

CHOSEN ASPECTS OF THE PARENTAL ROLE FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THREE GENERATIONS

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Abstract: Parental activity is an elementary assumption of the existence and continuity of the society. Parents are supposed to bring up their children in a correct way, to look after their nutrition, education, health and adequate opinion orientation. They are responsible for fulfilling of these social tasks. In the article we present our research aimed at examining the chosen aspects of the parental role and childlessness as its alternative from the point of view of three generations. In our research participated a chosen sample of respondents, consisting of representatives of three generations - students, parents and grandparents. The research results were processed by means of chosen statistical methods - methods of qualitative analysis. The research confirmed that opinions of respondents on the current parental role, i.e. its chosen aspects, statistically significantly depend on the fact which generational group they belong to - students, parents and grandparents.

Keywords *parental role, child, marriage, childlessness, χ^2 - test*

Introduction

A parental role is an important part of the identity of adult people. This role is primarily a biologically-conditioned role and, at the same time, it is also mentally and socially significant because it represents a key change in the life of every person (Vágnerová, 2000; Knoester, Eggebeen, 2006; Kurincová, Turzák, 2018). Its impact on the people's personalities and their subjectively perceived happiness or life satisfaction is really evident (Hansen, 2011). Parenthood is a transformative experience imposing a unique mix of stress and rewards for those who enter (Nomaguchi, Milkie, 2003). The birth of a child is a major life course transition that requires a reshuffling of roles, routines, and schedules (Vágnerová, 2000; Umberson, Pudrovska, Reczek, 2010).

1 Parental role, its transformation and realization

The tradition of parenthood has its uninterrupted, continuous line. Despite this fact, there have occurred many qualitative changes in the character of parenthood. One of them is the altered motivation to parenthood. According to Dytrych (In Dunovský et al, 1999, p. 111), it was thought in the past that parenthood was guided by instincts and, therefore, the role of maintaining the lineage was very important in this perception. People believed that there existed almost omnipresent maternal instincts that influenced the woman in such a way that she felt an irrepressible desire or urge at certain age to enrich her life with the birth of a child. In the past, children were considered to be part of a natural process because they guaranteed the care about their retired parents, they were the heirs of the family property and they were also the working force (already at a relatively early age). However, these aims do not represent the motivational basis of the parenthood anymore. Nowadays, there is characteristic a transition from the economic points of view to the emotional ones. The importance of the child for the life satisfaction and happiness of parents is a subject of many studies (Hansen, 2011; Pollmann-Schult, 2014; Ruppanner, 2018). They all emphasize the psychological and emotional aspects of parenthood. According to Matějček (2017, p. 25), the worldwide tendency is oriented to the psychologization and emotionalization of the family relationships. This attitude supports the satisfying of personal psychological needs of adult people in their coexistence with children.

Changes have also occurred in the contents and performing of the parental role. The current society tends to equalize the roles of both parents gradually and they become mutually substitutable. Maternal and paternal roles have been influenced by the fact that many women do not consider the maternal role as the only role for them and they want to grow also professionally. In our society the roles of both genders have been

changing and for this reason many women want to shorten the time of performing the maternal role in favour of professional and other activities. Such an attitude has been typical mainly of men until very recently. Several years devoted to the motherhood have changed from the lifelong task into a significant but only short episode in the prolonging life. As a consequence of the changed maternal role, fathers have been taking over some traditional tasks which were reserved only for mothers before. Sociological researches confirmed that the function of a father has changed more significantly than the function of a mother during the last decades (e.g. Možný, 1990; Miller, 2011; Bosoni, 2014).

Family is the framework for performing the parental role. Demographic changes, occurring in our society after the year 1989, caused the pluralization of the forms of family where the parental role is carried on. We think about the increase of nonmarital cohabitation, single-parent families, as well as homosexual partnerships. Whereas in the past the majority of children was born into a married family, nowadays it has become a trend (mainly in the case of the first child) that the child is born to unmarried parents. According to Tydlitátová (2011), the number of children born outside the institution of marriage has been growing continually and incessantly in Slovakia after the year 1989. In the period shortly after the Velvet Revolution, the marker showed the value of less than 10%, in the year 1991 there were 19,7%, in 2009 the number has overpassed the level of 31% and the last data (Šprocha, Šídlo, 2018) state that the number of these children has already reached almost 40%. The consequence of these demographic changes in current families can be seen in the altered structure of families, i.e. the decreasing number of complete, two-parent families and the increasing number of single-parent families. Zartler (2014) says that the rise in single-parent families by way of increases in divorce and nonmarital childbearing has been one of the most strongly pronounced trends in family behaviour over the past decades. The fact that children are brought up just by one parent does not cause any deviation in their development. According to Kendig, Bianchi (2008) single mothers do not spend less time with their children than married mothers, but they have more problems in the economic and social areas (Neises, Grüneberg, 2005). "Parenthood is associated with higher levels of distress for the unmarried than the married" (Evenson, Simon, 2005), single mothers reporting worse mental and physical health outcomes for this group, compared to married mothers (Davies, Avison, McAlpine, 1997).

