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# Silence in parental communication

## Milczenie w komunikacji rodzicielskiej

**Abstract:**

*Background: Parental communication is an important subsystem of family communication. In the literature on the subject, it is often discussed in terms of communication style, speaking and listening, and therefore it is analysed in the context of verbal and non-verbal communication. However, an important issue in parental communication is not only what has been said, but also what has been passed over in silence. Therefore, it is also worth paying attention to silence as an important form of parental communication.*

*Objectives: The authors set themselves the goal of drawing attention to silence in the sphere of parental communication in the context of young people using the Internet. In a silent home, many problems and family matters remain unspoken. In this context, silence takes on a new dimension, especially in parental communication in the context of teenagers using the Internet. It presents silence, which replaces face-to-face conversation, which fills interpersonal communication in the family, but not by supporting verbal communication or supporting the active listening process, but by constituting an alternative to talking about problems, often difficult and sensitive issues. It is from this perspective that the authors discuss silent parental communication.*

*Methodology: The first part of the article presents the results of research on the silent home. The research was conducted between November 24–27, 2020 on a sample selected in a quota manner, from the SW Panel online panel administered by SW Research. (1,072 respondents). The survey was conducted using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) technique. The second part of the article uses a secondary analysis of quantitative data from research conducted in 2022 "Teenagers 3.0" (NASK-PIB)*

*Results: Research shows that a silent home is definitely associated negatively by Poles. This concept is rather associated with lies and half-truths, as well as sadness and lack of understanding by loved ones. A silent home can also be considered in the context of a lack of open communication. The research results drew attention to an extremely important issue, namely that young people experience violence online, but do not inform their parents or guardians about it.*

*Conclusions: Silence is an integral part of family communication, including parental communication. A silent home is often a home in which there is a lack of open communication that allows for mutual understanding, support and help. In the context of parental communication, the lack of open communication in the area of listening and talking about existing problems can lead to a situation in which the youngest family members remain lonely and have to deal with the difficulties, problems and threats that appear in external communication on their own, including the threats posed by the improper use of the Internet.*

*Keywords: silence, home, silent home, family, parental communication, family communication, Internet.*

### Abstrakt:

*Tło: Komunikacja rodzicielska stanowi ważny podsystem komunikacji rodzinnej. W literaturze przedmiotu często omawiana jest ona pod kątem stylu komunikacji, mówienia i słuchania, a więc analizowana jest w kontekście komunikacji werbalnej i niewerbalnej. Istotną kwestią w komunikacji rodzicielskiej pozostaje jednakże nie tylko to, co zostało wypowiedziane, ale również to, co zostało przemilczane. Dlatego warto zwrócić również uwagę na milczenie jako ważną formę komunikacji rodzicielskiej.*

*Cele: Autorki postawiły sobie za cel zwrócenie uwagi na milczenie w sferze porozumiewania się rodzicielskiego w kontekście korzystania przez młodych ludzi z Internetu. W milczącym domu wiele problemów, spraw rodzinnych pozostaje niewypowiedzianymi. W tym kontekście milczenie nabiera nowego wymiaru, szczególnie w komunikacji rodzicielskiej w kontekście wykorzystania przez nastolatki Internetu. Przedstawiono milczenie, które zastępuje rozmowę twarzą w twarz, które wypełnia komunikację interpersonalną w rodzinie, jednakże nie poprzez wspieranie komunikacji werbalnej, czy wspieranie aktywnego procesu słuchania, lecz stanowiąc alternatywę dla mówienia o problemach, sprawach często trudnych i drażliwych. Z tej właśnie perspektywy autorki omawiają milczącą komunikację rodzicielską.*

*Metodyka: W pierwszej części artykułu przedstawione zostały wyniki badań dotyczące milczącego domu. Badania przeprowadzone zostały w okresie 24–27 listopada 2020r. na próbie dobranej w sposób kwotowy, z panelu internetowego SW Panel administrowane-*

go przez firmę SW Research. (1072 respondentów). Sondaż przeprowadzono przy użyciu techniki CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview). W drugiej części artykułu zastosowano wtórną analizę danych ilościowych pochodzących z badań zrealizowanych w 2022 roku „Nastolatki 3.0" (NASK-PIB)

Wyniki: Badania pokazują, iż milczący dom kojarzy się Polakom zdecydowanie negatywnie. Pojęcie to utożsamiane jest raczej z kłamstwem i półprawdą oraz smutkiem i brakiem zrozumienia przez bliskich. Milczący dom może być rozpatrywany również w kontekście braku otwartości komunikacyjnej. Wyniki badań zwróciły uwagę na niezwykle istotną kwestię, a mianowicie, że młodzi ludzie doświadczają przemocy w sieci, jednakże nie informują o niej ani rodziców, ani opiekunów.

