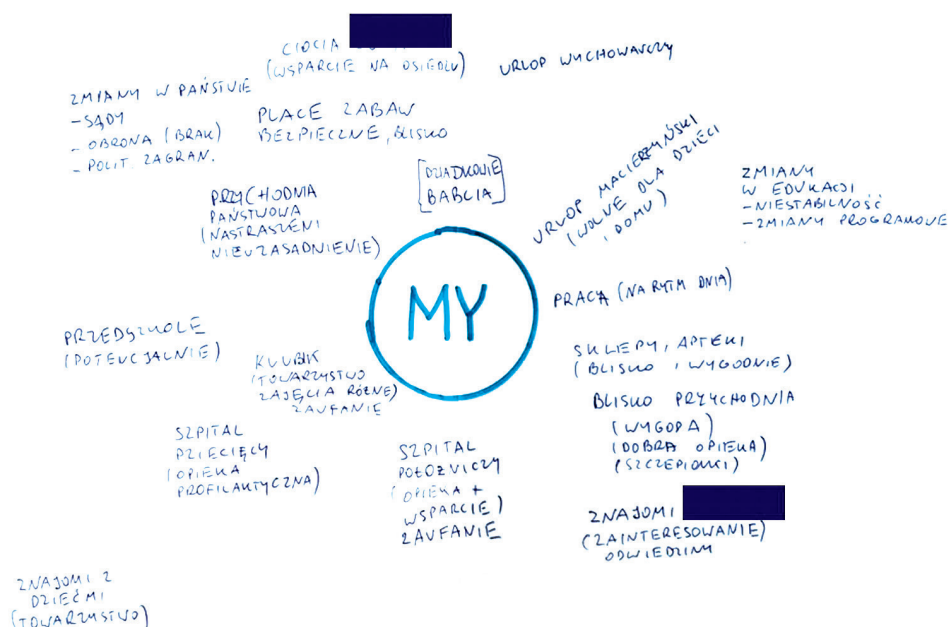
I used the following research tool to gather information on respondents' relations with social actors around them. The participants were given a large sheet of paper with the word “WE” (in the sense: our family, Pol. “MY”) in the centre and asked to come up with a list of all individuals and institutions that have influence over them. Then, the elements of the list were to be written down on that sheet in the following way: the closer to “WE”, the greater the influence (see: Picture 1 and Picture 2). Implementation of this research tool could be seen as a contribution to the qualitative research of family-institution relationships.

⁷ Financed by National Science Centre, Poland, grant no. UMO-2014/15/B/HS6/01874.



Picture 1. The example of sheets with a lowest number of listed individuals/institutions

Respondents listed: mommy, brother, sister-in-law.



Picture 2. The example of sheets with a larger number of listed individuals/institutions

Respondents listed: grandparents [grandmother], maternity leave, work, shops, medical centre, maternity hospital and children's hospital, daycare centre, kindergarten, playgrounds, aunt X, friends (who are interested in), changes in the State, changes in the education system. The list has been anonymised, mentioned names are covered.

When the respondents decided their lists were complete, the moderator began asking the following questions:

- 1) How does this individual/institution affect your family?
- 2) Do you have any influence on this individual/institution?
- 3) Does this individual/institution support you as parents? If so, what does it help you with?
- 4) Does this individual/institution obstruct your family? If so, how? What do you do then?
- 5) Do you trust this individual/institution? If not, why not?
- 6) How would you describe your relationship with this individual/institution in a few words?

If respondents did not mention kindergarten, school, workplace, health care, the Church, or politicians, the moderator enquired about them one by one.

The study involved an inductive approach (Neuman, 2003). The data was analysed using qualitative tools (Silverman, 2001), specifically the thematic analysis approach (Guest et al., 2012). The data was coded using ATLAS.ti software. The ethical procedure involved the preservation of the interviewees’ anonymity (e.g., names of respondents and their children were changed; the name of the medium-sized city was coded). All interviews were transcribed verbatim. For this paper, selected quotes were translated into English by the author. The translation was consulted with a professional interpreter.

Results

The individuals most frequently mentioned by interviewees are outlined in the first part of this section. Then, the institutions around the families, identified by respondents, are discussed. A summary of the results is shown in Figure 1.

