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DRUŽINE V VRTINCU POZNOMODERNIH DRUŽBENIH SPREMEMB

FAMILIES IN THE MAELSTROM OF LATE-MODERN SOCIAL CHANGES

Povzetek V članku so obravnavane značilnosti družinskega življenja v kontekstu poznomodernih družbenih sprememb in predstavljeni različni izzivi, s katerimi se družine srečujejo v vsakdanjem življenju (delitev družinskega dela, usklajevanje družine in dela idr.). Predstavljena so vprašanja s posebnim poudarkom na slovenskem kontekstu in posebnostih, kot so dobro razvite sorodstvene podporne mreže, tradicija zaposlitve žensk za polni delovni čas ipd. Avtorica obravnava nekatere značilnosti vojaških družin in izpostavlja, da bi morale raziskave o vojaških družinah upoštevati poseben odnos med vojaško organizacijo in družino ter tudi družbene okoliščine, ki so v zadnjih desetletjih bistveno spremenile družinsko življenje, ter predlaga vpeljavo koncepta družinske prakse.

Ključne besede *Družine, pozna modernost, starševanje, vojaške družine, Slovenija.*

Abstract This article deals with the characteristics of family life in the context of late-modern social changes, and presents various challenges that families are consequently facing in everyday life (among others, the division of family labour and the reconciliation of family and work). The author addresses these issues with a special emphasis on Slovenia, taking into account the specificities of the country. The main characteristics of military families are also presented. The author argues that research into military families should take into account the specific relationship between the military organization and the family, as well as the social circumstances that have shaped family life significantly in recent decades.

Key words *Families, late modernity, parenting, military families, Slovenia.*

Introduction Western societies have been experiencing significant transformations in family life for the past five decades, and the trends of pluralization of family forms and lifestyles challenge the idea of monolithic patterns of family life. According to family sociologists, these changes are so intense that the family has changed both structurally and in terms of form, and the changes are recognized as irreversible, resulting in a diversity of family life (Švab, 2001).

The aim of this article is to contribute a sociological explanation of these changes and their implications for military families. Just like all other family forms, military families have also been subject to these social changes, and it is therefore important to research how they have adapted to the new, late-modern social contexts. At the same time, I want to show that their specificities also need to be addressed and researched in order to identify their specific needs and the challenges and problems they face, especially in performing their vital social functions in everyday life.

In this article I claim that military families (where the military context influences the family life of all members) should be researched in concrete social contexts. In other words, both the particularities of military families and the general characteristics of late-modern family life are closely interconnected and should be researched as such.

At the same time it should be recognized that military families are not a monolithic social category, but are differentiated by various objective and subjective factors, primarily socio-demographic characteristics and the material circumstances in which they live, the family type, and also the type of employment one or both partners has within the military structure. From this perspective, I suggest applying the concept of family practices (Cheal, 2002; Morgan, 2011a, 2011b) which is already used in sociological research into family life; however, it has not been used in research into military families before. I see the concept of family practices as having great potential for offering an innovative way of researching aspects of everyday life which have not yet been studied, family dynamics, and the challenges that members of military families face.

When talking about everyday life, special attention should be paid not only to formal forms of support (specifically provided by the military organization, and also by the state institutions through family and social policy), but also to informal forms of support provided in everyday life in order to overcome the obstacles and challenges of modern life (in the sphere of family and work), e.g. various sources of paid (nannies, housekeepers) and unpaid services (grandparents, relatives, neighbours, friends). This is especially relevant for Slovenia, where previous research (Rener et al., 2006; 2008) has shown that strong kinship support networks play a key role in childcare, reconciling work and family responsibilities, and so on. It could be argued that, in the case of military families, such support is of extreme importance because of the specific nature and demands of military service, and that kinship networks may be a vital source of material, care and psychosocial support.

1   THE BROADER SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LATE-MODERN FAMILY LIFE: DEMOGRAPHIC AND FAMILY TRENDS

Changes in family life can be most systematically observed through official statistics. These are an established and internationally comparable means of measuring the current state of family life, as well as changes over several decades.

