

### III SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

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#### FAMILIES IN URBAN CENTERS<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract The purpose of the article is to give an insight into the living conditions of families and the activity patterns of employed parents in urban centers in Slovenia.*

*The analysis is based on statistical data, survey data and qualitative interviews. Bivariate and multivariate statistical analyses are applied to the survey data.*

*The two parent family is the dominant family type, followed by the extended family and one parent family type. Material living conditions correlate with family type, one parent families being the most deprived.*

*Until the nineties in young and middle aged generations the dual earner family type had been dominant. Employed parents utilize mainly traditional social networks when informally resolving family problems. Employed fathers in urban centers help their partners, but the division of family tasks to a certain extent, and often free time, remain gendered.*

*The lack of financial resources and high insecurity concerning employment status of parents has seriously endangered life in the nineties.*

family, living conditions, activity patterns of parents, informal support networks

#### Social and Economic Background of Family Life in Slovenia

In recent decades Slovenia has gone through demographic, social and economic changes which have influenced the forms of family life and the way of life of family members. Among the numerous factors, migration from rural to urban areas, and the increased participation of women in the labour force have been decisive. The economically active population working in the agricultural sector has rapidly diminished in favour of employment in other sectors of the economy. The agricultural population fell from over 80% at the end of the Second World War to about 25% in the 1980s.

The need for labour power in industry and the ideology of women's emancipation influenced a drastic increase in employment among women. Nowadays the highest rate of employment among women (84%) is in the age group 25 to 29 years, with most children (4/5) born to mothers in the age group 20 to 34 years. At the beginning of the nineties the majority of parents were employed full time (a 42-hour work week). Part-time employment, especially during the first years of a child's life, legally exist as an option, but is rarely practised. Compared to Slovenia, women in EC countries are more often employed part-time.

Most parents with children up to the age of 15 are employed (92.4%) and most young and middle aged people live in dual earner families (Černigoj Sadar, 1989). The objective and subjective indicators show that families with children are in a disadvantageous position in all family life cycles. In the Quality of Life Survey in 1984 more than half (56.9%) of the middle-aged employed parents with preschool and school children had an average income per capita under the poverty line. For most parents employment is an economic and existential necessity. However, in recent years real income has drastically decreased and in 1990 a dual earner family with one child and two average incomes could hardly cover minimal living expenses. Such incomes were not sufficient for a family with two children. In 1991 no family with children could cover living expenses with two average incomes (Skupna in osebna poraba po tipih gospodinjstev in potrošnikov, 1991). Inter-generational family solidarity, savings accumulated in the past, and the engagement of parents in all kinds of informal economy have helped family members retain a decent level of living.

## Household Structure

Slovenia has experienced great variations in household and family structure, although these changes have not always been evident in statistical data. Concerning household structure from 1961 to 1981, households consisting of a couple and their children remained the dominant type (Table 1).

**Table 1 Types of households in Slovenia\***

Type of household:	Years:		
	1961	1971	1981
One person	15.1	15.2	14.6
Couple	13.7	13.0	15.9
Couple with children	46.9	47.8	48.4
Men or women with children	12.3	11.8	10.7
Other	12.0	12.2	10.4
	100.0	100.0	100.0

\*Census data

Source: Demografska statistika, Zavod za statistiko R Slovenije, 1989.

The greatest increase is indicated in households where couples live alone. This is a consequence of a changing pattern of family life, on the one hand, and changes in the demographic structure of society on the other.

The household structure in urban areas is significantly different from that of non-urban areas (Table 2).

**Table 2 Percentage of People Living in Different Types of Households\***

Type of household:	Areas:	
	Urban**	Country centers, village
One person	5.5	4.7
Couple	14.2	9.7
Couple with children	58.2	51.5
Man or woman with children	8.9	7.5
Extended family	13.2	26.6
	100.0	100.0
Number of respondents	675	707

\*Representative sample of inhabitants of Slovenia

\*\* Republic, regional and community centers

Source: Družbena struktura in kvaliteta življenja v Sloveniji, 1991.

Households with two parents, and children are most frequent, followed by couples living alone and extended family households. Women make up the greatest part of one person urban households (80%), and most of them are over 55 years old. Also in one parent families, the head of the household is usually the mother (81%). Families in urban centres show a great variety of living arrangements. Young parents in particular experience different types of households in a short period before they settle down into the dominant type - a couple with children. In some arrangements a young father lives alone while his partner lives in the extended family household, or a mother lives in a one parent family while the father is in another type of household. Among persons officially living alone there are people who also regularly share a friend's one person household, as is often the case in the older generation.