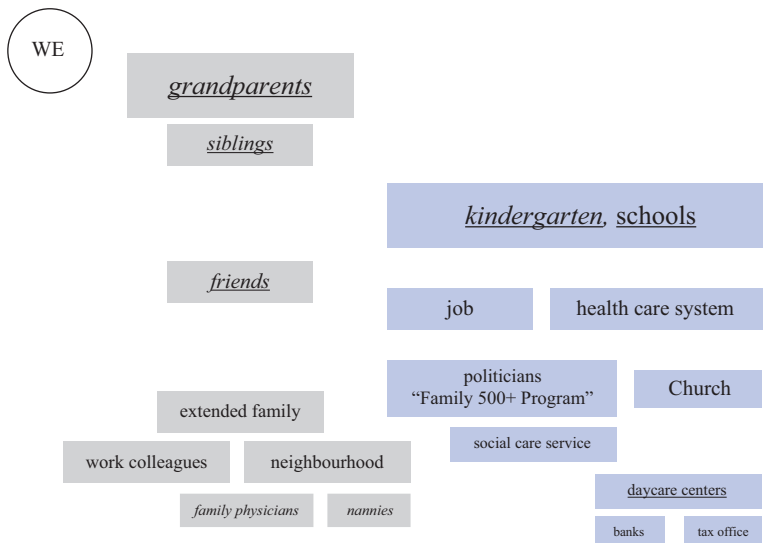


Figure 1. Summary of the results: individuals and institutions in families’ social environment

How should the data presented in the figure be interpreted?

- individuals and institutions that inspired trust in the interviewees have been marked in italics;
- individuals and institutions that were perceived to be supportive of families have been underlined;
- individuals and institutions mentioned most frequently by interviewees as having influence over their families have been marked in large font and placed close to "WE";
- individuals and institutions named the fewest times and perceived as less influential have been highlighted in a smaller font and placed further away from "WE".

Individuals around families

Almost all respondents spontaneously mentioned their parents, positioning them closest to the "WE" circle. Characteristically, however, they used only the term "grandparents", not "parents". Grandmothers (mothers more often than mothers-in-law) were indicated as significantly more influential and important than grandfathers/fathers-in-law. Grandfathers were hardly ever mentioned outside their role of grandmothers' helpers and as individuals, they were rather "invisible". The influence of grandparents primarily took three forms of support: organisational, financial, and emotional.

Organisational support increased the amount of time for parent's absence: grandparents assisted in children's daily routine (e.g., going to and returning from kindergarten/school), in sickness, or whenever parents wanted to be absent (e.g., over weekends). It also involved helping around the house (e.g., *they provide something to eat* – 18). As Jola and Marcin (25) said, grandparents: *feed, change, and dress their grandchildren just like we do*. Secondly, some respondents admitted that grandparents paid for their grandchildren's extracurricular activities, co-financed daily shopping, cooked lunches or bought expensive things (e.g., a car). The third type of assistance mentioned by respondents was emotional support, which mostly involved providing a sense of security. Many participants described grandparents as caring, trustworthy individuals who are emotionally close to their families and can always be relied on. Grandparental support was commonly regarded as natural and obvious – Angelika (24) said: *Grandparents ... they are simply present. They are with us, and they help*.

The same respondents who identified their parents as supportive also said that grandparents' attitudes and behaviours toward grandchildren were irritating. I recognised four major reasons why parents were annoyed with grandparents. First, almost all respondents claimed that grandparents spoiled their grandchildren. The pampering mostly consisted of providing children with a nearly unlimited amount of sweets. Julia's (21) statements perfectly demonstrate this: *My mom only feeds him with sweets. Grandma says, "It's better to eat a cookie than nothing"*. Marta and Tadeusz (5), the parents of a seven-year-old boy, defined the grandmother-grandson bond as follows: *Grandma wishes to overwhelm him with her love. She buys him everything he wants*. Second, interviewees were irritated when the grandparents did not obey the rules set by

the parents, which in effect reflected negatively on the parents' authority. Third, numerous respondents stated that their grandparents tolerated such behaviours in their grandchildren that they would not have tolerated, or indeed had not tolerated, in their own children. For the parents, that was a source of annoyance and, sometimes, even bitterness.

