
Free Time or Duties – Students’ Dilemmas

Iwona Ewa Waldzińska¹

Abstract

The changes that affect global society likewise affect the family. These changes refer to different aspects of how the family functions: its structure, its component relationships, and how its members spend their free time. Adults spend the majority of their weekdays at work, while the children spend this time within the education system; this arrangement thus determines how family life is organized. In order for a family to function well, all its members need to spend time together. This is necessary for creating strong bonds between parents and children. Upbringing is a process in which parents need time to teach their children various things and set a good example for them to follow. Children need to spend time with their parents so that they have an opportunity to follow that good example. Do contemporary families have enough free time? Does spare time mean the same as it did in the past? Do people realize the importance of spending time with others in real life and not online? The aim of this article is to present the findings of a survey conducted to discover students’ attitudes towards free time. The survey was carried out via the Internet between 1 and 31 January 2023 among the students of Cavalry Witold Pilecki State University of Lesser Poland in Oswiecim, Poland. The main conclusion is that contemporary students face a lack of free time as they spend their time either on work or doing activities connected with their studies.

Keywords: family, free/leisure time/spare time, students, upbringing

1. Introduction

Every person’s life can be divided between the duties they perform, whether these are related to work or studies or their family responsibilities; and what remains is their time off, which is commonly referred to as free, leisure or spare time. What exactly does this time off mean? Is it the time when someone does not perform any duties connected to their work or studies, or is it an allocation of time that has been carefully planned in a diary, for example to go on holiday? Does a person nowadays need to plan to go for a walk in their diary or set a reminder in the phone because otherwise they will not have time for it? Is doing nothing considered free time as well? The contemporary person lives in a period of significant and rapid changes in all spheres of life: culture, religion, and social norms and perspectives. All of this leads to changes within the family, changes

¹ Iwona Ewa Waldzińska, doktorica znanosti i predavačica na Malopolskom državnom sveučilište „satnik Witold Pilecki“ u Oswiecimu, Poljska

that go beyond traditions and values and which reach all the way down to how its members spend their free time.

2. Free time as an element of human life

The term *free time* can be analysed from different perspectives depending on what aspects are emphasized and the functions leisure plays. Accordingly, there are numerous definitions of free time. The most basic definition of this term provided by *Cambridge Dictionary* says that it is time when you do not have to perform any duties such as work or studies and you can do what you want. This is probably the way an average person understands the meaning of this notion. The online *PWN encyclopaedia* says that free time is part of the time that a person has, during which they can do various activities according to one's own preferences. The main focus of this definition is on the engagement in anything a person chooses to do. A more detailed definition of free time states that it is part of the time budget which is not devoted to any of the following activities: work – either regular or additional; studies; satisfying physiological needs, for example sleeping or washing; and doing domestic chores like cooking, cleaning or taking care of family members. It is instead time for holidays, family life, social duties, or any activities that bring temporary benefits. This definition emphasises the division of time into two parts: the time a person is busy performing their duties, and the time which can be devoted to things connected with relaxation (Kamiński, 1965). The pedagogical dictionary defines free time as the time that a person has left over after doing obligatory things both at work/school and at home and also after doing necessary domestic chores. Free time, according to this definition, may be devoted to the following things: 1) relaxation, 2) physical and mental recuperation, 3) entertainment, 4) social activity, and 5) interests and hobbies (Okoń, 1981). As can be seen, the main emphasis of the definitions of free time is placed on the time that is left over after fulfilling duties connected with school, work, or the family, and having satisfied basic physiological and hygienic needs (Przećławski, 1993).

Free time, according to another definition, is time outside work which a person can spend resting, making use of various achievements, developing hobbies and interests and entertaining themselves. The main function of free time is the satisfaction that one gains from doing something of one's own choice – or doing nothing. However, in order to fully appreciate the free time a person has, the appropriate state of mind is necessary (Gaworecki, 2007).

