





“Family Upbringing” vol. XXXIII (1/2026)  
„Wychowanie w Rodzinie” t. XXXIII (1/2026)

**Kinga Kuszak and Valentyna Kushnir**

Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań,  
Poznań, Poland

Kinga Kuszak  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2430-7803>  
Valentyna Kushnir  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9037-8060>

## **Ukrainian and Polish Parenting Practices**

### **Українські і польські практики виховавcze**

Submitted: February 6, 2026 – Accepted: May 15, 2026

#### **Abstract**

**Aim.** The research goal is to compare and contrast the approaches to upbringing and educational practices between Ukrainian and Polish families resulting from distinct traditions, values, and experiences. The article outlines the lifestyle model of a Ukrainian family and common educational practices in Ukraine in the context of selected facts about the Polish families. The authors focused on the socio-cultural conditions of marriage and raising children in Ukraine, intergenerational ties in Ukrainian and Polish families, and parenting practices in Ukrainian and Polish families. The disproportion in the approach arises from the accessibility of current studies on family and its changes in Poland in the light of knowledge deficiency regarding the specifics of Ukrainian families. Understanding the similarities and differences may contribute to developing cooperation between the societies and integrating them.

**Methods and materials.** Qualitative analysis of the results and reports on educational

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**Corresponding author:** Kinga Kuszak, e-mail: kinga.kuszak@amu.edu.pl,  
Wydział Studiów Edukacyjnych, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu,  
Szamarzewskiego 89, 60-568 Poznań, Polska

practices in Ukrainian families and selected results and reports on changes in Polish families and evolving educational practices in Poland.

**Results and conclusion.** The discussion on the similarities and differences between selected current educational practices in Ukrainian and Polish families. Cognition and understanding the similarities and differences between current educational practices in Ukrainian and Polish families enables the process of mutual understanding and better integration of both communities that create local societies in Poland.

**Keywords:** educational practices, a child in a Ukrainian family, a child in Polish family, multiculturalism, family

### **Abstrakt**

**Cel.** Celem artykułu jest pokazanie podobieństw i różnic w podejściu do wychowania i praktykach wychowawczych w rodzinach ukraińskich i polskich, które wynikają z odmiennych tradycji, wartości i doświadczeń. W artykule wyeksponowane zostaną: model życia w rodzinie ukraińskiej i powszechne w tym kraju praktyki wychowawcze na tle wybranych faktów dotyczących życia polskich rodzin. Autorki skoncentrowały uwagę na społeczno-kulturowych uwarunkowaniach małżeństwa i wychowania dzieci w Ukrainie, międzypokoleniowych więziach w rodzinach ukraińskich i polskich, praktykach wychowawczych w rodzinach ukraińskich i polskich. Ta dysproporcja ujęcia zagadnienia wynika z dostępności aktualnych badań nad rodziną, jej przemianami w naszym kraju przy niedostatku wiedzy na temat specyfiki rodzin ukraińskich. Zrozumienie istniejących podobieństw i różnic może przyczynić się do rozwijania współpracy między społecznościami i integracji obu środowisk.

**Metody i materiały.** Jakościowa analiza wyników badań i opracowań na temat praktyk wychowawczych w rodzinach ukraińskich oraz wybranych wyników badań i raportów na temat przemian w rodzinach polskich i zmieniających się w naszym kraju praktyk wychowawczych.

**Wyniki i wnioski.** Dyskusja nad podobieństwami i różnicami między praktykami wychowawczymi w rodzinach ukraińskich i polskich. Poznanie i zrozumienie podobieństw i różnic między wybranymi aktualnymi praktykami wychowawczymi w rodzinach ukraińskich i polskich umożliwiają proces wzajemnego zrozumienia i lepszej integracji obu środowisk tworzących społeczności lokalne w Polsce.

**Słowa kluczowe:** praktyki wychowawcze, dziecko w rodzinie ukraińskiej, wielokulturowość, rodzina, dziecko w rodzinie polskiej

## Introduction

The research goal is to approaches to upbringing and educational practices between Ukrainian and Polish families resulting from distinct traditions, values, and experiences. The article outlines the lifestyle model of a Ukrainian family and common educational practices in Ukraine in the context of selected facts about the Polish families. The authors focused on the socio-cultural conditions of marriage and raising children in Ukraine, intergenerational ties in Ukrainian and Polish families, and parenting practices in Ukrainian and Polish families. The disproportion in the approach arises from the accessibility of current studies on family and its changes in Poland in the light of knowledge deficiency regarding the specifics of Ukrainian families. Understanding the similarities and differences may contribute to developing cooperation between the societies and integrating them. The authors conducted a qualitative analysis of selected research results and studies on parenting practices in Ukrainian families and selected research results and reports on changes in Polish families and changing parenting practices.

