



# Motherhood during the COVID-19 pandemic: the significance of coparenting in explaining mothers' marital satisfaction and life satisfaction<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Despite the currently observed changes in the way women and men engage in family roles, mothers continue to play the key role in the care and upbringing of children. Therefore, their well-being seems to have special significance for the functioning of the whole family system. In view of the requirements that mothers had to meet during the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors decided to check what factors were significant in explaining their satisfaction with life and marriage. Special attention was devoted to coparenting, which, according to the literature, can be a valuable resource, making it possible to cope with family stressors more effectively. The study included 375 mothers, who were married and took care of at least one child aged 7–12 years. Coparenting was measured using the Coparenting Relationship Scale (Więsyk et al., 2024), while satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) and the Marital Satisfaction Scale (Norton, 1983). It was expected that a higher quality of coparenting was associated with higher marital satisfaction (H1) and with higher life satisfaction (H2). Hierarchical regression analysis revealed that coparenting was the key predictor explaining mothers' life satisfaction and marital satisfaction. It was found that coparenting quality was particularly significant in explaining marital satisfaction and that the strong relationship between these two variables could be described using the mechanism of spillover.

**Keywords:** coparenting, COVID-19 pandemic, life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, motherhood

## Introduction

Despite men's increasing engagement in family roles that has been observed in recent decades (Bakiera, 2014; Gębka, 2007), women continue to perform most childcare and upbringing duties (Bianchi et al., 2012; Michoń, 2016). According to many researchers (e.g., Binder, 2022; Carlson et al., 2022; Cummins & Brannon, 2022), the COVID-19 pandemic increased this disproportion in the degree of men's and women's engagement in family roles. In many households, it is mainly the mother who is entrusted with handling multiple new and difficult challenges, such as the greater amount of childcare and more help that the children need with schoolwork, the reorganization of former routine and daily schedule,

and the readjustment of work and family duties (Binder, 2022; Cummins & Brannon, 2022; Sevilla & Smith, 2020). What played an important role in coping with such challenges was resources – namely, specific characteristics, traits, and abilities constituting the adaptive potential (McCubbin et al., 1980). A resource regarded as crucial in the domain of family relations, enabling better adaptation to the challenges that the family system is faced with and to the changes it undergoes, is coparenting (Feinberg, 2002; Feinberg et al., 2021; Pruett et al., 2021). The significance of coparenting in explaining the life satisfaction and marital satisfaction of mothers adapting to the demands of the pandemic has not

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been fully explained in the existing research. To fill this gap in knowledge, we conducted a study that aimed to determine the role of coparenting in explaining life satisfaction and marital satisfaction among mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **1. Motherhood during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The pandemic requirements and restrictions forced the development of new forms of family life (Daszykowska-Tobiasz, 2022; Feinberg et al., 2021; Gambin & Zawadzki, 2022; Prime et al., 2020). Remote learning and work combined with the temporary suspension of the activities of day care centers, nursery schools, and community and leisure centers resulted in a considerable increase in the amount of time spent together at home compared to before coronavirus (Kurzępa et al., 2022; Prime et al., 2020). Due to the significant limitations on the forms of assistance provided by physicians and therapists, parents were often the only source of support for their children, who were particularly exposed to the experience of depressive and anxiety symptoms at that time (Ellis et al., 2020; Oosterhoff et al., 2020). Some authors (Gambin et al., 2020; Kurzępa et al., 2022) have pointed out that changes caused by lockdown measures may have been a source of positive family experiences, giving an opportunity to engage in shared activities and conversations and to build emotional closeness. However, for many families, adapting to the changes in the organization of family life led to heightened tensions and conflicts (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Oleđzka, 2020).

The situation of families partly depended on the quantity and nature of the challenges they had to face during the pandemic (Conway et al., 2020). What became a considerable difficulty for most working parents was maintaining clear boundaries between family and work roles, especially when they worked on a remote or hybrid basis (Markowska-Manista & Zakrzewska-Oleđzka, 2020; Binder, 2022). Another frequent problem, particularly in large families, was parents and children sharing the computer equipment necessary for remote learning and work, which usually

took place simultaneously (Bebel, 2020; Kurzępa et al., 2022). Researchers observed (Lachowska, 2021; Milska-Musa et al., 2021; Zawadzki et al., 2022) that the factors significant for parents' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic also included the financial situation of the family, parents' education level, and subjective perception of the pandemic. The people more exposed to the negative consequences of the pandemic were less educated individuals (Milska-Musa et al., 2021), struggling with a difficult economic and financial situation (Bebel, 2020; Zawadzki et al., 2022), negatively evaluating their capabilities of adapting to the demands of the pandemic and, consequently, experiencing negative emotions (Paredes et al., 2021; Vagnini et al., 2022).

