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LOVE, MARRIAGE, FAMILY.
INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

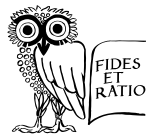


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The mediating role of stress coping styles in the relationship between maternal attachment styles and maternal-fetal attachment¹

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Abstract: The study aimed to explore the mediating role of stress coping styles in the relationship between maternal attachment styles and maternal-fetal attachment (MFA). A sample of 191 pregnant women completed three questionnaires: the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) to assess coping styles, the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) to measure maternal attachment, and the Maternal Fetal Attachment Scale (MFAS) to evaluate the emotional bond with the unborn child. The results showed that coping styles fully mediated the relationship between secure attachment and MFA. Mothers with secure attachment styles tended to use task-oriented coping strategies, which were associated with stronger prenatal attachment, and relied less on emotion-focused and avoidance styles, which weakened MFA. In the case of avoidant and anxious attachment, task-oriented coping fully mediated the negative impact of these attachment styles on MFA. However, emotion-focused coping did not significantly mediate the relationship between avoidant attachment and MFA, nor did avoidance coping mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and MFA. Interventions encouraging adaptive coping may benefit women with insecure attachment.

Keywords: stress coping styles, attachment styles, maternal-fetal attachment

Introduction

Pregnancy is considered a period of heightened emotional vulnerability in a woman's life, during which an internal representation of the future child begins to form (Rosa da et al., 2021). Maternal-fetal attachment (MFA) refers to the emotional bond between the mother and her unborn child, which plays a critical role in maternal well-being and fetal development during pregnancy. This is a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing thoughts, feelings, and inclinations toward protecting the fetus, interacting with it, and meeting its needs (Condon & Corkindale, 1997). This unique bond not only reflects a mother's emotional investment in the pregnancy but also establishes the foundation for the future mother-child relationship, shaping maternal behaviors and attitudes in the postpartum period (Suzuki et al., 2022). Higher levels of maternal-fetal attachment are associated with a range of positive

outcomes, including more effective maternal caregiving practices, lower levels of postpartum depression, and increased sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of the newborn (Alhusen et al., 2013). These positive maternal behaviors are essential for fostering a secure attachment between mother and child after birth, which, in turn, promotes the child's optimal socio-emotional development (Branjerdporn et al., 2021; Cannella, 2005).

One of the key psychological factors influencing maternal-fetal attachment (MFA) is the mother's attachment style – a concept derived from attachment theory. Attachment style refers to internalized relationship patterns from early childhood that shape how individuals perceive and respond to interpersonal relationships throughout their lives (Røhder et al., 2020; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby (1979, 1982), posits

¹ Article in Polish language: https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/61P_Nowi.pdf

that early interactions with primary caregivers create a foundation for internal working models – cognitive structures that shape expectations about oneself and others in relationships. These internal models form characteristic attachment styles that influence individuals’ emotional and behavioral responses in close relationships. Three primary attachment styles are identified: secure, anxious, and avoidant. Individuals with a secure attachment style generally hold positive expectations of others, effectively regulate their emotions, and readily build healthy, satisfying relationships. Their sense of security in relationships allows for emotional openness and trust in others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Conversely, individuals with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style often fear that others may not be available or responsive enough, leading to persistent worries about others’ interest and commitment. Such individuals may be emotionally dependent, with their self-esteem reliant on continuous reassurances from others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Those with an avoidant attachment style have difficulty forming close emotional bonds and generally avoid excessive reliance on others (Borawski et al., 2021). In stressful situations, they tend to rely solely on themselves, avoiding external support. Self-sufficiency and avoidance of emotional closeness serve as protective mechanisms against potential rejection or hurt (Tironi et al., 2021). Each of these attachment styles influences how individuals form relationships and emotionally respond to closeness and engagement in relationships with others.

Maternal attachment styles play a particularly important role during pregnancy, as they affect how a mother emotionally engages in the relationship with her developing fetus (Siddiqui & Hägglöf, 2000). Research shows that mothers with a secure attachment style exhibit higher levels of maternal-fetal attachment (MFA), manifested in positive thoughts and feelings toward the unborn child and greater involvement in prenatal care (Kucharska, 2021; McNamara et al., 2019). Conversely, mothers with an anxious attachment style often focus excessively on relationships and may experience heightened concerns about rejection or inadequacy as future mothers (Rholes et al., 2001). Such concerns can hinder full emotional engagement in

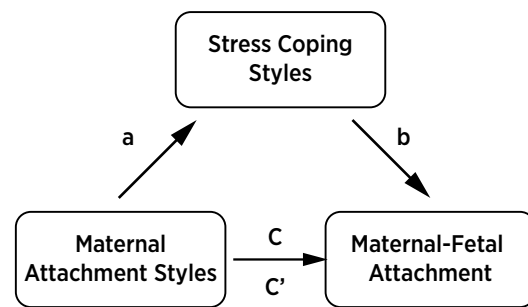


Figure 1. Mediational model for maternal attachment styles, stress coping styles and maternal- fetal attachment symptoms.

Path a reflects relation between each attachment style and stress coping styles, adjusting for all other attachment styles. Path b reflects relation between each stress coping style and maternal-fetal attachment. Path c reflects relation between each attachment style and maternal-fetal attachment, adjusting for all other attachment styles. Path c’ reflects the relation between each attachment style and maternal-fetal attachment after adjusting for mediators (stress coping styles).

the pregnancy and relationship with the fetus, leading to lower levels of prenatal attachment. In contrast, mothers with an avoidant attachment style are characterized by emotional distance and discomfort with closeness in relationships (Branjerdporn et al., 2021). They often struggle with emotional engagement in pregnancy and may downplay the importance of the bond with the fetus as a defense mechanism against vulnerability to hurt (Simson & Rholes, 2008). This stance may hinder the development of prenatal attachment, as these mothers avoid confronting the emotional and relational demands of impending motherhood (Cruvys et al., 2024).

Coping with stress is understood as a complex adaptive process that involves cognitive and behavioral actions undertaken by individuals to manage, reduce, or tolerate internal and external demands in a stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Endler and Parker (1990) distinguished three main categories of coping styles: (1) task-oriented coping, which involves directly solving the problem or changing the source of stress; (2) emotion-oriented coping, characterized by behaviors in which individuals focus on themselves and their emotional experiences in stressful situations; and (3) avoidance-oriented coping, where individuals do

not confront the problem but tend to avoid thinking and experiencing the situation. Coping styles play an essential role in shaping the prenatal attachment between mother and fetus, as the way women cope with challenges and emotions affects their ability to build a relationship with the unborn child (Suryaningsih et al., 2020). Studies indicate that mothers who use adaptive coping styles, such as task-oriented coping, are more likely to exhibit positive engagement in prenatal attachment (MFA) (Grote & Bledsoe, 2007). This style enhances a sense of control over challenging situations, supporting the mother's positive emotions toward the fetus and fostering a stronger prenatal bond (Malley et al., 2022). Conversely, mothers who use maladaptive coping styles, such as avoidance or emotion-focused coping, often encounter difficulties in developing a positive attachment to the fetus (Dunkel-Schetter & Glynn, 2011). Research shows that avoidant coping is associated with higher levels of maternal anxiety and depression, which can weaken the development of an emotional bond with the unborn child (Daglar et al., 2022). Similarly, emotion-focused coping may limit the mother's ability to form a positive mental image of future motherhood, negatively impacting MFA (Ozcan et al., 2019).

Numerous studies indicate that attachment styles significantly influence coping style selection (Stancu et al., 2020). The attachment system is activated when an individual encounters a situation perceived as threatening or challenging, which can vary considerably depending on individual experiences and subjective evaluations (Mikulincer et al., 2003). In such moments, an individual's specific attachment orientation, shaped by early relational patterns and internal working models, plays a crucial role in guiding both the interpretation of the nature and intensity of perceived threat and the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses aimed at coping with the situation (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009). Although pregnancy is a natural and anticipated stage in a woman's life, it often represents a significant source of psychological stress and anxiety, primarily due to the physical, emotional, and social changes occurring during this period (Dunkel-Schetter & Tanner, 2012). Increased vulnerability to stress and uncertainty may activate the attachment system in pregnant women, making them more sensitive to

relational cues and the need for support (Bianciardi et al., 2020; Marca-Ghaemmaghami & Ehlert, 2015; Wadhwa et al., 2011). According to attachment theory, different emotion regulation strategies and coping styles emerge as tools that fulfill the core objectives of the attachment system (Brenning & Braet, 2013). Individuals with a high level of attachment security tend to use task-oriented strategies and adopt a more positive and constructive evaluation of their capacity to cope with stressful situations. In contrast, individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety tend to hyperactivate the attachment system, leading to a greater reliance on emotion-focused strategies (Kural & Kovacs, 2021; Jerome & Liss, 2005). Consequently, individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety become overly vigilant, respond excessively to stressors, and tend to use maladaptive coping behaviors, such as magnifying problems and feeling ineffective in managing them (Tamannaefifar & Sanatkarfar, 2017). On the other hand, individuals with high levels of attachment avoidance are inclined to suppress responses to stressors and limit activation of the attachment system (McLeod et al., 2024).

The aim of this study is to examine the mediating role of stress coping styles in the relationship between maternal attachment styles and maternal-fetal attachment. This research aims to determine whether individual differences in coping styles can explain the relationship between mothers' early attachment patterns and the emotional bond they form with their unborn child.

1. Method

1.1. Procedure

The study was conducted online using a secure survey platform. Participants were recruited through online advertisements posted on social media platforms, pregnancy support groups, and parenting forums. The inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years old, currently pregnant in either the second or third trimester, and fluent in Polish. Women were excluded if they reported a history of severe psychiatric conditions or high-risk pregnancy complications.

Interested participants were directed to an online consent form, which provided information about the study's purpose, their rights as participants, and the procedures involved. After providing electronic informed consent, participants gained access to the survey link, where they completed a series of questionnaires designed to assess maternal attachment styles, stress coping strategies, and maternal-fetal attachment (MFA). The entire data collection process took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The survey was designed to be user-friendly and accessible on multiple devices, including smartphones, tablets, and computers, allowing participants to complete it in a setting and time of their choosing. All responses were kept anonymous, and participants were assured that their data would be stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Institutional Ethics Committee of the University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw, and the research was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

1.2. Participants

The final sample consisted of 191 pregnant women between the ages of 20 and 39 years ($M = 30.4$, $SD = 4.7$), who were in either the second trimester (52%) or the third trimester (48%) of pregnancy. The majority of participants were married (68%), 25% were cohabiting with their partners, and 7% identified as single. In terms of education, 55% of the women held a university degree, 32% had completed secondary education, and 13% reported having vocational training.

1.3. Measurements

1.3.1. The Attachment Styles Questionnaire (ASQ; Plopa, 2008)

The Attachment Styles Questionnaire (ASQ) is an instrument designed to evaluate adult attachment styles in romantic relationships, applicable to both men and women. Developed by Plopa (2008), the ASQ is based on the attachment theory framework introduced by Hazan and Shaver (1987). It distin-

guishes between three attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent. The questionnaire includes 24 items, grouped into scales that correspond to these attachment styles. Responses are provided on a seven-point scale, and the raw scores are converted into sten scores for further analysis. Reliability for the secure style equals 0.91, for the ambivalent-anxious style is 0.78, and for the avoidant style is 0.80. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient equaled 0.86 for the whole scale

1.3.2. Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS; Endler & Parker, 1994)

The *Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations* was used to evaluate participants' stress coping styles. This 48-item questionnaire assesses three distinct coping styles: task-oriented coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping. Respondents rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all to 5 = very much), indicating how often they use each strategy when faced with stressful situations. Task-oriented coping measures strategies directed at solving the problem or altering the situation to reduce stress, while emotion-focused coping assesses responses aimed at regulating emotional distress, such as venting emotions or seeking emotional support. Avoidance coping captures tendencies to disengage from or distract oneself from the stressor (e.g., hobbies or physical exercise). Higher scores on each subscale indicate a greater tendency to use the respective coping style. The Polish version of the questionnaire was adapted by Strelau et al. (2013).

1.3.3. Maternal-Fetal Attachment Scale (MFAS; Cranley, 1981)

A 24-item scale is a measure divided into the five following subscales: (1) Taking the parental role, (2) Treating a child as a separate being, (3) Interacting with the child, (4) Assigning characteristics to the child, (e) Being guided by the needs of the child. The questions are evaluated through Likert-type responses. The person answers by selecting one of the following terms: A—definitely yes; B—rather yes; C—I find it difficult to answer; D—probably not; E—

definitely not. The final score is obtained by the sum of all responses, which vary from 24 to 120 points. The Polish version of the questionnaire was adapted by Bielawska-Batorowicz (1995). The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for whole scale in this study equaled $\alpha = 0.78$.

1.4. Data analysis

Tables 1 and 2 present the means, standard deviations, results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, and Pearson correlations among the study variables. The mediation models specifically explored how different coping styles influence the relationship between various attachment styles and maternal-fetal attachment (MFA). Separate models were constructed for each attachment style, with each model focusing on a single coping style as a mediator, and were tested using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). The results revealed that the impact of attachment styles on MFA varies depending on the type of coping strategy employed. The pathways are defined as follows: Path a (relationship between attachment style and stress coping style), Path b (relationship between stress coping style and MFA), Path c (total effect of attachment style on MFA), and Path c' (direct effect of attachment style on MFA after accounting for stress coping styles). The significance of indirect effects was tested using the Sobel test (z-value).

2. Results

2.1. Correlations and descriptive statistics

Table 1 and Table 2 present the means, standard deviations, Shapiro-Wilk test results, and Pearson correlations among the study variables. The analysis revealed significant correlations between attachment styles, stress coping styles, and maternal-fetal attachment. According to the results, secure attachment was positively correlated with task-oriented coping and maternal-fetal attachment, while negatively correlated with emotion-focused and avoidance coping. Anxious attachment was negatively associated with task-oriented coping and maternal-fetal attachment, but positively correlated with emotion-focused coping. Avoidant attachment showed similar patterns, being

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviation and Shapiro-Wilk Test Results

Variables	M	SD	W	P
1. Secure Attachment	3.89	0.78	0.95	0.15
2. Anxious Attachment	1.72	0.68	0.97	0.42
3. Avoidant Attachment	2.15	0.89	0.95	0.11
4. Task oriented coping	29.59	3.36	0.98	0.23
5. Emotion-focused coping	17.31	5.78	0.98	0.24
6. Avoidance coping	13.38	4.20	0.99	0.34
7. Maternal-Fetal Attachment	87.12	8.02	0.97	0.22

M – mean, SD – standard deviation, W - Shapiro-Wilk Test, p – significance level, $p < 0.05$

Table 2. Matrix Pearson correlations between variables: attachment styles, stress coping styles, and maternal-fetal attachment.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Secure Attachment	-						
2. Anxious Attachment	-0.21**	-					
3. Avoidant Attachment	-0.18**	0.15*	-				
4. Task oriented coping	0.34**	-0.29**	-0.24***	-			
5. Emotional-focused coping	-0.30*	0.19**	0.21	-0.21**	-		
6. Avoidance coping	-0.27*	0.20	0.35**	-0.18*	0.28*	-	
8. Maternal-Fetal Attachment	0.22**	-0.18**	-0.21**	-0.21*	-0.32**	-0.19*	-

p – significance level, * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

negatively correlated with task-oriented coping and maternal-fetal attachment, and positively correlated with avoidance coping. Furthermore, task-oriented coping was positively correlated with maternal-fetal attachment, whereas emotion-focused and avoidance coping were negatively related to maternal-fetal attachment.

2.2. Stress coping styles as mediators in the relationship between maternal attachment styles and maternal-fetal attachment

For secure attachment, the models fit the data well for task-oriented coping ($F(2, 250) = 44.11$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.41$), emotion-focused coping ($F(2, 250) = 37.20$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.35$), and avoidance coping ($F(2, 250) = 38.75$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.38$). The total effect of secure attachment on MFA (Path c) was positive and significant ($b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 6.25$, $p < .001$). In the model with task-oriented coping, secure attachment was positively associated with task-oriented coping (Path a_1 ; $b = 0.48$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 6.00$, $p < .001$), and task-oriented coping positively influenced MFA (Path b_1 ; $b = 0.45$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 6.43$, $p < .001$). After accounting for task-oriented coping, the direct effect of secure attachment on MFA became non-significant (Path c'_1 ; $b = 0.22$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 1.72$, $p = .10$), indicating full mediation. The Sobel z test confirmed a significant indirect effect ($b = 0.22$, $SE = 0.06$, $z = 3.78$, $p < .01$). In the model with emotion-focused coping, secure attachment was negatively associated with emotion-focused coping (Path a_2 ; $b = -0.29$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = -3.22$, $p < .01$), and emotion-focused coping was negatively associated with MFA (Path b_2 ; $b = -0.25$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -3.12$, $p < .01$). After accounting for emotion-focused coping, the direct effect of secure attachment on MFA became non-significant (Path c'_2 ; $b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 1.45$, $p = .15$), indicating full mediation. The Sobel z test confirmed a significant indirect effect ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $z = 2.33$, $p < .05$). In the model with avoidance coping, secure attachment was negatively associated with avoidance coping (Path a_3 ; $b = -0.32$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -4.00$, $p < .001$). On the other hand, avoidance coping was

negatively associated with MFA (Path b_3 ; $b = -0.28$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -3.87$, $p < .001$). After accounting for avoidance coping, the direct effect of secure attachment on MFA became non-significant (Path c'_3 ; $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 1.33$, $p = .18$), indicating full mediation. The Sobel z test confirmed a significant indirect effect ($b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = 2.50$, $p < .05$).

For avoidant attachment, the models were well-fitted to the data across two coping styles: avoidance coping ($F(2, 250) = 42.15$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.38$) and task-oriented coping ($F(2, 250) = 31.24$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.31$), while the model with emotion-focused coping did not fit the data well ($F(2, 250) = 1.85$, $p = .16$, $R^2 = 0.02$). The total effect of avoidant attachment on MFA (Path c) was negative and significant ($b = -0.40$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -5.71$, $p < .001$). In the model with task-oriented coping, avoidant attachment negatively predicted task-oriented coping (Path a_1 ; $b = -0.31$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -3.88$, $p < .001$), and task-oriented coping was positively associated with MFA (Path b_1 ; $b = 0.32$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 4.57$, $p < .001$). After accounting for task-oriented coping, the direct effect of avoidant attachment on MFA became non-significant (Path c'_1 ; $b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -1.43$, $p = .15$), indicating full mediation. The Sobel test confirmed a significant indirect effect ($b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = -2.50$, $p < .01$). In the model with emotion-focused coping, avoidant attachment was not significantly associated with emotion-focused coping (Path a_2 ; $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 1.33$, $p = .19$), and emotion-focused coping negatively influenced MFA (Path b_2 ; $b = -0.22$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -2.75$, $p < .01$). Since Path a_2 was not significant, the direct effect of avoidant attachment on MFA remained unchanged after accounting for emotion-focused coping (Path c'_2 ; $b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -1.11$, $p < .01$), indicating no mediation. The Sobel test confirmed a non-significant indirect effect ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.03$, $z = -1.00$, $p = .32$). In the model with avoidance coping, avoidant attachment was positively associated with avoidance coping (Path a_3 ; $b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 6.12$, $p < .001$), and avoidance coping negatively influenced MFA (Path b_3 ; $b = -0.22$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -2.75$, $p < .01$). After including avoidance coping, the direct effect of avoidant attachment on MFA became non-significant

(Path c'_3 ; $b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = -1.50$, $p = .15$), indicating full mediation. The Sobel test confirmed a significant indirect effect ($b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.03$, $z = -2.42$, $p < .01$).

For anxious attachment, the overall models fit the data well for two coping styles: task-oriented coping ($F(2, 250) = 38.75$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.37$) and emotion-focused coping ($F(2, 250) = 34.12$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.32$), while the model with avoidance coping did not fit the data well ($F(2, 250) = 2.10$, $p = .12$, $R^2 = 0.04$). The total effect of anxious attachment on MFA (Path c) was negative and significant ($b = -0.45$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = -5.00$, $p < .001$). In the model with task-oriented coping, anxious attachment was negatively associated with task-oriented coping (Path a_1 ; $b = -0.38$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = -4.22$, $p < .001$), and task-oriented coping was positively associated with MFA (Path b_1 ; $b = 0.39$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 5.57$, $p < .001$). After accounting for task-oriented coping, the direct effect of anxious attachment on MFA became non-significant (Path c'_1 ; $b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -1.50$, $p = .14$), indicating full mediation. The Sobel test confirmed a significant indirect effect ($b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = -3.22$, $p < .01$). In the model with emotion-focused coping, anxious attachment was positively associated with emotion-focused coping (Path a_2 ; $b = 0.55$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 6.11$, $p < .001$), and emotion-focused coping was negatively related to MFA (Path b_2 ; $b = -0.19$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = -2.38$, $p < .05$). After including emotion-focused coping, the direct effect of anxious attachment on MFA became non-significant (Path c'_2 ; $b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -1.43$, $p = .15$), indicating full mediation. The Sobel test confirmed a significant indirect effect ($b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = -2.65$, $p < .01$). In contrast, in the model with avoidance coping, anxious attachment was not significantly associated with avoidance coping (Path a_3 ; $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 1.50$, $p = .14$), and although avoidance coping was negatively associated with MFA (Path b_3 ; $b = -0.21$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -3.10$, $p < .01$), the non-significant relationship between anxious attachment and avoidance coping resulted in no mediation effect. After accounting for avoidance coping, the direct effect of anxious attachment on MFA remained significant (Path c'_3 ; $b = -0.20$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -2.86$, $p < .01$),

indicating a lack of mediation. The Sobel test confirmed a non-significant indirect effect ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.03$, $z = -1.00$, $p = .32$).

In summary, the analysis revealed a significant mediating role of coping styles in the relationship between attachment styles and maternal-fetal attachment (MFA). Task-oriented coping fully mediated the positive association between secure attachment and MFA, strengthening prenatal attachment. In the case of avoidant attachment, both task-oriented coping and avoidance fully mediated the negative impact of this attachment style on MFA – avoidantly attached mothers were less likely to use task-oriented strategies and more likely to emotionally distance themselves, which weakened prenatal attachment. Among mothers with anxious attachment styles, both task-oriented coping and emotion-focused coping fully mediated the negative relationship with MFA. Task-oriented strategies mitigated this effect, whereas emotion-focused strategies amplified it, making pregnancy engagement more difficult. Avoidant coping did not have a significant mediating effect in this group. Overall, the results confirmed that task-oriented coping strengthened MFA, whereas emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies weakened prenatal attachment, particularly among mothers with anxious and avoidant attachment styles.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide novel insights into the complex relationship between maternal attachment styles, stress coping strategies, and maternal-fetal attachment (MFA). In particular, task-oriented coping emerged as a key mechanism supporting the development of a strong emotional bond between the mother and her unborn child, especially among mothers with secure attachment styles. A study conducted by Malley et al. (2022) confirmed that task-focused coping strategies during pregnancy mitigate the effects of stress and significantly enhance both the emotional and physical well-being of the mother. This, in turn, translates into greater maternal engagement in the pregnancy process and the development of a healthy prenatal attachment.

Other studies have demonstrated that greater use of task-oriented coping strategies in the prenatal period is associated with better cognitive development of the child at one year of age, suggesting that maternal coping styles may have long-term benefits for child development (Guardiano & Dunkel-Schetter, 2015).

A particularly significant factor in the context of attachment style is the mother's mental representations of impending motherhood and her ability to create cognitive schemas related to her future maternal role. The present study found that mothers with a secure attachment style, characterized by emotional stability and trust in themselves and others, were more likely to adopt a task-oriented coping approach. This translated into their active engagement in preparations for future motherhood. Such activities may include acquiring knowledge about prenatal development, visualizing future interactions with the child, and planning for both the physical environment and emotional readiness for the baby's arrival (Simpson & Rholes, 2015). These practices may intensify maternal emotional involvement with the fetus, foster deeper prenatal attachment, and support the transition to motherhood. By cultivating positive mental representations of future life with the child, these mothers reinforce their positive emotions toward the fetus, laying a solid foundation for the future mother-child relationship, which may, in turn, positively influence the child's socio-emotional development after birth.

The analysis also revealed that mothers with an anxious attachment style were more likely to use emotion-focused coping strategies, which significantly hinder the development of maternal-fetal attachment. An anxious attachment style is associated with excessive activation of the attachment system, leading to heightened perceived stress and stronger emotional reactions to anxiety-provoking situations (Kural & Kovacs, 2021; Jerome & Liss, 2005; Na & Moon, 2015). Emotion-focused coping during pregnancy may involve an intense focus on personal feelings and anxieties about the pregnancy, which further amplifies feelings of distress and reinforces negative emotional responses. This heightened self-focus often leads to psychological distancing from the fetus, as these mothers, instead of focusing

on the child's needs, become preoccupied with their own fears. The excessive activation of the attachment system and emotional reactivity characteristic of anxious attachment styles limit these mothers' ability to effectively manage pregnancy-related stress. Studies by other researchers also suggest that mothers with an anxious attachment style have a reduced ability to mentally envision themselves in the maternal role, which affects their level of emotional and cognitive engagement with the fetus (Rholes & Paetzold, 2019). By maladaptively fixating on their own emotions, they often neglect mental preparation for their new role, weakening the potential for maternal-fetal attachment.

An interesting finding of the present study, however, was that task-oriented coping may serve a protective function, mitigating the negative effects of anxious attachment on prenatal attachment. In the context of anxious attachment, task-oriented coping may divert the mother's attention away from excessive fears, redirecting her focus toward concrete actions and pregnancy-related goals. This strategy allows these mothers to manage their anxiety more effectively, thereby facilitating the development of maternal-fetal attachment. Research by other scholars has shown that task-focused approaches enable mothers to concentrate more on practical preparations for motherhood, which fosters positive maternal representations of pregnancy and reduces excessive emotional responses (Grote & Bledsoe, 2007; Tamannaefar & Sanatkarfar, 2017).

For mothers with an avoidant attachment style, the analysis indicated a preference for avoidance-based coping, which fully mediated the negative relationship between avoidant attachment and maternal-fetal attachment. This attachment style, characterized by withdrawal from stressful situations and avoidance of difficult emotions, hindered maternal engagement in the relationship with the unborn child. Avoidant coping strategies during pregnancy may include deliberately diverting attention away from thoughts about pregnancy and emotionally distancing themselves from aspects of motherhood. Such strategies weaken the development of prenatal attachment and limit the formation of mental representations of future interactions with the child, which could otherwise

support the transition to the maternal role. Previous studies confirm that pregnancy brings significant life changes that require the reorganization of daily priorities and the broader family system (Herzog et al., 2022).

Research on attachment styles underscores their crucial role in the transition to parenthood and in shaping relationships and bonding with the newborn. In the present study, both insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) were negatively associated with maternal-fetal attachment, whereas a secure attachment style was found to be a protective factor that facilitates the development of a healthy emotional bond with the unborn child. These associations have been widely supported by previous research (Chrzan-Dętkoś & Łockiewicz, 2015; Zdolska-Wawrzkiwicz et al., 2020). However, the study by Lutkiewicz and Bidzan (2023) did not identify a statistically significant correlation between anxious or avoidant attachment styles and maternal-fetal attachment. Moreover, the authors found that prenatal attachment mediates the relationship between secure attachment style and the quality of the romantic relationship. One possible explanation for the present study's findings is that women with a secure attachment style activate their mental representation of an attachment figure during the transition to parenthood, which promotes a cognitive connection with the unborn child. In contrast, women with an anxious attachment style may focus more on the stability of their romantic relationship and seek external validation from their partners rather than fostering a direct relationship with the fetus. On the other hand, women with an avoidant attachment style, due to their fear of intimacy and tendency to suppress emotions, may refrain from engaging in emotional bonding with the unborn child.