According to statistics in the field of demography and families, Slovenia can be placed in the group of Western countries (Švab, Rener, & Kuhar, 2012) that have the following trends: 1. pluralization of family forms and family life; 2. decreasing marriage rates and (slightly) increasing divorce rates; 3. decreasing (with slight increases in recent years) fertility rates etc.

Let us first look at these trends in general.

1. 1   Pluralization of family forms and ways of family life

In the first decades after World War II, the nuclear family (a married couple with children, with strict gender division of labour) was considered to be dominant, socially desirable and also functional, best-suited to industrial-modern society (Parsons, Bales, 1955). However, by the end of the 1960s these ideas gradually began to crumble because of the intense social changes of the time, which also influenced family life. The statistics increasingly showed new trends towards pluralization and diversity of family life. Over the next decades it became apparent that through pluralization the family had adapted to the new, late-modern social circumstances, thus proving how socially important and vital this social institution is (Švab, 2001). It turned out that the predictions about the collapse and crisis of the family (that were especially present in the 1970s) were completely wrong, and that diversity, also based on changes in family roles and the division of work in the family, has become a fundamental feature of late-modern family life.

Consequently, the so-called nuclear family has increasingly become only one of the family forms among several others, such as single parent families, reorganized families, same-sex families and so on. It should be stressed that sociologists of families in general and military family studies today recognize this fact, and that research focuses on different aspects of the lives of different military families in the new social circumstances (for an extensive up-to-date review of studies see Moelker et al., 2019a).

Official statistics on family types in Slovenia are, however, only available to a limited extent, as the official statistics did not collect data for all family types and some were added only recently (e.g. reorganized and same-sex families). Data on two-parent families (whether married or unmarried) and single-parent families have been collected since the 1981 Census.

The prevalent family form in Slovenia is still a married couple with children. However, its share is decreasing in favour of other family forms, mainly single-parent families and unmarried couples. The proportion of married couples with children in the structure of two-parent (married and unmarried couples) and single-parent families was 74.46% in 1991, decreasing to 55.26% in 2011, 52.25% in 2015, and 50.79% in 2018.

At the same time, there has been an increase in the proportion of unmarried couples with children (from 2.84% in 1991, to 14.41% in 2015 and 15.05% in 2018), and in the proportion of single parent families (from 22.71% in 1991 to 33.34% in 2015 and 34.20% in 2018) (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia – SORS).

According to data on family size and the composition of families, the number of family members has been decreasing in the last few decades, from 3.36 in 1971 (3.2 in 1981, 3.0 in 1991, 3.06 in 2002) to 2.9 in 2011 (the last available data) (SORS). In 2018 55% of the families had one child, and 36% had two children.

1. 2   Marital changes

Similarly to other Western countries, Slovenia is also experiencing significant changes in the area of marriage and divorce rates. The first important feature is an ongoing decrease in marriage rates as a consequence of the general decline in the social importance of marriage, a typical characteristic of late-modern Western countries, as well as the Slovenia-specific legal changes from 1976 that put married and unmarried couples in an equal legal position. In comparison to other European countries, Slovenia thus belongs to the group of those with the lowest marriage rates.

While there were 9.2 marriages per 1000 inhabitants in 1955, that number has been decreasing since 1970 (8.3 per 1000 inhabitants), through the seventies and the eighties (6.5 in 1980), and the nineties (4.3 in 1990 and 3.6 in 2000). According to the latest data from 2018, there were 3.5 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants (SORS).

Along with this trend, the age of women at first marriage is steadily increasing. In this respect Slovenia belongs to the group of (the majority of) Western countries where individuals are getting married later in their lives, while maintaining typical gender differences, i.e. men marry at a slightly older age than women. During the seventies the average age of women at first marriage remained approximately the same (23.1 in 1970 and 22.5 in 1975), but began to increase in the eighties (22.5 in 1980), and continued to increase throughout the nineties and in the first two decades of the new millennium (23.7 in 1990, 26.7 in 2000, 28.2 in 2005). According to the latest available data for 2018, the bride's age at first marriage is 30.5 years and the groom's is 32.6 years (SORS).

