

Možný, Ivo

The families of university graduates

In: Možný, Ivo. *Rodina vysokoškolsky vzdělaných manželů*. Vyd. 1. V Brně: Universita J.E. Purkyně, 1983, pp. 183-189

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/121972>

Access Date: 04. 03. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

1. INTRODUCTION

The book deals with structural tendencies that have emerged in families in which both spouses are university graduates (FUGs) in Czech society during the sixties and seventies. Some of the problems of such families are unique and are not expected to recur; others are general), while a number of them have emerged in the group of families studied but can be expected to turn into general problems.

It is in these families that the pressure for changes in the traditional patterns of family behaviour becomes the most intense. In these families, both the husband and the wife are gainfully employed for a lifetime, the difference between their earnings is the smallest as compared to other types of families, and the profession of the wife requires that she accomplish tasks that had traditionally been demanded only of men. The proportion of such families in the population is increasing with the rising educational level of women. For the youngest age groups, every twentieth marriage in Czechoslovakia is a marriage of two university graduates.

Of course, these families not only insist upon the new prescriptions of the male and female roles but they also bear evidence of the new problems emerging within them. Of all wives, women graduates have the highest average age at marriage. Even though this age has declined sharply in recent decades, it continues to be in the vicinity of twenty-five. Every fifth woman graduate remains childless for the whole of her life (only every tenth woman from the rest of the population). The FUGs with children have fewer children than the average. For FUG, the modus is one child. Divorces can be found more frequently among them. FUGs divorce twice as often as couples with an elementary school education (Table 44). The wives take advantage of the legal two years' unpaid maternity leave less frequently, and generally return to work after the six-months' paid maternity leave has expired. Sickness as a result of stress occurs more frequently among them.

A number of problems also emerge in the occupational sphere. Work as a social phenomenon is differently perceived by men and women. The differences can be focused in three aspects: the attitude towards proper work performance, the attitude towards the formal employing organization and towards the vertical mobility therein, and the integration into informal groups. In the family, as well, the changes in three interrelated roles have been subjected to investigations. Changes occur not only in the household division of labour, that is in the caretaker roles, but also in the mother and father roles of the spouses. The changes observed in these six selected roles represent a hermeneutic model for further research on FUGs (Fig. 1). Sociology can accomplish its task if it helps us to explain both how the entrance

of qualified women into the labour sphere modifies the character of the family, and how the present state of family structures and the egalitarian integration of women into the labour force modify the character of labour.

2. THE FAMILY ECONOMY AS A SOCIAL MICROSYSTEM

The second chapter deals with the family economy. It conceives the family economy as an energetic aspect of the activities of the family system as a whole in all of its functions. Attention is focused on how the family manages its energy in the course of time. There are two possible approaches to this problem. First, the family can be thought of as an element of the economic macrostructure. From this point of view, we are interested in how the family makes possible and stimulates, in the necessary quantity and quality, the recruitment of a labour force for the needs of the national economy. FUGs produce less than the average quantity at higher than average costs. Second, when the family is considered as a microunit of economic decision-making, the FUGs have been found to possess a bigger energetic capital. At the same time, a higher degree of tension exists in such families, because they operate under higher expectations. The contributions of husband and wife are more symmetrically distributed in these families. Yet in most instances not even FUGs turn into dual-career families in Czechoslovakia. In the course of the family life cycle, the internal structure of the systems of male and female roles does not develop as expected by young intellectuals at the time of their marriage. Originally, they generally agree on raising a family with several children and on maintaining an equal division of labour as regards child-care and housekeeping so as to leave the same latitude for occupational commitment to both of the spouses and allow permanent dynamics in their professional careers. Owing to an insufficient energy potential, however, this goal cannot be achieved by most such families. After the first child is born, the family usually modifies its original plans and meets its objectives not as a dual-career family but as a family of two working spouses. Nevertheless, even if her share in child-care is larger, the wife does not reduce her occupational commitment to such an effect as to induce her deprofessionalization. Frequently, at the cost of having a small one-child family, the wife retains a relatively independent status based on her own vocational classification, which, in case of marital break-up (or should the husband fail in his career), enables her to resume and dynamize her own professional career at any time. Under ordinary conditions, however, she always tends to sacrifice her career ambitions. Thus, symmetry in the family is achieved not by mirror similarity in the whole set of occupational and family roles but by complementation: both spouses invest an equal amount of energy in the activities of the system but, to a somewhat greater extent, the contribution of the wife is inward-oriented while that of the husband is directed outwards.