Similar findings were reported by Rholes et al. (2001), who noted that women with an avoidant attachment style tend to suppress emotions and withdraw from relationships, particularly in situations requiring closeness. Consequently, this may lead to difficulties in developing prenatal attachment and a reduced ability to mentally represent the maternal-fetal relationship. Similarly, Tesson et

al. (2022) emphasized that a lack of engagement in the changes associated with pregnancy, such as reorganizing priorities and adapting to the new maternal role, may significantly hinder the transition to motherhood. Their findings indicate that avoiding these processes is linked to greater emotional detachment from the fetus.

Furthermore, some studies suggest that the level of maternal-fetal attachment in women with an avoidant attachment style may be influenced by other factors, such as social support or prior maternal experiences. McNamara et al. (2019) found that avoidantly attached mothers who receive strong support from their partner or social network may be more emotionally engaged in pregnancy despite their initial tendency to distance themselves. In the context of the present study, this finding suggests that insecure attachment styles are not necessarily fixed mechanisms of coping and that their impact on maternal-fetal attachment may be modified by other psychological and environmental factors. Thus, analyzing stress coping styles as potential mediators in the relationship between attachment styles and prenatal attachment contributes significantly to understanding the mechanisms underlying maternal-fetal bonding.

In summary, a task-oriented coping style emerges as a key mechanism supporting MFA across all groups studied. Even among mothers with insecure attachment styles, such as anxious or avoidant, a task-oriented approach functioned as a buffer, mitigating the negative effects of these styles on prenatal attachment. The results are consistent with the literature emphasizing the importance of task-focused styles in improving mental health and the quality of the maternal-fetal relationship (Dunkel-Schetter & Glynn, 2011; Wu et al., 2020). This suggests that task-oriented coping may support a more constructive approach to motherhood even among mothers with insecure attachment styles. Focusing on concrete actions and goals related to pregnancy allows mothers to concentrate on the practical aspects of preparation, reducing anxiety levels and fostering the development of a positive bond with the unborn child (Grote & Bledsoe, 2007; Tamannaefar & Sanatkarfar, 2017).

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Motherhood during the COVID-19 pandemic: the significance of coparenting in explaining mothers' marital satisfaction and life satisfaction¹

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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

¹ Article in Polish language: https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/61P_Wies.pdf

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-Oleńczka, 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-Oleńczka, 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 α 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 α 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

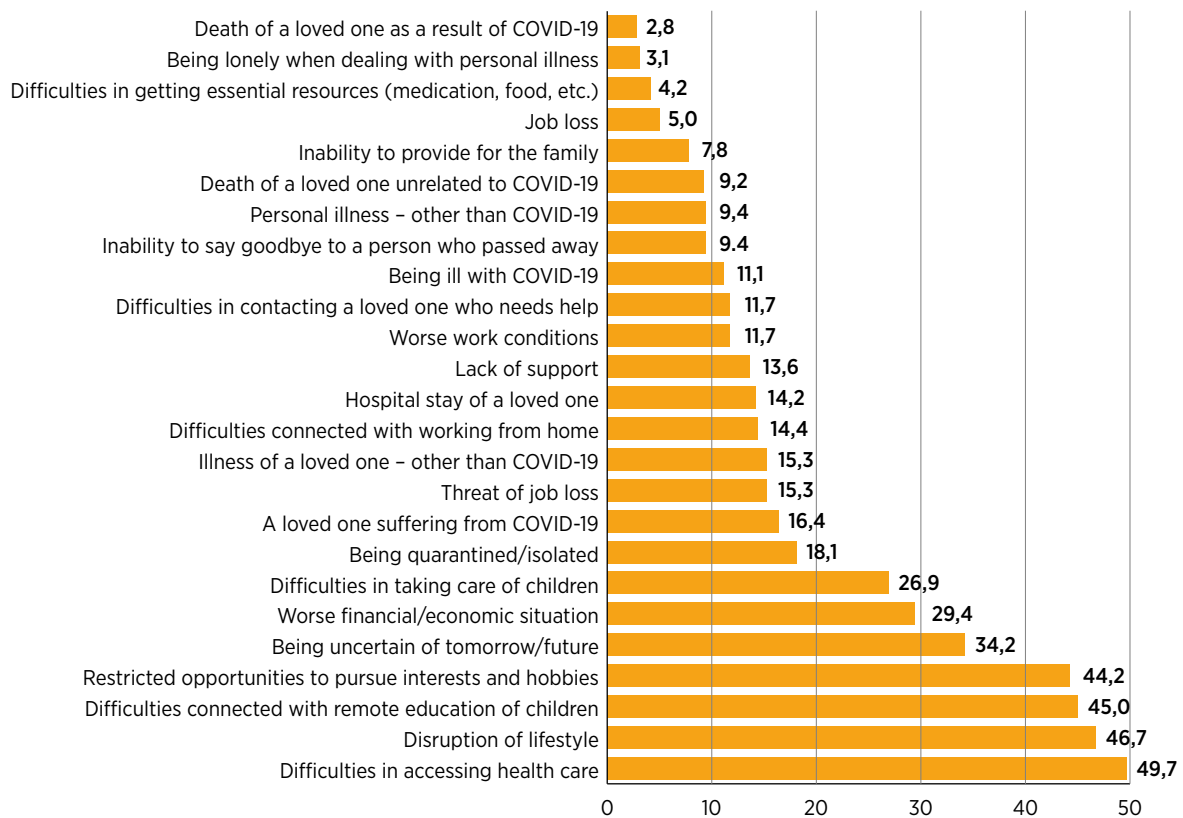


Figure 1. Negative Experiences Associated With the COVID-19 Pandemic (Percentage of Mothers Reporting a Given Experience)

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	B	SE	Beta	t	p	F	ΔF	R ² adj.	ΔR 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; R²adj. = adjusted R-squared; ΔR² = 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	B	SE	Beta	t	p	F	ΔF	R ² adj.	ΔR 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; R²adj. = adjusted R-squared; ΔR² = 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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Family system and sleep and circadian rhythm disorders in children and adolescents¹

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Abstract: *Introduction:* The aim of the article was to refer to the current psychological knowledge on the functioning of the family system, considered in the context of difficulties resulting from sleep and circadian rhythm disorders in children and adolescents. The considerations were based on the assumptions of the systemic theory of families and the theory of psychosocial development. Due to the increasingly common problems with maintaining the natural rhythm of life and a division into day and night, special attention was paid to the importance of preventive measures, covering both the entire family system as well as the school and work environments of its members. *Method:* The method of content analysis of publications presenting the results of quantitative psychological studies on the functioning of family systems in a situation of psychological crisis, sleep and circadian rhythm disorders in children and adolescents and their correlation with the health behaviours of parents as well as the effects that these disorders cause in children and adolescents was used in the review. Scientific databases such as PubMed, EBSCO, APA PsycArticles were used for the research. *Results:* The presented results of the literature review allow for a greater understanding of the connections between family values, parents' health behaviours, parenting patterns, conditions stemming from the school environment and sleep and circadian rhythm disorders in children and adolescents. *Conclusions:* It was found that the family environment can both prevent the occurrence of numerous difficulties in the functioning of children and adolescents, as well as be their source or even contribute to their intensification. The awareness that sleep and circadian rhythm disorders occurring in children and adolescents disrupt their social and cognitive development, contribute to the deterioration of their health and significantly limit the implementation of compulsory schooling and learning, it seems necessary to take decisive preventive and therapeutic actions. Further exploration of the undertaken issue through conducting scientific research is becoming a significant challenge, the results of which can contribute to the creation of effective psychological intervention programs supporting families in coping with crisis situations related to sleep and circadian rhythm disorders occurring in children and adolescents.

Keywords: adolescence, child, family, sleep disorder, circadian rhythm, psychological help

Introduction

The modern conditions of life connected with the continuously progressing technological development in some areas, the possibility of using artificial lighting as well as being online have made it difficult for many people to maintain the natural rhythm of life and the division into day and night. Exposure to light in the evening hours and sometimes even at night combined with irregularity of awake and sleep time results in sleep and circadian rhythm disorders in many people and can be the source of a lot of other

diseases. Some of the external circumstances that have been mentioned have an influence on the family environment, affecting its qualities, depending on the stage of the family development. In the present article, the psychological situation of families at a development cycle stage referred to as the family with children (with a little child, a school-age child, an adolescent) was subject to scientific considerations. It has been assumed that a family at this stage remains under a strong influence of situations connected with the children's

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developmental processes, crises experienced by the parents, related to their individual development, health and marital conflicts (Luberska, 2014).

Family specialists agree that events and assignments involving all the members of the family system are of a great importance for the family development cycle structure. They make the families look for new ways of coping with critical situations, which are conditioned by numerous factors (De Barbaro, 1999). Among the most frequently mentioned ones are: the quality of emotional bonds, communication skills, openness and readiness to accept changes, the level of self-esteem, personal qualities of individual family members, the kind of a critical event, its intensity, its significance for the family, the obtained social support and some demographic factors (Świętochowski, 2014).

Being the parent of a child with functional difficulties, which include sleep and circadian rhythm disorders, is a source of psychological crisis, as it affects the whole family system making it unstable. The family in the systemic meaning is a system of mutual interactions. Family specialists consider not only the role of influences of individual family members but also the functioning of the whole system, where each person depends on the others and all the remaining relationships. Taking this point of view allows us to define a family as a complex structure consisting of interdependent persons, who share the same history, experience a certain degree of emotional bond, and introduce interaction strategies for the sake of individual members and the group as a whole. It is assumed that the family system consists of many subsystems, which have some goals and tasks to be done together (Plopa, 2005).

1. Parental system and building health-promoting behaviours related to sleep in children and adolescents

The family system has been subject to modifications due to undergoing changes, sometimes negative, the assigned value or the way of functioning (see Smykowski, 2023). However, what has not changed in it refers to primacy and having a strong impact on its

members. This is because the family of origin is a role model and a place where not only people learn to be in close relationships (Plopa, 2005), but also they may acquire health-related behaviour patterns. Psychologists agree that people's behaviours are determined by their previous experiences. They are the effect of acquiring knowledge based on their own experiences or experiences of other people. According to the theory of social learning, it is also assumed that the majority of family contexts give numerous opportunities for the processes of social learning to work and family members are perfect role models (Wojciszke, 2017).

In childhood and adolescence the family environment still plays a significant role in the social space of a young person. It is still a figure whereas in the background there are other social environments with peers, romantic partners as well as other adults performing specific functions for young people, such as caring and educational ones. Throughout life the system and the range of interpersonal relationships of young people change, thus the parents who feel responsible for building the adaptive potential and the health-promoting behaviour profile of their child will provide them with a kind of protective policy for the future. The adaptive potential of a child is understood as a configuration of interacting variables, such as temperament, health, self-esteem, feeling of coherence, beliefs, social competencies and the quality of functioning of family environment (Kowalik, 2011) and is to a great extent related to the level of mental resilience. In turn, health-related behaviours mean all the behaviours of an individual that directly or indirectly affect health in three areas, i.e. the physical, mental and social ones. Among behaviours of this type we can include the ones that promote health, meaning care for healthy lifestyle, and the ones which are harmful for our health, for example risky behaviours, abuse of harmful substances or poor eating habits (Marmola, Wańczyk-Welc, 2017).

It is considered that the efforts made by parents into the impacts shaping individual aspects of the adaptive potential and the health-promoting behaviours of children and adolescents play an especially important role during the time when the young person's psyche is most malleable. It is assumed that in childhood and adolescence these impacts are able

to leave a relatively lasting effect and translate into a higher level of satisfaction in various areas of young people's lives. The family environment has a significant influence on the modelling of health-related behaviours, which arise as a result of interactions with the closest environment of a person. It is emphasized that parental impacts run on two levels, i.e. the direct and the indirect one. In respect of the considered issue of the circadian rhythm disorder in the delayed sleep phase variety, the parental impact on the direct level refers to regulating activities taken up for the sake of a child's health, including the regularity and the quality of their sleep, care for digital hygiene, regular meal times, oral hygiene and a general regularity of performing everyday duties. The parent who tries to responsibly build the child's proper sleep-related habits tends to shape them in an active way. On the other hand, the indirect parental impact on the child's health-related behaviours, including the one referring to the behaviours connected with sleep, is associated with behaviour modelling, parental role model transfer, e.g. in the context of daily evening rituals related to sleep and digital hygiene. It is important to be aware that it is the parents that profile the health-related behaviour pattern connected with sleep, and learning through observation is not the only process which is at its core.

Bearing in mind the fact that family environments are characterized by great variety, as far as the quality and the number of educational influences are concerned, this differentiation was shown on a continuum, where the most desirable position is occupied by so called *families of success*, which to a great extent affect the proper course of the child development process, and the least desirable one by so called *families of risk* (Brzezińska, 2013). In case of families of success, also referred to as *open families*, a key role is played by the strong and positive interpersonal relationships of a child with the adults. The significant psychological properties of these bonds are durability, stability and emotional closeness. As a result of that, the family members often spend time together, both involving the child in household jobs and engaging the adults in the child's activities. The open family also initiates and takes care of contacts with other people outside the closest family circle. Families of this type tend to

often take up interactions of a didactic nature, which facilitates the creation of specific cognitive maps in the mind of a young person. These maps can both refer to the children themselves and the surroundings, affecting the perception of the world and making the child able to predict other people's reactions in a more natural way. In the family of success, a young person, mainly through the contact with the adults who are sensitive to their needs, can not only get their cognitive curiosity aroused but can also have a better chance to build their identity, stabilizing the diversity of the social environment (Brzezińska, 2013).

Parental influences and shaping behaviours run differently in the family of risk. It is assumed that families of this type are less likely to provide a foundation for a widely understood educational success of a child. There is rather a tendency to exclude them from interactions with the family members, activities performed together and new activity areas, also those external ones. The inclination to lock oneself in one's own world, to isolate oneself from the world and the people is connected with a relatively narrow range of parental behaviours, usually schematic ones. Another feature of the discussed type of family is poor communication patterns of its members, which neither help to learn the rules existing in the social world nor facilitate the maintenance of proper interpersonal relationships (Brzezińska, 2013).

There are also a lot of other factors significant for the creation of developmental space for young people, such as the family structure (e.g. generationality, divorces, siblings), its socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, nationality, inclusive vs exclusive family orientation towards the local community and traditions (Smykowski, 2023).

2. Sleep and circadian rhythm – mechanisms, developmental changes and meaning

The stages of sleep and awake pattern are regulated by two independent although reinforcing each other, processes: the homeostatic process and the circadian rhythm. The homeostatic process leads to the need for sleep increasing with the time of staying awake and

decreases with the time of sleep. Increasing sleepiness is connected with a higher and higher concentration of adenosine in the brain – a nucleotide, which is a “by-product” of daily activity of a person.

The circadian process is responsible for the organization of human behaviour and physiology depending on the time of day and night. Among other things, it influences the time of sleep and wake, the work of individual organs, body temperature, hormone secretion, digestion rate, emotions, building immune processes and both physical and intellectual capacity (Borbély, Daan, Wirz-Justice, Deboer, 2016).

The most important regulator of the circadian rhythm, so called *Zeitgeber*, is light. Morning light reaching the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) in the hypothalamus (called the central clock) through the melanopsin photosensitive cells is a signal which stops the production of melatonin. It promotes activity during the daytime. On the other hand, the lack of light in the evening promotes the secretion of melatonin, which is a hormone preparing our bodies for sleep. Therefore, the task of the signals from SCN modulated by light is to synchronize the daily human activity to the day-night rhythm (Hattar, Liao, Takao, Berson, Yau, 2002), and the stable light-dark and sleep-wake rhythm is one of the more important factors responsible for the healthy circadian rhythm (Bjorvatn, 2022).

Light, however, is not the only regulator of the circadian rhythm. It is supposed that practically each body cell has a kind of a clock reacting to different stimuli (Hastings, Maywood, Brancaccio, 2022). Other important environmental factors affecting the circadian rhythm are meal times and fasting time, physical activity hours as well as social functioning (Monk, 2010). The researchers noticed that the need for sleep, its structure and chronotype change with age. The recommended number of sleep hours for children and adolescents is as follows: 14-17 hours for newborns, 12-15 hours for babies, 11-14 hours for children aged 1-2 years, 10-13 hours for preschoolers, 9-11 hours for school children and 8-10 hours for teenagers (14-17 years) (Gavriloff, Bacaro, Schlarb, Baglioni, 2022). Also the circadian rhythm, changes. At first it is hardly organized. Newborns practically sleep all day, their bodies are less capable of producing

and synthesizing melatonin, which starts working more effectively around 2nd till 6th month of life. At that time, the sleep-wake pattern adjusted to the times of day begins to appear (Paditz, 2024). Children with the developed circadian rhythm usually present the early chronotype, turning into the late chronotype in adolescence and reaching the peak around the age of 20 years. Then – in young adults and at later stages of development the chronotype gradually accelerates (Roenneberg, Kuehnle, Pramstaller, Ricken, Havel et al. 2004). The length of sleep is in common understanding perceived as an indicator of good sleep. In the related literature other sleep components are mentioned, which are equally significant. They are the quality of sleep (proportions of individual sleep phases, wake-up time), subjective satisfaction with sleep, time of sleep and its regularity (Sletten, Weaver, Foster, Gozal, Klerman et al., 2023). Regularity is an element of good sleep which is strictly related to the circadian rhythm, translating into the quality of sleep. Regular sleep is connected with the longer phase of deep stage of NREM sleep (N3 sleep) and REM sleep. The researchers also indicate the occurrence of correlations between fixed times of going to bed and getting up and academic achievements (Phillips, Clerx, O'Brien, Sano, Barger et al., 2017), body mass, metabolic disorders (Roane, 2015) and some other health aspects.

3. Sleep and circadian rhythm disorders in children and adolescents

Sleep deficit is presently a significant problem, noticed both in adults and children. It is observed on school days already in over half of the schoolchildren at the age of 6-11 years and in teenagers (Buxton, Chang., Spilsbury, Bos, Emsellem i in., 2015; Owens, Adolescent Sleep Working Group, Committee on Adolescence 2014; Wheaton, Jones, Cooper, Croft, 2018).

The researchers indicate that in the group of older adolescents, the homeostatic pressure for sleep builds up more slowly and the circadian rhythm is delayed, which can easily translate into later sleeping

hours. There are also some external factors – such as after school activities, homework, peer relationships and early hours of starting lessons, and they can be additional elements shortening sleep time, making morning wake-ups more difficult (Bartel, Gradisar, Williamson, 2015; Crowley, 2018; Logan, Hasler, Forbes, Franzen, Torregrossa et al., 2018). It has been observed that in the group of adolescents the sleep deficit has increased over the last few years. That might be related to the spread of smartphones (Twenge, Krizan, Hisler, 2017).

Sleep deficit is strongly correlated with not only the amount of sleep but also the disruption of its regularity. This deficit, which is usually bigger on school/workdays, is compensated for at weekends in the form of increasingly longer sleeping time. When there is a discrepancy between sleep and wake-up hours (resulting in discrepancies in the exposition to sunlight, mealtimes, sport and social activities) on weekdays and at weekends, such a phenomenon is referred to as “social jet lag”. It is considered to be the measure of misalignment of the biological and social rhythms of an individual (Wittmann, Dinich, Mellow, Roenneberg, 2006).

At the same time, despite the physiological delay of the circadian rhythm, a disorder called the delayed sleep phase syndrome (classified in the International Classification of Sleep Disorders (ICSD-3) (Sateia, 2014) is found in only 1-4% of adolescents (Daniels-son, Markström, Broman, von Knorring, Jansson-Fröjmark, 2016; Lovato, Gradisar, Short, Dohnt, Micic, 2014; Sivertsen, Pallesen, Stormark, Bøe, Lundervold, Hysing, 2013). That indicates the significance of the problem, which is irregularity or falling asleep time delay connected with the social jet lag fitting in the diagnostic criteria. This results in the fact that it is not included in “the diagnostic statistics” and because of that more difficult to notice. It is emphasized that insomnia and physiological delayed falling asleep time or the delayed sleep phase disorder can coexist, but at the same time they are sometimes confused. Moreover, one of these disorders can become the cause of another one (Siversten et al., 2013)

It has been found that going to bed later can cause sleepiness, mood swings, cognitive process disorders (resulting from sleep deficit). On the other hand,

teenagers and their parents, wanting to prevent the occurrence of sleep debt, may “force themselves” to fall asleep earlier than it is allowed by the natural circadian rhythm. That might lead to a disruption of the association of a bed with sleeping, cause emotional tension, the association of falling asleep with excessive effort, the sense of powerlessness and helplessness. (“Everyone at home is asleep, but I am not”). This situation can be a factor facilitating the occurrence of insomnia (Spielman, 1987).

Another sleep disorder is insomnia. It is the most common sleep disorder occurring in people, including children and adolescents. In ICSD-3 (Sateia, 2014) insomnia is described as difficulties falling asleep or maintaining sleep continuity in spite of appropriate conditions for sleeping. It is connected with worse functioning during the daytime, for example sleepiness, mood lability and cognitive functioning problems. If such a situation occurs more often than three times a week and lasts longer than three months, it can be referred to as chronic insomnia. The researchers point to its prevalence in the paediatric population. The problems with falling asleep and maintaining sleep continuity affect approximately 20-30% of preschoolers and from 4% to 39% of adolescents (de Zambotti, Goldstone, Colrain, Baker, 2018; Gavriloff et al., 2022). Insomnia – regardless of its name – is a disorder which is demonstrated not only at night, but also during the daytime. It is characterized by excessive arousal both on the cognitive level (ruminations, excessive worrying, racing thoughts) and on the physiological one (excessive activity of the sympathetic axis of the nervous system, non-physiological level of cortisol, elevated levels of inflammation, metabolic disorders and increased systolic blood pressure) (de Zambotti et al., 2018).

According to the researchers, the factors facilitating the development of insomnia include: female gender, high emotional reactivity, severe school stress, substance use, especially caffeine, and evening use of electronic devices. It is emphasized that caffeine in the form of coffee or energy drinks is regularly consumed by approximately 30% of adolescents as a remedy against sleepiness and can be a factor both causing insomnia and maintaining it (de Zambotti et al., 2018). The significance of using electronic devices

and the influence of blue light on sleep are still an area for scientific exploration, where the researchers have not reached agreement yet. Some sources support the hypothesis that the use of electronic devices can contribute to an increased level of arousal, causing problems with falling asleep (e.g. Lange, Cohrs, Skarupke, Görke, Szagun et al. 2017; Munezawa, Kaneita, Osaki, Kanda, Minowa et al., 2011). It still has not been decided whether using electronic devices is something that causes insomnia or is just its effect (de Zambotti et al., 2018). In turn, the findings of some other studies indicate that the differences in the falling asleep time of people using electronic devices before going to bed and not using them are minor and the possible delay in falling asleep is not related to the arousal connected with using a device and not being able to fall asleep but rather with delaying the very decision about going to bed (Bauducco, Pillion, Bartel, Reynolds, Kahn et al., 2024).

It is considered that insomnia and a sleep-wake pattern irregularity can be correlated. One of the important factors contributing to insomnia is the improper sleep hygiene. Mainly in respect of following the rules of regularity of going to bed and waking up. At the same time, insomnia, leading to increased sleepiness, may cause the will to catch up on sleep – to go to bed earlier, sleep longer at weekends, which in turn might result in deregulation of the circadian rhythm.

The parents who are at the child rearing stage of family development face the challenge to understand what makes up an event of a normative nature and what already does not. According to J. Goldsmith (2018) we can point out four significant aspects of this judgment. The first of them refers to accepting the fact that children and adolescents are characterized by developmental instability. For example, becoming aware that the need for sleep will change with age. The second aspect is connected with the first one and describes a desirable way of performing the parent's role as flexible. The third aspect concerns ensuring children and adolescents balance adequate to their age between dependence and the provided autonomy. And the last aspect describes the range of parental power, when and how to take interventions with the child's well-being in mind.

4. Effects of insufficient sleep/ circadian rhythm disorder

In the situation when a child/adolescent in a family shows a significant maladjustment of their inner rhythm to the social and school expectations, we can talk about the occurrence of circadian rhythm disruptions in them. As the circadian rhythm affects nearly most of body cells, its disorders go beyond the sleep-wake pattern problems. They can also be connected with mood disorders, metabolic disorders and immunological problems. Moreover, they affect school attendance and achievements, motivation for taking up different educational, social and health-related challenges. In such a situation the functioning of the family system changes dramatically as circadian rhythm disorders in a form of delayed sleep phase syndrome that are not taken care of make it difficult for the child and the whole family system to function properly.

Analysing difficulties occurring on the child's side, what is emphasized is the risk of failure to fulfil school obligations, limitation of peer interactions and widely understood social development.

The researchers stress that sleep and circadian rhythm disorders or deficits may have impact on the emotional life and increase the risk of other mental disorders (Reynolds, Spaeth, Hale, Williamson, LeBourgeois, et al., 2023). Sleep deprivation is connected with a higher level of anxiety, irritation, tension, hostility, confusion, catastrophizing, decrease of positive affect – less happiness, less energy, poorer emotional control (Baum, Desai, Field, Miller, Rausch et al. 2014; Talbot, McGlinchey, Kaplan, Dahl, Harvey, 2010; Tomaso, Johnson, Nelson, 2021). It can also intensify the feeling of loneliness, increase the number of conflicts (Simon, Vallat, Barnes, Walker, 2020). In the period of neuronal changes and increased emotional lability so characteristic for adolescence, sleep deprivation may make this tendency even stronger, decreasing self-control, enhancing impulsiveness, vulnerability, facilitating the way to risky behaviours and increasing the risk of using substances and addictions (Logan et al., 2018). It is worth noticing that sleep deprivation can be a self-perpetuating situation.

Decreasing self-control, increasing impulsiveness and striving for quick gratification, it can lead to a greater number of behaviours giving short-term pleasure (overeating, drinking alcohol, inability to stop using a smartphone) which can delay a decision to go to bed or worsen the quality of sleep thereby increasing sleep deprivation (Geng, Gu, Wang, Zhang, 2021; Kroese, de Ridder, Evers, Adriaanse, 2014).

Parents are also concerned about somatic symptoms experienced by their children. The most common ones are: headaches, gastrointestinal disorders and general weakness. It has been proved that in the longer perspective they can cause mood disorders, orthostatic deregulation, fibromyalgia, lowering of school results and contribute to social isolation. It is emphasized that circadian rhythm disorders often coexist with other mental disorders, such as ADHD, depression, anxiety disorders intensifying their symptoms (Kaczor, Skalski, 2015).

Sleep and circadian rhythm disorders are also correlated with metabolic health. Sleep deficits are connected with the risk of obesity, insulin resistance, elevated blood pressure (Zhang, Huang, Chen, 2017; Quist, Sjödin, Chaput, Hjorth, 2016). There are fewer studies referring to the role of circadian rhythm disorders in children and adolescents, therefore this problem matter is regarded as worth developing (Reynolds et al., 2023). However, it was noticed that less regular sleep-wake patterns translated into a greater risk of obesity (probably due to varying mealtimes and changes in hunger and satiety hormones regulation as well as dietary choices) (Miller, Lumeng, LeBourgeois, 2015).

One of the important factor disturbing the circadian rhythm in adults is shift work, which was considered as carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer at WHO (Straif, Baan, Grosse, Secretan, El Ghissassi et al., 2007). However, shift work affects not only the health of the person who does it but also its social environment. The results of the related literature review (Li, Johnson, Han, Andrews, Kendall et al., 2014) point out that the children of the shift working people showed more metabolic and social problems and coped with difficulties worse than the ones of the people working in

fixed hours. It could be an interesting issue of psychological research to consider “a children’s equivalent” of shift work – i.e. to find out the effect of different hours of starting school.

