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Distance marriage in the opinions of married women and married men

Małżeństwo na odległość w opiniach zamężnych kobiet i żonatych mężczyzn

Abstract

Aim. Contemporary changes in the labor market are causing relationships to take on new shapes and forms. One of these is long distance relationships. The couples do not live in the same place; the family functions only for a certain period of time, because its members work far away from home. Based on our own research, the article shows the functioning of a family living at a distance. The purpose of the article is to illustrate the motivation to work abroad and its consequences for family members remaining in the home country and temporarily separated from their loved ones.

Methods and materials. The study included married couples functioning remotely: 60 people working abroad, on short- or long-term contracts (35 men and 25 women) and 60 of their spouses (35 women and 25 men) who are in the home country. The diagnostic survey was conducted from March to April 2023 on paper and via the Internet. Data were obtained through a questionnaire and subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Results and conclusion. Based on the analysis, labor migration is associated with the desire to improve the economic situation and living conditions. The respondents also

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pointed to negative consequences related to family separation or reduced control over raising children and caring for seniors. According to long-distance spouses, the consequence of long-term separation is a loss of trust, indifference, or excessive longing. Family members try to fit into new roles, endeavoring to be a partner and a parent at a distance.

Keywords: family, child, labor migration, long-distance relationships, social consequences of migration.

Abstrakt

Cel. Zmiany występujące współcześnie na rynku pracy powodują, że związki nabierają nowych kształtów i form. Jedną z nich są obecnie tak zwane związki na odległość (*long distance relationships*). Pary nie mieszkają w tym samym miejscu, rodzina funkcjonuje tylko przez pewien czas, ponieważ jej członkowie (zarówno ojciec, jak i matka) pracują z dala od domu, a dzieci i małżonkę/a widzą tylko w czasie urlopu lub weekendu. W artykule w oparciu o badania własne ukazano funkcjonowanie rodziny żyjącej na odległość, w geograficznym rozłączeniu. Celem artykułu jest zobrazowanie motywacji do podjęcia pracy za granicą, a także konsekwencji takiej decyzji dla członków rodziny pozostających w kraju i czasowo rozłączonych z najbliższymi.

Metody i materiały. Badaniami objęto małżeństwa funkcjonujące na odległość: 60 osób pracujących zagranicą, na kontraktach krótko- i długoterminowych (35 mężczyzn i 25 kobiet) i 60 ich małżonków (35 kobiet i 25 mężczyzn) będących w kraju, którzy wyrazili zgodę na udział w badaniu. Sondaż diagnostyczny przeprowadzono od marca do kwietnia 2023 w formie papierowej i za pomocą Internetu. Dane dotyczące omawianej problematyki uzyskano za pomocą autorskiej ankiety i poddano analizie ilościowo-jakościowej.

Wyniki i wnioski. Na podstawie przeprowadzonej analizy wykazano, że migracje zarobkowe – w opinii badanych – związane są z chęcią poprawy sytuacji ekonomicznej i polepszeniem warunków życia. Poza korzyściami materialnymi badani wskazywali także skutki negatywne, związane z rozłąką rodzin czy ograniczeniem kontroli nad wychowaniem dzieci oraz opieką nad seniorami. W opinii małżonków na odległość konsekwencją długotrwałej rozłąki jest utrata zaufania do partnera, zobojętnienie bądź nadmierna tęsknota. Członkowie rodzin starają się wpasować w nowe role, próbując być partnerem oraz rodzicem na odległość.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, migracje zarobkowe, związki na odległość, społeczne następstwa migracji, dziecko.

Introduction

The family is of interest to many scientific disciplines, especially those located in the social sciences. Regardless of the adopted paradigm, the family constitutes a fundamental existential value for every human being. It is a specific and unique living environment, within which the processes of care, upbringing, socialisation and education

of children and young people take place. It is the place where man satisfies his subjective and supra-subjective needs, especially – fundamental for his comprehensive development – the need for physical and psychological security.

The family is an ever-changing category. These changes, as Beata Maj (2011, p. 18) emphasises, are not spontaneous; their source lies primarily in the processes taking place in society as a whole. The development of civilisation, especially in the sphere of information and communication technology, nanotechnology and robotics, makes modern man face not only a wide range of development opportunities, but also threats present in almost all spheres of his functioning. This sense of threat is heightened by social and political turmoil, growing economic unrest, phenomena threatening human health and life – such as the poor state of the environment, the spread of terrorism or the emergence of new hot spots resulting in armed conflict.

These changes have clearly translated into the functioning of the family – they have intensified many phenomena in family life that were already discernible in industrial societies, and have generated some new, specific features of the family, stemming from the characteristics and processes of post-industrial society (Tyszką, 1999, pp. 9–10). As a result of socio-cultural changes, it is no longer possible to speak of a single model of marriage and family; new models and patterns of family life are emerging. Changes in the internal structure of the family include, according to Franciszek Adamski (1982, p. 239), a change in the position and roles of spouses towards democratisation of relations between them, a change in the position of the child in the family and a process of autonomisation of the individual. In addition to couples with a child or children, which are considered the norm and the pattern, people are increasingly living in other forms of personal life organisation and various types of households. New alternative forms of living that are shown to be equivalent to or different from the traditionally understood married-family life include *LAT* (short for Living Apart Together) – spouses or partners live in an informal relationship but live separately (Kwak, 2014, pp.13–15). Piotr Szukalski (2013, p. 25) emphasises that increasingly marriage and family are based not on equivalence, but on love and trust. Despite the fact that the nature of family relationships and the rules of fulfilling marital and family roles have changed over time, marriage is invariably the primary form of family life planned by young people (Nowak, Banasiak, Górnicka, Zajęcka, 2019, pp. 432–446).

