

LOST AND WASTED HUMAN CAPITAL – HOW TRANSFORMATIONS OF FAMILY, SOCIALIZATION, AND POPULATION CONTROL INFLUENCE WELFARE AND WELL-BEING

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the influence of the transformations of marriage and family on the human capital (HC) creation in contemporary Western societies. One of the basic assumptions included here is that these processes are connected with profound socio-cultural shifts that were initiated in the 20th century, and were manifested e.g. through the sexual revolution of the 1968.

According to the thesis of the paper, it is necessary to point at this complex and multidimensional changes to understand why and how the West is losing its HC, which is followed by decrease in well-being and welfare at the same time. This important and alarming problem is illustrated by the analysis of the impact of abortion on the U.S. society and economy.

The paper contributes in an innovative way to the research on the quality and quantity of HC, which becomes a more and more valued factor of socio-economic development.

The analyses undertaken here engage the contribution of research on HC and family from such disciplines as economics, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies.

Keywords: human capital, family, socialization, population control, development

JEL classification: J12, J13, J24

Introduction – Why This Topic?

HC has become a highly desired resource in contemporary societies and their economies. One of the founding fathers of this line of research, Theodore W. Schultz wrote in 1961 that, “(...) the most distinctive feature of our economic system is the growth in human capital” (Schultz, 1961, p. 16).

In the times of advanced technologies and growing access to them, organizations realize that they have to look somewhere else to find an effective source of competitive advantage. In such context it turns out that the most indispensable and influential “asset” for long-term productivity and development are people themselves. It is confirmed by A.J. Bowlus and C. Robinson, who write that “the flow from human capital is by far the most important input in the world economy” (Bowlus, Robinson, 2011, p. 2).

The paper aims at deepening the understanding of the interaction between processes and phenomena present in Western civilization, which often seem to be separated. Firstly, it describes how marriage and family are crucial and irreplaceable in terms of creating and sustaining HC in the perspective of every generation. Secondly, it attempts to analyze the impact that the transformations of marriage and family in the West in the last fifty years have had on the spheres of procreation and socialization, which are fundamental in terms of HC development.

The thesis of the paper is that in order to understand the current difficulties and challenges of the welfare and well-being conditions in the West, one has to pay attention to the practices of population control which result in loss and waste of HC. It is illustrated with specific data and calculations.

In the presented approach, I am, in a sense, widening the spectrum of the analysis that was proposed by Gary S. Becker, who authored research on health as an element of HC. He mentions a paradox that becomes more and more problematic in the context of the future and condition of the Western civilization, which values HC and squanders it at the same time. In the context of health, Becker writes that there is a paradox of great concern about health within a society, which at the same time accepts the behaviors and habits which contribute to the development of different diseases resulting e.g. from an unhealthy diet or the lack of physical activity (see Becker, 2007a, p. 401). It means that in my paper I am testing a new approach to thinking of HC condition, which proposes to include factors not engaged in the analysis before. Although it mainly relies on the existing data, it combines and connects it in the way that is hardly present in the available literature.

In the context of demographic policy, one can describe the current social philosophy behind it as highly unsustainable, which is surprising in the case of the West which praises sustainable development. This is why, it is necessary to critically analyze the dominating assumptions, policies, and regulations which influence marriage, family, and procreation, because the state of these domains these days interrupts and impedes the processes of creating and enhancing HC, which we value so much.

1. Human Capital – Nature and Sources

For more than fifty years, economists and scholars from other social sciences have been discussing this category and, as a result, this concept has its established position in the academia and business domain. It does not mean that there are no terminological doubts or methodological difficulties with measuring it.

When we talk about HC, we mean these predispositions, skills, and qualifications which enhance individual productive capacities (Abraham, Mackie, 2005, p. 81). Although the concept is most often associated with economic perspective, one should not limit it strictly to the market or financial perspective, because human work is not always performed for wage, as it is in the case of household labor, performed daily by millions of people – mainly parents – around the world.