In short, parents' attitudes toward grandparents might be seen as a perfect example of ambivalence: on the one hand, grandparents were extremely supportive, but on the other, they were extremely annoying; on the one hand, grandparents were indispensable, but on the other, relations with them often involved a "fight" or even a "war" over different approaches to raising children; on the one hand, parents trusted grandparents and readily accepted their support, but on the other hand, they did not accept many of grandparents' behaviours toward grandchildren.

Siblings were indicated as influential far less frequently than grandparents. While grandparents' support was taken for granted, siblings' assistance had to be requested. Relationships with siblings did not provoke intense or ambivalent emotions. In contrast, relations with friends seem to be much more intriguing. The vast majority of respondents – even those who considered friends to be important – stressed that some topics should not be shared with persons other than family. Interviewees frequently used the statement that "dirty linen should be washed at home". "Money issue" was presented as an example of such a topic. Most frequently, interviewees reported their fears that others could use such knowledge against them. Many interviewees mentioned their *limited trust in people outside their immediate family* (21). In contrast, respondents who said they could discuss anything with friends at the same time saw this openness as breaking the dominant social norm of distrust.

Only very few respondents indicated the extended family members (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.), neighbours, work colleagues, family doctors (as persons, not as agents of the health care system), and nannies as influential.

Institutions around families

Kindergartens and elementary schools were the most influential and frequently referred to institutions that influenced families. Nurseries came in second, which is clear since nursery care in Poland is much less widespread than kindergarten care and most respondents had no experience with this institution⁸. The respondents' perceptions of kindergartens and schools and their level of trust in them as educational and caring institutions differed significantly. The vast majority of interviewees evaluated kindergartens significantly more favourably than they did schools. Parents viewed kindergartens as places where their children can self-develop, get educated and learn how to be more self-sufficient. Furthermore, the kindergarten staff, according to the interviewees, provided children with tender care and attention. In effect, children were

⁸ In 2021, for every 1,000 children under the age of three, 155 used nursery care (GUS, 2022). Kindergarten care was attended by 92% of children between the ages of three and six (Kazimierczyk, 2022).

protected, *completely taken care of*, and even *simply loved* (25). Almost all parents declared a positive relationship with the kindergarten staff, mutual readiness to discuss children's behaviours and openness to counselling on parenting issues. Some of the respondents were parents' representatives in kindergartens and they believed they had a voice in the running of these institutions. The vast majority of parents categorically stated that they trusted the kindergartens. The non-public ones were trusted even more.

Parents' attitudes toward elementary schools were definitely negative. First, respondents felt that children in schools were less individualised than in kindergartens and that their personal needs or difficulties were less frequently identified and addressed by the staff. The school was described by Angelika and Krzysztof (24), parents of two boys ages three and nine, as an *assembly line in a factory*. Children's anonymity at school might be linked with the perception that school is an unsafe place, where, as Iwona and Robert (27) stated, a child can be *pushed, slapped*, and generally *school means a struggle for survival*. Second, respondents believed they had less control over schools than over kindergartens. Marta and Tadeusz (5) described a teacher in their son's class who was extremely strict with the pupils. In the interviewees' own words:

'Tomek [son] is clearly stressed'.

'He's very nervous about school'.

'The kids are crying [...]'

'They do not want to enter the classroom'.

Despite their negative assessment of the teacher's work, which they mentioned multiple times throughout the interviews, the respondents did not try to change the situation. Nor did other parents in the class. Marta explained: *Everyone keeps their mouth shut because, I suppose, every parent is afraid their reaction may have an adverse effect on how their child gets treated*. Katarzyna and Maciek (18) emphasised that while the choice of school is a point at which they, as parents, can make decisions pertaining to their child's education, then later on, when they are not *inside the system [in the sense: since the child started education in school]*, well, *we don't have any impact*.

Nonetheless, for several respondents, having little control over the school did not imply discontent. Some parents stopped communicating with the school, assuming, as Ewa and Piotr (20) did, that they needed no contact if their children were doing well:

'How do we stay in contact with the school?'

'Yes, I am in contact, after all, I attend parent-teacher meetings ... Just kidding, practically I am not in contact at all...'

'Well, that's right, Natasza [daughter] is doing well in school [...]. I went to the meeting with the teacher, and then she said to me: "I have nothing to talk to you about because everything is fine".'

