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A Support received in the Large Families in Poland as a factor influencing the Students' Results in School: Quantitative Survey Report

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Abstract

In this study, I am going to present a fragment of the research concerning large families in Poland. I analyse the relation between shaping the educational failures and successes of the students having their origin in the large families and the support they get from their parents in the numerous families. The analysis shall be made based on the comparison of the character of the relationships inside the families in the study case of the students in the lower secondary school who come from different backgrounds. This article shall constitute the description of the results of the survey research conducted in two schools (lower secondary schools) in the group of over 150 students. The family relationships, communication character between parents – children are going to be analysed according to the place of living (village, city) and number of children in a family (large and small families).

Keywords: Large families, support, parents, educational failures, educational successes.

Introduction

What is the reason of differences in the students' school results? What influences the educational successes and failures? Those questions have been an important element of consideration concerning the education for many years in Poland⁶. As Konarzewski⁶ says, the family and environmental correlations have a significant importance in the context of a child functioning in a school. The educative style, values passed down by the parents, forms of solving conflicts are just few of the elementary elements creating the relation structure between a child and parents⁴.

What is the place of large families' phenomenon among the factors determining existence of successes and failures? As Bronisławska¹ says, the large families are environments particularly at risk of the social exclusion. Most of all, it results from the economic difficulties. Of crucial importance is also a matter of a stereotypical judgment of the large families by the rest of the society.

In this research report, I would like to present a fragment of my own research, the aim of which was to check if there are important differences in creation of successes and failures among the students from the large and small families. The research project included many areas among which there are: the students' perception of their own successes and failures,

the support gained by the family and school environment, extracurricular activities and objective indicators such as the average grade and the results of the competitions on different level.

The most interesting from point of view of the situation analysis of the large families seems to be a result distribution in the period of support received from the parents by the children. The support received from the parents is undoubtedly one of the most important elements influencing the educational results of their children. The environment that a student comes from has a crucial significance in the context of arising of the success and failures at school. One of the environments which is the most at risk of being problematic in the area of upbringing and education is a numerous family. The difficulties that families very often cope with influence the educational situation of the children.

Review of Literature

Some authors describing the concept of a large family in their works think that in the family with many children may take place a disorder in their relationships. The relations between the family members become inappropriate (the repelling, avoiding or excessively requiring attitude). The concentration on solving everyday problems (financial or housing difficulties) makes it hard to create the atmosphere of trust and safety. Iacovou⁵ describes it like this: Two or more children in the family are connected with having worse results at school. Both parental care and the interaction with other children may be important for the educational development of the offspring.

Ermisch and Francesconi² noticed the relation between having many children and a character of relationships inside the family and in their research, they focused on the analysis of attending private schools by the children from numerous families. According to the authors, the teenagers from large families experienced more difficult educative start which was the cause of their educational failures, choice of vocational schools and graduating on the lower level of education.

Another author whom I would like to cite in my work is Konarzewski⁶ who also noticed a relation between the phenomenon of large families and the family relationships. This author, apart from the issues above, pointed out the fact that children from large families are more oriented towards the order of the adults than the children from small families. It may be connected with the negative parental attitudes

mentioned above that may appear in the environments with more children.

However not all the experts think that the fact of having one’s background in the numerous family is the cause of negative relationships in social terms. Forma³ underlines that the specific relationship which is created inside the numerous families causes the deepening of social relationships and openness to others. The author stated that the children from numerous families have positive attitude as a student, friend and a member of a school community. According to Forma³, spending time in a big social group on the earliest life stages develops abilities to resolve conflicts, cooperate or be active in the wider social circles.

Research Design

The main aim of the research project, which was undertaken by me in the period from February to May 2016, was to investigate if and to what extent the background of the students of the lower secondary schools influences the development of their successes and failures concerning their learning. One of the most important research area was focused on the relation between parents and their growing children (13-17 years of age). The opinions of students from two different lower secondary schools were subjected to analysis. The research results confirm that the young people from the large families use the parental support in case of difficulties more rarely than their age-mates from the smaller families. They also tend to talk less with their parents about their problems concerning education.

