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Hidden facts. The modern family and its problems

Abstract: This article is an attempt to explain the transformation of the contemporary family. It considers how it is changing and explores why we encounter many breakdowns of this social group. The author contends that breakdowns are often the consequence of external factors, i.e., mass media (in particular), which disturb the proper functioning of the family. Referring to numerous definitions of the family, the article lists the fundamental functions that are the most important in our life.

Keywords: family, functions, transformations, problems

Introduction

Due to the changing world and its new habits, the family may in some way feel threatened. Of course, it cannot be blamed only on the present day situation, but also on the problems existing in Poland several years ago. At the beginning it is important to mention environmental issues, which have influence on the problems of the modern family. These are: increasing poverty of the society caused by high unemployment (result of the economic growth equation – increase in labour productivity: $R^2 = 0.822$, $Se = 1.97$, $DW = 2.08$ – sample 1967–2006; result of the employment growth equation (working people): $R^2 = 0.854$, $DW = 1.44$, $Se = 0.0089$ – sample 1968–2006; result of the marriage disintegration equation: $R^2 = 0.952$, $Se = 0.89$, $DW = 1.99$ – sample 1974–2006, where R^2 is the coefficient of determination coefficient, Se means error of estimate, DW value of the Durbin–Watson statistics), difficulties with finding a job

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and keeping it for a longer period of time, feeling anxious about securing life for retirement. Also, loss of faith to improve living conditions and a peaceful and prosperous life in the bosom of the family. Another particularly important factor are all kinds of family pathologies that the home has struggled with for centuries. At the moment, problems of alcohol and drug abuse by adolescents are increasing (in the group of third grade students of lower secondary school and students of the second grade of upper secondary schools $N = 5903$ alcohol turned out to be the most common psychoactive substance, at least once alcohol was used by 80.0% of students from the younger group and 92.8% of youth from the older group, Sierosławski, 2011). Their lives are accompanied by everyday stress, which results in an increasing number of suicides caused by loss of mental health each year (in 2018, according to the Central Statistical Office, 4,441 Poles committed suicide, and 5,182 according to the statistics of the Police Headquarters (5,255 in 2019). There were probably 10 to 15 times more suicide attempts.)

Problems of modern family

Another problem of the modern family is unemployment, which is still high. It results in poverty and insufficient resources of some of the families. At this point, the ninth UNICEF report on poverty caused by unemployment should be mentioned. Poland ranks 21st among 24 countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. This balance shows how big a gap separates children from poor families and their peers living on at least the average level. It should be noted that family stabilization depends on the income because it affects many factors of life, e.g. access to education, health level or access to broadly understood culture. In the social environment, one can come across such a term as “children’s poverty”. It is defined as a certain family deficit that limits the child’s development and is an obstacle to proper growth. This phenomenon can take various forms as under-eating, starvation, or very poor housing conditions. What is worse, the child is aware of poverty, which has a pyramidal impact on emotional development. He/she feels worse than peers, their everyday life is based on dealing with humiliation and shame because of poverty. Quite often a child living in poverty does not have proper role models in the family, therefore there is a high probability that children, like their parents, will be in a difficult financial situation (usually caused by a lack of education) as adults. Currently, economic migrations are becoming a common phenomenon in order to improve the living conditions of the family. Most often, the father decides to leave, which adversely affects the functioning of the family and the performance of the previously mentioned functions.

The consequence may be aggravation of destructive and undesirable behaviour.¹ This is due to the fact that, on the one hand, the family is still complete, but on the

¹ A. Śniegulska, *Refleksje nad współczesnym wychowaniem*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów 2013, pp. 90, 93–95.

