



„Wychowanie w Rodzinie” t. XXXI (4/2024)

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Adam STANKIEWICZ\*

## Family and the street as an educational environment

### Rodzina i ulica jako środowisko wychowawcze

#### Abstract

**Introduction.** The time and attention paid by parents and people closest to the adolescent determines the development of his or her social attitudes which in the future will influence the attitudes they present in adulthood. When there is a lack of role models, a young person looks for acceptance and finds his place in a peer group that can potentially influence him in a destructive way.

**Aim.** The aim of the article is to indicate the positive impact that being brought up in an understanding, and at the same time demanding and supportive, complete family has on a young person. The impact of this type of family environment on the future of an adolescent and the decisions made there, as well as the benefits for society from the presented attitudes are positive. In contrast, coming under pressure from peer groups often has a destructive impact on the child's current state as well as its future. Factors that have a negative impact on a young person include lack of proper communication with

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\* e-mail: [a.stankiewicz@wns.uz.zgora.pl](mailto:a.stankiewicz@wns.uz.zgora.pl)

University of Zielona Góra, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Pedagogy, 69 Wojska Polskiego Avenue, 65-762 Zielona Góra, Poland

Uniwersytet Zielonogórski, Wydział Nauk Społecznych, Instytut Pedagogiki, al. Wojska Polskiego 69, 65-762 Zielona Góra, Polska

ORCID: 0000-0002-3687-1655

parents, misunderstanding, and conflict with the law.

**Methods and materials.** The adopted work methodology used a substantive content analysis of source materials and texts.

**Results.** The article shows that a young person growing up in a complete family, which is the support and motivator of the actions undertaken by the adolescent, when the proper development of patterns and attitudes takes place. A child learns mainly by observing people from his immediate environment and, above all, imitates the behaviours of his parents. The consequence of growing up in a harmonious family is the belief that in adult life, a person from a so-called good home will express correct social patterns through its attitude and behaviour. The situation of a young person who is strongly influenced by his peer group is different. Being under the pressure of such groups has a destructive impact on the adolescent and on his contacts with his family, which means that he loses the source of correct role models and the consequence will be an irreversible loss of proper development.

**Keywords:** street children, family, peers, adolescents, society.

### **Abstrakt**

**Wprowadzenie.** Czas i uwagę, jaką poświęcają rodzice i osoby najbliższe adolescentowi, decyduje o kształtowaniu się jego postaw społecznych, które w przyszłości będą rzutowały na prezentowane w dorosłym życiu postawy. W momencie braku wzorców do naśladowania młody człowiek poszukuje akceptacji i odnajduje swoje miejsce w grupie rówieśniczej, która może wpływać na niego w sposób destrukcyjny.

**Cel.** Celem artykułu jest wskazanie pozytywnego oddziaływania, jakie na młodego człowieka ma wychowanie w wyrozumiałej, a jednocześnie wymagającej i wspierającej się, pełnej rodzinie. Wyraźny jest wpływ takiego rodzaju środowiska rodzinnego i podejmowanych w nim decyzji oraz korzyści dla społeczeństwa z prezentowanych postaw, w przeciwieństwie do pozostawania pod naciskiem grup rówieśniczych, które wielokrotnie oddziałują destrukcyjnie na stan obecny, jak i losy dziecka w przyszłości. Czynnikaми działającymi negatywnie na młodego człowieka są w tym przypadku brak prawidłowej komunikacji z rodzicami, niezrozumienie oraz wchodzenie w konflikt z prawem.

**Metody i materiały.** W przyjętej metodologii pracy zastosowano merytoryczną analizę treści materiałów i tekstów źródłowych.