Wnioski: Milczenie stanowi integralną część komunikacji rodzinnej, w tym rodzicielskiej. Milczący dom, to często dom w którym brakuje otwartej komunikacji, która pozwala na wzajemne zrozumienie, otrzymanie wsparcia i pomocy. W kontekście komunikacji rodzicielskiej brak otwartości komunikacyjnej w obszarze słuchania i mówienia o istniejących problemach prowadzić może do sytuacji w której najmłodsi członkowie rodziny pozostają osamotnieni i samotnie muszą radzić sobie z trudnościami, problemami i zagrożeniami jakie pojawiają się w komunikacji zewnętrznej, w tym zagrożeniami jakie niesie niewłaściwe wykorzystanie Internetu.

Słowa kluczowe: milczenie, dom, milczący dom, rodzina, komunikacja rodzicielska, komunikacja rodzinna, Internet.

## 1. Introduction

The atmosphere of the family home largely depends on the style and quality of family communication (Samfira, 2022, p. 132). It plays an important role in the development and upbringing of children. "The family is therefore an environment for the emotional and intellectual development of children. At the same time, it is worth adding that the specificity of communication and approach to children and other family members, the language used during conversations and the recognition of the fact that each person, every family member is an individual, will determine not only the relations between parents and children, but also the communication skills of children" (Podkowińska, 2011, p. 99). The family and the family home are an environment and place where communication, on the one hand, serves to build bonds, and on the other hand, it is a place where the youngest family members learn the rules of communication, so that in the future they can use them not only in the area of internal (family) communication, but also external communication. Family communication is of course an

extremely complex and broad concept. Each family has its own specific communication style, which distinguishes it from other families. B. Harwas-Napierała defines family communication as a dominant, specific and characteristic pattern of communication for each family that occurs in the relations between family members, encompassing the emerging subsystems" (Harwas-Napierała, 2006, p. 222). One of the subsystems of family communication is parental communication, which is the process of communication between parents and children. This is an important subsystem of family communication. The style and nature of this subsystem can determine the quality of the parent-child relationship, and also influence the behaviour of the youngest family members. Warm parental communication based on openness is associated, as research shows, with positive child health and well-being. In turn negative communication based on teasing and hostility is associated with poor child health (Grey et al., 2022, p. 2). Conversations with children about difficult, sensitive topics may seem particularly problematic. The way specific content is conveyed can affect not only direct verbal or non-verbal feedback, but also delayed feedback in the form of specific behaviours of children and adolescents. A good example of a sensitive topic for teenagers, especially girls, may be a conversation about their body weight. Studies show that raising the topic of improper weight by family members, for example by criticising another person for being overweight or underweight or their clothing style that is not appropriate for the weight, or mothers referring, for example, to their daughters' diet and weight can result in unhealthy eating habits, as well as poorer well-being – in extreme cases, it can lead to the emergence of depressive states (Bauer, Bucchianeri and Neumark-Sztainer, 2013; Grey et al., 2022, pp. 9, 10).

The style of parental communication is therefore crucial for the development, well-being and acquisition of communication skills by the youngest members of the family. However, it sometimes happens that the lack of openness and honesty in parental communication leads to situations in which many topics are not discussed in direct conversations. These topics are shrouded in silence, and parental communication, instead of openness, becomes silent communication. The aim of the article is to indicate the place of silence in parental communication in the context of children and young people using the Internet. Nowadays, the Internet is an important area of communication in the family. It is a tool that "introduces" the external world into the internal world of the family, and therefore family communication. T. Sławek states that "the space of the home is a "territory" in which the knot of the interior and the exterior (hence the significance of the motif of the door and threshold in painting) intertwines domestic and public virtues" (Sławek, Kunce and Kadłubek, 2013, p.76). The home

is a space that is not only "filled" with internal (family) communication, but also the external one. It is the Internet that is a tool, similar to television, that somehow "introduces" external communication into the area of internal communication, making both types of communication interpenetrate and intertwine. That is why it is worth paying attention to silence in the context of family members' use of the Internet. The Internet, like television, is an important tool in the sphere of education and socialization. However, it should be emphasized that despite their undoubted advantages, these tools can largely increase the communication distance between family members. Often, watching TV or using the Internet takes up a lot of time, so children and parents spend this time separately. Children and young people use different media than their parents and guardians, and as a result, they acquire different norms and patterns of behaviour, as well as shape different preferences or views on the world and ideas about the world (Dyczewski, 2005, pp. 235, 236).

