

The importance of parental authority and its determinants within the family

Znaczenie władzy rodzicielskiej i jej uwarunkowań w rodzinie

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Introduction

A family is children's first educational, social, caring and cultural environment. It fulfils developmental tasks in the biological, emotional, intellectual and axiological aspects to a different extent and with varying intensity. Fulfilling paternal and maternal roles provides children with a sense of security and satisfies their mental and social needs. It shapes values and norms of behaviour and creates bonds and closeness in verbal and behavioural interactions. Parental impacts in the course of everyday interactions that are unconscious or conducted in a planned and conscious manner are important in the intergenerational transmission of the culture of family life.

In the upbringing and socialisation of children and adolescents, a significant role in the family environment is played by the quality and level of parental authority. It is one of the important conditions for optimising the cognitive, emotional, social, educational and cultural development of children. This is due to the ontogenetic regularity of development of the young generation through imitation, modelling and observation of parental behaviour.

Parental authority may be natural and result from the biological determinants of the relationship between parents and children. It may also develop later in the children's life as a result of parents being perceived as supportive and kind people who meet their caring, developmental and educational needs.

Parental authority is created for a child naturally at birth and functions unconditionally, with greater or lesser emotional and social intensi-

ty throughout its life. On the one hand, the natural origin of parental authority may be a component that, due to favourable caring and emotional situations and close social relations, will result in the growth and development of various situations for the multilateral imitation of parents, mainly in the sphere of adopting the behaviour patterns, hierarchy of recognised values, norms of conduct and culture of everyday life. On the other hand, various types of threats functioning in the family environment and the nurturing and socialisation failure of parents can be a serious element disturbing or even eliminating biological and natural parental authority. Moreover, macro-social and micro-social conditions, especially in the period of biological and psychological maturation of children and adolescents, may pose certain threats to the social, axiological and emotional functioning in the family environment, while contributing to the weakening or even disregard of parental authority.

The aim of this publication is to analyse the importance of parental authority for the social, emotional and cultural development of the young generation, and to systematise the beneficial components of family functioning that increase parental authority.

The area of knowledge concerning parental authority and its importance in the process of educational, socialisation and culture-forming interactions is extensive. Strengthening parental authority in the family environment is an important social and pedagogical issue.

The above-mentioned conditions presented for the purpose of this study lead to the analysis of problems in the form of the following questions:

What is the understanding of the concept of authority and parental authority?

What is the importance of parental authority in the development of children and adolescents?

How does the meaning of parental authority change in different stages of a child's development?

Which elements of intra-family life increase the family authority?

In order to develop the article content, a research method was adopted in the form of a critical analysis of pedagogical and sociological literature. It is most adequate to the theoretical considerations of the formulated problems and the adopted goal, concept and systemic approach to the article content.

The Concept and Typology of Authority and Parental Authority

The very term 'authority' is derived from the Latin expression 'auctoritas', which means respect, significance, influence, and also 'a causer' in the sense of the influence of one person on other human beings. The concept, meaning and mechanism of the functioning of authority is analysed in various scientific disciplines (pedagogy, psychology, sociology, theology). Wincenty Okoń considers authority as 'the influence of a person or organisation enjoying general recognition in a specific sphere of social life' ('wpływ osoby lub organizacji cieszącej się ogólnym uznaniem na określoną sferę życia społecznego') (Okoń 2007, p. 37). In his definition, the author notices not only the subjectivity of authority, but also the process, i.e. the influence of an individual on another person or a human group, whose action causes a certain meaning in a specific community of social life.

The concept of authority is defined in broad terms by Lech Witkowski (Witkowski 2011). He expresses the view that it is a 'mechanism' that controls a certain social group. Authority understood in this way is undoubtedly recognised in a pedagogical and psychological sense. In the first meaning, it is important because it refers to actions taken by a person who is an authority and has an impact on the social, political, economic and scientific functioning of a certain group, association or organisation. From the psychological point of view, this term suggests that the authority adopts certain mechanisms that are inherent in the personality of a human being who undertakes various elements and means of verbal and non-verbal impacts that result in subordination and transmission of one's own views in relation to a social group.