Contemporary transformations in the labour market are influencing specific lifestyle changes. Economic development, which is associated with the growth of production or the intensive development of the service sector, determines the growth of consumption and, as a consequence, the increase of economic needs. This is accompanied by a growing self-consciousness of society, individualism and a clear tendency to improve the quality of one's own life and its standard. Deciding to leave the country

and starting remunerative employment abroad is an important element in meeting the growing needs of people. These changes are influencing the emergence of new forms of family life.

Specific features of a long-distance marriage

The contemporary transformation of social life is giving human relationships new shapes and forms. One of these is now so-called *long-distance* relationships, in which – as a result of economic migration – many married couples live. The couples do not live in the same place, the family only functions for a certain period of time, because its members, usually the fathers (but nowadays also the mothers), work away from home and only see the children and the spouse during holidays or weekends, sometimes more often through Internet communication (but without feeling physically close). The following terms are used interchangeably to refer to families of this type: nomadic family, commuting family, visiting family (Lichota, 2009, pp. 57–63).

The movement of populations has been known since the dawn of time. It is assumed that migration is the permanent or temporary leaving of a fixed place of residence and moving to another territory. The mass movement of Poles dates back to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The destinations of migration at that time were Germany and the United States, and its nature was mainly economic. Before Poland's accession to the European Union, the migration of Poles was mainly of a rotational nature, and its leading direction was invariably Germany. The situation changed after 1 May 2004, when Poland became a member of the European Union. At that time, a large migration wave took place, mainly directed towards the United Kingdom and Ireland, although Poles continued to migrate to Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the Scandinavian countries. Since 30 March 2008, Poles have been able to cross the Community's borders – without personal checks at the internal borders – and in 2011, all restrictions on Poles on the labour market in EU countries were lifted.

Economic migrations of Poles in the second decade of the 21st century have taken on a new character, becoming short- or long-term. At a time when travelling thousands of kilometres is not a major problem, and the development of global media has dramatically shortened the distance between people living on distant continents, human migration is developing dynamically. By comparing the motives between the past and the modern migration, one can observe an evolution and the change in the circumstances in which they are borne out of. It is indicative that the vast majority of people migrate for reasons related to work, family, study and above

all warfare fought in different parts of the world (Bernard, Kalembe, 2022, p. 338; Wilson, 2010, p. 192). The high cost of living and the economic downturn in recent years are causing Poles to seek work abroad again. Interest in earning money in a foreign currency is growing, as confirmed by employment agencies. Data from the *Money.pl* portal (LOS, 2023) shows that in the first quarter of 2023, candidates for work abroad sent nearly 700,000 applications. This is 90% more than in the same period of 2022. The most popular destinations for labour migration are Germany and the Netherlands. Migration, with its negative effects, mainly of a demographic and cultural nature, can also bring positive consequences for the migrant's country of origin: reduced unemployment and a positive impact on the labour market (Klimaszewski 2007, p. 26). Undeniably, personal factors – particularly family considerations (Marzec, Zajęcka, Karpuszenko, 2015, p. 182) – exert a strong influence both at the stage of formation of the decision to migrate and at later stages of the process.

Motives influencing this decision include those with economic, demographic, socio-political and environmental backgrounds. Economic migration is associated with the desire to improve the economic situation, improve living conditions and ensure stabilization. Equally, it can be an opportunity to reduce frustrations resulting from a lack of prospects for improving material status and to realise one's own professional aspirations (Wojtaszak, 2022, pp. 178-179). Deciding to work away from one's loved ones offers greater opportunities to meet one's growing needs, but making the decision is not easy. People in this situation often take stock of potential gains and losses. One could ask whether labour migration is a blessing or a curse of our times. On the one hand, it is a blessing because it makes life more comfortable, but on the other hand, it is a curse because it hinders basic functions, such as socialisation, and can result in relationship breakdown. Researchers (Kornaszewska-Polak, Gwóźdź, Wójtowicz, Szymczyk, 2021, pp. 10–107) emphasise various motives for leaving, and what they have in common is frustration, penetrating discomfort, and dissatisfaction with the current situation in one's own environment. The primary goal of contemporary Polish migration is therefore to change and improve one's economic status. The situation of these families is very diverse and should be considered individually, taking a close look at the experiences of children who are most relevant to the family's quality of life.