Definitions of free time can also be divided according to the element that they emphasise. Those that focus on the activities done in one's free time,

for example by playing sport, are called *structural definitions*. If the main emphasis of a definition is the function that free time has, for instance relaxation or developing one's personality, the definition is a *functional definition*. *Attributive definitions* refer to a single person and emphasise their causative power. (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2007). In the author's definition of free time, the following elements are indicated: intellectual, emotional, and physical wellbeing, which is the result of an individual's choice in favour of non-commercial activities that bring satisfaction (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2007). What is important is that only when the three requirements are fulfilled – freedom of choice, absence of economic gain, and satisfaction – can the time be called *free time* (Parczewska, 2017).

An analysis of the above definitions allows for the conclusion that they share a few key elements: work/studies and other duties and the time outside them, which a person can spend according to their own preferences. The functions of free time which appear in the definitions are similar as well: relaxation, entertainment, hobbies and interests. For the purpose of this article, what is meant by free time is any activity that a person chooses to do after fulfilling the duties connected with their work or studies.

How do Polish people spend their free time and have there been any changes in recent years? The results of the survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) in 2022 on the ways in which Polish people spend their free time show that, compared with 2020 and 2021, more people participated in a variety of social activities. The most popular were the following: going to a restaurant with family or friends, organising a party, reading a book, going away for a holiday, and attending a sports event. 76% of the respondents reported going to a restaurant. 70% (a rise from 63%) organised a party for family or friends. When it comes to reading books, the situation seems to have remained at the same level in the last three years, with six out of ten people reading at least one book for pleasure. Despite high inflation, the number of people going away on holiday is similar to the figure in 2019. Over half of the respondents participated in one holiday trip and a quarter participated in more than one. In considering these statistics, though, it is worth recalling that in 2020 and 2021, restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic would have had a negative effect on frequenting restaurants, cinemas, and hotels. As a result, fewer people were able to go out to spend their free time. In summary, after two years strongly affected by the pandemic and its attendant restrictions, the engagement of Polish people with free time activities appears to have returned to the numbers last seen in 2019 (Feliksiak, 2023).

3. The survey and its findings

Free time is an important element in one's quality of life. The amount of free time and the way this time is spent influences every aspect of a person's life, including their work and studies, their health, and how they feel (Zandecki, 1999, Daszykowska 2005). The question is whether people nowadays can really manage their time well so that they have it not only for work and other duties, but for themselves as well and how they spend it. The research goal was to discover and present the model of spending free time by full- and part-time students of Cavalry Witold Pilecki University of Lesser Poland in Oswiecim, Poland. Since this is a very broad topic, it was narrowed to the aspects such as the amount of free time that the participants have and the way(s) they organise it. The specific research questions arising from the goal defined are the following ones:

- 1) Do you live in a hurry?
- 2) Do you try to do as many things as possible during the day?
- 3) Do you perform extra duties connected with work or studies in your free time?
- 4) Are you affected by a shortage of time?
- 5) Do you delay things connected with work/studies?
- 6) Do you postpone doing things meant for free time?
- 7) Do you plan your free time?

In order to find answers to these questions, the survey was conducted via the Internet between 1 and 31 January 2023 among the students of Cavalry Witold Pilecki University of Lesser Poland in Oswiecim, Poland. The questionnaire consisting of the above questions was sent to the full- and part-time students of English Studies and Pedagogy. The number of participants in the survey was 81, of whom 80.2% were female, 18.5% were male, and 1.3% did not declare their sex. The majority of respondents (79%) were between 20-30 years of age. 12.3% of the students belonged to the youngest age group of below 20 years of age, and 8.5% of those who participated in the survey were between 30 and 50 years old. Almost 57% of the students who participated in the survey were employed, and one person was a pensioner. Three participants were unemployed. When it comes to family status, 64% of the students declared themselves to be in a relationship, and 11% had children. Undertaking the research is related to research interests of the author, which are various aspects regarding contemporary families.

The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions. Apart from the above ones, the first three concerned age group, sex and family status. Questions relating to the organisation of time had the same set of answers: *always, often sometimes, never, I do not know*. In the question about a family status it was possible to choose more than one answer. The aim of the survey was to examine students'

preferences regarding free time and determine whether the participants were willing to devote this time to doing other activities.