**Wnioski.** W artykule wykazano, że prawidłowy rozwój wzorców i postaw młodej osoby następuje poprzez wychowywanie się w pełnej rodzinie, która stanowi oparcie i motywuje adolescenta do podejmowania działań zgodnych z normami społecznymi. Dziecko w głównej mierze uczy się poprzez obserwację osób z najbliższego otoczenia, a przede wszystkim – naśladowanie zachowania rodziców. Następstwem wychowania się w zharmonizowanej rodzinie jest przekonanie, że w życiu dorosłym osoba z tzw. dobrego domu

będzie wyrażała swoją postawą i zachowaniem prawidłowe wzorce społeczne. Odmiennie przedstawia się sytuacja młodego człowieka pozostającego pod silnym wpływem grupy rówieśniczej. Przebywanie pod naciskiem takich grup wpływa destrukcyjnie na adolescenta i jego kontakty z rodziną, przez co traci on źródło prawidłowych wzorców, następstwem czego jest bezpowrotna utrata możliwości prawidłowego rozwoju.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dzieci ulicy, rodzina, rówieśnicy, adolescent, społeczeństwo.

## Introduction

To indicate the influence of the family, close friends and the so-called “street on adolescents,” it is necessary first to attempt to explain the term street children. There is no single universal definition of this concept. In the literature on the subject, various explanations can be found for the abnormal behaviour of children, such as “children involved in crime,” “neglected children,” “runaways,” “young people at risk of demoralisation,” or “young people who use violence” (Zwoliński, 2012, p. 195). The term “street children” first appeared in Polish academic literature in the first half of the last century. It was used in issues related to pedagogy, charity, philanthropy and repression. The definition indicated in a generalised manner that the concept in question refers to children living on the streets – “[...] vagrants, beggars, runaways from family poverty and violence, post-war orphans, most often looking for a way to earn money” (Głowacka, 2003, p. 876). It should therefore be noted that the reasons why children leave their family homes to “take to the streets” include low social status and, as is often the case, family pathology. It is also worth mentioning that this phenomenon also affects children from so-called “good families” and is a consequence of a situation in which family members conflict with each other to such an extent that they are unable to function together, or when adults are so preoccupied with their affairs, in many cases professional, that they do not pay attention to their children (Gurba, 2016).

It is believed that the most comprehensive definition of street children was proposed by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. It states that:

Street children are children under the age of 18 who live on the streets for shorter or longer periods. They move from place to place, have their peer groups and other contacts. They are registered at their parents’ address or a social institution. It is characteristic that these children have little or no contact with their parents, school representatives, or social welfare institutions responsible for them (Kurzeja, 2010, p. 13).

Another definition was accepted by the International Catholic Child Bureau:

[...] street children are any girl or boy for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including vacant dwellings, rubbish dumps, etc.) has become their usual place of residence and/or source of livelihood; and who are inadequately protected, supervised or guided by a responsible adult (Kowalak, 1998, p. 79).

When attempting to adapt the above definitions to Polish conditions, it should be noted that the definition proposed by the National Committee for Social Rehabilitation seems to be the most appropriate. According to this definition:

[...] Polish street children are those who, as a result of their families failing to fulfil their basic functions, spend a lot of time outside the home – on the street, in courtyards and other places of uncontrolled activity. The street has become their source of knowledge about life. It is here that they pursue their natural cognitive and social activities. These are therefore children who are growing up on the streets and being raised there (Zdanowicz-Kucharczyk, 2012, p. 56).

## **Street children in Poland**

Street children are young people who are looking for acceptance and satisfaction of their needs on the street, rather than among their loved ones at home. During adolescence, young people experience contradictions and rebellion. The experiences accompanying adolescence give them the impression of being independent and fully autonomous, but in reality, they still need the support and emotional closeness of their parents. Young people want to be treated as adults, with all the privileges that this entails; however, when they experience failure, they justify it by their immaturity (Gurba, 2016).