other hand, it shows the features of an incomplete family, such as disturbed system of family roles, resting on the shoulders of only one parent the task of upbringing a child. This often leads to exhaustion, increasing stress levels or marasmus, which also affects children negatively. There is also the other side of economic migration. The parent is deprived of daily contact with the child, not participating in the family life, very often he/she does not have any influence on upbringing decisions or providing the right models. This often results in the loss of authority, which the parent then tries to regain in various ways upon returning from emigration. By, for example, using physical violence for all offenses, or on the contrary, not interfering with problems so as not to spoil the atmosphere. A parent may also shower children with gifts to compensate for their absence in everyday life. His return quite often causes more chaos in the functioning of the family, which has to reorganize their life. Migration also affects the immediate development of a child. Children whose parents had emigrated very often display aggressive behavior, experience many emotional tensions, or have problems with making contacts with other people. It is connected with the child's greater sensitivity to what is happening at home and with impulsive emotional reactions to possible conflicts of the parents. Moreover, when a parent decides to emigrate, part of the household chores falls on the oldest child. On the one hand, positive aspects of this situation can be found, such as learning to be independent. On the other hand, when children lose their childhood, they are too mature for their age. All this leads to a weakening of the relationship of closeness with the parent, especially in the case of a maturing child it results in problems with their own identity or excessive longing for one and the other side.

It should also be noted that many young people emigrate due to high life aspirations. This is related to the postponement of the decision to have a family or to limit the number of children. An interesting fact, which the author notices, is the presence of the above dependence only in highly developed countries. In the so-called Third World, where living conditions are very difficult, the population growth continues to increase. It follows that improving the quality of life causes a decrease in motivation to start a family.² The problem of work can also be considered in a different context. Full readiness to work, many hours spent at work and often even taking work home, as well as many new tasks to perform, can make work addictive. Certainly, this is quite a threat to the family, when one of its members spends most of their time devoting themselves to the duties entrusted to them. However, this phenomenon should be viewed in two ways. On the one hand, it may be a matter of additional employment to maintain the family's living status, on the other hand, an employer requiring the full disposal of the employee. It can be observed that in the case of many professions, free time ceases to exist and it is the employee who has to define certain boundaries

² T. Rostowska, *Psychologia rodziny. Małżeństwo i rodzina wobec współczesnych wyzwań*, Difin, Warszawa 2009, pp. 104, 107–108, 111.

between home and work. However, it is not that easy. Meanwhile, work or study time is not only the time spent in the office or school, but also the period devoted to additional classes, training, tutoring. This can certainly be a concern as the time that a family can spend together decreases. That is why it is very important to use this time wisely to deepen relationships and provide a sense of security, especially for children. It is also worth mentioning the issue of commuting to work. It should be understood in two ways: everyday travel by car, bus, but also going to work in another country. These are often long hours of travel. It cannot be forgotten that the family is losing in this respect as well. Contact with the family is difficult, especially if the parent undertakes work abroad.³

Family – as “a source of threat”

It must not be forgotten that sometimes a person can be at risk in the family. This happens when the child is not sufficiently developed in the sphere of its sacredness and carnality. This results in inappropriate management of the child's development, which is why parents may find the pedagogical culture mentioned in the previous chapter useful. The danger in the family can manifest itself in various ways: the family does not provide a sense of security, it does not shape them to be people who improve the world, but on the contrary, people who introduce chaos and disorder in the world. Another threat to the family may also be succumbing to the external environment, accepting new things as something of one's own and thus giving up the values, traditions, principles and norms that have been shaped by them. In this case, the family teaches an adaptive and inactive attitude. It educates how to accept negative phenomena from the so-called mass culture as your own and adapt to them. An extremely disturbing growing phenomenon is abortion, which, needless to say, completely contradicts building a family. The reasons why so many people decide to end lives are unknown, it may depend on the views and attitudes of each individual towards the child.⁴ (In 2002, the number of registered abortions in Poland was 159). Another of the threats to the family is: the increasing number of conflicts in the family, quite often leading to divorce. Reducing the child's value in the eyes of parents, replacing the child with other goods. Another danger is having different values and norms, which also results in conflicts or misunderstandings. Yet another difficulty is the pursuit of individualism – professional fulfillment at the expense of the family.⁵

³ W. Muszyński, *Kondycja współczesnych rodzin*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2013, p. 22.

⁴ L. Dyczewski, *Rodzina, społeczeństwo, państwo*, Wydawnictwo: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 1994, pp. 33–34.

⁵ S. Kawula, J. Brągiel, A.W. Janke, *Pedagogika rodziny: obszary i panorama problematyki*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2014, p. 137.

