

Łukasz P. Ratajczak*, Agnieszka Kozłowska**

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

* ratay@amu.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0001-7889-1200

** agnieszka.kozlowska-rajewicz@amu.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-7614-6095

Changing the model of fatherhood Towards balancing parental roles and building balance between professional and family life

Abstract: The subject of theoretical reflections and empirical analysis is the change within one of the key social roles played by men: the role of a father. An essential element of these transformations is the detraditionalization of the fatherhood and family model, associated with moving away from patriarchy and the emancipation of women and men from their traditional social roles. Such a change helps reconcile professional and family roles, improves the professional situation of mothers, and, above all, benefits the child, who gains a father – a caring guardian, partner, and friend instead of a strict and absent father.

Considerations on the change in the fatherhood model are based on a literature review and reinforced by a pilot study conducted through an online survey among pedagogy students regarding their preferred family model, fatherhood, and childcare. In the pilot study, 69 students participated, mostly women (89.9%). The majority (71%) indicated a partnership model, while 25% chose a mixed model. Only one person indicated a traditional model, and no one selected the reversed traditional model. Over 90% of the respondents expect equal involvement of fathers in childcare, while 10% see them in the role of “helpers.” The majority of the respondents expect men to be regularly involved in household chores and yard work. Nearly half of the participants (N = 28) believe that a mother’s professional work positively influences a child’s development; N = 12 think it has a negative impact, and N=10 individuals believe it is indifferent. Regarding the father’s employment, these values were similar

(30, 11, 10). The most preferred forms of childcare for the respondents are daycare centers (over 70% of respondents) and home care (25%). The majority of respondents (70%) would like to have two or three children, and another 12% – four or more, indicating that the demographic decline is not the result of changing preferences but rather other obstacles.

Key words: family model, fatherhood, changing the model of fatherhood, work-life balance.

Introduction

The family is the most important social unit, highly valued in the hierarchy of values by Polish men and women; it is a place of development, socialization, education, and upbringing of children. It undergoes constant changes, which are the consequence of broader social, economic, and demographic transformations. Among them, the processes of emancipation of women and men from their stereotypical gender roles play a significant role, reflecting both in the family and in the workplace. In both spaces, traditionally dominated by one gender – men in the workplace and women in the family, the roles of women and men are beginning to balance. This changes both the labor market and the family – the relationships between parents, parents and children, and between family members and their environment.

The issue of women's emancipation, their access to education and the job market, the performance of "male" professions, and the associated problem of the possibility (or impossibility) of combining professional work with family life have been the subject of rich scientific studies (Criado-Perez, 2020; Titkow et al., 2004). A symbol of these changes is the stereotype of the "Polish Mother," a working woman simultaneously fulfilling traditional roles as a caregiver and guardian of the hearth and home.

Combining the traditional roles of caregiver and homemaker with professional work, although accepted as "natural," is, in reality, very burdensome for women who work, in a sense, "two jobs." Men, traditionally assuming the role of the main family provider and traditionally "exempted" from the duty of childcare, less frequently experience the work-home conflict, which, in practice, is primarily a problem for women who are mothers. However, as women's professional engagement increases (Mizerek, 2016) and their rights in the job market become more equal, there is room for a change in the fatherhood model. Women's income from work reduces the pressure associated with the need for men to support the family. It is also worth noting that the increasing professional activity of women naturally generates expectations and needs for equal sharing of household and caregiving responsibilities. These mechanisms underlie the social change represented by the change in the fatherhood model, characterized on various levels, including gender equality in family life, balancing professional and family roles, and masculine identity (Suwada, 2017).

This article analyzes the change in the fatherhood model and its significance for the functioning of the entire family and the possibilities of building a balance between professional and family life by both parents.

The basis of the analysis is a literature review supplemented by a pilot study regarding the opinions of pedagogy students regarding their preferred family model, fatherhood model, and forms of childcare for young children.

Detraditionalization of the family model

The way parents, both fathers and mothers, perform their roles defines the family functioning model. In the traditional model, the father is the dominant figure. He is the “head of the family,” its sole provider, and the person exercising authority. The mother takes on caregiving functions for children and manages household chores such as cleaning, laundry, and cooking.

In the partnership model, both parents work, jointly manage the family, and equally engage in childcare and household tasks.

