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Care Issues in the Transnational Families. A Polish Research Review

Abstract: Polish culture is strongly linked to both nuclear family and family networks, which are believed to safeguard stability and sense of security for individuals and communities. The migrations of young Polish men and women, which often scope to entire families, significantly alter the fundamentals of the above guarantees. The migration of Polish youth changes social expectations, possibilities of a family existing in an unchanged form, as well as provisions of care to those who need it, primarily children and elderly members of the kinship structure. For families affected by temporary migrations and experiencing increasingly settlement-oriented mobility, being “on the move” becomes “a way of life,” in which periods of “togetherness” are intertwined with much longer phases of separation. The practices and strategies employed by migrants in the hopes of overcoming the aforementioned challenges require thorough analysis. Therefore, a main goal of our article is to focus on multi-dimensional consequences of migration that pertain to the changes of ties and relationships in families, as well as the organization of child and elderly care.

Keywords: transnational families, care dilemmas, Polish migrants, child care, elderly care.

Introduction

The intensified international mobility of Poles after 2004¹ significantly impacts the changes of social relations, as well as the functioning and continuity of families. Migrations cause a whole array of challenges which were not visible until recently.² They also highlight numerous social changes, tensions and conflicts connected with, among other issues, the phenomenon of transnational families, the deconstruction and reconstruction of families, family roles, organization of childcare (transnational parenting) and care for the elderly

¹ The findings from the 2011 *Polish National Census (Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań—NSP LiM2011)* show that 2.017 thousands of people normally registered as living in Poland have been abroad for longer than 3 months at the end of March 2011. Among them, 1.560 thousand people were abroad for 12 months or longer (77.5%). The proportion of emigrants against the Polish adult population (15 years of age and older) was 6.1% and the ratio against the general population was 5.2%. The census data illustrate that women not only migrate slightly more often than men (circa 52% of migrants are female), but they also are more likely to engage in long-term migrations. More broadly, those from the 20–39 age group are most likely to migrate (they constitute roughly 62% of all emigrants), and, importantly, this age corresponds with being at the stage of starting the family, as well as exploring the labor market—seeking work and establishing one’s occupational position (NSP LiM 2011).

² In their classic book *Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by Thomas and Znaniecki (1976) showed how migrations lead to a disintegration of family life.

(transnational caregiving), as well as emotional and educational problems among migrant (and returning) children. The transformations occurring in Poland are embedded in the diagnosis of postmodern families which Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim proposed to call “global families” (2013).

As Polish culture values family networks, and believes that a strong family is crucial for the stability of both the individual and the community, the recent migration trend of young Polish men and women is challenging the previously held notions of what components must be present to create a safe and thriving environment for all generations of the modern Polish family unit. As social expectations change, a family’s approach and needs will change as well, creating adjustments to previous norms with regard to child and eldercare. Migrations, temporary separations, and re-integration issues are inherent in a family with a constantly shifting shape, and worthy of exploration through sociological, historical, and even psychological lenses. The main goal of our research is to focus on the multi-dimensional consequences of migration pertaining to changes in kinship relationships, as well as the organization of child and elderly care.

Social Relationships and Migration. Transnational Families

A clear concept of social relationships is crucial for the analyses presented here, as it constitutes a basis and an overarching frame for more specific and detailed investigations. Its sociological use encompasses all types of connections found among people, which might be equated to an idea of individual’s identification with a social group, and is often highlighted as an opposition to the notion of individualization (Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 99). It goes beyond the simplicity of linking individuals to a type of a superior entity but rather means the transformative potential that can be seen neither as a straightforward summation of traits found among individuals, nor equated with characteristics of the emerging structures. These definitions are also applicable to the core nature of family ties, especially their communitarian and interactive character. Seen as a natural community, a model of an altruistic “company” and the first training grounds for reaching a decision according to the will of an entire community, a family has constituted a key entity for studying and understanding both the individual success and means for creating public good (Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 186).

With regard to migration, some of the pull factors that affect the decisions of Polish citizens include an international labour market, lower degree of social control, as well as welfare system’s instruments, which comprise more numerous health and financial benefits, additionally greater in quality or value and comparably more accessible abroad than in Poland. Awareness of international differences that affect a family’s standing expectedly generates apposite and deep changes within family practices and family patterns. In order to grasp the transformations within families affected by migration, as well as broader mobility’s impact on private life, a transnational perspective is increasingly used. A transnational lens seeks to underline a significance of globalization processes for individuals, families and other groups. It also portrays lives that could not be captured under the traditional assumptions about the definite and uni-directional

nature of migration (Faist 2000; Levitt, Jaworsky 2007; Vertovec 2012, 2009; Glick-Schiller et al. 1995, 2009; Ryan, Sales, Tilky, Siara 2009; Pustulka 2012; Muszel 2013; Krzyżowski 2009). A transnational paradigm allows for showing migration-driven conflicts, tensions, and the disintegration of families, yet concurrently shows mobility as a force creating the potential for plentiful successes and new resources which benefit families.