In answer to the question about life in a hurry, around 52% of the students often experienced such a state, a quarter of them sometimes lived in a hurry and 12.3% mentioned a permanently hectic life. The detailed answers are presented in Image 1.

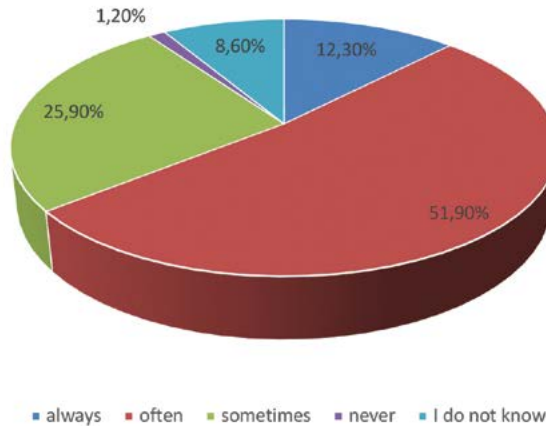


Image 1. I live in a hurry.

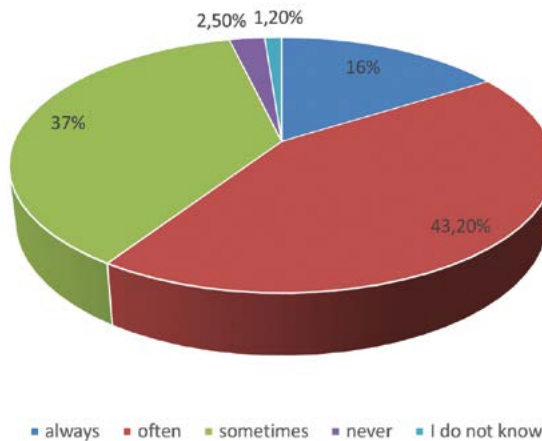


Image 2. I try to do as many things as possible during the day.

The answers to another question asked revealed that the great majority of the students try to do as many things as possible during the day. Only one person could not give a precise answer. The other participants do as much as they can either always (16%), often (43.2%) or sometimes (37%), as shown in Image 2.

The fact that the students try to do as many things as possible each and the information acquired in the answers to another question may serve as an explanation as to why the participants do not have free time or do not have as much free time as they would like to have. The majority of participants do extra activities, apart from regular classes at university, and these can be time-consuming. The students' replies to the question about their free time clearly show that they tend to spend it in a different way from that which was planned – still performing duties connected with studies or work. Detailed data are presented in Image 3.

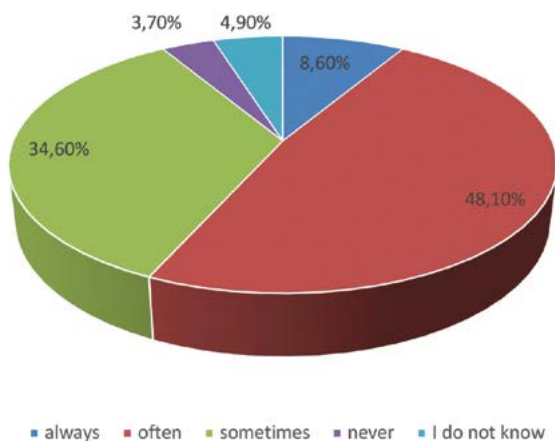


Image 3. I perform extra duties connected with work or studies in my free time.

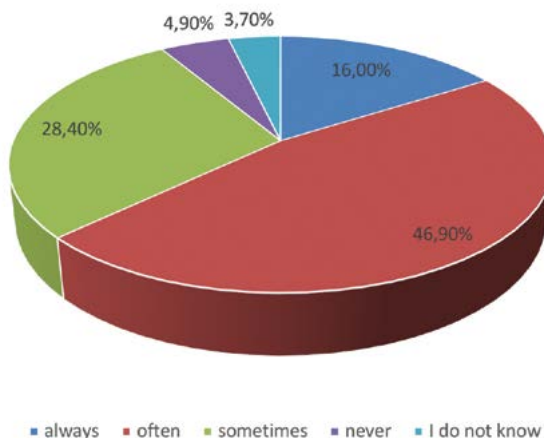


Image 4. I am affected by a shortage of time.

