

PSYCHO-SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FAMILY INSTITUTION IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

The family is part of the phenomena for which there was an interest especially in all societies. Knowledge of the functioning of this institution it is of paramount societal importance, given that it leaves itself, directly or indirectly, the imprint on the entire socio-economic system. So, on the state of the family depends, first of all, the reproduction of the population in a society, socialization / education of new generations, creation and transmission spiritual values, behaviour patterns, process organization production and consumption etc.

This article is presenting the most important theoretical contributions – from psycho-sociological point of view – on the family institution. The concept of family is analysed in a correlation with the concept of “couple”. Also, the article is presenting the most important typologies of families that are used in scientific literature, mainly the sociological one. We have tried to present in a comparative manner what are the characteristics of the traditional family and modern family in our contemporary society.

Key words: Nuclear family; Modern family; Couple; Family model; Isolated nuclear family.

1. Theoretical context

The formation of a family is nowadays a complex issue, being based on social, economic, biological, psychological and legal factors. Family is both a legal institution and a fundamental social group, both for the individual and for the society of which he is part. Family is strongly connected to marriage.

The establishment of a family in most cultures and peoples is based on the document by which the marriage between two persons is recognized. Marriage is considered by specialists to be the strongest demographic event, an event that is influenced by social, legal, cultural, psychological and moral factors (Mitrofan, Ciupercă, 1998, p. 67).

When analysing from a legal point of view, we emphasize the fact that, through marriage, the freely agreed union between a man and a woman is achieved, celebrated in compliance with the legal provisions, in order to establish a family. As far as our society is concerned, the main reason for this celebration is explicitly the establishment of a family. In support of this principle are the regulations stipulated

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in the Family Law on marriage and family. For sociologists and demographers, marriage underlines the beginning of the first sequence of the “family life cycle”, it influencing demographic events of maximum importance, such as fertility and birth (Mihăilescu, 1999, p. 34).

The life of certain people in their families is based on two very important aspects, namely:

- ✓ the biological side which is constant and which has remained almost unchanged over time and which has as its essential function the procreation and raising of children;

- ✓ the social side, which is constantly changing, representing morality, education, economy, legal and mental aspects.

In the extensive and documented study of primitive peoples, Nicolae Petrescu considers marriage as an act of civil and religious nature that includes many aspects including: the social evolution of peoples, the multitude of traditions, customs, habits, all causing a great diversity of types in which the marriage takes place (Petrescu, 2003, p. 38).

In traditional societies, marriage having a pronounced legal character, it can be achieved by: buying a wife, by preferential union of partners and by kidnapping. For primitive societies, marriage has its origin in the family, the real conjugal life starting after the birth of a child, which underlines the completion of the nuptial act. Some customs related to marriage, the forms in which it can be celebrated, are perpetuated in the history of the family and society, which means that on advanced stages of development (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) marriage can be achieved by kidnapping the wife. In many peoples, marriage is conditioned by wealth, parental rights over children, prejudices and social differences, which leads to a situation of degrading the woman, to consider it as a means of increasing the property of the husband.

Marriage and family evolved in time, and the transformations from the economic and social life, the habits, the traditions, the customs, leaving their mark on them. We can say that between marriage and family, on one hand, and social life as a whole, on the other hand, there is a permanent process of influence, conditioning, adjustment. Regarding the family life, in the relations between the partners, the changes do not have the same essence and depth as those in the social life and, especially, they are not established automatically. And, of course, the variety of conceptual delimitation would be much wider because different forms of marital manifestation accentuate or promote different sets of values in such a way that the claim to encompass the full range of forms of marital manifestation is impossible (Voinea, 2005).

The changes in family patterns are also the result of the convergent action of cultural, psychological, legal, moral factors. What is the couple? What about the family? This topic has been and is still studied by many sociologists, anthropologists or historians. Despite the fact that there have been and are many changes at family level, it seems that the needs and motivations to form a couple and later a family

have not changed, even though we live in a society where the number of divorces or the number of cases of infertile partners has accentuated.