## 2. Silent home

Home is a concept that is associated by Poles primarily with family (Duda and Podkowińska, 2022). It is a place where young people learn, among other things, how to communicate and use available communication tools, including the Internet. This is a concept inextricably linked to human existence (Duda, 2017, p. 26). After all, the life of every person is closely linked to family and home. It is at home that the basic principles, norms and values are instilled, which constitute the foundation of life for every adult family member, and more broadly – for every person (Krzesińska-Żach, 2015, p. 286).

Although the home is associated with internal (family) communication, it is also filled with external communication. Shared conversations among household members are an example of internal communication, however, television and the Internet open home to external communication, which can bond the family when its members watch different programs together, comment on the scenes watched, laugh together and experience the fates of the characters. On the other hand, external communication can lead to an increase in the distance between family members, when each household member is immersed in the world of television or the Internet, focusing on the content being watched and thus isolating themselves from loved ones. The Internet or television are therefore tools that can serve the family and provide a pretext for spending time together, providing new topics for conversation, or can be a form of escape from conversation, building a wall of silence in the home sphere. Similarly, mobile

phone conversations, on the one hand, can facilitate communication between family members who, for various reasons, are physically distant from each other, staying in a different place, city, or country at the same time. For example, "when children study in another city and are only at home on Saturdays and Sundays, the mobile phone not only supplements direct communication, but actually replaces it" (Podkowińska, 2017, p. 117).

On the other hand, a smartphone can distance family members, hinder their communication by taking away attention and time devoted to family life, and thus can hinder interpersonal communication among household members (Szymańska, 2021, p. 400). In other words, it happens that cell phone conversations "introduce" the outside world into the family's inner world, becoming a kind of communication noise that disrupts mutual listening, openness to full and active participation in face-to-face communication with household members (Onyeator and Okpara, 2019). Research also shows that although communication technologies make indirect communication faster and easier, it also makes it harder for people to be fully "present" with the people they communicate with. New communication technologies open family members to the outside world, the possibility of establishing new relationships, but at the same time, one can notice a decrease in satisfaction with this type of relationship, a lower level of presence and mindfulness of the relationship with another person (Onyeator and Okpara, 2019; Szymańska, 2021, p. 400).

In this context, it is worth paying attention to phubbing. The term phubbing is a combination of two words: phone and snubbing. This phenomenon refers to a situation in which the interlocutor somehow escapes from interpersonal communication by focusing on their mobile phone. Instead of focusing all their attention on the interlocutor, a person looks at their phone, which "distracts" them from the face-to-face conversation (Karadağ et. al., 2015, p. 60; Ivanova et. al., 2020. p. 656). We are talking here about the "mixing" of two communication situations, i.e. interpersonal communication (face-to-face communication) and indirect communication (using smartphones). The participant of such "mixed" communication situation, paying attention to his smartphone, ignores and disregards the direct interlocutor. This type of communication behaviour undoubtedly has a negative impact on social interactions (Isrofin and Munawaroh, 2021). On the one hand, the smartphone opens household members to external communication, and on the other hand, it closes them to interpersonal communication within the family. Phubbing increases the distance between household members, and interpersonal communication becomes closed in silence and quiet. However, we are not talking about the silence of the listener, which serves active interpersonal communication through full engagement in the listening