Almost 90% of the respondents admitted to doing things connected with either work or studies in their spare time: 48.1% of the students often do this, 34.6% sometimes and 8.6% always. Only 3.7% of the respondents never devote their free time to extra work or studies. This may be an explanation as to why they say they do not have enough time. Only four people said that they never lacked free time and three people had difficulty giving a precise answer to this question. Thirty-eight students often lacked free time, twenty-three of them sometimes experienced such a situation, and thirteen people always faced a shortage of time.

On the other hand, students also tend to delay things connected with work or studies. Only 12.3% never do this. The most common answer to this question was *often* (43.2%). 29.6% of the students sometimes put off performing work or study duties and almost 15% always do this. It seems that students live in a vicious circle: they suffer from a lack of free time because they decide to complete work or school assignments during this time, as they do not do these tasks during the time planned for them.

What is worth mentioning is that the vast majority of the students plan their free time. They do this either sometimes (46.9%), often (24.7%), or always (8.6%). The data obtained also show the following aspects related to leisure time nowadays. People plan this time, but do not always stick to the plans. Almost 78% of the replies show that students' plans are often or sometimes cancelled. This probably refers to the activities which can wait and be done later without serious consequences, such as meeting a friend, going for a walk, or reading a book – typical activities associated with leisure. Activities like going on a trip or holiday and more serious arrangements cannot be cancelled that easily. However, one should not delay doing little things for pleasure and relaxation as they are extremely important for physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Sport, meeting friends, and doing something only for oneself help lead a healthier lifestyle.

In summary, it can be stated that the majority of the respondents do not have enough free time. The reason for this is that they tend to spend the time that they have outside regular work and studies doing things connected with their work and studies. The situation does not change even if they plan their activities for their free time. It happens that they cancel or delay such plans in order to deal with some other duties. The respondents admit to living busy lives and trying to do as many things as possible each day. This also explains why most of them suffer from a lack of time meant for doing things of their own choice, the aim of which is to relax.

One must also bear in mind that free time is an essential part of family life. Nine students participating in the survey already have families. Working, studying, and having a family must be a difficult thing. However, those who are parents (11.1%) should remember that they are the most important people for their children. This is because of one of the roles that adults – as parents – need to fulfil – they are the first educators of their children.

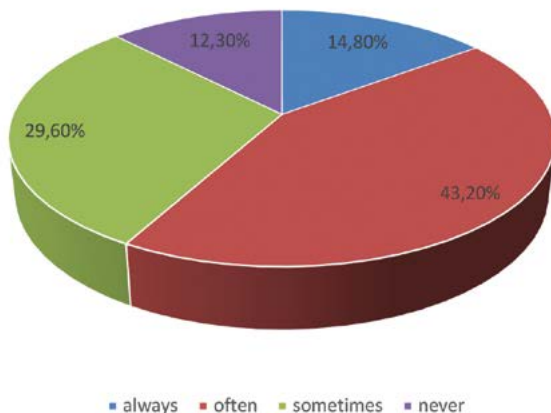


Image 5. I delay things connected with work/studies.

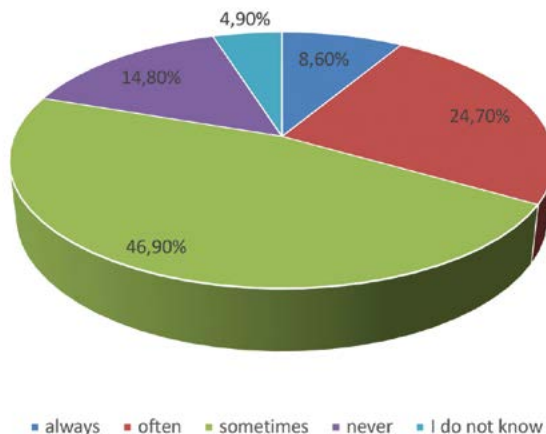


Image 6. I plan my free time.

