

## CHALLENGES AND NOVELTIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY FAMILY SPHERE

Florența-Larisa SIMION

Ph.D. student, The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, SNSPA (Romania), Email: [petrescu\\_larysa@yahoo.com](mailto:petrescu_larysa@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** *I consider it important to bring up how in contemporary society, the family remains one of the well-rooted realities, but which adapts to new social trends. The notion of "family" is in the process of evolving, and it is clear that this institution has undergone many transformations over the centuries. In fact, it is known that this institution enjoyed a series of defining elements that encompass the notion of family (children, household, protection, safety, affection, interaction, intimacy, moral values), but they are not always found together; Given the fact that there are changes in family members, a reorganization of each member's activities highlights an individualistic approach with different opinions about how the family is perceived today. Social transformations cannot remove the institution of the family, but add new perceptions of the forms of coexistence in the world. The fact is that only the shape of the nuclear family is changing, but not entirely. The institution of the family cannot disappear, but is in a process of adapting to the new social circumstances that value new technologies, for example, the media or social networks.*

**Keywords:** *family, choosing the partner for couple, celibacy, new methods of cohabitation: consensual union.*

### 1. Introduction

Throughout human existence, the family was the first social institution on the basis of which the human species was perpetuated and social groups were formed. As history means change, there are crystallized historical periods to which certain types of organization correspond: the peasant family in agrarian societies, the bourgeois family of incipient capitalism, the proletarian family of great industrialization. (Segalen et al., 1994)

Since ancient times, the most common form of family was the traditional one, individuals who lived in small households, but who had strong relationships between the members of the community in which they lived. Stone said that there was no emotional attachment within families. Individuals did not seek the emotional intimacy of their partner and did not consider this to be an important aspect of married life, as it is today.

Within marriage, sex was a source of pleasure, but not a proof of love in the couple, but rather, just a way of procreation. Marriages did not take place freely, young people were forced to marry according to their parents' interests. Individual freedom is subordinated to the social values of those times.

The main influences at the level of the family institution having as main reason the evolution of the media that had an important impact on people's perception of the changes that occurred in society. The media brought to the fore the opportunity to find out useful information in a short time. These aspects influenced the institution of the family through the information distributed much more quickly about the practice of divorce, marriage and alternative forms of cohabitation (celibacy and consensual union). Divorce is mainly discussed, more precisely, the free choice of the individual to separate from one partner and choose another, was no longer a taboo subject. Individualism manifests itself in the fact that people begin to have their own opinions about the relationships they are part of and to expose them to people. These aspects lead to new perceptions of life, so mentalities are changing. Also, contemporaneity brings with it the importance of international. (Popescu - Irofti, 2009)

Emile Durkheim's writings were the starting point for a "sociology of the family" that can explain how it is socially constructed and how it can evolve in the face of imminent transformations. That era marked a period of innovation, culturally, historically and socially. The birth of a modern society was the premise on which the sociology of the family was developed and the subject of individualism and the power of free thought at the level of the couple could be widely discussed. Durkheim, being a professor at the University of Bordeaux, France (1888) chose to develop a lecture called "Introduction to the Sociology of the Family" in which he exposed his main writings present in sociology: the division of social labor, the forms of religiosity and suicide. The French sociologist believed that in order to understand the forms of the current family (the traditional family) we must study ethnographic customs and traditions, not literary descriptions.

## **2. The family - between transformation and stability**

In view of the changes that are taking place in the institution of the family, I would like to bring up an interesting perspective, that of the "crisis of the family". The latter holds a privileged place in the history of the nineteenth century, and the themes that had an important impact on the evolution of the institution of the family are: the weakening of patriarchal authority, the weakening of the spirit of obedience. (Mihailescu, 1999). However, predominantly, there is the question of the existence of a "family crisis" in the twentieth century. If in the interwar period we find ideas about large families, the importance of kinship and the establishment of family functions in one's own home, an important factor of the "family crisis" is induced by the post-war period, which gives the state the possibility to take over family functions, and individuals can take care of extra-family aspects (work, education, travel).