process, but about silence that is the effect of the interlocutors "moving away". Silence can be helpful on the one hand, as exemplified by the silence of the listener, but on the other hand, in the area of the family home, various silent rules can be distinguished, which constitute a negative aspect of family communication (Podkowińska, 2024, p. 154). A silent parent or child in the face of problems and important issues is a disturbing communication attitude. When family members follow silent rules such as not talking about their needs or feelings, but keeping quiet about the topic, family communication becomes closed and shallow. Shallow in the sense that family members do not discuss topics that are important to them, difficult and sensitive issues, which are shrouded in silence. Children learn these rules, which become an integral part of parental communication. They therefore remain silent – like other family members – instead of talking about problems, asking for attention, help or support. They remain silent instead of externalising pain and suffering, or showing doubts, fear or uncertainty (Podkowińska, 2024, p. 154; McKay, Davis and Fanning, 2011, p. 256). These silent rules "open" family members to silence, behind which needs, feelings, fears and topics that are not discussed at home are hidden. Of course, this does not mean that silence in the space of the family home takes on only a negative shade. In communication practice, many varieties and shades of staying quiet can be distinguished – just like for silence or shouting. Sometimes silence and quiet are not what bothers people and is associated with loneliness, solitude, but it also happens that they become what a person needs in the excess of various messages that they receive throughout the day. It happens that family members need a "moment of respite" from conversations, shouting, noise. Just as the need for contact with another person, conversation, sharing one's feelings, ideas, observations is extremely important, so the need for rest, silence, and quiet seems to be equally important. A house that is too noisy may be perceived by some family members as "burdensome" in certain situations, and then a need may arise that directs a person towards silence and quiet. It happens that conversation becomes too tiring, and silence in such case allows for respite and rest, it also allows for immersion in the sphere of intrapersonal communication. How beautifully this need for peace and quiet, longing for silence and fatigue from excessive conversations is described by St. Sister Faustyna Kowalska: "When tired of telling stories and longing for solitude and silence, I went out into the garden in the evening so that I could talk to God alone, but I could not do that either, immediately brothers and sisters came and took me to the apartment, and again I had to talk, and there were so many eyes fixed on me" (Kowalska, 2021, p.241). And although meetings with family fill us with happiness and joy, too much conversation can become burdensome and difficult. The opportunity to

experience silence then becomes a respite. This need for lack of contact, silence, and quiet is a natural need that can be put on a par with the need for contact and conversation. St. Sister Faustyna Kowalska wrote about joy of silence: "The next day I was already in beloved Vilnius. Oh, how happy I felt to have returned to our monastery. It seemed to me as if I had entered it for the second time, I could not get enough of the silence and stillness, which [makes] the soul so easily immerse itself in God, everyone helps it to do so, and no one interferes" (Kowalska, 2021, p. 244).

Silence and quiet – just like noise and shouting – are inseparable elements of family communication, including parental communication. Home can be associated by its members with both silence and quietness as well as noise, hustle and bustle, commotion and uproar. Considering the different shades and dimensions of silence and quietness, it is worth considering what the household members associate a silent home with. Is it a home filled with peace and quiet, or does it rather resemble a place where coldness and secrets reign.

According to research conducted between November 24–27, 2020 Poles associate a silent home primarily with silence, lack of communication, and distance between household members (42%), cold and distant relationships (41%), sadness and lack of understanding (33%), secrets hidden by household members (26%), lies and half-truths (18%), and peace and carelessness (10%). As part of this study financed by the SGGW Research Teams and Research Support System, 1,072 surveys were completed. The CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) technique was used, and the sample was selected in a quota manner from the SW Panel administered by SW Research, reflecting the representation of Polish society in terms of age (5 groups), gender (2 groups), class of place of residence (4 groups), voivodeship (16 groups) and level of education (2 groups: higher and other)[1].

In terms of correlational comparisons, a negative basic correlation was obtained[2] ($r = -0.297$), which means that almost 30% of the time, lies and half-truths constitute an element of the silent home. Therefore, if a person thinks of a silent home, then in less than 30% of cases, he will perceive and associate this silent home with lies and half-truths. A silent home also correlates with sadness and lack of understanding at the level of $r = -0.187$. For less than 20% of Poles, a silent home is a home that consists of sadness and lack of understanding in the communication area.

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[1] The recorded negative correlations result from the structure of the scales, not from the direct direction of the relationship between the variables.

[2] This study was conducted by a research team led by Monika Podkowińska, PhD, SGGW professor.

Home appears as a silent place filled with lies and half-truths, sadness and lack of understanding, while cold and distant relationships, with which Poles often (41%) associate a silent home, in about 21% of cases will be associated with hidden secrets. In other words, cold and distant relationships are associated in the opinion of Poles with hidden secrets at the level of correlation r = –0.214. Matters that are shrouded in silence and not expressed verbally may contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of coldness and chill in family relationships. What is more, these cold relationships result in a lack of peace and carefreeness. At home, cold and distant relationships limit peace and carefreeness at the level of r= –0.210. The presented correlations are highly statistically significant, so the statistical significance is over 99.99%, the estimation error in this study is <0.001.