Before children go to kindergarten or school, they spend the majority of their time with their mother or father. It is natural for children to observe and copy the behaviour of the adults they see the most often. When children see their parents working a lot and doing duties connected with work at home, it is what they may also do in the future when they have their own families. Another thing is that parents who work a lot may not have enough time for their children. What is necessary for proper upbringing is valuable time spent together. There are numerous positive consequences of this. Firstly, the bonds between parents and children become stronger. Secondly, when parents and children spend time together, they can talk without hurrying. It is during such conversations that parents can teach their children values and family traditions, and talk about

problems. One must also remember that free time should be first and foremost for entertainment, fun, and relaxation.

What conclusions can be drawn for those participants who have not started family yet? One of the key skills in the contemporary world is the ability to manage time well. People work a lot, and some of that work takes place online, so the boundaries between work/study time and free time may become blurred or even disappear. Consequently, one spends too much time working, despite being at home, and there is no time for rest. There must be time for duties, but one must not forget about the importance of being able to find time for oneself: for relaxation, hobbies, or sport. Students should remember to participate in family life as well, and spend time with their parents, siblings, and grandparents. Get-togethers and chats are always a great opportunity to learn new things about family history, which is also an element of upbringing. Meeting and chats between representatives of different generations help maintain strong and good relations within families. This enables family members to know each other's needs better and fulfil them, which is a key element of family life, regardless of whether the students who participated in the survey had already started their own ones or not.

8. What kind of upbringing do we want?

Nowadays, people should remember that real life is life with other people: we need them and we need to establish relationships with them. In order to have good relationships, one should spend time with others face to face. However, a lot of activity nowadays takes place online: working/studying, shopping, communicating, and even maintaining a social life. Is that the upbringing that we want? What is necessary for people is to be with other people and have good relationships with them, both family and friends. In the past people needed a group in order to survive and nowadays they need different forms of support, for example emotional, financial, or informative in various situations (Lyubomirsky, 2020). The Internet cannot be a substitute for the family because it is the family which should be a model for each of its members, especially for young people. It is in the family that educational processes occur, during which one gains knowledge about rules, values, and living one's life. When talking about free time, one must bear in mind the changes that have already occurred and are still occurring within family life. One of these is the amount of time children spend outside the home – in kindergarten, at school, or with extra-curricular activities. This greatly reduces the time spent together, which is essential for building emotional bonds between members of the family and the emotional development of the child. That is why the basis for a child's

upbringing is the quality of contact and relationships between parents and children. In order for conversations to be meaningful, people need time to think what to say. Upbringing must be based on parents' wise love towards their children and their presence in the child's lives. If parents do not spend enough time with their children, they start to seek authorities outside the family – in the peer group or, more commonly nowadays, on the Internet, which gives a false impression of anonymity, freedom, and relationships. In upbringing what matters most is the pedagogical relationship and the emotional attitude of a mature adult – the mother and father – towards the young person becoming a mature adult (Olearczyk, 2020). The student participants of the survey may not need to spend so much free time with their parents as very young children because they are adults, so they do not have to be taken care of. However, this does not mean that they do not need to spend time with their parents. They also have problems and may want to discuss them with parents and if chats or more serious conversation have always been an element of family life, they still need them, no matter how old they are or whether they have already started their own families. Thus, if their parents work too much, or if they have too many duties related to studies and work, it is likely that there will be less or not enough time for a valuable time spent together. The students who are already parents should remember that an excessive amount of time spent on activities connected with work and studies may reduce the amount of time devoted to children and family life.