Today's family life, including the resulting threats, is influenced by the systemic transformation of the state in all areas of life. These transformations can certainly be good, on the other hand, they pose many new challenges and tasks that must be accomplished in order to achieve success. So how does this relate to the family? Changes that occur happen very quickly, and quite often people have a problem with finding themselves in a new reality. It results in failure of the family function and its neglect. The negative effects of the reconstruction of the state include the aforementioned unemployment or poverty, but also: a decline in the level of education, science, health, the housing crisis, and even the broadly understood problems of the natural environment. Problems in the psychosocial sphere are significant as well, i.e. family ties, interpersonal contacts, family cooperation, its solidarity, and the sense for which it was established. Any deformations that occur in Polish families in this area of life evoke a feeling of instability and anxiety. It is these feelings that are the basis for any pathological problems that take place in the family. Some of them were mentioned above, the list can be made more precise by adding: drug addiction, social orphanage, juvenile delinquency or loose morals. The increase in the intensity of these phenomena is, for example, inappropriate socialization of the family resulting from the lack of cohesion of a given educational environment. Another of the threats to the family presented by the authour is the portrayal of brutal scenes by the mass media that feeds society. This results in an increase in aggression and self-hatred. The family is often a place of torment, both mental and physical, including bullying of the loved ones. Especially for children growing up in such homes, it often means so-called psychological mutilation by either "toxic parents" or "overprotective mothers". In the literature it even has the special term "battered child syndrome". It should not be forgotten that the wife very often comes into contact with the problem of domestic violence. Currently, the penal code uses the term "marital rape".⁶ This shows that, unfortunately, the family is not always a role model for young people to promote dignity and positive values in them. According to the authour, not every family is a "school of good life and love", that is, an environment of exemplary behavior. On the contrary, through inappropriate behavior, disharmony in the family, it may be associated with a place of fear, oppression, and anxiety. In this situation, the family destroys everything important in the child: self-confidence, dignity, sense of security and acceptance. For many people, the only way is then to escape, cut off from the environment that destroys and enslaves them.⁷

⁶ G. Cęcelek, *Rodzina – jej przemiany oraz zagrożenia i problemy wychowawcze*, „Mazowieckie Studia Humanistyczne” 2005, nr 1–2, p. 242.

⁷ R. Doniec, *Rodzina polska jako środowisko życia i wychowania w XXI wieku – indywidualne doświadczenia i interpretacje*, https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/xmlui/bitstream/handle/item/5307/doniec_rodzina_polska_jako_srodowisko_zycia_i_wychowania_2013.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [access: 13.02.2019].

Family – pathological phenomena

However, many do not manage to break with the pathologies they learned at home. They run into conflicts with the law that resulted from social maladjustment. The reason for this is mainly a family with dysfunctions, negative environmental impact, alcohol abuse and the lack of proper behaviour patterns. On the basis of American research, other causes of social maladjustment are: improper atmosphere at home, full of constant conflicts between the child and parents; the lack of an emotional bond, and the factors presented earlier. The family may also be threatened by inappropriate educational attitudes, i.e. falling into certain extremes: overprotection or lack of interest in the child, but also negligible contact with the father. In this case, the entire family is disturbed, the child experiences the abandonment syndrome. One of the parents (usually the mother) has to take over the duties of both parents, including those of upbringing.⁸ It also seems quite important that social maladjustment can lead to anti-social personality. Genetic and environmental factors are considered to cause the above condition. The author notes that such behaviour does not always occur in a family with a low social status. This can also occur in a family with high economic status. In this case, it appears due to the disorganization of the family, too much freedom, and the breakdown of family and social ties. It can be noticed that all the presented problems are interrelated with the wrong way of upbringing, choosing wrong styles of upbringing as well as disorder in the functioning of the family. All of this can make the family unwell.⁹

Transformations of the family and its importance throughout history

The way the family changes is caused by many factors that are worth taking a closer look at. In the years 1946–1956, the population began to recover after several years of occupation. According to the data presented in the literature, the birthrate in Poland increased from 9.6 to 19.5 per mille. At that time, the government offered families financial aid to support large families. However, at the end of the 1950s, there was a breakdown in this area, caused by anti-natalist propaganda. It was believed that children negatively influence the development of the state and the emancipation of women. The upbringing of children should be taken over by the country, because the family is incompetent in this respect. Therefore, nurseries, kindergartens and schools

⁸ E. Mazur, *Obraz rodziny w percepcji skazanych odbywających karę pozbawienia wolności za przestępstwa agresywne na przykładzie Aresztu Śledczego w Kielcach*, [in:] *Rodzina w obliczu współczesnych zagrożeń i przemian społeczno-kulturowych*, Wydawnictwo Akademia Humanistyczna im. A. Gieysztora, Pułtusk 2015, pp. 125, 127.