An interesting definition and meaning of authority as a subject of social influence is presented by Lucyna Bojarska (2012). The author adopts the view of Józef Pieter that authority is the advantage and importance of a certain human being over individual persons or social groups, which is expressed in a certain recognition, respect and subordination of other human individuals in the interactions. Although this term corresponds directly with the definition of authority expressed by Okoń and Witkowski, it includes, in a more detailed manner, the subject of authority in the form of a significant person and his/her essential personal characteristics that create a mechanism of influence on other people or social groups. It also expresses the importance of authority in the form of respect, recognition and subordination for the person, displayed by other individuals or social groups. The author rightly proves that authority is not only the social relationship between the causer and the subordinate social group,

but also the internal personality and characterological properties of a human being. Moreover, Bojarska draws attention to the importance of authority in the social life of an individual and a group, including a family community, since she indicates things like specific behaviours, views and actions taken as well as values shaping and elimination of negative behaviours.

Analysing the importance of authority and its functions in the process of education, Mieczysław Łobocki (2012) presents the general structure of authority. He proves that authority consists of one subject. The subject may be one person or a social group. He suggests the view that for the authority to exist, it must have its recipient. The presented outline of the authority structure indicates the need for its classification. However, in defining the typology of authority, one should take into account the degree, scope, intensity, competences, and functions of people recognised and imitated by other human individuals or social, professional and political groups. Łobocki analyses the typology of authority presented by Józef Maria Bocheński. He mentions epistemic authority and deontic authority.

Epistemic authority 'belongs to people who have extensive knowledge in a specific field of science, culture, religion or philosophy' ('przysługuje osobom, które legitymują się rozległą wiedzą z określonej dziedziny nauki, kultury, religii, czy filozofii') (Łobocki 2012, p. 110). It is an essential feature of a human being who has the knowledge and ability to pass it on to others. A wide range of specialistic and scientific knowledge is important in this type of authority. This means that a person is competent and recognised in his/her field, and the information they have is so extensive that it constitutes a unit as an authority in the face of other individuals or groups of people. However, a person with epistemic authority, having in-depth knowledge in a specific field or even specialisation, may be characterised by poor competence in other fields of study.

The second type of authority, deontic, is also called the authority of the superior. It identifies the persons who have the power to issue orders or instructions. People holding a high position or function in comparison to other people are most often deontic authorities. According to Łobocki, deontic authority has a so-called practical goal, i.e. 'an occurrence being the object of authority expected by a person' ('zdarzenie oczekiwane przez osobę będące przedmiotem autorytetu') (Łobocki 2012, p. 112). Thomas Gordon (2010) provides a broader typology of authority. He recognises authority as two separate issues. On the one hand, he understands this concept as knowledge, competences and experience, on the other hand, he believes that it is power. Such views allowed Gordon to create his own division of authority. He distinguishes between

authority based on experience, on position and title, on informal contracts, and authority based on power.

Summing up, it should be expressed that authority includes a certain meaning, respect, trust and recognition of a specific person, social group or institution. It always has a positive or negative impact on the behaviour, actions and even personality traits of another person or group of people.

Among many social and individual groups, a family, including a mother and father, constitutes a certain natural authority for the child. It is unconditional, especially in its first stages of development. The unconditional nature of parental authority results from the kinship and biological ties between parents and their child. Krystyna Ferenz (2009) rightly expresses the view that parental authority is the first and special type of authority and is derived from natural origin. It is conditioned by blood ties and results from emotional relations between parents and their child.

Parental authority can be defined due to its objective features and due to the subjective significance for a child functioning in the family. The first term includes the content related to the personality traits of parents who make up the family community. In this sense, parental authority is expressed in respect, dignity and kindness, as well as love and psychological support.

In the subjective meaning, parental authority, of a mother and father, is formed by people who are highly appreciated by children and who are role models, whose values and norms of behaviour as well as views and life experiences should be adopted.