Apart from the lack or not enough time that some people may suffer from, another negative thing that may influence family life concerns the way families spend their free time, especially at the weekends. Whole families go to shopping centres, where they can do not only the shopping, but also eat a meal, and, in some cases, listen to concerts or see an art exhibition (Świątkiewicz, 2019, Świątkiewicz-Mośny, 2005). There is nothing wrong with doing shopping, which is an essential part of people's lives, and spending time in such a way occasionally. However, if it should become a habit, it may be impossible for a family to enjoy this time together. Shopping centres are usually noisy, crowded places which do not guarantee a good atmosphere for building strong bonds and good relationships between members of a family. If this is what young people learnt in their childhood, there is a possibility that they copy this behaviour later in life when they have their own families.

9. Conclusions

Time is a key word in people's lives nowadays. Spending most of the time one has available on one's own duties may lead to tiredness and loneliness. Raising children takes both time and the parents' involvement. The way that the parents organise their time can have an effect on the patterns their children will follow later in life. This concern those participants of the survey who have already started their families. They have to manage their time in such a way that family life will not suffer and that there will be opportunities for all members to spend it together. Those students who participated in the survey and have not started their families yet, should also learn to prioritise tasks so that there is always time left for hobbies, interests and other things of their choice, and not only for the activities connected to studies and work. It is extremely important for these students to try and change habits now. Free time is necessary to rest so that one has stamina to perform tasks connected with work or studies. If one plans activities for free time, they should stick to the plans and not cancel them, as this may bring more positive consequences than spending another days at desk. Concentrating on a different thing may help clear mind and performing duties connected with work or studies may be much easier later on. When talking about time, and this includes free time, one must remember that the most valuable time that a family can spend is together in the real world, not online. In order for a relation to be a good one, one needs to meet people, talk to them and be them and not only exchange messages online.

References

1. Czerepaniak-Walczak M. (2007). *Od próżniaczenia do zniewolenia – w poszukiwaniu dyskursów czasu wolnego.in:* E.Marynowicz-Hetka (ed.), *Pedagogika społeczna. Podręcznik akademicki*, vol.2. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, pp. 219–236.
2. Daszykowska J. (2005). *Czas wolny a jakość życia nauczycieli studiujących*. Kraków 2005, p. 9.
3. Feliksiak M. (2023). *Aktywności i doświadczenia Polaków w roku 2022*. Warszawa, Fundacja Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej.
4. Gaworecki W. (2007). *Turystyka wydanie 5 zmienione*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN, p. 90.
5. Kamiński A. (1965). *Czas wolny i jego problematyka społeczno-wychowawcza*. Wrocław Ossolineum, p. 247.
6. Lyubomirsky S. (2020). *Wybierz szczęście*, Warszawa: MT Biznes, p. 143-145.
7. Olearczyk T., (2020). *Przemiany polskiej rodziny i ich konsekwencje wychowawcze*, in: *Rodzina – Wychowanie – Przyszłość*, E. Osewska, J. Stala (eds.), Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II w Krakowie, p. 169--190.
8. Parczewska T. (2017), *Czas wolny jako jeden z wymiarów życia codziennego dzieci mieszkających w Polsce i w Portugalii*, *Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny XXXVI (1)*: 102-119.
9. Przecławski K. (1993). *Czas wolny dzieci i młodzieży*. in: W. Pomykało (ed.) *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Funacja Innowacja, pp. 75-77.
10. Świątkiewicz W. (2019), *Rodzina współczesna w Polsce. Kondycja i kierunki przemian*. in: *Rodzina w społeczeństwie – relacje i wyzwania*, E. Osewska, J. Stala (ed.) Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II w Krakowie, p. 28-29.
11. Świątkiewicz-Mośny M. (2005). *Family and Free Time. Modern Ways of Spending Free Time: Opportunity or Danger for Family*, in: *Rodzina na prelomie tisícrocia. Zbornik referatov z medzinarodnej vedeckej konferencie*, A. Kolesarova (ed.), Nitra, p. 301.
12. Zandrecki A. (1999). *Wykształcenie a jakość życia. Dynamika orientacji młodzieżowej szkół średnich*. Toruń-Poznań.

Web sources

1. *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/free-time>, Accessed September 29,2023.
PWN Encyclopaedia, entry *free time*, <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/szukaj/czas%20wolny.html>, Accessed September 22, 2