The workplace can be considered another institution listed by respondents as having an impact on their families. Employment had two effects on families, which respondents tended to describe simultaneously: first, it provided a livelihood for the fam-

ily, and second, it reduced the time *for the family*. Paulina and Konrad's (11) short conversation was an excellent demonstration of the dual impact of work on family: *It provides us with funds. And you are not at home [in the sense: because you are at work]*. The other type of employment's influence on family life was the structuring of both daily routine and leisure, e.g., holidays.

Respondents – especially female respondents – if they did recognise the positive aspects of work (apart from earning money), they indicated *a break from day-to-day duties* (21) and *a breath from everyday life*. [...] *[because] at work I can have a quiet cup of coffee, quite unlike at home* (14). Employment was rarely described as providing satisfaction, professional development or self-realisation. Work was mostly perceived as stressful, mood depressing, and having a generally negative impact on one's *well-being* (17), generating undesirable emotions that one *brings home* (10) and provoking the realisation that it all can *have a negative effect on the children* (18). Moreover, respondents rarely felt that the company, office or public institution where they worked supported them in their parental activities. In contrast, they were more likely to report assistance from coworkers (who, for instance, were ready to stand in when one had to take their child to see the doctor). Work was commonly presented as *in competition* with the family (in terms of time away from the family) or even as a *family enemy* (due to work being seen as a source of frustration that can negatively affect family life). A notable example was a conversation between Wojtek and Beata (26):

*'[Work] limits, restricts our being together, our being ... a family'.
 'Work consumes a part of our life'.
 'Half of our life'.*

The healthcare system was yet another social institution discussed. The majority of respondents professed distrust in physicians working primarily in the public health service. An excellent illustration here was Katarzyna and Maciek's (18) response to the question of whether they trust the health service: *'No [laughter]'. 'I mean, I'd rather go private [laughter]'*. Respondents' distrust and aversion to doctors may have derived from the experience of having one's parental concerns subjected to a very harsh judgement. Mothers, who had more regular contact with health care services than fathers, felt disrespected. Two stories provided excellent examples: Joanna (19) described how a doctor ridiculed her concerns about her child's health, which made her feel *totally insignificant [and] treated like a loony*; Julka (21) said a doctor dismissed her demands and labelled her *oversensitive*.

Politicians, political parties, and governing authorities were seen as less influential social institutions than the health system. Their impact was revealed in four contexts. One is the influence on families' financial situations. Interviewees primarily mentioned the public policy called the "Family 500+ Program" (launched in 2016, universal financial benefits for families with children) and the activities of social welfare centres. Respondents were ambivalent about this social programme. Those who had experienced financial improvement were openly enthusiastic: *Honestly, it's wonderful that it's there*, but at the same time: *When it wasn't there, we were also able to cope*, stressed Renata and Darek (12). Families in financial difficulties can apply for additional ben-

efits and then contact the social welfare centres. The interviewers described them as institutions that transmit welfare funds and *ask stupid questions* (24), demand *piles of documentation* (22), and sometimes humiliate the beneficiaries. Joanna (19) said: *Anybody who asks for financial support is profiled as an [instance] of social pathology plotting to extort money.*

Another form of impact of the government on families, as indicated by respondents, was related to the education system. In this context, parents discussed mainly the insufficient availability of nurseries and kindergartens, as well as the education reform introduced in 2016, which resulted in the abolition of middle schools (Pol. *gimnazja*). A third identified element of political influence was the organisation of the healthcare system. Here, the dominated opinions grounded in parents' experiences with the public health care system prevailed, so assessments were chiefly very negative. Fourth, a small percentage of respondents reported the government's effect on the organisation of various public-sector concerns such as the legal system, the economy, price rises, the labour market, and so on.

Even when the interviewees cited concrete examples of how their families were influenced by politicians' activities, the vast majority of them clearly distanced themselves from politics and those in power. Marek (19) stated: *They [politicians] irritate me. They have no impact on my life. It doesn't matter to me who is in power.* According to Tadeusz (5): *Politics is something we try to keep as far away from the child and family as possible [...] the level [of politicians] is zero, and there's no one to vote for; it's scary.* Regarding politics, other respondents declared: *We don't get involved in such matters* (27); *I do all in my power to ensure that politicians have as little effect on my family as possible* (23); *I don't watch the news because I don't want to get involved... I don't have the stomach for it* (12). Respondents stated unequivocally that they did not trust politicians. The government's support was seen only in terms of financial benefits, but in general, the interviewees felt their families were harmed rather than helped by politicians. Out of their own initiative, parents hardly ever mentioned politicians, political parties and governing authorities as influential institutions. Such bodies were mentioned in response to specific questions asked by moderators.