When we look at G.S. Becker's proposal, who, together with T.W. Schultz, is one of the economists from Chicago school who immensely contributed to the development of this concept in the twentieth century, we see that HC is understood as the result of certain attitudes, decisions, and activities treated as investments (Becker, 1993, p. 11). Becker writes that

the many forms of such investments include schooling, on-the-job training, medical care, migration, and searching for information about prices and incomes. (...) all these investments improve skills, knowledge, or health, and thereby raise money or psychic incomes (Becker, 1993, p. 11).

HC theory can be treated as an attempt of economics to conceptualize and measure all the elements that influence effectiveness and productivity of human beings. In the context of a society, it is useful to think of its HC as "(...) the knowledge and skills embodied in individuals that enable them to create economic value (...)" (World Economic Forum, 2016, p. 1). It is also useful to say that it consists of two, quite different, parts. The first of them is the knowledge and abilities to perform certain tasks, usually called 'hard skills', which to a large extent develop within an educational system. The second part, called 'soft (social) skills', consists of such

elements as the ability to communicate, to “(...) show up on time, to cooperate with others, to show initiative, to learn how to learn, and to cope with stress” (Abraham, Mackie, 2005, p. 82). When it comes to the soft skills, they develop in very special conditions. As the recent research of Heckman and others shows, the most important time for creating soft skills is early childhood, and the effects to a large extent depend on the family structure and the quality of interactions between parents and a child (see Heckman, 2012). He also underlines that soft, also called ‘non-cognitive’, skills which build a character are more important in terms of long-term educational and professional achievements (Heckman, 2017).

2. Human Capital Made by and with the Family

In order to understand the process of HC development, it is necessary to point at family as its main source. In a large body of literature, the influence of this primary group on the socio-economic development has been widely described and analyzed (Michalski, 2014). As we read in Gary S. Becker’s work,

no discussion of human capital can omit the influence of families on the knowledge, skills, values, and habits of their children. (...) Parents have a large influence on the education, marital stability, and many other dimensions of their children’s lives (Becker, 1993, p. 21; Becker, 2007b, pp. 4–5).

HC is not only created within families, and one should also mention the contribution of such elements as an educational or healthcare system. The problem is that sometimes the production of human capital becomes limited to the functioning of these spheres. The truth is that at the same time family and medical care or schooling systems are necessary because they together influence the quality of the outcomes. It is important though to say that family deserves to be treated as a unique institution in terms of HC creation because it serves as a catalyst in this process. It means that without a well-functioning family and fundamental time inputs from parents, it is less likely that the efforts of teachers and doctors (and others contributing) will be successful (Abraham, Mackie, 2005, p. 80).

Coming back to family, firstly, it is necessary to point at the fundamental fact of the procreative function of the family, which results in new human beings joining the society and making any development possible at all. It does not mean that this biological dimension of giving birth can be reduced to HC creation, yet it is a necessary condition which sometimes seems to be ignored or forgotten (see Michalski, 2010).

When it comes to the role of the family in the context of biological reproduction, we intend to point at the quantity side of human capital supply within a society. It means that the sufficient amount of it depends on the demographic trends and their outcomes. In terms of the long-term functioning and development, a society should reach fertility of 2.14, which is described as the replacement level fertility, which enables the population to reproduce itself and grow. In this light, the current demographic trends in the West should be seen as the danger to the process of HC development.

Besides the quantity of HC, one has to pay attention to its quality. If there is agreement that it is the family which seriously influences the effectiveness of HC development, then it becomes clear that the condition of this primary social group does matter. It is confirmed by Heckman and Mosso who write that “family environments during the early years and parenting are critical determinants of human development because they shape the lifetime skill base” (Heckman, Mosso, 2014, p. 60). This view is also supported by Abraham and Mackie who claim that the quality of home environment influences the potential of learning in the future. They also write that in the case of combination of parental and other paid care there is “(...) an emerging consensus that long hours of nonmaternal child care for children under the age of 3 can have adverse effects on children’s development (...)” (Abraham, Mackie, 2005, p. 83).