As a result of the numerous challenges faced by the family during the pandemic, parents began to experience a number of negative psychological outcomes, including PTSD symptoms, excessive worry, fear, and depressive symptoms (Fong & Iarocci, 2020; Zou et al., 2022). Parents experienced stress and psychological difficulties more often than childless people (Pruett et al., 2021; Russell et al., 2020). The situation of mothers was particularly difficult. It was mainly women that the responsibility for managing family life fell on (i.e., the responsibility for organizing free time, taking care of the home atmosphere, looking after children and elderly relatives), and it was they who more often bore the personal costs of the changes introduced (experiencing a feeling of overwork and a sense of being overburdened with new duties). In that period, compared to other social groups, mothers were more exposed to job loss, more often limited their employment or voluntarily quit their jobs to face up to the demands of childcare, and were more often forced to switch to the remote mode of work (Binder, 2022; Collins et al., 2021; Petts et al., 2021).

The multiplicity and complexity of the challenges that mothers faced during the pandemic made them a group particularly exposed to mental health disorders and stress (Giannotti et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2020; Zou et al., 2022). In their research, Zou et al. (2022) found that the incidence of depressive symptoms was 21.4% in the mothers they examined (11.6% reported moderate or high depressive symptoms) and 19.6% in the fathers (with moderate or

severe depressive symptoms experienced by 10.6% of male subjects). Researchers also observed that the way in which mothers coped with the demands of the pandemic was varied and related to the resources they had (Feinberg et al., 2021; Giannotti et al., 2022). Resources are the protective factors that can offset the demands faced by the individual, thus making the achievement of positive outcomes possible (Patterson, 2002). They may be located at the level of individual family members, in the characteristics of the system, and beyond the system's boundaries (McCubbin et al., 1980). What is considered to be an important resource, located within the family, is the quality of reciprocal relationships, which is conducive to overcoming difficulties; this includes coparenting, which gives closeness and support.

## 2. Coparenting as a variable explaining maternal satisfaction

Coparenting is defined as a special type of relationship between two people performing parental roles, engaging in childcare and upbringing (Feinberg, 2003; Gable et al., 1994). It is a complex multidimensional construct related, among other things, to how partners share the responsibility for child-related matters and to how they behave towards each other in the child's presence (Feinberg, 2002; Katz & Gottman, 1996). A relationship characterized by support, closeness, and open communication allows a family to adapt more effectively to various challenges, such as the birth of the first child (Feinberg et al., 2016; Le et al., 2016) or the COVID-19 pandemic (Feinberg et al., 2021, 2022; Pruett et al., 2021).

According to the system paradigm, the parental subsystem plays a supervisory and directive role in managing family life, and coparenting is regarded as the central point of the family system that family processes are centered around (Feinberg, 2003; Minuchin, 1974; Weissman & Cohen, 1985). It is directly and indirectly related to other areas of family functioning. According to Feinberg's (2003) ecological model of coparenting, marital satisfaction and life satisfaction can be directly explained by coparenting quality.

Building relations that are supportive, close, and based on agreement sustains the individual's well-being and contributes to the experience of positive emotions and development, while coparenting difficulties can pose a risk of decreasing the individual's satisfaction (Feinberg, 2002; Lamela et al., 2016). Most studies devoted to the association of coparenting with life satisfaction were conducted among parents who were divorced (Augustijn, 2023; Lamela et al., 2016) or lived in non-marital relationships (Mallette et al., 2020). Data collected by Augustijn (2023) showed that coparenting quality was positively related to life satisfaction and that it explained divorced parents' life satisfaction better than the legally regulated way in which the parents shared the custody of their children. The author found that higher coparenting quality was associated with higher life satisfaction and that stronger parental conflict was associated with lower life satisfaction (Augustijn, 2023). Lamela et al. (2016) also observed that coparenting conflict was a significant risk factor for decrease in life satisfaction. Based on the results of a longitudinal study on a large sample of mothers, Mallette et al. (2020) found that a greater decrease in coparenting support and fathers' commitment to the relationship with the child was associated with stronger depression and lower life satisfaction in mothers.