## **3. New families in today's society – alternative lifestyles**

Alternative lifestyles are one of the consequences of contemporaneity by the simple fact that individuals think freely, and the institution of the family no longer has the same purpose as in the families mentioned above. At a conference on the importance of the family, the notion of "alternative lifestyle" was brought up for the first time. This subject began to enjoy the analysis of specialists in the field starting with the twentieth century, by the fact that it was of interest how the alternative family can adapt to society. The perspective of new family forms highlights the idea that individuals must live for themselves, not just for those they care for (children, caregivers).

From a sociological point of view, there is an overload of responsibilities on the family, so that this institution can no longer cope with all the expectations coming from society. "The family is a major problem in our culture. (Nisbet, 1957)

The main influences at the level of the family institution having as main reason the evolution of the media that had an important impact on people's perception of the changes that occurred in society. The media brought to the fore the opportunity to find out useful information in a short time. These aspects influenced the institution of the family through the information distributed much more quickly about the practice of divorce, marriage and alternative forms of cohabitation (celibacy and consensual union). Divorce is mainly discussed, more precisely, the free choice of the individual to separate from one partner and choose another, was no longer a taboo subject. Individualism manifests itself in the fact that people begin to have their own opinions about the relationships they are part of and to expose them to people. These aspects lead to new perceptions of life, so mentalities are changing. Considering the analysis of the family and the identification of changes in this institution in recent decades, we notice an alternative type of family, a form of cohabitation as a couple: the consensual union. Of course, this form of family has always existed, but the way in which it makes its presence felt is different.

In the current period, there is a great tolerance on this type of cohabitation, both in urban and rural areas. Many people, although they do not get married, do not live alone, but live with a partner, that is, they do not only have sexual and affective relationships but also manage together.

Given the fact that there is a dynamic at the social level, the number of couples living together without marrying shows an increased number in the 70s. Taking the example of Sweden, in the '70s, the cohabitation rate was 1%, in the '80s it was 12%, in the 2000s it was 40%. (Stan, pag 66-67 apud. Rotariu, 2007)

Celibacy is that model of coexistence represented by the individuality of people. From a sociological point of view, the underlying causes of the spread of this phenomenon are both objective and subjective: objective causes are sexual: sexual impotence, adaptation difficulties; psychorelational: lack of attitudes for partnership, depressive states, inferiority complexes; material causes: economic constraints, homelessness; and the subjective ones are the following: the existence of distorted images about the family and its tasks; lack of courage in assuming family and parental responsibilities; psychotraumas (caused by serious marital conflicts in the family of origin). (Voinea, 2005).

Also, another important aspect is represented by "a double valence, oscillating between good-bad, desirable-undesirable. On the one hand, we have a delightful vision, when the person who is assigned the status of "celibate" is envied by married people for their freedom, individual autonomy and the benefits of independence. But, on the other hand, there is a desolate portrayal of celibacy, which focuses on the dimension of loneliness." (Rusu Mocănașu, 2014).

## **4. Social values in the institution of the family**

Social values represent some of the significant aspects in the sociology of the family, and among the most important values are the following: love – the family is based on love, being a strong feeling, both

between couple partners and between parents – children or close relatives (extended family). I believe that the formation of a family must be based on the mutual love between its members, and economic, political or social aspects must not take precedence over it. Respect – represents one of the important social values in preserving the poitious relationships within this social group. Mutual respect leads to trust between partners or between other family members. Tolerance - represents an indispensable social value of the family, from my point of view. I consider this because each individual is different, different opinions can arise, and tolerance helps to balance family life. Finally, the moral values of the family represent those personal values, different from family to family (these can vary, from social status, age, to the financial part or gender of the individual). These values lead to the originality of each family, to the consideration that each family builds its own set of values that help its members to communicate in absolutely any situation in order to establish viable solutions.