The data presented here and other sources so far prove that the condition, structure, and quality of family environment is important. This is going to be developed in the next paragraph, where the influence of the transformations of family life in recent decades on the HC creation in our societies is discussed.

3. Socio-cultural Context: Family Transformations, Sexual Revolution, and Effects on the Quantity and Quality of Human Capital

It is worth to remind Becker, who briefly summarized many aspects of the transformation of a family life in recent decades in the West in the following fragment. He writes in the beginning of his *Treatise on the Family*, that

the family in the Western world has been radically altered – some claim almost destroyed – by events of the last three decades. The rapid growth in divorce rates has greatly increased the number of households headed by women and the number of children growing up in households with only one parent. The large increase in labor force participation of married woman, including mothers with young children, has reduced the contact between children and their mothers and contributed to the conflict between the sexes in employment as well as in marriage. The rapid decline in birth rates has

reduced family size and helped cause the increased rates of divorce and labor force participation of married woman. Conversely, expanded divorce and labor force participation have reduced the desire to have large families (Becker, 1993, p. 1).

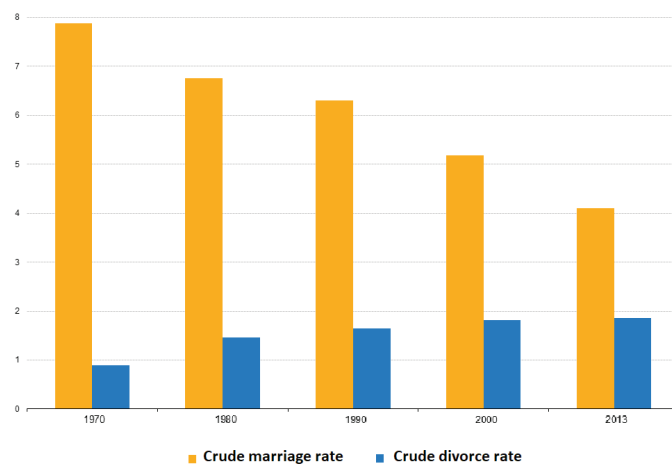
The important question here is how these changes affected the functioning of the family in terms of its capacity for HC creation. In this section, I am going to point at the main aspects of this socio-cultural shift which profoundly transformed the picture of marriage, family, fertility, and socialization patterns. One should focus in this case on two elements: fertility, which is responsible for having new babies born, who are necessary to start the process of HC development, and the condition of the family in terms of the structure, stability, and the quality of relationships, which influence potential investments in HC. As it was signalled, there are serious reasons to be concerned about both of these issues. Firstly, because the West becomes depopulated, and secondly, because the family deconstruction processes are seriously advanced. In this section, the analysis will focus on the processes that have been initiated more than fifty years ago, which, according to Abraham and Mackie, jeopardize the investments in HC in families (Abraham, Mackie, 2005, p. 79).

In the context of the profound changes, I point at such important factors – often associated with a sexual revolution – as divorce, cohabitation, out-of-wedlock births, single parenthood, blended families, contraception, and abortion. I am aware of the fact that these are issues which often ignite intensive emotions and ideological tensions. All the more, I believe that it is necessary to point at research evidence to discover real influences and interactions in order to understand better what supports and what weakens HC.

3.1. Divorce

First of all, it is worth pointing at a fundamental change that the legalisation of divorce introduced. It is already well known that it decreases marriage and family stability, fertility (Alesina, Giuliano, 2006), and weakens not only the quality of socialization of children, but also should be seen as the fact which seriously deforms their whole life (Wallerstein, 2000).

The rise in divorce is also connected with a diminishing role and status of marriage. Since 1970's, the number of divorces has been growing, whereas the number of marriages has been decreasing (see Figure 1).



Note: change in time interval on the x-axis. Excluding French overseas departments for 1970 to 1990.