Another trend in this respect is the rising divorce rate, which has also been recorded in Western countries since the late 1960s. This trend is linked, among other things, to the mass entry of women into the labour market, through which they gained

financial independence and, consequently, more autonomy in decision-making about their lives. However, mass employment of women is certainly not the only reason. At least equally important are the changes in values brought about by the broader social changes of late modernity, including the democratization of relationships in the private sphere (see Giddens, 2000).

Here, the Slovenian situation is slightly different from that of other Western countries, since divorce rates have remained almost unchanged for decades. For example, there were 1.1 cases of divorce per 1000 inhabitants in 1965 and 1970, and 1.2 in 1975 and 1980. There was a slight decrease in divorce rates in the first half of the 1990s, which could be explained by societal transition and increased levels of social insecurity (e.g. increase in unemployment etc.). In 2000 the divorce rate increased again to 1.1 and to 1.2 during the second half of the 2000s, while it was again 1.1 in 2018 (SORS). Although the divorce rate in Slovenia is among the lowest in Europe, this does not necessarily mean that couples are not increasingly getting divorced. Since marriage rates are decreasing we could speculate that official statistics are not sufficient in completely assessing trends in divorce rates, especially as the statistics for unmarried couples (and consequently 'divorce' rates in this group) are not available.

1. 3   Changes in fertility rates

One trend that is similar to other Western countries is the steady decrease in fertility rates, which has been continual in the last few decades; Slovenia has one of the lowest fertility rates in Europe. While there was a decrease in total fertility rates during the fifties (from 2.80 in 1953 to 2.18 in 1960), the second half of the sixties found an increase (from 2.18 in 1960 to 2.48 in 1966), and the fertility rate was still relatively high in comparison with today's rates (SORS). In the second half of the sixties and during the seventies there was a trend of decreasing fertility rates (from 2.48 in 1966 to 2.21 in 1970, 2.16 in 1975 and 2.11 in 1980). The natural increase reached the negative point (i.e. more people died than were born) for the first time in 1993 (-0.1). The lowest fertility rates were in 1999 and in 2003 (1.2); however, we are now witnessing an increase in fertility rates in the second half of the present decade. In 2008 the fertility rate was 1.53, rising to 1.61 in 2018 (SORS).

This increase is predominantly due to delayed childbearing or the "tempo effect", i.e. an increase in fertility rates in the cohort of women who have been delaying the decision to have children until their late thirties and are now at the end of their fertility period. However, according to demographic and sociological estimates (Švab, Žakelj, 2008), this turn is only of a temporary nature and it may slow down or even decline.

One of the important changes in the life course of individuals is the postponement of various events in family life. Besides the already mentioned increase in age at first marriage, there has also been an increase in the age of women at first birth. In 1965 the average age of a mother at first birth was 26.2 years. Over the next ten years it decreased, reaching its lowest value in 1975 with an average of 22.8 years. Since

then it has been increasing. The average age of women at first birth during the first half of the 1990s was 24.3 years, and during the second half 25.6 years. In 2008, the average age was 28.4, and it even increased to 29.5 in 2018 (SORS).

The postponement of the birth of the first child is due to several reasons: a prolonged time spent in education, the insecure situation in the labour market along with high unemployment rates, and inadequate housing policies for young people, among other things.

There has also been an increase in the number of children born "out of wedlock". This share has been increasing for decades. While in 1954 only around one tenth of children were born outside marriage, in 2005 this proportion rose to 47%. During the 1960s and the early 1970s, the percentage did not essentially change; it even decreased; during the 1960s, 9.1% of children were born outside marriage, and in 1970 this figure was even smaller – 8.5%. These data suggest that during the 1960s the ideology of the nuclear family, which favoured marriage as a precondition of family life, was prevalent in Slovenia, much as in other Western countries. It began to lose importance in the 1970s – for example, in 1975, 10% of children were born outside marriage, while during the 1980s this percentage increased to 13.1. It has been increasing steeply ever since, to 46.7% in 2005. In 2007, for the first time, more than half of the births were out of marriage (50.8%), and according to the latest data the share of children born out of wedlock was 58.6% in 2016, though it decreased slightly to 57.7% in 2018 (SORS).

