

## Intentional childlessness. A sociological analysis of the phenomenon.

### Summary

The ambivalence concerning having children is becoming increasingly conspicuous in late-modern societies. Some people, for whatever reasons, decide not to have children. Declining to take on a parental role is a phenomenon that reflects fundamental changes in social behaviour, which is particularly important in the context of the disturbingly low birth rates recorded in most countries of the Western cultural circle.

In sociology, the phenomenon of childlessness by choice is analyzed in the context of alternative forms of marital and family life. Researchers stress the increase in the number of intentionally childless people. Moreover, there starts to be observed – so far absent – a noticeable explicit declaration of the choice of staying childless, which additionally ceases to be perceived in an unequivocally negative way. Having children seems to be an imperative which the intentionally childless dare to contest, therefore the aim of the work is to outline the state of research on intentional childlessness, as well as to describe the attitudes of Poles towards this phenomenon.

The main theses of the dissertation focus on the demonstration that intentional childlessness does not constitute a marginal issue and that it must not be treated like one in research. The scale of the issue is growing, and its social perception is changing. Intentional childlessness is a consequence of a range of transformations of different character that have been observed in the Western societies in the last decades.

The paper is theoretical and empirical in nature and includes a compilation of both primary and secondary data. It consists of seven chapters with Introduction and Conclusion constituting an integral part of the dissertation. The first chapter is an introduction to the analysis of the topic. The chapter is mainly about the changes in forming family structures over the last few decades. The second and third chapters present the conditioning for the changes in family life and selected theoretical concepts of contemporary times. The fourth chapter includes a concise description of alternative forms of marital and family life. The next chapter is an analysis of secondary sources, in which the previous results of research revolving around the issue of intentional childlessness are presented. Various theories and concepts have been referred to, which allow to look at the described phenomenon in a multifaceted way. By contrast, the last two chapters of the paper contain a description of a

quantitative field study carried out for the purpose of this dissertation, conducted on a sample of 1097 adult Poles, analyzing attitudes towards the phenomenon of intentional childlessness.

The research project provided material that enabled the verification of hypotheses which have been put forward and made it possible to answer research questions. The analyses showed the existence of ambivalent attitudes towards childlessness by choice which can be seen in Polish society. However, much more frequently the declarations of the respondents show acceptance towards the phenomenon, in the emotional, behavioural and cognitive aspects likewise. Additionally, the opinions of the respondents are dependent on socio-demographic variables, including gender, age, place of residence or degree of religiousness.