Method

The research tool used in the analyzed research project is the survey which constitutes a standard element of the survey technique. The developed survey was based on the questions concerning the students’ successes and failures at school including the social differences. An important element of the survey was the issues concerning the people having the greatest impact on the students – parents, siblings, teachers and friends. That is why the content concerning the internal motivation and relation with others was divided in a way that let the respondents indicate people thanks to whom they feel the need to study. On the contrary, their aversion was towards educational activities (excessive pressure, lack of

support). An important segment of the survey was the questions concerning the relationship with their parents. Their scope was to indicate if there are some crucial discrepancies in the family relationships depending on the number of family members.

The data was collected via survey and was analyzed with details considering the differences not only in the aspect of having many children but also in the aspect of discrepancy between the urban and rural schools. In order to fully depict the differences between the students from large and small families, I decided to collect the comparative data from two lower secondary schools. One of them is situated in the city (Torun) and the other in the countryside (Cekcyn). This procedure was to differentiate four study groups including: students from large families living in the countryside, students from large families living in the city and, analogically, two groups of teenagers from smaller families from urban and rural environments. The motive of such an action was the willingness to look closely at the educational successes and failures of the students. The size of the family and the environment of origin are the elements influencing the educational achievements of the young people.

Sample

The material for analysis was collected while conducting the research using the survey. In the survey research, 163 students took part from which 54 are people attending the Lower Secondary School no. 9 in Torun and 109 teenagers studying at Lower Secondary School in Cekcyn. The researched group in Torun constituted the students of the three classes (two second classes and one third class of the lower secondary school). In the school in Cekcyn, the survey was filled in by the students of one first class, two second classes and two third classes. The respondents are 13-17 years of age.

The feature that was the most significant in the context of this research on successes and failures of the students is the fact of coming from a large family. In the researched group of 163 people, 73 are the students from numerous families (45 percent of the total). In my research, according to the common assumptions, for the large families I considered the family environment with at least three children.

Table 1
The structure of a study group

Answer	Lower Secondary School no. 9 in Toruń		Lower Secondary School in Cekcyn		Total
	girls	boys	girls	boys	
Students from large families	11	10	28	24	73
Students from small families	21	12	30	27	90
Total	32	22	58	51	163

Data collection

The basic problem of the research was included in the following question: "Should and in what way should the large family influence the educational successes and failures of the students of the lower secondary school?". I considered the number of children in a family and the family environment as the main variable. I extracted few main areas which turned out to be the most interesting in the context of differences between the students from large and small families (in division into the rural and urban environments). They included: the students' perception of their own successes and failures, support from the family and school environment, relation with parents, extracurricular activities and objective rates (average grades, results of the competitions on different levels).

In this study, I would like to focus on one of the analyzed areas. It will be the support received from the family unit. I decided to do that because in this aspect we can notice the great differences between the students from large and small families.

The material was collected during several meetings conducted in the period between February and May 2016. Before that, the content of the questions placed in the survey was consulted with the Principals of the schools that I implemented the research project in. I also took care of providing the comfortable conditions to fill in the survey and keeping a full anonymity of the respondents.

During the preparation, research implementation and the result interpretation I complied with the basic ethical rules of conducting a research (the confidentiality of the collected data, the transparency of the information, the voluntary character of participating). Prior to beginning the research, I analyzed in detail all the necessary ethical procedures which I implemented during the project realization.

Data analysis

The questions focused on the support received by the students from the family environment and were divided into several main areas: the help received in case of a difficult educational situation, the talks with parents about school and the talks with parents about the problems at school. The detailed analysis of the results collected during the survey research will be shown in the further part of the article.

The first element is to gain information concerning the people that the teenagers can count on in case of being in a difficult educational situation. The analysis of the collected data indicates two main sources of support - parents and a group of the age-mates. Not many students indicated teachers as people supporting them in case of educational problems (in the group of students from the large families in Ciekyn, it was only 3.5 percent).

The data show that over 70 percent of the students from the small families from the Lower Secondary School no. 9 in

Turun believe that they can count on their parents in case of difficulties at school. In the rest of the three study groups, it is much lower percentage. The students from the large families more rarely indicated their parents as a source of educational support. Also, the students from the small families from the rural school were unwilling to choose this option in the question "Who helps you when you have difficulties at school?".

Here we can see a clear environmental difference. The students from the small families living in the city receive more support from the family. The people from the village as well as the teenagers receive less support from their mothers or fathers. In those groups the significance of the age-mates, siblings and teachers is higher.

A very interesting research area is also the total lack of support in case of educational problems. The answers of students from different groups confirm the observed and described above phenomenon. A deviation towards the students from small families living in the urban environments is especially noticeable. In case of the parental support, they gained help from the family more often than the teenagers from the rest of the groups.