Both men and women are working abroad. Demand for female labour is particularly evident in the family services sector, which means employment as nannies, caregivers and cleaners. There is also a high demand in the private healthcare sector, agriculture and tourism. According to Dorota Praszałowicz, “a frequent phenomenon is rotational migration: women change every three months to work for the same Belgian family. This rotation is made possible by extremely dense

migration networks” (2008, p. 58). Izabela Kolbon (2016, pp. 185–190) found that women do poorly paid work, enjoying little social recognition and often belonging to the informal economy. The situation of physical isolation translates into social marginalisation, and any manifestation of migrant women stepping outside the role defined by their job description is met with resistance and resentment from employers.

Migrant women often struggle with guilt and remorse as they become distant mothers, developing the concept of distant care. This model of maternity care is not socially accepted.

When motherhood – traditionally assigned to the domestic sphere – is not realised within a shared physical space and the household itself extends across a minimum of two countries and two homes, women’s mothering practices are not legitimised and the materiality of such a form of care is downplayed, defined, as abandonment or orphaning (Urbanska, 2015, p. 49).

Men have more opportunities than women to work in a wider range of industries outside of Poland. They no longer work only in construction or agriculture, but also in places where high qualifications are required. The disappearance of many institutional barriers, the opening of the European labour markets – all this undoubtedly favours the spatial mobility of Polish immigrants and strengthens their sense of agency. Women whose husbands are sailors, soldiers or truck drivers are often colloquially referred to as grass widows or temporary singles. Such a family is chronically disconnected and also peculiarly disorganised. The man working in another country is constantly adapting to the family while at home, but he is also adapting to his job. The process of upbringing in a commuting family and the division of responsibilities is different from the traditional model, in which one parent is not a householder but a guest or runs the other household. It is estimated that four percent of all families in Poland and about 15 percent worldwide belong to this group (Burkacka, 2017, pp. 79–80). The realities of the labour market in Poland force many couples to separate geographically.

Marriage relationships undergo many changes in the course of their duration, and the cause for the affection changes greatly. Couples who live together on a daily basis have completely different relationship phases to long-distance couples. Bogdan Wojciszke (2011, p. 336) identifies three component phases of love: intimacy, passion and commitment. All these phases follow one another in succession, differing in their dynamics. If the couple passes all these phases, we are dealing with a mature relationship.

A long-distance relationship often means sadness, bitterness and feelings of loneliness. Couples geographically separated experience love without daily life and without sexuality. One spouse has left and lives in solitude away from his or her family,

while the other, who has remained in the country, has to cope with all the domestic responsibilities. Researchers note that love “at a distance is like sex without washing the sheets, like eating without washing the plates, like a mountain hike without sweat and aching joints” (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2013, p. 76). Research (Tuszyńska-Bo-gucka, 2015, p. 36) shows that men and women bear slightly different psychological costs of being in long-distance relationships: men pay for it with a diminished sense of self-actualisation in the relationship, women with increased relationship anxiety. Women have a better vision of self-communication than men, while men struggle in this area.

The migration of one parent causes disruption to the functioning of the entire family system. The reality of the nomadic family is disrupted and the emotional bonds between parent and child are strained. When a parent is heavily preoccupied with his or her own problems, his or her sensitivity to the child may be lowered, resulting in a lack of emotional accessibility of the parent to the child, which may generate all sorts of behaviour aimed at “bringing the parent closer” to the minor.

Although parents may try to give the appearance of caring and raising the child, at the same time, with their negative behaviour and emotional attitude they isolate themselves, fail to notice the child’s life problems and show no interest in the child’s school education (Dabrowska, 2011, p. 42).

It is assumed that in a temporarily separated family it is more difficult for children to draw from correct role models, observing female and male roles. Wioletta Danilewicz (2010) focuses on identifying the types of geographically separated families, and the family experience of growing up in migrant families. Her research has found that migrants perform parental roles despite the geographical distance separating them, preventing emotional family separation. They do not give up their maternal and paternal duties, but give them a new dimension. Migration need not lead to the destruction of the family; it is possible to preserve a sense of family togetherness and parents can try to continue exercising their parental roles towards their children, even though this is remarkably difficult.

Long-distance living as perceived by married women and married men in the light of self-reported findings

Previous research on long-distance relationships focuses on selected psychological, pedagogical or sociological aspects (Lichota, 2009; Nowakowska, 2009; Danilewicz,

2010; Kaszuba, 2021; Tuszyńska-Bogucka, 2023). The topic is mainly present in popular science journals, online blogs, social media and has an advisory character. Geographically separated relationships cause a number of difficulties and the temporary absence of one of the spouses affects the entire family system. It is extremely rare for research to attempt to show the perspective of those temporarily separated from their loved ones or those remaining in the country whose partner works abroad.

Given the theoretical findings, the aim of the research undertaken is to explore the migration experiences of families who pursue a form of family life in separation. Consideration of the issue of long-distance relationships led to the formulation of main problem and specific issues which gave direction to the empirical exploration.

Main problem: How do respondents functioning in long-distance relationships perceive their marriage and everyday problems?

Specific issues:

- What factors, in the opinion of respondents, led to the decision to work geographically distant from loved ones?
- How does migratory activity affect marital quality and family ties in the opinion of married women and married men working outside Poland and their spouses remaining in the country?
- In the opinion of temporarily separated spouses, what problems exist concerning daily family life?
- What are the parental experiences of the parents surveyed during family separation?