Coparenting quality is also highly significant for parents' evaluation of their marital relationship. Coparenting and marital relationship are interrelated and mutually influencing but distinct types of relationship. In most cases, the marital relationship starts before the birth of the child and continues long after the child has left the family home. It is aimed, above all, at satisfying the partners' emotional and intimate needs. Coparenting, by contrast, is meant to coordinate activities aimed at satisfying the emotional and physical needs of the child (Feinberg, 2002; Van Egeren, 2004). In the case of divorce, which breaks the marital relationship, coparenting may be the only form of relationship between the parents. Despite these differences, the associations between coparenting and marital relationship are strong and bidirectional, which is described in the literature (Katz & Gottman, 1996;

Morrill et al., 2010) as involving the mechanism of spillover. The mechanism of spillover is intrapsychic, which means it refers to changes whose cause and effect are located within a particular person. It also concerns the kind of influences between different areas of the individual's functioning that lead to a similarity between these areas (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Lachowska, 2012). They take place when the emotions and mood arising in connection with one role (e.g., marital) change the way of functioning in another role (e.g., in coparenting). A strong link between coparenting and marital relationship has been observed by many researchers (Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Le et al., 2016; Morrill et al., 2010; Van Egeren, 2004). Studies conducted among women showed that coparenting quality had a significant effect on their evaluation of different aspects of the romantic relationship, such as sexual satisfaction (Maas et al., 2018), relationship stability (Feinberg et al., 2012), and relationship satisfaction (Fillo et al., 2015).

Therefore, coparenting is an important resource that, in the face of challenges (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), can protect parents' well-being and their life satisfaction (considered in general terms and with regard to specific domains, including the marital relationship). In view of mothers' high exposure to pandemic-related demands, and in view of the enormous significance of their functioning for the entire family system, we decided that it was highly important and justified to investigate the factors explaining their satisfaction. It is also fully justified to investigate the role of coparenting.

### **3. Method**

The study aimed to determine the significance of coparenting in explaining the life satisfaction and marital satisfaction of mothers faced with the demands of the pandemic. The significance of coparenting was assessed while controlling for other variables important for life and marital satisfaction. The analyses included selected demographic variables (financial situation, participant's employment status, partner's employment status, age, number of children, and

education) and two pandemic indicators: perceived coronavirus threat and external pandemic-related stressors. According to stress theory (McCubbin et al., 1980; Patterson, 2002), the stressor (in this case, the sum of external pandemic-related stressors) and stressor perception (in this case, perceived coronavirus threat) are two interrelated but distinct elements of the process of coping with difficulties. Combined with resources, they determine the way an individual or family adapts to the demands. The inclusion of different psychological aspects of the pandemic is, therefore, theoretically justified.

We formulated the following research question:

- What is the relationship between coparenting and marital satisfaction in mothers adapting to the demands of the pandemic?

Based on the assumptions of family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974) and Mark Feinberg's (2003) ecological model of coparenting, and based on the results of studies analyzing the significance of coparenting for parents' evaluation of life satisfaction and marital satisfaction, we formulated the following hypotheses:

- Coparenting quality is positively related to marital satisfaction (H1) and life satisfaction (H2).

The study was conducted in February 2021, less than a year after the state of epidemic was introduced in Poland and shortly before the third wave of coronavirus was announced. Due to the restrictions in force at that time and the recommendations concerning protection against the spread of the virus, the research was conducted online, via Poland's nationwide research panel Ariadna. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. The invitation to take part in the study, together with a link to the website where questions had been posted, was sent out by email. In the message they received, respondents were informed that the study concerned family relations during the pandemic and that it was possible to withdraw at any time; they were also informed how much time it was estimated to take. In accordance with the rules of the research panel, respondents received a certain pool of points that they could subsequently exchange for prizes (in-kind items or vouchers for services of their choice).

### 3.1. Research tools

The following measures were used in the study:

1. Coparenting was assessed using the *Coparenting Relationship Scale* (CRS; Feinberg et al., 2012) as adapted into Polish by Więsyk et al. (2024). Each respondent's task was to rate 33 items concerning the way she and her partner acted together as parents (e.g., "I feel close to my partner when I see him play with our child"). The items were rated on a 7-point scale (0 = *not true of us* to 6 = *very true of us*; for the last five items, the response options ranged from *never* to *very often*, respectively). The higher the total score, being the sum of all item ratings, the more positive the coparenting. In the present study, the value of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability coefficient was  $\alpha = .96$ .
2. Perceived coronavirus threat was assessed using Conway, Woodard, and Zubrod's (2020) *Perceived Coronavirus Threat Questionnaire* (PCTQ) as adapted by Lachowska (2021). Consisting of 5-items, the questionnaire measures the worries and perceived threat resulting from the coronavirus epidemic (e.g., "I am worried that I or people I love will get sick from the coronavirus [COVID-19]"). Answers are indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not true of me at all* to 7 = *very true of me*). The possible scores range from 5 to 35. Higher scores indicate the experience of greater coronavirus epidemic threat. The measure has good psychometric properties (Lachowska, 2021). In this study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability coefficient was .94.
3. The experience of external stressors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the perceived impact of the pandemic on life were measured using a scale developed based on the *Coronavirus Experiences and Impacts Questionnaire* (Conway et al., 2020), translated into Polish by Lachowska (2021). The measure consists of 26 items. Respondents' task is to rate if they had experienced the situation described in each item during the pandemic. "Yes" answers are coded as indicating the occurrence of a given experience and scored 1.