If a true balance has been established, it is not the husband who, in an authoritarian way, makes the decisions (as was the case with traditional pseudocomplementarity when the ideology of equality often formed part of a false consciousness); instead, decisions are made by both of the spouses. Through the aim of the general emancipation programme has not been fully attained, the present state of affairs can nevertheless be considered a major achievement.

3. THE DIVISION OF LABOUR IN THE FAMILY — HOUSEKEEPING

The decisive proportion of the „family economy“ materializes in the economic function of the family. This function is understood to be a set of activities providing for the material needs of the family and the interests of its members. This mainly involves activities in the processes of the production and maintenance, distribution and consumption of material goods in the family.

The analyses of the present trends have shown that the initial predictions of an early atrophy of the economic function of the family, resulting mainly from the total disappearance of the productive subfunction and a substantial reduction in the provider subfunction, were unrealistic and seem increasingly unlikely of fulfilment. In certain population groups, contradictory trends are emerging and it is more difficult than was previously thought to predict the future directions of development. The consumption in kind of certain products increases in societies with real socialism and some petty family farming products become an important part of the market. The accumulative subfunction has not disappeared either. Some families accumulate a certain portion of their current incomes, investing it in appliances that serve as productive instruments in small undertakings in the second job.

However, families of highly educated partners are rarely of this type. Due to their relatively high earnings they are not financially compelled to act in this way; they are capable of increasing their incomes by increased effort in their professions. At the same time, their professions afford them a higher degree of self-fulfilment. In view of this, activities for the day-to-day material reproduction of family life gain in importance. The expected delegation of the household chores to service agencies has not in fact taken place. Instead, housework has become more efficient through the use of labour-saving devices, which, however, are demanding as to their handling and repairs. The families of two highly educated partners cope with this situation by reallocating role expectations. But not even in these families are the housekeeping duties of the husband and wife shared equally (Table 2 shows the proportion of housework done by men). The unequal burden imposed upon the wife increases with the duration of married life, as an increasing proportion of families curtail their initial plans to establish two-career families and return to a division of labour that approaches the traditional model. However, the husbands continue to feel that they have failed in what was expected of them by their wives and also by themselves. It has been found in one-fifth of the couples that the husband thinks he should do a larger amount of work around the home.

It is in this field that the interests and preferences of husbands and wives are in conflict. At a certain general level, the interests of the husband and wife are identical but they conflict at another level. In order to understand the mechanism of the present state, we should distinguish between preferences and interests. Preferences are perceived to occur at the psychological level, while interests relate to the sociological level. Preferences are subjective, whereas interests are objective in nature. Historically, men have been in a better position to apply their preferences than women. The products of their labour possess market value while the products of traditional female work have but applied value. This gives rise to the dominant position of men in market-oriented societies. In traditional philosophy, men proceed from the assumption it is proper to assert their preferences in the family, because „as long as everything is all right with the husband, everything is all right with the family“. Women, on the contrary, used to repress their preferences for the sake of their families, reasoning that „as long as everything was all right with the family, everything was also all right with the wife“. The new status of the wife who also produces goods having an exchange value changes not only her position in

decision-making but also her philosophy. As far as the household division of labour is concerned, this has a positive effect on a more equal sharing of tasks. The circumstance that no full equality in sharing the household duties has been attained can be understood as an expression of inertia in the family structures, a cultural gap. However, we can also believe that it is an objective expression of the group interests of the family based not only upon the performance of the provider function but also on that of the reproduction and socialization functions.