Table 1. Correlation summary

| x | y | r | p |
|---|---|---|---|
| Silent home | Lies and half-truths | −0.297 | <0.001 |
| Silent home | Sadness and lack of understanding | −0.187 | <0.001 |
| Hidden secrets | Cold and distant relationships | −0.214 | <0.001 |
| Cold and distant relationships | Peace and carefreeness in the family | −0.210 | <0.001 |

x – independent variable; y – dependent variable; r – Pearson's correlation coefficient; p – probability value (statistical significance, $\alpha$ = 0.05)

Hidden secrets shrouded in silence do not serve to build a positive atmosphere of home, but make home a place that distances household members from each other. In this sense, silence can be associated negatively in the sphere of family communication, including parental communication. It is difficult to understand a close person, offer them support and help, if family members do not talk to each other openly, do not share their feelings, thoughts, problems.

## 3. Internet in parental communication

Home is a place where parents and children can spend their free time together, learn, solve problems and play. Home is seen as a safe place (Duda and Podkowińska, 2022), where parents have control over what children do and how they behave. This subjective sense of security and control does not necessarily

mean in practice that parents are aware of what children do, with whom and how they communicate in the space of the family home. The Internet opens up parental communication, and more broadly, family communication to the outside world. Children do not have to leave home to contact strangers, get information about what is happening outside home and their family, talk to friends, discover the "secrets of the outside world". Nationwide studies of school-age children and parents, conducted using the CAWI method in October–November 2022 (4,984 students from the 7th and 8th grade of primary school and the 1st and 2nd grade of secondary school, as well as 1,255 parents and legal guardians from 160 schools located in all 16 voivodeships in the country) show that parents are not aware that children use the Internet in the evenings and at night. 9.2% of the surveyed children declared that they used the Internet on weekdays between 10.01 p.m. and 1.00 a.m. in the last week preceding the survey, while only 1.9% of parents declared that their children most often actively used the Internet during these hours. Thus, almost every tenth young person uses the Internet at night. 2.6% declare that they were actively online between 1.01 a.m. and 7.00 a.m. However, parents believe that children do not use the Internet during this

Chart 1. At what times do children most often actively use the Internet (spend time in front of a screen) in the last week (parents' and children's declaration)
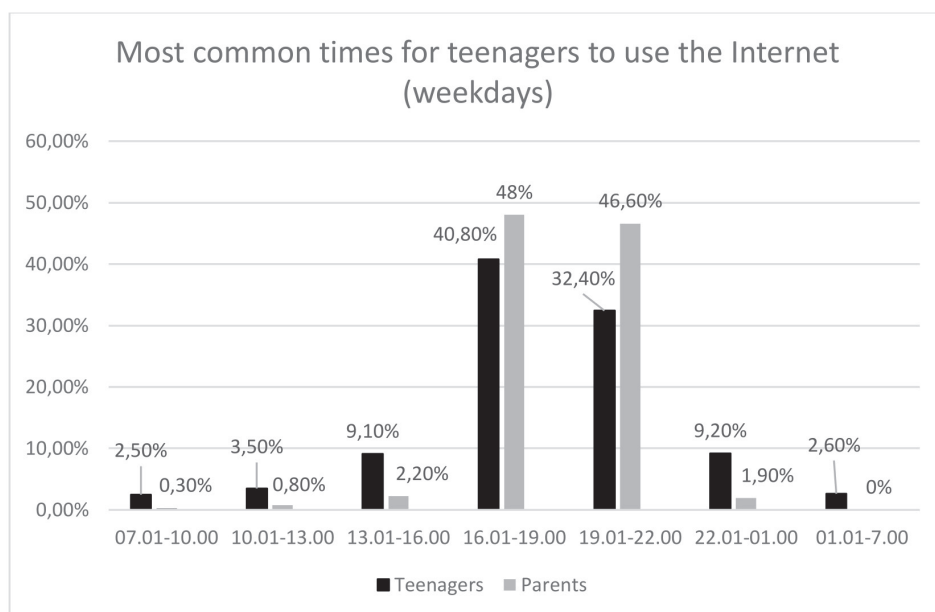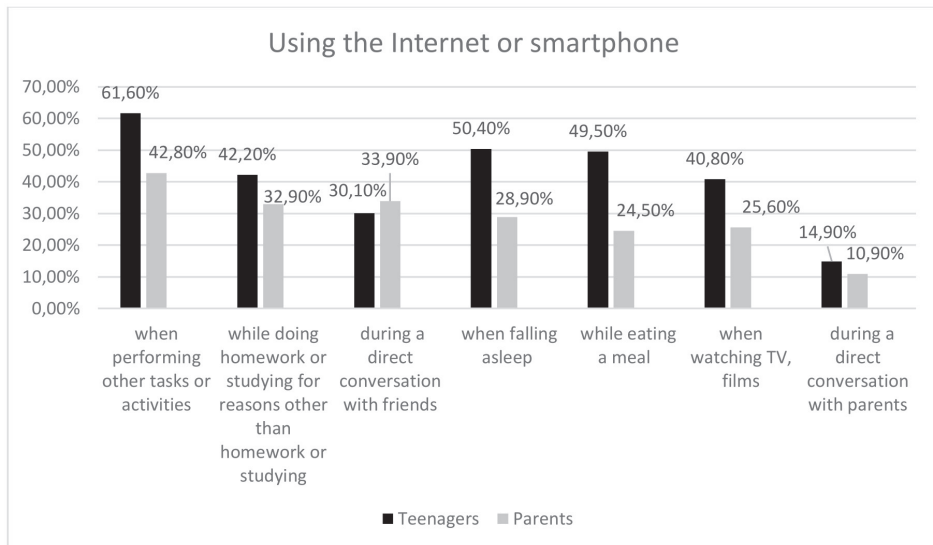