The possible scores range from 0 to 26. The sum of responses indicates the overall level of stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The higher the score, the greater the number of pandemic-related negative experiences.

4. Marital satisfaction was measured using five items from the *Quality of Marriage Index* (QMI; Norton, 1983). Respondents are asked to rate how true each item was of their situation (e.g., "Our marriage is strong"). Responses are given on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate higher marital satisfaction. The reliability of the QMI in this study was  $\alpha = .98$ .
5. Life satisfaction was assessed using the *Satisfaction With Life Scale* (SWLS), developed by Diener et al. (1985) and adapted into Polish by Juczyński (2001). The measure consists of 5 items, which the respondent rates using a 7-point response scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction (Juczyński, 2001). An example item is: "I am satisfied with my life." The reliability of the SWLS in this study was  $\alpha = .90$ .

### 3.2. Characteristics of the sample

The study included 375 women meeting two sampling criteria: being married and taking care of at least one child aged 7–12 years. The analyses were conducted on data collected from 360 respondents; 15 sets of responses were rejected due to insufficient diversity (standard deviation lower than 0.2).

Respondents' mean age was  $M = 36.98$  years ( $SD = 4.91$ ). Most of them had higher (55%) or secondary education (34.4%). They lived mainly in the countryside (31.1%) and in towns or cities: big ones (above 100,000 inhabitants – 26.1%), small ones (up to 50,000 inhabitants – 22.5%), and medium-sized ones (50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants – 20.3%). The majority of the women in the sample (71.1%) were gainfully employed. Respondents most often rated their financial and economic situation as average (49.4%) or good (41.7%). The mean length of their marriage was  $M = 13.07$  years ( $SD = 4.92$ ). Nearly half of the respondents (46.1%) were bringing

up two children, 27.2% were raising one child, and every fifth respondent (20%) had three children. The smallest group were mothers of four (5.9%), and two participants reported that they were raising five or more children (0.6%).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Mothers' family situation during the COVID-19 pandemic

In the first step of the analyses, we determined the characteristics of the situation that the mothers found themselves in during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other things, we looked at their family situation, including the mothers' and their husbands' mode of work, their children's mode of learning, and the number and nature of stressors the respondents faced.

The majority of the women (78.1%) were economically active. In this group, 52.3% carried out their job-related duties exclusively on an in-office basis, 38.7% worked in a hybrid mode, and 9% worked exclusively remotely. Nearly all respondents (92.8%) reported that their partners had a job – in-office (78.1%), hybrid (17.4%), or remote (4.5%). Children engaged in different forms of learning: 34.7% learned in a hybrid mode, 33.6% received education in class, and the remaining 31.7% learned exclusively in the remote mode.

According to 62.9% of the employed women in our sample, reconciling work and family obligations had become more difficult compared to the pre-pandemic situation, 27.7% of the mothers believed that it was as easy as it had been before the pandemic, and 9.4% felt that it was easier. Ensuring that all family members had the conditions and equipment (e.g., a laptop or computer) necessary for remote work and learning was not a problem for 46.4% of the respondents; the remaining mothers reported this was a problem they faced sometimes (41.7%), often (9.2%), or constantly (2.8%). As a result of the pandemic, 50.3% of the respondents became more engaged in helping the children with schoolwork, while 32.5% of the respondents reported that their engagement had not changed.

