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## **Transnational families - the educational environment of children and young people from migrant families**

### **Rodziny transnarodowe - środowisko edukacyjne dzieci i młodzieży z rodzin migracyjnych**

#### **Abstrakt:**

Wędrowni ludów określane mianem migracji występowały od zawsze, stanowiąc bardzo ważny czynnik rozwoju społecznego. Współcześnie zmieniają się jedynie ich motywy i rozszerza się ich zasięg. Obecnie migracje Polaków nabrały specyficznego znaczenia i stały się zjawiskiem naturalnym. Nie budzą społecznego zdziwienia spontaniczne wyjazdy do pracy, a opuszczenie kraju na rok lub dwa lata, czy też na zawsze staje się powszechnie uznaną normą. Znaczenia życiowego nabiera chęć zarobienia jak największych pieniędzy, poprawy warunków materialnych, nauka języka obcego, a także rozwój kariery zawodowej. Migracja ludności nie jest zjawiskiem nowym, ale w dobie globalizacji staje się coraz bardziej powszechna i wzbudza zainteresowanie badaczy ze względu na swoją różnorodność i zmiany, jakie powoduje w różnych dziedzinach życia osób migrujących. Wyjazdy poza granicę kraju, zarówno te czasowe, jak i na stałe wywołują różnego rodzaju skutki w krajach wysyłających migrantów, jak też i w krajach ich przyjmujących, a przede wszystkim w rodzinach osób migrujących. Rodzina jest jedną z podstawowych grup społecznych, stanowi "wewnętrzny świat", jednak podlega także wpływom z zewnątrz, które docierają różnorodnymi kanałami i kształtują społeczny oraz indywidualny system wartości oraz normy zachowania się społecznego poszczególnych członków. Jednym z czynników wpływających na rodzinę i powodujących jej przeobrażenia jest proces migracji zarobkowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodziny transnarodowe, środowisko wychowawcze dzieci i młodzieży

**Summary:** The migration of nations is a phenomenon that has been with us since time immemorial, always being a very important factor of societal development. Currently, only its motives and scope have changed. Nowadays, the migration of Polish citizens has a specific meaning and has become a natural state of affairs. There is nothing surprising in spontaneous migrations in search of better employment. What is more, living a foreign country for one or two years has become a widely approved norm. Motivations that are of importance at this day and age are the willingness to earn as much as possible, improve one's living condition, learn a foreign language, and push one's professional career further. The migration of people is not a new issue, but in the age of globalization, it is becoming notably more common, as well as more interesting for scientists, especially due to its diverse nature and changes that it initiates in various walks of life of migrants. The family is one of the basic social groups, it is an "internal world", but it is also subject to external influences that reach through various channels and shape the social and individual system of values and norms of social behavior of individual members. One of the factors influencing the family and transforming it is the labor migration process.

**Key words:** Transnational families - the educational environment of children and young people

## Introduction

The migration of nations is a phenomenon that has been with us since time immemorial, always being a very important factor of societal development. Currently, only its motives and scope have changed. Nowadays, the migration of Polish citizens has a specific meaning and has become a natural state of affairs. There is nothing surprising in spontaneous migrations in search of better employment. What is more, living a foreign country for one or two years has become a widely approved norm. Motivations that are of importance at this day and age are the willingness to earn as much as possible, improve one's living condition, learn a foreign language, and push one's professional career further.

The migration of people is not a new issue, but in the age of globalization, it is becoming notably more common, as well as more interesting for scientists, especially due to its diverse nature and changes that it initiates in various walks of life of migrants. The representatives of many society sciences-related disciplines, as well as a number of followers of theoretical doctrines have been remarkably interested in the phenomenon of migration and aspects connected with it (Castels, Miller, 2011). It has to be noted that the determination of people to travel from their own country to a foreign one has always had a notable impact on the state of such countries and their societies. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such migrations have become global in character, to a significant extent influencing politics and becoming a starting point of numerous societal changes (Ibidem), including those occurring in families. Therefore, it seems justified to broaden the available knowledge on the modern migration processes and effects it has on various spheres of local societies. The discussed problem has been addressed by Paweł Kaczmarczyk, who has noted that: „... the issue mentioned as the last one seems to be the key one, for the current image of migration created by the media is not only a deceptive one, but it also has a surprisingly strong impact on the decision of Polish citizens when it comes to migration. Migrations are especially macroeconomic in nature – differences in salaries between Poland and other Western European countries will for quite some time be a strong motivation to leave the home country. At the same time, it seems that the key issues that are the source of problems when it comes to migrations – both in the individual and societal sense – should be dealt with on the level of communities or provinces” (Kaczmarczyk, Tyrowicz, 2007).