Transnational families are defined as “sustained ties of family members and kinship networks across the borders of multiple nation states,” (McCarthy, Edwards 2011: 187) which encompass varied processes, practices, as well as activities and strategies in everyday life. The listed actions take place both on an individual level (e.g. contacts with neighbours and local community), and institutionally. In this understanding the processual character of a family is foregrounded and determines its facets as “doing” and “displaying” family in a practice-centred manner (Finch 2007). Consequently, it cannot be said that something “is” a family, but rather that families are undergoing a constant process of “becoming” and “doing” family (Finch, *ibid.*). Family is broadly understood as including not only parents and children, but also grandparents, aunts and uncles, or other relatives. Thus, families are increasingly featured not as an institution, but as parenthood understood as caring for their offspring and those in need, perceived as physical, emotional and intellectual work—the work which is carried out due to the intermediation of the culture, economic conditions and the state policy (Hryciuk, Korolczuk 2015: 13–14). Further, Anna Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz (2015: 206) emphasises that

care is a broad term including both the physical care, also that devoid of any personal relation between the caretaker and the charge, and the emotional care, where such a relation is indispensable. This is a practice composed of various factors: time, money, knowledge and skills, as well as social relations and emotions. Care, as part of a broader network of relations over the entire lifespan, assumes reciprocity and co-relation. It is also a relational notion, which means that it is based on a family context, but within a broader social dimension as well, hence it constitutes a part of social tissue that is necessary for its development.

A geographic separation does not necessarily mean that families are disorganized but is nevertheless a probable reason for a reorganization or a restructuring of resources in a manner that allows for protection of its uninterrupted functioning and durability. Again, a transnational family is not only a place for constant fights and distance, but also a space and source of success for all kin members (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002: 25, 63–82). The experiences of transnational families show how the maintenance of family ties and bonds takes place, how family roles are redefined (e.g. by non-co-residential motherhood/fatherhood), and how those changes further influence the wider kin and local communities.

Due to the processual character of the (de)construction of family ties as a consequence of economic/labour migration, several configurations of the analytic category of interest here occur in the course of the migration stories (Danilewicz 2010; Urbańska 2011; Muszel 2013; Fuszara, Kurczewski 2012). Hence, we can differentiate transnational families without children, families with small, nursery age children, as well as those with preschool and school age children, who implement various migration strategies. One of such strategies assumes (temporary, circular) migration of one family mem-

ber while the rest of the family (second adult and children) stay behind in Poland. Over the years, the person to migrate might alternate with the member of the family in taking care of the children. When both parents occasionally migrate together, children may “temporarily” fall under the direct care of grandparents or relatives, and, marginally, even the neighbours. In time, it may become possible for the children to join their parents (or one of them) in the receiving country, or—alternatively—a return migration takes place. Three key issues are worth emphasizing here. First, the configurations listed above can be temporally executed in varied orders. Secondly, children play a key role in the parents’ choice of the migration strategy. Thirdly, it is where the children actually stay (with one of the parents, with grandparents or with other caretakers), in either the sending or the receiving country, that determines the primary location of the family life—its centre-stage.

Using the example of a study conducted on Polish migrant families in Ireland, Małgorzata Muszel (2013) presented a course of such a process-driven creation of a transnational family. Muszel distinguished three phases, with the first defined as “pre-transnational” (with either a man or a woman migrating first). During this phase, the migration decision results predominantly from material (financial) than the emotional needs. As the primary family providers, who operate within the salient gender orders responsible for the family’s well-being, it is mostly men that emigrate. Women’s migration decisions are also strongly motivated by the established gender roles, especially by the culturally ingrained notions around motherhood. The most prominent doubts and dilemmas among women are connected with the potential abandonment of the children back in the country of origin. This is paired with a firm conviction that they need to arrange for supplemental female assistance prior to their departure if they are to facilitate the transition and smooth running of the house for the man and the children left behind. The next phase in a transnational family formation is called “transnational” and occurs when a migrant’s attention is focused on “things back home,” evoking a sense of guilt caused by migration and leaving the family behind. In the case of female migrants, their financial independence and self-esteem are seen to increase (f.e. [Urbańska 2015](#); [Małek 2010](#)). Paradoxically, men’s status appears to be less altered, as they fulfill their role of family provider, head of the family and father in a similar scope and realm. The evidence suggests that migrants in this stage declare their stay abroad to be a temporary situation, with a return home planned for a moment immediately after their (less precisely denoted) goal has been accomplished. The third phase is defined as “post-transnational,” expressed by a stressful, yet joyful experience of a family reunification. The members of the family resume a stable life together, building a new life in a new country, still never quite rejecting the thought of returning to their home country one day ([Pratt 2012](#)).

Other foreign and Polish studies develop family typologies based on the criterion of the migrating subject (father *versus* mother, [Parreñas 2005: 68](#); [Urbańska 2012](#); [Małek 2012](#); [Danilewicz 2010](#); [Fuszara, Kurczewski 2012](#); [Pustułka 2011, 2012](#)), in accordance with socio-demographic backdrops, the length of time spent abroad, and so forth. The distinctions are also drawn on the issue of the families separated either temporarily or permanently and the effects of migration on their family life ([Danilewicz 2010](#); [Dziegiel 2013](#)), the strength

of the family relationship and satisfactory performance of the family group,³ as well as the type and structure of the family⁴ (Danilewicz 2010).