Figure 1. Crude Marriage and Divorce Rates, EU-28, 1970–2013 (per 1,000 persons)

Source: Eurostat, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Crude_marriage_and_divorce_rates,_EU-28,_1970-2013_\(per_1_000_persons\).png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Crude_marriage_and_divorce_rates,_EU-28,_1970-2013_(per_1_000_persons).png).

Table 1. Marriages and Divorces in EU

Year	Marriages/1,000 persons	Divorces/1,000 persons
2000	5.2	1.8
2011	4.2	2.0

Source: Eurostat, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Infograph_marriages_births.jpg.

3.2. Cohabitation

According to Eurostat, there is nearly one divorce per two marriages. At the same time, the popularity of cohabitation, which is chosen as a substitute for marital bonds, is growing. The research shows that this form of a quasi-family life is less stable. What is more, the experienced cohabitation also influences the stability of marriages of men and women (Waite, Gallagher, 2000, p. 46). In the case of cohabitation, it is also more likely that the partners will be unfaithful (Wellings, Field, Johnson, Wadsworth, 1994, p. 116; Steinhaisler, 1995). Another study shows that cohabiting couples do not accumulate as much wealth as married do (Waite, Gallagher, 2000, pp. 111–114; Akerlof, 1998, pp. 299–303).

3.3. Single Parenthood

Divorce and cohabitation are also linked to single parenthood which influences child's development and decrease possible parental investments. According to J.J. Heckman,

intact families invest greater amounts in their children than do single-parent families (...). The evidence on disparities in child-rearing environments and their consequences for adult outcomes is troubling in light of the shrinking proportion of children being raised in intact families (Heckman, 2011, p. 33).

In the same source, he states that the reason and potential solution is not just money, which has been treated as the main explanation for years, but even more important is to have good parenting (Heckman, 2011, p. 33).

3.4. Blended Families

Looking at another issue, somehow also linked to divorces, one should pay attention to the phenomenon of blended families, which consist of spouses and children who are not all biologically related. According to research, this form of the family life is less stable and less effective in terms of enhancing children's HC (Ginther, Pollak, 2004, pp. 671–696).

One of the studies which confirm that the structure of the family plays a significant role in facilitating the future achievements of children offers an interesting explanation. It says that it is like this because of the differences in the level of investments in children in different cases of a family structure. As the author writes,

in a two-biological parent family, children may be considered collective or public goods and it is efficient for both parents to invest in a child's well-being. When parents separate, investment in a child decreases, as children are no longer viewed as a public good (formalized by Weiss and Willis 1985). Thus, in a single parent family with no contact with the nonresident parent, children may be considered a private good and only one parent efficiently invests in their well-being. Under fairly general conditions, (...) the optimal level of investment in a child who is a public good is strictly greater than that in a child who is a private good (Gennetian, 2005, pp. 416–417).

The above results apply to blended families as well as to single-parent homes. A different study performed by Donna K. Ginther and Robert A. Pollak shows that children raised in intact families, on average, were able to complete more years of schooling. In comparison to their peers from blended or single-parent families, they more often graduated from a high school, and successfully attended and completed a college (Ginther, Pollak, 2004, pp. 671–696).

3.5. Out-of-wedlock Births

Out-of-wedlock births become more and more numerous in the West these days. According to Eurostat, “in 2012, 40.0% of live births in the EU-28 were outside marriage, which is 12.7 percentage points higher than the share of 27.3% in 2000” (Eurostat, 2015).

When it comes to the consequences of it, one can refer to the effects that were discussed in the case of cohabitation and single-parenthood. When it comes to the latter, G.A. Akerloff, J.L. Yellen and M.L. Katz write, that “rising out-of-wedlock birthrates are of social policy concern because children reared in single-parent house-holds are more likely to be impoverished and to experience difficulties in later life” (Akerloff, Yellen, Katz, 1996, p. 278).