2   STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE FAMILY

Family sociologists agree that one of the key aspects of late-modern family change is the changing family structure, especially family roles and the division of family labour.

2. 1   Maternity

The family role that has changed the least is motherhood. This is partly due to the social (and ideological) construction of motherhood as the primary parental role, which remains a dominant parental role and also defines the way in which fatherhood is understood and carried out. This in turn affects the division of family labour, where women still take up most of the work – household and similar tasks, as well as caring for other family members (children, partners, elderly relatives etc.).

However, in recent decades this role has also undergone some important changes with regard to reproductive decisions. Young women spend more time in education, subsequently entering the labour market later in their life course, and they enter stable intimate partnerships and therefore form a family later. The ideology of (compulsory) motherhood is also changing and is less persistent, which can be seen in the gradual increase in the proportion of women who do not opt for parenthood at all.

2. 2   Fatherhood

In contrast to motherhood, fatherhood has been significantly more open to social change in recent decades. Family sociologists even talk about the new late-modern phenomenon of new or active fatherhood, thus characterizing the increasingly active role of fathers in caring for children as well as in sharing other family tasks (Rener et al., 2008).

However, studies in Slovenia also show that the division of family labour is not becoming more equal, and that fathers are participating only partially and conditionally, and are only involved in certain chores (e.g. playing with children, and taking over tasks that are less demanding and time-constrained) (see Rener et al., 2008). Fatherhood is more or less mediated through motherhood and it takes a supportive form. Thus, we can say that in Slovenia the dominant model of fatherhood is not an active fatherhood, but a model in which fathers participate and assist their female partners in child care, while women are expected to be the dominant parental figure (Rener et al., 2008).

Both subjective and objective factors can be found among those that influence the level of paternal activity, and although views on gender roles and gender equality have veered significantly in the past decades towards supporting equality, the fact remains that structural factors are those that most importantly frame paternal practices in everyday life. A more recent study on fatherhood in Slovenia (Hrženjak, 2016) further confirmed that the labour market and the position of an individual in the labour market influence how active fathers will be, and how intimate partners will coordinate obligations in the spheres of work and family.

It is worth mentioning that in Slovenia there is a specific culture of strong kinship networks, which – where available – provide an important support for parents, especially mothers, in their daily work-family reconciliation. This support primarily consists of daily or occasional childcare, services such as cooking and cleaning, and often also material and financial support, all provided mainly by grandparents (Rener et al., 2008).

2. 3   Division of family labour and reconciliation of work and family

The asymmetric division of labour is one aspect of structural change in the family where the shift is very difficult and very slow. Taking into account the fact that full employment of women in Slovenia is a tradition that did not change even during the transition period (in this sense, Slovenia did not follow re-traditionalization to the extent that some other post-socialist countries, e.g. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, did), one would expect that partners or spouses would share family work more evenly. However, as studies of the new paternity (Rener et al, 2008) note, there are not even many reasons for this. Although values have changed and today we find few people in favour of traditional gender roles, there are few changes in practice. Among the reasons for this, in addition to the already mentioned very

strong ideology of motherhood as a primary parental role, are less favourable labour market conditions, precarious employment, prolonged work schedules, and so on. Consequently partners are more likely to share family labour in a traditional way – men give priority to their careers, while women often adjust their careers to their family situation and requirements (Rener et al, 2008).

Women are therefore torn between two spheres, and a reconciliation of all requirements is thus understood to be a "women's problem"; there are few mechanisms to encourage shifts in the more structural dimensions of the gender division of labour and roles.