The researchers have found that social jet lag in teenagers translates into a higher Body Mass Index (Malone, Zemel, Compher, Souders, Chittams et al., 2016), coexists with clinical or seasonal depression (Henderson, Brady, Robertson, 2019), a higher level of irritation, sleepiness and poorer school achievements (Tamura, Komada, Inoue, Tanaka, 2022). In turn, the delayed sleep phase syndrome in adolescents is correlated with higher risk of using substances (especially caffeine and alcohol), a more sedentary lifestyle, absenteeism from school and a higher level of anxiety (Danielsson et al., 2016; Lovato et al, 2014; Siversten, 2013). Insomnia is also a disorder strongly affecting the quality of life. It has been found that it is connected with a higher level of stress, often coexists with depression, being its significant predictor. It is – together with depression as well as without it – a factor connected with suicidal ideation, suicide attempts and suicide. It is also related to using substances, engaging in risky behaviours (using drugs, driving under the influence of alcohol), which can be connected with not only emotional dysregulation but also the weakened control centre (de Zambotti et al., 2018; Simon et al., 2020).

The number of hours and the quality of sleep of children/adolescents are important for the quality of functioning of the whole family system. The parents of a child/adolescent suffering from sleep and circadian rhythm disorders witness numerous difficulties experienced by their child. That causes their anxiety and concern about their future, especially problems at school, health and peer relationships. Moreover, the parents are aware of numerous changes destabilizing the family lifestyle, e.g. interparental conflicts concerning the way of acting with a child suffering from the delayed sleep phase syndrome. They can result from a situation in which parents observe increased activity of the child when the other members of the family expect peace and quiet and want the child to go to bed. The child, however, refuses to do that. Other conflict areas may concern daytime functioning restrictions for the healthy siblings, inviting guests,

restrictions of going out together with the child, due to the fact that it will be difficult for them to wake up in the morning and do sports actively or participate in family meetings.

Parental abuse, conflicts, poor communication and atmosphere in the family can result in developing ineffective patterns of coping with emotions, cause stress, thereby making it difficult for a child to sleep well at night. On the other hand, parental warmth is considered to be a protective factor (Khor, McClure, Aldridge, Bei, Yap, 2021). Moreover, it is worth reminding that the effects of sleep deficit described in the context of children and adolescents also concern adults. Therefore, it can be supposed that a well-rested parent will be able to better manage their own emotions and these of other members of the family, understand difficult behaviours of their child and other adults in the system, which will facilitate building a good atmosphere.

A source of parents' concern can also be their helplessness, as they are not able to help their child or they see their own limitations, for example, resulting from their work, concerning their capability of helping their child to return to socially expected functioning. This kind of a family situation makes the parents, who feel responsible for the child, at the same time become aware of insufficiency of psychological tools that might be used to provide them with adequate assistance. Parents may also be frustrated by the fact that the psychosocial development of their child, who suffers from circadian rhythm disorders, is not going well and their behaviours are becoming less and less adaptive. This thesis's reflection can be found in the concept of psychosocial development of E. Erikson (2002). Referring to the human psychosocial development considered in the context of Erikson's theory, it is emphasized that it is based on motivation having its source in the need for achieving competence in fulfilling the expectations and requirements of the social environment in different areas of life. The author indicates that a human goes through eight stages of development in their life. By facing in each of them various conflict and crisis situations, they have an opportunity to solve them successfully and in this way develop adaptability on a higher level. On the other hand, inability to solve

a crisis leads to experiencing the feeling of inadequacy and makes it difficult to cope with crises occurring on the next stages of the human life (Erikson, 2002). Due to the issues raised in the study, emphasis was placed on discussing the stages of development with the effects of a successfully resolved crisis, referring to childhood and adolescence.

In early childhood, which ranges from the age of 1 to 3 years, the first crisis which is revealed is referred to as "autonomy *versus* shame and doubt". At this stage a child is trying to gain a sense of autonomy, self-determination. To let them solve this crisis positively, the parents need to act adequately to the age of the child, providing them with opportunities of influencing the environment, which will help them build high self-esteem and a sense of effectiveness and independence.

The pre-school period, which ranges from the age of 3 to 6 years, is connected with the necessity to cope with the crisis called „initiative *versus* sense of guilt". At this stage the child's goal is to realize their plans through interaction with other people. The parents supporting the child's initiative, adopting an attitude of reasonable freedom in the upbringing process, help the child develop self-confidence and conviction about the purposefulness of their own actions.

Children at the age between 6 and 12 years need to solve the conflict of „productivity *versus* feeling of inferiority". The school age is full of comparisons with peers, most frequently in respect of educational and sports achievements, social interactions and family life. A positive result of these comparisons translates into high self-esteem and self-acceptance.

Adolescence (age 12-18 years) is the time period for resolving the conflict between „identity *versus* role diffusion". The positive transfer to the next stage of development in this period is connected with development of the sense of identity. A strong conviction about who you are, faithfulness to one's beliefs and values, ability to face confrontations with people presenting different perspectives prove that this conflict has been solved successfully (Erikson, 2002).

In the presented concept, human development takes place in the social context, which is understood as any kind of voluntary participation of a person in

any social reference system that may concern them. In a situation of the occurrence of sleep and circadian rhythm deregulation or disorders, participation of a child in any social reference system that may concern them is highly difficult, which is likely to translate into failure to solve crises indicated in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

5. Preventive actions and directions of psychological assistance vs social systems

The improvement of the quality of sleep and the circadian rhythm in children and adolescents is, as in case of other areas of work with these groups, the result of numerous impacts. The related literature review allowed us to isolate a few significant levels, on which they take place.

The first of them is the level of the problem diagnosis, where it is necessary to have comprehensive medical knowledge about physiological sleep and sleep disorders and the therapy methods. That is because sleep disorders in paediatric population are frequently insufficiently detected and understood (Spruyt, Chan, Jayarathna, Bruni, International Paediatric Sleep Association et al., 2024). This is also the level of the social environment where children and adolescents are functioning, mainly the family, but also the school.

V. Satir (2000) emphasized that parents play the part of family architects. She regarded them as the most important subsystem in the family. It is the spouses that start the family, which is connected with revealing the level of satisfaction with it. It is them who decide about the quality of family atmosphere, satisfying the needs, the sense of security of all its members. The spouses also determine the quality and intensity of communication in the family and the style of their relationships and interactions is passed on to the children. The spouses' role is to arrange the family life and divide the duties (ibidem). A significant part in the prevention of sleep and circadian rhythm disorders can be assigned to the parents' knowledge about the sleep-wake pattern regulating mechanisms, the occurring developmental changes in respect of

the need for sleep and the circadian rhythm changes as well as the rules concerning healthy sleep and a pre-sleep routine (Gavriloff et al., 2022).

In the related literature we are able to find some clues in respect of family functioning and its impact on sleep. In case of the occurrence of sleep and circadian rhythm disorders in children and adolescents, it is worth thinking about modifying the family life arrangement. A minor cannot be required to make a rational decision to stop using a smartphone or playing computer games after 10 pm. They are often encouraged to be active late in the evening by the change of the social life pattern, the specific construction of computer games strongly immersing a person in virtual reality as well as by weaker parental control and the improper parental model. The occurrence of similar behaviours in the family will not motivate the child to change their harmful habits. A young person might not understand what negative health-related and social consequences they will experience. Not only in the future but also here and now. In the psychological studies an element of modelling can be seen. It was found that children more often tended to keep their electronic devices in their bedrooms if their parent did that too (Buxton et al., 2015). Moreover, it is assumed that the sleep time of teenagers is modified also by the sleep time of their parents (Khor et al., 2021).

We must agree with Satir (2000) and other top representatives of psychology, that it is the parents who are responsible for the health of the child and the shaping of behaviours which will promote it. An essential issue in trying to help a child experiencing circadian disorders with the delayed sleep phase is to ensure that they consistently comply with the sleep hygiene principles. That includes such behaviours as the parents' mindfulness focused on the effort to teach the child to go to bed when they feel sleepy, to associate the bed only with sleeping and to get out of bed whenever they have any problems with falling asleep, to do something else not to force themselves to fall asleep and to go back to bed when they feel sleepy again. The parent can help the child to have regular sleeping and getting up hours, not to sleep during the daytime, and if it is necessary, not longer than twenty minutes. It is recommended that fixed

sleeping hours are set. However, in case of adolescents, their chronotype must be taken under consideration – if their parents force them to go to bed too early, they might have a problem with falling asleep (Khor et al., 2021). In case of younger children, it is important that the parents maintain a fixed rhythm in their pre-sleeping routine both on school days and on holidays and at weekends (Prokasky, Fritz, Molfese, Bates, 2019).

An essential issue connected with the regularity of the sleep-wake pattern in children and adolescents is their contact with electronic devices. As the researchers indicate on the basis of the study review (Bauducco et al., 2024), electronics can have an ambiguous influence on sleep. The impact of electronic devices emitting blue light on the latency of sleep (the time from switching off the light with the intention to fall asleep to the very moment of falling asleep) is slight. However, it has been noticed that they have an influence on the delay of melatonin secretion and a decision when to go to sleep and the night sleep (Bauducco et al., 2024). It is a common phenomenon to keep the phone by the bed, to write text messages at night, to keep sound notifications/vibrations on, which disrupts the sleep architecture, leads to wake-ups and encourages us to use the telephone/messengers at night, lowering the quality and amount of sleep and disturbing the circadian rhythm. At the same time, the authors draw our attention to a potentially inverse correlation – the fact that it can be the problems with sleeping, emotional balance or longer wake-up time connected with the circadian rhythm disorder that are the cause of using the phone or social media at night.

The results of the analyses show that the risk factors in the described situation may include: individual susceptibility to the impact of technology, tendency to take up risks and fear of missing out (FOMO). On the other hand, the protective factors are, for example, individual character traits, such as self-control, and family rules. Although, on the one hand, a growing sense of independence and a desire for self-determination are a natural element in the group of teenagers, on the other hand, it is the parents' support, expressed as involvement in

the relationship as well as setting the rules for using technologies that is not only effective (Khor et al., 2021) but also expected by the adolescents. It has been found that teenagers notice the advantageous influence of parental regulations on the quality of their sleep (Jakobsson, Josefsson, Högberg, 2024). Similar conclusions concern the relationships of parents with children at the pre-adolescent age (Buxton et al., 2015). Thus, it is essential to set clear rules of using devices emitting blue light – not using them at least two hours before going to bed and in the bedroom (Buxton et al., 2015).

One must remember that besides this kind of light, they provide the contents that evoke strong emotions, making it difficult to fall asleep. Therefore, it is considered advisable to teach the child to control the intensity of stimuli they receive, depending on the time of day as well as develop the skills to calm oneself down before sleeping and minimize behaviours that might disturb sleep (Reynolds et al., 2023).

Regular physical activity of a child/adolescent, avoiding products containing sugar and caffeine are other good habits that facilitate falling asleep (Kaczor, Skalski, 2016). It is assumed that physical activity strengthens the homeostatic pressure for sleeping and, therefore, it is connected with going to bed earlier. It is disadvantageous only when done intensively less than an hour before sleep (Bartel et al., 2015). Regular mealtimes, maintaining a proper interval between the last meal and going to bed are another element enhancing regularity of the circadian rhythm (Monk, 2010).

The researchers indicate that it is light that is the most important *Zeitgeber*, that is why we cannot omit it in considerations while discussing healthy circadian rhythms. Modern people spend most of their time indoor, where it is significantly darker than outside even on a cloudy day. Additionally, due to artificial light sources and light pollution – nights are brighter. Both the elements weaken the circadian rhythm (Brown et al., 2022). Therefore, among other things, it is recommended that light should be dimmed in a child/adolescent's bedroom in the evening as part of the so called sleep hygiene (Akacem, Wright, LeBourgeois, 2018).

It is believed that bright light in the morning, experienced even during a few minute walk stops the secretion of melatonin, reducing morning sleepiness, increasing the secretion of serotonin and melatonin in the evening (Kaczor, Szczęśna, 2023). Thus, it is advisable that a teenager go for a morning walk with the dog or shopping to the bakery as their everyday duty. Although exposure to morning light is important for all age groups, it is especially significant for adolescents. That is because it is connected with advancing the circadian rhythm. It has also been observed that sufficient exposure to light during a whole day makes people less sensitive to the effect of light after the sunset, which can be arousing and delay your circadian rhythm (Chang, Scheer, Czeisler, 2011; Rångtjell, Ekstrand, Rapp, Lagermalm, Liethof et al., 2016). Some beneficial actions in the school environment can include classes outdoors if possible, using suitable window blinds and good lighting in classrooms and corridors (Kim, Casement, 2024).

It is assumed that parents supporting children and adolescents want to strengthen their belief that testing different behaviours, solutions, also those connected with failures is a natural component of the development process. It is considered that the involvement and support of the family for activities taken also outside the family environment, at school increase the effectiveness of the activities, better translating the transfer of knowledge into behavioural changes (Reynolds et al., 2023). In the COM-B model describing the mechanism of behavioural change its significant determinants are emphasized (West, Michie, 2020). The first condition necessary for a behavioural change to occur in a human is the capability of making it. That includes skills, knowledge, attention and memory processes (Capability) and external opportunities, such as physical and social factors making the change come true (Opportunity). For example, they can be beliefs about what the persons close to a child/teenager like parents, friends or teachers think about the problem with going to bed at a proper time, what experiences they have, how supporting they are for the child/

teenager. The thing that might be of importance here is the time needed for taking up a given topic or the related resources. The last condition of the behavioural change mechanism is Motivation, understood as different internal processes leading to the occurrence of change in behaviour. That can be a conviction that a given problem is important and we are able to make a change, some emotions related to a given issue – how beneficial or threatening it is not to get enough sleep at night.

An important issue in the context of the circadian rhythm in children is the time when they start their lessons or how the lessons are organized. That becomes especially significant at the stage of adolescence and chronotype delay. It appears that delaying the start of school lessons by one hour affected many areas of functioning. The ones connected with sleep – lengthening sleeping time, greater regularity and, as a result, a decreased social jet lag. The psychological effects included: better mood, higher satisfaction with life, less irritability. These connected with life and school achievements – fewer late-comings, less sleeping in classes, fewer problems with discipline, better attendance rate, higher grades as well as a decreased number of car accidents in case of adolescents who are allowed to drive (Barlaan, Pangelinan, Johns, Schweikhard, Cromer, 2022; Borisenkov, Popov, Smirnov, Dorogina, Pecherkina et al., 2022; Bowers, Moyer 2017; Chan, Tang, Leung, Poon, Lau i in., 2024; Meltzer, Wahlstrom, Plog, McNally, 2022).

Such a change is undoubtedly organizationally demanding on many levels, which is emphasized by Start School Later, Inc., which promotes such a solution. It cooperates with scientists, health specialists, teachers, headmasters as well as parents in order to raise awareness concerning the correlation between sleep and the school starting time and provide support for changing that². The level of awareness, openness and the pro-active attitude of parents can be a factor stimulating system changes and with this supporting children's chronobiological health.

Supportive parents, apart from being empathic, demonstrate tendency to give advice encouraging children to change their behaviour when they

2 <https://www.startschoollater.net/about-us.html>

realize that the development process causes disproportionate difficulties and consequences for their health and social functioning. Parents do not hesitate to take actions in a situation when their children experience strong anxiety. Their influences may contribute to ensuring their children/adolescents greater support, including the option of using psychological (Goldsmith, 2018) or medical assistance.

Conclusion

Technological changes, which result in lifestyle modifications and an increase in the knowledge on the importance of the chronobiological functioning of a human being, shall make us reflect on building awareness and correct habits connected with the sleep-wake patterns.

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Attachment styles in the family of origin and resentment. Young adult survey¹

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Abstract: Everyone experiences difficult situations that they have to face. Many researchers raise questions about the determinants of coping or lack of coping skills in such situations. One of the little-studied aspects in psychological analyses is the problem of resentment. This article considers how resentment is framed in psychology, as well as examines one of the factors concerning its determinants, namely attachment style during childhood. Research Objective: The article attempts to find an answer to the question of whether there are correlations between attachment style in the family of origin and resentment in young adults. Methodology: the study of 185 subjects used the Scale for the Study of Attachment Style in the Family of Origin (SPRP) by M. Ryś, Z. Krasowska and N. Witerek (2021), and those dimensions of the Scale of Psychological Resilience (SOP) by M. Ryś et al. (2020), which address issues of resentment. Results: The results of the study indicate significant correlations between non-secure parenting styles in the family of origin and the studied aspects of resentment. The results also indicate differences in the experience of resentment between men and women.

Keywords: secure and non-secure childhood attachment styles, rejecting attachment style, resentment

Introduction

The issue of attachment styles in the family of origin is the subject of analysis by many psychologists.² As J. Bowlby (2016) states, the patterns of attachment to parents developed in childhood are the basis of human development. The best-known classification of attachment styles distinguishes three attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant (Ainsworth, 1989). Most research on attachment to date covers only three patterns of attachment to a parent. M. Ryś proposed to distinguish the fourth style – rejecting, which is characteristic of people experiencing neglect or harm in childhood, and together with her team she created a method that can be used to examine the level of all four attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and rejecting (Ryś, Krasowska, Witerek, 2021).

An important issue discussed in this article is resentment. Everyone experiences difficult situations that they have to face. Attitudes towards difficult situations are analysed in the context of mental resilience, which has resulted in publications and research authored, among others, by A. Borucka and K. Ostaszewski (2012), M. Marciniak (2019), K. Ostaszewski (2014), A. Pacut et al. (2022), M. Ryś (2020), A. Studniczek et al. (2018).

This article attempts to find an answer to the question whether there are relationships between attachment style in the family of origin and resentment in young adults. In the study of 185 people, the Attachment Style in the Family of Origin (SPRP) scale by M. Ryś, Z. Krasowska, and N. Witerek (2021)

1 Article in Polish language: https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/61P_Karb.pdf

2 E.g.: Ainsworth (1989); Bowlby (2016); Kornas-Biela (2017); Liberska i in. (2016); Libura-Gil (2018); Łoś (2010); Marchwicki (2004); Plopa (2019); Ryś, Krasowska, Witerek (2021); Siwek (2012); Stępnicka-Markowska (2023).

was used, and the data from the Mental Resilience Scale (SOP) by M. Ryś et al. (2020), which deal with the issue of resentment.

1. Theoretical foundations of research

1.1. The problem of attachment in the family of origin

1.1.1. Definitional approach to attachment

The attachment theory owes its origins to the observation of the negative consequences of separation from the mother in the early stages of a child's life (Bowlby, 1998) and a review of ethologists' research on the attachment behaviour of birds and non-human primate species (Bowlby, 2016; Swojnóg, 2012). Its creator, J. Bowlby (2016), questioned the theory of secondary drive, which states that the child attaches to the mother's figure as a result of her satisfying its physiological needs. Instead, the author postulated that a separate behavioural system has been developed through evolution, the main goal of which is to strive for closeness with the attachment figure, which increases the chance of survival of the individual. The theory presented by J. Bowlby was continued by his student M. Ainsworth (1989), who conducted research on attachment among Ganda infants and created the Alien Situation Procedure, thanks to which individual attachment styles were distinguished. Since then, many researchers have developed issues related to this theory.

There are many different definitions of the concept of attachment in the literature. J. Bowlby defines it as the "need for a bond between an individual and a person or an individual of the same species" (Bowlby, 1980, after: Ryś et al., 2021, p. 241). The author believes that everyone has been provided with a repertoire of attachment behaviours, the main task of which is to maintain closeness with the mother figure. These include, among others: crying, screaming, smiling, vocalizing, clinging, "following". The main figure of attachment is a non-interchangeable figure. However, it does not mean that the child cannot have

secondary figures of attachment (Bowlby, 2016). Moreover, observations of infants (Schaffer, Emerson, 1964) and children (Ainsworth, 1963, after: Bowlby, 2016) indicate the following relationship: the more attached a child is to the main figure, the more likely it is that it will address attachment behaviours to other people familiar to it.

According to M. Ainsworth (1969, p. 971), attachment is an "emotional bond that an individual bestows on another specific person". The child treats the object of attachment as a safe base from which to begin exploration of the environment and to which he returns in a situation of anxiety and withdrawal. Stimuli activating the attachment system can be divided into two categories: those related to the well-being of the individual, e.g., hunger, pain, fatigue, or those related to the environment, e.g., external threat or separation from the attachment figure (Cassidy, 2016, after: Lubiewska, 2019). Similarly, attachment is defined by J.K. Baker (2006, p. 7), namely as an "emotional bond that includes: the desire for intimacy, anxiety after an inexplicable separation, pleasure or joy after a reunion, and grief after loss".

P. Marchwicki (2009) understands attachment as a "state in which an individual feels a strong tendency to seek the closeness of another specific individual, especially in situations of stress, difficulty, or threat" (Marchwicki, 2009, p. 11). The tendency to this type of behaviour is a property of the attached person. This means that a person is attached to a particular figure also in moments of temporary absence of her presence and in situations when she does not seek shelter and consolation from her at a given moment (Marchwicki, 2009, p. 11). In turn, M. Adamczyk (2016) defines this term as a "biologically rooted tendency to form strong emotional bonds with caregivers in the first years of life" (Adamczyk, 2016, p. 90). Attachment to the main caregiver is the basis for further human development. It plays an important role in the formation of internal operating models, i.e., the image of oneself and other people (Adamczyk, 2016).

M. Czub (2014, p. 11) defines attachment as a "specific relationship between a child and its most important caregiver". The author points out that it is an important factor in proper mental development.

Building attachment affects the quality of the child's emotional and cognitive processes. For this reason, it is the basis of educational, professional, and personal achievements (Czub, 2014). M. Plopa (2019, p. 485) defines attachment as a "relatively stable socio-emotional relationship with another individual, a person, as well as intrapsychic organisations that develop on the basis of individual experiences with the first caregivers". He emphasises that there is a relationship between certain attachment styles and such forms of social behaviour as: love, friendship, sense of security, loneliness, depression, and anxiety (Plopa, 2019, p. 485).

In this article, the concept of attachment will be understood in accordance with the definition already cited by J. Bowlby (2016). From the moment of birth, a person is equipped with a system that is the building block of attachment. It is shaped as a result of repeated interactions between the infant and the main caregiver (Bowlby, 2016), and the quality of the bond created is an important factor determining the future social and emotional functioning of a person (Plopa, 2015).

1.1.2. Attachment styles

Attachment style is a model of attachment-related behaviours that considers individual differences in the quality of the child's bond with an adult (Ainsworth, Wittig, 1969, after: Marchwicki, 2003). The experience of relationships with the attachment figure in childhood is one of the most important factors responsible for social and emotional functioning in the future. The attachment style is the result of the effectiveness and predictability of the main caregiver's response to stressful situations experienced by the child, and is also a representation of the strategies adopted in the future to cope with stress (Plopa, 2015).

Secure attachment style

Many researchers agree with the thesis that the most beneficial for further human development is the development of a trusting bond with the first caregiver (Atwool, 2007; Bukalski, 2013; Czapiga, 2007; Pistole, 1995, after: Porębiak, 2012, Walker et al., 2022).

It is formed when the main figure of attachment is easily accessible to the child, reacts sensitively to the signals coming from the child and adequately helps the child in experiencing difficult situations (Czub, 2014). Research by S. Goldberg et al. (1994, after: Słaboń-Duda, 2011) has shown that mothers of securely attached infants react equally sensitively to emotions expressed by the child as positive and negative. It is also the result of the complementarity of the child's and caregiver's behaviour – the child clearly communicates his or her needs, and the adult responds to them accurately (Pederson, Moran, 1996, after: Stawicka, 2008). The primary caregiver's reactions to signals from the child are characterised by consistency, coherence, and predictability (Brzezińska et al., 2016). The repetition of interactions with the attachment figure results in the formation of a positive mental representation of himself and other people in the child, which is the basis for the development of optimal self-regulation (Stawicka, 2008).

A child with a secure attachment style in the presence of its mother is calm and explores its surroundings with curiosity. He treats his mother as a safe base to which he can always return and receive comfort in a situation of discomfort. In the absence of the main attachment figure, he feels anxious, but when she returns, he greets her with joy, seeks closeness with her, calms down relatively quickly and returns to normal activity (Król-Kuczkowska, 2008). They communicate their emotions openly, are characterised by empathy, and tend to consider the other person's perspective. Emotions expressed as positive predominate, and expressing negative ones is short-lived. They inform about the frustration they experience (Iniewicz, 2008). At preschool age, a child is characterised by ingenuity, effectively copes with stress, is able to cooperate with peers, establishes casual conversations, and relates to other people in a friendly way (Czub, 2014).

A child who is securely attached more easily achieves a high level of mental resilience, independence, cooperativeness, self-reflection, control of their own feelings, empathy, and social competence in adulthood (Włodarczyk, 2016). The quality of the bond with the first caregiver is also associated with a general sense of well-being (Moore, Leung, 2002,

after: Matysiak-Błaszczyk et al., 2020). P. Darling Rasmussen et al. (2019) conducted meta-analyses of studies on the relationship between attachment and mental resilience. Their results indicate that the secure attachment style is significantly associated with the development of mental resilience. Research by R.C. Fraley and P.R. Shaver (2000) indicates that there is a relationship between attachment style in childhood and intimate bonds formed in adulthood. People with a secure attachment pattern feel greater satisfaction from the relationship with their partner, show greater acceptance, tend to positively value mutual dependence, and feel joy in close relationships. In adulthood, they are able to skilfully resolve conflicts, communicate their needs in a free way, and are convinced that the emotions they experience are accepted and understood by those close to them (Ryś et al., 2021). They also have the ability to rationally assess reality, in a situation of experiencing life difficulties, they tend to seek support and are able to admit their own weaknesses to their loved ones, which is the basis for building intimacy in the relationship (Karbowa, 2012).

Non-secure attachment styles

Research (Berek, 2019; Flores, 2004, after: Wyrzykowska, 2012; Suchańska et al., 2019; Wawiórko, Zabłocka-Żytka, 2018; Wendolowska, 2017) proves that the formation of an abnormal bond with the first caregiver is one of the risk factors for the occurrence of disorders in human development. In the psychological literature, there are various nomenclature for non-secure attachment styles³. This article uses the classification presented by Maria Ryś, who, in addition to the secure style, distinguished the following styles: anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and rejecting (Ryś, Krasowska, Witerek, 2021).

Children with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style have an experience of a relationship with a caregiver that is based on the inconsistency of the adult's response to the child's needs. The main attachment

figure tends to impose itself in contact with the child, alternating with ignoring the signals sent by the child (Nowotnik, 2014). It is also overly controlling and tends to punish the child through abandonment and unavailability. Such an experience of the first relationship teaches the child that the expression of the negative emotions felt gives a greater probability of attracting the caregiver's attention. This contributes to the strengthening of the secondary strategy of the so-called attachment hyperactivation, i.e., exaggeration of attachment behaviours (Kobak et al., 1993, after: Płopa, 2015). Through such behaviour, the infant experiences anxiety, has a tendency to excessive clinging and abandons exploration of the environment in favour of contact with an adult (Płaczek, 2012). During the separation from the main caregiver, he experiences severe anxiety, and after his return, it is very difficult for him to calm down. The child's ambivalent behaviour is also characteristic, manifested by alternating striving for closeness with the caregiver and the appearing resignation from seeking contact with the caregiver (Ainsworth, 1982, after: Stawicka, 2008). Research by C. Żechowski et al. (2018) has shown that the anxious attachment style is one of the predictors of somatic symptoms and difficulties in social functioning. Such a pattern of attachment also results in excessive seeking of attention from others, impulsivity, a sense of frustration and helplessness when experiencing difficult situations (Czub, 2014).