⁹ M. Miczyńska-Kowalska, *Zagrożenia współczesnej rodziny w społeczeństwie ryzyka*, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=285226> [access: 15.02.2019].

were established. Other forms of family life began to be spread and the institution of the family was weakened. In 1946, civil weddings were recognized and divorce was legalized. Old traditions and culture were disregarded. The traditional family model came to be considered obsolete, contrary to the “spirit of the times”. Soon, support for families began to be limited, which was mainly manifested in a smaller number of educational institutions and the construction of small apartments for a family of up to four. This caused great problems for the family throughout the country. Today, traditional family patterns and modern ones, preserved in society after the occupation period, still interpenetrate. The exploration of these models led to the internalization of individual components of the family on the basis of syncretism. This model of the family evolved towards becoming independent and breaking with the existing concepts. In the seventies, many works popularizing modern views on rational behaviour of women appeared. They popularized the use of contraceptives and the expression of approval of abortion. Modern women were meant to contradict the past backwardness of women who preferred traditional attitudes, rejecting techniques to avoid “unwanted children”.¹⁰ Also today, it can be noticed that the family is slowly ceasing to be an institution, a team and a system with permanent, unified values and features. More and more often, for many people it is no longer the most important thing, some people think that it is even unnecessary in their lives, so they do not decide to start it. We live in a time of conflict of interest. More important are: wealth, self-realization and work, and the family only interferes with the achievement of these goals. Today, marriages are beginning to be viewed as a joint “enterprise” based more on mutual profit rather than love. Increasingly, it can be seen that people decide not to get married. They decide to remain in informal relationships, often having children, which is becoming an increasingly common and acceptable phenomenon. The main reason for this is reluctance to get married or a will to test yourself before taking such an important step. Regardless of the arguments, the cohabitants believe that free unions have the characteristics of marriage, so a family is not only of a formal nature. It happens that these “deals” end when there are some problems, or difficulties in communication. Couples decide to break up instead of solving problems. It is believed that married couples who previously decided to be in a non-sacramental relationship divorce more often, often shortly after the sacrament of marriage. The essence of marriage is having children. Also in this aspect we observe many changes, mainly in the approach towards a child. For those who want to have them, children provide psychological comfort, while for others they are economically worthless because they do not provide any visible profits. You may notice a decrease in the number of births or postponing the decision about having a child. This is due to the aforementioned desire for self-realization and the economic uselessness of the child. Of course, these are

¹⁰ W. Muszyński, *Kondycja współczesnych rodzin*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2015, pp. 30–34.

not the only reasons, the others are: the lack of a sense of the need to have a child, fear of repeating our parents' mistakes. Currently, the family situation is diverse in many respects, including cultural and religious ones, or with regard to the functions to be performed by the family. The ties between the family and other microstructures, e.g. neighbours, also weaken. As a result, the family now has an intimate dimension and is closed to others. In the family, it is more and more important to develop the character of its individual members rather than adapting to the rules that apply in the family.