At the same time, they declared the lack of support most rarely (below 15 percent). The situation of the young people from the numerous families living in the village is different. They indicated parents supporting them in difficult situations in the smallest degree. However out of all the four groups, the respondents chose the option of a total lack of support most often (over 30 percent).

The detailed analysis indicated the fact that the young people living in the village in the numerous families tend to experience the failures at school most often. The reason for this is mostly the lack of support from the closest family and friends.

The results presented in the chart above indicate also that the lack of mother's or father's support is not compensated with positive activity of others. The teenagers from the large families are many times left alone with their educational problems what can be reflected in their achievements at school.

The discrepancy between the support that the students from different environments receive from their parents is presented above. In this place, it is worth expending our knowledge on this issue.

For this purpose, the analysis of the two next questions included in the survey will be of use. The first one is a very general question: "Do you talk about school with your parents?". The second one concerns the educational failures on a larger scale: "Do you talk about your problems at school with your parents?". The conversations about school are presented in the table 2.

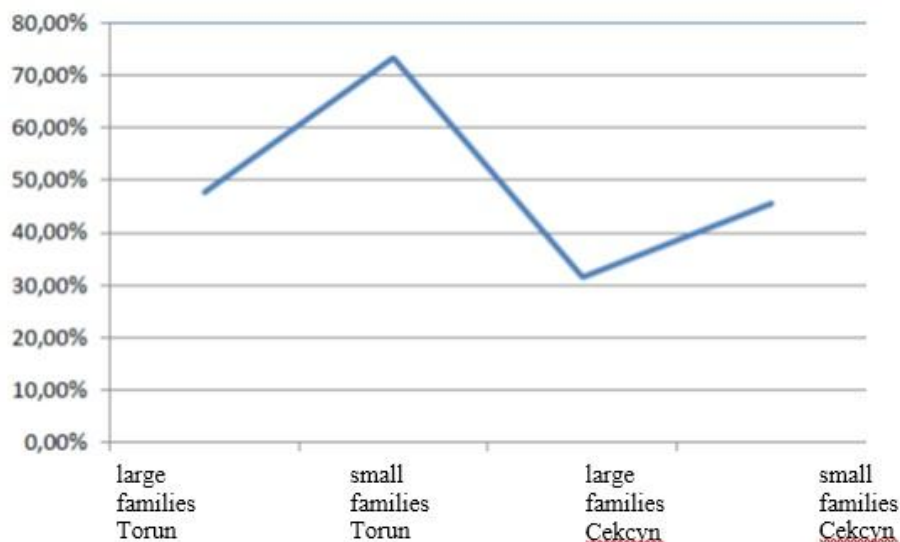


Chart 1: Parents' support

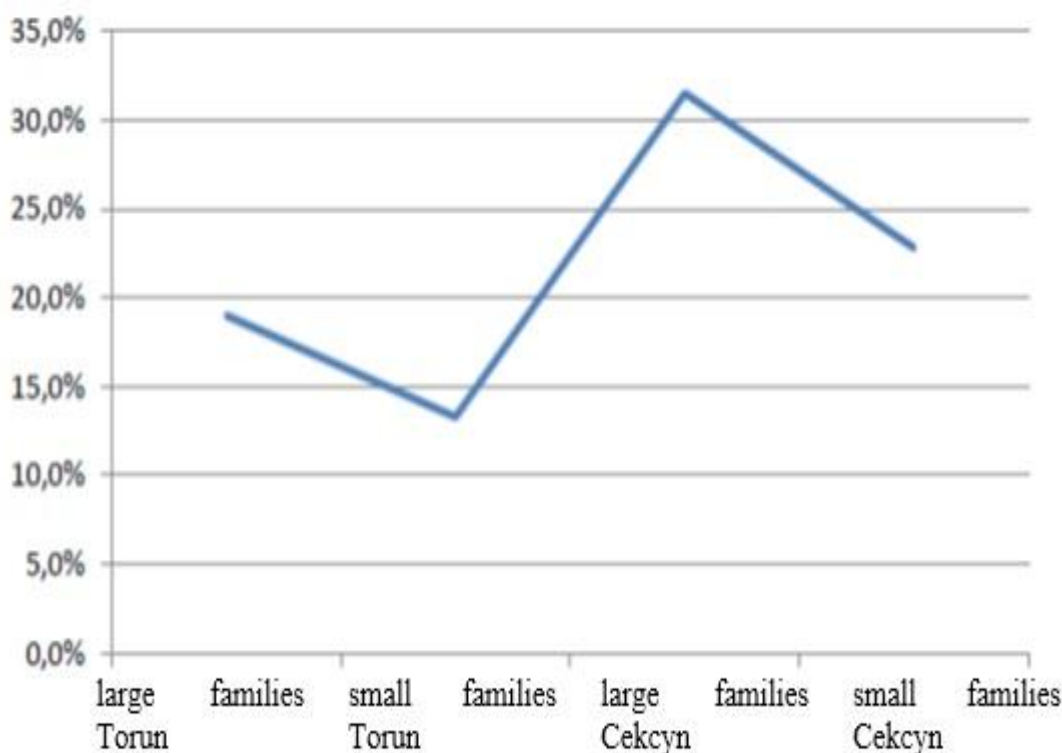


Chart 2: The lack of support towards the students

Table 2
Do you talk about school with your parents? – answers

Answer	Lower Secondary School no. 9 in Torun				Lower Secondary School in Cekcyn				Total	
	Students from large families		Students from small families		Students from large families		Students from small families			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
often	4	20,0%	11	33,3%	10	19,2%	23	40,4%	48	29,6%
sometimes	12	60,0%	18	54,5%	24	46,2%	23	40,4%	77	47,5%
rarely	4	20,0%	2	6,1%	16	30,8%	11	19,3%	33	20,4%
never	0	0,0%	2	6,1%	2	3,8%	0	0,0%	4	2,5%

The positive is the fact that a small part of the respondents answered that they never talk with their parents about school (8 people from the study group of 163 students of the lower secondary school). Noticeable is the difference between the students from the large and small families in the answer "often". In the case of the students in Torun and Ciekcyn living in the small families it is respectively 33,3 and 40,4 percent. What is more, the students from the large families chose this option less frequently (Torun - 20 percent, Ciekcyn - 19,2 percent).

The question better explaining the aspect of relationship between the students and their parents is: "do you talk with your parents about your difficulties at school?" The results concerning the above issue are included in the table 3.