There are different types of parental authority to distinguish. The typology of the division of parental authority depends on the parental roles performed, the styles of upbringing in the family, the functions performed towards children, and the fulfilment of mental and social needs in the family environment. Taking into account the listed components of family life, the authority of parents can be stated in the form of:

- emotional authority – based on expressing parents' love for their children,
- biological authority – based on blood ties between parents and children,
- power authority – domination of the father or mother, children are subordinated to parental power,
- competence authority – resulting from the father's or mother's high knowledge,
- moral authority – based on high moral culture and the adopted hierarchy of ethical values,

- social authority – resulting from the high social, administrative, professional and political position of the father or mother.

By analysing the typology of parental authority, it is possible to further specify their types as following: caring, educational, autocratic, upbringing, liberating and cooperating authority.

The Importance of Parental Authority in Child Development

The authority of parents plays an important role in the socialisation, upbringing and education of children in the family environment. Optimisation of this developmental process is conditioned by many things: imitating parents, identifying their personality traits by observing parental behaviour, stimulating the child's educational and cognitive activity, intentional activity of parents in transmitting values and culture of behaviour, and children's striving to identify with their parents (Tyszka 2002).

The quality of parental authority may have a positive meaning in the development and shaping of children's personal characteristics, in the first stages of development, and in the next stages of the functioning of the young generation. However, the greatest role of the father's authority, and especially of the mother's, is expressed in caring, upbringing, educational and socialisation activities in the first years of the child's life. This is due to the fact that parents are the first and often the only people the child notices, observes and reacts to their gestures, love, joy or sadness. In a family, a strong emotional bond is formed between the mother, father and child in the first stages of development. This bond is an important component of parental authority for children. Although the educational, caring and socialising influences in the family environment are often intuitive, unconscious and spontaneous, they are based on emotional authority. They result from the relationship and emotional ties between parents and their children; hence their developmental, cognitive and imitative effectiveness is quite strongly marked.

The constant dialogue with the child, the mother's caring love, the father's kindness and responsibility towards his child in everyday interactions cause the mechanism of imitation and emotional and behavioural identification with parents. The biological and emotional authority of parents makes young children learn to think, shape and express views, to adopt behavioural norms, values, and to interact with other people both during play and mutual cooperation (Cudak 2020).

The intensity in parental authority begins to change with children's admission to kindergarten, although in this period of children's life parents still fulfil significant caring, cognitive and socialising needs. Children then get to know a new environment and have to get used to the new rules of conduct. In the preschool age, children begin to develop morally. There is a so-called 'moral heteronomy' characteristic of this stage of children's development, which means that a child perceives all rules and norms as coming from outside. For a child, first of all, parents, next to the preschool teacher, become the entity creating all rules. According to Joanna Matejczuk (2014), a child tries to obey all orders as a result of love and respect for parents. During this period of life, children surrender to the authority of parents. They obey their parents, obey their orders, and most importantly, try to do them so as to avoid negative consequences. The preschool age is characterised by a willingness to submit to parents, resulting from the sense of rightness of all parental actions and a desire to avoid any punishments.

The example of behaviour, attitudes and views of parents with high authority is of great importance for children, especially in preschool age, in the internalisation of social norms and the value system. They accept and adopt as their own the behaviour and conduct in various social and family situations that are manifested by their mother and father. A good example of parents and their imitation by children happens not only in the younger stages of children's development, but also during the school and adolescence periods. Beata Nadolna is right to express the view that older children and adolescents search for 'idols' and role models to identify with them. These patterns are different and not always good. Then, parental authority helps to verify what is really valuable (Bialecki & Nadolna 2011).

Parental authority may function in positive educational and socialisation influences in relation to children in various developmental periods if the family manifests favourable family environment components such as: close emotional ties, friendly atmosphere at home, democratic style of parental impact, positive parental attitudes, high personal and pedagogical culture and quality of meeting mental and social needs.

