

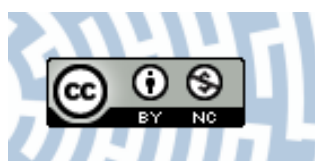


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The Social Need for Cohabitation Relationships. Sociological Approach

Abstract

The paper presents a selected aspect of the sociological empirical research on cohabitation relationships, conducted among the students of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. It has been indicated that the students' major (field) as well as the frequency of their participation, or its lack, in religious practices are significant independent variables differentiating students' attitudes towards this social phenomenon.

Key words: *cohabitation relationship, family, marriage.*

Introduction

Not until the last few years did the phenomenon of cohabitation arouse the interest of Polish social sciences researchers (A. Kwak 2005, K. Slany 2006). It has a different dimension than in other countries due to the fact that Polish family life has been shaped by different cultural heritage. Cohabitation ,which was and still is referred to as 'konkubinat', existed in Poland in earlier times. There was something shameful about being in such a relationship and this fact often remained concealed. Nowadays, however, cohabitation is gaining a new meaning. An increasing number of non-marital relationships has been observed, accompanied by tacit consent if not total acceptance. It is not the moral aspect of cohabitation that is being evaluated but its interrelations with other factors of family life such as divorce, fertility, marriage. Attention is drawn to the economic and social background of these changes (A. Kwak 2005, p.11).

There have occurred distinct changes in the formation of the family and its structure. The influence of norms and values focused on the traditional family is diminishing in favour of a nuclear family – the creation of modernised society (most often referred to as industrial). The separation of sexual life not only from procreation (within family) but also from marriage has changed the status of both the family and the people who follow norms and values inconceivable to former generations. Instability as well as the breakdown of the family, mainly for social reasons, initiates the process of reconstruction of relationships in a formal or informal way and generates, according to K. Slany, ‘serial monogamy or successive polygamy’. Giving birth and bringing up children can be separated from the institution of marriage and the division of chores based on a person’s gender. Single parenting or even childlessness by choice is becoming a permanent element of reality. Family as an institution started to be challenged in the early 1960s when a fundamental question appeared: what will there be in return? Postmodernity (Z. Bauman 1994), ambiguous and indefinite, produces various forms of marriage-family life, indefinite and vague themselves (cohabitation, solitary life) and allows them to be widely manifested, which was banned in the past. The alternative nature and variety of forms lead to an indefinite structure and function of the family (K. Slany 2006, pp. 15–16).

The social need for the alternative models of marriage-family life including cohabitation is unquestionable now. According to family sociologists and demographers they are present among almost all social groups, both in urban and rural areas (A. Kwak 2005; K. Slany 2006; J. Baniak 2010; M.M Sweeny 2000; A. Thornton, W.G. Axinn, Y. Xie 2007; A. Barlow, S. Duncan, G. James, A. Park 2005).

I have included this issue in my empirical research carried out as a survey questionnaire among 603 students from different fields and faculties at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (Slovakia). The students were asked if they saw the need for cohabitation relationships. At the same time I accepted the research hypothesis that a relatively good knowledge of alternative models of family life acquired from various sources evokes their positive attitudes towards cohabitation, which means that the majority of the students will approve of such relationships even if they are incompatible with religious practices. The answers of the respondents are presented in the tables below.

The attitudes of the surveyed students towards cohabitation are unanimous. Overall, over 60% of the surveyed men and women agreed that cohabitation relationships are something people need and thus they should exist; 26.4% of the respondents were strongly and unconditionally in favour of them. Such an opinion was expressed by 65.1% of the women and 54.5% of the men. The women recog-

nized the need for cohabitation by 10.6 percentage points more than the men. At the same time, the research reveals that almost 24% of the respondents are against, 9.8% strongly, the existence of cohabitation relationships. Only one in five women (19.2%) and one in three men did not see any need for such relationships. Almost 16% of the respondents had no opinion on the subject. It shows that a higher percentage of the surveyed students reject the Catholic model of sexual morality and declare for cohabitation (60.4%) and a lower percentage (23.9%) accept the model but at the same time declare against non-marital relationships. The difference between these indices is big, 36.5%, and statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 15.785$; $df = 4$; $\alpha = 0.003$; $V = 0.162$), cf., Table 1.

Table 1. The social need for cohabitation relationships in accordance with the gender of the respondents

Do people need cohabitation relationships?	Gender			
		female	male	Overall
yes	L	92	67	159
	%	27.5%	25.0%	26.4%
rather	L	126	79	205
	%	37.6%	29.5%	34.0%
no	L	33	26	59
	%	9.9%	9.7%	9.8%
not really	L	31	54	85
	%	9.3%	20.1%	14.1%
I don't know	L	53	42	95
	%	15.8%	15.7%	15.8%
Overall	L	335	268	603
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: my own research

A profound analysis of the survey results shows that the students' attitudes towards the need for cohabitation differ according to their major (field). Most decided were the students of political sciences (70.5%), sociology (68.5%), pedagogy (67.9%) and physics (66.6%). Such an opinion was more seldom expressed by the students of technical education (59.2%), computer science (52.8%) and health and safety at work (44.2%). Most seldom such an opinion was expressed by the students of mathematics (40%), who were divided in their attitudes, since almost a similar number of the respondents (38.1%) expressed an opinion that cohabitation relationships should not be allowed. The analysis shows that among

the students of mathematics 15 women and 9 men were in favour whereas 17 women and 8 men were against; 12 women and only 2 men had no opinion about the need for cohabitation. It may be concluded that the male and female students of mathematics maintain two opposite attitudes. However, almost one in four among all the respondents did not see any need for cohabitation relationships, they believed marriage to be a much better model of family life $\chi^2 = 52.758$; $df=28$; $\alpha=0.003$; $V=0.148$) (cf., Table 2).