When we talk about military families, we can speak of an even more specific situation in which the family and the military organization simultaneously act as two greedy institutions, that is, institutions that have very high demands on family members (Vuga, Juvan, 2013; Hannola, 2019). Qualitative research on a sample of military families in Slovenia (Vuga, Juvan, 2013) found that both institutions are somewhat greedy, although the military organization is to a far greater extent, meaning that family life is subordinated to the requirements of the military organization in which one or both partners work.

2. 4 Childhood

Modern family life has brought about another significant change with respect to past generations: parenting and the perception of children and childhood. The main shift that has taken place is increasing child-centredness and the phenomenon of a protective childhood and the consequent intensification of the imperatives and norms of (good) parenting. With a protective childhood or child-centeredness (Švab 2001; 2017), a number of new requirements have emerged for parents in terms of child care. Sociologist Frank Furedi (2008) created the term "paranoid parenting" to highlight the effects of the extreme social pressures exerted on parents when it comes to child care.

It should not be overlooked that these burdens, although directed at parents in general, are also inevitably gender-based. The aforementioned ideology of motherhood as the primary parental role, together with the increasing imperatives of parenting, creates (social and psychological) pressures, primarily on mothers (Švab, 2017).

3 SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF MILITARY FAMILIES

In the analysis of military family politics and the specificities of military families, Moelker and colleagues (2019b) emphasized the importance of a comprehensive analysis of the relationships between the three involved institutions – the state, the military organization and the family – and therefore the interconnection of the macro, mezzo and micro levels of analysis. A comprehensive analysis is required as these levels are intertwined and interdependent, and families play an extremely important

role. It could be said that without its support, there would be no military success (Moelker, Rones and Andres, 2019b, p 10).

However, it should be noted that the relationship between the military family and the military organization has certainly changed dramatically in the past few decades, due to the fact that family life has undergone the series of aforementioned social changes and has radically altered, while the military organization has remained rather traditional (Raid, Kasearu, Truusa, 2019, p 87). Although much of the social change in late modernity (including family changes) is driven by the late modern form of reflexive individualism (Giddens, 2000), we should not think of the family as becoming an institution of alienated individuals who look only to their own needs. On the contrary, family in late modernity remains one of the most important communities and at the same time institutions, which (in general) meets the various needs of all its members, offers material and emotional support and shelter, and especially works as an equipoise of individualism (Švab, 2001). In this respect, we should also see military families as providing support to those family members who work in the military organization.

Studies on military families also point out and recognize that family is not a static unit (Moelker, Rones, Andres, 2019, p 5) and that family life is dynamic, constantly changing in the context of specific social circumstances. The relationship between the family and the military organization (following the theory of Norbert Elias) could be defined as "shifting networks of living, constantly growing/aging, and socialized people who constantly do and reconstruct the family and the military in an ongoing process" (Moelker, Rones, Andres, 2019, p 5). The emphasis here is not only on the institution, but vice versa, on the community, on the "formations/network/ relationship (figurations) of interdependent people who are, according to Elias, always characterized by the interweaving processes of shifting power balances" (Moelker, Rones, Andres, 2019, p 5).

As with all institutions, in the case of families and the military organization there are relationships in which different tensions arise, and therefore the relationships are always negotiated. Because of the specific nature of work in the military this may have negative effects on family relationships and various negative consequences for all the family members involved. These topics have been relatively well researched abroad, most often through individual studies of specific problems encountered in military families on the basis of tensions between the two institutions.

In this context, particular attention is paid to two areas. Firstly, to the typical patterns of ongoing tensions, negotiations, and redefinitions of relations between the family and the military organization, and also to the relationships between family members, i.e. to certain general and, for most military families, typical characteristics of family life, and the specific challenges and problems they face in everyday life due to the fact that one or both parents are employed in the military. The most important topics here are the following: reconciliation of work and family (for both partners); the

related division of family labour, family roles and responsibilities; gender relations; intimate partner relationships; the quality of relationships between family members; the challenges of parenting; the role of kinship and other (paid and unpaid) support networks, and so on. Secondly, attention is paid to military-specific problems (and factors), which certain families and individual family members are faced with (both in terms of health, family relationships etc.) and which require systematic support and available mechanisms to prevent and address these problems by various institutions. These problems range from intimate partner violence and conflict in general, and alcoholism and drug abuse, to specific problems that individual family members (especially children) face, divorce, suicide etc.