Source: Based on: (NASK, 2023)

time (NASK 2023, p. 16,19), and therefore do not know what their Internet communication looks like.

Moreover, parents often do not notice communication situations in which children use the Internet while performing other activities. Only 42.8% of the surveyed parents gave a positive answer to the question about whether their child/children perform other tasks or activities while using the Internet or smartphone. This type of communication behaviour was confirmed by 61.6% of children (including 35.6% of teenagers who declared that they use the Internet or smartphone often, 19.3% very often and 6.6% always). Half of the surveyed teenagers (50.4%) declared that they use the Internet or smartphone while falling asleep, while even less than one third (28.9%) of parents indicated that their children behave in this way. Similar discrepancies are visible in the context of the use of the Internet and smartphone by teenagers while eating meals and watching TV, films, etc. It can be said that half of the children surveyed (49.5%) declared that they are active on the Internet and use a smartphone while eating meals, while only every fourth parent (24.5%) confirms this type of communication behaviour. Similarly, every fourth parent (25.6%) declares that their child/children use the Internet or smartphone while watching TV or films, while as many as 40.8% (including 20.5% often, 12% very often and 8.3% always) of teenagers admit to this type of communication behaviour. The responses of parents and children differ by about 10 percentage points in the case of using the Internet or smartphone for purposes other than learning while doing homework and studying. The difference of four percentage points concerns the use of the Internet or smartphone during interpersonal parental communication. 14.9% of teenagers declare that they use the Internet or smartphone during direct conversations with their parents. A similar difference – only about four percentage points – concerns using the Internet or smartphone while talking to friends. One third of parents (33.9%) pay attention to such communication behaviour, while 30.1% of teenagers admit to this type of behaviour (15.5% often, 8.1% very often and 6.5% always, respectively) (NASK 2023, p. 23, 24, 28).

Differences between the responses of parents/guardians and children are also visible in matters concerning control. Home is seen as a safe place (Duda and Podkowińska, 2022), but opening up to the outside world through the use of the Internet can lead to various types of threats and dangers, from which parental control is intended to protect children. However, as the research shows, more than half of teenagers (53.7%) declare that their parents do not establish or introduce any rules regarding the use of the communication tool that is the Internet, both in terms of time spent online and Internet content. Furthermore, every fourth teenager declares that the methods introduced by parents to control the time spent

Chart 2. How often do children use the Internet or smartphone during everyday activities (parents' and children's declarations)



Source: Based on: (NASK, 2023)

on the Internet (28.8%) and access to Internet content (28.9%) are ineffective and inefficient. At the same time, less than three quarters of the surveyed parents (74.6%, including 6.9% very effective, 22.7% effective and 45% rather effective) declare that the actions they take to control the Internet content their children have access to are effective. Both the declarations of parents and children indicate that most homes do not apply control in the form of introducing rules regarding the selection of content available to teenagers on the Internet. Although the discrepancies in the declarations of parents and children regarding the establishment and enforcement of rules for using the Internet are clearly visible, in the context of the discussed topic, it is worth taking up conversations that are intended to prevent possible threats. The research shows that slightly more than half of parents declare that they apply the rules for using the Internet in the form of conducting preventive conversation with their children in order to prevent threats. However, only one fifth of the surveyed teenagers (19.9%) confirm that their parents conduct such conversations (NASK 2023, p. 11, 12, 169).