The Catholic Church was another institution mentioned by respondents as having an impact on their families. However, just one-third of the parents named it, which is in contrast with the prevalence of declarations of Catholicism in Poland – 87% of Poles describe themselves as "believers" or "strong believers", according to the CBOS quantitative survey conducted in 2021 (CBOS, 2021). Respondents' perceptions of the Church as an institution and their perceptions of Catholic religion varied markedly. The institutional church, represented by priests, clergymen, and teachers of religion at schools, was seen as untrustworthy and unsupportive. Additionally, some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the involvement of the Church in politics in Poland. Furthermore, the Church *repels* them due to the *clergy's greediness* (21). Another cause for the unfavourable evaluation of the Church was, as Arek and Kasia (7) pointed out, its readiness to meddle:

Silly pronouncements which, to put it bluntly, make no sense. Neither to us nor to science. Admittedly, one can hardly talk of the Church's scientific foundations, but the Church

itself meddles with scientific matters; let's take for instance the in vitro. A number of our acquaintances have made use of that. Who would consult the Church on IVF?!

At the same time, some respondents stated that the Catholic religion and faith provide them with emotional and spiritual support. The majority of respondents had an ambivalent attitude toward the Catholic Church. The ambiguity reflected in Julia and Maciek's (21) question: *Theoretically, we are Catholics, aren't we?*, as well as Marek's (23) distinction between *Christian values*, which were significant to him, and *Church values*, which he strongly questioned.

Among other influential institutions around families, yet only occasionally referenced, there were: banks (in the context of receiving and repaying loans), stores (their location relative to where respondents lived influenced the organisation of family life), daycare centres for children (which offered care for a few hours and helped *socialise the child* [28]), and sports clubs for children.

Discussion of the results

The study justifies the identification of three dimensions of families' social isolation. First, **absence of social institutions that families can trust**. Out of all the institutions listed by respondents, only kindergartens inspire trust and are perceived as family-friendly and supportive. Elementary schools are evaluated negatively because parents lack trust in them and receive less assistance from them. Parents' relationships with the other institutions mentioned, especially politicians, the Catholic Church, and the public healthcare system, are not founded on trust. Additionally, the vast majority of respondents do not perceive these institutions as supportive. On the contrary, parents are often irritated by the actions of these institutions (especially politicians), feel "alienated" (especially by the Church), and attempt to avoid them (as is the case with the public health services, which are ignored when the choice of the private ones is deemed feasible). Furthermore, the majority of respondents claim that, as parents, they have no (or very little) control over the listed institutions.

Given that most of the institutions are not trustworthy nor helpful, informal support networks are formed through familial bonds, mostly with grandparents, but also with siblings and, less often, with friends. Even if they are irritating, respondents' closest relatives have the greatest influence on parents and are the most supportive. In other words, the people regarded to be part of the family (typically of only the immediate family) and family ties are the most essential markers on the social environment map, and family ties involve the highest level of trust. This is clearly demonstrated in the conversation between Jola and Marcin (25). The respondents identified their family as only themselves and their children (Marcin) or as them, children plus parents and siblings (Jola), and then concluded: *I don't think we'll add anyone [in sense: important to them]. We are so hermetic*. Hermetic here is a quality capturing the processes by which the immediate family isolates itself from the outside world.

The second dimension of families' social isolation is the **desire presented by parents to separate their families from social institutions, and willingness to cut them-**

selves off from institutions, especially politicians and the Catholic Church. The parents discuss specific aspects of politicians' and the Church's influence on their family life (mentioning money transfers, influence on education and health systems in the case of politicians, and influence on children's religious practices such as baptism, communion, going to mass, and attending religious classes in the case of the Church), but simultaneously some of them state strongly that these institutions have no influence on their families. Moreover, they want to separate their families from the influence of politicians and the Church. This seeming contradiction may be caused by parents' associations of political or religious influence with attempts to interfere in the lives of their families ("meddling"), to which they are decidedly opposed. Parents also claim that they are unconcerned with what politicians and priests or clergymen think of them. At the same time, the majority of interviewees underline the importance of the opinions of people in their immediate network (mainly their grandparents and, less commonly, siblings, friends, and acquaintances). Kindergartens and schools were mentioned as institutions whose opinions were relevant to the respondents, but only in the first case was the assessment discussed in the context of supporting parents.