Between these models, there are various mixed models where both parents work and engage in household and caregiving duties, but in unequal proportions. There is also the “reversed traditional” model, where the mother is the sole family provider, and the father takes care of children and the home. According to CBOS studies, in 2000, 42% of Poles preferred the traditional family model; 38% – the partnership model, while others indicated a mixed model as optimal. In 2012, the percentage preferring the traditional model halved (chosen by 22% of respondents), and those preferring the partnership model increased by about 1/3 (chosen by 48% of respondents). In 2020, only 12% of respondents preferred the traditional model, compared to 58% who chose the partnership model (CBOS, 2020). In reality, the models implemented did not fully align with preferences. In 2013, only 27% of respondents implemented the partnership model, compared to 48% who indicated it as preferred in 2012. In 2020, 37% of respondents implemented the partnership model, compared to 58% who wanted it. These data indicate a growing societal expectation for balancing parental roles, and simultaneously, these expectations are not fully realized in practice. However, the frequency of the partnership family model is increasing, which the authors link to a change in the fatherhood model intensively occurring over the past 20 years.

This change involves rejecting the patriarchal (conservative) model based on the father’s power and dominance as the head of the family (Sosnowski and Konaszewski, 2018). The detraditionalization of the family model results in the redefinition of the roles of father, mother, and child, as well as their mutual relationships. Sikorska (2009) points to a *new, involved* father who also pursues a career (although to a lesser extent than before), similar to his partner – the *new mother*, who combines parenting with a professional career. The challenge

of balancing professional and family roles is no longer just a mother's problem; both parents must find solutions. Their success in this area depends on the level of institutional childcare available in their place of residence and the flexibility of working hours, as well as support for the parent-employee in the workplace.

Changes within contemporary families, especially in parental role models, are also evident in the opinions of Polish men and women in studies commissioned by the Share the Care Foundation (2020). These studies show that both women and men are equally capable of taking care of young children. Furthermore, respondents of both genders unanimously believe that time spent with the father is just as valuable for the child as time spent with the mother, emphasizing that both parents should have the same responsibilities and rights in caring for their children.

(Re)construction of the fatherhood model

Implications beyond the individual

The transposition of the fatherhood model from patriarchal to egalitarian impacts all family members positively. It provides both parents with greater space for personal development in both their professional and private spheres. It expands the previously available space for women to pursue their professional careers and opens up new possibilities for men in their parental roles. In such a model, neither parent is excluded or deprived of the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations in terms of professional development. Simultaneously, neither parent has to sacrifice their professional work for the sake of the child. The child, in turn, receives an increased opportunity to interact with both parents, and none of them has to sacrifice their professional work for the child.

Implementing such a model requires an appropriate institutional environment that ensures high-quality childcare. This includes facilities such as nurseries, preschools, children's clubs, or caregivers who would assume caretaking responsibilities during the parents' absence. Providing such an environment is a task for the state, which should create legal and financial conditions securing the possibility of care for every child in one form or another. An alternative to institutional care could be providing parents with the option of a long, paid parental leave, as realized in the entire European Union in 2022 through the "Work-Life Balance directive" (Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of June 20, 2019, on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers and Repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, 2019).

Another element of the environment that conditions the involvement of both parents in both work and childcare is the level of employer support. This applies to working hours (the ability to drop off and pick up a child from a nursery/preschool), childcare support (company nurseries and preschools), the possibility

of taking leave for childcare, as well as company programs supporting parents and families.

Father involvement in childcare, especially in the early years of a child's life, is also significant from a pedagogical perspective in shaping the father-child relationship. The presence and involvement of the father in childcare contribute to the child's socio-emotional development (Pleck, 2010). Scientifically proven, a child can feel secure with the father, be eager to stay with him, and benefit from interaction with him, provided the child knows the father well. This underlines the importance of having a present and engaged father (Janowicz, quoted from Długołęcka, 2022). The benefits of involved father presence for a child's development, especially in the early years and even during prenatal development, are increasingly recognized. Studies by Wang, Huang, Lin, et al. (2020) indicate that significant father involvement and their engagement in caregiving activities for infants nearly halve the risk of developmental delays in children up to the age of two. A closer relationship between the father and the newborn, along with any effort he puts into building it, is also essential for eliminating developmental delays. In a report titled *Involved Fathers Play An Important Role In Children's Lives* (2020), it is emphasized that father involvement in a child's life leads to higher academic achievements, greater school readiness, facilitates the development of mathematical and verbal skills. Additionally, children with involved fathers exhibit higher emotional security, self-esteem, fewer behavioral problems, and greater social competence than children who do not have the opportunity to grow up in the presence of caring and engaged fathers.