Can we therefore point out that the issues of threats in the area of Internet communication are shrouded in silence at home? Such conclusions can be drawn from the research results indicating silence in the sphere of parental communication referring precisely to the threats posed by the Internet.

The research results confirm that teenagers experiencing online violence do not react or tell anyone about it. This passivity, which is revealed in situations of experiencing online violence, is becoming more and more common – its increase from 32.4% in 2020 to 38.5% in 2022 is visible (NASK 2023, p. 7). It is also worth noting that parents are not fully aware of whether and what kind of online violence their children experience. For example, 38.9% of teenagers declared that they had experienced online name-calling, while only 10.2% of parents stated that their children had experienced this type of violence. Less than a quarter of teenagers declare that they have experienced online violence in the form of ridicule, while only 11.5% of parents indicated this form of violence. Even fewer parents declared that their children had experienced online humiliation (5.9%) and intimidation (3.1%), while such declarations were made by just over a fifth of teenagers (22.2%) in the case of humiliation and 16% in the case of intimidation, respectively. These differences are also visible in declarations related to the lack of violence experienced on the Internet (57% of parents and 40.4% of teenagers), and as many as a quarter of parents answered that it is hard to say when asked whether their child had experienced online violence (NASK 2023, p. 64).

The fact that the topic of violence and threats is shrouded in silence in the sphere of parental communication is evidenced by the lack of knowledge of parents/guardians about children receiving someone's naked or semi-naked photo via the Internet and mobile phone or smartphone. Less than one third of teenagers declared (32.7%) that they had received such photos, while only 5.6% of parents had knowledge of this fact (NASK 2023, p. 86).

The above data show that parents are not very aware of the forms of violence experienced by their children on the Internet. It can therefore be concluded that in this thematic area, parental communication is largely shrouded in silence. Especially since young people who decide to meet an adult they met on the Internet, in many cases do not inform anyone about such a meeting – a quarter of teenagers (25.3%) declared that they did not inform anyone about a planned meeting with an adult they met on the Internet, and only 38.9% of the surveyed teenagers informed their parents/guardians about it. Two out of ten teenagers in such cases passed on information about the meeting to their friends or colleagues, and less often to their siblings (4.8%) or someone else (4.8%). According to the teenagers' declarations, 6.7% of the surveyed children informed someone else about such a planned meeting. It is disturbing that compared to 2020 (14.1%), the percentage of teenagers who decided to meet with an adult with whom they established contact online is increasing (17.9%). Although this is a smaller percentage than ten years ago, when every fourth teenager declared such a meeting (25.9% in 2014 and 23.1% in 2016), almost one fifth of teenagers still make such declarations in this regard (NASK 2023, p. 7, 79,80).

Chart 3. Do teenagers experience online violence? (parents' and children's declarations)
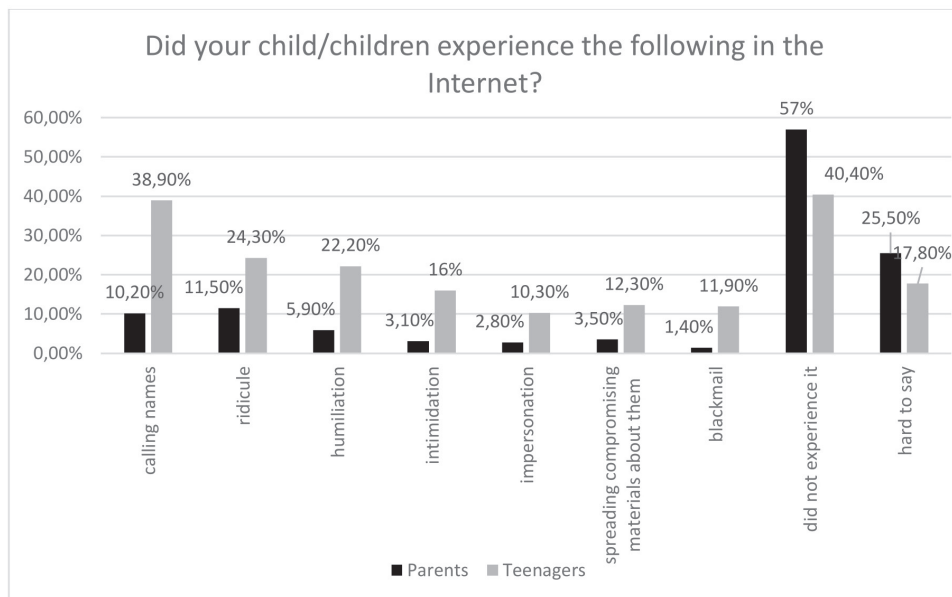


Source: Based on: (NASK, 2023)

## 4. Summary

The analysis of the research results presented above allows us to draw several key conclusions from the perspective of assessing the quality and effectiveness of the parental communication process, and more broadly, family communication.