The data above informs that a small number of children often talk with their parents about their difficulties at school (11,2 percent in the whole study group). The option chosen most frequently was the answer "sometimes". In order to compare the groups from large and small families, we can use the comparison of answers "rarely" and "never".

Results

The analysis of the collected materials shows that the students from large families living in the rural environments talk with their families about their educational problems least frequently (more than a half of the respondents). Almost as high percentage of the students of the lower secondary schools in the village living in smaller families chose option "rarely" and "never" as the one describing their contacts with their parents concerning their problems at school. The detailed interpretation of the results leads to a conclusion that the students from small families from the lower secondary school in Torun have the most positive contact with their parents (30 percent of the negative answers).

The teenagers from the large families talk with their parents about their situation at school less frequently than their age-mates from smaller families. The possibility of such a phenomenon is proved by the respondents' answers to the question "do you talk with your parents about your difficulties at school?". The situation where the half of the respondents from the group of students from large families rarely or never talks with their families about the school

problems undoubtedly may influence the proneness to their educational failures.

It is hard to evaluate to what extent the educational failures are influenced by the impaired functioning of the child's family. I believe however that the lack of support from the family (especially parents) may be the cause of forming complex educational difficulties. The collected results show that the group of students who in their survey questions concerning the family situation indicted their parents as a source of support most rarely, used to receive low grades at school. The situation is shown in the chart depicting the average grades gained by the students in the winter semester of the school year 2015/2016. In the chart, I included the lowest scores (the grades average between 2.0-3.0).

As it results from the data included in the chart, the students from the large families' experience failures at school in form of the low average scores more often than the students from small families. Almost half of the respondents from the group of students from the large families from the Lower Secondary School no. 9 in Torun received the average results than their age-mates from the smaller families. In the analyzed area, the best were the students from the small families from the rural environment (a bit over 20 percent of the indications for the average below 3.0) grade below 3.0 for the first semester of the school year 2015/2016.

Also, the students from the large families who attend the Lower Secondary School in Ciekcyn received lower results than their age-mates from the smaller families. In the analyzed area, the best were the students from the small families from the rural environment (a bit over 20 percent of the indications for the average below 3.0).