The tightness of emotional ties in the family is conditioned by the relationship of parents and children, directness in social and emotional interactions between parents, parents and children and closeness and cordiality in the functioning of the family environment. Emotional ties in the family are an important element of the quality of meeting children's mental and social needs. A family, and parents themselves, like no other social group, strive to satisfy the multilat-

eral needs of their children by love, respect and kindness, as well as safety, care, social contact and dialogue. The high degree and scope of their satisfaction by parents optimise their parental authority, which results in effective social, mental and physical development of children.

Among the different styles of upbringing in a family, parents who create family environment with democratic interactions enjoy the greatest authority. It is an authority that does not abuse parental power and domination, but is based on mutual understanding, educational support, and the subjective treatment of children. Parents recognise and respect their children's views, rights, decisions and life problems. In a family, there is mutual cooperation in interactions between its members.

An important component that strengthens or weakens parental authority is creating a positive home atmosphere by parents. A pleasant, friendly and cordial atmosphere generates an emotional and social balance in the family home. Both parents and children are happy to be there and they long for it (Przygoda 2015). This kind of home atmosphere stimulates the multilateral development of children, strengthens family ties, and strengthens the parents' authority. An emotionally favourable home atmosphere, full of peace and kindness causes positive relationships in interpersonal systems between parents and children.

Parental attitudes towards children play an important role in interpersonal interactions in a family, in caring and educational interactions. Attitudes accepting children, cooperating with them, giving them understood freedom and recognising their rights and obligations are beneficial for maintaining high parental authority. Fixed, positive behaviour of parents towards children, in which there is a dialogue between parents and children, emotional balance is manifested in the home environment and positive feelings and views are expressed in parental interactions, certainly helps trigger the mechanism of parents' acceptance and imitation of their life culture and recognised values. Children in family environments with positive parental attitudes want to identify with the system of values and norms displayed by their parents.

One of the marked elements of everyday family life influencing the creation and strengthening or limitation and weakening of parental authority is the quality and level of the parents' general and pedagogical culture. The personal culture of parents, the father and mother separately, is manifested in moral and ethical behaviours and in recognised and implemented pro-social values. Parents, by displaying their family culture in interactions with children, contribute to conveying valuable pro-social behaviours to their children.

Parents' pedagogical culture is manifested in the form of knowledge about raising and growth of children, functioning of the family, sensitivity to the needs, upbringing and care for the young generation, responsibility for their lives, kindness in interactions with children and educational influence in the family environment. The high level of parents' pedagogical culture is an important paradigm of rational educational, caring and socialising activities in relation to children. Children and adolescents living in families with high general and pedagogical culture adopt the models of their parents' behaviour, their norms of conduct, their values and the culture of life in the family and local environment.

In modern families where a partnership model functions or is created, the father's authority is not related to parental authority. It is shaped in everyday relationships with family members, through his own behaviour, the adopted system of values, behaviour patterns, parental attitudes, styles of upbringing and caring interactions as well as the social position held in the family home and in the family environment (Kawula, Brągiel & Janke 2007).

The differentiation of the authority of the father and mother depends on the way and quality of meeting the psychosocial needs of children. The father's authority most often results from physical strength, firmness, a sense of security, emotional stability, responsibility, and rationality in educational, caring and socialising activities. In addition, he strengthens the parental authority by educating children, frequent dialogue, familiarising with new phenomena, eliminating life difficulties and shaping their personality traits.

The mother's authority is formed through her care, quality of meeting mental needs and full acceptance of children. It is also formed by creating a friendly atmosphere at home and supporting children in multilateral educational, social and caring situations.

A mother becomes the authority for her child first due to the period of pregnancy and childbirth, and a father becomes the mother's complement, and therefore becomes the authority later in the child's life.

Considering the upbringing of children, a father has a stronger influence on his sons because of the male pattern which is the main goal of his upbringing. Mothers, on the other hand, develop stronger emotional and social relationships with their daughters in order to show the pattern of true femininity. Parental authority is a dynamic process that begins with the birth of a child and develops over the subsequent periods of their lives. However, it is conditioned by the quality of life in the family environment.