Even if lately the concept of couple and implicitly of family has experienced changes and is still in the process of change, it remains, as Levi-Strauss says “a universal phenomenon, present in all types of society”. Love has different forms and meanings for each person, so that everyone will come to feel this feeling for a person at some point. It is more difficult for this unique feeling to be maintained and developed and to succeed in making the person next to us feel loved. The couple's relationship is the basis for the formation of any family and is the starting point of the partners to a life together.

In today's society, a couple's partners no longer consider that their conjugal life begins with the marriage itself. Now the partners spend, before this step, a time together, they discover each other, in all aspects, they have sexual relationships before marriage. Conjugal roles have also changed. If in traditional societies, within a couple, the roles were well determined, now the partners tend towards freedom, flexibility in the couple and on the sharing of responsibilities. The importance given today by young people to marriage is lower than in the past, for many of them the professional achievement being more important, often defining themselves by what they have, and not by what they do or are.

2. The family and the couple – a conceptual analysis

Family is a universal institution, found everywhere and fulfilling the same main functions: transmitting biological and cultural heritage, ensuring material and emotional protection for descendants, forming a climate for the development of the personality of all its members. In any society, the family has distinguished itself as a specific group characterized by a strong internal weld, maintained both by the action of internal forces and by the pressure of society.

Overtime, the family has been the most favorable environment preserving and transmitting national traditions and values from one generation to another, being considered one of the most conservative institutions of society. In recent decades, in many societies the family seeks to get rid of these “merits”, she becoming more and more sensitive to everything the essential transformations that take place on the economic, social, political and cultural. There is an obvious process of emancipation, of democratization, of secularization, liberalization of family life, manifested by non-compliance legal or ethical rules promoted by the company or by non-adherence to socially convenient virtues (Mihailescu, 1999, p. 28).

According to Burgess and Locke, “the family is a group of people united by marriage, blood, adoption, or any sexual relationship in which adults cooperate financially to provide mutual support, and people have committed to each other in an intimate interpersonal relationship, and members have a sense of self-identity significantly attached to a group that in turn has its own identity” (Burgess, Locke, 1953, pp. 89-90). G.P. Murdock defines the family as “a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both

sexes, at least two of whom have a socially approved sexual relationship and one or more children owned or adopted by sexually cohabiting adults” (Murdock, 1953).

Davis Kingsley describes the family as a group of people whose relationships with each other are based on inbreeding and are therefore related to each other (Kingsley, 1939, pp. 660-661). Malinowski said the family is the institution in which the cultural traditions of a society are handed down to a newer generation. This vital function could only be fulfilled if the relations with parents and children were mutual relations of authority and respect (Malinowski, 1960, pp. 60-63).

Giddens defines the family as “a group of people directly related by kinship; whose adults take responsibility for raising children” (Giddens, 2000, p. 23). He understands kinship as relationships between individuals, relationships established, for example, either through marriage or offspring, and establishes blood ties, such as: mother, father, children, grandparents, etc.

For defining the types of family, another criterion can be the house, distinguishing the *residency families* (people living in the same house, have a common home and carry out some economic and household activities together) and *meaningful interaction families*, self-help relationships, exchanges reciprocal visits with other relatives. Another classification, perhaps the best known, is that of traditional and modern families (Voinea, 1993). The traditional family is the family group with a large number of members, with a fixed role structure, with elements of authority well determined by gender and generations and which is subject not only to legal provisions but also to all canonical imperatives of the traditional type. The modern family - also called nuclear family - is a type of family with a small number of members, with an egalitarian structure, with roles assumed by agreement, which makes its own rules and is no longer dependent on a set of traditions, customs, cultural rules. or harsh social control (Ibid.).

The transition from traditional to modernity implies a gradual reduction of community influence and, of course, of the extended family group. If the “blessing” of marriage was a direct consequence of the families of origin, sometimes even against the will of young people, modernity valued much more love, intimacy, freedom of choice and an increasingly diminished external influence.

