

From the Guest Editor

Dear Readers,

Life course research (e.g. Arnett, 2000; Brzezińska & Syska, 2016; Grotowska-Leder, 2019; Kohli, 1986; 2007; Kotowska, 2018; Leisering, 2004; Settersten, 2004; Szukalski, 2016; Walter 2006, Walther, 2009) has been on the rise since the early 1980s in the West and since the turn of the century also in Poland. The growing popularity of the life course perspective is associated with the transformation of industrial/modern societies into post-industrial/post-modern ones and the emergence of a new order. The normative life pattern typical of the industrial stage implies that the successive stages of life, i.e., youth, adulthood and old age, or time for study, work, family life and retirement, occur in chronological order. The life pattern internalised during the socialisation process and supported by the welfare state mechanisms was followed by subsequent generations, which made individual and family life stable and predictable. Biographies were structured around work and family life. Their standardisation promoted the well-being of individuals and societies (cf. Kohli, 1986; 2007). The next stage of social development, described as post-modern society based on individualism, social differentiation, liberalisation and emancipation as well as unpredictability and relativity (cf. Beck, 2002; Giddens, 2010) is characterised by the transformation of basic safety nets: the family, the labour market as well as welfare institutions. Transformation of family life forms, segmentation and deregulation of the labour market as well as the welfare state crisis shape different life conditions. Given a multitude of choices, risks and uncertainty, individual biographies get individualised and fragmented (Bauman, 2006; Beck, 2002). Key stages of life are subject to de-standardisation, deregulation and de-linearity. This concerns youth, adulthood, and old age, while transition from youth to adulthood becomes most problematic. The process

is prolonged, while attaining the social status of becoming an adult, i.e., completed education, stable employment, running a household and starting a family no longer occur in this order. The processes we are witnessing are shaking the biological and economic foundations of individual and social development. They are accompanied by a decrease in the birth rate, population ageing and lower productivity.

Against this backdrop, family support, and in the light of the current paradigm of social policy, investing in the family is gaining special importance. Despite the observed transformation, family is still the basic unit of human functioning. Protection of needs and support are provided within a family especially when other safety nets such as the labour market and state fail.

In this volume we present five articles on the functioning of contemporary Polish families. The studies were based on the papers presented in the plenary session entitled *Social investment as a sociological issue*, which was part of the programme of the international conference *Investing in families. Social policy and social practice in Central and Eastern Europe*, organised on April 24–26, 2019, by the Department of Applied Sociology and Social Work of the University of Lodz in cooperation with the Polish Committee of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and two sections of the Polish Sociological Association: the Section of Social Work and Section of Sociology of Family. The Conference was the 5th edition of *Investing in children & families* conference cycle. The aim of this edition was to discuss theoretical frameworks, research results, policy solutions and methods of professional work with families in Central and Eastern European countries in the framework of social investments. The interest was focused on activities of public and non-public bodies aimed at helping families with problems typical of their life-course stage, as well as families experiencing other issues. The meeting was an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience between researchers representing various disciplines such as sociology, demography, medicine, psychology, social policy and social work.

The opening article by Irena E. Kotowska is titled *On births and low fertility in Poland and family policy supportive of childbearing*. In the paper, the author covers the situation in Poland in terms of changes in birth rates and fertility, and also family policy reforms. Referring to numerous comparative studies on the fertility effects of various policy measures, she attempts to evaluate whether family policy reforms implemented since 2008 in Poland might be considered as supportive of demographic renewal. In the conclusion, she formulates a strong statement that panel research on family-related behaviours and childbearing decisions is needed to adequately evaluate the effects of long-term policies on demographic renewal.

In the next paper on *Investment in the family: is it beneficial in post-modern society?* Iwona Taranowicz tries to answer several important questions: ‘What are

the state's reasons for encouraging its citizens to start a family and have children? Is the family no longer attractive for individuals and if so, then why?' She analyses the reasons behind the failure of the governmental programme known as 'Family 500+' to encourage Poles to have more children. She concludes that today, the family ceased to be a 'life-long' institution. Still, its attractiveness has not diminished. People still build various forms of family relationships and when such relationships fail, they start new ones; because the family remains the basic community of feelings and intimate relationships, forming its core is the source of what is particularly valuable in the age of individualisation: emotional self-fulfilment.

In her paper *New, precarious adulthood: kidults in the 'crowded nest'*, which tackles the issue of kidults leaving their family nest, Mariola Bieńko offers an insight into one of the components of the process of transition to adulthood, which entails behaviours such as completing formal education, entering the labour market and taking on the first job, developing a relationship, and leaving the parental home. Following the definition of a kidult as a childless person aged 25–34 living with his or her parents, she applies a qualitative research method (IDI) to explain that young people navigate the multicultural world on their own, aiming at satisfying their needs. Some of the young adults who feel fully satisfied with temporality give themselves time to become adults. It is beneficial for them to be non-adults for as long as possible.

The next two papers focus on the role of the family as an important unit from the point of view of family members' health. The purpose of the first article *Family life as an area of emotional work and investments: an analysis from the perspective of sociology of mental health* by Monika Frąckowiak-Sochańska is to analyse and interpret family life as an area of individuals' emotional work and investments. Assuming that relationships within a family have an undeniable influence on the state of people's mental health, they can be a source of support as well as an emotional burden. The author uses meta-analysis of various sources of data and puts forward the thesis that living in a family entails both an emotional barrier and support. In this context, we should search for practical solutions to enable families to protect and strengthen the individual's mental health.

In her paper *Support for families in protecting the mental health of children*, Monika Wójta-Kempa discusses the determinants of effective assistance that can be offered to families experiencing mental health crises. She puts forward solutions in the field of prevention and mental health care for children and adolescents in relation to the family system. To achieve the best clinical results in the treatment of mental illnesses, medicine needs to conduct early identification and intervention within the patient's closest environment. Family members are the first group to witness an emotional crisis, behavioural disorders and other mental dysfunctions in children.

Therefore, parents/caregivers should have the necessary competencies to catch prodromal symptoms at an early stage, but also to properly assess their seriousness. In Poland, quick and coordinated actions are needed to support families in protecting children's mental health.

The last paper in the volume was prepared by Małgorzata Szyszka. The aim of the article *Transnational families in the light of the practice-based approach* is to address issues of migrant families. Being aware of the diversity of types of migratory families, in her analysis the author focuses on families with one migrant parent, i.e., non-co-residential parenthood. Using the practice-based approach, she examines the practices of transnational families in relation to the concept of 'doing' and 'displaying' families, a new paradigm of contemporary family studies developed by David H.J. Morgan and Janet Finch. She examines and points out which of the practices used in the transnational family are of particular importance in the context of socially acceptable patterns of family behaviour.

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