Parenthood brings in positive experience, but it is also a certain burden. For this reason, it does not have to be completely accepted. In certain circumstances adult people can postpone parenthood or they prefer childlessness. According to Umberson, Pudrovska, Reczek (2010), recent decades have witnessed a trend toward increased childlessness and delayed childbearing. This fact is confirmed by statistics, as well as by several authors (Vajda, Kósa, 2005; Matějček, 2017). According to them, despite relative well-being in the western cultures the number of born children has had a descending tendency in the last decades. Therefore, the postponing of parenthood to higher age (Mills et al., 2011) and the increase of (un)voluntary childlessness (Hašková, 2009; Beaujouan et al., 2017) have become very discussed topics in the current society. Mills et al. (2011) see the reason of postponed parenthood mainly in the growing educational level of women and their increasing participation at the labour market. According to Matějček (2017, p. 19), some people think that children will endanger their inner balance. However, the reasons do not have to be only negative ones, but also positive ones - not only egoism, but also responsibility. Hašková (2009) studied factors influencing the voluntary childlessness and she mentions the following factors as the most decisive ones: the level of education, type of education, type of occupation, concentration of young people in big cities and the family status. Another significant factor is the fact that there

increases the number of young people who do not have a stable partner at the age of 25 - 30 (the majority of their parents became parents at this age) and this shortens the period of starting a family at the age of the highest fertility.

2 Research of chosen aspects of parenthood and childlessness from the point of view of three generations

2.1 The project of the research

Current frequent forms of family life (nonmarital childbearing, single parents, homosexual partnerships) provoke many public as well as professional discussions about their impact on the performing of the parental role. Based on occurring changes in the family life mentioned above, we aimed at finding the opinions of the public on chosen aspects of parenthood in the current family from the point of view of three generations. We examined the parental role and we focused on three aspects: 1. „legalization“ of the child with the marriage of parents (parenthood and nonmarital family), 2. parenthood in the alternative type of a family, 3. childlessness.

The aim of the research was: 1. to obtain the opinions of the public on chosen aspects of parenthood and childlessness in the current family from the point of view of three generations, 2. to find out whether the age and belonging to a certain generational group determines the opinions of respondents on chosen aspects of parenthood and childlessness, i.e. to find out whether there exists a statistically significant difference in opinions of respondents on parenthood and childlessness from the aspect of three generations.

For the needs of our research we set the following research questions: 1. Is it necessary “to legalize the child” with the marriage of parents? Does the society require so that the child is born to married parents? 2. Are the traditional opinions on the upbringing of children still dominant? Does the society connect the upbringing and care about children mainly with the maternal role? 3. Are there more frequent negative or positive opinions of the public on the upbringing of children by single parents or parents of the same gender? 4. Is the voluntary childlessness evaluated negatively as an expression of egoism?

The research sample consisted of students of universities, their parents and grandparents from different regions of Slovakia. The total number of respondents was 333 and they were divided into three groups. The first group was formed by 132 students of universities, in the second group were 118 parents and the third group consisted of 83 grandparents. In the set there were represented respondents of both genders and all marital statuses, coming from villages and towns and having a different level of achieved education.

In order to obtain the research data we used a non-standardised questionnaire - the same for all three research sets. The questionnaire involved the Likert scale for measuring the attitudes and opinions of the respondents with the aim to specify their level of agreement or disagreement with the given statements on a 5 - degree scale: 1 - I totally agree, 2 - I rather agree, 3 - I cannot express myself, 4 - I rather disagree, 5 - I totally disagree.

Based on the results of our research, we found out that the opinions of respondents of the relevant generational groups differ from each other. The aim of the statistical analysis was to ascertain whether these differences are also statistically significant, i.e. whether the answers of the respondents of three groups to the particular statements are dependent on the belonging of the respondents to their age group (students, parents or grandparents). Therefore we tested the dependence of two nominal characters A, B where the character A - the status of the respondent - achieved three levels: a student, a parent or a grandparent and the character B - represented possible answers to the given statement.

