

POSTMODERN FAMILY– COORDINATES AND TRENDS

Cristiana BALAN

Spiru Haret University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Brasov,
Romania (cristianabalan777@yahoo.com)

DOI: 10.19062/2247-3173.2016.18.2.5

Abstract: *The family is considered a universal institution, specific of any human society. Like society, the family may be a kernel of understanding and explaining reality. Contemporary family is characterized by situations which often make it incapable to solve them by itself. The nuclear family is characterized by choosing the partner based on affection and freedom of choice and aims to mutual happiness of individuals. Modern couple is deeply marked by freedom of choice, having love as the central criterion and exercising their right to self-development. Problems in marriage can have strong effects on partners and often lead to negative states of sadness, anxiety, tension and even depression.*

In spite of the difficulties encountered in time, family has proven to be viable as a dominant social institution and remained so for decades. Changes which have occurred do not necessarily replace family with an alternative, but rather modify some aspect of its existing structure. Analyzing family in terms of its future or lack thereof, the gradual trends involved do not offer support for the assumptions of an imminent decline of this institution.

Keywords: *nuclear family, divorce, consensual partnership, dissolution of the couple, postmodern family.*

1. FAMILY AS THE PROTOTYPE OF SOCIETY

The family, an essential element that is part of the fundamental realities is considered a universal institution, characteristic to any human society. As the society or community nature of man, the family may be a kernel of understanding and explaining reality. As a biological being, the man is placed in a kinship group, i.e. individuals whose homogeneity and independence is related to their physical constitution itself.

Therefore, the family is the purest manifestation of human social life, which contours the profile of the first forms of collective coexistence. The first human communities, clans, tribes or primitive hordes were only loose family structures, kinship groups, where endogamy was the guarantor of group solidarity (primarily physical, of consanguinity). For a long time, actually, the family was the basis and model after which the society was built.

2. CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

Contemporary family is characterized by a constellation of problems and situations that often make it incapable to solve them by itself. As a unit / adult couple, it lives the complexity drama of economic, cultural and relational situations of our time. As a group of adults who build together social values, traditions and their own culture, the family feels the pressure of problems concerning economic recession, the culture crisis and interpersonal communication difficulties in recent years. Paradoxically, the more

perfected the means of mass communication become, the more a lack of interpersonal communication especially in terms of socio-affective relationships is felt and therefore, the concern to optimize generally and in various fields, the relationships among people, affective communication and negotiation techniques, cooperation and collaboration extends.

The accelerated pace of contemporary life requires people to adapt quickly to situations that are constantly changing and turn them into very busy people. In this context and in family life important changes have occurred. Even the term *family* began to be understood by specialists in a wider manner than the group composed of parents and their children. It is taken into account the degree of kinship, domestic group etc. Family group is defined by common residence, co-habitation and presence of children. Thus, the family is not only a socio-emotional unit but also a group where there are tensions and conflicts.

Not long ago, most marriages usually lasted until the death of one of the partners, but in recent decades lifestyle has changed. In recent decades we have seen a massive increase in the rate of divorce - a dissolution causing both emotional disorder and financial difficulties.

Even if we know that many relationships fail miserably, most couples are formed with the purpose and desire that their relationship to last. Both partners believe they will stick together and can not imagine the reasons that would make them separate. There is often a perfect fit between their interests, attitudes and lifestyle. Unfortunately, all these can be misleading. After a week, a month, a year or even half a century, the relationship is no longer what it was in the beginning, the partner seems to be a different person than the one known long ago. Choosing a partner has a decisive influence on the future. Joining two separate lives, perhaps even contrasting lifestyles creates a common lifestyle in which the two who have become a couple will live together. The nuclear family is characterized by choosing the partner based on affection and freedom of choice and aims to mutual happiness of individuals.

The modern couple is deeply marked by freedom of choice, having love as the central criterion and exercising their right to self-development. If the central criterion - love - disappears, the conjugal union loses its reason to be (Baran-Pescaru, 2004). Most researchers consider that the main reason for the increasing divorce rate that characterizes the contemporary society is precisely the choice of marriage partner after a preponderant criterion, namely, that of affection and romantic love.