When the modern family was consolidated, and the traditional one no longer represented a model of cohabitation sought among society, there was a valorization of individualism, of the individual's desire for freedom, thus, family values experienced a period of tolerance over the couple (equality between women and men from a decision-making and professional point of view; emphasis on emotionality and romantic love in the couple). In recent decades, discussions about family values and the diversification of opinions on strengthening a marriage have been considered, both in the US and in Western Europe, but also on other continents. Of course, in the debates on this topic, it was considered to think of intervention strategies meant to reduce the rate of divorce, celibacy and to bring new aspects about the formation of a family through marriage. Thus, W. Galston (Galston, 1996) proposes a three-point plan aimed at reducing divorce: (1) state-mandated premarital measures (promarital education in schools and churches); (2) interventions during marriage, which would mean encouragement through fiscal policies (tax exemptions, allowances, etc.) and by making working time more flexible, on the part of the state and private sector, through salary benefits, maternity leave, helping families in economic difficulty; (3) attention paid to the legal code relating to divorce, in particular the prohibition of divorce without unilateral fault (in which, if one partner wishes to divorce, he or she may do so, not being obliged to prove the guilt of one or the other)." (Galston, 1996)

Next, through this study, I intend to analyze the limits and challenges that can defend in the formation and consolidation of a family. I would also like to bring up several issues that are identified at the family level and that I would like to address in the chapter on sociological research. Among those of interest are the following: firstly, the instability in the couple is identified (mistrust, lack of communication, geographical distance between the two partners); ); secondly, it is highlighted, within the families in which there are children, the geographical distance that represents a reason for the occurrence of family conflicts, the increase in divorces but also a problem related to the loneliness of the children left in the care of the grandparents; Thirdly, new technologies bring to the fore problems related to communication and the formation of virtual identities through online discussion platforms or dating sites. Identity plays an important role because individuals can form a digital profile designed to reflect the positive side of their personality, without knowing their true identity.

Taking these aspects into account, potential problems are identified that can generate repercussions such as: sentimental disappointments, states of anxiety, mistrust in other partners or aspects that belong to the sphere of social deviance: economic deception, human trafficking. I would also like to bring up the phenomenon of jealousy that I have. Thirdly, problems arising at the family level can also be caused by the preponderance of the use of the Internet in everyday life, either at the level of the couple (woman and man) or within the extended family (parents, children, grandparents, relatives). If we analyze these elements through the prism of the Romanian saying "What is a lot hurts!" (through the idea that excess can be considered responsible for certain repercussions on the individual), we can think of the following meaning: both couples who use the Internet as a source of communication (through online discussion platforms) and other family members (mainly children), there can be harmful elements.

On the one hand, considering the couple, we can identify the following issue: the opportunity to socialize with other strangers of the opposite sex stands out. If we think about it, there may be the possibility of hidden identities of one of the partners. Subsequently, problems arise at the family level, the phenomenon of jealousy as an opposite. First of all, instability in the couple occurs due to misunderstandings that have arisen at the level of the partners. Misunderstandings arise through the lack of communication, especially face-to-face communication. Of course, in today's society, the internet offers a wide range of possibilities through the multitude of social networks and online platforms through which the "longing" can diminish.

For example, what the husband no longer finds in his wife or vice versa, he considers that he can find in someone else, another person, met on the Internet, using an online account with his own password (either social network or matrimonial site) or another phone number. As a result of these aspects, there may be economic deception, sentimental disappointments, but also the loss of the person in real life that leads to the dissipation of the family; From the perspective of other family members, for children, excessive use without adult supervision can lead to disappointments or situations of deception on children through hidden identities (pedophilia or human trafficking network).

From another perspective, the phenomenon of jealousy also has another value from a family point of view. As we have stated above, the family, by highlighting a couple made up of "him and her" can highlight a type of jealousy such as the loss of property, of the loved one and of the choice of another, the idea of replacement.

In the case of children, jealousy has a different meaning. More precisely, acts of "jealousy" can have their beginning during childhood, jealousy also presenting another facet in addition to the one mentioned above; most of the time, a child can become jealous, involuntary, one of the parents, and then in adulthood, colleagues, friends, the loved one depending on the environment of origin, family, care from the parents, the feeling of "envy" being noticed. Of course, jealousy manifests itself in the fact that the individual believes that the partner belongs to him in one way or another. Through a vision of history, we learn that Sophocles wrote in the fifth century BCE, one of the most important mythological legends of all time, "the history of Oedipus". The dramatic story of Oedipus and his friends has been the inspiration for many representative Greek literary works over the centuries.