In this context, the authors of the publication are interested in how future educators and caregivers—students of pedagogy—view family models and the way fathers fulfill their roles. This article presents only preliminary, pilot studies as a supplement to the analysis presented and a basis for future, more systematic research. The purpose of the empirical pilot study was to investigate the opinions of male and female students on their preferred family life models and parental roles.

Material and methods

Over 300 students from the pedagogy and preschool and early school pedagogy programs were invited to participate in the research. These students were previously encountered by the authors in their teaching activities and were currently studying at the Faculty of Educational Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The invitation for the research was sent via email through the USOS system. Students did not receive any bonuses for participating in the study.

The authors utilized a diagnostic survey as the method, employing a questionnaire as the research technique. To collect empirical data, an online survey questionnaire was prepared using the Google Forms application.

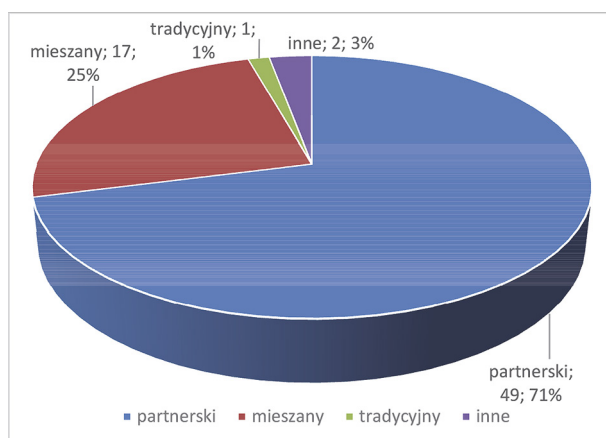
In the pilot study, 69 individuals participated, of which 89.9% (N=62) were women. The remaining 7 individuals identified themselves as men – N=4 (5.8%) and non-binary individuals N=3 (4.2%). Participants were asked about their preferred family model, childcare preferences, expected involvement of men in childcare and household chores, and their preferred number of children. The questions were modeled after CBOS research to facilitate comparative analysis of the obtained results. The survey included space for free comments and remarks to gather opinions from participants that were not captured in the closed-ended question categories.

Due to the small sample size, the authors opted not to conduct statistical analysis, limiting the analysis to basic statistics performed using the *Google Forms* and *Excel* applications.

Results

The survey comprised 6 questions regarding the following: preferred family model; beliefs about the impact of parents' work on a child's development; expectations regarding fathers' involvement in household chores; expected number of children, and perception of institutional care in the early stages of a child's development.

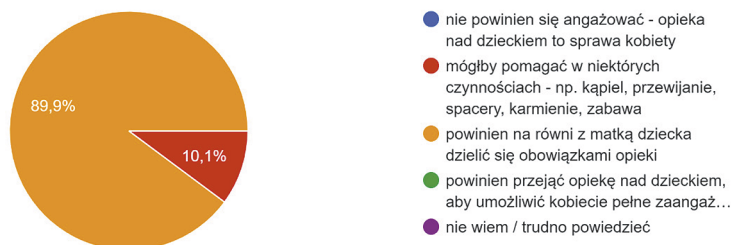
In terms of the preferred family model (Figure 1), the majority of respondents indicated a partnership model for the family (71%). The traditional model received the fewest responses (1 person). Only 25% indicated a preference for a mixed model. No one selected the reversed traditional model.



Tradycyjny – traditional; inne – other; partnerski – partnership; mieszaany – mixed
Fig. 1. Preferred family model. N = 69

The empirical material obtained from the responses of the surveyed students to the question of how much a father should be involved in childcare shows that over 90% of respondents expect full partnership, while less than 10% see the father as a “helper” entrusted with only specific tasks such as bathing, feeding, and playing. None of the respondents selected the option that the father should not be involved at all or that he should take over the entire care of the child. In this question, there was also no response in the “don’t know/hard to say” category (Figure 2).

Jak uważasz, jak powinno wyglądać zaangażowanie mężczyzn w opiekę nad dzieckiem ?
69 odpowiedzi



What do you think the involvement of men in child care should look like ? 69 responses

- he should not get involved – taking care of the child is the woman’s business
- he could help with some activities – such as bathing, changing, walking, feeding, playing
- he should equally share care responsibilities with the child’s mother
- he should take over the care of the child to allow
- the woman to be fully involved....