Autonomy in the family

The rules and norms themselves are no longer so precisely and ruthlessly set. There is a greater freedom and tolerance of individual family members and the choices of each of them.¹¹ The nature of families has changed quite significantly. Previously, they were multigenerational, then they began to transform into the aforementioned nuclear families, and up to now have become a transformed – extended family. What still strongly connects the family is the economic sphere. Today, the young generation decides to leave the family home late. The factors causing such a situation are: quite long education process in our country and difficult economic conditions, i.e. finding a job, lack of stabilization. That is why the most common type of family is the latter – extended. It can come in two shapes. It is a young family living with the parents of one of the spouses, or living separately but maintaining regular contact with other family members. The second element of the changes are those in the social position of the family. They relate primarily to the role of the child and the elderly in the family. Currently, the child has a high position in culture and the result of this is getting to know child's mechanisms of behavior and development. This resulted in the child being treated as a full family member who also has the right to vote. The above-mentioned changes in social position also apply to the elderly. The reform began in the first half of the 20th century. Youth has become an important goal of life, the energy and assertiveness of young people were valued above all, rather than the life experience of older people. That is why we are dealing with a rather specific role of the eldest in the family. On the one hand, they no longer have full power over the young generation, but on the other hand, we need them. Mainly in the care and education of children. Grandparents' role is currently considered to be "available" in a difficult situation (parents' illness, sudden departure, staying longer at work) or when a direct request for help is made. In other situations, complete neutrality should be maintained in situations where this assistance is not needed. There are also many changes in the educational function. In the past, this process was connected with the daily duties controlled by the father, he was also the most important person in the family. Currently, the upbringing of children and adolescents is handled by specially appointed institutions, i.e. kindergartens and schools. This is due to the fact that the parents, having their

¹¹ W. Muszyński, *Rodzina jako wartość: wzory – modele – redefinicje*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2015, pp. 40–42.

professional obligations, cannot always devote themselves fully to raising their child. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental change that is occurring in families. In the past, children were treated quite coolly, and they were principally expected to fulfill their duties. Nowadays, there is more closeness, a friendly atmosphere and more love and care in a family. A certain paradox can be noticed here: on the one hand, the educational function has been somewhat weakened, on the other hand, due to cordiality in relationships it has been deepened.¹² Certainly, factors such as industrialization and urbanization had a significant impact on the entire family. More specifically, technological changes and the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society have brought huge revolutions, including those in the family. The above improvements resulted in the equal rights of women and men. Women started to become active, which resulted in fewer births. On the other hand, if the spouses have children, they are not able to fully engage in his upbringing due to professional obligations.

Conclusions

Summing up these considerations, a certain image of the family emerges. Women take up professional activities, they do not focus only on the family. There is gender equality with regard to domestic responsibilities of women and men. There are different views on raising children, rules and norms in the family. The modern family is replacing traditional values in favour of contemporary trends. Also in this article there is an aspect of individualisation in the family and greater freedom of its members.¹³ We can find a similar sketch of transformations by referring to Alvin Toffler's Three Waves Concept. He believes that the history of the family can be divided into three civilization waves. The first, called agrarian, is based on agriculture, the second wave lasting only 300 years is the industrial revolution. This was when the so-called nuclear family – parents with several children became popular. The last wave that continues to transform is the technological revolution. In the case of this revolution, a man becomes an individual, makes choices consistent with his convictions and his autopsy. Love as the main reason for getting married, however, has somewhat changed. Currently, romantic love is being abandoned in favour of a clear and transparent arrangement. It usually lasts for a short time, as long as both people have some benefits and pleasure from it. Its end comes when it ceases to respond or no longer fulfills its tasks. It can be broken for no particular reason. It was this change in the understanding of love that had a significant impact on the increase in separation and divorce rates

¹² E. Świdrak, *Świadomość wychowawcza we współczesnej rodzinie*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2013, pp. 68–70.

¹³ G. Cęcełek, *Rodzina – jej przemiany oraz zagrożenia i problemy wychowawcze*, op. cit.

in Poland.¹⁴ For this reason, several forms of family life can be distinguished. It is a complete family consisting of a father, a mother and offspring. In this case, it should be taken into account that it happens that children are born before the conclusion of the marriage certificate. Quite often, young people create a family for a long time, have children, but live without getting married. Another form are one-parent families. They are made up of mothers or fathers with children, sometimes the children themselves who do not have parents as a result of orphanages or other random events. From year to year, due to the increasing number of divorces, this type of lifestyle is becoming more and more popular. In our society, usually the single parent is the mother. Another arrangement is the already mentioned quite extensively cohabitation relationship – life without a formal marriage. People form families, but they do not always have to have children. The last form is marriage without children. Partners postpone decisions about having a baby until later, and in many cases it does not happen at all. This is due to life aspirations other than the family. It is worth noting that other forms of family life than marriage were once not accepted in society. Today they are becoming something natural and accepted. However, one fundamental difference can be found. In the past, the institution of the family was something permanent and solid, today it does not always guarantee happiness due to its lack of durability in the event of major problems.¹⁵