The beginning of adolescence is associated with the appearance of symptoms of biological maturation. Girls begin puberty at around the age of 10, while boys begin a year later. Puberty ends when adulthood begins to emerge. This period is extended in time and involves both biological and psychological changes. Adolescence, which is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, is a very important but also extremely difficult time in a person's life (Gurba, 2016). Sudden and rapid growth, closely related to sexual development, influences the perception of oneself no longer as a child but as a teenager. During puberty, adolescents are interested in the changes they observe in their physical appearance. At the same time, biological changes also begin, resulting in an interest in sexuality and the emotions that accompany it (Kroger, 2007). Young people should incorporate the changes they observe into their

self-image. This affects their understanding of their own sexuality and, subsequently, the consolidation of their gender identity. According to Józef Augustyn (2009), we can conclude that in the process of gender integration of adolescents, contact with a parent of the same gender is important, as well as gaining experience with a parent of the opposite gender. This is associated with the possibility of disrupting this process in adolescents who do not look for role models at home, but on the street. This type of behaviour can be observed in young girls who hang out in shopping centres, known as *galerianki* [shopping mall girls] or boys who engage in prostitution, as a result of which their sexuality becomes a commodity rather than an attribute of their identity. Underage prostitution in Poland was presented in a very vivid way when the film directed by Katarzyna Rosłaniec (2009) entitled *Galerianki* was released in cinemas. The film shows episodes from the lives of three friends, Milena, Kaia and Julia, who are prostitutes in the Paradiso shopping mall. Later, they are joined by Alicja. In their conversations, the girls talk about the gifts they receive from the men who use their sexual services – their sponsors. The film also presents the family environments in which the girls grow up. The picture presented to the audience shows dysfunctional, broken families in which moral values have been destroyed (Brzezińska, 2009).

Nowadays, there are increasingly fewer gender-related requirements. The lack of role models in the family home means that young people seek them on the streets. This can cause adolescents to lose their gender identity. The shallowness and fleeting nature of sexual interactions contribute to a sense of sexual attractiveness, but they also disrupt the value of this specific sphere of life. It should also be noted that early sexual initiation does not mean maturity, but is a form of discovering one's sexuality associated with the search for previously unknown sensations (Gurba, 2016).

During adolescence, young people reject most forms of help and care from adults as an expression of their autonomy. Orders and recommendations from parents or educators are seen as an attack on their independence and a challenge to their adulthood. The situation is different when they are in a peer group, where young people uncritically conform to the behavioural standards of the community (Noller, 1995).

It may seem that “street children” who are not controlled by the rules and prohibitions of their parents or guardians can live freely, experiencing independence and a lack of obligations daily. However, this kind of autonomy often plays a maladaptive role in the lives of young people. It is associated with premature psychological independence from parents. An increase in this type of behaviour, accompanied by a reduction in contact with parents and an increase in peer relationships among street children, is a cause of problematic behaviour among young people. This kind of autonomy among immature teenagers, who are deprived of the restrictions and requirements imposed by authority figures, exposes young people to harmful experiences (Garber & Little, 2001).

A prerequisite for a young person to reach maturity is to gain autonomy associated with self-control and self-regulation. In order to talk about the proper development of these processes, parents who exercise proper control over their adolescent child are essential. This is manifested in creating various situations in which the child is obliged to take independent action while receiving emotional support from their parents. Such behaviour directly determines the proper course of an adolescent's development in the context of family relationships. All kinds of social connections a young person has have a positive impact on their development, but parents play the biggest role in shaping attitudes. Next come peers, who are the main source of influence (Gurba, 2013).

## **Youth rebellion and adolescent development**

Youth rebellion is fundamental to personal development, both adaptive and maladaptive. Anna Oleszkowicz (2006), who developed the concept of youth rebellion, defines it as

[...] the need and desire experienced in an individual experience to oppose and withdraw further consent to all physical, social and psychological states of affairs that the individual subjectively perceives as limiting, threatening or incompatible with his or her idealistic expectations and ideas (p. 60).