Fig. 2. Expectations regarding fathers’ involvement in childcare and household chores.

The opinions of surveyed students regarding fathers’ involvement in household and domestic chores also confirm their choices related to the preferred family model. Primarily, there was an expectation for men to be regularly involved in most household chores. The majority of respondents – over 91% – indicated that fathers should be involved in tasks such as taking out the trash, as well as car-related responsibilities like washing (84.1%) and minor repairs, tire changes, and oil changes (87%). Following that, respondents mentioned minor renovation and technical work at home – hanging pictures, assembling furniture – with 85.5%, and gardening with 79.7%. The subsequent positions included dishwashing (manual or in the dishwasher) at 71%, grocery shopping at 66.7%, vacuuming at 62.3%, floor cleaning at 46.4%, window cleaning at 43.5%, laundry at 47.8%, and ironing at 40.6%. A few respondents (8.4%) pointed out other activities.

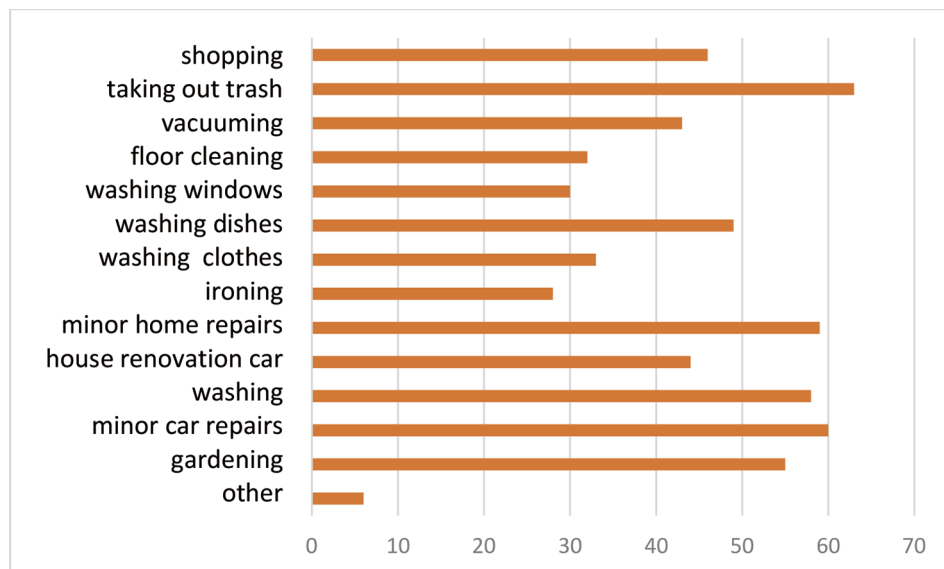
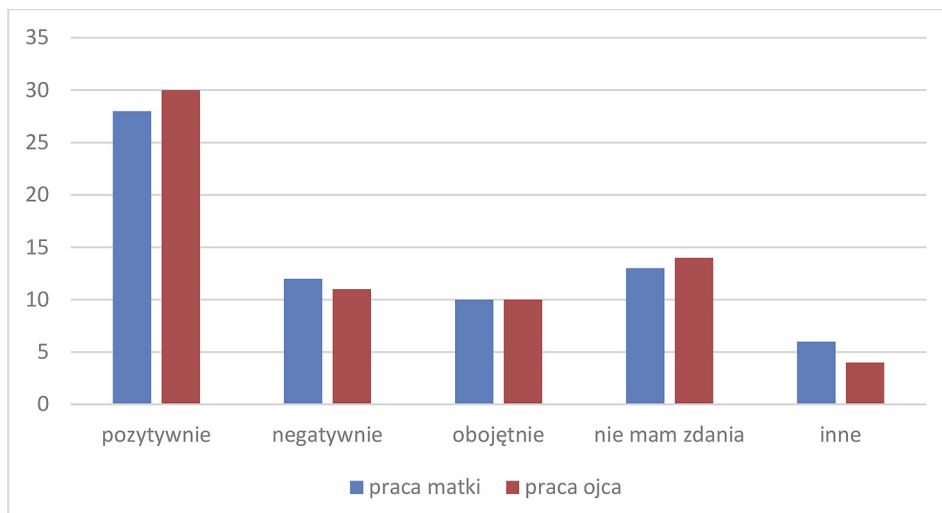


Fig. 3. What household tasks should a man regularly perform?