The avoidant attachment style arises when the maternal figure actively rejects the child's attempts to make contact with her (Ainsworth et al., 1978, after: Wallin, 2011). Due to personal or social conditions, the caregiver does not regulate the emotional tension experienced by the infant. This results in the development of a strategy of defensive exclusion in the child, i.e., the repression of the figure of attachment that rejects behaviour and his own need for attachment (Król-Kuczkowska, 2008). An avoidant attached child does not show interest in the caregiver, tends to avoid contact with him, and spends more time exploring the environment than looking for

3 M. Ainsworth (1978; after: Ainsworth, 1979) created a laboratory procedure on the basis of which she distinguished three patterns of attachment of a child to its mother: pattern B – secure attachment style, pattern A – avoidant attachment style, and pattern C – anxious-ambivalent attachment style. M. Main and J. Solomon (1990; after: Wallin, 2011) added a fourth style to this classification: pattern D – disorganised attachment style.

closeness. Infants experiencing such a relationship with their first caregiver learn that the emotions they express do not bring the desired results (Plopa, 2015). Interestingly, the research of G. Spangler and K.E. Grossmann (1993, after: Senator, 2012) showed that these children, despite the lack of a behavioural reaction to separation from their mother, had the highest level of cortisol in saliva, i.e., a hormone indicating the perceived stress. People with this attachment pattern tend to show false affect, excessive emotional control, avoid close contact, and see other people in a negative light. In difficult situations, they do not seek support because they expect rejection (Brzezińska et al., 2016). Analyses of research on the importance of attachment styles on later human development indicate that the avoidant pattern is associated with irritability, impulsivity, experiencing frustration, lack of trust, uncertainty, and difficulties in relationships (Komorowska-Pudło, 2016).

These two attachment styles inadequately describe the situation of people who grew up in families where pathological behaviour towards the child occurred. For this reason, M. Ryś, Z. Krasowska, and N. Witerek (2021) created a research method that considers the third non-secure attachment style, which they described as rejecting. It is formed when a child is brought up in a dysfunctional family, in which he experiences neglect or harm. The infant perceives the attachment figure as both a source of threat and relief, which results in a clear motivational conflict when the attachment system is activated. It has a deep-rooted conviction that life is full of difficulties that cannot be effectively overcome. He behaves suspiciously of life's chances, because he is convinced of their impermanence. People from such an environment are characterised by a low level of mental resilience (Ryś, 2020), they experience mental health problems (Soudi et al., 2015, after: Ryś et al., 2021) and are not motivated to self-develop and pursue their own desires. In adulthood, these people do not defend their own rights, have problems with opposing others and have a sense of being unloved.

The experience of the relationship with the attachment figure is the basis for further human development. The quality of the bond with the first caregiver is related to the development of internal operating

models (Marchwicki, 2006). J. Bowlby (2016) assumes that internal operating models formed in early childhood are generally a permanent element of the human personality. For this reason, the attachment style determines important aspects of the image of oneself, other people, and the relationships between them (Ryś et al., 2021).

2. The problem of resentment

2.1. Definitional approach and analysis of resentment

Ressentiment has been the subject of special interest of philosophers for the last few centuries.

Marc Ferro, in his book *Ressentiment in History*, describes the manifestations of resentment over the centuries. Although the author uses the term “eternal resentiments”, in fact, he refers in his publication only to the period of the ancient rebels, whom he describes as the first rebels in history (Ferro, 2013, after: Karbowski, 2025).

In the nineteenth century, resentment was perceived as a substitute reaction in a situation of powerlessness and powerlessness. According to Nietzsche (2022, p. 24-25), it is the substitute reaction of the “weak” against the “strong”, which makes the weak “good” and the strong “bad”, Nietzsche saw the sources of this substitute reaction in the structure of interpersonal relations, in the social structure. The theory of resentment was developed by Max Scheler in his work *Ressentiment and Morality* gives a definition of resentment: “Ressentiment is spiritual self-poisoning that has strictly defined causes and effects. It is a permanent psychological attitude which arises when certain emotional impulses and passions, which are normal in themselves and are essentially part of human nature, are systematically suppressed and not discharged, and are entailed by certain permanent tendencies to a certain kind of illusion about values and corresponding value judgments. The emotional reflexes and passions that are primarily at play here are: a vengeful feeling and a reflex of revenge, hatred, malice, jealousy, envy, mockery” (Scheler, 2008, p. 33-34).

Despite the importance of this topic, it is only in recent years that attempts to analyse this phenomenon in the social sciences or health sciences have appeared. A pioneer of work in this area is Mariusz Karbowski (2023, 2025), who in his approach to resentment, refers to philosophical approaches, but presents his analyses as revealing resentment by showing it from the position of the so-called “emotional self”, understood as a complex emotion resulting from tensions in social relations. In a 2025 scientific monograph, he captures resentment as a complex of hidden emotions, such as anger, envy, hatred, jealousy, or desire for revenge, which often go unnoticed by people whose behaviour may be motivated by them. These emotions, strongly interrelated, have a significant impact on both the reactions and the individual’s mental state (Karbowski, 2025).

Inspired by the pioneering works of M. Karbowski, other works, including research papers, aimed at deepening the understanding of the phenomenon of resentment, began to be created. The results of such work are presented in this article.

As a definitional approach, M. Ryś and E. Trzęsowska-Greszta proposed the definition of resentment as an attitude towards previously suffered harm, as resentment manifested in an emotional return to difficult, sometimes traumatic events (emotional aspect), but also in their analysis (intellectual aspect) and in actions taken towards revenge or forgiveness of the culprit.

Such an approach is the result of many investigations into various approaches to mental resilience, in which the phenomenon of resentment plays a significant role in overcoming negative life events, leading to a relatively good adjustment of the individual, despite adversities and/or traumatic experiences in childhood (Craig, Bond, Burns, 2003; Kumpfer, Summerhays, 2006; Luthar, Iron, 2003; Sameroff, Rosenblum, 2006).

Thus, resentment is associated on the one hand with experiencing a threat or a traumatic situation or the occurrence of an increased level of risk to the well-being of the individual, and on the other hand, with having competencies that allow them to cope with such experiences and overcome adversity (Luthar, 2006; Luthar et al., 2000; Luthar, 2006; Masten, Powell, 2003; Masten, 2007; Rutter, 2000).

Adversity is life events or circumstances that are highly stressful for an individual, related to a family or social situation (e.g., poverty, parents’ divorce) or with an immediate threat to life (wars, disasters, terrorist attacks) (Rutter, 2000; Luthar, Zigler, 1991; Masten, Powell, 2003). In adversities, a characteristic phenomenon is the coexistence of several risk factors that may strengthen the risk of resentment. The action of one risk factor usually has little negative effect on the individual, but the co-occurrence of several risk factors over a long period of time can cause behavioural or health disorders (Davis, 1999; Greenberg, 2006; Kumpfer, 1999; Masten, Powell, 2003).

In the work on resentment, analyses were particularly used on such problems as part of resilience, such as risk factors, especially: 1) family (violence, parental divorce, poverty, low parental education, mental disorders of parents, neglect, lack of parenting skills, orphanhood); 2) individual (related to biological and genetic susceptibility, intelligence, temperament); 3) environmental (crime, unemployment, violence at home, low level of education at school) (Blistein et al., 2005; Fergus, Zimmerman, 2005; Garmezy, 1985; Hetherington, 1993; Hetherington, Elmore, 2003; Kumpfer, 1999; Kumpfer, Summerhays, 2006; Lin et al., 2004; Luthar, Zigler 1991; Luthar, Zelezo, 2003; Luthar, 2006; Masten, Powell, 2003; Rutter, 2000; Sameroff et al., 1993; Sameroff, Rosenblum, 2006; Werner, 1994).

Shaping attitudes towards resentment is a multi-dimensional process. It is conditioned by both innate factors and various life experiences, which consist of the individual’s personal experiences and the external environment (Ryś, Trzęsowska-Greszta, 2018). N. Garmezy indicated three groups of protective factors: 1) individual characteristics; 2) factors related to the family environment; and 3) characteristics of the non-family environment (Ryś, Trzęsowska-Greszta, 2018; Borucka, Ostaszewski, 2012; Masten, Powell, 2003; Rutter, 1987; Ryś, 2020; Wawryk, Gwozda, 2013).

2.1.1. Personal resources of the individual

Humans have many personal properties that affect whether they will be resistant to the negative effects of the environment (Opóra, 2016b). W. Pilecka (2009)

lists among the individual resources of an individual: a good level of mental development, temperament, a positive self-image, a sense of meaning in life, a positive attitude to life, and qualities important in social contacts – a sense of humour, having talents, and interpersonal attractiveness.

A strong predictor of the right attitudes towards resentment is general cognitive abilities, which are understood as general intelligence and the transformation of information about oneself into specific mental structures (Pilecka, Fryt, 2011). A high level of intellectual efficiency allows the individual to better understand the difficulties experienced, choose an effective way of coping with them, and also makes it easier to ask for external help (Grzegorzewska, 2011). The most important cognitive schemes that play an important role in this regard include: 1) self-efficacy, meaning the belief that personal goals are achievable, despite life difficulties; 2) self-esteem, which is created through the prism of the opinions of others, and 3) perceptions and subjective assessment of social support, i.e., the belief and trust of the individual that he is loved and has someone to turn to in difficult times (Pilecka, Fryt, 2011).

A balanced sense of control and tolerance for uncertainty and complexity are an important basis for this. This shapes the individual's flexibility of action, greater self-confidence, and increases the frequency of experiencing emotions perceived as positive (Letzring et al., 2004, after: Nadolska, Sęk, 2007). A sense of control also ensures the ability to incorporate stressful events into the normal course of life, allows to use previously acquired knowledge and skills, and makes it easier to choose the best course of action in problematic situations (Kobasa, 1979, after: Strycharczyk, Clough, 2022).

What is conducive to coping with difficult experiences is also adequate self-esteem. It reduces the internal sense of danger when experiencing difficulties. People with inflated self-esteem tend to experience emotions strongly perceived as negative, they are also prone to self-aggression or expressing aggression directed outwards. On the other hand, people with too low self-esteem overestimate the difficulties they experience, give in to them and blame themselves for any failures (Ryś, 2020; Ryś, Trzęsowska-Greszta, 2018; Tyszkowa, 1986; Zielińska, 2012).

Another individual factor related to the formation of attitudes towards difficult situations is temperament. The most beneficial for increasing resilience is the so-called positive temperament, which includes personality traits such as: good control and inhibition, conscientiousness, adaptation skills, as well as a positive, moderate mood (Rothbart et al., 2001, after: Grzegorzewska, 2011). W. Pilecka (2009) lists among the dimensions of temperament important for coping with difficult situations: a moderate level of activity, positive emotionality, a high degree of socialisation, proper control of impulses and attentional processes, a higher level of perceptual sensitivity, maintaining the need for stimulation at a lower level, and plasticity. A positive temperament creates softness in the individual in external contacts and strength relating to the inner "self". Thanks to it, a person develops the ability to understand the situation well and looks for effective methods of coping with difficult moments (Grzegorzewska, 2011).

Emotional intelligence also plays an important role in shaping attitudes towards difficult situations. It is defined as the "ability to differentiate one's own emotions and adequately recognise the emotions of others and to use this information in the process of coping with difficulties" (Mayer, Salovey, 1993, after: Ostrowski, 2022, p. 83). Emotional intelligence is associated with appropriate social adjustment, i.e., the ability to interact with others, effective conflict resolution, and the ability to maintain mental balance through the use of mature adaptation mechanisms (Ryś, 2020). Emotional intelligence is also related to the recognition of one's own emotional states and the accompanying bodily signals. Thanks to this, when experiencing difficult situations, the individual can better manage their emotions and use them in a constructive way (Fredrickson, 2004, after: Nadolska, Sęk, 2007).

2.1.2. Influence of the family environment

One of the key elements shaping attitudes towards difficult situations is the way in which parents fulfil the role entrusted to them. The proper performance of parental functions is characterised by specific dimensions and their appropriate combination.

A well-performed role of a parent is conducive to the child's ability to cope with difficult situations through: clear communication, expressing the emotions felt, building bonds, setting specific boundaries, and effective problem-solving (Grzegorzewska, 2011).

Thus, the development of attitudes towards difficult situations depends not only on the personal predispositions of the individual, but also on the quality of the relationship with parents. Developing a trusting attachment to the main caregiver gives the child a sense of security and confidence that the parent will help him in difficult situations. A secure bond is the result of the number and quality of interactions characterised by care, warmth, and sensitivity. It facilitates the achievement of social adjustment and the acquisition of mental resilience (Pilecka, 2009).

A significant role in the formation of attitudes towards difficult situations is played by the style of upbringing, defined as a "constellation of ways and methods of influencing the child in a specific emotional climate" (Pilecka, 2009, p. 116). The democratic style is the most beneficial for building resilience. It provides family members with adequate freedom and expects everyone to be responsible for their actions. Thanks to such upbringing, the child learns to solve problems and conflicts through negotiations and compromises. The democratic style is also conducive to: achieving school success, establishing good contact with peers, developing interpersonal skills, and building independence. Parents who use this style introduce positive and consistent discipline into family life, which helps create the child's resistance to life stress (Pilecka, 2009, p. 116).

The optimal environment for the development of immunity in a child that allows it to cope well in difficult situations is a mentally resilient family. F. Walsh (2016, after: Sikorska et al., 2021), analysing the processes underlying family resilience, lists its three main pillars. The first is a system of beliefs and assumptions. A mentally resilient family perceives adversities in life as challenges, an optimistic approach to life prevails in it and tends to seek support in faith or social contacts. The second pillar concerns the organisation of the family. For the development of mental resilience of its members, the family system should be characterised by: plasticity, internal co-

hesion, and financial security. The last pillar relates to communication and problem-solving. It means that family communication should be characterised by: openness and clarity of message, externalisation of one's own emotions, and striving for satisfactory conflict resolution (*ibidem*, comp. also: Ryś, 2020).

Young people growing up in families with an atmosphere of trust and cooperation have better skills to cope with difficulties. They are also not afraid to make independent decisions and seek help when they need it. They are aware of the fact that their parents are their support and respect their individuality and autonomy. The more parents treat their child as a partner, giving them freedom of choice and responsibility for their own actions, the greater the chance that they will be able to overcome life's challenges on their own (Ryś, Trzęsowska-Greszta, 2018).

E. Januszewska (2000) points out that growing up in an environment that allows to experience the consequences of own actions and does not impose excessive expectations on the child, is conducive to learning effort, self-control, and cooperation with others. A teenager who feels safe, loved, and respected is able to use a properly selected difficulty and gain a sense of strength and competence. While experiencing problem situations, he learns about his abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. He is able to develop them further by pursuing his goal, facing challenges and difficulties, as well as by experiencing failure. In this way, he builds self-confidence, develops skills to cope with stress, and shapes self-respect, which is based on actual achievements (*ibidem*).

K. Ostaszewski (2014) also points out that one of the strongest protective factors is the so-called effective monitoring. It means intentional educational measures that provide good conditions for the child's development and protect it from threats. Parents who want to effectively monitor their children must consider their developmental needs and build a relationship of trust with them. Monitoring does not just mean controlling a child, but also supporting them in making decisions and dealing with problems. K. Ostaszewski's research on a sample of 3600 Warsaw students indicates that the greatest impact on effective monitoring is the mother's support and family life characterised by common rituals (*ibidem*).

The greatest support in building coping with difficult situations is to show unconditional love and acceptance to the child, while setting clear rules and requirements. This helps shape a sense of security and value, which has a positive effect on the development of the individual and his self-fulfilment. The parents and the school community should: support the child in building adequate self-esteem, encourage him to take on new challenges, enjoy his successes, and teach him how to cope with failures. The adult's task is to respect the child's individuality, create opportunities for their development, and be an example in effectively coping with problems (Wojtczuk, 2020).

2.1.3. Influence of the non-family environment

A.S. Masten (2005, after: Borucka, Ostaszewski, 2012) emphasises the essence of the characteristics of the local community among the non-family protective factors supporting the development of resilience. He draws attention to the essence of a favourable living environment that provides residents with: clean water and air, low crime, a sense of security, and sufficient housing conditions. The school environment is also a very important protective factor. To increase the resilience of the child, it should provide good education and wide development opportunities. An important social aspect is also easy access to health care and emergency services, the possibility of employing parents near their place of residence, as well as valuable relationships with peers or adults outside the family who act as a mentor (Masten, 2005).

Mentor means an "adult who is not a parent, who naturally accompanies a young person in his or her daily life struggles" (Ostaszewski, 2014, p. 141). Research shows that mentor support reduces risky behaviours, prevents the development of mental problems, shapes positive attitudes towards school, and helps achieve better academic results. A mentor is also a source of inspiration and motivation and encourages a person to broaden her interests and horizons. In situations where a teenager is in a conflicting relationship with his parents, having a mentor has a corrective value for the individual's development. A young person can turn to him in case of problems and receive support and mature help. Through such

activities, the mentor creates favourable conditions for the positive development of mental resilience (Ostaszewski, 2014, p. 141; Ryś, 2020).

An important element of the non-family environment, shaping mental resilience, is also learning in a well-functioning school (Opora, 2016a). School should create opportunities to build positive self-esteem, self-efficacy, and security. A key factor in developing mental resilience is also good interpersonal relationships with peers. Social relations act as an external buffer in two ways. Firstly, they are a source of support in stressful situations, and secondly, the previous experience of the received help shapes internal mechanisms in the individual, which are useful in future overcoming difficulties (Opora, 2016a).

Belonging to a pro-social group is also included among the protective factors (Borucka, Ostaszewski, 2008). People who are socially engaged are more likely to establish and maintain relationships with other people. This increases their social capital, which is a resource helpful in protecting against the negative effects of stress (Marciniak, 2019).

Resilience consists of several models of interaction, which can also be related to processes occurring within resentment, i.e., studies of the relationship between risk factors and protective factors (Garmezy, 1985; Luthar, Zelezo, 2003; Rutter, 1987; Rutter, 2006; Werner, 2000; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). The most common are the three models that were first described by Garmezy et al. (1985). They distinguished: (1) the risk balancing model; (2) risk reduction model; (3) the risk-resilience model. The sustainable risk model assumes that protective factors reduce the impact of risk factors or shorten the duration of their impact. In the risk reduction model, protective factors are assumed to interact with risk factors. They act as a "buffer" or a kind of "protective shield". The risk resilience model assumes that a moderate level of risk acts in a resilient way and at the same time prepares the person for new and more difficult tasks (Garmezy, Masten, Tellegen, 1984).

The resilience models developed by Garmezy et al. (1985) were supplemented by a further three models developed by Fergus and Zimmerman (2005). These researchers introduced a protective-stabilising model, a protective-reactive model, and an inoculation model.

Rutter (1987) distinguished four mechanisms for building attitudes towards the risk of injury: (1) reducing the impact of risk by cognitive reinterpretation of the threat or changing the requirements for the implementation of a selected task or by using help; (2) reducing the negative reaction chain; (3) establishing and maintaining self-esteem and self-efficacy, building self-confidence; (4) opening up to new possibilities.

Semmer (2006) after analysing numerous results of research on the characteristics of a person with a high level of resilience, which also determine a low level of resentment: (1) perception of the surrounding world as favourable; (2) expecting more positive situations to happen than negative ones; (3) treating stressful situations as a challenge; (4) accepting difficulties and failures (the person treats them as an opportunity to gain new experiences and develop); (5) confidence in one's ability to manage one's own life.

An important field of action in protecting against the negative effects of resentment is also strengthening self-esteem and developing self-efficacy. High self-esteem and belief in the ability to cope with a difficult situation have a huge impact on whether a person will use the available resources or cope with adversity.

3. Research problem

3.1. Research problem and hypotheses

The experience of the relationship with the first caregiver creates in the child a specific style of attachment to the mother's figure. It is the basis for the formation of internal operating models that include representations of the image of oneself and other people (Bowlby, 2016). Research by R.A. Arend et al. (1979, after: Bowlby, 2016), R. Valiei and A. Karimi Baghamalek (2019), S.M. Kennison and V.H. Spooner (2023), T. Zahide Tapeli and C. Itir Tari (2018), J.K. Jenkins (2016), P. Mariner et al. (2014), N. Aslam and S. Aamir (2013) and P. Fonagy et al. (1994, after: Svanberg, 2009) indicate the existence of a correlation between

attachment style in the family of origin and resentment. However, these studies did not consider the rejection attachment style distinguished by M. Ryś, Z. Krasowska and N. Witerek (2021). Therefore, this study investigated whether there are relationships between attachment style in the family of origin, as measured by a scale that considers the rejecting attachment style and psychological resilience in young adults.

The study's aim was to check whether there are relationships, and if so, what relationships, between the attachment style in the family of origin and those aspects of mental resilience in young adults that relate to resentment.

In search of answers to explain the research problem, the following hypotheses were adopted:

There is a relationship between the attachment style in the family of origin and attitudes related to resentment:

- the more secure the attachment style in the family of origin, the more correct the *attitude towards difficulties and problems* is in adulthood;
- the more secure the attachment style in the family of origin, the more correct the *attitude towards life and oneself* is in adulthood;
- the more secure the attachment style in the family of origin, the lower the level of somatisation in adulthood;
- the more secure the attachment style in the family of origin, the more in adulthood it is proper functioning in the emotional sphere;
- the more secure the attachment style in the family of origin, the more correct the attitude towards hurt is in adulthood.

3.2. Test methods

In order to check the assumed relationships, research was carried out using the following research tools:

- attachment style in the Family of Origin Study Scale (SPRP) by M. Ryś, Z. Krasowska, and N. Witerek (2021);
- the subscales in the Mental Resilience Scale (SOP) by M. Ryś et al. (2020) that deal with resentment;
- surveys.

Attachment Style Scale in the Family of Origin (SPRP)

To determine the attachment styles of young adults to their parents, the Attachment Styles Scale in the Family of Origin was used. It measures the respondent's attachment style to both parents – separately to the mother and father – in retrospective terms. The response was measured using the Likertian Scale – from 1 (definitely not) to 5 (definitely yes). The tool consists of 60 statements that form 4 scales that check the intensity of the style: safe (SB), anxious-ambivalent (SLA), avoidant (SU) and rejecting (SO). Cronbach's alpha for each scale was: SB scale – 0.966; SLA scale – 0.954; SU scale – 0.954; SLO scale – 0.947 (Ryś et al., 2021).

- Secure style:
People who score high on the SB Scale have developed a secure attachment style to their parent in childhood. They feel that their parent has met their basic needs, established a close bond and bestowed unconditional love on them. Such people easily establish lasting relationships, accept the emotions they experience, are able to transparently communicate their needs to their loved ones, and skilfully resolve conflicts. They also have a highly developed sense of their own autonomy, are willing to take on new challenges and effectively cope with problem situations (Ryś et al., 2021).
- Anxiety-ambivalent style:
High scores on the SLA Scale indicate the formation of a non-secure attachment style in childhood. Such people have experienced inconsistent, unpredictable, and inconsequential attitudes of the parent. People who have developed an anxious-ambivalent attachment style in childhood simultaneously feel fear of intimacy and the need to satisfy it. They are also afraid of rejection, which prevents them from developing their own autonomy, and in interpersonal relationships, they subordinate themselves to the other person (Ryś et al., 2021).

- Avoidant style:
People who score high on the SU Scale have developed an incorrect attachment style in childhood. Their parents did not satisfy their basic need for love, acceptance, contact, and security, which resulted in increased frustration. In adulthood, people with an avoidant attachment style use avoidant coping strategies to calm down their emotions and protect them from being hurt (Ryś et al., 2021).
- Rejecting style:
High scores on the SO Scale also indicate a non-secure pattern of attachment to the parent. This attachment style is formed in people from dysfunctional families who experienced rejection or violence, both physical and psychological, in childhood. People with a rejecting attachment style in adult life have a problem with defending their own rights, are unable to stand up in dangerous situations, and feel unworthy of love (Ryś et al., 2021).

Ressentiment Scales in Mental Resilience (SOP)

To examine the level of mental resilience in a group of young adults, the Mental Resilience Scale (SOP) was used. The questionnaire is constructed from 35 statements that form 5 scales. They include various aspects of mental resilience: 1) *Attitude towards difficulties and problems* (Scale I); 2) *Attitude towards life and oneself* (Scale II); 3) Somatisation (Scale III); 4) The emotional sphere (Scale IV); and 5) Attitude towards wounds (Scale V). For each scale, Cronbach alpha was: Scale I – 0.697; Scale II – 0.862; Scale III – 0.738; Scale IV – 0.685; Scale V – 0.771. The response was measured using the Likertian Scale – from 1 to 5. High scores on the Mental Resilience Scale indicate a high level of mental resilience of the respondent (Ryś, 2020).

- Attitude towards difficulties and problems:
The higher the scores of the respondent on Scale I, the more they perceive life problems and difficulties in a broad context. They tend to persistently look for effective ways to solve stressful

situations and treat them as life challenges. On the other hand, low scores on this scale indicate the respondent's difficulties in coping with problems and a tendency to be easily discouraged (Ryś, 2020).

- **Attitude towards life and oneself:**
People who scored high on Scale II believe that they can cope with overcoming problems. On the other hand, low scores indicate the individual's tendency to feel powerless in the face of life's problems. In addition, the experience of a problematic situation lowers self-esteem and obscures any prospects for a better life (Ryś, 2020).
- **Somatisation:**
High scores obtained on Scale III indicate that the examined person tries to take care of herself, both physically and mentally, in order to effectively cope with stressful situations. Low scores obtained on this scale indicate the tendency of the individual to experience psychosomatic problems as a result of the reaction to the experienced stress. In difficult situations, a person achieving low scores on this scale may feel internal breakdown, have sleep problems, stomach problems, problems with memory and concentration, as well as problems with proper breathing (Ryś, 2020).
- **Emotional sphere:**
The higher the scores of the examined person on Scale IV, the more support she feels from their loved ones in difficult situations. In the face of life's challenges, she is not overwhelmed by fear and discouragement, she does not feel lonely and she is able to enjoy life. On the other hand, low scores indicate a tendency of an individual to lose the ability to enjoy life in the face of difficult situations. It is also characterised by a sense of loneliness, inability to ask for support from loved ones and problems with controlling strong emotions (Ryś, 2020).
- **Attitude towards wounds:**
High scores achieved on the V Scale indicate that the individual has achieved a mature attitude towards the wounds suffered. Such a person does

not torment herself with failures, is able to draw effective conclusions for the future and has the ability to forgive others for the harm done to her. The lower the scores obtained on this scale, the lower the ability of the examined person to forgive others and himself. They also tend to feel the effects of the wounds they have experienced for a long time and are characterised by hypersensitivity, which results in reliving previously experienced harm (Ryś, 2020).

Self-Survey

The self-survey was created to collect sociometric data, such as: age, gender, education, life situation, family of origin, traumatic experiences, relationship status, material status.

3.3. Method of carrying out the study and persons surveyed

The research was conducted remotely, using the Webankieta platform. Participation in the study was completely anonymous and voluntary. 229 people aged 18-35 were examined, including 144 women (63%) and 85 men (37%). In order to reduce the difference between the number of women and men tested, the analysis of the results of 44 women was abandoned – it was done randomly by excluding the results of every second respondent.

Finally, the answers of 100 women (54%) with mean age $M = 23.50$ and 85 men (46%) with mean age $M = 23.40$ were considered in the study, which is presented in Table 1.