Table 2. Social need for cohabitation relationships in the opinions of students of different majors (fields)

Major (field of studies)		Do people need cohabitation relationships?					Overall
		yes	rather	no	not really	no opinion	
Sociology	L	21	29	6	7	10	73
	%	28.8%	39.7%	8.2%	9.6%	13.7%	100.0%
Pedagogy	L	25	47	6	12	16	106
	%	23.6%	44.3%	5.7%	11.3%	15.1%	100.0%
Political sciences	L	40	39	10	15	8	112
	%	35.7%	34.8%	8.9%	13.4%	7.1%	100.0%
Physics	L	5	13	1	5	3	27
	%	18.5%	48.1%	3.7%	18.5%	11.1%	100.0%
Mathematics	L	13	12	15	9	14	63
	%	20.6%	19.0%	23.8%	14.3%	22.2%	100.0%
Technical education	L	8	8	1	5	5	27
	%	29.6%	29.6%	3.7%	18.5%	18.5%	100.0%
Health and safety at work	L	13	26	5	11	17	72
	%	18.1%	36.1%	6.9%	15.3%	23.6%	100.0%
Computer science	L	34	31	15	21	22	123
	%	27.6%	25.2%	12.2%	17.1%	17.9%	100.0%
Overall	L	159	205	59	85	95	603
	%	26.4%	34.0%	9.8%	14.1%	15.8%	100.0%

Source: my own research

An independent variable – the frequency of the respondents' participation in religious practices, or lack of such participation, turned out to be a significant variable that differentiates the attitudes of the surveyed students towards the need for cohabitation. The analysis of the results showed that cohabitation relationships were most widely accepted by non-believers (67.4%) and by those who participate in religious practices several times a year (69%). On the other hand, those who

believe in God and who attend religious practices several times a week (66.7%) reject them as incompatible with the principles of the Roman Catholic Church. Those who attend religious practices once a week were not unanimous. They represented two different views – the first group was in favour of cohabitation (49.6%) whereas the other one rejected the alternative model of family-marriage life (35.6%) considering the sacrament of marriage as needful and appropriate. The research has shown that the higher the level of religiousness was, exemplified by the frequency of participation in the Holy Mass, the smaller the percentage of the respondents was in favour of cohabitation relationships. However, the more respondents declared their participation in the Mass, the more of them claimed that there was no need for such relationships. There are significant statistical differences between these indices. ($\chi^2=89.562$; $df=16$; $\alpha=0.000$; $V=0.193$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Social need for cohabitation with respect to the respondents' participation in religious practices

Participation in religious practices	Is there a need for cohabitation relationships?					Overall	
	yes	rather	no	not really	I don't know		
several times a week	L	0	5	15	7	6	33
	%	0.0%	15.2%	45.5%	21.2%	18.2%	100.0%
once a week	L	23	41	15	31	19	129
	%	17.8%	31.8%	11.6%	24.0%	14.7%	100.0%
1–2 times a week	L	9	17	3	5	12	46
	%	19.6%	37.0%	6.5%	10.9%	26.1%	100.0%
several times a year	L	57	72	14	18	26	187
	%	30.5%	38.5%	7.5%	9.6%	13.9%	100.0%
no participation	L	70	70	12	24	32	208
	%	33.7%	33.7%	5.8%	11.5%	15.4%	100.0%
Overall	L	159	205	59	85	95	603
	%	26.4%	34.0%	9.8%	14.1%	15.8%	100.0%

Source: my own research

Conclusions

In the contemporary world cohabitation is becoming an increasingly common, socially acceptable and increasingly popular model of family life. This alternative lifestyle is especially preferred by young people focused on self-fulfilment and

individualism, students with temporary jobs, who, after finishing their studies seek professional success and relatively high economic status through hard work and long working hours. This is why they do not, unlike their parents and grandparents in the past, make decisions on early marriages but aspire to professional fulfilment and social security. Therefore, they consider cohabitation to be an attractive form of emotional commitment which provides favourable conditions for self-fulfilment. Such a relationship may eventually be legalized (cohabitation being preliminary to marriage) (A. Kwak 1995, pp 145–146) or may end up in breakdown.

The research reveals that the surveyed students were young members of society who will soon start their own families. Family according to W. Świątkiewicz (W. Świątkiewicz 1998, p. 9) is 'the smallest but at the same time the most important part of social life.' The surveyed students claimed that cohabitation relationships are required and as such should exist. It will be for them to decide whether to get married or live in cohabitation.

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