First of all, it should be emphasized that the Internet occupies an important place in the sphere of family communication, including parental communication. Similarly, silence is an important form of family communication. And although Poles associate a silent home rather negatively, it is worth remembering that silence, like the Internet, can have a positive or negative impact on parental communication. Silence "is part of the atmosphere of the home built by family members. It can unite, but it can also divide – just like other forms of communication" (Podkowińska, 2024, p. 157). There are many varieties and shades of silence. "The word 'silence' expresses a very complex reality manifesting an immeasurable wealth of forms" (Wencel, 2001, p. 9), however, when silent rules begin to prevail in the family home that have a destructive effect on the quality of family relations and openness to communication, it can be said that this

silence leads to greater distance, is associated with secrets and lies. Its overtone becomes negative.

Secondly, home is a place for the development of not only internal – family communication, but also external communication. The Internet, smartphone is a communication tool that opens household members to the outside world and makes internal and external communication intertwine. Even early studies show that home is the place where children primarily use the Internet (Skowroński, 2013, p. 227).

Thirdly, using the Internet or smartphone during face-to-face conversations with friends, colleagues, household members for a purpose that is not related to the topic of the conversation and the interlocutor means that silence understood as a form of family communication may take on a different meaning. Instead of the silence of the listener, which serves to focus attention on what the interlocutor is trying to convey, there appears the silence of the inattentive interlocutor, focused on a different type of message – the Internet or smartphone. When indirect communication takes place in parallel to interpersonal communication through the use of the Internet and smartphone, the interlocutors begin to be separated by a wall of silence, which creates a distance between them. Silence in this case is not used for the purpose of deeper understanding of the interlocutor, hearing what the recipient would like to convey. In this case, silence indicates that although together, the interlocutors spend time separately in the same place, engaging their energy and attention in the reception of different content. Interpersonal communication ceases to fulfil its functions. It does not allow for "discovering" the interlocutor, it does not allow for full understanding. In such a case, the Internet and smartphone become a kind of noise, forming interference in the sphere of interpersonal communication. It is therefore virtually impossible to use all the possibilities that face-to-face communication provides in the area of building bonds and mutual understanding.

Fourthly, it can be pointed out that parental communication regarding the online activity of household members is shrouded in silence and constitutes an area of silent family communication. The lack of conversations about threats and problems related to online communication may be the reason for parents' insufficient knowledge about the difficulties, problems and challenges their children face in the "comfort of home". Awareness of how, when, and for what purpose children and young people use the Internet in a safe place such as home is the key to understanding and providing support and assistance to children when they encounter various difficulties and threats that online communication brings. And here interpersonal communication becomes important – face-to-face conversation, which is the most important tool that serves building bonds, closeness, mutual

understanding and support not only for the youngest family members. It is the basis for building a safe communication space of the family home. It can be based on silence, but one that serves to listen and fully engage in the process of parental communication, more broadly family communication.

It should therefore be emphasized once again that differences in the parents' and children's perception of threats and forms of violence to which teenagers are exposed on the Internet may be related to the silent form of parental communication. Lack of open communication can lead to silence on topics that are important from the perspective of children's and youth development, and the lack of conversations can lead to an increase in the communication distance between parents and children. As a result, this can lead to a deepening of the area of silent communication, which is not related to the use of silence to be together, but unfortunately divides and distances household members. Even early studies (2008 TNS OBOP for the Dzieci Niczyje Foundation) on online threats, including initiating conversations with children about violence and online threats, show that only slightly over half (54%) of surveyed parents talk to their children about verbal violence on the Internet that can be experienced from peers, or about peers publishing or sending photos and videos featuring the child against their will (53%) (Wojtasik, 2009, p. 5).

To sum up: silence is an important form of parental communication, however, if it replaces conversations about important, often sensitive topics for teenagers and their parents, it can lead to a situation in which family members feel lonely and, although they are together at home, this silent home is no longer perceived as warm and safe, but becomes an oasis of loneliness and misunderstanding – parental communication takes the form of communication that is ineffective and unsatisfactory for both children and parents.

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