Leaving the family home by an adolescent, if not determined by other factors, is a specific manifestation of rebellion. This type of behaviour is a manifestation of independence from adults, while at the same time pointing to unacceptable phenomena and events occurring in the adult world. Adolescent rebellion most often takes one of two forms – destructive rebellion and constructive rebellion. The first form is based on negation, criticism and rejection. It can be observed mainly in early adolescence, but there are cases where it is also perceived later in life as the only way to achieve independence and define one's identity. Negating everything activates and sustains adolescents because it fulfils important functions at this stage of life:

- is a determinant of stimulation and excitement and positively influences the intensity of experiences, acting as a kind of protection against identity confusion; in this way, it defines “who I do not want to be”;
- allows the individual to show their rebellious side to those around them;
- is an attempt to change an unacceptable family situation;
- determines submission to a peer group;
- is a source of pleasure resulting from the very act of being rebellious (Oleszkowicz, 2006).

Constructive rebellion is a specific, more mature form of rebellion. It appears in the life of a young person at a time when, in addition to negative behaviours, we can also observe positive images of self-perception in the form of phenomena, values, norms or ideas that they strive for and in the name of which they formulate their opposition (Oleszkowicz, 2006).

Youth rebellion cannot be described solely as a negative manifestation of destructive behaviour in young people. A constructive impact of rebellion on adolescents can also be observed, which directly influences the formation of their identity. An observable manifestation of this is a high level of commitment and motivation, through which selected goals influencing the realisation of one's life plan are achieved. It should be noted here that destructive rebellion, manifested in increased aggression or substance abuse, is observed among people with a lower level of normative identity (Gurba, 2013).

Research conducted on a group of teenagers who can be described as street children and who did not grow up in a real family home reveals a group in which destructive rebellion is significantly prevalent. In the future, this may directly determine the abnormal development of the individual, resulting in the perpetuation of inappropriate patterns in adult life (Sierocka & Drewniak, 2006). It is therefore important that those closest to young people create conditions and opportunities for them to express their opposition and present their own, often different, opinions. Adolescents, despite their behaviour being burdensome for those around them, convey important information to their parents. They describe their experiences and views and define the goals they want to pursue. This places them in the family hierarchy. Rebellion, which escalates at home, where teenagers feel safe, is a manifestation of assertiveness towards their parents, which is intended to increase their autonomy. In addition to teaching adolescents to express their opinions, such communication gives them the opportunity to learn the opinions of authority figures, i.e., their parents, which helps them form their own opinions on specific issues (Gurba, 2016).

Cases where rebellion takes the form of going out onto the streets are worth discussing. Such situations are uncomfortable from the parents' point of view, as they lose control and the ability to influence their child. The circumstances of a young person being on the street are conducive to the adoption of a negative identity. This is expressed through negative speech and non-compliance with the norms and rules of society. Such situations arise when a young person perceives themselves as someone who does not meet socially approved values and expectations, e.g., when they are under the influence of a specific social group that imposes values contrary to those generally accepted, values from the so-called "social margins." Young people living on the streets find a favourable peer group that accepts them into their circle in a natural and unproblematic way, but this happens only when they accept the norms and submit to the rules of the group. It should be noted that the rules and norms of the group are in opposition to the norms

and rules prevailing in society. This behaviour of adolescents stems from an unmet need for contact with their family, intertwined with the search for acceptance by a peer group in which the young person has found understanding (Gurba, 2016).

One of the fundamental elements of adolescent development is asking questions about goals and tasks that help them define the meaning of life. This is a way of creating an abstract vision of their life. The initial vision is idealistic, which means that it does not always fit in with the surrounding world. Later, it enters a phase of compensatory and practical idealism, which begins to be acceptable and, at the same time, achievable. If the goals set by a teenager contain pro-social values and are relatively long-term, and therefore acceptable and formulated autonomously, they can form the basis of the meaning of life (Obuchowski, 1977). Young people, functioning in a family environment, have the opportunity to relate in their own way to the social norms and values passed on to them by their parents. The result of this is the independent development of their stable system of values. A different situation arises when adolescents find themselves on the streets, where they encounter different, changed rules and norms of behaviour. This makes it much more difficult to determine the meaning and significance of their lives. This, in turn, leads them to try to live superficially, in the here and now, which becomes their main value. However, it is important to note that such situations do not affect the normal biological, psychological, and moral development of adolescents (Gurba, 2016).