In our opinion, the concept of practice is best explained by Małgorzata Sikorska, who, following Theodor Schatzki, defines practices as “open, spatial, and temporally dispersed relationships/groups/arrangements of what is done and said” (Sikorska, 2019, p. 63). According to this author, practices are open and therefore variable and are not reduced to routine activities (although they are often performed routinely and without reflection). They are rooted in a specific place and time. Practices include what is done and what is said. Moreover, they take the form of sets, systems of actions interrelated in terms of causality and purposefulness (Sikorska, 2019). By the term *parenting practices*, we understand all educational activities resulting from accepted (more or less consciously) values and assumptions concerning the importance and role of the family in the process of socialisation and upbringing of the younger generation, as well as from the rooted subjective common theories prevailing in families and social groups in a given society at a given moment in social life. The family plays a key role in both Ukrainian and Polish culture, but differences in approaches to raising children are evident and stem from the different traditions, values, and historical experiences of the two countries. In Ukrainian culture, the family is central to social and emotional life. Strong family ties are seen as the foundation of identity and stability. Living together, mutual care, and support are expressions of respect and love between family members. Raising children in Ukrainian families is often based on traditional values such as respect for elders, nurturing family ties, and passing on cultural heritage. Parents strive to be authority figures for their children, while also caring for their emotional and social development.

In Poland, the approach to raising children is also deeply rooted in tradition, but it is changing under the influence of modern trends and globalisation. Polish families

are increasingly emphasising individualism and autonomy in their children, which leads to greater freedom in decision-making for younger generations. Values such as education, personal development, and social activity are a priority in many Polish families. Parents try to support their children in their passions and interests, while also providing encouragement and assistance.

Differences in approaches to raising children in Ukrainian and Polish families are particularly evident in the context of migration and the presence of many Ukrainian families in Polish society. Ukrainian families settling in Poland often have to adapt their traditional values to their new living conditions. This process can be difficult, especially in the face of language barriers. Polish families, in turn, face the challenge of integrating Polish and Ukrainian children into schools and local communities, which requires an appreciation of the specific culture and parenting practices of the newly arrived families. Cooperation between parents, teachers, and children is key to building mutual understanding and respect.

The aim of this paper is to highlight selected similarities and differences in approaches to upbringing and parenting practices in Ukrainian and Polish families, which result from different traditions, values, and experiences. We will focus mainly on presenting the characteristics of the Ukrainian family and its parenting practices. When it comes to Polish families, selected issues concerning parenting practices will be presented in the form of comments and comparisons. This is because we assume that the results of research, reports, and analyses on changes in Polish families are available and popular in the scientific field of pedagogy and related disciplines.

## **Family as the Foundation of Society**

Both in Poland and Ukraine, family is an important element of social life. However, changes in family life are shaped by slightly different factors, and therefore, their dynamics vary. In Poland, the issues of the crisis in family life are being addressed increasingly often and clearly (in scientific and social discourse), manifested, among other things, by the deinstitutionalization of marriage, an increase in the number of alternative family models, new types of families, a decline in the stability of marriages and an increase in the number of divorces, an increase in the number of children born outside of marriage, loosening of ties between family members, the percentage of people living outside of the family, a decline in fertility, *etc.* (e.g., Bągiel & Górnicka, 2022; Sikorska, 2009; Szlendak, 2010). Family life in Ukraine is also undergoing changes, but their specificity and dynamics are slightly different, which we will try to present.

### ***Socio-Cultural Determinants of Marriage and Raising Children in Ukrainian Families***

In Ukrainian families, raising children is traditionally seen as an important and responsible task. Historically, the belief has developed that the family in Ukrainian society fulfils not only economic and social functions, but above all, reproductive and educational functions. Research shows that most young Ukrainians still associate the concept of *family* primarily “with having and raising children” (Kozubowska, 2020, p. 112). This indicates that even in the context of pan-European changes, in which marriage and parenthood are increasingly treated as two distinct forms of social life, traditional ideas about family values still dominate in Ukraine.

Although Western trends, including starting a family later in life, are gradually reaching Ukrainian society, a significant proportion of young people still marry between the ages of 19 and 25 (in Poland, there has been a steady increase in the number of marriages after the age of 30). This pattern of behaviour stems not only from personal or emotional factors, but also from ingrained cultural stereotypes governing the start of sexual activity. In the Ukrainian socio-cultural context, there is still a belief in the need to sanction intimate relationships, especially in the case of girls. Relationships outside the framework of official marriage are often judged through the prism of the traditional moral code, according to which a girl’s virtue and honour are determinants of family dignity, and a man who does not take responsibility for his partner is contemptuously regarded as a frivolous reveller.