The following variables were included in the study:

- opinions on the functioning of marriage and the migrant family,
- gender of respondents,
- living at a geographical distance (spouses who work abroad and spouses who have remained at home).

The diagnostic survey was carried out from March to April 2023 among couples functioning at a distance (with women or men). The research tool used in the study was two self-created survey questionnaires. The first one – for spouses working abroad – consisted of 42 closed questions, while the second one, designed for spouses remaining at home, contained 41 closed questions. Both the first and second questionnaires contained single-choice and multiple-choice questions. Everyone was informed about the purpose of the survey and assured of its anonymity.

Among married couples in which it is the man who works outside the country, 35 women completed the survey questionnaire on paper, while their husbands,

who work on long-term contracts, completed it via the Internet. A major challenge was to reach women working abroad whose partners remained in the country. In the women's research group, the research was more complicated, taking place entirely online, using the Women in Emigration UK social network. An obstacle to the research was the inability to contact these women's husbands, so the women surveyed were asked to send questionnaires to their spouses by email. From the questionnaires sent out, it was possible to collect 25 correctly completed questionnaires. The research intention was to gather a broad research population, but the respondents repeatedly refused to participate in the research, claiming that it was their intimate, private affairs or the completed questionnaires were incomplete. A total of 60 people working abroad, on short-term and long-term contracts (35 men and 25 women) and 60 of their spouses (35 women and 25 men), residing in the country were surveyed and their opinions were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Basic information is included in the socio-demographic characteristics of the families presented. They are separated families with one parent, the other remaining with the children in their family home. 60 married couples varying in years of service (only six couples have been in a relationship for between one and five years) who live in a long-distance relationship on a daily basis were surveyed. They were aged between 30 and 65, living in both rural and urban areas. They had vocational to higher education, are economically active or inactive, with or

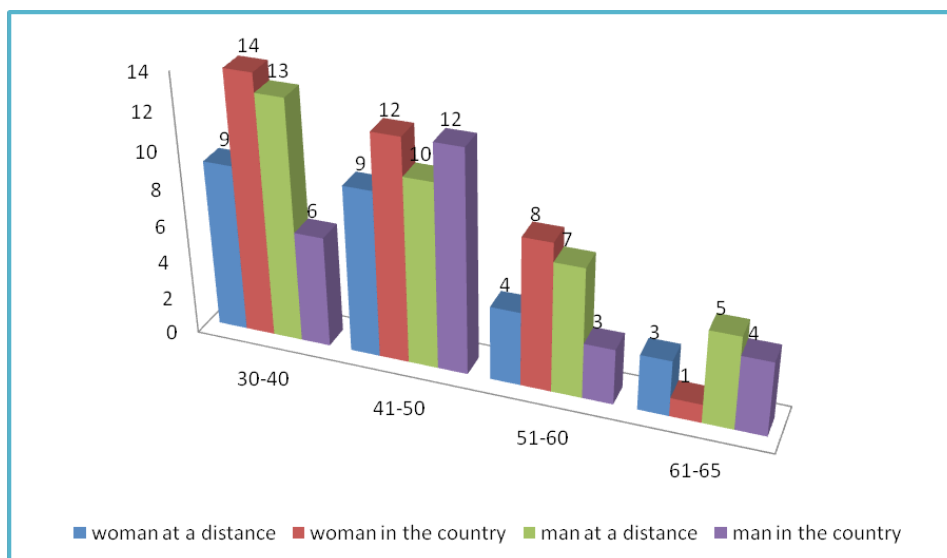


Figure 1: Age of people surveyed.

Source: own study.

without children. When presenting data on people working outside Poland, the figures used the abbreviation “male/female long-distance” and “country” for their spouses.

The data quoted (Figure 1) shows that the highest migration mobility is between the ages of 30 and 50, after which it decreases significantly after 50. Only three women and five men over the age of 60 work outside the country. Labour migrants mainly live in cities (38 couples). 22 couples live in the countryside.

Analysing the data collected, it was found that of the 25 women working in the UK surveyed, 18 had secondary and higher education, while the educational structure of the 35 men was more diverse: 18 had secondary and higher education and 17 had vocational education. Among the women who remain in the country, 10 had primary and vocational education and 25 had secondary and higher education. Among the men who stayed in the country, 11 had primary and vocational education and 14 had secondary and higher education.

The type of work undertaken, both by the migrant parent and the stationary parent, is also relevant. Migrant parents function differently from stationary parents, who have to cope with many tasks on a daily basis. They each face different problems. There are also fathers and mothers who consciously take up remunerative employment and are dependent on their spouse. The chart below (Figure 2) shows the type of work done by the married couples interviewed.