In the group of people surveyed 1% of women and 1.2% of men had primary education, 3% of women and 9.4% of men had secondary education, 62% of women and 55.3% of men had incomplete higher education (student status), and 34% of women and 34.1% of men had higher education. 85% of women and 91.8% of men were brought up in a complete family, and 15% of women and 8.2% of men were brought up in a single-parent family.

The subjects were asked to assess the prevailing atmosphere in the family of origin. 24% of women and 42.4% of men rated it as loving, kind, and ac-

cepting; 12% of women and 3.5% of men rated it as tense, quarrelsome, and angry; and as a variable: once good and bad, assessed by 64% of women and 54.1% of men, as shown in Table 4.

It was also checked whether the respondents had experienced a very difficult, traumatic event in their lives. The collected data shows that 31% of women and 28.2% of men have experienced such an event.

4. Results

In order to verify the hypotheses regarding the relationship between the studied variables, a correlation analysis was performed. For variables whose distribution was close to the normal distribution, the r-Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated. On the other hand, for variables whose distribution deviated from the normal distribution, its nonparametric equivalent rho-Spearman was used.

Tables 1 and 2 present an analysis of the correlation between attachment style and resentment scales in the group of young adults.

Based on Table 1, it can be concluded that the following correlations between variables occurred in the group of women. The secure style in attachment to the mother positively correlates with the *Attitude towards difficulties and problems* and *Attitude towards life and oneself*, as well as positively, moderation with *The emotional sphere*. The anxious-ambivalent style in the mother's attachment negatively correlates with *Somatisation and Attitude towards wounds*, and negatively, moderately correlates with *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, *Attitude towards life and oneself*, and *The emotional sphere*. The avoidant style in attachment to the mother negatively correlates with the *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, *Attitude towards life and oneself*, and *Somatisation*, and negatively, moderately with *The emotional sphere*. The rejecting style towards mothers correlates neg-

Table 1. Analysis of the correlation using the rho-Spearman coefficient between attachment style to the mother and resentment scales in a group of women

Variable	Attitude towards difficulties and problems	Attitude towards life and oneself	Somatisation	Emotional sphere	Attitude towards wounds
Safe style	0.261**	0.237*	0.152	0.446**	0.114
Anxiety-ambivalent style	-0.324**	-0.317**	-0.284**	-0.492**	-0.218*
Avoidant style	-0.242*	-0.248*	-0.205*	-0.481**	-0.164
Rejection style	-0.296**	-0.282**	-0.234*	-0.496**	-0.154

** Significant correlation at 0.01 (bilaterally)

* Significant correlation at 0.05 (bilaterally)

Table 2. Analysis of the correlation using the rho-Spearman coefficient between maternal attachment style and resentment scales in a group of men

Variable	Attitude towards difficulties and problems	Attitude towards life and oneself	Somatisation	Emotional sphere	Attitude towards wounds
Safe style	0.229*	0.227*	0.163	0.277*	0.228*
Anxiety-ambivalent style	-0.287**	-0.416**	-0.294**	-0.328**	-0.403**
Avoidant style	-0.244*	-0.314**	-0.208	-0.312**	-0.270*
Rejection style	-0.314**	-0.371**	-0.200	-0.320**	-0.274*

** Significant correlation at 0.01 (bilaterally)

* Significant correlation at 0.05 (bilaterally)

atively, poorly with: *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, *Attitude towards life and oneself*, and *Somatisation*, and negatively, moderately with *The emotional sphere*.

Based on Table 2, it can be concluded that the following correlations between variables occurred in the male group. The secure style in attachment to the mother positively and weakly correlates with *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, *Attitude towards life and oneself*, *The emotional sphere*, and *Attitude towards wounds*. The anxious-ambivalent style in attachment to the mother negatively correlates poorly with *Attitude towards difficulties and problems* and *Somatisation*, and negatively, moderately correlates with *Attitude towards life and oneself*, *The emotional sphere*, and *Attitude towards wounds*. The avoidant style in attachment to the mother negatively correlates poorly with: *Attitude towards difficulties and problems* and *Attitude towards wounds*, as well as negatively, moderately with *Attitude towards life and oneself* and

The emotional sphere. The rejecting style mothers negatively correlates poorly with *Attitude towards wounds* and negatively, moderately with *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, *Attitude towards life and oneself* and *The emotional sphere*.

Tables 3 and 4 present an analysis of the correlation between attachment style to the father and resentment in the group of young adults.

Based on Table 3, it can be concluded that the following correlations between the studied variables occurred in the group of women. The secure style in attachment to the father correlates positively but poorly with *The emotional sphere*. The anxious-ambivalent style in attachment to the father negatively correlates with *The emotional sphere* and *Attitude towards wounds*. The avoidant style in attachment to the father negatively, poorly correlates with *Attitude towards wounds* and negatively, moderately with *The emotional sphere*. The rejection style in

Table 3. Analysis of correlation using the r-Pearson and rho-Spearman coefficients between the attachment style to the father and scales of resentment in the women's group

Variable	Attitude towards difficulties and problems	Attitude towards life and oneself	Somatisation	Emotional sphere	Attitude towards wounds
Safe style	0.145	0.062	0.065	0.262**	0.100
Anxiety-ambivalent style	-0.110	-0.151	-0.071	-0.266**	-0.202*
Avoidant style	-0.126	-0.142	-0.097	-0.307**	-0.236*
Rejection style	-0.189	-0.169	-0.120	-0.356**	-0.218*

** Significant correlation at 0.01 (bilaterally)

* Significant correlation at 0.05 (bilaterally)

Table 4. Analysis of the correlation using the rho-Spearman coefficient between the attachment style to the father and the resentment scales in the male group

Variable	Attitude towards difficulties and problems	Attitude towards life and oneself	Somatisation	Emotional sphere	Attitude towards wounds
Safe style	0.401**	0.361**	0.353**	0.404**	0.314**
Anxiety-ambivalent style	-0.442**	-0.477**	-0.370**	-0.515**	-0.413**
Avoidant style	-0.406**	-0.438**	-0.392**	-0.474**	-0.357**
Rejection style	-0.402**	-0.426**	-0.343**	-0.410**	-0.347**

** Significant correlation at 0.01 (bilaterally)

* Significant correlation at 0.05 (bilaterally)

attachment to the father negatively correlates with *Attitude towards wounds* and negatively, moderately with *The emotional sphere*.

Based on Table 4, it can be concluded that the following correlations between the variables occurred in the male group. The secure style in attachment to the father positively and moderately correlates with *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, the *Attitude towards life and oneself*, *Somatisation*, *The emotional sphere*, and *Attitude towards wounds*. The anxious-ambivalent style in attachment to the father negatively correlates moderately with the *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, the *Attitude towards life and oneself*, *Somatisation*, *The emotional sphere*, and *Attitude towards wounds*. The avoidant style in attachment to the father negatively, moderately correlates with the *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, the *Attitude towards life and oneself*, *Somatisation*, *The emotional sphere*, and the *Attitude towards wounds*. The rejection style in attachment to the father negatively, moderately correlates with the *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, the *Attitude towards life and oneself*, *Somatisation*, *The emotional sphere*, and *Attitude towards wounds*.

5. Discussion and interpretation of results

In the group of studied women, there was a positive correlation between the secure attachment style to the mother and the following SOP scales: *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*; *Attitude towards life and oneself*, and *The emotional sphere* (Table 1). Women whose basic needs were met by their mother in childhood, felt her unconditional love, and had a close emotional bond, show greater perseverance in finding solutions to problem situations in adulthood. They treat the difficulties they experience as life challenges and are not discouraged in overcoming them. They also benefit from the support of their loved ones, thanks to which they do not feel lonely and are able to enjoy life. The results also indicate the existence of a positive correlation between the secure attachment style to the father and *The emotional sphere* in the group of women (Table 3). This means that women

whose fathers satisfied their need for love, acceptance, and security in childhood feel support from their loved ones and are able to skilfully cope with strong emotions. The correlations confirm the results of previous research by S.M. Kenninson and V.H. Spooner (2023), which showed that a higher level of trusting attachment correlates positively with the level of mental resilience.

The study did not show any significant correlations between the secure attachment style to the mother and *Somatisation* and *Attitude towards wounds* in the group of women (Table 1). There were also no significant correlations between the secure style of attachment to the father and *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, *Attitude towards life and oneself*, *Somatisation*, and *Attitude towards wounds* (Table 4).

On the other hand, the obtained statistical data indicate the existence of negative correlations between post-secured attachment styles and resentment scales. In the group of women, a high intensity of the anxious-ambivalent attachment style to the mother correlates negatively with all aspects of coping with difficult situations. It means that women who have experienced erratic and unpredictable maternal behaviour in childhood have difficulty coping with problems. They are also characterised by a tendency to react psychosomatically to stressful situations, they are unable to ask for support from loved ones and experience a sense of loneliness. They also tend to feel the long-term effects of hurt and difficulty forgiving the harm done to them. The study also showed a significant negative correlation between the avoidant attachment style to the mother and the following scales: *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*, *Attitude towards life and oneself*, *Somatisation*, and *The emotional sphere* (Table 1). Women whose basic needs were not met by their mother in childhood, as a result of which they experienced a sense of frustration, are characterised by a lower intensity of correct attitudes towards difficult situations in adulthood. The research also indicates the existence of negative correlations between the rejection style and *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*; *Attitude towards life and oneself*; *Somatisation*, and *The emotional sphere* (Table 1). Women who have experienced re-

jection or violence from their mothers in childhood have difficulty coping with adversity in adulthood. The problems they experience obscure their prospects for a better life, they also feel inner breakdown, loneliness, and have difficulty controlling strong emotions. In the group of women, the correlation analysis also showed significant relationships between all post-secured attachment styles to the father and *The emotional sphere* and *Attitude towards wounds* (Table 3). It means that women whose fathers were inconsistent in their behaviour, did not meet their basic needs, rejected them or committed violence against them, have problems with experiencing strong emotions in adulthood. They are also unable to ask their loved ones for support, feel lonely, and have difficulty forgiving others for the harm done to them.

The study did not show any significant correlations between the *avoidant* and *rejecting attachment style* and *Attitude towards wounds* in the group of women (Table 1). The results also do not indicate the existence of significant correlations between post-secure patterns of attachment to the father and the following SOP scales: *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*; *Attitude towards life and oneself*, and *Somatisation* (Table 3).

In the group of studied men, there was a positive correlation between the secure attachment style to the mother and *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*; *Attitude towards life and oneself*; *The emotional sphere*, and *Attitude towards wounds* (Table 2). Men whose mothers provided for their basic needs in childhood and gave them unconditional love show greater perseverance in overcoming difficulties in adulthood. They believe in their own abilities, and in the face of challenges, they are not overcome by terror. They are also able to draw helpful conclusions for the future from difficult experiences and are able to forgive others for the harm done to them. Analysis of the obtained data also indicates the occurrence of significant positive correlations between the secure style of attachment to the father and all aspects of the mental resentment scale (Table 4). Men whose fathers gave them unconditional love, provided for their basic needs, and were a “safe haven” for their children cope well with life’s problems. They take care of themselves, both physically and mentally,

they can ask others for help in difficult situations and do not feel lonely. They do not torment themselves with failures and wrongs from the past and are able to draw constructive conclusions for the future from unpleasant situations. This is confirmed by the results of meta-analyses carried out by P. Darling Rasmussen et al. (2019), which showed the existence of positive correlations between secure attachment and the level of mental resilience. In the group of men, the study did not show any significant correlations between the secure attachment style and *Somatisation* (Table 2).

The results indicate the existence of a significant relationship between post-secured styles of attachment to the mother and those dimensions of mental resilience in the group of men that concern resentment. The anxious-ambivalent style was positively correlated with all scales of resentment. It means that men who experience inconsistencies and inconsistent parental attitudes of their mother in childhood are characterised by a lower intensity of mental resilience, i.e., a higher level of resentment. The study also showed a negative correlation between the avoidant and rejecting attachment styles and the following mental resilience scales: *Attitude towards difficulties and problems*; *Attitude towards life and oneself*; *The emotional sphere*, and *Attitude towards wounds* (Table 2). Men whose mothers did not satisfy their basic need for love, acceptance, and security in childhood, felt rejected by it or suffered harm from it, are less able to cope with difficult situations. They are also unable to ask their loved ones for help, they feel lonely and abandoned. The life failures they experience lower their self-esteem, they have difficulty experiencing strong emotions, and it is difficult for them to forgive, both others and themselves. Correlation analyses also showed significant negative associations between post-secured attachment styles to the father and all dimensions of resentment in the group of men (Table 4). Men who did not experience unconditional love from their father in childhood, felt rejected or hurt by him, have difficulty coping with problems. The difficulties they encounter overwhelm them and obscure the prospects for any improvement. In stressful situations, they have problems with concentration and feel internal disintegration. They also have difficulty

controlling strong emotions, asking for support and feeling the long-term effects of the harm they have experienced. This is confirmed by the results of research by N. Aslam and S. Amir (2013), who showed a relationship between non-secure attachment patterns and a lack of mental resilience.

Summary

Early adulthood is associated with many challenges taken up by young people. Entering new social roles, starting your first job, or choosing a life partner, is associated with the stress experienced and the need to overcome emerging difficulties. The results indicate that the secure attachment style to the mother and father correlates positively with mental resilience, which means less tendency to resentment. Women and men whose parents met their emotional needs in childhood show greater resistance to difficulties and are able to effectively cope with emotions. These people do not torment themselves with past wrongs, they forgive more easily and are able to use the support of loved ones, which protects them from a long-term sense of resentment.

On the other hand, non-secure attachment styles, especially anxious-ambivalent and avoidant, are associated with a higher level of resentment, which manifests itself in difficulties in coping with problems and strong emotions. Women with an anxious-ambivalent attachment style to their mother

tend to be somatised, feel lonely and have difficulty asking for help, which is conducive to perpetuating resentment and a negative attitude to the world.

The avoidant attachment style, both to the mother and the father, correlates negatively with mental resilience, which means greater tendencies to experience internal breakdown and difficulty accepting the past. In the group of men, the negative impact of non-secure attachment patterns on resentment is particularly pronounced, because the lack of love and acceptance from parents reduces their ability to cope with adversity. Men with an avoidant or rejecting attachment style are more likely to experience powerlessness in the face of difficulties, it is more difficult for them to forgive both others and themselves, which is conducive to the accumulation of negative emotions.

Research confirms previous findings that secure attachment promotes mental resilience and reduces the tendency to feel resentment. On the other hand, the lack of stable bonds in childhood makes it difficult to regulate emotions and leads to long-term resentment. Attachment patterns shape how individuals deal with past hurts – people with a secure attachment style are able to draw constructive conclusions, while people with non-secure styles are more likely to have difficulty accepting and forgiving. In conclusion, in research on attachment styles in the family of origin of young adults, resentment emerges as an important construct that requires further scientific exploration.

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Familism and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with grandparents of young adults from monoparental families¹

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Abstract: *Introduction:* The aim of the study was to determine the intensity of the dimensions of familism and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with grandparents in groups of young adults from monoparental families with their mother and from full families, and to estimate the relationship between the dimensions of familism and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with grandparents. *Method:* The research conducted was quantitative, cross-sectional and self-report. Four psychological tools with good psychometric properties were used, i.e. the Familism Scale, the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother, the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather, the Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale and the questionnaire. *Results:* There were no differences in the dimensions of familism in the groups of young adults from monoparental families with a mother and from complete families. Young women from monoparental families with their mother rated the quality of interpersonal relationships with their grandmother and grandfather higher than women from intact families. Statistically significant relationships were obtained between the dimensions of familism from the traditional values trend and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother. They occurred most frequently in the group of women from monoparental families with a mother. *Conclusions:* The specificity of research on the relationship between the dimensions of familism and the quality of interpersonal relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, especially those in early adulthood, is associated with methodological awareness of the high complexity of the family environment. Considering these issues creates space for searching for new methodological solutions.

Keywords: grandchildren, grandparents, familism, family, early adulthood, interpersonal relationship

1. Introduction

The contemporary massive and multidimensional sociocultural changes are playing an important role in the functioning of a person in numerous spheres of their life. While focusing on the family sphere, one can notice ongoing modifications in family systems, which have been observed in the last years both in the macro- and micro-scales (Bakiera, 2023; Liberska, 2014; Napor, 2022; Rostowska, 2019; Wałęcka-Matyja, Janicka, 2021). One of the more significant of them concerns transformations in the family system structure, including an increasing social approval of a divorce (Szlendak, 2015). This phenomenon was confirmed by the results of the

National Census of 2021, indicating that although complete families are still the most common type, accounting for 44% of all families in Poland, the number of marriages with children decreased by 14.5% in comparison with 2011. On the other hand, the family type which recorded growth (by 2.6%) in relation to the Census of 2011 is the monoparental family (mothers with children and fathers with children, comp. Burkacka, 2017). The results of the National Census of 2021 showed that nearly a quarter of families in Poland consisted of a single parent with children. It was observed that the vast majority of families of this type were single mothers

¹ Article in Polish language: https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/61P_WalA.pdf

(85%). As far as monoparental families with a father are concerned, in 2021 their number increased by 13% in comparison with 2011. However, it is still the rarest family type in Poland, accounting for 3.5% of families in the family structure².

In the light of psychological studies, the family structure type modifies the scope of the grandparent's role and determines the specificity of the interpersonal relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. In intact families the members of a nuclear family tend to come to mutual agreement on their coherent system of meanings, referring to beliefs, traditions and values, which results in an increase of significance of the family as a group to which an individual belongs. Grandchildren have two couples of grandparents, who, especially in their childhood, often cooperate with each other while sharing care of them. In patchwork families (comp. Burkacka, 2017) children belong to more than one family community, and this kind of belonging is not clearly determined. Grandchildren have a few couples of grandparents, who neither always know each other nor cooperate while taking care of them (Wałęcka-Matyja, 2009). As a result of a divorce, separation or death of a spouse, the previous family structure falls apart, turning into a monoparental family (comp. Burkacka, 2017), most often with the mother. There are different reasons of this phenomenon, including the fact that the courts more often award custody of children to women (Suwada, 2020). Family breakdown not only contributes to the change of its situation in the formal and legal aspect but also affects the relationships with grandparents. The circumstances of the crisis of the previous family model can strengthen the relationships with the maternal grandparents whereas, at the same time, the relationships with the paternal grandparents tend to become weaker (Napora, 2019a).

In the related literature, there are two perspectives to be found, which define the role of the family structure in the process of children upbringing and socialization. Many of the studies refer to emphasizing challenges in performing the educational function

in monoparental families (Kuzdak, 2018; Stahl, 2020). On the other hand, in some other studies the authors indicate that a monoparental family does not perform the educational functions less effectively than a family consisting of two biological parents (Gawda, 2018; Wałęcka-Matyja, Krawczyk, 2022). One of the factors facilitating a monoparental family the proper performance of family tasks and functions is the provided social support. A single parent can often rely on the social and emotional support coming from the closest people – their own parents. The research results confirm that in the situation of a marriage breakdown, it is the grandparents who try to guarantee stability and security to the whole family system and especially to their grandchildren. Support provided by the extended family often buffers the direct and indirect effects of stressful life situations, enabling more optimistic response to the new circumstances. While helping the single mother, the grandparents give her an opportunity to take up activities in many areas of life, including the professional sphere, which has a preventive effect, reducing the risk of social exclusion and enhancing the well-being of the mother and the child (Napora, 2019b). It has been found that the grandparents' emotional bond with their grandchildren reduces the risk of the worsening of the children's problems in the sphere of their social functioning. Some interesting research results referring to the issue of the emotional bond between grandparents and grandchildren coming from families with a diversified structure indicate a difference in this respect between American and European grandchildren. It has been noticed that in case of European grandchildren, they reported a stronger emotional bond with their grandparents while living in monoparental families. On the other hand, American grandchildren declared a stronger emotional bond with their grandparents when they lived in complete families (Duflos, Giraudeau, 2022).

It has been proved that in families where one of the biological parents is emotionally or/and physically inaccessible, the relationships with the biological grandparents, characterized by kindness and stability,

2 *Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2021 Rodziny w Polsce w świetle wyników NSP 2021*. Warszawa (2023). (From:) <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2021/nsp-2021-wyniki-ostateczne/rodziny-w-polsce-w-swietle-wynikow-nsp-2021,7,2.html> (access: 07.12.2024).

can be one of the more important relationships in the life of adolescents. Interpersonal relationships with them expand the circle of social experiences and create an opportunity for the young people to get better educational achievements (Wałęcka-Matyja, Napora, 2022). They also contribute to soothing anxiety, being an invaluable source of care and support, especially when a single parent has to spend a lot of time at work. Therefore, a hypothesis can be formulated that grandparents, who gift their grandchildren with their „grandparents’ love”, compensate them for their emotional orphanhood (Attar-Schwartz, Tan, Buchanan, 2009). The research results indicate the occurrence of positive correlations between the assessment of the relationship with the closest grandparent (mostly grandmother) as mentoring ones. These relationships are connected with the fact of understanding the situation by grandparents from the perspective of a grandchild and facilitating the synthesis of identity of the persons who are entering adulthood (Michałek-Kwiecień, 2023).

Grandparents, perceived as “the parents of our times”, play an important role in making choices by their grandchildren as regards life values and life goals, shaping beliefs, moral principles, attitudes towards love and marriage, work ethic and educational orientation (Appelt, 2019; Michałek-Kwiecień, 2024). Values, which refer to the goals and the ways how to achieve them, are passed on by grandparents in the process of upbringing, while playing together, talking about different issues, which with time more and more often concern grandchildren’s experiences, as well as doing joint actions aimed at solving life problems. Values, understood as a carrier of the culture internalization process, cause the fact that a diversified approach to the socialization of women and men may determine differences in ascribing meanings to individual values. According to some psychological studies, women obtain a higher intensity of average scores for community values, related to care of other people and the need to shape and maintain emotional relationships, whereas for men, it is the values connected with subjectivity, activeness and resourcefulness that seem more

typical (Gerszta, Świdzka, Zalewska-Łunkiewicz, Obidziński, Ryś, Hamer, 2022). In some studies of familism³ it has been found that in groups of women and men (N = 1480; 960 women and 520 men; aged 18-55+ years) there were statistically significant differences in all familism dimensions, except for the scale of family support. Men obtained higher mean scores in the dimensions of respect, religion and material success and achievements whereas the mean scores in the dimension of individualism were higher in the group of women (Wałęcka-Matyja, 2022). One can also observe differentiation in respect of familism dimensions in the groups of people selected according to age. In the group of people in late adulthood, the values connected with respect for the family and the related responsibilities, family support, belief in spiritual power and material success were characterized by the highest intensity in comparison with the groups of people in middle and early adulthood (Wałęcka-Matyja, Janicka, 2021). Family specialists agree that for the oldest family members not only are they important dimensions of family values, but also it is vital to pass them on to young people in the process of intergenerational transmission (Michałek-Kwiecień, 2022). That plays a significant role in strengthening family bonds. A good example can be the results of a study in which it was found that a high intensity of grandparents’ religiousness was related to a closer bond with their grandchildren (Bengston, Copen, Putney, Silberstein, 2009).

Summing up, it is believed that grandparents taking up different activities, such as transmission of family values, traditions and cultural knowledge, provision of widely-understood financial and emotional support as well as care of grandchildren will strengthen family bonds and ensure a better life quality of the whole family system (Kołązyk, 2020). The analysis of literature devoted to scientific discussions of the relational aspect of the functioning of grandparents and grandchildren, especially the ones in early adulthood, allows for the conclusion that this issue is relatively rarely studied by researchers. Therefore, it was an inspiration for taking up psychological discussions of the

3 Familism is understood as a culture value, whose core is a strong identification with and attachment to the family group and showing family solidarity (Wałęcka-Matyja, Janicka, 2021).

issue of familism and the quality of intergenerational relationships in the perspective of young adults. These discussions were carried out based on the assumptions of the attachment theory (Bolwby, 2007), the systemic theory (comp. de Barbaro, 1999) and the ecological theory (comp. Bronfenbrenner, 1981), regarded by family specialists as theories allowing them to describe and explain the correlations occurring in family systems in the most comprehensive way.

2. Own research

2.1. Aim of study

The aim of the carried out psychological study was to determine the familism dimensions and the intensity of retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandparents in the groups of young adults from monoparental families with the mother and complete families. Furthermore, estimations were made as to correlations between the familism dimensions and the intensity of retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandparents. Three research questions were formulated.

1. Do familism dimensions have differentiated intensity levels in the groups of young adults from monoparental families with the mother and from complete families?
2. Does the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandparents have differentiated intensity levels in the groups of young adults from monoparental families with the mother and from complete families?
3. Are there any correlations between familism dimensions and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandparents?

Based on the related literature, the following research hypotheses were formulated.

Hypothesis 1. There is differentiation as regards familism dimensions in the groups of young women and men from monoparental families with the mother and from complete families.

Hypothesis 2. Young women from monoparental families with the mother will assess the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather till their age of twelve more positively than the ones coming from complete families.

Hypothesis 3. Young men from monoparental families with the mother will assess the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather till their age of twelve more positively than the ones coming from complete families.

Hypothesis 4. There are correlations between familism dimensions and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandparents in the surveyed groups of young women and men from monoparental families with the mother and from complete families.

2.2. Surveyed persons

The study included 217 people in early adulthood ($M = 23.46$; $SD = 2.57$; comp. Brzezińska, Appelt, Ziółkowska, 2015), coming from monoparental families with the mother and from complete families, raised in cooperation with the maternal grandparents. In the related literature we can find some evidence confirming the thesis that in the situation of the parents' divorce, it is mostly the grandparents who provide unconditional support and understanding to their grandchildren, without judging the situation (Soliz, 2008). In the retrospective research conducted on young adults from monoparental families with the mother, it was proved that in case of a divorce the contacts with the maternal grandparents, especially with the grandmother, become more intensified (Napora, 2019). That constituted a premise for making a decision to consider this criterion as significant in the purposive sampling of the surveyed persons. In the process of assessing the research material, while considering whether the criteria of sampling and the completeness of information were fulfilled, a part of the material was omitted due to methodological reasons. Finally, 196 scores were accepted to be statistically developed. In the surveyed sample there were 92 people coming from monoparental families with the mother (42.4%) and 125 people from complete families (57.6%). From monoparental

families with the mother there were 53 (58%) women and 39 men (42%). From complete families there were 70 women (56%) and 55 men (44%). The vast majority of the surveyed persons from monoparental families indicated a divorce (n = 61; 66,3%) as the reason of the family breakdown. Other reasons were connected with the father's death (n = 13; 14,1%) or the parents' separation (n = 5; 5.5%). The remaining, undefined, reasons were indicated by 13 persons (14.1%). The percentage shares of the examined women and men were comparable, respectively 56.7% (n = 123) and 43.3% (n = 94). The majority of the respondents declared living in the city (n = 184; 84.8%) whereas there were 33 respondents living in the country (15.2%). The most commonly declared education level was university education (n = 112; 51.6%) and secondary education (n = 101; 46.5%). Few respondents declared vocational education (n = 1; 0.5%) and primary education (n = 3; 1.4%). Referring to the distance

from their place of residence at the age of 12 to their grandparents' homes, the majority of the respondents said that they had lived approximately 15 km from their grandmothers (n = 171; 78.8%) and from their grandfathers (n = 161; 74.2%) (tab. 1).

The respondents also estimated how often they had spent time with their grandmother and the grandfather in the period up till the age of 12. It turned out that 138 of the surveyed young adults had seen their grandmother a few times a week (63.6%) whereas the number of the respondents who had seen their grandfather a few times a week was 102 (47%) (tab. 2).