This patriarchal-modern model of behaviour continues to determine the low level of acceptance for informal relationships, especially in rural areas and small towns. Living together without officially registering a marriage is often perceived as socially unacceptable in Ukrainian society. According to research by the M. V. Ptucha Institute of Demography and Social Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, the percentage of young couples living in informal relationships does not exceed 12%, while in Western Europe this figure ranges from 40% to 60% (Libanova, 2021). For comparison: data from the Central Statistical Office on the demographic situation in Poland indicate a systematic decline in the number of marriages (Szukalski, 2024).

In Ukraine, the main reasons for the rejection of informal relationships are, on the one hand, the stereotypical thinking of older generations and, on the other hand, the imperfection of the legal system, which does not provide women (and mothers in particular) with sufficient social protection in the event of a relationship breakdown. Another problem highlighted by Ukrainian researchers is the low level of sex education among young people. In most schools in Ukraine, such education is incidental or completely absent, leading to a superficial understanding of reproductive health, responsibility in relationships, and gender equality. This creates a fertile ground for the persistence of traditional (and sometimes outdated) ideas about marriage and family, and contributes

to high rates of unplanned pregnancies and early marriages the same time, statistics indicate numerous negative consequences of early marriage.

According to data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, more than 35% of marriages between people under the age of 25 break down within the first five years of living together (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2023). The reasons for this phenomenon stem from the immaturity of the partners, economic instability, a lack of established models of communication, as well as the low level of preparation of young people for parenthood and living together. Social expectations regarding the proper order of life events: a) intimate relationships; b) marriage; c) children, do not always go hand in hand with the responsibility and reflection of young people.

By comparison, in Poland, the issue of sex education in schools is highly politicised. Introduced into schools in 2025/2026 by the Ministry of National Education, the optional subject of Health Education (replacing the subject of Family Life Education), whose curriculum broadly addresses the issue of younger generation health condition, has sparked numerous controversies (including allegations of the sexualisation of the younger generation). As a result, nationwide participation in the classes in the first year after its introduction was 30% of those eligible (Serwis Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, n.d.).

The current social situation in Ukraine, including armed conflict, mass migration, and general instability, has accelerated the transformation processes in the lives of the younger generation. Young people are increasingly seeking personal stability and professional fulfilment before deciding to start a family. However, these new trends coexist with traditional expectations from family and community, leading to some tension in the worldview of the younger generation.

Another characteristic feature of the Ukrainian family is that the upbringing of children falls mainly on the mother, while the father usually remains on the sidelines of this process. This responsibility stems from both cultural traditions and socio-economic conditions. It is the mother who is responsible for the child's physical and mental health, care, development, and social skills (Males, 2018).

The interesting results of Nadia Husak's (2005) study on the readiness of young Ukrainian men for fatherhood show that they consider the most important characteristics of an ideal father to be: the ability to provide the family with an adequate standard of living (first place in the ranking), dominance (second place), and strictness (third place). Unfortunately, such fatherly traits as gentleness and caring ranked only 10th and 9th. These data confirm the existence of a persistent stereotype of the father, which has been formed in young men on the basis of the models present in their families of origin (Husak, 2005). The reason why young men do not understand the social role of a father and are unprepared to fulfil it, as the researcher points out, is, on the one hand, the lack of systematic education of older teenagers in preparing them to fulfil the social roles of men and fathers, and on the other hand, the existence of a persis-

tent stereotype that traditionally assigns the role of a breadwinner to man and the role of a guardian of the home and mother to woman (Husak, 2005).

By comparison, changes in parental roles in Poland are leading to greater involvement of young men in the process of raising children and more frequent use of paternity leave. Current data from the Social Insurance Institution indicate that between January and August 2025, twice as many men took this type of leave as in the previous year (Bogucka, 2025). According to Małgorzata Sikorska, “the change in the balance of power between parents is one of the most significant modifications in interpersonal relationships in contemporary societies. Being a new mother means one thing, but being a new father means something else entirely, and this is a completely new phenomenon in the history of fatherhood” (Sikorska, 2009, p. 189). Paweł Kubicki, however, expresses moderate optimism, writing that parental leave “may encourage many men to practice independent childcare earlier” (Kubicki, 2009, p. 95).

