

Socio-cultural changes in the lifestyles of the contemporary Bulgarian family

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Abstract

Objectives. The objectives of the present paper are to analyze the changes in economic and cultural conditions of Bulgarian family and the way they influence the whole life framework, well-being as well as intergenerational family support and relations.

Material and methods. The analysis is based on several national representative surveys carried out in 2006, 2009, and 2012 with respondents living in urban and rural regions, aged 18-65 years, relatively homogenously distributed in the variables of environment, sex, educational level and age group. Data refer to different aspects of people's lives and their families. Follow the living conditions, economic and cultural capital, social support, cohesion and family solidarity.

Results. Based on the findings of the three rounds of ESS, the present study revealed changes in Bulgarian family life in the following areas:

- 1) Economic issues: unemployment, low income, deteriorated living standards, place many Bulgarian families in difficult conditions.
- 2) Family support and solidarity: difficulties in economic terms affect family relationships and cohesion. 2/3 of the respondents indicate that they feel comfortable at home. Displayed variables: time spent with family, sense of concern for the closest people, forms of mutual assistance.
- 3) Cultural capital in the family: educational status of parents, intergenerational education mobility, motivation for education and achievements in school.

Conclusions. The basic conclusion of the study is that the economic and cultural conditions of Bulgarian family have important and vital impact in the lives of individuals.

Keywords: family life stile; solidarity; generations; intergenerational education mobility.

Introduction

The Economic crisis in the years of transition (1990 until today) put a heavy mark on contemporary Bulgarian family, damaging its value system and worsening its internal climate. Family values, such as good will, support, thinking about others, respect, are minimized and they have been changed to egocentrism, distrust and concerns on survival. Thus, members of the Bulgarian family little by little alienate each other, immersed in dynamics of postmodern world.

However, exactly in this situation of uncertainty and anxiety, family remains a basis for lots of individuals and even though destabilized, it still takes an important place within the value system of contemporary Bulgarians, which has preserved quite a few of patriarchal traits of its personality.

„Despite the crisis of marital institute, family continues to be an unconditional value to Bulgarians” (Pamporov, 2009, p.167) as 98.5% of Bulgarians agree that in order one to be happy it is necessary to be married or to have a longstanding relation”. In addition, this empirical result may be interpreted in a wider context of the necessity of “loving” (Delhey, 2004, p.11). Because “to live in good relations with a partner” is one of the conditions for satisfaction with life as a whole and for happiness. That is why it is not by chance that even nowadays one can discover love, sympathy, support, carefulness, tolerance, concern within the Bulgarian family. Family exists because human beings cannot live on their own. Every human needs a family as a place of shelter, of survival, peace and security, of spiritual balance.

In the context of Bulgarian family the basic issues of the present article are:

- To analyze the changes in economic and social conditions of Bulgarian family.
- To present the way these changes influence the whole life framework and well-being.
- To reveal aspects of intergenerational family support and relations.

The article is based on results obtained by European Social Survey in three rounds - 2006, 2009, and 2012/3, mainly with Bulgarian respondents living in urban and rural regions, aged 18-65 years. Data refer to different aspects of people's lives and their families: living conditions, economic and cultural capital, social support, cohesion and solidarity, family well-being.

Economic situation of Bulgarian family

Bulgaria is one of the poorest countries in Europe. Unemployment, low income, poor living standard place many families in difficult conditions. The bad economic situation is one of the basic factors for social exclusion. According to European Social Survey (ESS), only 1% of Bulgarian citizens live comfortably on their income versus: 35% in Slovenia, 13% in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia, 8% in Poland at the beginning of 2013.

At the beginning of 2013, a new slide down towards major social distress was observed in Bulgaria. In only two years (2011 – 2013) the number of destitute Bulgarians increased by 7%, and 43% of the population were in the situation to barely manage to overcome material difficulties.

The reasons for the poor living standards of Bulgarians are rooted not only in the low incomes, but also in the basic sources of income: low share of personal work activity income and high share of pensions. The rate: work income – pensions is 2:1. Almost one third of the Bulgarian households (32%) rely on pensions as a basic source of income.

Family cohesion

The family has a strong impact on dispositions towards life, future, self-image, and work. It creates a specific environment and the total set of conditions related to understanding and care; it is a specific social capital that is inherited in the course of interaction between actors (Coleman, 1988). *Social capital* in the family is represented by the relations between children and parents. When the *human capital* (comprising education, skills, and knowledge) possessed by the parents is not complemented by the social capital embodied in parent-child relations, the full family socialization is damaged. That is why the parents' physical absence from home may be considered a kind of structural insufficiency of family capital; this insufficiency may be evident even in cases when the adults are present, but do not have strong relations with the children (Coleman, 1988).