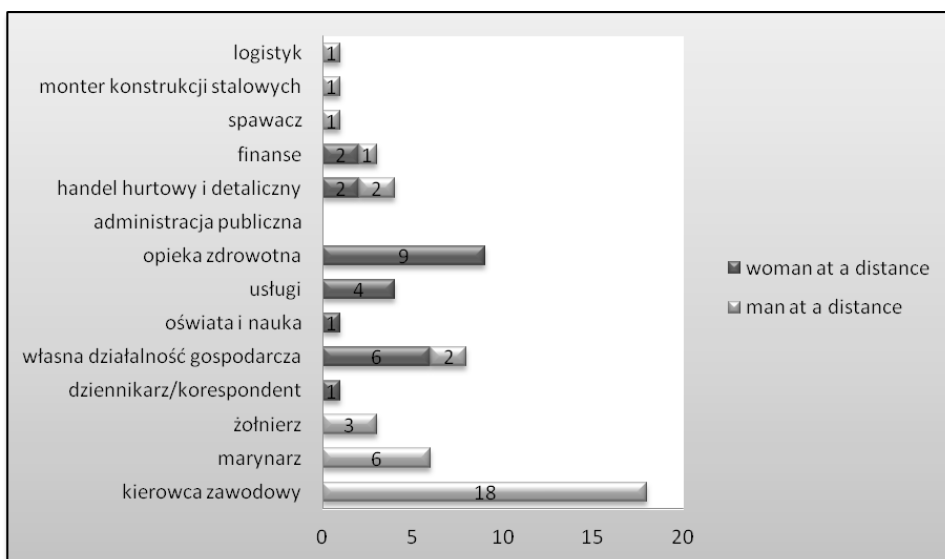


Figure 2: Occupation of migrant spouses.

Source: own study.

The data shows that the vast majority (18) of the men interviewed were professional drivers, six were seamen, three were soldiers, two were self-employed, two were employed in the wholesale and retail sector, one in finance and three had manual jobs (welder, steel fitter, painter). Among the women abroad (25 persons), most of them, nine, worked in health care, six were self-employed, four worked in services, four were engaged in finance, wholesale or retail sectors, one worked in education and science and one as a journalist/correspondent.

The labour activity of the partners who stayed in the country varies: 17 of the 35 women interviewed have not worked and were dependent on their husbands, while the rest of the respondents had permanent jobs compatible with their education. As for men whose partners worked outside the country, only one was dependent on his wife, while the others worked in the construction industry, public administration or were self-employed.

Balance of gains and losses of functioning families in commuting relationships in the opinion of respondents

It is worth starting the interpretation of the data obtained by determining the amount of time the respondents had spent away from their families. The analysis of the collected material showed that most men chose trips lasting between two and six months or short-term trips, i.e. one week. One in five respondents went away for a fortnight. A small number of male respondents declared that they had left for a month or more than six months. Almost one third of the female respondents decided to go away for two to six months; seven women declared that they were away for a month, one in five declared that they left their family for more than six months, while a negligible number of female respondents declared short-term trips. From these declarations, it can be concluded that female respondents more often opted for long-term trips, while the length of time spent abroad by men varies more.

Respondents were also asked about their motivation to work at a geographical distance. The data obtained prompts the conclusion that economic migration predominates, although the desire for change was also highlighted. According to the respondents, change had influenced them to earn more, thus improving their standard of living and stabilising their financial situation. The distribution of responses is shown in Figure 3.

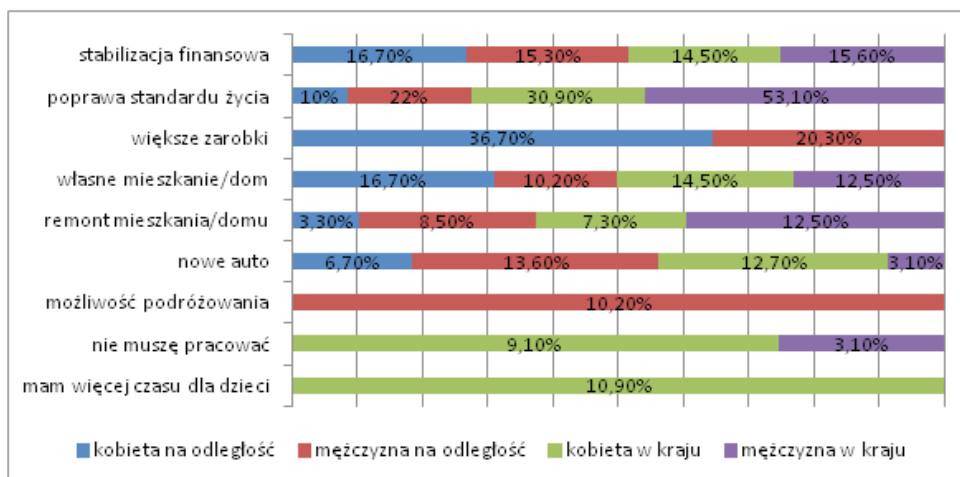


Figure 3: Change in economic situation caused by departure according to respondents.

Source: Own study.

It is worth exploring respondents' views on how they think working away from the family affects the quality of the relationship. Most of the women interviewed regretted not being able to participate in the daily life of the family, as well as overburdening their partner with responsibilities. Only a few women emphasised that their departure had caused a loosening of the emotional bond with their children and their spouse and had influenced parenting problems with their children. As for men who were geographically distant, the vast majority of them emphasised that working away from the family has had the effect of loosening the bond with their spouse and shifting most of their responsibilities to her. One in four men regretted not being able to participate in family life on a daily basis and said that relationships with their children had deteriorated. The percentage distribution of statements is shown in Figure 4.