Table 1. Data Concerning Mothers' and Their Husbands' Mode of Work and Their Children's Mode of Learning

Mode of work – respondent (%)	
Exclusively remote	9.0
Exclusively in-office	52.3
Both remote and in-office	38.7
Mode of work – partner (%)	
Exclusively remote	4.5
Exclusively in-office	78.1
Both remote and in-office	17.4
Children's mode of learning (%)	
Remote	31.7
In-class	33.6
Both remote and in-class	34.7

Table 2. Pandemic-Related Difficulties

Ensuring that all family members have the conditions and equipment necessary for work and learning (%)	
is not a problem	46.4
is sometimes a problem	41.7
is often a problem	9.2
is constantly a problem	2.8
Compared to before the pandemic, engagement in and the amount of time devoted to helping the children with schoolwork (%)	
have decreased	7.2
have not changed	32.5
have moderately increased	37.2
have strongly increased	23.1
Sense of competence in helping the children with schoolwork (%)	
highly competent	12.5
moderately competent	50.6
partly competent and partly incompetent	27.2
moderately incompetent	7.8
highly incompetent	1.9
Reconciling work and family obligations (%)	
much easier	2.0
a little easier	7.4
as easy as before the pandemic	27.7
a little more difficult	41.0
much more difficult	21.9

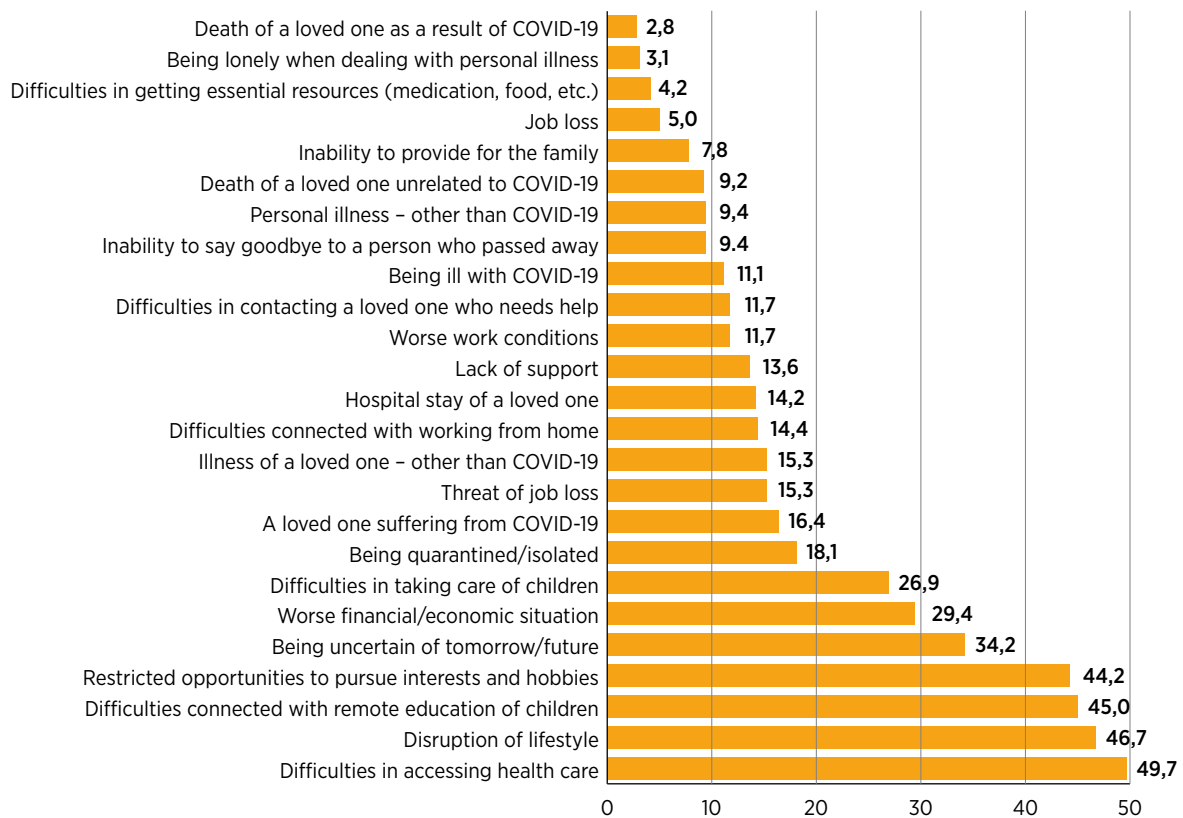


Figure 1. Negative Experiences Associated With the COVID-19 Pandemic (Percentage of Mothers Reporting a Given Experience)

The most often experienced pandemic-related stressors included: difficulties in accessing health care (49.7%), disruption of lifestyle (46.7%), difficulties connected with remote education of children (45.0%), opportunities to pursue interests and hobbies (44.2%), and being uncertain of tomorrow/the future (34.2%). Detailed data concerning the pandemic-related difficulties experienced by respondents are presented in Figure 1.