The family and the parental style of upbringing children have a decisive impact on the relationships that are built within the family and on the child's self-esteem; the latter depends on the degree of autonomy given to the child and the support it receives from the parents. Conversely, the

more this style is marked by control, restrictions, poor communication, lack of encouragement for adaptation, the lower self-esteem will be. Upbringing is not a levelling but a differentiating process and a child from a well-to-do family has better chances for development and mobility than its poorer coevals (Sherman, 1996, p.12). In the family, the child assimilates those assessments, definitions, and dispositions towards the world, those forms and styles of thought, that define the central orientations and statuses. In this way are legitimated the ways of connecting to the world, the knowledge, and the ways of speaking (Bernstein, 1958; Bernstein, 1975).

Family capital is connected with creating traditions and a life style, linguistic maturity and predispositions, complemented by the dimensions of family cohesion (a style of upbringing and family relationships); family support becomes an important *prerequisite for the formation of a positive attitude towards social relations and of the self-esteem, for building confidence and establishing communications*. That is why children with a damaged family socialization – including violence in the home, lack of supportive environment and relationships – display greater liability.

Family strength defines power of society, its vitality and sufficiency of every person. In answer to the question “How does your family solve its problems”, 47.6% have indicated that “only the parents make the decisions” and 52.4% have reported that “only the father decides” (Milenkova, 2004). The measures undertaken in such families usually tend to be punitive: more than 1/3 of the respondents stated they were punished for misbehaving by their parents. Also, among those children who stated that “they felt more uncertain than last year” the percentage of those who were punished at home was 44.4; this shows that home violence and family rigidity tend to weaken self-confidence of children.

Currently, many families in the country are chiefly concentrated on surviving, and they delegated the main part of the tasks of upbringing children to other institutions, chiefly the school. Relations between spouses, stress factors in the home, create additional emotional tension and anxiety in children, and become a prerequisite for children’s lack of interest in schooling, creating unfavourable conditions for education.

Consequences for children

Low income and poor living standard of Bulgarian families impact the children attendance of school, which is one of crucial consequences of socialization in the family.

Empirical data clearly show a strong correlation between poverty risk of the household and the education level of the household head: families with a low-educated head risk poverty twice as much as families whose head has completed secondary education; while the risk for this second category is, in turn, twice greater than for families whose head has a higher education diploma. (Nicaise, 2010, p.2). The first odds ratio is significantly larger in Bulgaria – 39% versus 11%, compared to 24% versus 13% on average for EU 27 (see Figure 1).

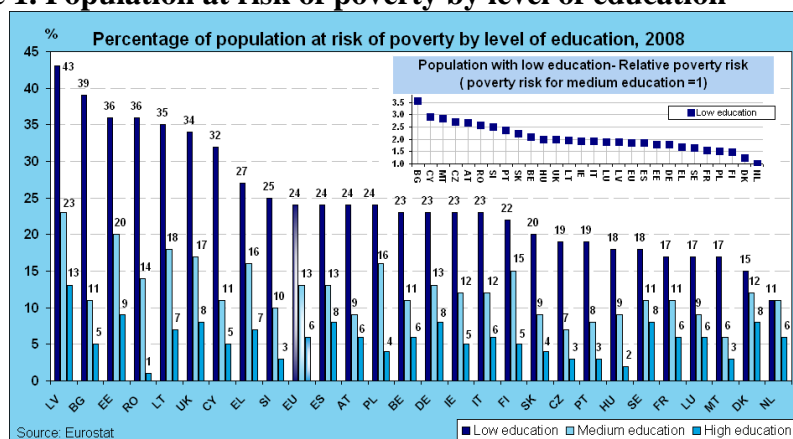
This picture is made more concrete in a study conducted by the World Bank, which “shows that the share of children included in the education system that come from the 20% poorest households is considerably lower than the average share for the country” (Nonchev, 2006, p.27).