In the face of changes, one can speak of a family crisis, and there are many current factors that make up this aspect. One of the reasons is the disappearance of the natural character of the family. People first calculate whether starting a family is profitable, then make a decision. Another factor is the already mentioned separation from culture and tradition. Man looks for his own identity, and this most often causes some confusion among children and adolescents. The transformations have also broken up some commitments to continuous choices. This also applies to children who are now operating on a “worth – not worth” principle. They look for possible benefits when taking action or give up if it is not profitable in any way. More and more often the mass media have a greater influence on the upbringing of children. Family members are increasingly moving away from one another in favour of the virtual world. Anyone would be able to identify the negative effects of the constant use of the mass media on the child’s development levels. Another problem faced by families is the belief that we ourselves are the most appropriate authority, judge and advocate for ourselves. Families teach their children this approach to reality. The achieved goal, success are the measure of evaluation, only then one can speak of success. Another recurring factor is less and less time spent with the family and greater focus on work. The transformations also resulted in a diminishing contribution of family members to taking care of family life. The author mentions laziness as the main reason for this state of affairs.

¹⁴ M. Świątkiewicz-Mośny, *Rodzina – kondycja i przemiany*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2011, p. 12.

¹⁵ L. Dyczewski, *Rodzina, społeczeństwo, państwo*, op. cit., pp. 131–134.

On the other hand, the reason for inactivity is the consumptive lifestyle of the family. The media "feed" people with images of comfort, while wealth does not expose the desired values, such as altruism, openness to other people. The last factor is a certain inhibition of the family's moral activity and a lack of faith in ideals. Even in the family one can encounter behaviours such as disloyalty or lying. In summary, the changing world has led to discontinuity and durability. Currently, people lack a sense of stability and security. There is a need to have a solid foundation on which to build in the event of failure and difficulties. It is also tiring to constantly search, make choices, fear whether you are doing the right thing. This gives rise to many negative emotions: fear, anxiety, insecurity. This results in the pursuit of comfort in life, an easy life, forgetting that this is not the most important thing in life. People miss the nuclear family and the traditions they could attribute as theirs. The author also believes that people do not want such a large interference of the mass media in their family life. The media should create a positive image of the family, thus encouraging them to have one. We also cannot forget about moral issues and greater care for the family. Looking at the considerations below, it can be seen that starting a family today is an individual choice rather than a compulsory necessity. The aspect of work undertaken by women is also important. Of course, this can have both good and bad sides. Certainly, the advantage of this situation is the child's greater independence, responsibility, but also a greater scope for independent initiative. The child knows that he/she can make decisions about their own life. The parent, on the other hand, by giving the child such an opportunity, gives the child the right to make mistakes and learn appropriate patterns and behaviours from them, especially those desirable in society. On the other hand, however, a child knows that he has the right to his own opinion and has no obligation to adapt to others in every situation.¹⁶

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¹⁶ R. Doniec, *Rodzina polska jako środowisko życia i wychowania w XXI wieku – indywidualne doświadczenia i interpretacje*, „Horyzonty Wychowania” 2013, Vol. 12, No. 24.

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Ukryte fakty. Współczesna rodzina i jej problemy

Streszczenie: Artykuł jest próbą wyjaśnienia przemian rodziny na przestrzeni społeczności. To, jak się zmienia, dlaczego spotykamy się z wieloma załamaniem tej grupy społecznej, zależy od czynników zewnętrznych, tj. środków masowego przekazu (w szczególności), które zaburzają jej prawidłowe funkcjonowanie. Na przykładzie licznych definicji tej grupy społecznej, jaką jest rodzina, w artykule wymieniono, jakie podstawowe funkcje zostały konkretnie wprowadzone do stanu odległego od homeostazy i jakie są przyczyny tego stanu.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, funkcje, przemiany, problemy

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