In the statistical analysis of the obtained data there was used the χ^2 - test for verifying the independence of two qualitative characters A, B . We tested the zero hypothesis H_0 : the characters A, B are independent versus the alternative hypothesis H_1 : the characters A, B are dependent. The testing criterion is

the statistics χ^2 defined by the relation $\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{j=1}^m \frac{(f_{ij} - o_{ij})^2}{o_{ij}}$,

where f_{ij} are empirical numbers and o_{ij} are forecast numbers.

We deny the tested hypothesis H_0 at the level of significance α if the level of the tested criterion χ^2 exceeds the critical level $\chi^2_{\alpha}(r)$ (Markechová, Stehlíková, Tirpáková, 2011).

We performed the test by means of the programme STATISTICA. In the output set of the programme we obtained the contingent table, the value of the testing criterion χ^2 - test and the value of p meaning the probability of a mistake we make if we deny the tested hypothesis. If the calculated value of p is relatively small ($p < 0,05$, resp. $p < 0,01$), we deny the tested hypothesis H_0 about the independence of the observed characters A, B (at the level of significance 0,05 resp. 0,01). We will evaluate the test on the basis of the calculated p -values and, subsequently, we will present the results in the tables.

2.2 The analysis of the research results

Regarding the research aims mentioned above, in the analysis of the research data we verified by means of χ^2 - test whether the opinions of three groups of respondents about the given statements are significantly different. Therefore we tested the dependence of two nominal characters A, B where the character A - the status of respondents - achieved three levels: a student, a parent or a grandparent. The character B - answers to the statement - achieved five levels (1 - I totally agree, 2 - I rather agree, 3 - I cannot express myself, 4 - I rather disagree, 5 - I totally disagree).

The first set of statements (No 1 – 2) was focused on the topic of “legalization of the child” with the aim to find out how it is important for the respondents so that the parents get married before the birth of the child. We tested the statistical significance of differences in the opinions of respondents from particular groups on the following statements:

1. For the child it is not important whether the parents are married or not.
2. It is not important so that the parents get married before the birth of the child.

We tested the statistical significance of the differences in the answers of the respondents of three groups to the statements No

1 and No 2 by means of the χ^2 - test. The results are stated in the Table 1.

Table 1 Results of the χ^2 - test

Statement	χ^2	p
No 1	10,554	0,228
No 2	52,446	0,000*

The values of probability p smaller than the stated level of significance $\alpha = 0,05$ are marked with an asterisk * in the Table 1. Based on the results mentioned in the Table 1, we can state that respondents of three groups answered to the statement No 2 statistically differently, but they answered to the statement No 1 without a statistical difference. When we were evaluating the statement No 1, there was not evident a statistically significant difference in the answers of respondents of three generational groups. We found out a rather reluctant or rejecting attitude in all three groups of respondents to the statement which

says that for the child it is not important whether the parents are married or not. The highest level of disagreement was expressed by grandparents (66%), followed by parents (58%). The lowest level of disagreement could be seen in the student group (48%). This disagreement of all three groups of respondents with the statement *"For the child it is not important whether the parents are married or not"* confirms the norm that requires so that the child is born to married parents. According to the opinions of the respondents, the marriage of parents represents an important matter for the child.

Based on the results obtained with the analysis of the answers to the statement No 2 *"It is not necessary so that the parents get married before the birth of the child"*, we can confirm different evaluations of this statement from the point of view of three observed generations. The highest level of disagreement with the statement No 2 was expressed by grandparents (74%: I totally disagree 29%, I rather disagree 45%) and by parents (59%: I totally disagree 19%, I rather disagree 40%), i.e. according to their opinion it is necessary so that the parents get married before the birth of their child. This condition of getting married was the least important for students who agree with the given statement (44%: 17% I totally agree, 27% I rather agree). According to students, it is not necessary to get married before the birth of the child. 44% of students, 36% of parents and 20% of grandparents agreed with this statement. The statistical analysis confirms that the mentioned differences in the answers of respondents are statistically significant, i.e. they are statistically significantly related to the fact which generational group the respondents belong to. Regarding to the mentioned results, we can assume that the generations of grandparents and parents have more traditional opinions on the legalization of the child with the marriage of the parents, compared to the generation of students.