Stereotypical thinking about the priority role of women in raising children is further reinforced in Ukraine by the way maternal functions are organised at the state level. The point is that maternity leave lasts three years, which allows mothers to stay at home with their children during this crucial period. Mothers also receive financial support from the state, which partially compensates the costs of childcare. This creates favourable conditions for women to focus on raising their children, but at the same time reinforces the strong social belief that mothers bear full and unconditional responsibility for their offspring. Although the presence of the mother during the first years of a child’s life is undoubtedly important in terms of upbringing and emotional development, this tendency is not always beneficial for women. In families with two or three children, a woman may be on maternity leave for up to six years or more, which significantly reduces her chances on the labour market and diminishes her professional competitiveness. Naturally, not all women take advantage of this opportunity and give up work for such a long period, but most stay with their child for at least three years. This is also encouraged by the lack of nurseries and childcare facilities in Ukraine. In Poland, changes are being made systematically to support young parents in caring for their children in the form of systemic solutions. Data from the Central Statistical Office on childcare for under-three-year-olds in Poland show that in 2024 there were 4,800 nurseries, 900 day-care centres and 2,200 childminders, offering a total of 237,300 childcare places (GUS, n.d.). There are also other options available to young mothers, such as support from their parents in caring for their children.

In Ukraine, children are sometimes admitted to kindergartens from the age of two, and most often from the age of three. In such circumstances, full responsibility for childcare rests almost exclusively on the mother. In Poland, a high percentage of preschool enrolment has been recorded for several years. Data from the Foundation “Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę” [We Give Power to Children] report for 2020/2021 indicate that over

90% of children aged 3–6 participate in preschool education. In addition, preschools are gradually affected by demographic decline, which means that there are more places than children, and preschool classes are not created due to insufficient enrolment.

As Ludmyła Males (2018) writes, the conventional scale of assessing involvement in parenting in Ukraine differs radically between mothers and fathers. Mothers are seen as responsible for 100% of childcare, and any deviations from this norm are socially condemned. In turn, a father's involvement is often seen as an extra *plus* that, with minimal effort, brings him closer to the image of a *good father* (Males, 2018). In Poland, this trend is changing towards greater participation of young fathers in the childcare process, although there are certain areas of childcare that are strongly feminised, e.g., staying at home with a sick child (Michoń, 2016). According to Małgorzata Sikorska, the unequal distribution of household responsibilities among women persists (2021). There is also a visible discrepancy between the image of *new fatherhood* created in the media and the reality of fatherhood (Majka-Rostek, 2011).

Partnership and parity in raising children are not the norm in Ukrainian families, but rather the exception. Parenting remains primarily the *destiny* of women, while fathers' involvement is mainly limited to financial support. The traditional argument that men are responsible for the material well-being of the family is often used to justify this approach (Males, 2018). Neo-traditionalism continues to occupy a significant place in social consciousness, placing women responsible not only for the present, but also for the past and future of the family.

At the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine, women who fled to Poland with small children experienced serious difficulties in coping with the challenges of adaptation without the support of loved ones and family. On the other hand, being in a new environment and gaining different experiences encourages significant changes towards a more equal approach to parental responsibility. Observing European families and their ways of dividing parental roles influences Ukrainian women's views.

However, despite the active role of women in raising children, the situation after divorce often becomes much more complicated. It is worth noting that the number of divorces in Ukraine is growing every year and, as of 2024, has increased by 42.2% (Hamalii, 2025). In most cases, children remain with their mother, and the father distances himself from the upbringing process. In the best-case scenario, the father limits his involvement to paying child support; however, in many cases, his participation in raising children—both financial and personal—remains minimal or non-existent. This places an additional burden on women, who are forced to combine the roles of caregiver, breadwinner, and emotional support for their children.

The problem of defaulting on child support payments in Ukraine attracted public attention after the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine launched a register of child support debtors on its website in 2018. The register showed that 92% of debtors were men

(Socio-demographic characteristics, 2017). This figure illustrates the prevalence of irresponsible fatherhood, which is unfortunately gradually becoming the cultural norm in Ukraine. In contrast, daily care and responsibility for the well-being of children are consistently assigned to mothers.

In Poland, changes are gradually taking place in favour of equal treatment of parents in this matter. The website of the Polish Ministry of Justice contains a statement indicating that in recent years, the percentage of positive decisions on applications submitted by fathers for child custody has been steadily increasing. The number of applications submitted by men is also growing (Polish Ministry of Justice, n.d.). In turn, according to data contained in the report by Małgorzata Sikorska and Małgorzata Gawrońska, in Poland, 3.6% of children live in an alternating custody model after their parents' separation, which means that the child spends at least one-third of the nights in a standard month with each parent (Sikorska & Gawrońska, 2025). The authors emphasise that in the Polish context, no research has been conducted to show the psychological consequences of children living in alternating custody.