Final remarks

Each family creates a specific community of members in which certain functions, social roles, meeting biological, social and psychological needs are fulfilled. In the family environment, the educational, caring, social, cultural and educational processes take place in a more or less conscious way. Optimising children's development in various spheres of their personality depends mainly on recognised and manifested parental authority. Parents, especially the mother, by assuming the maternal role after giving birth to a child, naturally becomes an authority for them through the very fact of kinship. She is, in certain periods of a child's life, the only closest person who expresses concern for their biological, emotional and social development during nursing and educational activities. In modern families, in the partnership model of family functioning, a father also performs the caring and nursing function over the new-born child and in subsequent developmental periods, acquiring parental authority. Parents, both mother and father, are significant and close people for children who fulfil their most important health, development, social and emotional needs, therefore in direct physical and mental contacts children imitate parental behaviour, learn the first words, experience joy and sadness. For young children parents become the only authority that is important in communicating certain behaviours, recognised values, interaction with other people, verbal and non-verbal culture in the family environment.

Parental authority (of father and mother), despite kinship, is not given to parents until the end of their procreation family. It can be consolidated and developed in the later developmental periods of children (the phase of school life, adolescence, and adulthood), it can also be weakened or even eliminated. Hence, in modern families, parental authority occurs in the form of power exercised by a father or mother, in which compulsion, subordination, parental decision-making and authoritarian attitudes are manifested. However, more and more often the real parental authority is becoming apparent in procreation families. It is based on personalistic character traits in the form of kindness, caring, responsibility for the fate of children, cooperation and development support and mutual dialogue in interpersonal relations in the family community. The personality traits of father and mother in the family environment are significant elements consolidating the quality and intensity of parental authority. It is an important component in the intercultural transmission of family values, the culture of everyday life, the transmission of behaviour and quality of socialisation, education and mutual interactions in the family and non-family environment.

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STRESZCZENIE

Władza rodzicielska jest dana przez naturę, pokrewieństwo i zachowana lub osłabiona w okresie rodziny prokreacyjnej. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest z jednej strony analiza znaczenia władzy rodzicielskiej dla rozwoju dzieci, z drugiej zaś analiza funkcjonowania różnych elementów życia i zagrożeń wewnątrzrodzinnych. Rodzice w pierwszych etapach rozwoju dziecka są pierwszymi i najważniejszymi osobami, które mają wpływ na ich sferę poznawczą, emocjonalną i aksjologiczną. W okresie szkolnym i dojrzewania autorytet rodzicielski może rozwijać się poprzez więzi emocjonalne w rodzinie, postawy akceptujące atmosferę domową, demokratyczny styl rodzicielski i kulturę zachowań rodzicielskich. Dzieci funkcjonujące w rodzinach, w których przejawia się wysoki, realny autorytet rodzicielski, przyjmują wartości i normy społeczne. W większym stopniu identyfikują się z osobistymi cechami ojca i matki.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Rodzina, władza, władza rodzicielska, więzi rodzinne, kultura, kultura pedagogiczna, postawy rodzicielskie, potrzeby psychiczne i społeczne.

SUMMARY

Parental authority is given by nature, kinship, and preserved or weakened during the period of the procreation family. The aim of this article is, on the one hand, to analyse the importance of parental authority for children's development, and on the other hand, to analyse the functioning of various elements of life and intra-family threats. Parents in the first stages of a child's development are the first and most important significant persons who have an impact on their cognitive, emotional and axiological spheres. During school and adolescence, parental authority may develop through emotional ties in the family, attitudes that accept the home atmosphere, a democratic parenting style and a culture of parental behaviour. Children functioning in families in which high, real parental authority is displayed, adopt social values and norms. They identify with the personal characteristics of their father and mother to a greater extent.

KEYWORDS Family, authority, parental authority, family ties, culture, pedagogical culture, parental attitudes, mental and social needs.

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