In terms of HC creation, out-of-wedlock births pose a serious disadvantage. R. Haskins and I. Sawhill show that if a young person first finishes a high school, then finds a job, marries, and then becomes a parent, they have a two percent chance of ending up in poverty, and almost a seventy-five percent chance to join the middle class with the income of no less than fifty thousand dollars per year (Haskins, Sawhill, 2009). It means that it really matters for the parental investments in HC of their children how and when they make the most important decisions in their life (see also Klepinger, Lundberg, Plotnick, 1997).



Figure 2. The Role of Order of Key Life Decisions and Actions for Welfare

Source: author's own work based on Haskins and Sawhill, 2009 (see Schulz, 2013, pp. 16, 39).

3.6. Contraception

In the case of the last two factors analysed here – contraception and abortion – it is not difficult to admit that certainly they negatively influence the quantity of potential HC, because they limit births. In the case of contraception, there is an ongoing debate whether it influences marital stability and the quality of relations between spouses, which in the long run shape a better or worse environment for investments in children's HC. It has been often suspected that while natural family planning (NFP) methods – often connected with stronger religious involvement – strengthen marital bonds and decrease the likelihood of a divorce, contraception weakens the relationship between spouses and thus makes a divorce more probable. In 2015,

Richard J. Fehring published his research which gives a clearer picture of this issue. He writes in the conclusion, that

ever use of NFP certainly has some influence on divorce among reproductive age women. However, how much influence use of NFP has on divorce is not known, certainly religiosity (and in particular frequent church attendance) has some influence, as well as positive marital dynamics that are developed with use of NFP, i.e., communication, self-control, and mutual motivation. Contraceptive use, sterilization, and abortion seem to have a destructive effect on the marital bond (Fehring, 2015, p. 281).

3.7. Abortion

Abortion is the last phenomenon analyzed here as a factor which seriously influenced and transformed a family and social life in the twentieth century. Its legalisation in different countries triggered many complex changes and profoundly modified the Western culture and civilization. Leaving aside the history of abortion, I will present here the research calculating the impact of abortion on lost and wasted productivity in the United States.

In this section, we are presenting a proposal for evaluating the HC loss due to abortion in the case of the United States. Henry Potrykus and Anna Higgins, the authors of the article *Abortion: Decrease of the U.S. Population & Effects on Society*, are offering a very interesting analysis, which helps understand how this practice of population control influences a wide range of behaviours and processes within a society. In their analysis, they concentrate on social and economic consequences of forty years of law which allows taking life of the unborn children. In their opinion, abortion has had a massive effect on the society in many aspects. Not only does it reduce births, but also changes conception behaviors. According to their analysis,

abortion encourages sexual behavior – in particular, out-of-wedlock sexual behavior (...). The expected consequence of conception, and in particular, the possibility of out-of-wedlock birth, previously discouraged sexual behavior, particularly that outside of marriage (...) (Potrykus, Higgins, 2014, p. 3).

According to the data, there have been between 1.2 million to 1.5 million abortions per year, and it is known that abortion reduces births by around 10 percent (Potrykus, Higgins, 2014, pp. 2–3). This number is the result of specific calculations, since we know that abortion modifies (increases) conception behaviors.

The authors then estimate the number of people that are missing due to this practice. The base for the calculations is the number of live births between 1970s and 2000s, which averaged approximately four million per year. In the conclusion of this part, they write that

given that abortion caused a 10 percent decrease in the number of children born, one determines that approximately a third of aborted children would be present today had abortion not been legalized. While 100 percent of successfully aborted children are clearly not alive, others would not have been conceived due to the exercise of self-restraint from engaging in sex. It is the remaining percent of those aborted that would have been contributors to the labor force (33 percent of all abortions, about 400,000 persons per year) (Potrykus, Higgins, 2014, p. 4).

The exact calculation they make is as follows:

$$(4,000,000 \text{ births per year}) \times (10\% \text{ decreased birthrate}) = 400,000 \text{ births} \\ \text{(that would have been) lost to abortion.}$$

It results in the situation, when $400,000/1,200,000 = 0.33$

$400,000/1.2 \text{ million annual abortions} = 33\%$ of aborted children would be present today

(Potrykus, Higgins, 2014, p. 4).