### 1. What is a transnational family?

Considerations relating to the issue of migration have been tackled from many perspectives, among others: political, psychological, historical, economic, and pedagogical one. Travels abroad, both those temporary and permanent ones, may cause a myriad of outcomes in countries sending migrants, those accepting them, as well as in families of migrants. A family is one of the most basic societal units and is a kind of an “inner world” of

a person, but it can be affected by outside stimuli that may reach it via various channels and shape both social and individual system of values and behavioral norms of its members. One of aspects affecting families and causing them to transform is the process of economic migration.

It has to be noted that a family separated by economic migration is not a new issue. Analyses of functioning of spatially separated families can be, as noted by Bartłomiej Walczak, found in studies from the 1920s, especially those by William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki(Thomas, Znaniecki, 1976). In „The Polish Peasant in Europe and America”, the aforementioned authors focused on changes in the value system and functioning strategies in families that are nowadays referred to as transnational ones(Walczak, 2014), the life of which is not restricted by any barriers(Danilewicz, 2010). A transnational family is understood as „a nuclear family, forming at least two households within the borders of different countries(Ibidem)”.

Transnational families live and function in two or more different countries, but their members are still connected with familial and emotional bonds. They decide to opt for economic migration to improve their quality of life and enhance their material status. Migration changes everyday life and functioning patterns of such a societal unit too.

## **2. Functioning and quality of life of transnational families and upbringing of children and youth**

In transnational families, the migrant typically serves the role of a husband and a father, so his aim is to provide for the family. Wives of migrants tend to work as well, but their professions are less profitable. Their major goal is to take care of the home and proper children upbringing. Due to the said fact and while taking into account the frequent absence of men, females assume the role of heads of families, making key decisions relating to the life and functioning of a given family. Some couples try to mutually decide on familial issues, but due to the distance separating them, it may prove to be difficult at least. Children in transnational families, depending on their age and developmental capabilities, tend to support their mothers in performing house-specific chores. The analysis of some of such families has indicated that the structure of such a societal unit also changes with time due to migration and such a state of affairs occurs in a twofold manner. In the first scenario, women take over responsibilities of husbands and roles they should play in families for the time of their absence. For such families, migration does not cause any significant changes in terms of interpersonal relations and emotional bonds. In the second case, the ongoing migration process may notably change the distribution of responsibilities and roles, as well as may to a remarkable extent weaken emotional bonds and relations between family members. Then, loosening ties between the migrant and the members of his or her family staying in the home country can be observed. Such a state of affairs can be accompanied by frustration, the lack of understanding and support, as well as an emotional collapse of the entire family. Family

members still functioning in their home country have to deal with a completely different reality than the migrant. The strength of institutional and mental bonds connecting individual family members with one another translates directly into a greater or weaker familial integrity. A conclusion can be drawn that before the departure of the migrant, families are more integral and bonds between their respective members are tighter. Economic migration outside the borders of the home country may sometimes lead to loosening the bonds connecting family members, resulting in its lowered integrity.

As it turns out, economic migration initiates the aforementioned changes in the familial structure. Regardless of if changes have been greater or more negligible, they have been identified for all the examined families. Migration has had a notable impact on the family, quite often reorganizing its mode of functioning completely.

Changes have occurred in individual familial systems, as presented below:

– *Marital subsystem*

Marriage in a transnational family is subject to chronic separation of the partners. It may result in further strengthening bonds between the beloved ones or cause their loosening, which may in turn lead to a bitter breakup. Furthermore, migration can to a significant extent disrupt the initial structure of the family and change the way duties are separated. In said scenarios, women may feel left alone and overwhelmed with house chores, whereas men may experience exhaustion in connection with the performed work-related undertakings. Interestingly enough, the abovementioned factors do not always impact the relationship in a negative manner. Proper relations between the partners, strong emotional bonds connecting them, and the ability to maintain mutual interactions after migrant's departure do not result in emotional problems experienced by the parties involved. In the examined families, women have frequently stated that migration has not had a significant effect on their marital bonds. What is more, one female has explicitly stated that the temporary leave of her husband has caused the increased appreciation of roles served by the partners in the family, as well as of widely-understood closeness.

Nevertheless, not all marriages have been as successful. Among the examined societal units, there have been also those, where migration has resulted in the decreased strength of emotional bonds between the partners, the limitation of the number of interactions, as well as in the overall deterioration of the relationship. However, the aforementioned situation has not always been connected with the departure of the migrant, but also – with the lowered engagement of the married couple in the maintenance of their relation at a satisfactory closeness level. Distance between beloved ones has, in the discussed case, resulted in emotional numbness, failure to maintain a proper contact with the partner, and finally – growing accustomed to the absence of the migrant.