The perspective of those who remained in the country is interesting. A significant proportion of male (16.67%) and female (21.74%) respondents felt loneliness in their relationship and missed their spouses. According to the data collected, 67% of the women surveyed felt that the nature of their husband's work has left them with an excess of single parenting and housekeeping responsibilities. Women had to cope alone with domestic finances, repairs or caring for their elderly ailing parents. In contrast, men (65%) complained of problems with childcare or meal preparation, which their wives had previously carried out. One in five respondents admitted to difficulties in combining work and parental responsibilities. Interestingly, in crisis situations, women declared that they do not inform their husbands about the problems occurring, have not asked anyone for help, striving to be independent. In

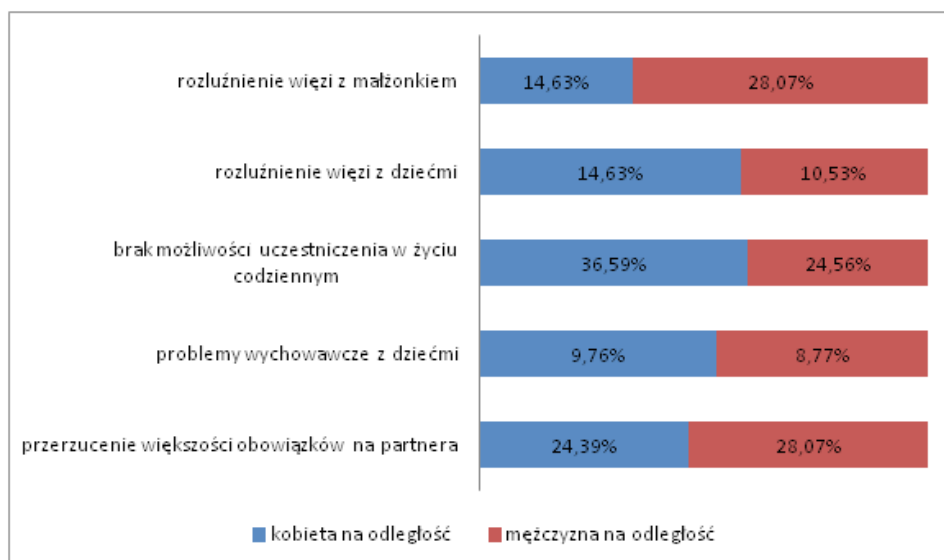


Figure 4: Work and family functioning in the opinion of migrant spouses.

Source: own study.

contrast, the men surveyed had a very extensive support network, they could count on their parents, siblings, friends or partner.

The distance that separated spouses in migrant families affected their emotional bonds in different ways – for some it was conducive, for others it was even difficult to function in such a relationship. The analysis of the data allowed us to conclude that the bond between the woman in the country and the man on emigration has definitely weakened the most, as this was declared by almost half of the surveyed spouses. Some of the respondents have had no opinion at all, perhaps because their relationship has frozen and was still at the same level. By far the smallest number of respondents stated that their ties have definitely deepened. The details are shown in Figure 5.

A long-distance relationship cannot do without constant and frequent contact. In order to ensure that the family bond does not fade away, it is necessary to communicate as often as possible. A daily form of contact prevails among the respondents, only a few declared occasional contact (once a week/two weeks) with their loved ones. The vast majority of respondents kept in touch with their nearest and dearest through phone calls or video calls, because they cared about the sense of closeness and togetherness with their family. Keeping in touch and living the other person's life was of great importance for the relationship.

A long-distance relationship involves a whole range of emotions. A mixture of longing and loneliness or anger and jealousy can lead to a situation where one partner

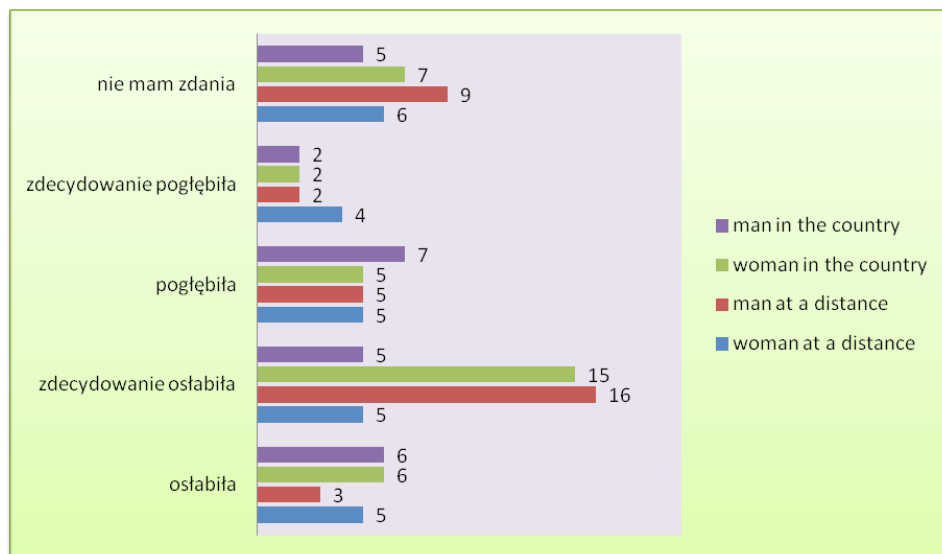


Figure 5: Geographical separation versus sense of connectedness as assessed by respondents.