Table 2. Abortion and Lost Human Capital Figures for the USA

1.2 abortions per year
10% – decrease of births due to abortion
4,000,000 – number of live births in the USA between 1970s and 2000s per year
$4,000,000 \times 0.1 = 400,000$
400,000 people missing = lost human capital per year
40 years of abortion = $40 \times 400,000 =$ about 15,000,000 people lost with their human capital between 70 billion and 135 billion dollars loss of economic activity (valued work)
Lost Economic Activity
LEa = <70,000,000,000 \$; 135,000,000,000 \$>

Source: Potrykus and Higgins (2014), pp. 4–5.

Potrykus and Higgins write, that

(...) approximately 10 million workers have been eliminated by abortion. Of these 10 million, approximately 5 million would be of age to actively participate in the labor force today. Without legalized abortion, over 5 million additional people would be part of the current labor force. This is a substantial fraction of the present labor force of 150 million workers (Potrykus, Higgins, 2014, pp. 4–5).

In the next step, they try to find how much of economic activity in terms of valued work is lost because of legalized abortion. According to their estimations, every year the United States loses between 70 billion and 135 billion dollars (Potrykus, Higgins, 2014, p. 5).

Other authors, R. Lee and A. Mason, offer interesting estimations of relations between changes in support ratio and an income per capita as a consequence of a decline in fertility. They include an old age survival rate, which is an important factor influencing current demographic processes. In their analysis, they assume that per capita income is the result of the wage and the support ratio (Lee, Mason, 2010, p. 163). The total wage is represented by T_t , total population by N_t , annual wage earned by workers by W_t , and the support ratio by SR_t .

As a result:

$$\frac{T_t}{N_t} = W_t SR_t.$$

In calculating per capita income, they assume that fertility and old age survival influence the support ratio, and propose the following equation:

$$\frac{T_t}{N_t} = \frac{W_t}{1 + F_t + s_{t-1} / F_{t-1}}.$$

In their description of these relations we read:

Holding the wage constant, a decline in fertility in the current period leads to a contemporaneous increase in the support ratio and in per capita income. In the following period, however, the number of elderly dependents increases and, thus, the support ratio and per capita income decline. The magnitude of the decline depends on the old age survival rate. The higher the survival rate the greater the decline in the support ratio and per capita income. Given the fertility rate, an increase in the survival rate leads to a decline in the support ratio and per capita income (Lee, Mason, 2010, p. 163).

All this means that to understand the impact of decreasing fertility, one should consider a short- and long-term perspective as well, and include additional factors such as e.g. changing longevity and a support ratio it influences.

Conclusions

According to the data collected and presented in this article, our Western civilization suffers from serious loss and waste of HC. It is probably one of the most surprising paradoxes of

our times that the West, which praises a sustainable development these days, leads an extremely unsustainable way of life. The available research shows that it is justified to claim that such characteristic phenomena as described here – divorce, cohabitation, out-of-wedlock births, single parenthood, blended families, contraception, and abortion – decrease the quantity and quality of HC.

Of course, it is possible that in single cases of some of the situations mentioned above (e.g. of divorce), there may be some positive consequences, yet statistically – on the basis of a large body of research and literature (also cited in this article) – it is well-founded to say that their general influence on the quantity and quality of HC is negative.

If we really value HC, we should admit that the approach to human being and human life that has dominated the West in the 20th and 21st century is impossible to justify and sustain. It destroys our competitive advantage and leads our civilization to underdevelopment.

If it is too difficult for us to find any ethical or metaphysical foundation for supporting actions and decisions which would put an end to this huge loss and waste of skills, ideas, talents, and possible innovations, let us stick to the economic reasoning and start with this perspective. A good argument for that can be found in Schumacher's writings, where we read that

from an economic point of view, the central concept of wisdom is permanence. We must study the economics of permanence. Nothing makes economic sense unless its continuance for a long time can be projected without running into absurdities (Schumacher, 1993, p. 20).

There is still time to change our ways, I believe.

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