Geographic mobility among parents living with their children has been high. Most of them (nine out of ten) now living in urban centres have changed their residence of living at least once.

A typical urban family has two children. Nearly half of one parent families also have two children. It is the parents from older generations and/or those living in the extended family who most often have three or more children.

### **Material living conditions of urban families**

Material living conditions correlate with family type. Persons living in two-parent families - of orientation - have the highest material standard. Due to numerous financial resources - 94% of these families have two or more members regularly employed - they have modern household appliances, good equipment for different leisure pursuits and cars (87%). However in housing standards they are comparable to other types of families. Although in most cases material living conditions for two parent families are not critical, their members quite often (about two thirds of them) express difficulties covering daily expenses.

One parent families are the most deprived, especially the members living in one parent families of procreation. In 10% of one parent families of procreation, there is no regular source of income; most parents in such families (81%) say that they have difficulties covering daily expenses and that they are not satisfied with their living conditions.

Intergenerational family solidarity is one of the most effective mechanisms in resolving housing problems, but it depends on the material resources of the family of orientation. Therefore, many adult children are not able to establish their own families and thus continue to live with their family of orientation long into their adult life (Table 3).

Additionally, there are also certain emotional ties that develop in non-dominant family forms that can prevent adult children from establishing their own families.

**Table 3 Adult Persons Living with their Parents**

Type of family of orientation:	% of persons having no children aged 34 years or more
One parent	20.8
Two parents	2.5
Extended family	25.0

Source: Družbena struktura in kvaliteta življenja v Sloveniji, 1991.

In the nineties the dependency of the younger generation on their families for housing, financial support, and raising children has increased. The number of parents living with their adult children has increased as well. The forced cohabitation living together of different generations, the growing number of unemployed parents, and the high level of insecurity cause numerous conflicts within families.

### Informal Support Networks

Social networks are multifunctional and multidimensional. They may be supportive, or may, on the contrary, hinder members of the family in choosing the most promising solutions. Social support is understood as any relationship that has a positive impact on individual welfare. In the following paragraphs the role of the social networks of employed urban parents will be described in resolving family problems such as child care, raising children, and caring for sick family members (Černigoj Sadar, 1989).

Urban mothers usually ask for help from the same persons irrespective of the problem they have to solve. In most cases this is their partner or mother. Their help is multifunctional. This seems to be the most convenient, economic, and most appropriate way to meet the needs of the women. Although it may be burdensome for the person giving help, it can obviously not be replaced by any other informal or formal resource. The one person resource system, although convenient for some, may become a serious deficiency in an emergency or if a new social network is sought.

Only in cases where the interviewed women receive help from their partners do they give help to other people as well (tending to a sick family member, advising and occasionally taking care of a child). In all other empirically found patterns of behaviour, help goes "one way". The women are either givers or receivers of help.

Help offered by the interviewed women is also multifunctional. For example, women give advice, tend to sick persons and help with household chores. Relationships between patterns of receiving and patterns of giving help are very weak, which means that receiving does not necessarily involve help-giving.

Although similar to patterns practised by urban mothers, patterns employed by urban fathers display some differences. Two way relationships are rare and appear only in relation to relatives. In patterns where men receive help from their female partners, they themselves help only in case of illness. Men rarely try to solve several problems at one time. They are mostly occupied with one problem and delegate others to their female partners.

Although there are many modern elements in the way of life in urban communities, employed parents utilise mainly traditional social networks when informally resolving family problems. When more problem solving situations are taken together (child care, child-rearing and tending to sick family members) one concludes that by far, most problems are solved by partners inside

the nuclear family. The second most important source of help are female relatives, particularly mothers and mothers-in-law. The latter help two thirds of our interviewed mothers in the urban areas. Other female relatives give help in half of all cases. Also, neighbours and friends who give help are mostly women. Women are also the most frequent resource persons in resolving personal and other problems (Boh et al, 1988). These helping activities penetrate a woman's life well into adulthood.

### Common and Separate Activities of Employed Couples

Attitudes concerning the division of tasks within the family and woman's labour participation vary as to the age and education of family members. When taking into account the entire population in Slovenia, the traditional orientations are indicated. However, in young and middle aged generations, the dual worker family type is dominant.

Urban parents have easy access to all kinds of welfare institutions and, in spite of critical remarks, they use them frequently, especially those from the higher strata. Professionalization of child care in the broadest sense of the term has become part of the everyday life of urban families. During the week, family members spend most of their time in one of the so called public institutions. Even the youngest children leave home with parents early in the morning and come back in the afternoon. For example, in Ljubljana in 1989, 77% of children aged 11 months to 6.5 years were in kindergartens, or day care centers (Letopis o zdravstvenem in socialnem varstvu v Sloveniji 1990).