### – *Parental subsystem*

Remote parenthood is possible, but certain strategies have to be adopted. They differ depending on the age of the children to be taken care of. It is relatively straightforward to maintain satisfactory relations with older children by means of using online messengers or phone communication methods. Quite frequently, parents tend to lose themselves in work, neglecting their families. Their relation with children may be affected by that and become weaker, because kids functioning in their home-specific reality do not always want to talk to parents, for they have their own tasks to perform and passions to follow. After a longer absence of the parent, children find it difficult to come up with mutually interesting conversation topics and tend to become gradually accustomed to his or her absence. Contact between the migrant parent and the child, as well as mutual relations of partners to a great extent depend on the approach of the second parent staying in the home country. If he or she encourages the kid to communicate with the temporarily absent caretaker and to engage in various interactions with him or her, then the quality of such contacts will be better. While examining the surveyed families, it has turned out that there have been mothers doing their best to maintain communication between children and absent fathers at the optimal level.

Separation with the beloved ones is a difficult experience for both the migrant and his or her family. It may cause various conflicting emotions to emerge, among which there are: anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, alienation, and the sense of insecurity.

### – *Child-related subsystem*

Siblings in transnational families express much emotional support towards each other and provide each other with help in the performance of everyday tasks. Older children tend to take a proper care of the younger ones, help parents bring them up, and even engage in educational talks with them, including those relating to everyday life and various experiences. Children being members of transnational families have openly expressed that they have had strong feelings for their siblings, even though there have been frequent quarrels between them resulting from age and field of interest-related differences.

A factor that cannot be neglected while discussing transnational family functioning is communication that can be observed on two levels, namely – between family members in a house setting and between the migrant and the family in a virtual setting. In the case of the former, communication between mothers and children is the predominant one. Their conversations are mainly focused on everyday issues at home and at school, life-related matters, and widely understood upbringing. Due to the fact that mothers are responsible for raising children properly, they have to explain life-related norms and patterns to their kids. They are also required to pass on key values and to act as paragons for their children. Migrants tend to maintain contact with their families via phone or via the Internet, resorting to online messengers, such as Skype, Messenger, and WhatsApp. They make it possible for such migrants to participate in conference calls, during which family members can not only

talk to one another, but also – see one another. Conversations between married partners are rather focused on everyday life, work, and plans for the future.

Among transnational families, there are some in the case of which members feel free to exchange ideas, views, and emotions freely, spontaneously, and without any limitations. They are also likely to all engage in making key family-oriented decisions. Parents, even if they are abroad, try to communicate with their children, which is a vital educational and socializing tool. However, there are also families which are negatively affected by distance and communication in which is almost non-existent. Their members are not likely to share their thoughts, opinions, and views with one another. Conversations are then oftentimes limited to quarrels, disputes, and blaming one another for problematic familial situations.

Migration is considered by many to be a simple and effortless possibility of improving one's living conditions. Such a belief makes a number of people leave their home countries. However, it has to be highlighted that they are not always capable of assessing both positive and negative aspects of economic migration, especially – its impact on the family. It has been observed that the results of the aforementioned change are noticed by family members when it is in progress. Migrants and their beloved ones have focused on financial benefits at the very beginning, when additional funds have made it possible to improve the quality of life notably and increase living standard, allowing to, among others, help children pursue their dreams and passions. In some ways, material benefits compensate for the separation and the feeling of loneliness that is connected with it. The examined migrants have tried to maintain as good contact with their families as possible. Even though there has been a notable distance between individual family members, they have tried to keep in touch and maintain strong bonds between one another. At later stages of migration, some things may change. The necessity to maintain two households in two different countries generates more expenses, which may be also related to gradually lowering sums of money sent to the family living in the home country. Individual family members may also start noticing negative sides of working abroad. Especially emotional ones have been noticed during the examination and have been connected with separation, longing, and familial bonds becoming looser. The migrant tends to focus especially on work and starts accustoming to living without a family and in a different country in a society that functions in a completely different manner. Oftentimes, the frequency of contacts with the family decreases and the family itself starts to adapt to a new familial reality. Women – wives of the migrants gradually learn how to live in an independent manner and try to face all the challenges they have to deal with in everyday life, including child upbringing, house maintenance, and working in order to generate a decent income. Females are slowly becoming accustomed to the absence of their husbands and even though they wait for them to come back, after a relatively short time it turns out that the additional family member makes it problematic for everyday life to run its proper course. Children brought up in transnational families create strong bonds with their mothers, who are fully engaged in their education and development. Even though migrant fathers still serve their roles of main