The tragic events that mark the course of Oedipus' life emerge from the predictions of the oracle who told him that he would kill his father and marry his own mother. This whole story is highlighted by Sophocles in a bivalent way: of drama in all the power of the word, but also of the inner pain of the hero who cannot change his painful destiny. De altfel, domeniul psihanalizei a acaparat subiectul în momentul în care Sigmund Freud a analizat faptele mitologice ale lui Oedip ca parte a comportamentului copiilor, aflați în plină dezvoltare. Noțiunea „Complexul lui Oedip” evidențiază „manifestarea copilului (cu vârsta cuprinsă între doi ani și șapte ani) de a-și respinge inconștient părintele de același sex cu el, din pricina unei apropieri de natura afectivă fata de părintele de sex opus.” (Freud, 1899).

## 5. Conclusions

The variety of forms of marital cohabitation are subjects of wide interest in sociological research. Marriage is one of the most important aspects in strengthening the family through social, personal and legal aspects. In a society in the process of change and adaptation to the multitude of information that is easily found from community to community, from one country to another, marriage remains a binder between the formation of a family and its functionality in society. Throughout history, several models of marriage and the way individuals perceive marriage in society have been noted. Two of the models mentioned above, both the British and the French, highlight a multitude of significant aspects for the sociology of the family.

First of all, the French model brings up the way in which Christianity plays an important role both in the choice of the couple's partner, as well as in the customs and custom common customs on the basis of which the family itself is formed.

Secondly, the British model mentioned by Giddens highlights the way in which the institution of the family is perceived by the members of a state. We understand how the ethnic issue is visible in the Birtanian family model, related to marriages between persons and those belonging to a minority family. British marriage is also based on romantic love, but we note the notion of "patrilineal heritage".

The two models reflect the way in which the institution of the family is built in two societies with a perfect cultural diversity, but which retain some defining aspects of family formation, regardless of the evolutionary path.

Family life was undergoing a strong social change, with new perspectives on living together as a couple and a desire for independence of the partners. Therefore, the current transformations based on new methods of communication and the use of the Internet in absolutely any daily activity, lead to freedom of opinions, decisions and highlight changes in perspectives on how the family is seen, towards alternative family styles.

The "crisis" of the family, a paradigm of great interest, showed the transition from the traditional family to the modern one, and it is worth noting the weakening of patriarchal authority, the man having an important function in the family, but at a similar level to the woman whose professional career begins to develop.

**References:**

1. Freud, S. (1899) *Interpretarea viselor*. Ed. Deuticke Verlag.
2. Galston, W (1996). *Divorce american style, Public Interest, Summer*, apud. Petru Iluț, 2010 *FORME ALE CAPITALULUI SOCIAL ÎN FAMILIA LĂRGITĂ DIN ROMÂNIA*, „Revista Română de Sociologie”, serie nouă, anul XXI, nr. 5–6, p. 416–438, Bucharest, pag. 420.
3. Mihailescu, I. (1999). *Familia în societatile europene*. Bucharest: University of Bucharest Publishing House.
4. Nisbet, R. (1957). *Family Environment: A Direct Effect of Family Size on Intelligence, Eugenics Society*, Cassell.
5. Popescu - Irofti, R. (2009). *Introducere în sociologia familiei. Familia Românească în societatea contemporană*, pag. 44.
6. Rotariu, T. (2007). *Aspecte privind structura populației României după starea civilă*, în Petru Iluț. (coord.) *Dimensiuni ale familiei actuale din România*, Iasi: Presa Universitară Clujeană.
7. Rusu Mocănașu, D. (2014). *Prejudecati si stereotipuri referitoare la celibatari*, *Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos din Galați*, fasc. XX, Sociologie, nr. 9, pp. 65.
8. Segalen, M, Burguiere, A, Klapisch- Zuber, C, , Zonabend F (1994). *Histoire de la famille*, Paris, le livre de poche.
9. Segalen, M. (2011). *Sociologia familiei*, Iasi: Polirom.
10. Stan, A. (2009). *Sociologia familiei*, pag 71, [online] available at: <https://sociogrii.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/curs-sem-ii-sociologia-familiei.pdf>
11. Stănculescu, C. *Mitul lui Oedip și complexul lui Oedip în mitologie*. [online] available at: <https://mythologica.ro/mitul-lui-oedip-si-complexul-lui-oedip-in-mitologie/>
12. Tudose, F., Marian, A. (2004) *Alfabetar de sexologie*. Bucharest: INFO Medica.