Due to unemployment, low income and increasing poverty, parents are unable to cover the education costs of their children. Despite the operating programmes (free textbooks in primary school, free transport, and the programme “a glass of warm milk”), which should contribute to reducing the family’s education expenses, many of the vulnerable children are embarrassed to go to school. They feel poor, isolated from the world of their coevals. Researchers have found that the leading precondition for non-attendance of school is poverty (61.1%), the value system of the parents (16.4%), and the lack of parental control (13.2%) (Jeleva, Kirov, Markova, 2006). Children

who have dropped out of school indicate “lack of funds” as the cause for discontinuing their education (Nonchev, 2006, p.27-8):

- 24% confessed “we did not have money for textbooks and notebooks”. Lack of resources for schoolbooks is mentioned by: 26.2% of the Roma; 26.3% of the Turks; 16.1% of the Bulgarians;
- 19% indicated the lack of “appropriate clothes and shoes”; by ethnicity, the children who gave this answer were 21.7% Roma; 16.9% Turks; 10.2 % Bulgarians.
- “I had to help at home, to work on the family farm” is among the reasons for dropout from school provided by 12% of the children aged 12-16.
- “Care for the family” was reported by 23.4% of Bulgarians, 15.3% of Turks, 59.1% of the Roma.

Figure 1. Population at risk of poverty by level of education



Source: Eurostat
Source: Boyadjieva, 2012

Dropout for economic reasons is also connected with various forms of:

- migration of parents: 1) from village to city; 2) from one city to another; 3) to a foreign country.
- and with various forms of child labour.

Some of the children who do not go to school are idle, visit friends or stay at home. In some cases, the answers indicate other occupations: care for someone in the family (indicated by 30% of dropouts); collecting and selling scraps (24%); collecting herbs, helping on the family farm, construction work (Nonchev, 2006, p.30-1).

One or both parents' unemployment, and/or the family's low standard of living places children in a difficult material situation, and the care for earning a livelihood and surviving becomes their responsibility too. In focus group discussions the children stated (Milenkova, 2004) that they helped their parents and earned a livelihood; the concrete way they did that depended on the place of residence, traditions, crafts and size of the family.

The *education* of parents is a decisive factor of school attendance (Table 1).

Table 1. Structure of the population by education and ethnicity by 01.02.2011

Ethnic group	Total	Higher	Secondary	Basic	Primary	No education
Total	6680980	1263688	2743181	1434960	761393	69093
Bulgarians	5664624	1222511	2552240	1084290	483961	21830
Turks	588318	22326	141359	234851	127042	19623
Roma	325343	948	18948	97544	131337	26154

Source: Tilkidjiev, 2011, p.506

Often the parents of school dropouts have themselves experienced serious disappointments in their careers, have undergone problems like divorce, unemployment, etc.

Family and its coherence

In contemporary Bulgarian family, the basic common activity is watching TV. Leisure outside the home is brought to a minimum. Nevertheless, young people continue to value family basically. From the data taken from 2009 ESS, 71 % of young people see their future as part of a family according to their living plans.

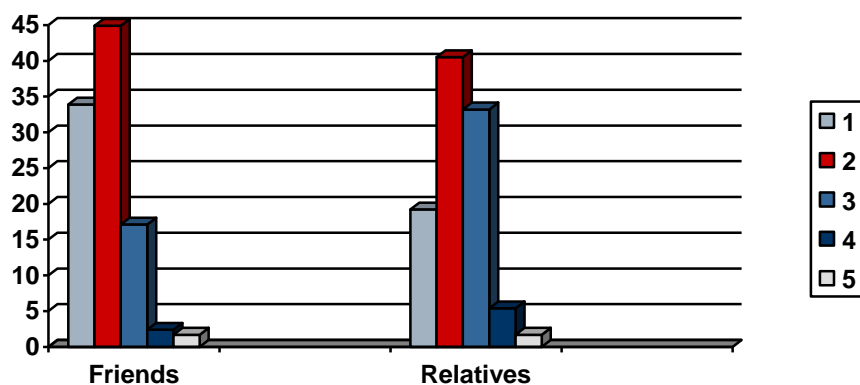
Almost 2/3 of the respondents indicate that they feel comfortable at home. To evaluate this aspect the following variables were considered:

- time spent with family
- a sense of concern for the closest people
- forms of mutual assistance.

It can be witnessed that time spend by young people with friends or relatives is highly esteemed (Figure 2).

Figure 2. How often do you meet with friends and relatives?