Transnational Care

Importantly, transnational families are like other families that operate in a single geographic space with regard to experiencing tensions and conflicts. Transnational care occurs when:

[...] people live across and care across the borders of nation-states. As each type of care, transnational care is not easy; the ability and commitment to transnational caregiving is limited by time, a phase of a family life, health care, and the other sources of caregiving and professional duties, as well as cultural preferences and expectations [...] Transnational care has to deal with visa restrictions and regulations of a migration policy, differences in access to telecommunication infrastructure and a health care system between the countries, as well as expensive travel and communication, and the consequences for employment (Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding 2007: 3).

According to Jørgen Carling, however, inner asymmetries are inherent to transnational migrations and their immobile partners in the sending society (Carling 2008: 8). This has significant implications with regard to the scope of evaluating migrants' engagement in family life (and family's social security) in the country of origin. For instance migrants may feel proud and expect social esteem on the grounds of remitting money, while the non-migrants left-behind may deem the exclusively monetary transfers as insufficient engagement in the family and community life. Similar discrepancies can be observed in the area of communication. Bi-laterally positioned transnational actors—migrants and their spouses remaining in the sending community—may feel frustrated with a lack of information about what is happening “on the other side.” The fears appear greater on the end of the relatively immobile members of transnational families, as they rarely regularly visit their relatives in their place of residence abroad. Disproportion related to the information flow leads to gossip about migrants' lives. The two outlined asymmetries (regarding engagement and communication flows) cause transnational inequality. According to Carling the financial and social remittances between migrants and non-migrants are never balanced.

In addition, an asymmetry engrained in gender and power relations is more visible in transnational families. Rhacel Parreñas delineates two ideal types of transnational households. The first type—*Father-Away Family*—comprises a migrant man and a woman who stays home. Fulfilling his traditional role of a breadwinner, a male in this model expects his wife to fully commit to raising a family (Parreñas 2005: 68). Simultaneously, that man's capacity to secure financial provisions relieves him of any responsibility for the emotional safety of the household's members. The second type of transnational households—*Mother-Away Family*—differs in a sense that migrant mothers, according to Parreñas' results, delegate care for their children to their female relatives. While migrant men usually do not partake in child-rearing activities, migrant women fulfil their traditional role of a caregiver from a distance (Parreñas 2005: 103). This alternative scenario of mothering is found

³ a) family structurally disintegrated, b) family emotionally disintegrated, c) family with a disturbed type of community, d) family community separated spatially, e) family community of emotional type.

⁴ a) married couples without children; b) married couples with children; c) partners/cohabiters with children; d) partners without children; e) single mothers with children; f) single fathers with children.

among female migrants who engage in a range of activities aimed at securing both financial and emotional safety for their children. Parreñas concludes that migrant mothers often have to, for instance, remind their children about the economic needs of the family that may only be fulfilled through migration. From looking at their children's narratives, a majority of Parreñas' respondents could be classified as "super mums" and routine communication with children ensures that a mother can to a certain degree feel present in their everyday lives (*ibidem*). Therefore, despite physical distance, migrant mothers continue to perform the roles traditionally ascribed to their sex.

In the last decade, the phenomenon of transnational care for the elderly in a sending country has become an important issue in the area of migration studies. Research in this area has been presented in several important monographs (see Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding 2007; Landolt and Da 2005; Mason 2004; Zechner 2006; Krzyżowski and Mucha 2014). Most of them contain empirically grounded analysis of multiple patterns and strategies of maintaining ties of kinship, despite (sometimes even substantial) geographical dispersion. Migrants, in the transnational context, negotiate the scope of intergenerational relationships, opportunities and forms of care for their parents living in the sending country. Although the direct practice of short-term support of elderly parents in daily activities (in different areas: home, office, healthcare facilities) is difficult, other forms of mutual aid, for example, telephone contact, advice, and emotional support are certainly possible. By examining transnational care we should pay special attention to such characteristics as distance, resources (ability to carry out transnational care), the circumstances, and different cultures of care (both in host and sending communities, Zechner 2006). The geographical distance between those who provide care and those who receive support seems to be important, but it is not the crucial component of the definition of transnational care. Cohabitation of parents and their adult children, near and far distance, are the factors that determine the different possibilities and forms of care both for adult children and their parents who can take care of grandchildren.

Therefore, how it is possible to care for an elderly person in the context of international labour migrations? A fragmentary picture of how this care can be organized emerges from various studies. Much depends on the culture of care and the systems in place in the exact nation states, or even local communities. The results of research can be roughly divided into two categories: emotional experience and practices. The first category includes emotional issues, what Hochschild calls managing of emotions. Loretta Baldassar (2008) based on her research on the transnational space between Australia and Italy and has generated an analytical model of co-existence of migrants in lives of their elderly parents, including four types of transnational care management. The first type includes virtual participation through the use of new communication technologies. The simultaneous presence by "replacement," the second type, is accomplished indirectly through objects (pictures, items, letters), and people. The third type is physical coexistence, the possibility of contact with the absent family member. The last type is imaginary coexistence, through prayers, thoughts, memories. The second category includes socio-cultural practices associated with care. In the case of migration they are mostly mediated. Based on the few studies on these practices, we can analytically distinguish the following types of mediated care, which can be divided into synchronous and asynchronous practice. Synchronous practices include, for example,

sending money dedicated to care, sending parcels, supplying medicines, paying bills, and giving advice. Asynchronous practices relate to a situation where at the time of arrival, migrants help parents, and in a very short period of time try to catch up and to somehow implement a number of caring practices such as arranging medical appointments, cleaning the home thoroughly, teaching new communication technologies, buying new equipment for the household, helping in shopping for everyday objects and non-perishable foods, and consulting.