The second set of statements (No 3 – 5) was focused on the gender aspects of parenthood and other types of family (single-parent family, homosexual family). Our aim was to find out whether there prevail traditional opinions on the upbringing of children, i.e. whether this task is connected primarily with the maternal role. We also wanted to obtain the opinions on the upbringing of children in different types of family. We tested the statistical significance of differences in the opinions of the respondents of particular groups about the following statements:

3. Women can care about children better than men.
4. Single parents are able to bring up children in the same way as the complete families.
5. The upbringing of children by partners of the same gender can be as good as the upbringing by parents of both genders.

Once again we tested the statistical significance of the differences in the opinions of three groups of respondents about the statements No 3 - 5 by means of the χ^2 - test (Table 2).

Table 2 Results of the χ^2 - test

Statement	χ^2	p
No 3	50,257	0,000*
No 4	7,200	0,515
No 5	18,068	0,020*

Based on the results mentioned in the Table 2, we can state that respondents of three groups answered to the statements No 3 and No 5 with a statistically significant difference, but they answered to the statement No 4 without any statistical difference. In the evaluation of the statement No 3 *"Women can care about children better than men"* we found the highest level of agreement with this statement by grandparents (61%: I totally agree 43%, I rather agree 18%). From these results it is evident that the generation of grandparents has the most traditional opinions and they perceive the parental role primarily as the maternal role. Parents (45%) and students (27%) agreed to a lesser extent with the fact that women can care about children better than men. They connect the parental role with the mother, as well as with the father. At the same time, we can see that

students disagree with this opinion about better care about children provided by women than by men the most (41%: I totally disagree 11%, I rather disagree 30%). The opinions of students and parents witness about the weakening of the traditional conviction that the parental role is primarily a maternal role. Statistically significant differences were evident also in the evaluation of the statement No 5 about the upbringing of children by homosexual parents. The most rejecting attitude to the upbringing of children by homosexual parents could be seen in the group of grandparents. 72% of grandparents disagree with the opinion that the upbringing of children by these parents could be as good as the upbringing by parents of both genders (I totally disagree 48%, I rather disagree 24%). Comparing these three groups of respondents, students and their parents have a less rejecting attitude (55%, 55%) to the upbringing of children by homosexual partners, i.e. only a half of parents and students perceive the upbringing of children in this type of family negatively. A very interesting finding is the fact that relatively a big group of respondents (students 20%, parents 32%, grandparents 18%) could not express their attitude to this question. This is probably related to the lack of scientifically verified facts about the impact of the homosexuality of parents on the development and upbringing of children.

The statistical analysis of the answers to the statement No 4 did not show any statistically significance of differences between the groups. We found out ambivalent attitudes of respondents to the upbringing of children by a single parent. Comparing their opinions, we found out a similar level of agreement, as well as disagreement with the statement *"Single parents can bring up children in the same way as the complete families"*. 46% of students, 46% of parents and 47% of grandparents agreed with this statement. Disagreement was expressed by 40% of students, 37% of parents and 34% of grandparents. We can state that an explicitly rejecting (or accepting) attitude to the upbringing of children by a single parent was not expressed by any group of respondents.

The third set of statements (No 6 – 8) was focused on the topic of childlessness because the natality in Slovakia and in other European countries has a decreasing tendency. On one hand, there increases the number of infertile couples and, on the other hand, there increases also the number of those who have decided for the childlessness. For these reasons we wanted to obtain opinions of the public on the value of a child in their lives. We asked them if they perceive a child as one of their life aims and

how they evaluate voluntary childlessness. By means of the χ^2 - test we tested the statistical importance of differences between the three groups of respondents in their opinions about the following statements:

6. Who does not have a child, cannot live a happy life.
7. It is not correct if people do not have children as a meaning of life.
8. Voluntary childlessness is an expression of egoism, careerism and indolence.

The results are recorded in the Table 3.

Table 3 Results of the χ^2 - test

Statement	χ^2	p
No.6	20,213	0,009*
No.7	28,622	0,000*
No.8	28,752	0,000*

From the results mentioned in the Table 3 it is evident that respondents of three generations have statistically different opinions on all statements related to childlessness we presented to them. The answers confirm a disagreement with the statement No 6 *"Who does not have a child, cannot live a happy life"*. All three groups of respondents expressed a similar level of disagreement with the given statement (students 58%, parents 46%, grandparents 50%), but they had a different level of agreement with this statement (students 14%, parents 33%, grandparents 30%). Parents and grandparents agree with this statement more than students, they attribute a bigger meaning to the child in the context of life happiness. Respondents perceived

the child as the main determinant of life happiness in a different way. They agreed with the statement *"It is not correct if people do not have children as a meaning of life"*. Parents agreed with this statement the most (67%: I totally agree 31%, I rather disagree 36%), then students (57%: I totally agree 30%, I rather agree 27%). The least level of agreement was expressed by grandparents (53%: I totally agree 33%, I rather agree 20%). Grandparents questioned the meaning of the child as the life aim the most.