The third dimension of families' social isolation is characterised by the **perception of the family (usually narrowly defined by respondents) as a safe space as opposed to a "dangerous area" outside**. Many respondents perceive the world outside the family as threatening and unpredictable. These themes emerged either in response to questions (e.g., about children's futures) or spontaneously in various interview contexts. Respondents noted a range of threats to which they believed children were exposed, beginning with *leading someone [in sense: the child] astray* (3, 26), *bad influence* (9, 21) emanating from *bad company* (3, 4, 6, 22, 25), *bad people* (26), *dodgy people* (12) or *sects* (16). *Bad company* included those addicted to drugs, alcohol, or gambling, as well as *hot middle school girls* who are *hunting for young boys* (5) or a future *unsuitable wife* who would not take care of the respondent's son (21). Another significant risk mentioned by parents is addiction to technological devices (see: Sikorska, 2022). One of the implications of considering the outside world as dangerous was an upbringing based on distrust, implying a socialisation in which it was critical to *be warned of dangers* (22). This approach is excellently captured by Beata's comment (26): *You also need to teach [a child] trust in people, so... that they don't trust everyone*.

The main limitation of my research is the reduction of the sample to families with children. This might influence the respondents' selection of individuals and institutions considered influential. Grandparents, the most frequently mentioned individuals, were described by respondents as grandmothers and grandfathers of their grandchildren rather than their own parents. As for institutions, the most frequently mentioned were childcare and educational institutions. Implementing a survey based on a sample of families with teenagers or families without children might change the list of individuals and institutions identified as having influence on families, or at least affect the order in which they would be mentioned. In such cases, one could anticipate that grandparents, as well as childcare and education institutions, would not be listed most often. The absence of extensive literature on civil society or civil involvement issues could be considered as a limitation of my paper, too. However, this was dictated by the intention to focus on family-institutional relationships, for which

the concepts of amoral familism and sociological vacuum, implemented as a theoretical framework, seem to be best suited.

Closing remarks

I argue that families' social isolation can be seen as one of the most significant aspects of family life in contemporary Poland. Three dimensions of social isolation experienced by families with children are identified: the absence of supportive social institutions that families can trust, families' willingness to cut themselves off from institutions, and the perception of the family as a safe space as opposed to a "dangerous area" outside. In my opinion, the concept of family social isolation regarding a liberal-democratic Poland in the second decade of the 21st century corresponds to three observations made by Banfield (1958) and Nowak (1979), which deal with rural Italian communities in the 1950s in the first case, and Polish society under the communist regime in the 1970s and 1980s, in the second.

First, the notion of trust towards family members (and representatives of other primary groups) was essential for both Banfield's and Nowak's thoughts. Informal networks are centred around family, which is a provider of services, insurance, and the transfer of resources (Alesina & Giuliano, 2011) and which, in effect, can have a compensatory function against institutions (Koralewicz & Wnuk-Lipiński, 1987; Bojar, 1991). The relationships within the family or primary groups are perceived as intensive, authentic, and vivid (Tarkowska & Tarkowski, 1990), supportive and based on emotional connections (Koralewicz & Wnuk-Lipiński, 1987; Bojar, 1991). Family members and other intimates are seen as "insiders" (Nowak, 1979), who are familiar, recognised, and comprehended (Tarkowska & Tarkowski 1990). The results of my study echo these observations, demonstrating the tendency to perceive family as a safe space in opposition to a "dangerous area" outside. In particular, grandparents were described as the most supportive kin relations, even if they sometimes irritated the parents. Parents view grandparental assistance as natural. Furthermore, grandparents, siblings, and friends are all identified as individuals who can be trusted. In reference to institutions, only kindergartens are perceived by parents as supportive and trustworthy.