Children in Migration Families

By analyzing the consequences of the parental migration to the children⁵ the most important issue is, in the constructionist terms (Burr 2015), the frame in which the discourse is created. Two dominating models can be distinguished in the discourse, applied to explain the family and the upbringing situation of those growing up in migration families. Since the key differentiating factor is the inevitability (or a lack thereof) of certain negative consequences occurring in children as a result of their parents' migration, those models can be assigned to two broad categories: determinist or indeterminist.

The most controversial example is a deterministic "euro-orphans" discourse. In this largely moral-panic type of framing, the number of children left to their own devices or state's care when parents leave to another country is debatable, but most frequently the estimations pointed to about 110 thousand, 100 thousand, 290 thousand or even 400 thousand (see e.g. Walczak 2008, 2010; Łaszyn 2008; Łuka 2008). The parents' migration is essentially treated as pathology or, at the very minimum, as a phenomenon potentially dangerous for the proper development of children and adequate functioning of the family, including a causal line being drawn between spouse's migration and divorce (Boćwińska-Kiluk, Bielecka 2008; Kozak 2010; Gabryś 2009; Młyński, Szewczyk 2012; Piekut-Burzyńska 2013). The assumption considered fundamental here pertains to the functionalist belief that a family can only operate well if their members are together (Domaszuk 2004). The latter holds for migration of either parent, however, a mother's migration is definitely evaluated in a much harsher manner (Czykwin 2009). Quite rarely in these debates is any attention turned to the social-economic context of migration or its duration, the frame is based instead on moral assessments. The widespread stigmatization of migration families, having more institutional (preschools, schools, outpatient clinics, experts and consultants) than individual (case/experience-based) roots, leads to a strong exclusion of such children from the *a priori* assumed normalcy and the difficult process of overcoming one's "otherness." The notion of "social orphanage" referred to in the discourse is a very strong and defin-

⁵ Beginning an analysis of the problems which might be troubling children in migration families, or—more broadly—of their situation, one should note a lack of a precise definition of 'children of migrants' as a coherent group. Beata Boćwińska-Kiluk and Elżbieta Bielecka (2008: 48–49) suggest the following division. First, in consideration of the age and time of experiencing migration, one can differentiate children that currently experience their parents' migration and adults whose parents migrated in their childhood. Secondly, based on the functional criterion, children can be divided into those who function well and those displaying some type of disturbed behaviour. Another division into groups refers to the parents' migration type: children of refugees, of the deported, emigrants, immigrants or repatriates.

ing term,⁶ positions the parents, especially migrant mothers, among deviants, and bearers of "social evil" (Urbańska 2009, 2015). This perspective overlooks perception of a family as a cooperating group (Giza-Poleszczuk 2007), analysing the consequences of migration viewed only in the aspect of absent parents—abandoned children, while ignoring or even questioning the significance of an extended family (Walczak 2008a, b).

The indeterminist model assumes that the consequences of migration depend on a combination of risk factors (including also those associated with a child's personality) and environmental resources (Boćwińska-Kiluk, Bielecka 2008). Migration itself is described as a potential threat, while the situation of the family and the bonds between its members are of key importance (Danilewicz 2010). Thus, it allows for multifarious understandings and various forms of executing and implementing migration over the family life-cycle, and means that positive consequences of mobility are not improbable (Kawczyńska-Butrym 2009). The research indicates an enormous significance of the time factor: the longer the separation, the more problems in the relations between the married couple/partners, as well as between parents and their children (Gromadzka 2008). On the other hand Urbańska (2015) shows that if the relationship between parents and children is based on honesty and trust we can witness (by elder children) the support of parents' decision and help by family management.⁷ In summation, the actual consequences also depend largely on the type of migrating family. Parental and upbringing problems occur most frequently in families where the family relations were disturbed before migration. The migration itself, although creating a risk situation, does not preordain the same to take place. Adopting this kind of more flexible approach to parental migration, the empirical studies enable identification of the positive effects of migration. One of the paramount beneficial consequences is an improvement of the family's financial situation and enhanced living standard, as well as provision for a financial security of the children's future (Młyński, Szewczyk 2012). Expansion of the children's educational chances and opportunities could be seen as another indirect effect of migration. Last but not least, the period of migration, although a difficult time for the family, can also ultimately benefit the kinship structure, with positive effects on its structure, division of labour and responsibilities, as well as its coherence (Krasnodebska 2008).