#### 4.2. Results: Descriptive Statistics for the Distribution of the Variables and Bivariate Correlations

The testing of the theoretical model of relationships between the variables was preceded by computing descriptive statistics concerning the distribution of the variables (mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values, skewness, and kurtosis; Table 3).

We found a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between perceived coronavirus threat and the sum of pandemic-induced difficulties.

A weak negative association was observed between the sum of pandemic-induced difficulties and life satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was moderately and positively correlated with life satisfaction and strongly correlated with coparenting. Coparenting was weakly and positively associated with life satisfaction (Tab. 4).

#### 4.3. Results of Hierarchical Linear Regression

To identify the variables explaining the variance in life satisfaction and marital satisfaction, we performed a stepwise hierarchical regression analysis, with the threshold for removing a statistically non-significant variable established at  $p < .05$ . The first block of variables entered in the model were demographic variables: (1) financial situation (5-point Likert scale; higher scores meant better financial situation); (2) respondent's employment status (1 = employed; 0 = unemployed) and;

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Distribution of the Variables Included in the Study

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Perceived coronavirus threat	21.67	8.37	5	35	-0.42	-0.65
Sum of pandemic-induced difficulties	4.70	3.58	0	22	0.99	1.71
Marital satisfaction	25.12	8.11	5	35	-0.67	-0.04
Coparenting	124.83	37.31	8	198	-0.05	-0.25
Life satisfaction	21.18	5.47	5	35	-0.17	0.73

Table 4. Pearson's r Correlations Between the Variables Included in the Study

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived coronavirus threat					
2. Sum of pandemic-induced difficulties	.43**				
3. Marital satisfaction	.25	-.05			
4. Coparenting	-.02	.00	.74**		
5. Life satisfaction	.03	-.21*	.52**	.38**	

Note. Levels of significance: \*\**p* < .01. \**p* < .05.

(3) partner's employment status (1 = employed; 0 = unemployed); (4) age; (5) number of children; (6) education, recoded as a dummy variable. As a result, instead of one four-level categorical variable "education," we analyzed three variables: vocational, secondary, and higher (1 = present; 0 = not present), in accordance with the rule of coding: the number of dummy variables = the number of variable levels - 1. The second block was stress-related variables: (1) number of stressors (higher scores indicated a larger number of pandemic-related stressors); (2) perceived coronavirus threat (higher scores indicated higher perceived threat). As the last block, we entered the coparenting variable. Thus, the program entered successive variables in the model, rejecting those that were statistically non-significant in previous stages. The results are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

The regression analysis was stopped at the fifth model, in which we added variables one by one in order to assess their effect on the life satisfaction explained variable (Table 5).

In the first model, the significant predictor was financial situation (7.6%). It turned out that better financial situation translated into higher life satisfaction scores. Adding information about partner's employment in the second model increased the explained variance level to 9.9%, which indicates a significant effect of both financial situation and partner's economic activity on life satisfaction. Partner's employment turned out to be a risk factor for lowered life satisfaction. Further models included also respondent's employment status and the number of stressors experienced, which increased the level of explained variance to 10.7% and 12.8%, respectively. Respondent's employment and a higher number of stressors were risk factors for lowered life satisfaction. The last model, with the coparenting variable added into it, showed the highest proportion of explained variance in life satisfaction (24.1%). Coparenting proved to be the most important predictor, suggesting a strong positive association with the level of life satisfaction. It turned out that higher perceived coparenting was a protective factor against lowered life satisfaction. Moreover, the results showed that after coparenting was entered in the model, respondents' perception of their employment ceased to be significantly associated with their life satisfaction. The conclusion from the analysis is that during the pandemic, apart from demographic factors: financial situation and partner's non-employment, it was a higher level of successful coparenting that explained life satisfaction. By contrast, the experience of stressors was associated with lowered life satisfaction, which classifies them as risk factors. Education, perceived coronavirus threat, mothers' economic activity, respondents' age, and the number of children in the family were not significant in explaining mothers' life satisfaction during the pandemic.