2.3. Procedure

The psychological study had a cross-sectional, quantitative and self-report nature. It lasted 30 minutes. It was conducted with the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) technique, designed to carry out quantitative measurements using the Internet sites

Table 1. The assessment of how far the respondents lived from their grandparents in their childhood, broken up by gender (n = 217)

Gender	Woman (n = 123)		Man (n = 94)	
	N	%	N	%
Distance from place of residence to grandmother's place				
Distance approx. 15 km	100	81.3	71	75.5
Distance approx. 15-50 km	14	11.4	15	16
Distance approx. 100-200 km	6	4.9	3	3.2
Distance 200-500 km	1	0.8	4	4.3
Distance bigger than 500 km	2	1.1	1	1.1
Distance from place of residence to grandfather's place				
Distance approx. 15 km	99	80.5	62	66
Distance approx. 15-50 km	15	12.2	18	19.1
Distance approx. 100-200 km	5	4.1	4	4.3
Distance 200-500 km	1	0.8	8	8.5
Distance bigger than 500 km	3	2.4	2	2.1

Source: author's own work.

Table 2. The assessment of how often the respondents spent their time with their grandparents in their childhood, broken up by gender of the respondents (n = 217)

Gender	Woman (n = 123)		Man (n = 94)	
	N	%	N	%
Time spent with grandmother				
A few times a week	83	67.5	55	58.5
Once a week	20	16.3	20	21.3
Once a month	10	8.1	10	10.6
Once in half a year	7	5.7	7	7.4
More rarely	3	2.4	2	2.1
Time spent with grandfather				
A few times a week	66	53.7	36	38.3
Once a week	18	14.6	22	23.4
Once a month	17	13.8	12	12.8
Once in half a year	10	8.1	13	13.8
More rarely	12	9.8	11	11.7

Source: author's own work.

(Morawski, 2021)⁴. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature and the possibility to stop it in any time without consequences and that its results will be used in a scientific work. The collected data were analysed using the specialist software IBM SPSS Statistics 28, licensed by University of Łódź. In the statistical analyses the following statistical methods were used: Student's t test, exploratory factor analysis and Pearson's correlation coefficient (r). The adopted level of statistical significance was regarded as acceptable if the calculated test probability p was $p < 0,05$.

2.4. Research tools

The material for analyses was collected by means of four psychological tools with good psychometric properties, i.e. the Familism Scale, the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother, the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather, the Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale and the questionnaire. The psychological tools were uploaded to the internet using the Microsoft Forms application.

2.4.1. Familism Scale

The Familism Scale (FS) is a tool developed by Katarzyna Walęcka-Matyja (2020) on the basis of the MACVS Scale (Mexican American Cultural Values Scales for Adolescents and Adults, Knight, Gonzales, Saenz, Bonds, German, Deardorff et al., 2010). This scale is designed for adults and allows for the measurement of five aspects of family values, i.e. family support, respect, religion, material success and achievements, individualism. This tool consists of 44 statements and the respondent is expected to give their answer on a 5-grade Likert's scale, where „1” means „I definitely disagree” and „5” means „I definitely agree”. The Familism Scale has very good psychometric properties. The values of Cronbach's α coefficient are following: for the scale of respect – 0.91; family support – 0.70; religion –

0.95; individualism – 0.63 and material success and achievements – 0.87 (Walęcka-Matyja, 2020). In the conducted study, the analysis of reliability revealed the following values of Cronbach's α calculated for familism dimensions: respect 0.71; family support 0.57; religion 0.40; individualism 0.75 and material success and achievements 0.78.

2.4.2. Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale

The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (URCS) is a Polish version translated from the original tool URCS (Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale; Dible, Levine and Park, 2012). URCS as developed by Monika Wróbel and co-workers (2014) is designed for adults and measures interpersonal closeness in various social relationships. The tool consists of 12 items and each statement refers to the interpersonal relationship of a surveyed person with a person X (partner, friend, employer and others.). In case of this study, the person X was the maternal grandmother and the maternal grandfather of the respondent. A respondent's task is to assess their agreement to the statements on a 7-grade Likert's scale, where „1” means „I definitely disagree” and „7” means „I definitely agree”. The Polish version of URCS with mean values $M = 5.71$, standard deviation values $SD = 1.10$ and left-sided skewness of the results distribution is similar to the original scale. The reliability analysis of URCS showed that Cronbach's α amounted to 0.94 (Wróbel et al., 2014).

2.4.3. Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother/Grandfather

Two psychological tools were developed by the authors of the study to measure the young adult grandchildren's retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother/grandfather in their childhood (till the age of 12 years). It was assumed that the most favourable assessments of the grandparents' commitment were connected

4 The research was conducted by a master's seminarian.

with the opinions of the grandchildren concerning the earliest years of life and the period of attending primary school. In the later period, these relationships become weaker (Hurlock, 1985). The inspiration for this study was the „Grandparent’s Survey” providing information on, among other issues, the perception of emotional closeness with the grandparents from the perspective of teenagers (Attar-Schwartz, Tan, Buchanan, 2009). After receiving consent from the authors to develop the Polish version, it was translated into Polish. Taking into account some earlier research findings, it was assumed that the quality of the interpersonal relationship depends on the gender of grandparents and grandchildren (MaloneBeach, Hakoyama, Arnold, 2018; Michałek-Kwiecień, 2020). The presented reason was the basis to develop two versions of the scale, one for assessing retrospectively the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother and the other for assessing retrospectively the interpersonal relationship with the grandfather. Each version initially consisted of 17 items.

In order to estimate the usefulness of the basic scale, planned in two versions, and to determine the statistical properties of the individual scale items, an online pilot test was carried out with the use of the Microsoft Forms application (comp. Hornowska, 2023). The duration time of the survey was approximately 20 minutes (completing the questionnaire, the pilot versions of the scale for the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother and the scale for the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandfather as well as the Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale). The collected data were analysed by means of the IBM SPSS Statistics 28 software, licensed by the University of Łódź. The adopted level of significance was $\alpha = 0.05$.

This pilot test included 141 persons in early adulthood, i.e. at the age of 19 – 35 years. Women accounted for 57% of the sample ($n = 81$), men 43% ($n = 60$). The majority of the respondents came from towns with over 150 thousand inhabitants ($n = 67$; 48%). Towns up to 150 thousand inhabitants were represented by 46 people (33%) whereas 28 respondents (20%) declared rural background. The surveyed persons most often had secondary ($n = 91$; 65%) and

university education ($n = 48$; 34%). Few respondents declared vocational education ($n = 2$; 1%). In the surveyed group there were no other types of education declared.

Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother

The Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother included 17 items, to which answers were given on a 5-grade Likert’s scale, where “1” means “No” and “5” “Definitely yes”. Table 3 presents the values of the Kaiser–Mayer–Olkin’s test (KMO) and the Bartlett’s test.

The high value of the KMO index confirmed the validity of use of the factor analysis. With the assumption of the occurrence of correlations between the potential factors, it was possible to isolate a factor using the Principal component analysis (PCA) and to use the OBLIMIN oblique rotation technique. As a result of the undertaken actions in the factor analysis (EFA), one factor was isolated (tab. 4).

Considering the obtained result, it was found that the received factor explained 49% of variance in the variable. The adopted level of the absolute value was 0.4. Due to this fact, two questions which did not fit the criteria of the absolute value were removed from the matrix. They were following: Did your grandmother happen to refuse to take care of You because of her plans (e.g. a planned trip, home duties, professional work, etc.)? (-0.385) and Did, in your opinion, your grandmother allow You to have more freedom than your parents did (e.g. she allowed you

Table 3. The KMO test and the Bartlett’s sphericity test for the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother

KMO measure of adequacy of sampling	0.916
Bartlett’s sphericity tests	
Chi-square approximations	1136.645
<i>df</i>	105
Significance p-value	0.000

Source: author’s own work.

Table 4. Eigenvalues and the total explained variance for the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Sums of squares of loads after rotation		
	total	% variance	% accumulated	total	% variance	% accumulated
1	7.377	49.181	49.181	7.377	49.181	49.181
2	1.175	7.836	57.016			
...
15	0.205	1.368	100.000			

Source: author's own work.

Table 5. The component matrix for the scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother

Items	Component 1
Did your grandmother show You help?	0.846
Were You satisfied with the amount of time your grandmother devoted to You?	0.783
Was your grandmother an authority figure for You?	0.774
Did, in your opinion, your grandmother actively try to satisfy your health-related needs (e.g. she took care of You when You were ill, etc.)?	0.729
Did You feel secure in the care of your grandmother?	0.728
Did your grandmother take an interest in your life (e.g. how You coped at school, what mates You had, how You spent your free time)?	0.723
Did your grandmother show positive feelings to You (e.g. she said she loved You, she was concerned about You, she was proud of You, etc.)?	0.711
Did your grandmother actively try to satisfy your basic needs (e.g. she prepared meals for You, took care of your sleep, etc.)?	0.708
Did your grandmother try to pamper You (e.g. making your favourite dish, giving You presents without an occasion, etc.)?	0.683
Did You share your problems with your grandmother?	0.658
Did You respect your grandmother's attitudes towards the family (e.g. her attitude towards her children/ husband, family celebrations, etc.)?	0.656
Did You enjoy your visits at your grandmother's?	0.655
Do You think that your discussions with your grandmother about her life experience translated to your decisions, acting?	0.651
Did your grandmother have a direct influence on your everyday life in your childhood (e.g. she took care of You when your parents were absent, used her upbringing methods, affected your decisions)?	0.586
Did your parents encourage You to contact your grandmother (e.g. asking You to call your grandmother, to visit her on a free day, etc.)?	0.552

Source: author's own work.

to eat more sweets, to go to bed later, cooked your favourite dishes, etc.)? (0.382). Thereby, the 15-item version of the scale was adopted (tab. 5).

The adopted version of the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother is a one-factor tool and allows us to assess the quality of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother in the retrospective perspective

(till the age of 12 years) of the grandchild in early adulthood. The respondent's task is to refer to 15 items using a 5-grade Likert's scale, where „1” means „No” and „5” means „Definitely yes”. The higher the score on the scale, the more positive the assessment of the relationship is. In the conducted study the analysis of the reliability estimated for this tool was Cronbach's α with the value of 0.92.

Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather

In order to determine the psychometric properties of the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather, a methodological procedure analogical to the above described scale for the grandmother was conducted. Therefore, the recurring elements of this description were omitted. The Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother consists of the same 15 items which are included in the version for the grandmother. The only difference is that the word “grandmother” was replaced with the word “grandfather”. In order to justify the use of the factor analysis for the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather, the Kaiser–Mayer–Olkin’s index (KMO) and the Bartlett’s test were applied (tab. 6).

The high KMO index confirmed the validity of using the factor analysis. One factor was isolated by means of the Principal component analysis (PCA) and the OBLIMIN oblique rotation technique (tab. 7), which explained 57% of variance in the variable.

The adopted version of the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather is a one-factor tool and allows us to assess the quality of the interpersonal relationship with the grandfather in the retrospective perspective (till the age of 12 years) of the grandchild in early adulthood. The respondent’s task is to refer to 15 items using a 5-grade Likert’s scale, where „1” means „No” and „5” means „Definitely yes”. The higher the

Table 6. The KMO test and the Bartlett’s sphericity test for the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather

KMO measure of adequacy of sampling	0.938
Bartlett’s sphericity tests	
Chi-square approximations	1421.185
<i>df</i>	105
Significance p-value	0.000

Source: author’s own work.

score on the scale, the more positive the assessment of the relationship is. In the conducted study the analysis of the reliability estimated for this tool was Cronbach’s α with the value of 0.96.

For both versions of the scale, the analysis of measurement validity was carried out, using the Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (Wróbel et al., 2014). In the conducted study, the reliability analysis estimated for this tool revealed the Cronbach’s α value of 0.96 – for the interpersonal closeness with the Grandmother and 0.98 – for the interpersonal closeness with the Grandfather. The analyses were conducted for the whole sample taking part in the pilot test ($n = 141$) with the use of the Pearson’s r coefficient. Some positive correlations in the expected direction were found. The Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother was strongly correlated with the assessment of interpersonal closeness with the Grandmother ($r = 0.738$; $p < 0.01$) and a little less strongly correlated with the assessment of interpersonal closeness with the Grandfather ($r = 0.365$; $p < 0.05$). On the other hand, the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather

Table 7. Eigenvalues and the total explained variance for the Scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Sums of squares of loads after rotation		
	total	% variance	% accumulated	total	% variance	% accumulated
1	8.560	57.067	57.067	8.560	57.067	57.067
2	0.990	6.597	63.663			
...
15	0.164	1.090	100.000			

Source: author’s own work.

was strongly correlated with the assessment of interpersonal closeness with the Grandfather ($r = 0.689$; $p < 0.01$) and a little less strongly correlated with the assessment of interpersonal closeness with the Grandmother ($r = 0.354$; $p < 0.01$). In this way, the validity of both versions of the scale designed for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother and the Grandfather was confirmed. The validity understood as a degree of compliance with which the developed tool measures what it is supposed to measure (comp. Hornowska, 2023). Due to the preliminary nature of the research findings, it is emphasized that there is a necessity of taking up and more closely studying the issue of the validity of both the scales for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandparents in further studies.

2.4.4. The sociodemographic questionnaire

In order to collect data of a sociodemographic nature, the questionnaire was used. It included questions concerning: the respondent's gender, age, place of residence, education, structure of the family of origin, maternal grandparent's gender, frequency of contacts with the maternal grandparents and the distance between the respondent's place of resi-

dence and the maternal grandparents' place of residence. The variables included in the questionnaire were selected based on the research results showing that in the perspective of the grandchildren in early adulthood the intergenerational relationships are determined by many sociodemographic factors. The most important of them are: the grandparents and the grandchildren's gender, the grandparents' origin and the frequency of contacts, the distance between the grandparents' place of residence and the grandchildren's place of residence, the grandparents' age and health (MaloneBeach et al., 2018).

3. Results

In the first place the descriptive statistics of the studied psychological variables were estimated (tab. 8).

Considering the results from table 8, it was found that in the Familism Scale the respondents obtained the highest intensity of the results in the respect dimension ($M = 39.57$). The distribution of variables can be described as left-sided and more flattened than normal. On the other hand the lowest intensity of the results was observed in the religion dimension ($M = 16.28$). The distribution of variables can be described as right-sided and flattened in comparison

Table 8. The descriptive statistics of the studied psychological variables (n = 217)

Variable	M	SD	Sk	Kurt.	Min. - Max.
Familism Scale					
respect	39.57	9.755	-0.185	-0.574	16-61
individualism	20.32	2.678	-0.232	-0.127	11-25
religion	16.28	7.879	0.460	-0.899	7-35
family support	21.22	3.950	-0.321	-0.154	10-30
material success and achievements	29.37	6.987	0.503	0.286	13-54
URCS Grandmother					
URCS Grandfather	43.56	22.016	0.106	-1.065	12-84
The scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother					
	60.61	10.467	-0.839	0.018	28-75
The scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather					
	49.79	16.897	-0.599	-0.556	15-75

M - mean, SD - standard deviation, Sk - skewness, Kurt. - kurtosis, Min. - Max.- minimum and maximum values. Source: author's own work.

to normal. Furthermore, it was noticed that the respondents got a higher intensity of the results in the Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale URCS) with the grandmother ($M = 51.56$) and the scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother ($M = 60.61$) than in the Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (URCS) for the grandfather ($M = 43.56$) and in the scale for the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandfather ($M = 49.79$).

3.1. Familism in the perspective of young adults

On the basis of the Central Limit Theorem, the normality of distribution of the analysed psychological variables was assumed. Next, the assumption of variance homogeneity was checked by means of the Levene's test. This assumption was met – variance homogeneity was confirmed for each examined variable. On this basis, the Student's t test was applied for independent groups in order to check whether there is differentiation in familism dimensions between the

groups of young women from monoparental families with the mother and the ones from complete families and if there is differentiation between between the groups of young men from monoparental families with the mother and the ones from complete families (tab. 9).

Considering the obtained research results (tab. 9), no differentiation was found with regard to familism dimensions both in the compared groups of young women ($p < 0.05$) and in the compared groups of young men ($p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 1 was not confirmed.

3.2. Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather in the perspective of young adults

An attempt was made to determine if there is differentiation in respect of the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather in the groups of women from monoparental families with the mother and from complete families as well as in the groups of men

Table 9. Familism dimensions in the groups of women from monoparental families and the ones from complete families ($n = 123$) and in groups of men from monoparental families and the ones from complete families ($n = 94$)

Variable	Women from monoparental families ($n = 53$)		Women from complete families ($n = 70$)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
respect	38.75	10.637	37.66	9.461	-0.604	0.547
family support	21.42	4.465	20.23	3.707	-1.609	0.110
religion	15.77	7.665	16.80	8.493	0.692	0.490
material success and achievements	27.23	5.427	27.17	6.297	-0.051	0.960
individualism	21.06	2.749	20.10	2.783	-1.898	0.060
Variable	Men from monoparental families ($n = 39$)		Men from complete families ($n = 55$)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
respect	40.64	10.202	42.02	8.469	0.713	0.478
religion	15.97	8.074	16.31	7.282	0.210	0.834
family support	21.23	4.631	22.27	2.851	1.247	0.217
individualism	20.18	2.910	19.98	2.198	-0.358	0.722
material success and achievements	32.15	7.932	32.27	6.857	0.078	0.938

M – mean, SD – standard deviation, t – Student's t test statistics, p – significance level
Source: author's own work.

Table 10. Differentiation in respect of the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather in the groups of women from monoparental families and from complete families (n = 123) and in the groups of men from monoparental families and from complete families (n = 94)

Variable	Women from monoparental families (n = 53)		Women from complete families (n = 70)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother	64.81	8.927	58.86	11.050	-3.209	0.002
Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather	54.58	15.180	46.14	16.806	-2.875	0.005
Variable	Men from monoparental families (n = 39)		Men from complete families (n = 55)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother	58.15	10.294	60.53	10.356	1.097	0.275
Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather	51.13	14.087	48.87	19.568	-0.650	0.517

M - mean, SD - standard deviation, t - Student's t test statistics, p - significance level
Source: author's own work.

from monoparental families with the mother and from complete families (tab. 10). Table 10 presents differentiation in respect of the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather in the groups of women from monoparental families with the mother and from complete families as well as in the groups of men from monoparental families with the mother and from complete families.

The received research results show that there is differentiation in respect of the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother in the compared groups of women ($p < 0.05$). It was found that higher mean scores in this respect were received by the women from monoparental families with the mother in comparison to the ones from complete families ($M = 64.81$; $SD = 8.927$ vs. $M = 58.86$; $SD = 11.050$) $t(123) = -3.209$, $p = 0.002$, $d = 10.192$. Considering the results in respect of the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandfather in the compared groups of young women, some statistically significant differences were also found ($p < 0.05$). Young women coming from monoparental families with

the mother received on average higher scores in comparison with young women from complete families ($M = 54.58$; $SD = 15.180$ vs. $M = 46.14$; $SD = 16.806$) $t(123) = -2.875$, $p = 0.005$, $d = 16.126$. The obtained results confirm hypothesis 2. At the same time, the obtained results do not allow us to conclude that there was any differentiation in respect of the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather in the compared groups of men ($p > 0.05$). Such being the case, hypothesis 3 was not confirmed.

3.3. Familism and the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather

Looking at the correlations between familism dimensions and the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather, we divided the respondents into the groups of young women from monoparental families with the mother and the ones from complete families and the groups of young men from monoparental

Table 11. Correlations between the variables in the group of women from monoparental families with the mother (n = 53)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. respect	-						
2. family support	0.716**	-					
3. religion	0.610**	0.406**	-				
4. material success and achievements	0.247	0.033	-0.094	-			
5. individualism	-0.267	-0.166	-0.375**	-0.038	-		
6. Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother	0.404**	0.312*	0.284*	0.132	-0.134	-	0.738**
7. Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather	0.117	0.213	0.018	-0.026	-0.102	0.354**	-

n = 53, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. Source: author's own work.

Table 12. Correlations between the variables in the group of men from monoparental families with the mother (n = 39)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. respect	-						
2. family support	0.773**	-					
3. religion	0.602**	0.530**	-				
4. material success and achievements	0.303	0.101	0.224	-			
5. individualism	-0.553**	-0.466**	-0.505**	0.001	-		
6. Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother	0.095	0.059	0.111	-0.252	-0.181	-	0.751**
7. Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather	-0.090	0.025	-0.121	-0.039	-0.047	0.397*	-

n = 39, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. Source: author's own work.

families with the mother and the ones from complete families. Table 11 shows correlations between the analysed variables in the group of young women from monoparental families with the mother.

Table 12 shows correlations between the analysed variables in the group of young men from monoparental families with the mother.

Table 13 shows correlations between the analysed variables in the group of young women from complete families.

Table 14 shows correlations between the analysed variables in the group of young men from complete families.

Analysing the correlations between familism dimensions and the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother in the group of women from monoparental families with the mother, some weak positive correlations were revealed with the values from the so-called traditional trend, such as respect, family support and religion. On the other hand, in this group of women there were no correlations between familism dimensions and the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandfather. In the group of men from monoparental families no statistically significant correlations were found

Table 13. Correlations between the variables in the group of women from complete families (n = 70)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. respect	-						
2. family support	0.766**	-					
3. religion	0.620**	0.494**	-				
4. material success and achievements	0.244*	-0.002	0.216	-			
5. individualism	-0.161	-0.021	-0.161	-0.187	-		
6. Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother	-0.069	0.031	-0.133	-0.226	0.011	-	0.695**
7. Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather	0.006	-0.023	-0.072	-0.054	0.020	0.453**	-

n = 70, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. Source: author's own work.

Table 14. Correlations between the variables in the group of men from complete families (n = 55)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. respect	-						
2. family support	0.673**	-					
3. religion	0.422**	0.225	-				
4. material success and achievements	0.532**	0.346**	0.273*	-			
5. individualism	0.222	0.214	0.033	0.500**	-		
6. Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandmother	0.056	0.131	-0.019	-0.162	-0.013	-	0.642**
7. Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the Grandfather	0.267*	0.238	0.053	0.077	-0.161	0.453**	-

n = 55, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. Source: author's own work.

between familism dimensions and the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather. In the group of young women from complete families there were no statistically significant correlations between familism dimensions and the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather. In the group of men from complete families we did not obtain any statistically significant correlations between familism dimensions and the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandmother whereas a weak positive correlation was revealed between the respect dimension and

the Retrospective Assessment of the Interpersonal Relationship with the grandfather. The obtained results confirm hypothesis 4.

4. Discussion

Nowadays more and more people tend to delay assuming the roles of both parents and grandparents. Modern grandparents are often professionally active, able-bodied, not fitting into the common stereotypes connected with old age. As Leopold and Skopek (2015) indicate, Polish women take the role of a grandmother at the age of 47 and men become

grandfathers when they are 51. Grandparents, who are active in many areas of life, also play an important role in the functioning of the family, providing support in difficult moments, cooperating in the grandchildren's socialization process and ensuring the feeling of stability (Napora, 2019b). One of such moments can be the family crisis resulting from the parents' divorce. It is when the interpersonal relationship between the grandparents and the grandchildren becomes particularly vital.

In this psychological study, the aim was to check whether, depending on the family structure, there is differentiation in the intensity of familism dimensions and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather in the groups of young adults and if there are statistically significant correlations between the analysed variables. The collected empirical material allowed us to verify the assumptions of three hypotheses. In the first one it was expected that familism dimensions would have different intensity levels in the groups of young women and men selected according to the structure of the family of origin. Based on the obtained research results, no differentiation was observed with regard to familism dimensions both in the compared groups of young women and the ones of young men. The received results allow for the conclusion that the surveyed adults referred to family dimensions in a similar way, and the structure of the family of origin was not a differentiating factor in this respect. With this, hypothesis 1 did not get confirmation in the author's own study. This finding is different from the ones obtained in other psychological studies (comp. Wałęcka-Matyja, Krawczyk, 2022), in which young women from monoparental families considered material achievements and financial success to be more important than the ones from complete families. The identified difference in the results of the research carried out in the groups of young adults may encourage researchers to further probe into this subject matter.

The study of the research results allows us to assume an attitude to the second hypothesis, in which the authors expected to find that the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandparents would be differentiated in

the perspective of young adults, depending on the structure of the family of origin. The obtained results allow us to formulate the conclusion that women from monoparental families with the mother retrospectively assessed the quality of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother and the grandfather higher than women from complete families. That confirmed the assumptions of hypothesis 2. However, there were no statistically significant differences as regards the retrospective assessment of the quality of the interpersonal relationship with the grandparents in the compared groups of men, which did not allow us to confirm hypothesis 3. The obtained results are congruent with the ones received so far (comp. Michałek-Kwiecień, 2020; Michałek-Kwiecień, 2023; Napora, 2019a), where it was proved that the maternal grandmother was identified as emotionally closer than the grandfather, and that the correlation between the grandchild's gender and the gender of the closest grandparent was also significant. According to the studies of a retrospective nature, conducted in the groups of young adults, it was young women who more often regarded their grandmother as their closest grandparent in comparison to young men (MaloneBeach et al., 2018). Referring to the last, fourth hypothesis indicating that there might be some correlations between familism dimensions and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandparents in the surveyed groups of young adults, we shall admit that the results confirm it. The findings quite clearly show that the most numerous correlations between familism dimensions connected with traditional values (respect, family support, religion) and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother occurred in the group of women from monoparental families with the mother. This means that in the group of women from monoparental families the higher the assessment of the quality of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother was, the stronger the need was to maintain proper intergenerational relationships and to emphasize the importance of the parents' opinions in shaping their children's attitudes and helping them to make decisions (respect). These women were also

more willing to support their close relatives (family support), and to assign a greater significance to the spiritual sphere (religion) than the women from complete families. The results obtained in the author's own study confirmed the role played by grandmothers in family systems. The explanation of it can be perceived in different perspectives, which most often include theories emphasizing the commitment and responsibility of women for keeping the family together or evolutionary theories highlighting reproductive strategies taken by women (MaloneBeach et al., 2018). No statistically significant correlations were found between familism dimensions and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandparents in the group of men from monoparental families. It can be believed that the transmission of family values was not as clear as in case of the women from monoparental families. The obtained result can be explained in the light of some psychological studies in this respect. It was found that it is girls who more often meet with their grandparents than boys (Jappens, Van Bavel, 2016; Napora, 2022). Adolescent girls tend to assess the support received from their grandparents more positively than boys and more often look for informational support, e.g. life advice from them in comparison with boys (Napora, 2018). The results obtained in the groups of women and men from complete families do not indicate the occurrence of any statistically significant correlations between familism dimensions and the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother or the grandfather (in the group of women) or with the grandmother (in the group of men). On the other hand, they allow for the statement that in the group of men from complete families a higher retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandfather was correlated with a greater intensity of the need to maintain proper intergenerational

relationships and to emphasize the importance of the parents' opinions in shaping their children's attitudes and helping them to make decisions (respect). The obtained results are congruent with other research findings, which allow us to formulate the conclusion that paternal parents get more positive assessments of closeness and frequency of contacts in the perspective of grandchildren from complete families. On the other hand, in families with single mothers, these assessments are significantly lower. In families of this type we can observe an increase in the importance of the role of a maternal grandmother (Napora, 2016).