⁶ The term is—which needs to be emphasized—unacceptable in any description of the phenomenon as the children in question absolutely cannot be fittingly classified as orphans (Kolankiewicz 2008: 81; Szczygielska 2013; Walczak 2008a: 159). Stanisław Kozak assumes that the term defines as a situation when at least one of the parents migrates abroad. A similar explanation can be found, among others, in the *Information Bulletin* issued by the Ombudsman for Children (2008), which reads "The phenomenon of 'euro-orphanhood' is becoming increasingly visible although it still remains unknown to the larger circles of the society. Psychologists define 'euro-orphanage' as a situation of children left behind in the country by parents emigrating abroad (...), as they believe that children deprived of a permanent contact with even one of the parents feel like orphans." Nonetheless, it is worth noting the revisions in the definition of the said phenomenon as proposed by MEN (Poland's Ministry of Education), the suggested changes referring to the conceptualization contained in the study ordered by the Ombudsman for Children and completed in 2008. MEN claims that "the term of 'euro-orphanage' shall be understood as a situation where the parent/parents' labour-migration results in a disorder affecting performance of the basic functions of the family, such as ensuring continuity of a child's/children's socializing process, emotional support for a child and cultural transmission."

⁷ Urbańska presents among others narratives concerning situation when migration is the border situation, the escape from the domestic violence. If the children understand the situation, they can be supportive for (usually) their mothers.

Children's Issues Associated with Parents' Migration As Seen from Pedagogical and Psychological Research Perspectives

This section tackles the most important consequences of family separation by migration of one or both parents. Before we present the possible consequences of parents' migration, we would like to stress the two phases in researching the topic. In the first phase (ca. 2007–2010), the migrant children discourse was conducted in the already mentioned “euro-orphanhood” frame. The prevailing works from that time, as well as the press discourse (e.g. [Boćwińska-Kiluk, Bielecka 2008](#); [Kozak 2010](#)) were concentrated on potential negative influence of parents' (especially mother's) absence on a child, even if the second parent was at home (e.g. [Walczak 2008a, b](#)). The significant research findings presenting a more complicated picture and stressing the role the extended family plays or investigating the relationships within the family ([Walczak 2008a, b](#); [Danilewicz 2010](#); [Krasnodębska 2008](#)) were not present in the public discourse. The second phase (from 2010) is characterized by more diverse argumentation and questioning this very strong moral judgement of migrant families. We witness also the process of reunification of migrant families (by return of—more probably—migration of all members of the household, [Ślusarczyk, Slany 2016](#); [Ślusarczyk, Pustułka forthcoming](#)). The research studies stress also the varied motivations of migration decision (e.g. already mentioned domestic violence cases, [Urbańska 2015](#) or other forms of family disintegration [Kawecki et al. 2015](#)) as well as the positive consequences of migration and the ways families manage the time of separation ([Kawecki et al. 2015](#); [Brzezińska, Matejczuk 2011](#)). The other research area focuses on the possible and real activities of social support system and school ([Kawecki et al. 2012](#)). It is also important to take into account the situation of the family and the support possibilities by diverse social institutions and local community by analysing the influence of parental migration on children which we distinguish into the four areas.

The first area constitutes the issues combined with family relations and disruption to the continuity of the upbringing process. Some of the effects of parental absence that must be foregrounded include: missing the absent parent, anger, sadness, longing, a sense of abandonment and loneliness, especially when both parents are away and the child might be feeling guilty. The latter is due to the fact that they receive a message (though never expressed directly) that the parent/parents migration was in fact meant for his/her good and benefit ([Pawlak 2012](#)). A frequently overlooked difficulty is that migrants' children have to work out an explanation of the family decisions all by themselves, and their reactions can range from rationalization to the earlier-mentioned idealization of the absent/returning parent, to accusations and the rejection of the unworthy migrant parent from one's life ([Kostrubiec 2009](#)). Negative phenomena, albeit of different type, include the process of taking on the adult roles—substituting for parents in the capacity they cannot serve from abroad ([Kolankiewicz 2008](#); [Młyński, Szewczyk 2012](#)). This often unwanted yet sometimes unavoidable commitment forces precocious maturity and shortened childhood.⁸ The most

⁸ Simultaneously, these grown-up-like behaviours and traits are often regarded as constitutive for a positive mechanism whereby a child adapts to the new situation. Such positive mechanisms further include implementation of task-oriented strategies (discussion of the problem with friends to find viable solutions together, studying, talking to one's parents, reading books that might contain solutions, a visit to a psychologist, [Piekut-Burzyńska 2013](#)).

serious consequence in this case is informal or even formal disintegration of the family (Becker-Pestka 2012; Krasnodębska 2008) and brings about changes affecting the entire life of the child.

The second area, we can distinguish, is of psychophysical kind. Main demarcated areas showcase emotional, cognitive and behavioural shortcomings. Stress, yearning, as well as a need for closeness and affinity with the absent parent or parents, which sometimes cannot be satisfied by other people, may even yield psychosomatic reactions and result in health problems. A feeling of the “otherness” can be conducive to a search for groups that would help them regain the lost sense of security and (even illusory) belonging, bringing about a higher risk of association with the so-called bad company or even entering groups of a sect type (Pikuła 2009). Other ways of coping with the difficult situation is the use of psychoactive substances or alcohol, early sexual initiation (primarily in search of propinquity), or even—although definitely less frequently—deviant and criminal behaviour (Boćwińska-Kiluk, Bielecka 2008; Kozerańska 2008; Radochoński 2000; Walczak 2008a, 2008b, Kawecki et al. 2015).