Marriage was and is usually associated with stability, morality, harmony, balance. At the opposite pole stands divorce, i.e., instability, imbalance. This bipolar perception shows its limits currently.

3. DIFFICULTIES IN COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS

Conjugal partners can go through difficult periods and these periods sometimes reach a point where the two, deeply disappointed by each other, begin to wonder if they want to continue to stay married. Usually couples who achieve a high level of disappointment argue a lot and their arguments do not lead to resolution, but to a greater wear of the relationship. Other couples who experience great difficulties may not argue at all, but they live an increasingly feeling that tells them they don't share anything anymore. Partners who are facing these problems cease to do nice things for each other, stop communicating, lose their mutual feelings, their friendship and sex life.

There are also other signs of a serious deadlock in a marriage: contempt, withdrawal, violence and a complete loss of any connection with the partner. It is important to know

that all this happens not only to married couples but are possible in any long-term relationship.

Sometimes couple problems relate only to the communication relationship and solving certain situations, fights, contradictory discussions, things about intimacy and sexuality. This kind of problems begin to occur in couples who can not communicate, do not know how to give each other the support they need. There are couples who get along very well at the beginning of the relationship, during the romantic period, but the partners are not yet ready for a long-term relationship and then is when disagreements arise.

Studies show that the risk of difficulties to occur in marriage is high at the beginning and it increases after the periods of transition in which children are born or when children reach adolescence (Voinea, 1996). Sometimes problems can be directly linked to individual problems of one partner, such as substance abuse, alcohol and others.

Marriages that work well can be deeply troubled by a terrible event like infidelity of one partner. (Bistriceanu, 2005).

Problems that occur in marriage can have powerful effects on partners, often leading to negative states of sadness, anxiety, tension and even depression. If these conditions are prolonged, they can have an effect on physical health. Also the effects on the family may be profound when conflicts are ample, children raised in a conflictual environment will themselves have more difficulties than other children.

Divorce – a psychosocial complex phenomenon which is the final form of the dissolution of conjugal life, changing the life of partners and their descendants. It determined tension, conflicts, frustration and dissatisfaction whose effects extend beyond the pronouncement of the court. Understood as a prescribed social and legal way of dissolution of the marriage (Ilut, 2005), the divorce is actually the last step in a process of erosion and dissolution of the family couple.

At first glance, like marriage, divorce seems to be the result of individual choices and desires of the partners. Systematic analysis of divorce reveals that it can be determined by economic, cultural, psychological, religious factors etc. that work on the partners, inside and outside couples.

As a phenomenon, divorce can be prevented by the action of factors that contribute to the strengthening of marriage and the family. The social factors that can limit the phenomenon of divorce are: prosperous state of health, social protection of population, a pro-family attitude of the population, intolerance of divorce, religious and legal prohibitions. But in the current context, some of these factors can be perceived as being in direct contradiction with human rights.

The contemporary society is facing an increasing number of extramarital relations, consensual unions, divorces with breakdowns of the classic family. The frequency of these events is determined by the processes of industrialization, urbanization, the increasing levels of education and emancipation of women, economic reasons, unemployment, poverty.

Although some general social factors may act on the dissolution of couples, divorce remains the ultimate decision of the partners to separate, to end the existing conjugal union, to try another form of cohabitation, contracting another marriage or living without a partner. Essential in the breakup of a family we find the following factors acting from within the couple: insufficient knowledge of their partner, lack of love, early marriage, significant differences in age between the partners, differences in instruction and education, infidelity, aggressive behavior, differences regarding children's education etc.

The higher the rate of divorce, the more visible and accepted separation becomes; by changing the mentality on divorce, it is no longer considered as a failure but as a solution, a positive response to a critical situation. With this new concept of divorce, which appears

as a start for a better life, positive consequences are presumed, but the surrounding reality, as well as the investigational data also show us the multitude of negative consequences

Regarding the two partners, the psychological effects depend a lot on children, whether or not they exist, on the affective investment made in the marriage, on who initiated the divorce, the value of partners on the erotic and marital market, on the number of relatives and friends of each of the partners.