Secondly, in both concepts of amoral familism and sociological vacuum, the prioritisation of family bonds is accompanied by low levels of trust in institutions. Nowak (1979) identifies a sense of "alienation" from institutions, which are viewed as unfriendly, uncooperative, unreliable, or even threatening. My findings complement Banfield's and Nowak's theses, revealing a lack of supportive social institutions in which families can place their trust, as well as parents' willingness to isolate themselves from institutions. The results of quantitative research cited in the introduction (CBOS, 2020, 2022; Evalue, n.d.; European Social Survey, 2020–2021) confirm the thesis of low level of social trust in Poland. Moreover, parents claim that institutions have no influence on their families or that they do not want institutions to have any influence. At the same time, they argue that they have no control over institutions. A lack of trust in institutions and distancing from them can be regarded as one of the key reasons for the appreciation of both the family as a universal value and family relationships that connect those qualified as family members.

Thirdly, Banfield and, particularly, Nowak highlight the existence of a barrier between the private and public spheres, which may arise from both a high level of trust in family members and a low level of social trust in institutions. Wnuk-Lipiński (1982) introduced the term “dimorphism of values” to illustrate the relevant attitudes toward individuals and institutions. The results of my study confirm these observations. Family members (especially grandparents and siblings, but also friends) are viewed as “insiders” who operate in the private sphere and belong to the “world of individuals” in opposition to institutions (except kindergartens) that operate in the public sphere.

What are the reasons for the similarities between Banfield’s and Nowak’s observations (made more than a half-century ago) and the presented findings? The simplest explanation is that the concepts of amoral familism and sociological vacuum are defined at such a high level of generality that they are universal enough to be applied to various types of societies. In other words, the coexistence of high levels of trust in family members and in members of other primary groups with low levels of trust in institutions is ubiquitous and obtains regardless of the type of economy (socialism or capitalism) or the type of organisation of society (traditional or postmodern society, communist regime or liberal democracy). An alternative response, which solely applies to Nowak’s concept, refers to the course of long-term processes of cultural and structural formation – the process of *longue durée* (Braudel, 1995), which is grounded in social relations, including relationships between families and institutions (see: Sawicka & Sikorska, 2020) regardless of the type of society organisation. Both answers are, in my opinion, reasonable.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express her thanks to Jan Wawrzyniak for editing and proofreading and to the Faculty of Sociology, University of Warsaw, for subsidising proofreading costs.

References

- Alesina, A. & Giuliano, P. (2011). Family Ties and Political Participation. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 9(5), 817–839. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-4774.2011.01024.x>
- Banfield, E.C. (1958). *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*. The Free Press.
- Bigoni, M., Bortolotti, S., Casari, M., Gambetta, D., & Pancotto, F. (2016). Amoral Familism, Social Capital, or Trust? The Behavioural Foundations of the Italian North – South Divide. *The Economic Journal*, 126(594), 1318–1341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eoj.12292>
- Bojar, H. (1991). Rodzina i życie rodzinne. In M. Marody (ed.) *Co nam zostało z tych lat... Społeczeństwo polskie u progu zmiany systemowej*. (28–69). Aneks.