Special attention is directed to the third area—the educational and upbringing problems in children from migration families, namely reduced self-control, problems with concentration, school negligence, deterioration of the school performance and poor grades, habitual absence from school and truancy, lowered motivation for school work, failure to complete homework (Boćwińska-Kiluk, Bielecka 2008; Walczak 2008b, 2010). Another problem could be a diminished respect for authority (lack of discipline) combined with aggression displayed against schoolmates and/or themselves by way of self-inflicted injury. In this and previous areas the support of the school and teachers is very important, but as the research shows the parents rarely inform school staff about the migration and ask for support during the time of separation (Kawecki et al. 2015).

Legal issues create the fourth area of migration consequences: the issues pertinent to care for children and decision-making in matters regarding the child, that is the execution of parental custody and guardianship in its legal dimension. It is extremely important to regulate the issue, especially when both parents or the sole custodian migrate. Unfortunately in the context of the stigmatising discourse regarding “euro-orphans” and migrating parents, it is very rare that parents lodge a voluntary motion requesting a court decision to resolve the matter. Moreover, some parents are not aware of the potential consequences of any negligence in that respect. Notably, without the consent of either the parent-custodian or legal guardian, medical assistance can be given to a child only in specifically defined situations, and in some cases it is a guardianship court that needs to issue their consent,⁹ but this issue is well regulated. More problems arise as far as child’s education is concerned, e.g. ensuring that the child adheres dutifully to his/her school or preschool schedules, and enrolling a child to a suitable school facility. Exercising the right to raise the child in agreement with a given value system (e.g. enrolling the child in religion classes),¹⁰ or applying for a minority language exam (according to art. 13 of the same Act) are just some examples of matters and decisions that remain within the exclusive competence of parents or legal guardians,

⁹ The December 5, 1996 Act on the profession of medicine doctors and dentists, published in the Official Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2011 no. 277, It. 1634, art. 32, par. 2, 3, 8; art. 34, par. 3.

¹⁰ Official Journal of Laws (Dz.U.) of 2013 It. 827.

no *bona fide* custodians are consulted or heard in the cases germane to such decisions. In that case, the only possibility is a court's decision suspending the parental authority in view of a transient obstacle in its execution and appointment of a legal custodian (pursuant to art. 149 of Poland's family and guardianship code, [Szczygielska 2013](#); [Zielińska 2008](#)).

The risks of the occurrence of disorders and a determination of their type vary greatly. The main prognostications are the age of the child and the phase in the family's migration life-span ([Boćwińska-Kiluk, Bielecka 2008](#)). The situation is most difficult for the children who, because of their parents' emigration, fall under the custody of strangers or educational-care centres (foster homes).¹¹ While the consequences of separation are arguably easy to foresee in general, they are nevertheless difficult in reference to making advanced plans, anticipating adequate reactions and drafting specific ways to effectively move forward in providing the child with meaningful help.

Migrants and Their Elderly Parents—Forms of Caregiving

The negative and positive effects of international migrations also apply to older members of a transnational family. Migration reshapes not solely the childcare, parenting and guardianship practices, but also the care provisions with respect to elderly parents. Migration influences older adults in many ways. Not only do they migrate when they retire but also just before retirement age, for example to take care of their grandchildren living abroad ([Bargłowski, Krzyżowski and Świątek 2015](#)). Even if they do not migrate themselves, their personal social network might include children or friends who live in another country who change the older people's lives through financial and social remittances. On a macro level, this may lead to modifications in care culture. The system transformations resulting from the migration of adult children, rather than occurring independently, overlap with the following processes: demographic (e.g. low fertility rate), socio-cultural (e.g. the changing role of women in society; emancipation) and economic (e.g. the emerging private market for elderly care). Migration intensifies transformations in the care model leaning toward greater commercialisation and privatisation of care services while concurrently sustaining family responsibility ([Perek-Białas, Raław 2014](#)).

Despite the lack of statistics on the international migration of the elderly, the very fact that about 231 million people (usually of working age) migrate ([United Nations 2013](#)), invites us to reflect on the impact of the migration of adult children on the living situation of their elderly parents. Looking at issues related to the care for elderly parents in the context of spatial mobility is particularly interesting. The need for caregiving is an important process of organization of a transnational family life, including its members in an informal exchange system of care and support—transnational caregiving—working across borders of nation states. This issue is increasingly visible in the public discourse in Poland (and other Eastern European countries) and, similarly to the analyses regarding transnational

¹¹ Nonetheless, according to the estimates (see [Walczak 2008b](#), information of Poland's Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for 2008 and subsequent years), the share of such children in the total number of migrant parents' children was and is extremely small. Still, it is unsurprisingly this group of children that are very much in jeopardy of falling victim to various disorders ([Kolankiewicz 2008](#)), which even the best organized care cannot guarantee to prevent.

parenthood, it appears submerged in the atmosphere of moral panic. The reason for concern lies in the uncertainty regarding who is responsible for taking care of elderly parents. It is embedded in the debates on the two entangled and mutually reinforcing conditions, namely the adult children's migration and settlement abroad on the one hand, and the ineffective public institutions tasked with providing care for the elderly in Poland on the other. Little research has thus far been conducted in Poland on the topic of transnational care over elderly parents in migrants' family realms.