According to the results of the study, the role of the father in the Ukrainian education system remains limited and less active, which is often due to socio-cultural conditions, such as entrenched stereotypes about *male* and *female* responsibilities. Sikorska adds that contemporary mothers are more likely to have the right to be tired, to not be able to cope, to ask their loved ones for help, and may be more selfish than mothers were a dozen or so years ago. The figure of the *bad mother* is disappearing and being replaced by the *sick mother*, which is usually synonymous with a mother suffering from depression (Sikorska, 2009). The image of the involved father is also becoming more common (shaped by social and media campaigns; Kubicki, 2009). The sight of a man taking his children for a walk, going to the playground, or attending a school meeting is not rare. Men are also increasingly openly demonstrating their attachment to their children and their involvement in caring for them, which is referred to as *male caregiving* (Brażel & Górnicka, 2020; Kluczyńska, 2024). Tomasz Szlendak adds: men in Poland are only just learning what has long been present in Western European culture. They have to learn everything: cooking, cleaning, washing up, and grocery shopping (Szlendak, 2009).

## Intergenerational Family Ties in Ukrainian and Polish Families

Strong intergenerational ties are a traditional feature of Ukrainian families. Typically, Ukrainian families are three-generational in structure: grandparents, parents, and children. Even if children live separately, parents remain involved in their lives until the end of their days, supporting them emotionally, morally, and financially. The older

generation often actively participates in raising their grandchildren, especially by taking care of them when they are sick, during vacations, or when their parents are at work. Such assistance is seen as a natural expression of family solidarity.

An important element of family life is the tradition of frequent gatherings with loved ones – both on the occasion of holidays, anniversaries, or funeral receptions, as well as on ordinary days when there is a need to discuss important family matters. Of particular importance are the joint celebrations of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and family members' birthdays. Everyone gathers at the table – from the youngest to the oldest – which promotes the transmission of values, customs, and family memories. On the other hand, in Poland, the model of independent functioning of young families is becoming increasingly popular, supported by family policy measures such as the *Becikowe* (Baby Bonus) program, the *Maluch* (Toddler) program, the introduction of parental leave, the *Kosiniakowe* (Childcare Allowance) program, the “*Rodzina 500+*” (Family 500+) program, and others (Sikorska, 2021). The older generation is the *anti-source* of knowledge about how to treat children, “this includes both one’s own parents and parents-in-law, as well as the broadly understood generation of grandmothers and grandfathers,” writes Małgorzata Sikorska on the basis of her research (Sikorska, 2009, p. 285). Relations between the younger and older generations are not always ideal, despite attempts by the grandparents’ generation to support young parents, Łucja Krzyżanowska and Maria Wiśnicka add. Conflicts often arise in which “young mothers are at a disadvantage from the outset because they are often dependent on the help of their mother or mother-in-law” (Krzyżanowska & Wiśnicka, 2009, p. 128). However, research shows that adult children in Poland are supported by their parents. As Mariola Piszczatowska-Olesiewicz writes, Poles do not associate child’s independence with their coming of age.

Rather, they assume in advance that they will always help their children in various ways. It should be assumed that this is not only about financial assistance, but also about moral and emotional support, as well as devoting time to children and their families. (Piszczatowska-Olesiewicz, 2011, p. 86).

What Polish and Ukrainian families have in common is emotional closeness – family members, even if they live far apart, try to keep up to date with the events in the lives of their children and grandchildren: successes in school, problems, changes at work, health, and relationships. Phone calls, instant messaging, frequent visits, or online meetings help maintain constant contact and a sense of closeness.

In Ukrainian culture, it is common to ask parents for advice, share plans, and even consult them on important decisions, which demonstrates a high level of mutual involvement. Traditions of passing down family recipes, embroidery, icons, jewellery, and other heirlooms that connect the present with the past are also popular. Some families even cultivate their own customs associated with specific dates or rituals. All

this not only strengthens family identity but also builds a sense of emotional security, support, and generational continuity.

Ukrainian sociologists emphasise that strong intergenerational ties result both from the traditional nature of family culture and from the insufficient effectiveness of state social policy. It is for this reason that parents and grandparents often provide financial support and assistance with daily tasks to their adult children and grandchildren, even if they do not live together. At the same time, older family members also receive support from the younger generation, which emphasises the mutual nature of family relationships (*Trends in the development of the modern family*, 2010).