- Braudel, F. (1995). *A History of Civilizations* (R. Mayne, trans.). The Penguin Press.
- CBOS. (2020). Zaufanie społeczne. *Komunikat z badań*, 43(2020). https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2020/K_043_20.PDF
- CBOS. (2021). Religijność młodych na tle ogółu społeczeństwa. *Komunikat z badań*, 144(2021)/144. https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2021/K_144_21.PDF
- CBOS. (2022). Zaufanie społeczne. *Komunikat z badań*, 37(2022). https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2022/K_037_22.PDF
- Foschi, R. & Lauriola, M. (2016). Do Amoral Familism and Political Distrust Really Affect North–South Differences in Italy. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 47(5), 751–764. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022022116644986>
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K., & Namey, E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483384436>
- GUS. (2022). Złobki i kluby dziecięce w 2021 r. https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/6000/3/9/1/zlobki_i_kluby_dzieciece_w_2021_r.pdf
- Herreros, F. (2015). Ties that bind: Family relationships and social trust. *Rationality and Society*, 27(3), 334–357. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043463115593122>
- Huyseune, M. (2019). The Reception of the Concept of Amoral Familism. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 33, 365–388. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-019-09335-6>
- European Social Survey. (2020–2021). *Europejski Sondaż Społeczny*. https://esspl.shinyapps.io/ess_app/
- Evalue. (n.d.). <https://www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu/>
- Ferragina, E. (2009). The never-ending debate about the moral basis of a backward society: Banfield and “amoral familism”. *Journal of Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 1(2), 141–160. <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01314030>
- Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust: the social virtues and the creation of prosperity*. Free Press.
- Füzér, K., Huszár, A., Bodor, Á., Bálint, L., & Pirmajer, A. (2020). Social capitals, social class, and prosperity in high-trust and low-trust societies. *International Journal of Sociology*, 50(1), 48–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2019.1684081>
- Jhang, F.-H. (2021). Bonding social capital and political participation: the mediating role of political interest. *The Social Science Journal*. DOI: 10.1080/03623319.2021.1919846
- Kazimierczyk, I. (2022). Edukacja dzieci w Polsce – wybrane aspekty. In M. Sajkowska and R. Szredzińska (eds.), *Dzieci się liczą 2022. Raport o zagrożeniach bezpieczeństwa i rozwoju dzieci w Polsce*. (216–237). Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę. https://fdds.pl/_Resources/Persistent/1/5/6/d/156da34c6b8ff398968a5ac7c5e459e0268ff09d/Dzieci%20si%C4%99%20licz%C4%85%202022%20-%20Edukacja.pdf
- Koralewicz, J. & Wnuk-Lipiński, E. (1987). Życie rodzinne, towarzyskie i publiczne. Wartości i deprivacje. In E. Wnuk-Lipiński (ed.), *Nierówności i upośledzenia w świadomości społecznej: raport z badania: nierówności społeczne, poczucie więzi, wiara w siebie*. Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN.
- Neuman, W.L. (2003). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Allyn and Bacon.
- Nowak, S. (1979). System wartości społeczeństwa polskiego. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 4(75), 155–173. https://www.studiasocjologiczne.pl/img_upl/studia_socjologiczne_2011_nr1_s.261_278.pdf

- Pawlak, M. (2015). From Sociological Vacuum to Horror Vacui: How Stefan Nowak’s Thesis Is Used in Analysis of Polish Society. *Polish Sociological Review*, 1(189), 5–28. https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/6552/from_sociological_vacuum_to_horror_vacui.pdf
- Podgórecki, A. (1987). Całościowa analiza społeczeństwa polskiego. In E. Wnuk-Lipiński (ed.), *VII Ogólnopolski Zjazd Socjologiczny: Materiały*. (576–612). Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne.
- Putnam, R. (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.
- Reay, D. (2014). White middle-class families and urban comprehensives: the struggle for social solidarity in an era of amoral familism. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 3(2), 235–249. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204674314X14008565988654>
- Sadurski, W. (2019). *Poland’s Constitutional Breakdown*. Oxford University Press.
- Sawicka, M. & Sikorska, M. (2020). Struggling with Emotions in Times of Social Change: Control Restoring Operations in the Workplace and the Family. *Polish Sociological Review*, 212(4), 411–424. <https://doi.org/10.26412/psr212.02>
- Sikorska, M. (2019). *Praktyki rodzinne i rodzicielskie we współczesnej Polsce – rekonstrukcja codzienności*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
- Sikorska, M. (2022). “Addictive” for children and “helpful” to parents: electronic devices as a non-human actor in family relations. *Journal of Family Studies*, 28(3), 841–857. DOI: 10.1080/13229400.2020.1759446
- Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Tarkowska, E. & Tarkowski, J. (1990). „Amoralny familizm”, czyli o dezintegracji społecznej w Polsce lat osiemdziesiątych. In E. Wnuk-Lipiński (ed.), *Grupy i więzi w systemie monocentrycznym*. (37–69). Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN.
- Wnuk-Lipiński, E. (1982). Dimorphism of Values and Social schizophrenia: a Tentative Description. *Sisyphus. Sociological Studies*, 3, 81–89.
- Woźniak, W., Kossakowski, R., & Nosal, P. (2020). A Squad with No Left Wingers: The Roots and Structure of Right-Wing and Nationalist Attitudes among Polish Football Fans. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 67(6), 511–524. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2019.1673177>
- Ziółkowski, M. (2000). *Przemiany interesów i wartości społeczeństwa polskiego*. Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora.
- Żadkowska, M., Olcoń-Kubicka, M., Gądecki, J., Mizelińska, J., Stasińska, A., Schmidt, F., & Halawa, M. (2018). Metodologiczne aspekty jakościowych badań par – synteza doświadczeń terenowych. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 3(230), 41–69. DOI: 10.24425/122472