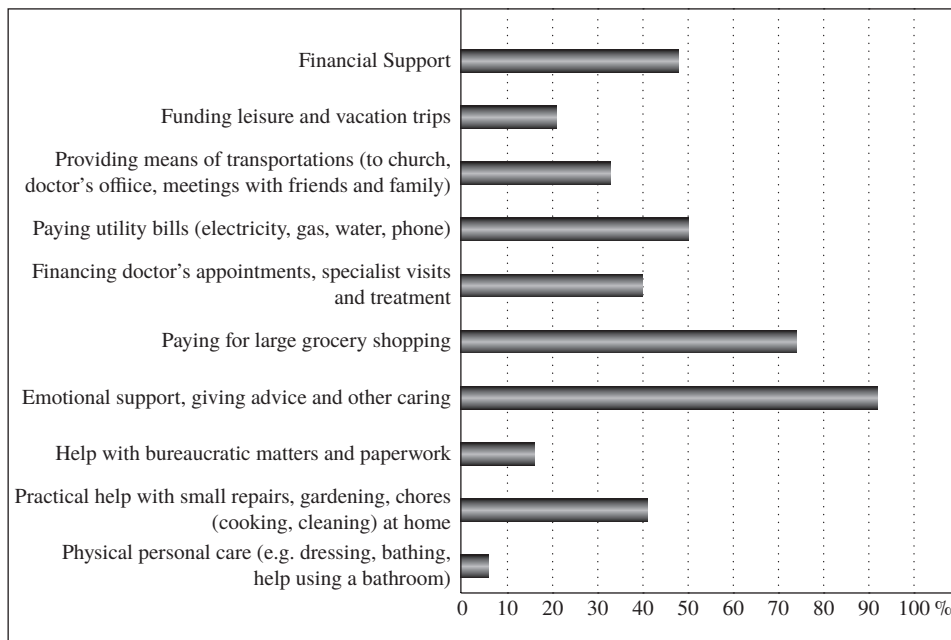
In his study, Łukasz Krzyżowski (2013)¹² turns to the transnational perspective which enables observation of numerous practices exercised in the care of elderly parents. As highlighted by Krzyżowski, it is absolutely essential to disqualify stereotypes regarding the care of elderly people in the context of migration of their adult children. First, intergenerational transfers are not one-directional and not always necessary—it is equally frequent that parents help their children working abroad, and not all elderly parents require provision of intensive care or support. Secondly, one should not forget the dynamics of such obligations at various stages of a transnational family's life. Thirdly, in the case of labour-migration and the related migrants' contact with a different system of elderly care, obligations towards elderly parents (and ways of their execution) undergo modification but do not disappear. All the same, obligations modified in various ways require implementation of social practices of remittances of a new type.

An analysis of the migrants' care over their elderly parents should begin with a description of the earlier-mentioned support provided by parents to their children from the start of their migration history. As found by Krzyżowski, during the initial months of emigration, parents mainly support their children financially, and later on it is common that they supply the very much needed care for small children. Availability of free domestic care is a valuable resource, translatable into an economic value in a situation when migrants do not have to give up work or finance private childcare in order to safeguard care for their children. Qualitative research shows that, first and foremost, grandparents take care of their grandchildren temporarily during the migrants' temporary holiday stays in Poland. Further, in some cases a child was brought to Poland and left under the care of grandparents (usually—grandmother's care) for longer periods of time when the child's mother worked temporarily abroad. Therefore, it is generally quite difficult to determine the country where the child is actually raised. The frequency of "grandmothers' childcare migration" to their grandchildren's countries of residence and the length of their stay in those countries is more or less similar to that of migrants' children "migration to Poland towards being in grandmother's care" in the parents' country of origin.

As follows from Krzyżowski's research (see Fig. 1), when parents need care, assistance provided by migrating children is in accordance with three schemes of support and remittances, determined in consideration of their degree of transformation effected in the Polish culture of care, sourced and available locally. Those include: a) practices which, despite migration, are exercised in the same scope by migrants and the relatively non-mobile

¹² This section of the study uses selected fragments of Krzyżowski's book (2013), edited to suit the focus of the article.

Fig. 1

Forms of Remote Care Over Elderly Parents

Source: The authors' own work based on research completed by Łukasz Krzyżowski (2013).

members of the family network, including instances of emotional support, advising/counselling, search for required legal or healthcare information, offering different services, running errands, etc.; b) practices which are subject to modification in transnational spaces, such as: monitoring the parents' daily life by means of Skype (e.g. making appointments for visits at the doctor's), shopping on the Internet, financing the services of a person providing direct assistance to the parents in everyday chores, such as cleaning and cooking, electronic payment of home bills; c) new practices resulting from the migrants' functioning in transnational spaces, including, for example: financial support extended to parents (direct and indirect), which is essentially novel in the Polish culture of care provided locally and physically (on a fixed-location first-hand basis); technical assistance, consisting for example of installation of new equipment in the parents' apartment, usually brought by the migrating children from the receiving countries and intended to facilitate the parents' everyday functioning; medical consultations on the parents' condition in the countries of immigration and sending medication packages; instructing the parents on the use of computer and the Internet. Thus, migrants are usually responsible for the parents' financial support, helping in the payment of bills and finance extra visits at the doctor's office. The high level of engagement in a whole range of social and financial remittances is notable.

