

## **Family – A Prototype of Society**

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**ABSTRACT:** Family represents a superior form of community.- mainly the husband's, the wife's and children's – which is based on social and biological relationships, having the supreme purpose to prepare the future generation healthy and thoroughly educated in order to participate in developing the society.

The family, as a closed group has a special social-psychological structure of interpersonal relationships. In its study, first are the functional connexions between individuals who have specific roles, meaning that they follow certain norms and behaviors of the culture they belong to. The center of the family relationships, as in any other social group is the joint activity towards solving the family's problems.

**KEYWORDS:** family, community, freedom, social, belief, religion, society

Through its universality, complexity and flexibility, the family continues to fill the central place among the factors that determine and guide development, the continuity of human societies, by providing an affective, value-enhancing, orderly, securing and individualized climate (Voinea 2005, 8).

The most common definition of the family is that it “constitutes the fundamental unity of society and the natural environment for the growth and welfare of the child. Each society has a certain family system to establish relationships between mature men and women and between them and children.

The family is a superior form of community – mainly of the husband, the wife and the children, based on social and biological relationships, with the supreme goal of preparing the future generation, healthy and well-educated, to participate in the society development” (Bulgaru 2000, 103).

The family as a relatively closed group owns a particular psychological social structure of interpersonal relationships. In their study, at the forefront there are functional links between individuals who fulfill certain roles, that is, they follow certain norms and patterns of behavior appropriate to the culture they belong to. The core of intra-family relationships, as in any other social group, is represented by the common activity focused on family problems (Dumitrascu 1997).

If before the discovery of problems and “dysfunctions” within the family in its effort to adapt to the modern society, the general view was that the family is the main source of human sociality and sociability, that the family model is the one that was and still needs to be taken up in the organization of society as a whole (the old societies, as well as the current social organizations that still comply with the traditional model, preserve models of structures inspired by the family community), today the idea of the family life anachronism, even the family as a stand-alone institution is wildly spread. The idea of family autonomy to many of the social development programs, its ability to delay or even oppose some of the foresights of these programs obviously tends to dissatisfy the architects and the managers of the social progress. Today, sociologists agree that the individual particularities of personality (“individuality,” as defined by Georg Simmel) grows proportionally with the expansion of the individual’s social environment. Competition develops the specialization of individuals as they pullulate, thus favoring their differentiation and separation (Bistriceanu 2006, 7).

Family history illustrates the evolution of this institution from a broad, comprehensive social group of all aspects of individual life, society itself, to the family as a small group, as a unity of a plan that embraces it (the expanded society). The tendency to diminish the area and social influence of the family left much room for “free” manifestation (here meaning no constraint) of the individual. Its transformation into unity seems today, rather than constituting an integrated building of individual personality, to be perceived as a stage towards its abolition as an autonomous, constraining structure. (Bistriceanu 2006, 10).

French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss defines the family as an organized group that originates in marriage and consists of a husband, a wife and children born as the result of their union, of their relationship, although sometimes other relatives can be added to this restricted group. The family group is united by moral, legal, economic, religious and social rights and obligations.

The family group varies according to its structure levels. From this point of view, we distinguish *the simple family* and *the extended family*. The simple family can also be defined as primary or elementary, and consists of parents and their unmarried children (own or adopted). Within the simple family, one can speak of the *family of origin* or *consanguine*, which represents the group where a child is born and is raised up and *the procreation* or *own family* - which each individual knits together when he / she marries.

American sociologist Thomas Burch affirms that people living in the same dwelling, being relatives or not, are considered to be the members of the same family unit. In this case, the family unity depends on the dwelling and is known in the sociological literature as a *strength family*. Another aspect is when the family members do not share the same dwelling, but live along distances away when the husband or the wife is away in the country or abroad in order to work, to study, to specialize, and visit each other periodically. In this case, we have an *interaction* or *migrant family*. American sociologist N.J.Smelser looked at the *broad-based family* as at a unit of continuity, meaning that there are many generations living in the same old house, keeping on the traditions, concerns and habits of the family. In this case, individuals can disappear, they are passers-by, but the family as a group is maintained over generations.

Another point of view in connection with the concept of family is the sociological names of “*normal family*” and “*abnormal family*”. The first form of understanding the notion of “normal family” is that of a family that is composed of a husband, a wife, and one or more children. By “abnormal family” in this respect we understand an incomplete family, a family without one of the spouses or without children. Another form of understanding of the term “normal family” is the family officially formed in front of state organs, and the “abnormal family” is the family that is not officially formed, living in concubinage. If we refer to the ethical character of the family, “normal family” means the family based on respect and love, and in the case of “abnormal family” we speak about building a family based on interests.