Students' opinions regarding the impact of parents' work on child development show that respondents assess the value of this influence similarly for both mothers and fathers (Figure 4). According to the majority of respondents, a mother's work has a positive impact on child development (N=28); 12 respondents stated that it has a negative impact, and 10 respondents found it neutral. In relation to the father's employment, these values looked similar (30 – positive; 11 – negative; 10 – neutral).

In the question about preferred forms of childcare, respondents indicated both the form of care and its justification. Analysis of the obtained responses from the surveyed students reveals that the majority of them (over 70%) prefer daycare centers (Figure 5). Students justified their choice of this institution slightly more often by the necessity of sending the child to the facility rather than the need for the child's social and cognitive development. Subsequently, respondents pointed to home-based childcare, either by parents or with the involvement of relatives or a nanny. Only 4 people had no opinion on this matter.

Lastly, students were asked to indicate how many children they would like to have in the future. The majority of them (70%) stated that they would like to have two or three children; another 12% of respondents indicated four or more. Just under 9% want to have only one child, and 7% – none. These results, illustrated in Figure 6, contradict the belief that the younger generation desires a comfortable life without children.



Pozytywnie – positive; negatywnie – negative; obojętnie – indifferent; nie mam zdania – no opinion; inne – other; praca matki/ojca – mother’s/father’s work

Fig. 4. How does the mother/father’s professional work affect the child’s development? N = 69

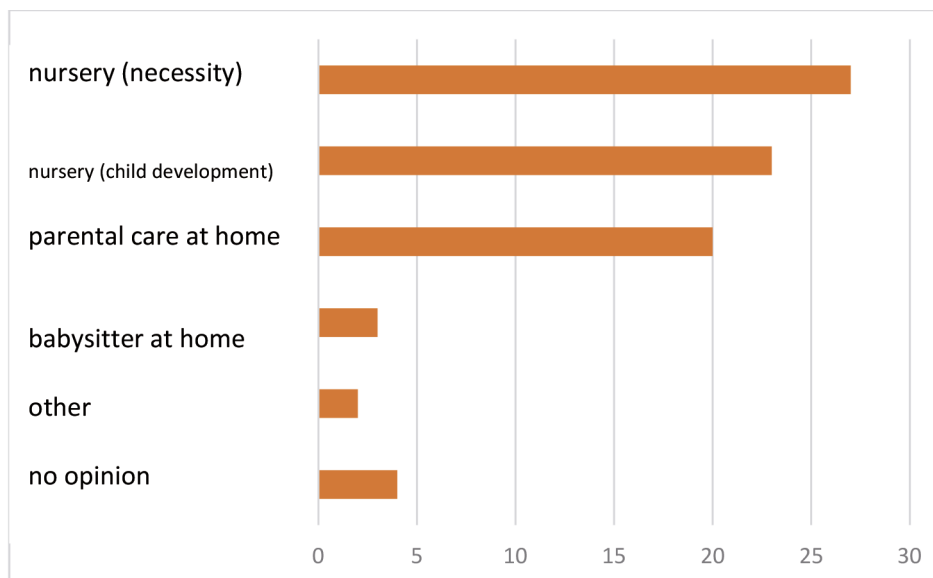
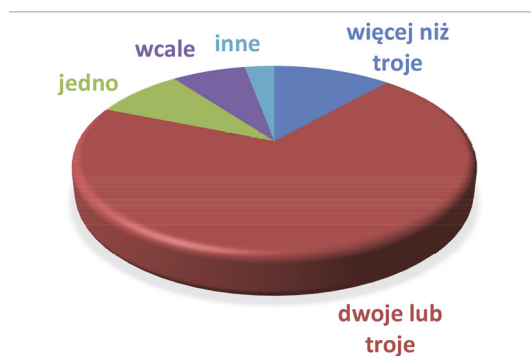


Fig. 5. Preferred forms of child care. N = 69



Jedno – one; wcale – none; inne – other; więcej niż troje – more than three; dwoje lub troje – two or three

Fig. 6. Preferred number of children. N = 69

Discussion

The article presents research results confirming the ongoing change in the model of fatherhood — one of the key social roles played by men. This change involves detraditionalization and increased involvement of fathers in childcare. The cited studies provide scientific evidence of the positive effects of involved fatherhood for children, fathers, and mothers. They also highlight a shift in the perception and significance of fatherhood for child development. These changes are associated with shifts in the family model, impacting the position of women in the family and the job market. They significantly improve the possibilities of balancing the professional and family lives of both parents. In this context, the change in the fatherhood model contributes to a more equitable division of roles in the family, greater equality in the burden of both parents, and, consequently, an increase in gender equality and the overall well-being of the family. The shift in the fatherhood model can play a key role in strengthening family sustainability, given its positive impact on all its members.