Many sociologists argue that industrialization, urbanization, space and social mobility, access to education and changing the status of women have led to a fundamental basis for changes in family structure. It has gone from extensive tradition-based structures to nuclear ones. Parsons argues that modern industrial society has led to the growth of what he calls the “isolated nuclear family” (Parsons, 1956). Parsons argued that there is a functional relationship between the isolated nuclear family and the modern economic system. Nuclear families best meet the requirements of industrial society. In modern societies with a large division of labour, there are people with specialized skills necessary to move to distant places. The isolated nuclear family is geared towards this type of geographical mobility. In addition, the status of a person in modern industrial society is based primarily on the criterion of achievement and further universalist standards.

The quality of the marital relations of the future generations depends on the new values that modernity promotes, but also on the way in which the conjugal relationship is appreciated. Marital relationships are not born by themselves but are created and permanently consolidated in a long process of communication, interaction, in a process of mutual adaptation, support and construction of common goals.

Couple is defined as a bipolar structure, of biopsychosocial type, based on mutual interdeterminism - partners, men and women support, develop, stimulate, satisfy, they develop as biological, emotional and social individuals, through each other (Mitrofan, Ciupercă, 1998, p. 67).

The conjugal couple represents the generative core of the family micro-group, structurally and functionally expressing the way in which two people of the opposite sex are creatively founded, developing, motivating and determining each other through mutual adaptation and assimilation, simultaneously biologically, psychologically and socially (Mitrofan, Mitrofan, 1994, p. 89).

The couple can be harmonious, satisfying, stabilizing, having good chances to turn into a marriage, or, on the contrary, disharmonious, dissatisfying, distorting, tending to dissociation / dissolution. The family, as a fundamental social institution, is inter-conditioned with multiple domains of social life.

In every society, the law accompanies the couple throughout the institution of the family through legal regulations on marriage (formal and substantive conditions), rights and obligations during the existence of marriage, as well as regulations on the dissolution of marriage (Voinea, 2000). Moreover, the law regulates all family relationships that have been converted into legal relationships: mutual obligations between spouses, property relations, the exercise of parental rights, parental responsibility, the effects of divorce, etc.

The family has been a landmark of stability in the lives of individuals over time. The accelerated rhythm of change in contemporary society has made it increasingly difficult to decide over a definitive choice or a lasting relationship.

Most researchers in the family field, but also political actors or public opinion, in general, claim that, in recent decades, the family in contemporary societies has experienced important changes. At the same time, it continues to be a fundamental institution in society, which is why, in public debates, the issue of "family decline" is viewed with increasing concern.

The image of the family, taken over in the political and scientific speech, is that of an institution that preserves national traditions and values, being relatively independent of the socio-economic context and having a great capacity for inertia (Ghebrea, 2000, p. 32).

Without diminishing its importance as a social institution, the changes of the last decades in the sphere of the family justify the conclusion that, on the contrary, the family is no longer a conservative institution, but one more and more adapted to society transformations: the family now seeks to get rid of the glory of conservatism, of the "merit" of being the keeper of national values, becoming rather the "barometer" of social change, going through a visible process of democratization, laicization and liberalization (Mihăilescu, 1999, p. 17).

The last thirty years have witnessed a redefinition of the traditional model and family functions. The changes caused by industrialization, modernization, globalization, migration and new models of consumerism have influenced families and their perception of themselves (Popescu, 2009, p. 31). The family is no longer such a conservative institution, but one that is adaptable, dynamic, sensitive to changes in society and adopting a new social structure, which also involves the emergence of new lifestyles (Popescu, 2009, p. 34).

In other words, the state of the contemporary family, "its restructuring", as well as the development prospects of this institution, will be able to be appreciated only taking into account the cardinal transformations (Toffler, 1983, pp. 282-283) that have taken place produced in social life and in the mass consciousness during the twentieth century XX century. We also mention that the factors that generated the changes in marriage behaviours and family patterns are not the same in all societies, just as changes are not the same in magnitude, nor as content.