4. THE EMPLOYED WOMAN AND THE WOMAN AS AN EMPLOYEE

The progress in the division of labour in the households of FUG forms part of the historical development that has radically changed both the character of the family and the character of labour. The basic historical trend is towards decreasing differences between the character of female and male work. This is mainly based on the declining number of children in the family, from seven at the end of the century to one or two at the present time. Thanks to this, a huge amount of women's capacities were set free. The second source of free capacities is the reduced amount of work to be done around the home owing to the mass production of ready-to-cook food, the mechanization of housekeeping and, to a certain degree, the development of services. On the other hand, the nature of labour has changed, making the labour sphere more suited to the application of specific feminine characteristics. The development of technological processes has reduced the importance of the worker's physical strength. The changes in the relations of production in socialist societies open the labour domain to women by placing less emphasis on aggressivity and competitiveness. As a result of these changes, women's integration into the labour force has changed from a two-phase cycle (the wife gainfully employed before motherhood, and when possible, after motherhood) to a one-phase cycle where the wife has virtually no disruption in her occupational career because of childbearing (comp. Fig. 5). However, as stated in the case of FUG, this has been possible at the expense of family size and leads to families with less than two children. This solution is not acceptable for a long period of time, because the final result would be the disappearance of the population. Provided that we reject a solution based on differentiated fertility, where low fertility in certain social groups is offset by high fertility in other groups, we can seek resources for further advancement only in changing the nature of labour. The existing technological and economic facilities, if combined with reduced demands on consumption, could make it possible to modify the character of labour so as to allow standard reproduction behaviour even with full integration into the labour sphere. This aim is served by the very presence of women in jobs. It has been found that in occupations where an increased proportion of women are present the work climate clearly changes so as to allow the women to behave in the ordinary maternity-oriented way. However, in occupational fields with a high proportion of men, a high proportion of divorced and childless women and women having only one child have been found. Under the present conditions, women gain some resources for the performance of mother roles, because they work as well as men do, but they are not oriented towards vertical mobility in their professions. The feminization of professions does not proceed in such a way that women gradually occupy whole individual professions or occupy of the positions in all professions; instead, there exists a complete spectrum ranging from fully feminized occupations through more or less feminized professions to fully male employments (Fig. 6 and 7). In most cases, women graduates are the first to penetrate the traditional male professions. The age pyramid for a number of professions shows that women are

beginning to dominate in the younger age groups (Fig. 8). However, as a group they hold routine positions in intellectual professions or terminate their careers at the lower levels of management. The causes of this state of affairs are discussed and the potential for the fully committed professional involvement of women who are mothers is examined.

5. THE HUSBAND OF THE GAINFULLY EMPLOYED WIFE AT WORK AND IN THE FAMILY

The conditions for performing the male role have also changed in recent times. In this society, the fundamental change in the external parameters took place in the late forties and early fifties. It was the men graduates who were the first incumbents of change. Traditionally, they were characterized by having married relatively late, in general only after reaching the age of thirty. They used to marry women who were much younger than they. Thereby, men assured their natural dominance in the family, even when, at a later date, they began to marry wives as educated as themselves. The age-at-marriage of these men dropped abruptly in the early fifties, however. The age differential between the spouses also decreased to 1.5 years and peer-marriages became commonplace. The difference between the age at which men became economically independent, which remained as high as before, and their age-at-marriage disappeared. As, after graduation, men are obliged to go through one year's military service without receiving any pay, a number of men marry even before acquiring economic independence. Thus, a significant proportion of FUGs start their married lives with the husband depending on the wife's income. In 11 % per cent of FUGs, the wives earn more than the husbands in the first five years after marrying. It is no wonder that under these circumstances the men graduates marry with a pronounced egalitarian ideology.

However, a fully symmetric family organization is a great cultural innovation. It destroys deeply rooted cultural patterns and meets with numerous obstacles. The basic problem of men in FUGs is that of illegitimate masculinity. This problem mirrors the internal imbalance present in the complementary female role. The dramatic changes in the women's social position are responsible for the fact that woman graduates in particular have inconsistent and ambivalent expectations of their husbands. On the one hand, they declare an egalitarian ideology and demand symmetrical role sharing. They expect the husbands to share equally in domestic chores and child-care, thus, enabling them, to pursue their own professional careers for a lifetime with the same commitment as the husband. On the other hand, however, they continue to derive their basic social identity from the fact that they do not lose their femininity even in intellectual professions. They want their husbands to help them with the housekeeping tasks but — and this should be emphasized — it is only assistance they want to receive. Their social self-confidence is also based on the fact that they dominate in these traditionally female spheres and that they were able to get married to highly qualified men: the high status of the judging person increases the value of his estimate. In our culture, the man's status is also anchored in his occupational achievements and in social distinctions (title, income) related to these achievements. Women are also highly sensitive to what the outside world thinks about their husbands. The husband is more willing to put up with the fact that his wife is an outstanding professional, though not a perfect house wife, than the wife is to accept that her husband performs household duties excellently but has obviously failed in his profession.

In view of this situation, the husband discovers that neither of the positions in the FUGs is fully legitimate. If he chooses the symmetric variant, he has to face

the fact that he must expect less of himself in his profession and, in addition, that he has to cease to expect that his wife will expect higher professional achievements of him.