1 – Every day; 2 – Several times a week; 3 – Several times a month; 4 – Once a month; 5 – Less



Also in support of the importance of family community and its acceptance as crucial for the entire life of the individuals are the results obtained through some other questions (Table 2):

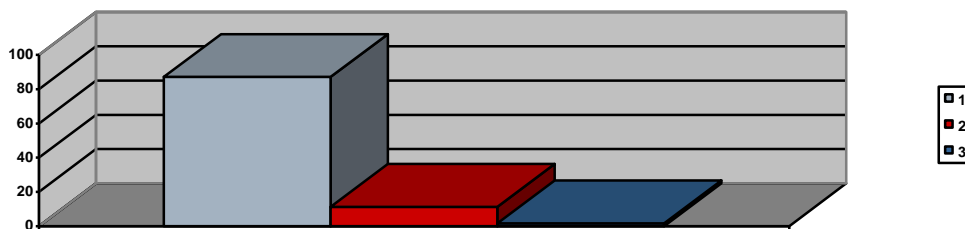
Table 2. How do you estimate the time you spend on contacts with relatives/ friends?
01- "completely dissatisfied"; 10- "completely satisfied"

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Doesn't know
Friends	4.5	4.0	5.9	6.8	11.0	15.7	9.3	11.8	14.2	17.8	0.0
Family	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.9	10.6	16.0	16.3	16.6	14.8	16.6	0.0

Family is important because it is a source of support and positive energy. It creates a feeling of belonging and having an identity The obtained results are clear enough (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Do you have anyone in your family, with whom you can discuss very personal issues:

1 – Yes (87%); 2 – No (11.3%); 3 – No answer (1.7%)



It is impressive that the respondents are conscious of the necessity of contacts with friends and relatives. They stick to that regime of proximity and communication, they support social relations' rhythm and they consider it important. As a whole, contacts with family and friends increase community spirit and contribute to development of free speech, strengthening democratic relationships. Interpersonal confidence is very tangible, creating a fundament to human coherence.

Family and Education dimensions

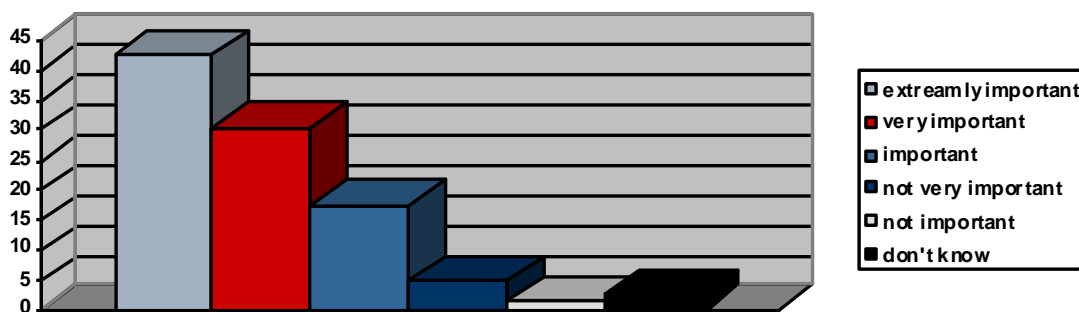
Education has a key role for increasing personal chances; it is a necessary and important condition for taking a professional position and middle class statute, as education is a form of investment in better qualification and level of knowledge. The role of education as a mobility stimulus reveals itself most clearly when it is observed for a longer period of time on the basis of a cohort analysis, allowing for a following up of transitions in the framework of the cohort itself (inter-generation perspective) and in relation to parents, i. e. in inter-generation section (Shavit, 1993). The effect of educational expansion depends on the initial position and class affiliation of individuals, as well as on preferences and the level of "saturation" of the very educational institutes. In that sense one can state that the dimensions of individual and social mobility are not identical.

Education as a mobility factor in Bulgarian society was also presented in other surveys (***)"Town and Village – 86"; Mihailov, 1988).

The theoretical works are based on the optimistic view regarding the potential role of education to improve life chances of individuals from different social strata. However, the formulation of such conceptions cannot be separated from the dominating political ideas of the second half of the 20th century. In the most Western European societies, beliefs in individuals' rights connected with the "new" place of man in social life are wide spread. The ideas of freedom and rights unambiguously define the theses for equality in the access to goods, to educational achievements and to well being. In relation to education, concepts proclaiming it as a condition for the so-called "contest mobility" (Turner, 1971, p.171-89), presuming to guarantee to individuals a possibility for a sufficiently long training which is not predetermined by social origin, and selection to be realized at a relatively later stage, are becoming popular. Education obtains a predominant role for individual success and his/her social position. Birth status ceases to be of leading importance in relation to the future and it is transformed in merit status, including education level as one of the important indicator (even the most important one).