Source: own study.

becomes entangled in an emotional and/or physical relationship with another person. Respondents from all groups emphasised the lack of understanding of the problems experienced by their partner or partner. Both those working abroad and those at home felt a lack of closeness, tenderness and a sense of uncertainty about their future. Men

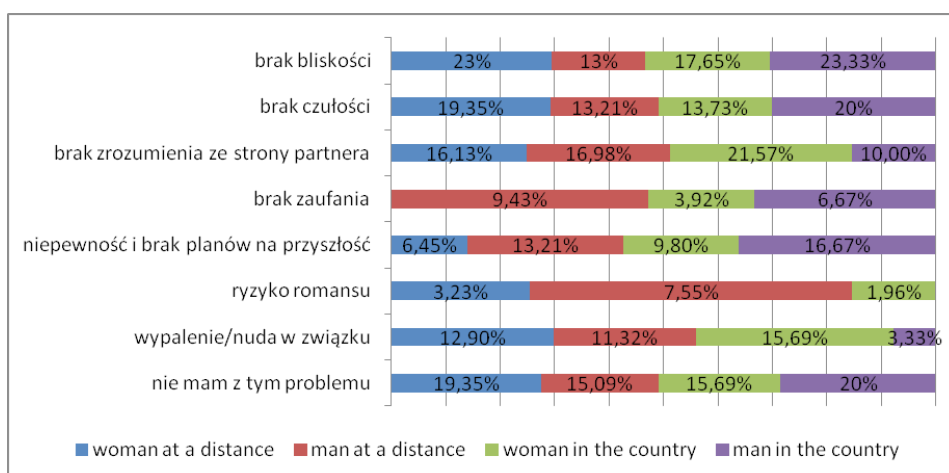


Figure 6: Problems experienced in commuting marriages according to respondents.

Source: own study.

working abroad were more likely to distrust their partners and to fear an affair compared to their partners or migrant women. It is interesting to note that almost half of the men surveyed had concerns that their family would break up and they would have nothing to return to. The costs of marital separation are high, marked by longing, the sense of grief resulting from having to separate, and the difficulties of daily life focused on one parent. The distribution of responses regarding the problems experienced in commuting marriages is shown in Figure 6.

It is worth presenting the respondents' perspective on their relationship with their children. Just as between spouses, relationships can deteriorate or improve between parents and children in temporarily separated families. All married couples surveyed had children: 48% of respondents had two children, 37% had one child and 15% of survey participants had three children. Due to their different ages and marital seniority, the children of the respondents were of different ages: one in two parents had children of pre-school and school age, and older spouses had children in early adulthood. The way in which they take an interest in their children's problems – in their own assessment – is illustrated in Figure 7.

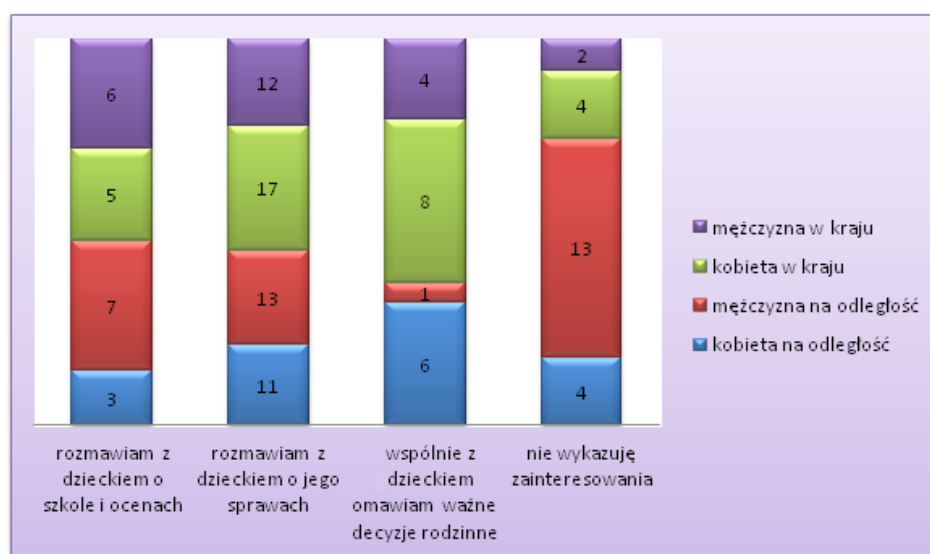


Figure 7: Interest in the child shown by stationary and migrant parents.

Source: own study.

Based on the respondents' declarations, one can conclude that parents, both labour migrants and stay-at-home parents, were focused on their children, trying to talk to them about important issues. Migrant parents, when returning home, tried to spend time together with their children on games or trips, compensating for their absence.