An expression of the major changes in Romanian society is the evolution of the age of marriage. The increasingly active involvement of women on the labour market, but also the choice of forms of cohabitation without documents delays the moment of marriage. In accordance with the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, the average age for marriage tends to rise. In 2017, the average age at the date of marriage increased compared to 2016 for both men and women. Thus, the average age at marriage, in 2017, was 33.3 years for men and 30.1 years for women, compared to 32.7 years for men and 29.4 years for women in 2016.

Currently, the family is dependent on the social system, in many respects, and by respecting the norms of society it retains its role as a fundamental social institution, being a stable reference ground in the life of the individual. The functions of the family remain the same, but the content of the changes, due to the new institutions that take over from the traditional functions of the family, especially the economic, educational functions, but also those of socialization (Voinea, 2005).

In traditional societies, the suitable age for marriage, especially for women, was up to 25 years. After 25 years, a woman was considered "old" for marriage. In today's society, the increase in the level of education for both men and women, the increase in employment for women and their desire to be promoted on the labour market, but also the value changes lead to the delay of the moment of marriage. This has consequences for when children are born. By delaying births, the number of child births is reduced, which contributes to lowering the fertility rate below the level of generational replacement.

In general, the traditional family was based more on financial aspects than on feelings. The marriage was concluded only if it was advantageous for both parties, being considered more of an economic partnership. The family had several children, because most of them did not survive, the infant mortality rate being very high. The children had well-established rights, as well as obligations. The parents were more concerned with the economic development of the family than with the personal development of the child. The parents dictated, for the most part, the child's path to adulthood, because it was considered that they knew what was best for the child.

Marital roles are strongly differentiated in societies in which the family performs a multitude of functions and not only those of reproduction and socialization. Thus, in traditional societies, the family was a unit of production in which tasks and responsibilities were rigorously specified and assigned by sex, age, birth rank. The man, husband and absolute parent, had a privileged economic role, with a great responsibility, namely to ensure the proper development of the entire economic and social mechanism of the family. The constitution of the conjugal family also implies the creation of some material conditions necessary for the natural development of the family life and the fulfilment of its purposes for each individual and for the society. The existence of a home, its endowment with the necessary household and technical means as well as the provision of a budget with which to satisfy the material and spiritual needs of the group members form the fundamental economic coordinates. Marital roles are manifested differently in economic terms; the husband will have obligations to procure the means necessary for the family's living and will concentrate the household activities to satisfy the family's needs, and the wife will take over the traditional housework: food preparation, childcare, cleaning, laundry, etc. The children, according to their sex, age, birth rank, had a series of domestic obligations as well as those related to field work, cattle care, etc.

3. Conclusions

The decision to choose the partner with whom to form a couple is supported by conscious and unconscious motivations of the individual. Sociologists and psychologists believe that the choice of partner is motivated by both the similarities between the two of them and their complementarities. People are attracted to those who are similar to them in terms of socio-cultural values and norms or professional status, but also to those who are different.

The partners paradoxically appreciate the differences or what they do not find in themselves, but discover in others. Studies have indicated that even though similarities play a key role in marital choice, socio-cultural and personality traits complementarities become essential for maintaining the cohesion of the couple. For instance, similar experiences initially shared may be a point of mutual attraction, but the manner in which each has resolved the situation can be difficult and complements their own strategy.

We live in a world that is constantly changing, facing great difficulties and to which we often do not seem to belong. Whether we like it or not, we all need to bear the idea of diverse opportunities and risks of such a world. There is no place where this observation is more valid than in our personal and emotional lives.

The term "relationship", applied to personal life, started to be widely used only about 20-30 years ago, as did the idea of need of "intimacy" and "connections" in personal life.

The fact that many of us, whether we oppose these changes or not, is of concern to us today and is representative for the deep transformations that have affected our personal and emotional lives for a few decades. A relationship is something active, you have to maintain it. It depends on gaining the other person's

trust to maintain in time. Most types of sexual relationships have now become alike marriage. Couple compatibility is also very important, the partners building a relationship based on the values they are guided by and not only.

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