However, the depth of these bonds depends to a large extent on the nature of the relationship between children and parents. In some families, these relationships are shaped by a parenting style with clearly defined elements of control and high expectations of the child, while paying less attention to their emotional needs and autonomy (trends in the development of the modern family, 2010). According to a study by a Ukrainian researcher Kateryna Kravchenko (2015), more than half of Ukrainian parents find it difficult to accept their child as they are, displaying various types of parenting attitudes, such as *symbiosis*, *infantilization*, or *authoritarian hypersocialization*. The traditional approach to children is often associated with a strong desire on the part of parents to prepare their children as best as possible for social success. This combination intensifies the phenomenon of treating children conditionally, not as they are, but as they should be according to the expectations of modern society. The result is a weakening of the natural emotional closeness between parents and children, due to excessive control and pressure (Kravchenko, 2015). High expectations, excessive control, and treating children as investments is also visible in Polish families, although on a declarative level parents appreciate, value, and treat offspring as partners (Sikorska, 2009).

It is important to note that the authoritarian style of parenting in Ukraine is largely a legacy of Soviet pedagogy, which regarded control and obedience as the basis for shaping responsibility in children. In Ukrainian society, it is still quite common to believe that a *good child* is an obedient child who brings joy and pride to their parents, helps them, and does not cause problems. Such beliefs often encourage the use of punishment as a tool for achieving desired behaviour. Although not all contemporary Ukrainian parents raise their children in an authoritarian manner, many of them still use selected elements of this style. According to research by Svitlana Korniiuchuk and Oksana Oliinyk, 54.55% of men and 45.45% of women declare a directive parenting style, which confirms its continued significant presence in the parenting practices of Ukrainian families (Korniiuchuk & Oliinyk, 2022). This style can promote discipline, orderliness, and responsibility in learning and everyday functioning, as children learn to follow rules and understand that breaking them has certain consequences. At the same time, this form of responsibility is based primarily on fear of punishment

rather than on an internal sense of duty and autonomous motivation. It is also worth noting that parents are increasingly moving away from an authoritarian style in favour of an authoritative approach, and the younger generation of families is looking for more partnership-based, dialogue-oriented, and supportive parenting strategies, as confirmed by research on family factors and parenting practices in Ukraine (Burlaka *et al.*, 2017). Polish educational practices (at least in theory) include talking to children, negotiating, giving them choices, allowing them to participate in decision-making and making decisions themselves, and positive reinforcement (Sikorska, 2009).

## **Parenting Practices in Ukrainian and Polish Families – Selected Issues**

In this part of the paper, we will look at selected parenting practices in Ukrainian families. We have chosen two issues for analysis: children's freedom in life and their relationships with peers. We are aware that we are painting an incomplete, fragmented picture, but due to the limited scope of the paper, we have made certain choices regarding the practices and their interpretation.

### **Life Freedom of Ukrainian Children**

One of the characteristic features of Ukrainian parenting culture is granting children a relatively high degree of freedom, which clearly distinguishes it from parenting models typical of many Central and Western European countries, including Poland. This approach has been shaped by historical, cultural, social, and legal factors. In Ukrainian tradition, children are seen as active participants in the socialisation process from an early age. This attitude is supported by a general tendency towards limited state interference in regulating children's behaviour (Saienko, 2021). One of the key factors determining a greater degree of freedom in raising children in Ukraine is the lack of strict legal regulations regarding children being without adult supervision. For example, in Ukraine, there is no clearly defined age at which a child remains under the constant supervision of an adult. From an early age, children go to school, use public transport, go shopping, and sometimes look after their younger siblings without supervision. Such experiences foster the development of qualities such as responsibility, initiative, and resourcefulness (Onyshchenko, 2020).

Another characteristic feature of the Ukrainian approach to upbringing is the active socialisation of children in informal environments, such as the backyard or the street. The lack of excessive control by adults encourages children to set their own rules for play, negotiate, learn to avoid conflicts, and establish communication. Such informal

social interactions support the development of emotional intelligence and social skills (Holovashenko, 2022). The Ukrainian style of upbringing assumes that a child's freedom is not an exceptional situation, but a permanent element of their development. It is not limited to a lack of control, but is realised through trust on the part of adults, active involvement in family life, and daily responsibilities. The positive effects of this approach can be seen in Ukrainian children's readiness to make independent decisions and their ability to adapt to a changing environment. This is particularly evident in the context of migration, when children often assimilate new cultural and linguistic conditions more quickly and effectively than adults (Skorobohatko, 2023).