Another aspect of the term of “normal family” refers to a family that has a dignified, honored life, and children receive a particular education (Rotaru 2011, 5). The term “abnormal family” relates to disorganized families, with the presence of alcoholics, chronic ill people who do not work, hobble, practice prostitution. In these families there are “problem children”, delinquent children and other social deficiencies (Bulgaru and Dilion 103-106). Children are the ones who bear most of the unwanted consequences of the conflict between family members. The impact of the described phenomenon on the modern family is manifested in the increase of the number of divorces, of the number of incomplete families, of the decrease in the birth rate. In the social situation created, the family is a good whose loss of both individuals, men and women, and the whole society, pay dearly.

Intra-familial relationships are harmonious to the extent that they respond to the humanist principle - forming an attitude towards the other that in turn implies generosity, mutual respect and exigency. All these provide a favorable psychological social climate in the family, without this the necessary conditions for the education of the children cannot be created (Dumitrascu, 1997).

## **1. Family as a prototype of society**

The family belongs to the category of primary or fundamental realities, being a universal human institution. Like society or community nature of man, the family can be the nucleus of understanding and explaining reality.

### ***1.1. Anthropological approach***

Research data has resulted in the consolidation of a consistent, more consistent knowledge base than that provided by sociological studies. This may be a cause for why the anthropological definitions given to the family are a landmark in the sociological approach as well. The best known and most useful definitions of the family usually have two meanings:

The narrower one, according to which **the family is a social group composed of a married couple and its children** (a definition that is based, as we observe, on marriage and couples, as an institution generating family life, a conceivable conception, as we will see in the following chapters);

The broader one, that identifies the family with **the social group whose members are linked by age, marriage or adoption, who live together, cooperate economically and take care of their children** (George Peter Murdock). Matching with the above-mentioned anthropologist's definition, *the Britannica Encyclopedia* describes the family by three main features: the shared dwelling of members, economic cooperation and biological reproduction.

### ***1.2. Historical approach***

In the UK, as well a special field, called *family history*, was born. In the British specialists researches in family history (as an autonomous study discipline), the investigations of this institution focused on one of the following three aspects (cf. Michael Anderson):

a) *Affective dimension (referring to marital or parental relationships, sexual attitudes, premarital practices, etc.); the research in this direction is that the major socio-cultural changes influence the affective family profile. Counterproductive is the difficulty of detecting and relative quantification of specific indicators.*

b) *Demographic dimension (studies households, number of baptisms, marriages, funerals, and the basic research represents civil registers). This approach is closer to the natural sciences, providing verifiable information with a high degree of precision.*

c) *Economic-household dimension (refers to economic relations between family members, inheritance, property, succession of titles and privileges, etc.).*

### ***1.3. Sociological approach***

The family is therefore the purest form of manifestation of human society, which gives the profile of the first forms of collective cohabitation. For a long time, the family has been the basis and the model for building society. Sometimes more attentive to the paradigmatic context than to the subjective and objective consistency of the family, sociologists place their studies in three major theoretical perspectives: functionalism, conflictualism and interactionism.

According to the *functionalist perspective*, the family is a social institution that, like all other social institutions, exists by virtue of exercising certain functions. General types of the family identified functions are: reproduction (producing a

sufficient number of followers to ensure the perpetuation of the community or society), socialization (transmission to children - but not exclusively to them - of dominant cultural patterns), care, protection and affection, identification (conferring an identity and social status by legitimizing ownership to a particular group of relatives), and regulating sexual behavior.

*The conflictualistic perspective* conceives the family as a system of permanent conflicts, negotiations and trusts; despite the compulsion to co-operate to survive, spouses compete for autonomy, authority and privileges.

*The Interactive Perspective* (represented by Peter Berger, Sheldon Stryker, etc.) understands the family as a dynamic entity, where people constantly shape their existence and define their relations. Marriage, even the birth of children, involves the shaping of new definitions; the process is more complicated as they have to build a sub-world, a kind of greenhouse where spouses, two people with different and separate biographies can coexist and interact (Bistriceanu 2006, 11- 15).

## **2. Family functions**

In any society, the family has been distinguished as a specific group, characterized by a strong internal weld, maintained by internal forces. The internal forces that unite the family are the strong feelings and emotional attachment of spouses, as well as parents and children, mutual respect, solidarity. A combination of dependencies resulting from economic, social and cultural functions, from duties towards children, towards parents will be added to this sentimental cohesion (Voinea 2005, 11).

A complex characterization of family functions distinguishes:

**2.1. Internal functions** that contribute to creating an intimate life regime designed to provide all members with a climate of security, protection and affection.

**2.2. External functions**, that essentially ensure the natural development of the personality of each member of the group, socialization and proper integration into the social life.

The main internal functions of the family are:

a) *Biological and sanitary functions* include child procreation requirements and hygiene and health requirements for all family members. In this regard, regular health care for all family members must be ensured. The hygiene side in a family is essential. All family members must learn the strict application of all hygiene standards, ranging from individual hygiene to collective hygiene.

b) *Economic functions* are the main balance indicator in a family. The family where economic problems are resolved can be said to be an organized family, that has the opportunity to solve its full range of obligations to state and society (Bulgaru and Dilion 2000, 106).