### **The influence of the environment on the adolescent's future**

The first and most important thing in everyone's life is their natural environment, created by their family and relationships with their parents. When we talk about family, we mean at least three people – a father, a mother and at least one child. According to Józef Rembowski (1972), the family is a specific organisation with a defined division of roles between its members. It is bound by mutual moral responsibility, aware of its distinctiveness, united by love and mutual acceptance, and has its own traditions and customs. Maria Ziemska (1975) describes the family differently, defining it as a small, natural social group in which the central roles are played by the mother and father, which constitutes a relatively stable whole. The family undergoes dynamic changes related mainly to the course of life of its members, is based on existing social traditions and develops its traditions.

The quality of an adolescent's relationship with their parents plays a very important role in the development of a growing child. Their development largely boils down to creating their self, based on previous identifications, with the main role being assigned to identification with their parents. The family, therefore, has a leading role

in the development of the child and in helping them in the event of an identity crisis. Relationships with peers are not essential for the development of a young person's identity, but rather contact with their parents. This is crucial for getting to know oneself and the world around them, which is the basis for building one's own identity. This is evident in many empirical studies indicating that:

- The greatest self-discovery through growing up occurs in families where the mother accepts her child's behaviour, thereby instilling a sense of security in them.
- Adolescents who communicate properly with their parents find it easier to build their own identity, while those who have difficulty reaching an agreement with their family are less likely to attempt to define their identity.
- Young people who are encouraged by their families to develop themselves by making independent decisions and who maintain close ties with their families have the best chance of getting to know themselves and defining their own identity.
- Young people who are emotionally attached to parents who are not very interested in supporting them in defining their individuality display characteristics of an assigned identity.
- Children who are restricted in defining their individuality and come from families with weak emotional ties exhibit diffuse-avoidant identity traits, which constitute a lack of identity resolution (Gurba, 2016).

This demonstrates that adolescents, during the period of personality formation, need to be provided with special care due to their immaturity (Wolicki, 2013). This leads to the conclusion that children should be raised in such a way that they can develop their potential while respecting their dignity and freedom. In many cases, mistakes made by parents in the process of raising their children are noticeable, leading to violations of the child's well-being and dignity. The reason for this situation is the family environment, which, instead of being identified with support and security, in many cases does not protect against the "cruelty" of the world (Łuczynski, 2008).

There is a noticeable tendency for parents to be unable to cope with their freedom, which causes a conflict between satisfying their ego and devoting themselves entirely to their child.

This leads to an increase in the number of people who are ineffective as parents and to the reinforcement of conflicting parental attitudes. However, these are not the only situations that influence the difficulty of raising a child. Additional factors include economic, ethical and intra-family conditions. These are unfavourable determinants in the proper development of a child's personality and the functioning of family members (Mastalski, 2006). Lidia Pietruszka (2015) states that the following factors have a destabilising effect on the family's educational environment:

1. economic and social:
  - irregularities in family structure,
  - unsatisfactory material and living conditions,
  - inappropriate division of labour and roles within the family;
2. cultural:
  - low educational culture of parents,
  - passive leisure activities,
  - lack of interest of parents in their children's education and future,
  - parents' ignorance of customs and traditions;
3. psychosocial:
  - unfavourable atmosphere in the family home,
  - disturbed emotional bonds between the child and parents,
  - inappropriate 'control' of the child by parents,
  - lack of susceptibility to change.