In the first model the analysis (Table 6) revealed that financial situation showed a significant positive association with marital satisfaction, and this association explained 3.8% of the variance in the dependent variable. In the second model, the addition of



Table 5. Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyzing the Factors Explaining the Variance in Life Satisfaction

Model	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	$\Delta F$	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>adj.</i>	$\Delta R^2$
1	(Constant)	13.23	1.46		9.05	<.001	30.70***		.076	
	Financial situation	2.29	0.41	0.28	5.54	<.001				
2	(Constant)	15.69	1.64		9.56	<.001	20.71***	9.96**	.099	.023
	Financial situation	2.48	0.41	0.30	6.02	<.001				
	Employment – partner	-3.37	1.07	-0.16	-3.16	.002				
3	(Constant)	15.31	1.64		9.32	<.001	15.30***	4.10*	.107	.008
	Financial situation	2.73	0.43	0.34	6.37	<.001				
	Employment – partner	-2.90	1.09	-0.14	-2.66	.008				
	Employment – respondent	-1.31	0.65	-0.11	-2.03	.044				
4	(Constant)	16.73	1.69		9.92	<.001	14.18***	9.70**	.128	.021
	Financial situation	2.53	0.43	0.31	5.89	<.001				
	Employment – partner	-2.60	1.08	-0.12	-2.41	.017				
	Employment – respondent	-1.10	0.64	-0.09	-1.72	.087				
	Number of stressors	-0.24	0.08	-0.16	-3.11	.002				
5	(Constant)	11.66	1.72		6.79	<.001	23.85***	54.05***	.241	.113
	Financial situation	2.04	0.41	0.25	5.02	<.001				
	Employment – partner	-2.43	1.01	-0.12	-2.41	.017				
	Employment – respondent	-0.54	0.61	-0.04	-0.89	.374				
	Number of stressors	-0.26	0.07	-0.17	-3.58	<.001				
	Coparenting	0.05	0.01	0.34	7.35	<.001				

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; *SE* = standard error; *Beta* = standardized regression coefficient; *t* = Student's *t*-test result; *F* = analysis of variance result; *R*<sup>2</sup>*adj.* = adjusted *R*-squared;  $\Delta R^2$  = coefficient of change in *R*-squared from the previous model.

\*\*\**p* < .001. \*\**p* < .01. \**p* < .05.

Table 6. Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyzing the Factors Explaining the Variance in Marital Satisfaction

Model	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	$\Delta F$	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>adj.</i>	$\Delta R^2$
1	(Constant)	16.68	2.21		7.54	<.001	15.09***		.038	
	Financial situation	2.43	0.63	0.20	3.88	<.001				
2	(Constant)	16.61	2.18		7.62	<.001	13.86***	12.15***	.067	.029
	Financial situation	3.14	0.65	0.26	4.84	<.001				
	Employment – respondent	-3.34	0.96	-0.19	-3.49	<.001				
3	(Constant)	0.94	1.67		0.56	.577	157.54***	412.94***	.567	.500
	Financial situation	1.68	0.45	0.14	3.74	<.001				
	Employment – respondent	-1.58	0.66	-0.09	-2.39	.017				
	Coparenting	0.16	0.01	0.72	20.32	<.001				

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient; *SE* = standard error; *Beta* = standardized regression coefficient; *t* = Student's *t*-test result; *F* = analysis of variance result; *R*<sup>2</sup>*adj.* = adjusted *R*-squared;  $\Delta R^2$  = coefficient of change in *R*-squared from the previous model.

\*\*\**p* < .001. \*\**p* < .01. \**p* < .05.

information about respondents' employment status brought an increase in explained variance to 6.7%. It turned out that having a job was related to lower marital satisfaction compared to a situation of the respondent having no job. The addition of coparenting in the third model considerably increased the explained variance to 56.7%, which suggested that it was coparenting that best explained marital satisfaction based on the collected data set. The conclusion from the analysis is that, apart from demographic factors, financial situation and respondent's (mother's) employment status (not engaging in economic activity), a significant predictor of marital satisfaction was coparenting. Support and cooperation in the relationship with the other parent were crucial elements explaining the level of mothers' marital satisfaction. The remaining factors turned out not to be significantly related to the dependent variable. It should be stressed that the pandemic-related factors – perceived coronavirus threat and pandemic-related stressors – turned out not to be significant, either.

## **5. Discussion**

The present study aimed to determine the significance of coparenting in explaining mothers' life satisfaction and marital satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that, from the perspective of the mothers taking part in the study, the pandemic was a very difficult moment in the life of their families. The epidemiological situation and the restrictions imposed because of it became a source of numerous stressors for the respondents. The most frequent stressors that the mothers struggled with included difficulties in accessing health care, disruption of lifestyle, and difficulties connected with remote education of children.