The conducted study was not free from limitations, among which we can, for example, include the fact that the referred results of the retrospective assessment should be read through the prism of the specifics of a self-descriptive study, where data are provided by respondents themselves. Non-probabilistic sampling of participants limits room for interpretation of the results and the correlational research model does not entitle us to formulate conclusions concerning the directions of the so identified correlations between variables. Furthermore, there is still an open perspective of testing the model on representative samples of young adults from other types of families. e.g. blended and foster ones. Despite the mentioned difficulties, it is regarded that the results of the conducted analyses can be useful and will contribute to the intensification of preventive actions designed for young people and families in crisis situations. The author's scales, i.e. the scale of the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandmother and the scale of the retrospective assessment of the interpersonal relationship with the grandfather can still be developed in further studies and used in the future to better describe and understand intergenerational relationships and identify their quality as one of significant determinants of young people's development.

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Love and the value of family seen by university students. A cognitive quantitative and qualitative case study of the UMCS students¹

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Abstract: Taking into account the fact that emotional intelligence is an important factor in the performance and development potential of young people, this article aims to investigate the world of emotions in two selected groups of students, i.e. students of Applied Linguistics at UMCS from the first and fifth year of studies. In particular, the study concerns the range of experienced emotions of love and the importance of family in young adults and the reasons why the selected two groups of students experience these feelings. The theoretical framework that best fits this quantitative and qualitative study on emotions and their causes is based on a hybrid model resulting from the combination of two important cognitively oriented theoretical models, namely: (i) Plutchik's (1980) theory of eight basic emotions; and (ii) Averill's (1980) social-constructivist model of emotions. The study was conducted using an anonymous questionnaire method without taking into account sensitive data. It included quantitative survey questions, multiple choice and matrix with one possible answer and one direct open question – all of them concerning students' emotions. The results based on the preliminary survey show that *love* received the highest percentage increase among female students of Applied Linguistics at UMCS, or more precisely, 5th-year students experience love 12% more often than the 1st-year students. In the case of men in the last year of Applied Linguistics studies, *love* increased by 17%, which ranks third among all emotions studied. In general, the emotional life of both women and men studying Applied Linguistics develops and deepens around the values of love and family.

Keywords: emotions; family; love; university students; values

1. Introduction and research aims

Recognised as “the most influential psychological conditions of human personality” (Kant, 2019, p. 441), emotions not only reveal our internal well-being and desires and often display them for the environment, but they also motivate our decisions, behaviour and reasoning, having, consequently, impact on whole human life. The role of emotions is documented as vital in various social settings by developing and enhancing interpersonal and intra-personal communication and relationship (cf. Fischer, Manstead, 2018). Those who have learnt to understand, use, and manage their own emotions are known as being emotionally intelligent.

Importantly, this human aptitude of turning one's own and others' emotional potential into further advantage may prove extremely useful in the development of young people's values and future decisions, such as the one concerning family. Values and emotions associated with them have an important impact on young people's feeling of identity, understanding of their existence, on their personality formation, on their viewpoint of the world, their approach to problems and solutions, and their general well-being (cf. Arslan, Saruhan, Saruhan, Ulaş, 2021, p. 660). It is love and family that occupy one of the important

¹ Article in Polish language: https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/61P_Dabr.pdf

places in the life of any person, particularly the young one. In most cases, as it is commonly cited in the literature, if the family is prosperous and stable, it can provide the spiritual and moral education of the younger generation and ensures the sustainability of the successful development of society (Vishnevsky, Yachmeneva, 2018; Elkin, Malysheva, Trubnikova, 2021, p. 430).

In this light, the aim of our study is twofold, i.e. (i) to collect the data concerning emotions and values experienced and appreciated by 115 students of the 1st and 5th-year of Applied Linguistics at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin (Poland), and (ii) to explore the range and causes of experienced emotions and values associated with them. In other words, when processing the data, we desire to extract both the list of emotions, the frequency of feeling them as well as the main reasons behind their occurrence, while focusing on the feeling of love and the value of family for young people. We hope that our investigation of students' psycho-emotional condition – with our particular emphasis put on the role of love and family values – may be a crucial step to help the chosen representatives of the contemporary young generation make their life successful, by getting to know their emotions better as well as to redirect or /and develop their values “in a particular real-world environment” (cf. Deguchi, Hirai, Matsuoka, Nakano, Oshima, Tai, Tani, 2020, p. 2; Mazurek, 2019).

The article is structured as follows: this introductory section outlines the research objectives and introduces the topics addressed in this cognitive case study. Section 2 of the article presents the basic definitions regarding emotions and values, emphasizing the importance of family in developing these human concepts. The theoretical framework chosen for the study is also revealed here. Section 3 will introduce the methodology and database of the study undertaken. Section 4 will discuss the results of the study, while the last section (Section 5) will close the article with important concluding remarks, pointing out the limitations of the conducted research.

2. Definitions of emotions and values. The theoretical framework of the study

Emotional states are most often associated with particular instances of emotion, such as, e.g., anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise (Barrett, Haviland-Jones, Lewis, 2016). Robert Plutchik's (1980) classification of eight basic emotions and at least three derivative states resulting from each basic emotion provides a widely-spread list of thirty two emotions, which differ in intensity and duration. Indeed, emotions can emerge as occurrences (e.g., panic) or dispositions (e.g., hostility); they can be short-lived (e.g., anger) or long-lived (e.g., grief) (*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018), functional or dysfunctional (Graham, 2014), categorised in a different way by various cultures or appearing as the universal primitives (Glinka, 2013). Consistent with that, a psychotherapist Michael Graham claims that emotions exist on a continuum of intensity; thus, for instance, *fear* may range from extreme terror to mild concern (Graham, 2014, p. 63).

Taken from the etymological sources, the English word 'emotion' traces back to the 16th century, originating from the French word *émouvoir*, which means 'to excite', based on the Latin word *ēmōtus*, which means 'to move out, move away, remove, stir up, irritate' (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, n.d.). Yet, it was only in the 1830s that the concept of emotion in the English language received its present meaning, hence, “[n]o one felt emotions before about 1830. Instead they felt other things – ‘passions’, ‘accidents of the soul’, ‘moral sentiments’ – and explained them very differently from how we understand emotions today” (Smith, 2015, p. 4-7). The contemporary English dictionaries provide the following definition of emotion: “a strong human feeling such as love, hate, or anger” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, n.d.; *Cambridge Dictionary*, n.d.); a part of a person's character (*Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, n.d.); a spontaneous mental reaction that is experienced, “distinguished from cognitive and volitional states of consciousness,” but involving “mental activity and sometimes [...] physical effects on the body” (*Collins English Dictionary*, n.d.).

In the scientific literature, there has been still no consensus on a definition of emotion, in spite of the increasing popularity of the research on emotion over the past three decades, and many fields contributing to the investigation, including psychology, neuroscience, medicine, history, sociology of emotions, cognitive linguistics, and computer science, among many others (Glinka, 2013). In the current research, emotion is far from being viewed only in terms of primitive responses, closely related to physiological arousal and separated from ‘higher’ thought processes. Instead, emotions are generally described, similarly to the dictionary definitions, as mental states. Even though cognitive processes, associated with ‘thinking’, such as reasoning and decision-making, seem to be separate from emotional processes, referred to as ‘feeling’, we assume, after Barrett et al. (2016), that an emotion experience entails a conceptual structure that is stored in memory, including current perceptions, cognitions, actions, and core affect. Hence, contemporary emotion researchers seem to come to understanding that the mental representation of one’s emotional experience has not only a purely perceptive nature – as it used to be thought – but it includes motor and instinctual mechanisms as well as cognitive ones. In short, emotions are described as inferences about the causes of physiological arousal, or as the result of a cognitive and conscious process which occurs in response to a body system response to a trigger (Barrett, 2017).

In this light, for the purpose of our study, we accept, first, the multi-componential view of emotion, in which the term ‘emotion’ is defined as a mental state that comprise multiple different components, e.g. subjective experience, cognitive processes, which result from our neurophysiological changes, and which are diversely related to our thoughts, feelings, behavioural responses, as well as a degree of pleasure or displeasure (Cabral, de Almeida, 2022). Indeed, we are aware of the fact that emotions are often entangled with human mood,² temper, personality, character, creativity or/and intelligence (Dacko-Pikiewicz, Khan, Popp, Sahibzada, Shafait,

2021; Kalbarczyk, Tomczyk, Ślusarski, 2017; Kuška, Mana, Nikolai, Trnka, 2020; and TenHouten, 2021, p. 610; to mention but a few). In addition, “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (cf. TenHouten, 2021, p. 610) is defined as one’s ‘emotional intelligence’. A person with a high rate of ‘emotional intelligence’ (otherwise known as emotional quotient or EQ, or EI for short) is able to diagnose both her/his own potentialities, weaknesses and exercise the knowledge into her/his personal, academic and professional life. When applying EI to university students, this ability is best defined as “appraisal and channelization of one’s own and others’ emotions for the sake of learning and countering problems” (Dacko-Pikiewicz et al., 2021, p. 4). In the ability-based model of EI, emotional intelligence is seen as a blend of four dynamic emotional abilities, i.e. (i) the ability of the social adaptation through perception and comprehension of emotions in self and others; (ii) the skill of advocating the goals attainment through control and adjustment of the emotional situations of self and others; (iii) the ability to argue for problem-solving through proper utilisation of one’s emotions; and (iv) the capacity to delineate the emotions’ regulation over the time to sustain emotional and intellectual development through the self’s thoughtful ruling of emotions (cf. Dacko-Pikiewicz et al., 2021, p. 3-4).

Second, having acknowledged the fact that the ability to recognize and manage one’s emotions is crucial for one’s proper personality growth, we emphasize the significance of *values* in young people’s successful performance and development. The concept of ‘value’ derives from the Latin word root of ‘valere’ and means “to be valuable” or “to be strong” (Izgar, 2013, p. 14). In contemporary dictionaries, the term ‘value’ is defined as “the beliefs people have, especially about what is right and wrong and what is most important in life, that control their behaviour” (*Cambridge Dictionary*, n.d.). In Arslan’s (2021) study, it was noted that when teaching values in the

2 The commonly accepted psychological distinction between mood and emotions or feelings implies that moods are less intense and do not result from a singular trigger.

family, parents give greater priority to the values of love, honesty, respect, and responsibility, compared to the values of friendship and cooperation. Values, often related to the concept of family, morality, and tradition, are divided into moral, religious, social, economic, scientific, artistic, and political values. Accordingly, we adopt after Arslan et al. (2021, p. 659-660) that values constitute the sum of “material and spiritual elements that cover the social, cultural, economic and scientific values of a nation” (Arslan et al., 2021, p. 659). Even though values can change, based on time and personal or social needs, and they can vary within different nations and cultures, the importance of values in the personality growth of young generation needs to be highlighted (MEN, 2018). Indeed, values are the source of the inner drive and motivation, which helps us to resist various difficulties in life, to face obstacles and to acquire our human strengths and qualities.

Third, it is family that is the basis for upbringing the future generation and a person’s socialization. If the society facilitates the formation of a person’s values in relation to the family, the state as a whole benefits from it (Elkin et al., 2021, p. 430). One of the basic tasks of every family is to participate in the educational process within the family community, which primarily consists of the “ability to mutually bestow humanity upon each other” (Borutka, 2020, p. 152).³ This process is two-sided, and therefore parents bestow their mature humanity upon the young person, who in turn gives them all his novelty and freshness (John Paul II, 1994, no. 16). In order for the educational process to be properly reliable, the family should refer to lasting values, such as respect for the dignity of the human person, honesty, responsibility and interpersonal solidarity. Otherwise, young people are doomed to moral confusion, lose their sense of security and become susceptible to all kinds of manipulations coming from the environment (Gogacz, 1993, p. 13). The relationship between emotional life, values and family can best be described by the term ‘family intimacy’, which refers to the emotional relationship between family members, their mutual

support and harmonious bond with each other. As observed by Wang (2016), intimacy positively affects college students’ subjective well-being, as it establishes a correct view of love, higher level of self-esteem, self-love, etc. When a family lacks this mutual attachment, it often leads to depression of young people (cf. Han, Wang, 2022, p. 2807).

Fourth, the working theoretical framework that would best fit our research, based on collecting the quantitative details concerning emotions and reasons behind them, particularly two variables, i.e. love and family value, is a blend (hybrid model) of two important theoretical cognitively-oriented models, namely, (i) Robert Plutchik’s theory (1980) of eight primary emotions; and (ii) Averill’s (1980) social-constructionist model of emotions.

To elucidate briefly, what is offered by Plutchik is his claim of eight primary emotions, i.e. anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, trust, and joy. We, hence, adopt Plutchik’s reasoning for the primacy of these emotions since each of them is a trigger of behaviour with high survival value. In effect, other emotions represent mixed or derivative states, occurring as the combinations, mixtures, or compounds of the primary emotions (*ibidem*). Consequently, our objective is to check the occurrence of the eight primary emotions, and their mixed states, in the students of Applied Linguistics of the University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska in Lublin (Poland).

The second element of the hybrid model is the social-constructivist theory of emotions, which emphasizes the role of individual development. The central argument in this model is that emotions are not only regulated but constituted by social expectations and rules. In other words, emotions are made meaningful through language use in the centre of social interactions. Therefore, in addition to cross-cultural variances which shape the emotional tunes in inhabitants, also societal structures (e.g. institutions, authorities, groups) may have an impact on the shape of emotional life of an individual. Indeed, emotions are socially, culturally and psychologically constructed (TenHouten, 2021, p. 610). Since discourse, as part

³ The original words given in Polish in all the cases of citations of Polish authors were translated into English by the author of this article.

of a language is one way of expressing one's feelings (Laskowska, 2016, p. 141), in our investigation we will try to examine the reasons of particular emotions, as provided by the students in their discourse, i.e. their statements in the survey material.

3. Methodology and database of the study

The study is to be quantitative, qualitative, and comparative in nature, with the aim to explore, process and compare the most and least experienced emotions in two groups of students, as well as to examine the main reasons behind these feelings.

The research group consists of: 115 students, out of 129 full-time students of Applied Linguistics at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, who belong to two survey groups, namely first-year students and fifth-year students. The total number of students of Applied Linguistics is 266, which means that 43% of the student population was surveyed as part of this study. The number of respondents is 89% of the planned measurement, which makes the study statistically significant. The first group of respondents includes 79 women and 13 men aged 19-20, who at the time of the survey were in their 6th month of studies at the university. The second research group consists of students of the last year of Applied Linguistics, i.e. 18 women and 5 men aged 23-24, who have six months left to complete their studies. In this regard, there is a noticeable numerical advantage of first-year students over final-year students, as well as a predominance of women over men participating in the study. The frequency of first-year respondents is 98%, and from the fifth year – 66% in the study.

The data on emotions was extracted from written discourse, i.e. anonymous questionnaires that do not include any sensitive personal data, i.e. name, surname, address or ID card data of the respondents. Nevertheless, the surveyed students were asked to provide information about their age, gender, year of study and answers to the questions. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, all collected data was anonymized, processed and digitized.

The questionnaire form (attached to the article as Appendix 1) was created and prepared in paper form by the author of this study. It contains: the purpose of the study and information on the use of data, a request to complete the survey and a set of two tasks. The first task is a quantitative set of questions in the form of a closed matrix with one possible answer, which were used to measure the type and frequency of occurrence of 32 specific emotions from Plutchik's list, illustrated in Table 1. The second task is a directly open question about the type of cause of the experienced emotional state.

The qualitative data were measured on weak scales (nominal and ordinal), while the quantitative data were measured on strong scales (interval and ratio). In task 1, the measurement of the type and frequency of emotions (occurrence and frequency of experienced 32 emotions) was examined by marking a given emotion and rating it on a scale from 0 to 7, where 0 means "I don't know (if I feel this way), and 7 means "I always feel this way)". Task 2 included a direct open question (for qualitative study of

Table 1. Basic emotions, their derivatives and mixtures

Basic emotion	Derivatives of basic emotions with higher intensity	Derivatives of basic emotions with lower intensity	Mixtures of two neighbouring basic emotions
joy	ecstasy	serenity	love
trust	admiration	acceptance	submission
fear	terror	apprehension	awe
surprise	amazement	distraction	disapproval
sadness	grief	pensiveness	remorse
disgust	loathing	boredom	contempt
anger	rage	annoyance	aggressiveness
anticipation	vigilance	interest	optimism
*[joy] cf. 1	ecstasy	serenity	

Own elaboration, based on Plutchik (1980).

emotions), which concerned the causes of the most common emotions in the respondents' lives, i.e. those emotions that they experience often, very often or always, i.e. were marked in task 1 on a scale of 5, 6 or 7. This task of measuring the most common triggers of emotions provided us with the qualitative data hidden in the students' discourse. Data obtained from the survey were grouped, and the paper version of the surveys was secured against access by third parties.

4. Discussion of the study results

The study has yielded a great deal of meaningful results concerning the emotional life of the first and fifth-year students of Applied Linguistics. In the open-ended question, high quality answers were obtained, expressed in an unconventional way and highly individualized.

Table 1 provides a list of 32 emotions from Plutchik's list that young people were asked to include in a survey questionnaire, with the intention of determining which of these emotions they experienced in their lives and with what intensity. As seen in Table 1, there are four main groups of emotions placed separately in the columns, with eight emotions in each. The first group refers to basic emotions, the second and third groups concern derivative states of the basic emotions, which are either more intensive than the basic emotion (group 2), or less intensive than the basic emotion (group 3). The last group is devoted to the blends of the two neighbouring basic emotions. Hence, the first task of the students was to indicate a proper number on the scale, next to the given emotion. The scale ranges from 0 to 7, where 0 stands for an answer "I don't know this emotion," and 7 stands for an answer "I always experience it."

Based on the results obtained from task 1 of the surveys – presented in the form of Table 2 – it can be observed that, when it comes to the emotions which are commonly associated as pleasant⁴ by female students, *love* recorded the highest percentage increase. In other words, the 5th-year female students

experience *love* 12% more often than the examined 1st-year female students. We can also observe an increase in other pleasant emotions among female students almost graduating from their studies, such as: *acceptance* by 5%, *interest* by 4%, *awe* by 4%, *ecstasy* by 3%, and *admiration* by 2%. In the case of men of the last year of Applied Linguistics studies, the highest increase in pleasant emotions was recorded in the case of *acceptance* and *joy*, both of which have increased by 29%. In addition, we have been noticed a significant rise of *interest* by 20%, *ecstasy* by 20%, *optimism* by 17%, *love* by 17%, *trust* by 17%, and *serenity* by 12%, while *admiration* has grown up by 5%.

Nonetheless, some pleasant emotions have fallen, when we compare the 5th-year with the 1st-year students, as seen in Table 2. In the women, a decrease has been noticed in a much larger number of cases of pleasant emotions, such as: *distraction* by 22%, *optimism* by 17%, *joy* by 7%, *surprise* by 7%, *amazement* by 5%, *anticipation* by 5%, *trust* by 3%, and *serenity* by 1%. The examined men of the 5th-year, however, have felt less *awe* by 23%, *vigilance* by 15%, *anticipation* by 11%, *amazement* by 8%, and *distraction* by 7%.

What is more, taking *anger*, *disgust*, *sadness*, and *fear*, as well as their derivative and mixture states as emotions with a high hedonic content of displeasure, the results obtained in the study reveal that most of the unpleasant emotions have weakened in the 5th-year students in comparison to the 1st-year students under scrutiny, as illustrated in Table 3. In particular, in the case of the female students, a noticeable decrease has been noticed regarding *annoyance* by 20%, *disapproval* by 15%, *terror* by 9%, *anger* by 7%, *fear* by 5%, *rage* by 5%, *grief* by 4%, *submission* by 4%, and *loathing* by 2%. The male students have experienced less *grief* by 31%, *sadness* by 26%, *fear* by 26%, *apprehension* by 26%, *disgust* by 23%, *pensiveness* by 18%, *terror* by 8%, *loathing* by 8%, and *submission* by 8%.

On the other hand, the percentage points of some unpleasant feelings have increased in the two control groups of students, as given in Table 3. The last-year female students have experienced more *apprehension*

4 Due to the space limit, we are not able neither to elaborate further on the issue of pleasant and unpleasant emotions vs. positive and negative emotions, nor the degree of pleasure or displeasure in emotions. An interested reader is referred to Cabral and de Almeida (2022) for more detailed distinctions.

Table 2. Percentage comparison of pleasant emotions between 1st-year and 5th-year students

Year of studies at Applied Linguistics at UMCS	trust	admiration	acceptance	love	joy	ecstasy	serenity	optimism	anticipation	vigilance	interest	surprise	amazement	distraction	awe
1 year, women	36.0%	18.0%	28.0%	49.0%	46.0%	2.0%	12.0%	28.0%	22.0%	28.0%	24.0%	12.0%	5.0%	27.0%	9.0%
1 year, men	23.0%	15.0%	31.0%	23.0%	31.0%	0.0%	8.0%	23.0%	31.0%	15.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.0%	31.0%	23.0%
5 year, women	33.0%	20.0%	33.0%	61.0%	39.0%	5.0%	11.0%	11.0%	17.0%	28.0%	28.0%	5.0%	0.0%	5.0%	13.0%
5 year, men	40.0%	20.0%	60.0%	40.0%	60.0%	20.0%	20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%

Own elaboration.

Table 3. Percentage comparison of unpleasant emotions between 1st-year and 5th-year students

Year of studies at Applied Linguistics at UMCS	aggressiveness	anger	rage	annoyance	contempt	disgust	loathing	boredom	remorse	sadness	grief	pensiveness	disapproval	fear	terror	apprehension	submission
1 year, women	1.0%	12.0%	10.0%	33.0%	3.0%	5.0%	3.0%	24.0%	17.0%	23.0%	17.0%	17.0%	20.0%	27.0%	9.0%	39.0%	9.0%
1 year, men	8.0%	23.0%	15.0%	38.0%	31.0%	23.0%	8.0%	31.0%	15.0%	46.0%	31.0%	38.0%	15.0%	46.0%	8.0%	46.0%	8.0%
5 year, women	0.0%	5.0%	5.0%	13.0%	5.0%	13.0%	5.0%	28.0%	17.0%	39.0%	13.0%	17.0%	5.0%	22.0%	0.0%	60.0%	5.0%
5 year, men	20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	40.0%	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%	0.0%

Own elaboration.

by 21%, *disgust* by 7%, *boredom* by 4%, *contempt* by 2%, and *sadness* by 16%, while the fifth-year male students have felt more *disapproval* by 25%, *anger* by 17%, *contempt* by 9%, *boredom* by 9%, *rage* by 5%, *remorse* by 5%, and *annoyance* by 2%.

Then, we moved on to the analysis of task 2, which required the students to provide for the reasons of the most frequent emotions in their lives, which they experience *often*, *very often* or *always*, as it was marked on the scale with the points 5, 6 or 7. Accordingly, when analysing the students' discourse concerning the reasons of their emotions in task two, we have noticed that both the female and male first-year students have seen no particular reason for their emotions. This conviction of the students may result either from their ignorance and unawareness of a given

emotion or from the inability to express themselves and their emotions. Then, the most frequent reason among the first-year female students is their concern about studies, exams, tension, and uncertainty before the exam session and new semester. The next most important cause of their emotional state refers to the women's relationships with other people and their family members. In the fourth place is their concern for the future and daily duties, such as being on time to catch the train back home. What is worrying is the fact that a very common reason of emotions that has been listed is the women's illness, their focus on failures, monotony in life, their thinking about the harmful memories of the past, about deceased people, missed opportunities, and the conflict with Russia. It is also quite frequent for them to focus

on conflicts and quarrels with their loved ones and roommates, as well as the lack of hope and faith in their own strength.

Among the triggers behind pleasant emotions, the 1st-year female students list: their curiosity about life, hobbies, music, TV series, movies, animals, nice weather, indulging in delicacies, and potential opportunities at the university, i.e. academic championships. The same reasons of emotions have appeared in the male students of the first-year; yet, with the predominance of their focus on worrying about conflicts with people. Also, challenges in their private life and difficult times in their relationships are often too overwhelming for them.

The 5th-year male students, similarly to the first-year students, most often mention the lack of a reason for their emotional states. Next, in the vast majority of cases, it is their loved ones, friends and family who are responsible for the occurrence of feelings. It is worth noting that women of the 5th-year often mention their fiancé as the source of their positive emotional states. Their concern about the future and upcoming life choices as well as worries about past events that have left an impact on their lives are the next most common reasons for emotion. Studying at the university as well as stress due to exams are not as common among the 5th-year students as they are among the first-year students. Their feeling of injustice, uncertainty and lack of self-acceptance and security are also frequent causes of their experienced emotions. However, the reasons behind pleasant feelings include reading books, travelling, working with children, which students undertake, e.g. as part of their teaching internships, and relaxation after their duties and tasks, e.g. by watching a TV series or a good movie. In the 5th-year men there are the same reasons for emotions as in their female colleagues. However, what is worth paying attention to is comparing their achievements and life to others, which seems to result from their natural male competition.

5. Concluding remarks

Undeniably, students go through different stages of their emotional life during their education (Dacko-Pikiewicz et al., 2021, p. 4). The results of

the 2020 meta-analysis prove that students with higher emotional intelligence show higher academic performance at school (Bucich, Brown, Double, Jiang, MacCann, Minbashian, 2020). Being aware of one's emotional condition not only stimulates the student's attention towards the learning process, but it also encourages them to maintain their learning and retention (Ganotice, Datu, King, 2016). Provided that students' emotional life is well-directed and in progress, success may occur faster than when based only on their logical or linguistic intelligence. Indeed, the success of the student is the result of both their reasoning capacities as well as their self-awareness, self-control, emotions, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (Kant, 2019, p. 442).

The research on emotions among the students of Applied Linguistics at UMCS presented in this article referred to the emotions experienced by 115 students of the 1st and 5th-year of Applied Linguistics. The study investigated the range and frequency of these states, checked the position of *love* among them, and examined the reasons hidden behind them, including the meaning of family for the students. In short, the obtained results reveal that the graduating men seem to become more, while the graduating women become less, *aggressive*, *angry*, *disapproving*, and *annoyed*, in comparison to the first-year students of these studies. However, in the case of the female population of respondents, the feelings of *fear*, *sadness* and *loathing* have been felt more often among the fifth-year students, when compared to their female colleagues from the first-year. *Boredom* and *contempt* have risen in both male and female students. When it comes to pleasant emotions, the results are generally comparable in both of the student groups. It has turned out that *love* has received the highest percentage increase in female students, hence, the 5th-year female students experience *love* 12% more often than the examined 1st-year female students. In the case of men of the last year of Applied Linguistics studies, *love* increased by 17%, which takes the third place of all the emotions under scrutiny. Yet, unfortunately, *optimism*, *joy*, *trust*, and *serenity* have decreased in the female students, but they have grown in the male students.

Among the reasons behind unpleasant feelings (as obtained from task 2), the respondents have indicated their ignorance of the nature of the unpleasant states, inability to deal with difficult situations relating to themselves, the academic world, family environments, and fear of new challenges, especially in the post-Covid-19 era. In addition, the results obtained from the surveys reveal that the main reasons for experiencing the particular emotion have shifted from being purely others' opinion-driven and only education-based – onto a feeling of one's personal value, getting directed into future family life and work perspective. In general, the emotional life in both female and male students of Applied Linguistics tends to develop and deepen in the values of love and family. Thus, no matter what stage of study or life university students are at, they still need to rely on the support of family and family intimacy, which provides for them a higher self-esteem and self-love (cf. Han, Wang, 2022, p. 2807).

Lastly, let us add that the conducted research has its limitations and requires further development in the future. The research conducted so far on emotions among the students of Applied Linguistics at UMCS is an initial stage. Thanks to the undertaken

case study, it was possible to achieve two goals, i.e.: (i) to construct a simple questionnaire (to measure the type, frequency and intensity scale of emotions) and (ii) to determine the general causes of experiencing positive and negative psycho-emotional states by the students of linguistics.