Does the openness of the family to public institutions (in some cases we could even speak about the intrusion of state institutions into the very beginning of the socialization process) have any influence on the division of tasks within families and the leisure of their members?

The 145 employed couples with children mainly do (from 77% to 90%) share informal work activities, relationships with relatives and friends, care and upbringing of the children, family trips, and watching TV (Černigoj Sadar, 1991). Employed mothers are deprived of those activities which enhance the development of their psychophysical potential and the social relations outside the family circle. Having realised their social obligations, the everyday reality of about 50% of couples is split into "male" and "female" patterns of behaviour. Mothers are engaged in activities most important to them, these are activities connected with the family and practical activities. While for their partners, more individualistic activities are important such as TV viewing, hobbies and sport. Activities which give leisure a specific flavour, or have innovative potentials, are in most cases the domain of men. However, women also have aspirations for such activities, and the higher their education the more often they realize their aspirations.

The younger the women, the lower the economic status of the family, and the more they are engaged in activities for the family. Men are engaged in such activities mostly when they have small children (Table 4).<sup>2</sup>

**Table 4 Predictors of Family Activities\***

	Sign.		Mult. R
<b>MEN</b>			
Significant predictors (1):			
- age of oldest child	-0.34	0.000	0.34
<b>WOMEN</b>			
-age of respondent	-0.29	0.000	0.33
-household income	-0.17	0.036	0.37

\*Sample: 145 employed couples from two urban local communities in Ljubljana and Celje, which was selected out of a quota sample of parents living with children from five local Slovenian communities in Slovenia (1983).

Source: Černigoj Sadar, N., 1991.

The education of our interviewed persons and that of their fathers significantly correlates with their engagement in cultural activities (Table 5).

**Table 5 Predictors of Cultural and Educational Activities**

	Sign.		Mult. R
<b>MEN</b>			
- education of respondent	0.29	0.001	0.43
- household income	0.21	0.013	0.46
- education of father	0.16	0.036	0.49
<b>WOMEN</b>			
- education of respondent	0.31	0.001	0.35
- education of father	0.23	0.009	0.39
- age of respondent	0.21	0.009	0.44

Source: Černigoj Sadar, N., 1991.

For women, age is also decisive for their participation in cultural activities. It seems that women postpone the realization of their aspirations until middle age.

Life priorities, attitudes towards the division of labour in the family and aspirations are losing their gendered attributes, although this is not the case in actual behavioral patterns. This inconsistency is a source of conflict among employed urban couples. High aspirations with no material support coupled with the decay of social welfare in the nineties has intensified frustration within the family. Such a situation seriously endangers primary family functions and decreases the social opportunities of family members.

## Conclusions

In young and middle aged generations the dual-worker family is prevailing in urban centres. There is no data as to what proportion of dual-workers are dual career families. Although for most parents, it is an economic necessity to be employed, the socio-psychological factors are important as well. There are many urban parents for whom work and family have equal priority. However, parents often report stress arising from role overload, discontinuity between gender-role socialization, their current way of life and their desired life style. They are encountering normative dilemmas too. Employed fathers have entered family life and are helping their partners, but the division of family tasks and free time remain gendered. Such differentiation in itself is not problematic but the options resulting from differentiated patterns of behaviour.

In urban families modern and traditional elements of organizing everyday life are intertwined. Most families, to satisfy their needs, used to combine resources gained from informal networks and public services. Some family functions even became oversocialized although parents were skeptical. Nowadays, public services have become expensive and less accessible, while private services are rare or too expensive. Such a situation combined with the lack of financial resources and a high level of insecurity concerning employment status has disorganized urban family life. Family members' aspirations are too high for informal resources to compensate for the lack of formal ones. Urban families are more dependent on public resources compared to other families. Therefore, a decrease in such resources would seriously endanger the emancipation of their members, especially women.

In the young Slovenian state, particular family issues have become the focus of public debate (such as the abortion question, and private and voluntary services to help family members) while issues concerning life and family cycles, policy in connection to urban life are still waiting to be discussed.



## NOTES

1. This article is the corrected version of a paper presented at the First European Conference of Sociology, University of Vienna, Austria, August 1992.

2. The independent variables used in stepwise regression analysis (results shown in Table 4 and 5) are:

- the education of: respondent, respondent's partner, respondent's father and mother;
- the age of: respondent and his/her oldest child;
- life spheres priorities: work, family leisure;
- household income per capita.

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