The Ukrainian model of parenting combines elements of freedom, trust, and early autonomy for children. It is based on the assumption that independence and self-reliance do not suddenly appear upon reaching adulthood, but are gradually shaped through everyday experiences. This approach gives children more space for independent actions, which potentially promotes the development of adaptive skills, mental resilience, and responsibility in the face of contemporary social challenges.

### **Changes Towards Child's Participation in Poland (the Gap Between Theory and Practice)**

In Poland, there is a visible discrepancy between scientific discourse, which emphasises the importance of children's participation in various areas of life (*e.g.*, Jarosz, 2016; Jarosz, 2019; Jarosz, 2020), and everyday parenting practices. In practice, parents' relationships with their children are the result of many variables, including the image of the ideal child, parents' experiences from their own family home, their level of education, place of residence, the child's set of characteristics, the relationship between spouses, expectations formulated by the immediate and extended environment, *etc.* There are also many techniques for controlling children, which can be classified as positive behaviour-oriented (supporting the child) or negative behaviour-oriented (punishing the child). Parental educational practices are diverse and, in some cases, contradictory, *e.g.*, a child is sometimes rewarded and sometimes punished for the same behaviour. Parents are increasingly declaring strengthening strategies for the relationships with their children. They say that children should not be forced to do things, but rather one should try to resolve problems through negotiation and dialogue (Sikorska, 2009). They believe that children should be listened to carefully and that ways to resolve situations should be sought (Sikorska, 2009). At the same time, according to research by the same author, among various parenting strategies, they most often choose the strategy of punishment, which takes various forms: prohibitions, isolating the child, shouting at them, physical punishment, or threatening them with punishment (Sikorska, 2019).

Tomasz Szlendak lists manipulation of parental love, deprivation of love, and shaming the child as common parenting practices (Szlendak, 2011). As mentioned above, the level of parental control over children varies and depends on many factors, including the level of obedience and submission expected by parents (*e.g.*, parents of *well-behaved* children tend to exercise less control than parents of *difficult* children (Szymańska, 2009). According to Irena Obuchowska, there are three trends in parenting practices in Poland: indifference, sensitivity, and ambition. Indifferent parenting practices manifest themselves in neglecting children and not fulfilling their needs. Children have a lot of freedom and at the same time lack control and care from their parents. Parenting practices based on parental sensitivity manifest themselves in noticing subtle reactions in the child and adjusting one's own behaviour accordingly. Parents sometimes interfere excessively in their child's affairs and do not leave them any freedom. On the other hand, parenting practices saturated with parental ambitions boil down to preparing the child for life in a competitive world, which may involve excessive control of the child (Szlendak, 2011). These trends, identified at the beginning of the 21st century, seem to be present in everyday parenting practices. Concluding this section, one more reflection on the participation of children should be made. According to research, the sphere of freedom for contemporary children in Poland is the sphere of consumption. Even preschoolers act as advisors to their parents, making consumer decisions while shopping together at the supermarket, and their influence on adult purchases is greater than they themselves suspect. Moreover, according to research by Małgorzata Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, children aged 9-11 make autonomous purchasing decisions (Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, 2006).

## **The Art of Living Harmoniously with Others in Ukraine**

A child's position in a peer group is significantly influenced by their social skills, ability to defend themselves, communicate, and coexist with others. In Ukrainian culture, great importance is traditionally attached to living in a community, in the family, local community, village, or class. Child's social experience begins at an early age: through play, working together, participating in family celebrations and rituals, and through daily contact with peers.

The Ukrainian educational tradition is based on the principle of attentive accompaniment rather than strict control, *i.e.*, children have the right to experience conflicts, misunderstandings, and even physical confrontations in order to learn to recognise boundaries, build mental resilience, and cope independently in difficult social situations. In kindergartens and primary schools, teachers do not usually intervene immediately in every argument, which is in line with the belief, entrenched in the Ukrainian model

of upbringing, that children should learn to resolve conflicts independently (Burlaka *et al.*, 2017). The goal is not to avoid confrontation, but to acquire the skills of reconciliation, rebuilding relationships, and mutual understanding. When faced with a child's complaint, Ukrainian parents often do not intervene immediately, but give advice, encouraging them to learn self-defence and assertiveness: "if they insult you, don't be silent, defend yourself," "if they hit you, hit them back," or "if you see that the forces are unequal, run away." According to most adults in Ukraine, the ability to set one's own boundaries and take an active stance towards oneself is developed primarily through direct experiences in peer relationships. In folk pedagogy, there are numerous proverbs and sayings that emphasise the value of honesty, strength of character, and the ability to defend one's own interests. Phrases such as "Don't be a wolf – but don't let yourself be eaten either," "Hit back when you're hit," "Don't cry, you're a boy," and "Nobody likes the weak" reflect a cultural focus on resilience and strength, even if they are not always consistent with contemporary assumptions about non-violent upbringing.