The analysis of the inter- and intra-family dynamics of military families above all highlights the following topics:

– Reconciliation of work and family and conflict between the family and the military organization (as well as the requirements of both institutions) (Anderson, Goldenberg, 2019; Hannola, 2019), especially during deployment (Pluut, Andres, 2019).
– Family support for a family member who is an employee in a military organization, and self-perception of the family as a "military family" (and the frequent rejection of this label) (Olsson, Olsson, 2019);
– Problems encountered by the spouse of a person employed by a military organization (Dursun, Wang, & Pullman, 2019);
– Analysis of the maintenance of family relationships and long-distance communication in the event of deployment (Andres, Moelker, 2019);
– Intimate partner violence and risk factors for violence (Siebler, Karpetis, 2019);
– Parenting in military families (Mogil, Paley, 2019);
– Family planning and the self-perception of a military employee as a parent (Reiter, 2019);
– Problems (e.g. stress) and pressures experienced in specific types of military families, such as single parent families, and the importance of support networks such as friends and family (Skomorovsky, Bullock, Wan, 2019).

Conclusion   In this article, I wanted to show how family life has gone through various important changes during recent decades, resulting in the pluralization of family forms and diverse family life. In my opinion, military families are no exception in this respect, so research into this subject must focus on the new circumstances in which the families and family members live. Nevertheless, military families have certain specific characteristics which arise from the fact that one or both of the intimate partners (and therefore parents) work in a military organization. Undoubtedly, this has important consequences for all family members and the relationships between them (including the intimate partnership, as well as parent-child relationships).

At the same time, military families, just like non-military families, get on with their ordinary everyday lives, which can establish certain tensions that family members must resolve on a daily basis as well as in the long run. In order to grasp

the specificities of military families and the general characteristics of late-modern family life, research should take into account both dimensions and study them as intertwined.

As previously mentioned, researchers of military families have already recognized the importance of understanding family life as changing and fluid, and one way to grasp the diversity, dynamics and changeability of (military) family life is, in my opinion, possible by the introduction of the concept of "family practices" (Cheal, 2002; Morgan, 2011a; 2011b), which "consist of all the ordinary, everyday actions that people do, insofar as they are intended to have some effect on other family members" (Cheal, 2002, p 12).

In family research this concept serves as a tool for us to explore what families and their members do in the family milieu, as well as in other social spheres (work, school etc.), and also the relationships between them, and above all what significance they give to the family and family life. This concept has already been used in concrete studies, for example, in studies of divorced family life, non-heterosexual intimate relationships, Muslim families in Southeast Asia, and studies of families in the hotel industry (Morgan, 2011b).

In this respect, I think it could be useful for researching military families, in order to identify specific patterns of practices, relationships between family members, and the problems and challenges they face in everyday family life, with particular attention to the specifics of military families, and how work in a military organization affects family life.

Research into family practices, however, should not focus only on the micro level of everyday life as such, but must inevitably be linked to the structural location of the family and structural inequalities (including intra-familial inequalities based on the asymmetric division of family labour). In doing so, it is also important to bear in mind that people in their daily lives do not merely reproduce existing patterns of behaviour and follow social norms and rules, but – and this is precisely the innovative approach to researching family practices – in everyday life they may continuously create new practices and strategies.

This allows us to pay attention to the specific family practices that members of (military) families carry out in everyday life, including sharing family labour (especially caring), reconciling family and work, challenges in parenting and upbringing, and so on. In this respect, particular attention can also be paid as to what extent families, through different family practices, adjust to the demands of the military organization.

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