We also found out differences in the opinions of respondents when we were evaluating the voluntary childlessness. Parents (46%) and grandparents (45%) agree to a greater extent with the statement No 8 *"Voluntary childlessness is an expression of egoism, careerism and indolence"*, i.e. they evaluate the voluntary childlessness more negatively than students who agreed with this statement the least (31%). At the same time, we can see that students disagree with the negative evaluation of voluntarily childless couples the most (49%), compared to parents (35%) and grandparents (36%). On one side, there is the acceptance of voluntary childlessness which is perceived as the right of option (more presented by students). On the other side, there is its criticising and negative evaluating categories such as egoism, indolence and careerism (expressed more by parents and grandparents).

3 Discussion and conclusions

In the presented study we aimed at the topic of the parental role and childlessness as its alternative. Parenthood is considered to be a natural, if not implied phase of marriage /partnership and it has a significant influence on the personalities of people, their thinking and emotional feelings, as well as on their interpersonal relationships. Moreover, people have a tendency to believe that parenthood is a synonym of meaningful and satisfying life. During the last decades we have witnessed many changes in the family life, e.g. increase of nonmarital cohabitations, single-parent families, homosexual partnerships. For this reason, we analysed opinions of respondents of three generations on childlessness and parenthood in these types of family. Our aim was to find out values and norms related to chosen aspects of the parental role.

Our research findings confirmed the following conclusions:

- acceptance of the norm about the "legalization" of the child with the marriage of parents, i.e. the norm to get married before the birth of the child,
- a decreasing preference of the mother as a more competent person in the care about children,
- an ambivalent attitude to single parents,
- a rejecting attitude to the parenthood of people of the same gender
- a weakening negative evaluation of the voluntary childlessness.

From our research findings it is evident the decreasing norm about the "legalization" of the child with the marriage of parents, i.e. there increases the acceptance of the nonmarital form of parenthood. We can mention that the generation of grandparents is inclined to the norm of upbringing children in a married family the most. However, the nonmarital form of parenthood is gradually becoming more accepted. This fact is certainly related to the fact that the stigma of a "child born out of a wedlock" is getting weaker or even lost in our society. We also found out the weakening preference of the mother as a more competent person in the care about children. From the opinions of students and parents it is evident that the traditional understanding of the parental role as primarily the maternal one is getting weaker. On the other hand, grandparents connect the upbringing and care about children primarily with the maternal role.

When we were examining parenthood in alternative types of family, we found out an ambivalent attitude of respondents of all three generations to the parenthood in a single-parent family. This fact corresponds with the opinion of Zartler (2014) who

thinks that although these families are accepted as a reality, moral undertones have not disappeared from public and scholarly discourses. Currently is more openly presented the topic of cohabitation of people of the same gender and their right on parenthood. McCann, Delmonte (2005, In Goldberg, Downing, Moyer, 2012) state that parenting can be viewed as a core human issue and the desire to parent as one that crosses the lines of sexual orientation. Our research findings confirm rejecting attitudes of the Slovak public to the legislation of relationships of people of the same gender. We can say that the older is the generation of respondents, the more rejecting attitude they have to the upbringing of children by people of the same gender. At the same time, the younger is the generation of respondents, the more liberal opinions they have on this topic. An increasing number of voluntarily childless people focuses the attention of researchers also on this change in the area of family life. Our research findings confirmed the fact that respondents did not agree with the negative evaluation of voluntarily childless people. This points out to the fact that the prejudice about the obligation of adult people to look after and bring up children, has already been overcome. The opinions of the public lead to the perception of parenthood as an option, not as an obligation. We can say that respondents do not perceive a child as the only source of life happiness, but they attribute a significant role to the child in the meaning of life. People who have decided to be voluntarily childless for any reason, are not negatively evaluated by the society.

We can conclude our study with the fact that our hypothesis, i.e. the assumption of a statistically significant difference in the opinions of respondents on chosen aspects of parenthood and childlessness according to their generational group, was confirmed. Statistically significant differences were evident mainly between the generation of grandparents when they were compared to the generation of parents and students whose opinions were more liberal. We can suppose that opinions of respondents depended on the fact if they already perform the parental role. We agree with Kurincová, Turzáková, Turzák (2018) who think that the ability for parenting does not come automatically when one gives birth to a child. It's a long and difficult way to become a parent, to become a mother or a father.

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