In our study, we expected that coparenting quality was positively related to marital satisfaction (H1) and life satisfaction (H2). After including the variables that, according to a review of the literature on the subject, are significant in explaining marital and life satisfaction (financial situation of the family, parents' employment status, mother's age, number of children in the family, parents' education), and after

including the pandemic indicators (perceived coronavirus threat, sum of pandemic-related stressors), coparenting explained an additional 11.3% of the variance in life satisfaction and 50% of the variance in marital satisfaction. In both cases, coparenting was the key predictor explaining satisfaction.

The analyses showed that the variables significant in explaining life satisfaction were financial situation, partner's employment status, the number of stressors experienced, and coparenting. Better financial situation and more successful coparenting were associated with higher life satisfaction. Partner's professional activity and a greater number of pandemic-related stressors, by contrast, were risk factors for a decrease in life satisfaction. The analysis of factors explaining the variance in marital satisfaction revealed that mothers' evaluation of the relationship with their husbands depended on the financial situation of the family, mother's employment status, and coparenting quality. The mothers who were more satisfied with their marital relationship were those whose families were in a better financial situation, those who did not engage in economic activity, and those who evaluated their coparenting more positively.

As researchers point out (Binder, 2022; Smoder, 2021), during the pandemic, every form of work – remote, in-office, or hybrid – may have been associated with various negative effects in the functioning of the family and its members. In the case of women working on a remote basis, these effects included a sense of being overwhelmed with duties, fatigue, frustration, health deterioration, a decrease in work quality (particularly in the case of women taking care of small children), and a decrease in marital quality. Also the in-office mode of work exposed women to being overburdened with duties and was additionally associated with a perceived decrease in the amount of time spent together – family time (Binder, 2022). In the pandemic situation, when the performance of professional duties may have particularly hindered engaging in family relations, including the relationship with the spouse, economically inactive women may therefore have rated their marital relationship higher. The results obtained in the present study also show that the women more satisfied during the pandemic were those whose partners were not

economically active. Perhaps the non-working male partners could be more engaged in family roles (such as childcare, helping the children with schoolwork, or doing the housework), supporting their female partners in managing family life and relieving them of some duties.

Better financial situation and higher support and cooperation in child-related matters turned out to be factors explaining both indicators of adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results obtained are consistent with the psychological stress theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and family stress theory (McCubbin et al., 1998; Patterson, 2002). A stable financial situation and the support received in family relations can be important resources facilitating adaptation to demands, including those of the COVID-19 pandemic (Feinberg et al., 2021; McRae et al., 2021; Zawadzki et al., 2022). They can limit the susceptibility of individuals and their families to the detrimental effect of a stressor and create a potential that can be used to cope with stress as effectively as possible (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000; Hobfoll, 1989).

In the light of the obtained results, we observed that coparenting quality was particularly significant in the context of marital satisfaction. This is confirmed by the findings of previous researchers (Katz & Gottman, 1996; Morrill et al., 2010), who noticed a strong association between these two types of relationship, described as involving the mechanism of spillover (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Lachowska, 2012). From the moment of its emergence, coparenting becomes an area in which the partners often engage in the largest number of interactions, and the extent to which they are satisfied with the course of these interactions influences their evaluation of their relations with the partner. The mood and emotions developed in the relationship between father and mother and between husband and wife strongly interact (Katz & Gottman, 1996; Liu & Wu, 2018; Morrill et al.,

2010). Support, closeness, approval, and agreement in coparenting contribute to building intimacy and commitment to the marital relationship (Feinberg, 2002; 2003).

The current research project has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. An important limitation is the non-representativeness of the sample. This excludes the possibility of generalizing the relationships found. Another significant limitation of our study is the correlational character of the analyses, which makes it impossible to formulate conclusions regarding the direction of the relationships between the variables analyzed.

## Conclusion

The obtained results are consistent with the assumptions of family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974) and the ecological model of coparenting (Feinberg, 2003). They show the key role of coparenting in explaining the satisfaction of mothers who are in a difficult and demanding situation. It has been found that coparenting is a factor that directly impacts the area of parent's individual functioning. Coparenting quality seems to play a key role in explaining mothers' marital satisfaction.

The relationships found in this study have practical value. Regardless of other factors, enhancing cooperation in the parental subsystem is of great positive significance for life satisfaction and marital satisfaction. This points to the need for including the issue of coparenting in therapeutic programs. Specialist assistance in building coparenting (aimed, for instance, at raising the quality of mutual communication, solving conflicts, and building agreement in matters of child care and upbringing) may contribute not only to an increase in mothers' satisfaction with coparenting itself but also to their marital satisfaction and overall life satisfaction.

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