The conclusions from the literature review are supported by the pilot study, where the majority of respondents (71%) preferred the partnership model of the family. This is more than the CBOS study in 2020, where 58% of respondents reported such preferences. In the pilot study, 90% of respondents expressed the belief that fathers should be involved in childcare on an equal footing with mothers. Most respondents also expect fathers to regularly perform household chores.

Differences between the pilot study and CBOS results may be an artifact due to the small sample size or may arise from the fact that women dominated among the pilot study respondents. Expectations of partnership in the family,

equal involvement in childcare and household chores, are more often expressed by women than men. The young age of the respondents, more radical in their views than respondents in the CBOS sample representative of the entire Poland, further strengthens the article's thesis that the change in the fatherhood model is the result of a lasting social change that will deepen as subsequent generations enter the marital market and start families.

The question about the expected number of children yielded results similar to the CBOS results from 2019. In the report "Preferowane i realizowane modele życia rodzinnego" ("Preferred and Realized Models of Family Life"), 75% of respondents indicated they would like to have two (47%) or three (28%) children; in this pilot study, it was 70%. In the CBOS study, 11% wanted four or more children, in the presented survey – 12%. The difference appears in another area: in the CBOS study, only 2% of respondents reported not wanting children, while in the surveyed group of pedagogy students, it was 7%. These data show that Poles want to have children and large families much more often than they actually do. The fertility rate for Poland in 2020 was 1.38 (GUS, 2021), meaning that most Poles have one or two children, not two or three. The cited CBOS study (2019) states that as many as 23% of Poles have no children at all (compared to 2% who declare that they do not want children); only 35% of respondents have two children, compared to 47% who wanted that; only 15% of respondents have three children, compared to 28% who wanted that.

Identifying the barriers responsible for this difference is crucial for the development of a country with one of the lowest fertility rates globally, currently undergoing depopulation. It is also crucial for the quality of life for citizens who have the right to self-realization both in their professional and family lives. The model of fatherhood, through its connection with the sense of quality of life and the overall well-being of the family, can be one of the factors influencing the number of children in a family. Research on Swedish and Hungarian families indicates that the more equal the division of care for the first child between the mother and father, the greater the likelihood of having a second or even third child (Szelewa, 2019).

Contemporary men, as fathers, create their own parental role based on increasing awareness and involvement. This indicates a reflective approach to the parenting role and the need to construct it according to individual needs and beliefs (Bierca, 2019). Fathers representing the youngest generation want to be involved in the upbringing process, considering the benefits derived from their active presence in the child's life (Sosnowski, 2018) and the family as a whole. Fatherhood implemented according to the new model allows men to gain experiences that were unavailable to fathers acting as family providers, heads of the family, or strict disciplinarians (Bakiera, 2021). It has also been noted that the greater the involvement of men in fatherhood, the greater their perceived psychological well-being (Wac, 2021). Research by Katarzyna Suwada (2017)

shows that men performing caregiving work change and become less inclined to pursue masculinity based on power and domination.

Despite many positive effects of the involved fatherhood model, childcare is still predominantly seen as women's domain (Michoń, 2016). This is evident, among other things, in the disproportionately smaller percentage of paternal and parental leaves chosen by men compared to women. Regarding a child up to the first year of life, as many as every third father emphasizes the mother's primacy in taking care of the infant (Włodarczyk, 2014).