Traditionally, the economic function has three important dimensions:

1. the productive component, that aims at producing goods and services necessary for the family's living in the household ;
2. the component on the professional training of the descendants, the transmission of occupations from the parents to the children;
3. The financial side consists of administering a budget of income and expenses to cover family needs and the realization of savings, the source of acquiring goods and values.

Throughout the family history, there have been substantial changes in the economic function in general and in each of its dimensions, in particular (Voinea 2005, 28-29).

c) *Family solidarity functions* include help based on feelings of love and respect between parents and children, between brothers and sisters, elders in the family or sick and disabled (Bulgaru and Dilion 2000, 109).

Ensuring the “success of marriage”, the function of cohesion and marital solidarity is fundamental for at least three reasons:

- Providing individuals with emotional security, trust, support, protection and the possibility of harmonious personality development;
- Any disorder in this function leads to undermining the unity of the group, causing disturbances in other functions, that is the hint for the beginning of the family disintegration;
- Solidarity and family cohesion make practically all the moments of a couple's life and also of all family members. Achieving this desideratum of solidarity and unity requires a functional relationship between partners, between them

and their descendants and, as appropriate, among the other members of the family (Voinea 2005, 38).

d) *The pedagogical-educational and moral functions* aim at ensuring education and school system for children, their primary socialization.

The way parents can educate their children, integrate them into family life and society varies according to the value given to children in the culture. From this point of view, we cannot speak about a universal, identical way for all families to accomplish their socialization functions. In our country, as well as in some other countries it is considered that “beating is broken out of heaven” - “whoever beats well, loves much”. In other communities, however, punishment imposed on children by beating is forbidden.

The socialization function of the family presents major differences from the “patriarchal family” - where the son learns from his father the profession he practices, the young man being completely subjected to the father’s authority - going to the situation when the level of knowledge received by children in school far exceeds the level of parents’ knowledge. But this also does not weaken the function of socializing the family, because the modern family does not entirely transfer to its society formative-educational functions. So, the social function does not disappear; only the ways parents teach children the social norms they need to know and that guide them through their life, the rules and systems of imperatives that the family group turn into children’s habits (Voinea 2005, 109-110).

Within the family, the child assimilates social norms and values, becoming able to relate to other members of society. Family socialization has several components:

- normative, that passes on the main social norms and to the child;
- cognitive, through which the child acquires the skills and knowledge necessary for the action as an adult;
- creative, that forms creative thinking capacities and gives adequate answers in new situations;
- psychological, that develops the affectivity necessary for the relationship with the parents, the future partner, with own children and with other people, this component being synthesized by the expression “psychological communication”.



Being the “court” that performs primary socialization, the primary group where children have a continuous contact and the primary context where socialization patterns are manifested, the family cannot compete with any other court (Voinea 2005, 30-31).

The personality of the child develops within the family; even in early life, parents teach their child the types of behavior necessary for fitting into society. Children see the way their parents behave, often some patterns of behavior are taken by them from their parents. As some specialists in the field claim, the child plays different roles as a theatre actor, with so much conviction and sometimes with all the talent. By playing these roles, the child acquires them as behavioral patterns. Still from the early years of life, the child learns in the family that the roles are complementary. Observing the behavior of the older ones and referring himself to his parents, the child gradually understands that in society, in his small society that is family, the roles are complementary. As the child grows up, as the sphere of social relations spreads also through the family, he reaches a wider conception of adult roles. By making a series of visits with his parents, he notices how others behave outside the family, and so he learns something new every day. At the same time, parents need to be careful who their son or daughter comes in contact with. Children should attend kindergartens, particularly constructive institutions, especially at a young age of 3-7 years, when the child assimilates everything.

The family ensures the child’s development as an independent personality, developing his responsibility for his own actions, the ability to guide himself in certain situations. The family must inoculate the child the idea of social duty, a duty to the extent of his forces. Parents need to know the child’s relationship with the school, they need to control how they use their free time.

The socializing function of the urban family differs from that in rural areas. Certainly, in the countryside, children can be well educated, with beautiful souls. We know many children born and raised in the country, who carry the high sense of duty to their parents, deal with high schools and faculties without parents wasting enormous amounts of money with so-called “preparers” that diminish confidence in themselves and cultivate laziness in students.

Therefore, “the core” family group (mothers fathers) has the great intention of preparing for life, in all respects, their sons or daughters, so that they are considered as having “seven years of home”.

The overlap of the listed functions, the complex relationships set in motion by the living mechanism of the family determine the continuity of the internal functions in the general social field. Thus, *external functions* are a continuation, an extension of the internal functionality, the long-term effects of the family institution (Bulgaru and Dilion 110-112).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For example, the provisions that encourage the individual's emancipation from structures that may affect his free personal assertion. This is particularly the case with ideologies aimed at women's or children's or young people's empowering and attacking the basic structure and authority of the family.

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