As previously noted, informal socialisation environments, *i.e.*, the street, the playground, the village, also played an important role in Ukrainian educational tradition, where for generations children learned to function in children's communities without the constant presence of adults. In such conditions, not only were play scenarios developed, but also skills in conflict resolution, negotiation, and role division. Children learned to follow their own unwritten rules, understand behavioural cues, read the emotions of others, and adapt to complex social dynamics. The social skills acquired in this way often formed the foundation for later adult life. However, with the development of modern technologies and changes in lifestyle, traditional forms of socialisation began to disappear. Today's children spend more and more time in virtual space, where social interactions take place without physical presence and emotional and behavioural commitments are limited. Direct communication, emotional sensitivity, and the ability to read other people's reactions are disappearing. In such an environment, it is more difficult to develop empathy, the ability to compromise and cooperate, qualities that were considered the foundation of dignified coexistence in the traditional Ukrainian community.

## **Peer-to-Peer Relationships of Polish Children**

Compared to practices in Ukraine, socialisation among peers in Poland seems to be monitored to a greater extent by adults. In this regard, as before, it is important to note the diversity of practices and their dependence on various factors, such as the family's place of residence, the number of children in the family, individual characteristics of the child, social preferences of the child and their loved ones, the family's socio-

economic status, *etc.* The systematic direct social relations of many children today are limited to kindergarten/school contacts and occasional contacts during meetings with peers after kindergarten/school, *e.g.*, during extracurricular activities or visits to friends' homes. The children themselves do not always create these relationships. They depend to a large extent on adults, who create space for children to establish and maintain peer relationships. In Poland, children are walked/driven to and from the same places. Data contained in the *Ulica Szkolna* [School Street] report indicate that 40% of children in Poland are dropped off to school by their parents (Ulica Szkolna, n.d., accessed January 30, 2026). A child's place of residence determines their opportunities for developing peer relationships. Daily peer relationships are much easier in residential areas (in so-called bedroom communities), more difficult outside the city, in ageing neighbourhoods and municipalities.

Older children are much more likely to move around without adult supervision than younger children. Therefore, the younger the children, the more their peer relationships depend on adults. Meetings with peers take place in children's homes under adult supervision. In some communities, it is popular for several parents to take turns picking up children from school and organising time together in different homes. This requires adults to be involved in organising children's lives. This is not always possible, and after returning from kindergarten/school, the child is cut off from meeting their peers. In such situations, direct relationships are often replaced by those mediated by communication technologies, taking place in *glass backyards* (Nowosielska, 2023). Being online satisfies the need to be among people, write Joanna Lewczuk and Mariusz Jędrzejko (2017). Many children with a distorted self-image and low self-esteem feel safe in the world of virtual relationships and prefer them to face-to-face relationships. According to data, 82.6% of high school students regularly use the Internet to establish and maintain social relationships (Wańkiewicz *et al.*, 2019), and over 70% of children aged 9–17 have a profile on a social networking site (Pyżalski, 2019). Even based on this fragmentary data, it is clear that the peer activity of Polish children has been transferred to the virtual world. This leads to the following conclusions: among children, there is a decline in the ability to communicate face-to-face, hold conversations, discuss, resolve conflicts and disputes, and develop empathy and a sense of community.

## Summary

Both the Ukrainian and Polish models of upbringing are strongly rooted in tradition. The upbringing of children in Ukrainian and Polish families combines elements of freedom, trust, and responsibility, as well as a high level of adult involvement, both emotionally and organizationally. Strong intergenerational bonds are typical for both

cultures, although relations between generations are shaped slightly differently. Informal socialisation and a developed culture of extracurricular activities for children are specific to Ukrainian parenting practices, creating a rich educational context that supports the adaptability, resilience, and social skills of the younger generation. Contemporary challenges, such as the digitisation of life, war (which affects daily parenting practices), and related migration, require a thoughtful balance between traditional values and the needs of modern society.

The dynamics of change in Polish families seem to be greater, and certain trends related to parenting practices are somewhat different. This is certainly facilitated by greater economic stability in the country. Both Ukrainian and Polish families are strongly influenced by global phenomena, including the significant impact of information technology and modern media, which create a space for the independent and social functioning of the younger generation.

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