The direction of the family's educational influence is also disrupted, mainly in the area of care. Parents fail to notice actions aimed at preparing their child for social life and shaping the right attitudes towards the world. One of the main reasons for such shortcomings in children is the extreme trend towards individualism, in which individuals strive to free themselves from all kinds of dependencies and group bonds. This situation occurs among people who become parents at a young age. Young parents do not control their lives, thereby undermining traditional forms of family functioning. In such cases, they struggle with being responsible and prudent parents (Adamic-Zgraja, 2008).

The family environment in which an adolescent is raised determines their proper development. The pedagogical competences of parents and the bonds between them and their child are particularly important in this regard. Parents are obliged to treat their child skilfully and responsibly in family life, which results in finding a common dialogue. This leads to a strengthening of the child's sense of family, community, and security. A properly functioning family provides the child with role models. The child learns communication mainly through observation of those closest to them. In addition, they acquire the ability to be sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. They develop their potential, strengthening their self-confidence and trust, which leads to responsible decision-making about their future (Łuczyński, 2016).

During adolescence, parents cease to be their children's authority figures and are replaced by their peers. This happens because people of a similar age begin to play a more important role in a young person's life than their parents. If a teenager's parents are supportive, their peers will have a much smaller influence on them. In such situations, children seek support from people of a similar age only on issues such as music, fashion, or hobbies. Adolescents who have support from their loved ones will model

their important life decisions on values similar to those taught to them by their parents. It is therefore clear that peers become authority figures for children; when parents are ineffective in their parenting, they fail to provide support and role models for their children. The maladaptive function of a child's individuality is a consequence of becoming emotionally independent from their parents too early. This situation means that higher levels of emotional individualisation, coexisting with a lack of or significantly limited relationship with parents, and at the same time with very good peer relationships, can lead to the development of negative youth behaviour (Gurba, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

In recent years, there has been a growing problem of street children. This is currently one of the most important issues in the educational and social spheres. This forces parents to take special care of their adolescent children. In situations where parents are unable to care for their children, this responsibility should be taken over by appropriate social services established for this purpose. Organised care for adolescents cannot allow for the emergence or deepening of disorders in the psychophysical and social development of young people. In addition, social services play an important role, as they are obliged to take the necessary measures to support dysfunctional families. Their activities are focused on providing professional psychological, educational and social care for children and young people. The tasks carried out in this way are aimed at helping the youngest members of families. These tasks include supporting one of the main human needs, namely the need for self-fulfilment. Adolescents are constantly striving to develop while struggling with constant adversities that affect their mental and physical condition. It is therefore important for parents to develop a sense of responsibility and awareness of the goals and tasks they have to fulfil in terms of raising and socialising their children. These activities are aimed at protecting children from the unpleasant consequences of demoralisation and social exclusion in the future (Hosemann, 2000).

Social and interpersonal relationships between teenagers and their parents and peers, which are characterised by the highest level of closeness and mutual dependence, differ significantly in terms of openness. Relationships with parents are closed relationships with a diverse distribution of power and authority. They are not easy to destroy or abandon because their foundations are based on kinship, which makes them obligatory. The situation is different in the case of peer relationships, which are open relationships. They are built continuously and voluntarily or break down suddenly. When attempting to compare a child's relationship with their parents and peers, it can be observed that in the case of the latter, access is equally divided among its members. The closeness

and openness that exist between the parties is reflected in the way conflicts that naturally arise in relationships are resolved. However, the way in which an adolescent will resolve problems between themselves and their parents or peers will differ, which is a consequence of the different relationships between them. The difference between a teenage relationship and a relationship with parents is mainly that they are both close and open, and the members strive to minimise misunderstandings and express negative emotions. These behaviours are intended to contribute to reaching a compromise and maintaining the relationship. In relationships with parents, such protection is not necessary due to the fact that they are related. If the family has healthy relationships, a safe cognitive context for different roles and views naturally emerges, which is essential for adolescents to develop a mature identity (Gurba, 2016).

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