Engaging fathers in child care can change the situation for women who mostly experience a work-home conflict. For them, childcare is the primary reason for absence from the job market. The "Ojcostwo na świecie 2021" ("Fatherhood Worldwide 2021") report emphasizes that as many as 42% of working-age women cannot work for pay due to caregiving and homemaking responsibilities, compared to only 6% of men (2021). Similar disparities are also revealed by data from the study titled "Praca a dom. Wyzwania dla rodziców i ich konsekwencje" ("Work vs. Home. Challenges for Parents and Their Consequences"), prepared by the research team of the Polish Economic Institute. According to this report, in "68% of families with young children aged 1–9, where both parents work, mothers are most responsible for caregiving duties. The reverse situation, where the working father primarily takes care of the children, applies only to 11% of families" (Kiełczewska, Kukołowicz, Wincewicz, 2022). Similar proportions apply to general household and caregiving duties – 55% of families have mothers doing more work, and only 10% have fathers doing more. When a child is sick, working mothers stay with the child in the majority of cases (50%), and fathers much less often (14%) (ibid).

One of the reasons for these disparities may be the education of young people in traditional parenting roles characteristic of the traditional family model (Desperak, 2004; Pankowska, 2004). This message particularly affects boys. According to research conducted by the Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę (Giving Children Strength) Foundation and presented in the report "Tata 2022. Raport z badania polskich ojców" ("Dad 2022. A Report on the Survey of Polish Fathers"), found that "the most conservative group in terms of worldview is fathers aged 18–20. Significantly more often than fathers aged 31–40, they believe that the mother should take care of the baby's care, and the father should engage in sports. Moreover, significantly more often than fathers over 31 years old, they point to the mother as the person responsible for helping the child in learning and contact with teachers or taking care of a sick child" (Włodarczyk, 2022).

Involved fatherhood. Areas of social reinforcement

The father as a significant figure in family life is increasingly becoming the recipient of various solutions, not only systemic but also grassroots initiatives pro-

moting the importance and broad scope of his parental involvement. It is worth highlighting actions taken by non-governmental organizations, including the already mentioned “Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę” (“Giving Children Strength”) Foundation and the “Share the Care” Foundation, which promote the idea of a partnership family model and, therefore, involved fatherhood. These actions primarily include workshops for fathers and the building of knowledge resources through empirical research and the presentation of their results in reports, articles, and podcasts. Equally important are initiatives for fathers promoted on social media, blogs, and websites, undertaken by active and engaged fathers. An example of such grassroots projects is the website founded and run by Kamil Janowicz (*Father_ing*, 2023), which, as the author himself writes, is dedicated to fathers and fatherhood, although not only. It constitutes an extremely important and easily accessible educational space for modern fathers, promoting their parenting activity.

In the context of civic educational initiatives and increasing knowledge about the benefits of involved fatherhood for the entire family, the absence of this perspective in formal education is striking. This is visible in textbooks as well as school programs (Chmura-Rutkowska, Mazurek, et al., 2016a, 2016b; Chmura-Rutkowska, Sołtysiak-Łuczak, et al., 2016, Desperak 2004; Pankowska 2004). Overcoming the traditional fatherhood model faces difficulties also in connection with the not yet adequately worked out topic of male identity in the modern world. Traditionally defined masculinity does not match the expectations of contemporary women and families, who find happiness more often in full partnership than in the traditional model based on power (Kielczewska et al., 2022). Traditionally conceived fatherhood is deeply rooted in culture and manifests itself in various areas, such as law, for example, in regulations regarding parental leave, where until recently, fathers had to base their rights on the mother’s rights, acting as if in her stead. These regulations were changed by the implementation of the work-life balance directive, which recognizes the father as an autonomous caregiver of the child, defining his rights to paternity and parental leave based on his own employment history, not the child’s mother’s history. The new law also grants two months of parental leave exclusively to fathers, reinforcing the changes in the evolving fatherhood model and addressing societal expectations in this regard (Kozłowska and Ratajczak, 2022).

Conclusions

The shift from the traditional model of fatherhood to a partnership model is an anticipated social change that fosters family well-being, social justice, and the full utilization of the professional potential of both parents. To reinforce these trends, it would be beneficial to introduce content related to modern, involved fatherhood into formal education. The younger generation expects a higher degree of part-

nership and involvement of both parents in childcare and household chores. They also recognize the right of both parents to professional development without the need to choose or “sacrifice” work for the sake of the family. Additionally, they acknowledge the right of both parents to full engagement in family life without having to sacrifice it for work. Achieving a balance between work and home life requires greater involvement of fathers in family life than before. It also necessitates systemic support from the state, including conditions for institutional or home-based childcare and appropriate legal frameworks regarding workers’ rights.

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