They become Father Christmas, showering their children with presents, giving money and drowning out their guilt. However, 13 out of 35 men working abroad show no interest in their child's problems, concentrating on their own professional life and delegating the responsibility of caring for the child to their partner. It can be assumed that this is the "resigned supporter" syndrome, who does not intervene for fear of spoiling the family atmosphere or his own well-being.

The prolonged absence of a parent due to economic migration brings material benefits on the one hand, but on the other hand, disorganises family life, entails many risks and is not indifferent to the proper development of the child. The bond that binds a child to his or her parents may disappear, as sometimes long-distance conversations are not enough. Children experience loneliness, which, the longer it lasts, leaves a more visible mark on the child's psyche. Lack of parental control can generate all sorts of negative behaviour prompting increased absenteeism in school, concentration problems, early sexual initiation or problems with the law. One in two of the parents surveyed did not observe any negative effects in their children due to a parent's absence. Figure 8 shows details of the behaviour of children from migrant families as perceived by the parents surveyed.

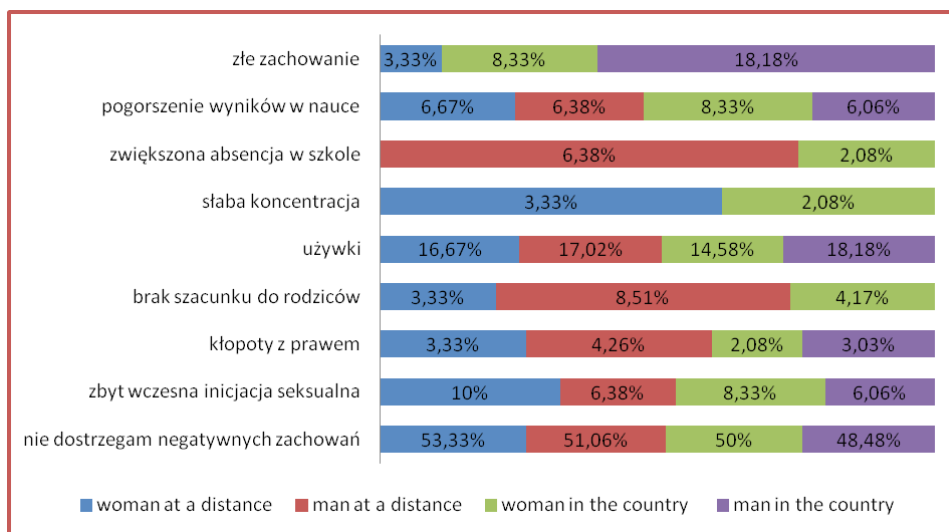


Figure 8: Manifestations of negative behaviour in children in connection with being raised in a temporarily incomplete family according to the respondents.

Source: Own study.

The data presented shows the complex situation of both the parent living away from home and the family members who have remained in the country.

Completion

In recent years, in connection with Poland's accession to the European Union and the lifting of all restrictions for Poles on the EU labour market, the problem of migrant families has emerged. The increased mobility of people has resulted in families living at a geographical distance becoming one of the patterns of marital and family life in the postmodern world. It is difficult to exhaustively discuss the broad context concerning the functioning of families living at a distance. Despite the small research population, it has been possible to show the balance of gains and losses of the functioning of families living at a geographical distance. Economic migration is associated with the desire to improve one's economic situation, to improve living conditions, to stabilise, all in a bid to reduce their frustrations resulting from the lack of prospects for improving material status and realising one's own aspirations. The deepening disparity in earnings between Poland and other countries, the unsatisfactory social system and the difficult living situation (Homoncik, Pujer, Wolańska, 2017, pp. 7–9) make many Poles count on improving their family's living conditions when migrating. The most important social changes induced by migration take place on the ground of the family. For migrants, in addition to material benefits, there are also negative effects, related to family separation or reduced control over the upbringing of the younger generation and care for seniors. The consequences of long-term separation are loss of trust in the partner, indifference or excessive longing.

Family members try to fit into their new roles, subjecting themselves to the trials of being a partner and a parent at a distance. The weakening of the bond with the migrant parent may result in children developing psychological problems – anxiety, depression or psychosomatic problems due to a significant weakening of parental influence (Nowak, 2011, p. 63). The study also showed signs of the positive sides of a long-distance relationship. The situation of migratory separation results in individual family members being deprived of daily contact with their loved ones and being forced to function under completely new conditions. Some couples, for example, had to learn – as a result of dealing with the stress of separation – how to cope with fulfilling new life tasks and dealing with crisis situations.

The above considerations and reflections show the impact of postmodern changes on the definition and functioning of the modern family, forcing new solutions in Polish social policy. The problem of migrant families is undoubtedly a socially unsolvable problem, even if the balance of losses for the family outweighs the balance of gains. The situation of such families is very diverse and should be considered individually, taking into account children – as very important in the context

of the quality of life of the family – and the experiences of the spouses. The need for interdisciplinary research, using standardised research tools, characterising the level of functioning of the entire family system in the context of labour migration therefore seems justified.

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