However, choosing the traditional variant (a choice that has been found to be common during the later phases of the family-life cycle) does not result in satisfaction either. The husband has to work much harder-and, usually, does so in fact — in order to justify his deviation from the egalitarian ideology proclaimed and explicitly accepted by him. His career slows down, in its mid phase, to a greater extent than that of graduates married to less educated women. But the initial handicap increases his efficiency, so that his career takes on a steeper course in the final phase of his profession. This is due not only to the larger amount of energy released in the family after the children have left home but also to the competition existing in the form of the higher real and latent income (professional performance) of the wife.

6. CHILDREN IN THE FAMILIES OF GRADUATES

The child's socialization process in FUGs is characterized by the fact that the child's parents are usually older people, the father often being over fifty when the child still attends school. Often such children live in second marriages and — even more frequently — in families with no father. Three-generation families are less frequent. The child has less intimate social contacts. On the other hand, such children have the advantage of comparatively better standards of material welfare. In contrast to other families, the average income increases with the duration of the marriage and material pressures to start earning an independent livelihood are less urgent. Such families usually have a more extensive collection of books, the parents go more frequently to theatres or concerts, and they travel more frequently. This means a wider range of mediated stimuli for the child. The child lives in a more sophisticated world. The family compensates for the lack of the child's contacts within the family by providing better access to broader strata of society.

In view of the fact that work at home is more frequent in such families, the child sees parents at work more often, although it is more difficult for him (due to the abstract nature of such work) to grasp the content and social function of parental activity. The child's respect for the father, traditionally stemming from the child's respect for the father's skill and dexterity, relies here on mediated symptoms of his skill, his social prestige and standards of consumption. Parenthood becomes the father's stimulus for professional achievement. Nevertheless, this factor can channel the father's efforts from true commitment to the acquisition of merely outward distinctions of achievement, towards a consumer type of orientation and the drive for formal prestige. Once this is discovered by the adolescent, it can give rise to a generation conflict. Respect for the mother traditionally drew on sources outside the professional sphere. A second personality thus emerges in such families, woman personality displaying its own sense of social identity. In her profession, the mother gains her own basis of social identity. Thus, two independent models of professional commitment shape the child's socialization process in such families — the male model and the female model. Distinctive of the latter model is a certain combination of particularity and universality. The features ensuing from the man's involvement with major social organizations are mediated through the mother within the microcosm of the family, just as women's mass involvement in the labour domain accounts for the presence of certain aspects of particularism. The mother's professional involvement accounts for the decisive shift of the child's perception of things private and public. The traditional identification of private matters with the

female element and public matters with the male element loses its force. Motherhood in such families is coextensive with the first formative years in the professional branch in question. Women generally do not give up employment; the child attends a nursery school or somebody else is hired to take care of the child.

Although children in dual-career families enjoy the same amount of care and love as children in other families, they live in an atmosphere marked by less spontaneity and by more self-consciousness and vigilance. The same applies to the roles of the sexes: investigations show a definite shift towards features traditionally described as masculine. As with the division of labour and the parental roles, the change is perceived as being far more extensive than it actually is. Women perceive men as being more masculine than they perceive themselves and husbands perceive their wives as being more feminine than they themselves do. Equally, the shift from spontaneity towards rationality in parenthood is perceived more intensely than in reality. In some cases this generates a diffuse feeling of inadequacy, the feeling that parents still owe something to the child — an effortless, carefree spirit of spontaneity, which is so difficult to achieve in the process of radical social change and whose value the child symbolizes. This feeling, whether substantiated or arising from the newness of the situation, gives rise to a compensation mechanism. Parents who believe that their child — due to their professional ambitions — had hard times in early childhood, frequently devote more parental care in the middle and advanced phases of family life. In this way, fathers compensate not only for the feeling of debt vis-a-vis the child, but also for the feeling of loss of professional competence arising from the gradually restricted scope of power characterizing the final stages of their professional lives.

If we have to summarize in one sentence the essence of the experience gained by the first generation of FUGs, we can say the following: What can be achieved is a wider choice; what cannot be avoided is the very necessity of choice. Many couples realize this with bitterness — and often too late. The question is whether a daughter can make use of her mothers' experience. And if so, what the daughter's choice will be. We do not underestimate the men's role, but the men are even more confused than the women are.