providers, they are excluded from everyday interactions. It leads to limiting the role of the father to the economic one only, whereas the responsibility for the emotional development of the family is transferred to mothers. It quickly becomes apparent that even regular conversations via phone or messengers are not enough and that they fail to replace everyday direct interactions between family members. Each and every family tries its best to work out optimal ways of dealing with separation. A prolonged migration makes the aforementioned separation a natural element of everyday life and becomes bearable and completely normal after some time. In the case of the examined sample, migration has not changed relations between partners and parents and their children in three cases only, which has been caused by a notable engagement of the migrants in familial life and supporting their families staying in home country. Strong and deep relations can last even with distance separating people from one another. However, in the majority of cases bonds become gradually less strong. Family members go on with their lives and after some time, they stop noticing the lack of one of their own. On the other hand, migrants who are occupied with work and living in a different country stop caring that much about the needs of their families. It often happens that both migrants and their families stop thinking about migrant's return to the home country. Said individuals claim that they have to stay for financial reasons, but in many situations the factual gains are less and less grand with time. In some examined families, partners have openly claimed that their families have collapsed emotionally and further migration might have led to them breaking up completely. It can therefore be stated that migration may cause marriages and families to fail. However, if such a scenario comes true, all family members are to blame, not just the migrant. If bonds between the individual members had been strong, then the separation-related longing should not have affected familial relations negatively. The provided hypothesis has been proved by statements of some of the examined families.

Experiences connected with the ongoing process of economic migration can be divided into two groups: positive and negative ones. When it comes to the former, one can identify the possibility of satisfying some needs of family members, covering expenses, and improving the financial situation of the family as such thanks to the work of one of its members. What is more, stable employment also makes it possible to equip the household better, resulting in the improvement of overall living conditions. Furthermore, the level of independence of women and children staying and functioning in the home country increases. It also has to be added that separation allows individual family members to understand feelings and bonds between them better, as well as to appreciate the role played by every person included.

On the other hand, migration is also strictly connected with negative experiences, among which there are individualization of life of family members and the necessity of experiencing key events alone. Migration may also loosen bonds between married partners and destabilize family life, which may end up destroying said social unit completely.

Transnational families are frequently the ones including children. They are characterized by a rather democratic mode of upbringing. Parents try their best to establish friendly relations with their kids, respect their biological, mental, and social needs, as well as attempt to satisfy them. Additionally, children often have the possibility of expressing their own opinions on family-specific issues and have certain duties to perform, so they are engaged in planning, executing, and controlling tasks. Children typically know how they should behave in particular situations. Their parents rather resort to educational talks than to punishments and reprimands. Thanks to such an approach to upbringing, kids develop self-control and self-discipline relatively quickly, which has been proved by the examination carried out. Children brought in said families have a strong emotional attachment to their mothers, which is based on mutual trust and friendship. Due to the prolonging absence of fathers, they do not take a significant part in the upbringing process and the bond between them and their kids is not as strong. Relations with fathers are notably weaker than those with mothers and may even completely cease to exist with time. Children from transnational families are typically more independent, for they are accustomed to helping their mothers with house chores. They also tend to have many fields of interest in which they can excel thanks to financial support from abroad.

While taking into account the level of pedagogical functioning of modern transnational families, they can be classified as a normal family type with signs of a disorganized societal unit. They are characterized by full composition and normal biological bonds between parents and children. The recurring absence of one of parents, who is focused on working abroad, does not make such unit constantly but rather temporarily single-parent one. Interpersonal relations are based on strong emotional connections developed between mothers and their children. Emotional relations between married partners and between fathers and their children typically become less intense, especially in the course of migration. Occurring conflicts are temporary in character and are solved by means of conversations and agreeing on a particular mutually satisfying solution. The distribution of roles in a family resembles, on the one hand, the model that is typical for a traditional family, in which a father takes care of providing for the family, whereas mother is focused on managing the house and caring about children. On the other hand, the father does not fulfill his other tasks resulting from his social role, which are taken over by the mother during his absence. The structure of the family and the distribution of roles are subject to temporary disorganization.