There are multiple consequences on children. In traditional societies there is a tendency to stigmatize the child whose parents are separated. In modern urban society, this hardly matters. There are a number of psychological effects in relation to the identification of the role of sex and forming attitudes towards family and work.

Divorce causes important consequences for family members at the economic, social, psychological and legal levels. The ties that have united the spouses in marriage cease with divorce, previously set common goals can not be achieved anymore and family relationships break up and leave room for tense and conflictual relations,.

It is said that life is a series of decisions to be taken. We note with regret that, as a rule, the most important decisions are the easiest to pass by. And the choice of the spouse is a special decision, extremely complex, one of the most important in our life. To not set time aside and to not put energy in this decision leads to a premature damage the relationship.

In such cases, the trend must be one of change and not repair. Every relationship suffers in time, but the differentiation is made in terms of values disputed. There are stable and strong relations, where the bond between partners is not achieved through material goods or number of offspring procreated, but simply by the need of one another. Marital problems of this type require only some "adjustments" which are made most efficiently by partners awareness of their status.

According to Maslow's theory on the individual's needs, we can categorize the disfunctionalities of the couple. The first two levels of needs (when they are not met) cause most problems that can be solved very simply by using surrogacy. Marriage is the unity between the two partners, at least theoretically. Practically, it is a unit controlled simultaneously by two different judgments.

This ancient observation serves as motivation to support the idea that every family should have one "head" (usually the man!). This is not the solution, it is only a temporary and convenient solution. Effective non-involvement in decision making of the "secondary part" (usually the woman!) often leads to the permanent alteration of the relationship.

The causes are numerous, predominantly among them we find pride, which not only is responsible for altering the relationship, but prevents dynamic, and often unconsciously, solving the problems occurred by the mere refusal of any kind of help. In couple relationships there are clear rights and obligations. Yes, but these are part of the truths that should never be materialized into words. Their compliance must be instinctive. Mentioning them, drawing attention to them will always bring the desired result, but will also open a new source of problems, so the result is a very short-term workaround.

In any family, a divorce can be interpreted as a dramatic agent of change. We refer to a change in the personal, interior, intimate level of each of those involved. Even though we currently witness more separations it does not mean that they are less painful. When a family is in crisis it is the duty of all to help to some extent, to intervene. It is a collective responsibility still not too well understood, to protect those involved in divorce. Adults divorce each other, but not their children, but for the latter, the perspective seems most often negative.

The family has proven to be viable as a dominant social institution and remained so for decades. Changes which have occurred do not necessarily replace family with an alternative, but rather modify some aspect of its existing structure. Analyzing family from the perspective of the future or the lack thereof, the gradual trends involved offer no support to the assumptions of an imminent decline of this institution.

Currently, the family is in a transition process that is expected to continue for at least a generation, since many of these changes involve the middle-aged and the family interaction patterns for youth are still developing.

Contemporary authors of some controversial studies regarding modern family evolution, such as Judith Stacey, talk about a new concept regarding the interpretation of the direction toward which the contemporary family is oriented. Recent decades led to derisory the concept of modern family, replacing it with a wide range of family arrangements, with which we accustom harder and we reorganize frequently, due to changes in the occupational and personal context.

The term *postmodern* is used here to indicate the disputed, ambivalent and indecisive nature of the family today. Postmodernism does not necessarily mean a new stage of family development. It involves a kind of Brownian motion, because people are inspired by old family patterns, but also try the new. The postmodern family is more democratic, but this occurs at the cost of an instability inducing relativity within the couple, since its founding.

REFERENCES

- [1] Băran - Pescaru, Emilia. *Familia azi. O perspectivă sociopedagogică*. Editura Aramis, București, 2004.
- [2] Bistriceanu, Corina. *Sociologia familiei*. Editura Fundației România de mâine, București, 2005.
- [3] Iluț, P. *Sociopsihologia și antropologia familiei*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2005.
- [4] Stacey, Judith. *In the Name of the Family*. University of Michigan, USA, 1997.
- [5] Voinea, Maria. *Psihosociologia Familiei*. Editura Universității București, 1996.

SOCIO –
HUMANITIES