Discussion

From the results above, I can deduce that the data collected by me confirmed the researches of the other authors. Those cited by me in this study also underline the possibility of creation of the different educational failures among the students from the numerous families. These students have difficult studying conditions (financial, housing) but as the authors indicate (and what was also shown in my research) the character of the relationships and support may be the main reason for the educational failures.

Table 3
Do you talk with your parents about your difficulties at school?

Answer	Lower Secondary School no. 9 in Torun				Lower Secondary School in Ciekcyn				Total	
	Students from large families		Students from small families		Students from large families		Students from small families			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
often	2	10,5%	3	9,1%	4	7,7%	9	15,8%	18	11,2%
sometimes	9	47,4%	20	60,6%	21	40,4%	20	35,1%	70	43,5%
rarely	5	26,3%	5	15,2%	22	42,3%	20	35,1%	52	32,3%
never	3	15,8%	5	15,2%	5	9,6%	8	14,0%	21	13,0%

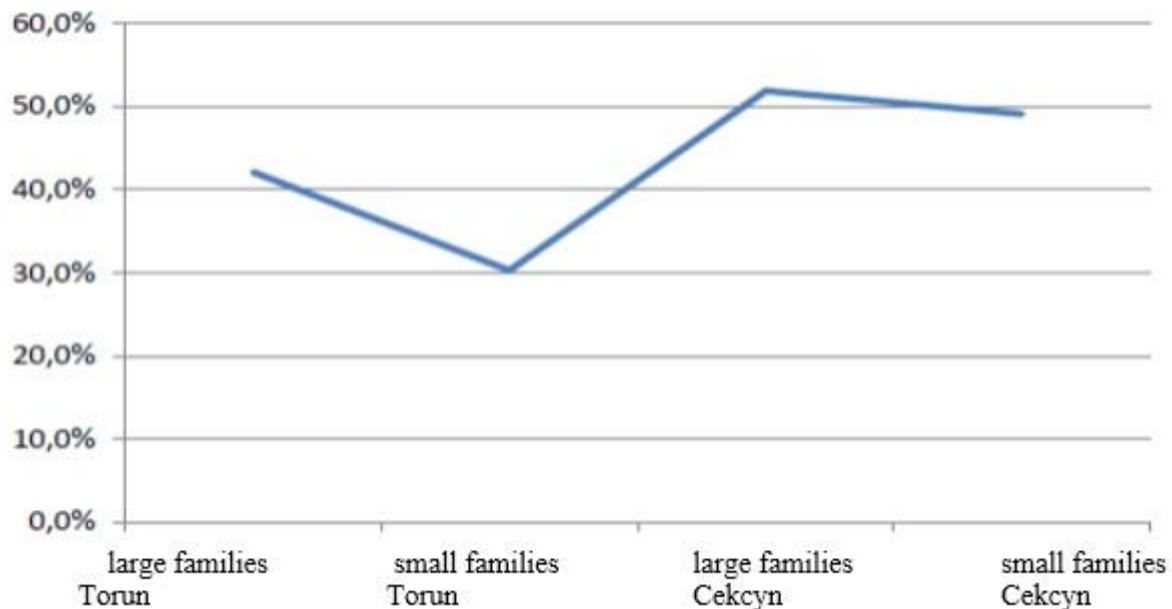


Chart 3: The total of the answers "seldom" and "never" to the question: "Do you talk with your parents about your difficulties at school?"

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can include several statements:

1. The students from the small families living in the urban environment receive more support from their parents than their age-mates from the large families.
2. The students from the large families are more prone to experience educational failures comparing to the other study groups because of the lack of support from other people.
3. The students from the large families talk with their parents about school less frequently than their age-mates.

The conclusions above may lead to determining the possible forms of help and support for the large families. The support should be directed towards the strengthening of the positive relationships and bonds inside the families. An important element is also the enhancement of the communication, cooperation and engagement in the mutual problem solving.

The school has a leading role in this process. The teachers, educators or the school pedagogues should pay attention to the impairments of the social functioning of their students. They should try to reach the origin of those impairments in order to eliminate them at the earliest stage. As I wanted to show in this text, the family relationships, their character and the support received by the children and teenagers from the

family have a significant influence on the shaping of the educational failures and successes of a child. That is why the full cooperation between parents - child - school is necessary because only by the complex supporting actions it is possible to avoid the educational failures.

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