Different meanings and connotations are attributed to economic support, which is the most popular and common form of assistance provided to elderly parents by their migrant

children that emerges from the study. Financial remittance i.e. sending money (in either direct or indirect form) is not only appreciated by the parents through its quantity, but also in terms of quality. In other words, migrants' money transfers have a great sentimental value for their elderly parents and are a symbolic token of the migrating children's concern and care. For migrants (especially for women), financial support is a compensation for physical absence, providing for the parents' personal hygiene and practical household help in the parents' home in Poland.

Children that do not migrate support their parents mainly by performing various activities and services that require no direct financial expenditure, but the important input of physical presence and time devoted to such support. The adult children that stay behind are thus responsible in particular for practical household assistance (cleaning, cooking, everyday shopping), advice in contacts with public administration, assistance in legal matters and proceedings, providing local and more distant transportation measures and facilitation of getting to remote locations. Furthermore, there are forms of support offered to elderly parents residing in Poland that are practiced, usually not attributable exclusively to either migrating or non-migrating children. Such practices include primarily the multitude of tasks aimed at monitoring the parents' life situation, as well as the general care and interest in the parents' well-being. According to the parent-respondents of the survey, these obligations could be performed quite successfully due to modern communication technology. Oftentimes, on their visits to Poland, migrants bring cleaning and food supplies of extended shelf-life for the parents' longer-term assistance. Moreover, while visiting Poland, children do extensive shopping to stock various supplies for future use by their parents. Increasingly so, there are cases of Internet shopping paid by migrants and delivered to the parents' home.

Although the division of care responsibilities among siblings in a transnational family might appear to be rational and functional, one deals here rather with certain tensions stemming from the gender orders. The gender division implicates that, e.g. when the only daughter migrates, the son (who remains in Poland) rarely takes over her culturally imposed responsibilities, which leads to strained relations and conflicts. Compared to migrating men, migrating women more often support elderly parents financially, as found in studies similar to this one, dedicated to migrants from other cultures and geographical locations. Thus, in the context of migration, fulfillment of one's family obligations requires sometimes various denials and renouncements on the part of migrants, in particular of women, especially when they already have to cope with their care responsibilities as mothers abroad. Such a situation often necessitates making difficult choices regarding whom to help and to what extent, while it also requires generation of extra funds, e.g. by applying for social aid/income support in the receiving country in order to supplement and extend one's resources.

Polish Migrants and Their Families—A Post-Accession Assessment

When leaving Poland, migrants look forward to an improved living standard, higher salaries, sometimes a better job or a more appealing lifestyle. The question is to what degree

do they also take into consideration the family transformations created by the migration. Without a doubt the migration movement of families is not a minor concern, but at the very core of our understanding of social life in contemporary Poland. Many Poles leave family members behind in order to provide for them by taking advantage of labor market opportunities in other countries.

The huge post-accession outflow from Poland has impacted the social change in the family realm, frequently resulting in a disorganization of family ties, as demonstrated by a high rate of divorce, among other indications. The expert discourse reveals serious emotional and educational problems experienced by the migrants' children. Migration differentiates Polish families in terms of their form, structure and the quality of intra-family relations. It further makes the phenomenon of the transnational family and its properties apparent, shaped by patterns of work and type of migration. Instead of severing family ties, migrants refine and enhance strong family bonds that sustain them across time, space and national boundaries.

Similarly to other countries, it is Polish women who play a central role in migrant families. Within mobility processes women become "family managers" who orchestrate and navigate a complex nexus of social security of the family network across borders, adding new roles to those already culturally-attributed. The roles associated with their own migration are supplemented by migration of their partner and children, situation of the elderly, and the entirety of family in the transnational space. Importantly, in addition to the challenges faced by most migrants and their families, one should note the struggles and contentions that must be addressed by the Polish state. The first area to be tended to is the education system; the provision of care and psychological-educational assistance to the children whose parents emigrated, as well as extending support to students returning to a Polish school after a period of migration abroad. Second—building local systems of support, linking the state and local aid structures with the activities and programs operated by churches and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must be fostered. The third area to be addressed is development and expansion of the institutional support that has a capacity to meet the needs of the elderly. Considering that the Polish system of care over the elderly relies almost exclusively on the informal and in-family-provided care, the living conditions of the elderly may in time progressively deteriorate. This projection follows not only from the birth-rate depression recorded in Poland since early 1990's, but also from the changes in terms of longevity and those pertaining to care over the elderly—a consequence of the migrants' contact with other demographically old-age-facing cultures where family-provided care is being replaced (or supplemented) by institutional support.

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