According to Bulgarian respondents (ESS - 2006) education is important for success in life nowadays in this country (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Importance of education for the success in life today.



90.5% (Bulgarian respondents) have indicated education as an important condition (“extremely important”, ”very important”, ”important”)

In addition, the fact that education is estimated as a significant existential circumstance shows up in the educational profile of the respondents and their environment (Table 3).

Table 3. Educational profile of respondents, ESS

2013	respondent	father	mother
Lower than elementary	2.1	9.2	12.8
Elementary	3.7	10.4	11.9
Basic	22.3	37.1	35.3
Secondary	48.7	28.8	27.7
College	4.1	1.7	3.3
Higher	18.7	8.1	6.7
Postgraduate qualification/academic degree	0.4	0.1	0.1

2009	respondent	father	mother
Lower than elementary	2.4	6.2	8.2
Elementary	5.1	12.3	13.7
Basic	22.1	33.1	32.3
Secondary	49.4	34.1	32.1
College	4.6	1.9	3.8
Higher	15.2	8.5	6.6
Postgraduate qualification/academic degree	1.1	0.1	0.2

2006	respondent	father	mother
Lower than elementary	2.4	7.6	9.8
Elementary	6.4	13.1	15.0
Basic	24.3	35.5	34.9
Secondary	45.6	26.9	25.1
College	6.1	2.0	4.4
Higher	15.1	7.9	5.3
Don't know	0.2	6.9	5.6

Compared data about educational profile of respondents and their parents show a change in direction of increase of educational status in absolute expression, which is indicative for: 1) presence of inter-generation mobility; 2) the fact that education is considered and estimated as an important

factor for success and individual development; 3) the fact that both secondary and higher education of respondents and their parents have grown up in 2009 compared to 2006. 4) Increasing the share of respondents with higher education in 2013 compared with 2009. All these results come to support the thesis that education is not only a value; it is actually mapped on educational strategies of Bulgarians (although as a matter of fact educational aspirations and realized strategies of Bulgarians are marked with certain modesty, related to a European scale).

At the same time, educational achievements are not only a function of efforts and ambitions, but also of family involvement, which means that educational attainments and well-being are connected with family environment and its importance for individuals (Milenkova, 2014). That is so because high parental status creates conditions for children to attain also high educational achievements and positions. In that sense, even when there is no interest even for partial achievements on students standpoints, education's social character is preserved due to social definiteness of educational attainments (Grusky, 2008; DiMaggio, 1982), supporting the thesis of cultural capital and reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Cultural capital as a system of implicit and deeply internalized values and resources transferred to generations is influenced by social class, race (ethnos) and parents' education (Lareau and Weininger, 2003). Cultural capital examined as particular cultural practices, activities, resources, concerns school results, educational attainments and future social individual choices (Ganzeboom et al., 1990; Kalmijn and Kraaykaamp, 1996; Dumais, 2002). Educational values, embodied into mechanisms of educational system urge parents and students to compete for places at high quality elite status – they choose to take part in that competition and so they become part of the reproduction of the dominant culture (Milenkova, Molhov, 2011).

Conclusion

Family as a value is under serious danger and the marriage and family institutes are in crisis. Demographic situation in this country shows a negative demographic growth since 1990, hindering transfer of values and experience from parents to children. Along with that, migration processes (especially youth emigration), social status and the economic conditions of Bulgarians exert unfavourable influence on the preservation of family values too.

In conclusion, the following basic issues connected with the significance of education to middle class can be brought out:

- The family was placed in a difficult situation under Bulgarian severe social conditions.
- Economic conditions and living standard are low and this reflects on the feelings of insecurity and instability.
- At the same time, a high degree of concern and support, mutual aid and emotional attachment occur within family members.
- Cultural capital (Di Maggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002) of Bulgarian families is correlated to their social status (Milenkova, Molhov, 2011).
- Family and its resources influence the educational achievement of pupils.
- In the country there is a real process of increasing of educational level (secondary and higher education), which represents an indicator of intergenerational mobility.
- Educational attainments are stimulus for well-being because they involve investment in social contacts and a qualitative competition on job market.

This study shows that the family was placed in a difficult situation under Bulgarian conditions. Economic conditions and living standards are low and this reflects on the feeling of

insecurity and instability of family. At the same time the family occurs a high degree of support, concern of members, mutual aid and emotional attachment.

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