The quality of life in families of migrants is a category, to which scientists have ascribed a number of meanings. Some of them have focused on the material sphere of life, others on emotional one, whereas yet others have been interested in relations between members of such families. It has to be undoubtedly stated that one of elements affecting the quality of life in migrant families are relations between married partners. Migration does not cause love to become weaker, but it introduces new feelings, such as loneliness, alienation, and anger directed towards the partner. The level of fascination with the other person and



overall affection also decreases. What is more, some difficulties with communication start to be more visible. Migration causes partners to stop communicating directly and even if they manage to work out alternative methods, they are not as effective and satisfactory. Separation may result in marital bonds loosening, mental distancing, and the willingness to engage in other relationships. As a result, the process of communication between the partners is disrupted, there are more frequent quarrels, misunderstandings, as well as the loss of trust, emotional numbness, and mental indifference can be observed.

When it comes to the quality of familial life, one cannot neglect the economic aspect that is the very core of economic migration. The improvement of material situation of the family is a reliable measure of migration efficiency that allows to quickly increase the overall quality of life.

Nowadays, it is quite common for a higher standard of life to be combined with a lower perceived quality of life. Transnational families may experience difficulties connected with the feeling of the senselessness of existence and therefore their mental condition may deteriorate. It may be caused by alienation, prolonging loneliness, the lack of satisfactory inter-family relations, and the necessity to deal with separation with the beloved ones. Among the examined families, there have been some in the case of which both economic and emotional quality of life have increased notably thanks to migration. Separation has caused them to appreciate closeness and made their relationships stronger. The risk of marriage failing has motivated them to focus on improving relationships and strengthening bonds between partners.

A strong relationship of two people can definitely withstand a prolonging separation. As it turns out, when familial and emotional bonds have been shaped and developed throughout the years, migration does not necessarily have to have a negative impact on a given social unit. In the case of strong marriages, it may even lead to the intensification of mutual feelings, maintaining passion and fascination with the partner, as well as the lack of feeling of being bored with the second person.

While analyzing the category of the quality of life of transnational families, scientists have also focused on relations between parents and their children. When fathers decide to travel abroad to work, mothers tend to take over their roles, which may lead to such feelings as exhaustion, tension, and frustration that may in turn negatively affect the overall quality of life. Migrant fathers are deprived of direct contact with their children and they frequently not participate in the upbringing process. Limited contacts of parents and children in transnational families lead to loosening bonds between them. One has to remember that such bonds are a determining factor when it comes to happiness, contentment, and widely-understood high quality familial life. In a properly functioning family, bonds between its members are honest, voluntary, based on love, and focused on mutual acceptance. In the case of transnational families, such connections tend to transform and become less honest, as well as weaker with time.

Parental relations also change as a result of migration. What is more, there are various approaches to parenthood. Nevertheless, one has to bear in mind that one of main motifs of economic migration is to maintain the well-being of the family.

Yet another important indicator of the quality of life is the way family members communicate with one another. The need for communication may be subject to change at various stages of familial development and functioning paradigm shifting. Familial communication may be positive or negative in character. Positive approach of individuals taking part in a communicative act may result in an increased interest in such an interaction and careful listening to what the interlocutor has to say. It leads to a frequent and satisfactory information exchange, as well as promotes optimal problem solving, strengthening interpersonal bonds, and feeling good about a given relation. The basis for satisfactory familial bonds and high quality of life should be an affiliate mode of communication, which is oriented towards treating one's own needs and expectations as equal to those of the interlocutor and towards not enforcing one's point of view while at the same time judging behavioral patterns of the partner. In transnational families, distance may negatively affect communication and in some cases may make it non-existent. Then, conversations between married partners are much more formal and focused on family-related issues. There are also frequent quarrels, disputes, and blaming one another for problems encountered. It is then difficult to maintain a friendly tone of conversation. There are also families, in which the communication process is optimal and is considered by family members to be a priority, which in turn improves the quality of life of the social unit as such.

The feelings of contentment, joy, and life satisfaction are exceptionally important when it comes to achieving a high quality of life. In order for an individual to fully enjoy his or her life, his or her development must have a harmonic character. Familial environment is exceptionally important when it comes to human development, but it may be subject to a number of changes. The assessment of the quality of life of family members may be therefore subjective in nature only.

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To sum up all of the above, it has to be stated that a difficult economic situation of many citizens of Poland forces them to leave the home country to seek for a better paid source of maintenance. Transnational families are an indispensable element of modern reality. Travels abroad are slowly becoming more and more commonplace, granting people the opportunity of stabilizing their economic condition. Travelling abroad frequently helps maintain the current level of life of a family, as well as is a kind of strategy allowing for survival, avoiding unemployment in the home country, as well as for improving living conditions in general. Migrants see their trips through the prism of financial benefits. They also notice some drawbacks, which are predominantly connected with the emotional sphere of life and loosening familial bonds.

Familial life with migration in the background may have a varying character and be difficult sometimes. It is also connected with a variety of experiences.

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