Nevertheless, it is worth applying the results obtained now in the real world, e.g. trying to help the students become aware of their emotional states and their causes and help them deal with these states in a constructive way. The future of every person, especially a young one, depends on their upbringing, and people with authority, i.e. parents, educators, teachers or guardians, are responsible for this process. "When talking about upbringing, its integral nature should be taken into account and its religious dimension should be strongly emphasized" (Borutka, 2020, p. 165).

Finally, it is worth trying to identify "emotions responsible for achievements" that are "directly related to actions or results of achievements" (Pekrun, 2014). This would be a future opportunity to undertake further research on both activity-related emotions, such as pleasure, frustration and boredom, and on results-related emotions, including joy, hope, pride, fear, hopelessness, shame and anger.

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Interculturalism – a challenge and a potential for marriage¹

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Abstract: The impact of culture on behaviour is particularly visible in romantic relationships. However, there are only few studies concerning the exceptional and unique aspects of intercultural marriages. As there is a great variety of such couples, it might be necessary to indicate their specificity, but it is also important to look for similarities. Two cultures in one marriage can be a challenge for the spouses and may trigger strategies aimed at protecting such a relationship. That will require a mobilization of the potential of a couple for building a life together. Based on the review of the studies, in this article the authors presented the most commonly reported challenges faced by intercultural couples. The most severe of them appeared to be the problems connected with the family of origin, communication, money management and confronting cultural values. The article shows some strategies applied by the partners to solve untypical and unexpected difficulties. It appears that the ways of coping with such problems play a protective role for the marriage. Nevertheless, whether a couple will be able to take up protective actions by applying proper strategies and whether they will prove effective depends on the resources of the partners. The authors also point to the significance of the most important relational resources necessary to build and maintain an intercultural relationship, activate strategies for achieving a cultural compromise and face a possible social disapproval. However, it should be emphasized that developing adaptability to a new culture, improving mutual relational skills, understanding the expectations of the partner and their social group as well as verifying the applied strategies are all complex time-consuming processes. The above-mentioned challenges faced by mixed couples were described not only in the recent studies but also in the previously conducted ones. That means that despite the promoted openness for diversity and inclusivity, the spouses from different cultures still experience similar problems. Taking this into account and some context variables difficult to control (cultural, social, situational ones), no wonder that the assessment of the quality of intercultural relationships is ambiguous.

Keywords: challenges, intercultural marriages, relational resources, strategies of coping with cultural differences

Introduction

Progressing globalization and wide possibilities of making contacts with people from other countries and even continents result in the opening to new cultures. Migrations, tourism development as well as business trips connected with scientific exchange and education encourage close relationships of an emotional nature. An increase in the number of intercultural marriages is also being observed in Poland. In 2023, 5655 mixed marriages were registered. More Polish women (3040) than men (2615) married people from other European countries and non-European ones. Polish women most frequently chose husbands from Ukraine, England, Germany and Belarus. On the other hand, Polish men most often married women from Ukraine,

Belarus, Germany and England (Demographic Yearbook, 2024). Taking into account the increasing emigration of Ukrainians to Poland, we can still expect Polish-Ukrainian marriages to be the most common and their number to grow.

Due to cultural diversity of the people who get married, such marriages are given different names. If the partners' nationality is different, their relationships are referred to as binational (Szukalski, 2015) or cross-border (Cukras-Stelągowska, 2022) ones. If there are more differences, they may be called cross-cultural, multicultural or intercultural ones (Lendzion, 2017; Uhlich, Luginbuehl, Schoebi, 2021). However, these terms are used interchangeably. Tianna Leung (2021) suggests that mixed

¹ Article in Polish language: https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/61P_Jani.pdf

relationships should be treated as intercultural ones, which allows us to take wider culture areas under consideration.

There are hardly any studies devoted to the exceptional and unique aspects of these relationships. The ones conducted so far point to the problems connected with the necessity to meet different expectations, value systems, religions, family-related beliefs, child-rearing as well as the perception of marital roles and facing communication challenges between the partners (Bustamante, Nelson, Henriksen, Monakes, 2011; Janicka, Wnuk, 2021; Miluska, 2018; Okemini, 2016). A fundamental difference, which is the basis of the above mentioned problems, is the one occurring between individualistic cultures and collectivist ones. They are responsible for shaping agentic and communal orientations, which determine social expectations, attitudes and behaviours (Wojciszke, Cieślak, 2014).

The influence of culture on behaviour is especially visible in romantic relationships (Hashimoto, Mojaverian and Kim, 2012). Their difficulties may concern not only closeness and intimacy, rules of functioning but also social approval and integration, which is so important for a young couple (Skowroński, Othman, Siang, Han, Yang, Waszyńska, 2014). It can happen that some cultural practices and beliefs of the partner cause social disapproval. Such couples may experience discrimination or rejection from the family and friends (Leung, 2021). Therefore, mixed marriages are more often exposed to dissatisfaction, conflicts and tension than monocultural ones.

Two cultures, combined in one marriage, may generate complex problems. The researchers look for the key ones which might be the most serious challenge for mixed marriages.

1. Challenges for intercultural marriages

Mixed marriages face numerous challenges, which are usually related to the cultural differences of the partners and the individual life history of a couple.

It is difficult or even impossible to carefully analyse all challenges. The most recent qualitative and quantitative research of intercultural marriages,

conducted by Anthony Machette and Ioane Cionea (2023), revealed the most common ones reported by couples in the USA. The ranking of the reported 29 challenges allowed us to identify the four most important ones: 1 – family (problems with parents-in-law), 2 – communication, 3 – financial ones and 4 – problems related to culture values.

The most severe issue for mixed marriages was coping with parents-in-law overly involved in the life of a couple. The participants of the research also paid attention to the language barriers with the partner's family (Machette, Cionea, 2023). It turns out that intercultural couples complain about a lot more problems with the parents and other relatives than monocultural ones (Bustamante et al., 2011; Leung, 2021).

Referring to difficulties of this kind, one must point out to the significance which is attributed to the family. Culture sets patterns and norms that regulate the family life and the privacy limits. Therefore, what might seem excessive interference in one culture can be perceived as something absolutely normal and even desirable in another one.

In some cultures we can observe a high dependence on the family of origin. This strong bond includes not only maintaining close relationships with them but also treating them as a priority and taking their opinions into account to make important decisions (Campos, Scott, Roesch, Gonzalez, Hooker, Sheila, Castañeda, Giachello, Perreira, 2019; Padilla, Jager, Updegraff, McHale, Umaña-Taylor, 2020). Such excessive loyalty towards the family and the sense of commitment can be incomprehensible for the partner and may lead to conflict (Uhlich, Luginbuehl, Schoebi, 2021).

The family can show disapproval of the marriage or the different cultural origin of the son- or daughter-in-law. The most severe aspect of it is racial prejudice. It is targeted at the partner, the relationship or even the children. Unfavourable or stigmatizing attitudes of the parents-in-law may encourage conflicts and deprive the partners of their so important and expected support (Machette, Cionea, 2023). Lack of family support inhibits marriage development, increases stress connected with traditional values and rituals and even leads to divorce (Bustamante et al., 2011; Campos and Kim, 2017).

Family support is more significant than that received from friends or acquaintances (Walecka-Matyja, Janicka, 2021). It is necessary for the partners' health and well-being (Campos et al., 2019). It is an important factor sustaining intercultural marriages (Skowroński et al., 2014). The participants of the study who reported their parents-in-law as the greatest challenge indicated their negative impact on their marriage (Machette, Cionea, 2023).

Another challenge for intercultural marriages was communication problems. They are usually caused by language barriers and cultural rules of communication. They are well-explained by the dimensions of cultural differences identified by Hofstede (2011)² describing specific styles of reactions, expression, revealing feelings and communication with partners, which can be expressed differently and misinterpreted by a person from a different culture. The previous studies confirm that they can bring about disagreements between the partners.

Culture affects the way how individual people learn to communicate verbally and non-verbally in a proper manner and read the complex system of meanings. People from mixed relationships do not always interpret the context of the spouse's statements and their non-verbal messages correctly. They feel anxious when cultural differences do not allow for expressing emotions. They are not able to comply to the communication rules binding in a different culture, to which the partner belongs, and they are afraid that they will not come up to their expectations (Janicka, Wnuk, 2021; Machette, Cionea, 2023; Miluska, 2018). Learning about and understanding the partner's culture makes it possible to discover differences in communication.

Money management is another challenge faced by intercultural relationships. This problem might not seem something exceptional as it is also experienced by monocultural couples. However, the scientists found out that the belief whether finances should be shared or separate has a cultural dimension. According to the studies, it appeared that the couples who appreciated joint finances the most were the couples from Spain (after: Machette, Cionea, 2023) and Ukraine

(Shut, 2024), whereas the British and Swedish couples preferred financial independence. The Swedish couples, however, were characterized by more egalitarian financial practices than the British ones (Roman, Vogler, 2013). Thus, the partners' attitude to finances and money management may be affected by their origin and cultural values (Machette, Cionea, 2023). They determine the level of a woman's economic dependence on a man. Cultural and economic factors are interconnected and reinforce each other. They can also intensify differences in availability of socioeconomic resources, which is not without significance for the quality of marriage (Roman, Vogler, 2013). It turns out that the strategies of money management affect the interactions and the range of interdependence of the partners. The couples who have joint accounts experience less financial disagreement in comparison to the couples who keep their money on separate accounts and the ones who share them only in part (Kridahl, Duvander, 2023).

Differences of cultural values, rules and traditions, which may affect the partners' life together, were indicated only as the fourth most important challenge by mixed marriages. Most of the studies highlight them as the greatest problem for intercultural relationships. This is because values internalized in the socialization process shape not only the social behaviours of an individual but also their beliefs and expectations about marriage and the roles played therein. Therefore, the greater the difference of attitudes, beliefs and values, the higher the risk of conflicts (Skowroński et al., 2014). The situation becomes even more complex if one of the partners represents the system of values of a numerically and culturally dominant society whereas the other partner identifies with the system of values of a national minority. In such a case, inconsistency of family messages and those from outside the family may threaten the integration of a relationship (Moroz, 2020).

The main area of disagreement between the spouses appeared to be the interpretation of the role of a woman in marriage, which was connected with a division of house chores (Machette, Cionea, 2023). Male part-

2 Cultural rules of communication were described in detail in the article: Janicka and Wnuk (2021). Partners' communication in intercultural marriages. *Scientific Quarterly Fides Et Ratio*, 46(2), 142-172. <https://doi.org/10.34766/fetr.v46i2.871>

ners usually identify with traditional roles and tend to maintain them, which they consider to be more advantageous for marriage (Bustamante et al., 2011; Uhlich et al., 2021). But the studies have shown that an unequal and unfair division of house chores can reduce satisfaction with marriage. It happens that women and men realize the existence of such cultural values, which may affect the choice of a spouse. It has been proved that 24% of women, immigrants from Asia, involve in intercultural marriages with men from America, hoping to have an egalitarian division of chores in comparison to 9% of Asian men, who, due to that, avoid such relationships with American women (after: Skowroński et al., 2014). Even partners from European countries and other territorially close ones may demonstrate such differences. That was proved by the comparative studies of Ukrainian women in intercultural relationships (with Polish men) and monocultural ones (with Ukrainian men) conducted by Diana Shut. Monocultural couples appeared to be more traditional as regards a form of a close relationship and a division of chores in comparison to intercultural ones. 67.4% of monocultural couples were in formal relationships – marriages – whereas only 32.6% of intercultural ones were formally married. Ukrainian women appreciate the partner's share in house chores (cleaning, cooking, care of children, shopping, etc.). This assessment was a bit better for mixed relationships than monocultural ones. The man's contribution in house chores appeared to be significant for the satisfaction of the woman especially in the dimension of closeness and intimacy (Shut, 2024). Sociological studies also prove that relationships of Poles are more often of an egalitarian nature than Ukrainian ones (Szukalski, 2020).

Referring to the four mentioned challenges, it can be noticed that especially the first three of them (family, communication and finances) can occur in all marriages, regardless of their cultural structure. However, it can be expected that these problems will be more severe and harder to correct in intercultural marriages than in monocultural ones. An important thing is the power of cultural heritage, which enhances the differences between the partners. The more distant cultures meet in one marriage, the stronger the tensions and conflicts are in all the four areas.

It is also important in what country mixed couples live. The studies conducted in France, Canada and the USA showed that the least lasting mixed marriages were the ones living in France. On the other hand, the divorce rate for intercultural marriages in Canada and the USA was even slightly lower than for monocultural ones (Project – *Integration of International Marriages: Empirical Evidence from Europe and North America*, after: Hruzdz-Matuszczyk, 2021).

The presented challenges, specific for mixed couples, were described in the most recent studies and the previously conducted ones. That means that despite the promoted openness to diversity and inclusivity, the spouses from different cultures still experience similar problems.

2. Interculturalism as a potential for marriage

The cultural context of problems makes them more complex. Therefore, it is difficult to compare mixed marriages to monocultural ones. Each new relationship, especially a close one, is both a challenge and hope. Each of them requires proper preparation, yet the scope of knowledge and possibilities must be greater when marriage is intercultural. The people in such a relationship must be prepared to face cultural differences, must be willing and open to meet and understand the cultural determinants of the partner's behaviour and the rules binding in their social group, especially the family. That brings the need for change also in one's own behaviour. That is because it is essential that differences strengthen the potential of a couple to build a life together.

2.1. Coping with challenges – strategies taken up by partners

A mixed relationship requires greater flexibility and creativity due to experiencing difficulties, which are not infrequently untypical and unexpected. The partners cope with them taking up various strategies. The one that is especially desirable is adaptation. Its basis is to understand that the cultural heritage of each person is specific. It is acceptance, not critique,

that is necessary for good married life and supports the adaptation process (Blount, Young, 2015). However, it needs time, therefore, couples with longer experience have better chances as their knowledge about the partner and their culture is greater.

A wider process which is connected with adaptability is acculturation. Mixed couples apply some of its specific strategies. They can be advantageous and disadvantageous for such a relationship. One of the strategies that may threaten a close relationship is cultural distance, demonstrated by marginalization or separation. Marginalization assumes complete withdrawal from both the cultures and possibly maximum reduction of differences. In turn, separation means separating from the partner's culture, for example: through rejecting it and maintaining contacts only with representatives of your own culture. Also, it can be possible for both the partners to separate completely from the unfriendly society. On the other hand, a beneficial strategy is integration orientation, which means heading towards biculturalism. It is demonstrated by attempting to maintain and cultivate your own culture and showing favour and tolerance to the partner's culture. The opposite of this strategy is assimilation, i.e. a tendency to completely assume the new culture and reject your own. That can be caused by perceiving the partner's culture as better, more superior than your own. That is the case when the partner's culture is dominant in the society and being a part of it is regarded as a kind of upward mobility (Boski, 2022; Moroz, 2020). Taking up strategies makes it possible to overcome cultural barriers, although acculturative stress can limit that. It appears that women acquire language skills more willingly and faster, adapt to a new culture more easily and show a higher level of acculturalism than men (Boski, 2022; Hruzd-Matuszczyk, 2021; Uhlich et al., 2021; Sowa-Bethane, 2019).

It has been found out that intercultural couples use similar strategies of coping with marital stressors that can be reinforced by cultural differences. On the basis of empirical research on intercultural communication and marriage counselling, six strategies of that kind have been identified. They include: gender role flexibility, which assumes communicating expectations; humour – important for releasing

tension; respect for the partner's culture – concession, acceptance of the rules, traditions and customs of the partner; finding similarities – beliefs, practices; cultural reformulation or development of mixed values and expectations that could redefine an intercultural relationship and general acknowledgement of other cultures – acceptance of cultural differences (Bustamante et al., 2011).

Furthermore, attention is paid to the potential of family interculturalism, especially in case of marriages concluded in border areas, where the partners are members of national/ethnic minorities and representatives of dominant cultures. That requires making some efforts in order to reach agreement concerning the chosen strategies. In a situation when parents-in-law were unfriendly or interfered too much in the life of a couple, the partners applied the strategy of avoidance or tactical preparation to family visits. The majority of the respondents admitted that they decided to avoid interacting with the parents-in-law due to demands they set for their marriage (Machette, Cionea, 2023). Avoidance is not a constructive strategy and proves that the couples did not cope well with unfavourable attitude of the parents-in-law. However, the research shows that negative public perception can activate similar actions of the partners, which may protect their relationship and strengthen the bond between them. The partners become more resilient and able to cope with adversities (Blount, Young, 2015; Byrd, Garwick, 2006).

The most effective strategy used to work through cultural differences was taking an interest in the partner's culture, looking especially for cultural similarities. Discovering similar beliefs and values and focusing on shared goals allow the partners to strengthen their close relationship (Leung, 2021). Moreover, concentrating on similarities in their world-view or their lifestyle can help to build the common ground, deflecting attention from the differences between the partners (Boratvi in., 2021; West, Magee, Gordon, Gullett, 2014). That is connected with positive attitude, since building their own culture the couples are not obliged to abandon their individual cultural beliefs. This is possible as culture is not a binary system. It can evolve and change through personal development and development of

the partners' relationship. Therefore, creation of the third culture ensures the most favourable result for a close relationship (Leung, 2021).

Identification of similarities and differences has a positive effect on the search of the reasons of conflicts and the ways to solve them. Exchange of knowledge with the partner raises awareness regarding the problems connected with inequality, racism, power relation, political discourse (Djurdjovic, Girony, 2016). Mixed relationships give an opportunity to find a lot of cultural points of reference through experiencing and integrating different value systems. Thanks to them the people in a relationship acquire new competencies by participating in customs, traditions, rites which they have been unfamiliar with so far (Bhugun, 2019). Learning about other culturally conditioned values and behaviours can encourage you to rethink your own self and your own culture (Djurdjovic, Girony, 2016).

2.2. Role of relational resources

In order to take up proper strategies of coping with cultural differences and try to cooperate and communicate effectively, the partners need to have specific competencies, which are connected with their individual resources, especially relational ones.

In contact with a new culture, competencies must be considered in three areas: a cognitive one (knowledge about the norms and rules binding in a specific culture), an emotional one (sensitivity to diversity) and a behavioural one (behaviours, abilities) (Głażewska, 2020). They are essential for similar understanding of reality, mutual acceptance, sensitivity and affection and joint actions. They determine the sense of closeness, the emotional bond between the spouses and the effectiveness of solving conflicts (Ryś, Greszta, Grabarczyk, 2019). The indicated competencies depend on the resources of the partners in intercultural relationships, since it is regarded that the main reason of marital conflicts is psychological differences, possibly psychological differences combined with cultural ones (Jassem-Staniecka, 2018).

The studies conducted so far show numerous personality traits and relational features responsible for marriage integration. They have been described in

detail in psychological literature. The abundance of the analysed factors of marriage success makes it more difficult to verify them fully and reliably. Therefore, it is significant to highlight the ones which are necessary for initiating and maintaining close intercultural relationships and coping with challenges. They should play a protective role for intercultural marriages and strengthen the partners' chances for a life together.

An intercultural relationship is initiated by love and some features not connected with culture, such as attractiveness, age, education or economic status (Boratav et al., 2021). People who are ready to live in a mixed relationship are usually characterized by greater social openness, acceptance of differences and a higher level of involvement (Bhugun, 2019). The studies confirm that these features are also decisive for such a relationship to be successful.

It is love that is a guarantee of an intercultural couple to have a life together. But, to confront differences and adversities effectively, it is necessary to have relational resources, the most important of which are empathy and trust.

Empathy is responsible for intercultural sensitivity, respect and tolerance. It is connected with the ability of assuming the partner's perspective, which gives better understanding of their otherness and improves communication (Machette, Ioana, 2023). Empathy in marriage is one of the basic conditions of intimacy, acceptance, openness and trust (Landwójtowicz, 2019).

Mutual trust ensures or even increases the sense of security in a relationship (Wade and Robinson, 2012). The people who trust their partner are more willing to take care of and satisfy their needs and more often tend to solve conflicts in a compromise and constructive way (Balliet and Van Lange, 2013). They also better cope in any situations of social exclusion (Yanagisawa, Masui, Furutani, Nomura, Ura, Yoshida 2011).

Trust is connected with a tendency to forgive (Kim, Weisberg, Simpson, Oriña, Farrell, Johnson, 2015). The studies have shown that kindness for the partner who did something wrong is crucial for the actions leading to effective conflict solving. However, the chances for forgiveness are greater when partners are connected by an emotional bond (Ryś et al., 2019).

The mentioned relational resources are a good foundation to build and strengthen a mixed relationship and are indispensable for taking up proper strategies, important to reach a cultural compromise and face any possible social disapproval.

Conclusion

There are few studies devoted to the exceptional and unique aspects of intercultural marriages. Their diversity makes it essential to indicate their specificity, and also look for similarities of challenges and ways to cope with them.

In this article we presented the most difficult challenges, which are similar for mixed couples, and the most frequently used strategies of coping with cultural differences. Their effectiveness depends on the partners' resources, which they bring into marriage. It is usually a strong affection that brings them together, which guarantees readiness for change, for example: readiness to live outside the mother country, be separated from the family, friends. Apart from that, the people who decide to marry someone from a different culture are open to otherness and willing to look for similarities connected, for example, with education, interests, hobbies. Focusing on them rather than on differences in appearance (race, colour of skin), ethnicity or place of residence guarantees the marriage success.

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The couples who behave like that will undoubtedly cope better with challenges connected with contacts with another culture, ostracism of a new social group or, which appeared the most severe challenge, lack of acceptance from the spouse's family.

Taking into account the challenges faced by mixed couples, their coping strategies and different relational potential of the partners, no wonder that the studies of the quality of such relationships are ambiguous. On the one hand, they are regarded as high-risk and lower quality relationships (Blount, Young, 2015; Skowroński et al., 2013) but, on the other hand, their quality is deemed higher in comparison with monocultural couples (Froidevaux, Campos, 2023; Sowa-Behtane, 2019). Some other studies prove that relationships of this kind are not more problematic than monocultural ones, and the difficulties most couples face are similar (Kenney, Kenney, 2012; Machette, Ioana, 2021).

It should be emphasized that the perception of a relationship and its quality assessment can be modified by context variables difficult to control (cultural, social, situational ones) and the length of a couple's life together. At the same time, a development of adaptability to a new culture, learning and understanding the expectations of the partner and their social group and verifying the applied strategies are complex processes which need to be considered in a time perspective.

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Shaping patriotic attitudes in the Pilecki family¹

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Abstract: The research refers to shaping of patriotic attitudes amongst renowned Polish families. The objective of the research is to answer to the following question: How patriotic attitudes had been shaped in the Pilecki family? The author applies the history-pedagogy method. Pilecki family history in the period between the second half of the 19th century and the thirties of the 20th century (repressions after the January Uprising in particular) has been analysed. Three generations of the Pilecki family have been described: Julian and Ludwika Pilecki, Witold and Maria Pilecki, and finally Witold and Maria's children. The author concentrates on the three following levels of the shaping of attitudes: emotional, behavioural, cognitive. *Results and conclusions:* The results of the analysis show that, in the Pilecki family, patriotism had been taking shape at all three levels. At the emotional level, an atmosphere of patriotism had been present and recollections of the Tsarist regime's injustices had been cultivated. At the behavioural level, young people had been encouraged to fill the ranks of scouting organizations and to cultivate Polish language and traditions. It happened to move to other places where Russification pressure had been weaker. The repressions had been met with both courage and determination. At the cognitive level, interesting discussions concerning Polish history were regularly organized. The knowledge on this subject had been transferred to the youth. Polish literature and paintings had been carefully studied. Cognitive actions had been carefully planned. Children's acumen had been shaped thanks to constructive games and working with books. Patriotism engraved in memories of the insurgents had also been consolidated. The research demonstrates how patriotism had been shaping itself in the Pilecki family. The next challenge is to find out how this information can be used in modern times. Situations and episodes from the Pilecki family's life, described in the article, can serve as inspiration in shaping patriotism.

Keywords: Witold Pilecki, Steadfast Soldiers, patriotism, history-pedagogy method, Pilecki family

Introduction

The name Pilecki has become widely known thanks to its distinguished representative, Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki, a celebrated hero of the Polish post-war anti-communist and independence underground.

Members of the underground, known as the Steadfast Soldiers², actively resisted the subjugation of Poland by communist authorities. For nearly the entire second half of the twentieth century, the history of the Steadfast Soldiers was distorted, and the truth was concealed. After 1989, they became known primarily to history enthusiasts, but gradually Poles became increasingly aware of the heroism of these forgotten heroes and their contributions to the homeland. The establishment of 1 March as the National Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers in 2011 signifies significant positive changes in certain areas of Polish civic consciousness.

In academic terms, the biographies of many Steadfast Soldiers have been subjected to thorough historical analysis. However, the challenge now is to analyse these biographies from a psychopedagogical perspective. There is a gradual increase in studies of this kind (Juroszek 2022, 2023a, 2023b; Rybicki, 2022; Sabat, 2016, 2018), however, it still remains a proverbial "drop in the ocean." Thus, the author of this article aims to encourage educators, psychologists, sociologists, theologians, and other representatives of social and humanistic disciplines to take up this topic.

Both Polish historians (Cyra, Wysocki, 1997; Mandrela, 2019; Pawłowicz, 2017; Płuzański, 2015; Tracki, 2014; Wysocki, 2013) and foreign scholars (Patricelli, 2011) regard Witold Pilecki as an outstanding

1 Article in Polish language: https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/61P_Juro.pdf

2 Another, commonly used term is „The Cursed Soldiers” (Śląski, 1996)

and steadfast figure. The renowned English historian Michael Foot included Witold Pilecki among the six bravest individuals fighting in the resistance during World War II (Foot, 2003). For researchers, the question of the educational environment that shaped him becomes particularly interesting. The analysis of the history of families like the Pileckis is valuable for all Poles, as it provides guidance for shaping patriotic attitudes in their own families.

In the literature on the subject, an attitude is defined as a relatively enduring evaluation of phenomena, people, objects, or ideas (Aronson, Wilson, Akert, 1997, p. 313). This evaluation is reflected in beliefs, emotions, and actions. In other words, an attitude consists of components that can complement, permeate, and occur in varying proportions: emotional (reactions towards the attitude object), cognitive (beliefs, thoughts about the attitude object), and behavioural (actions, observable behaviours). Many researchers emphasise that, in a significant simplification, an attitude is a stored evaluation – whether good or bad – of a given object (Aronson et al. 1997, p. 313).

1. Research objectives and method

This article aims to analyse how the process of shaping attitudes – in terms of patriotism – took place in the Pilecki family. The figure of Witold draws particular attention to the question of the educational environment that shaped him.

The research objective is to answer the following research question: How were patriotic attitudes shaped in the Pilecki family?

In this article, the term “family” is defined as a group of people descended from a common ancestor. A family encompasses at least three generations: grandparents, parents, and children. Patriotism is defined as love for one’s homeland and readiness to make sacrifices for the good of its citizens (Rynio, 2018; Zwoliński, 2015; Żaryn, 2020). It is assumed that a patriot is someone who loves one’s country and is willing to make sacrifices for it.

The historical-pedagogical biography method was employed, which aims to show the patterns and ideals of upbringing during a given historical

period and the ways they were realised in practice (Szulakiewicz, 2004, 2015a, 2015b). The childhood and adolescence of Witold Pilecki (along with his siblings) were described against the backdrop of the history of his parents – Julian Pilecki and Ludwika Pilecka, born Osiecimska. Witold’s youth was also described based on the memories of his adult children: Zofia Pilecka-Optułowicz (2017) and Andrzej Pilecki (Pilecki, Krzyszkowski, Wasztyl, 2015). Reference was made to a biographical study devoted to the childhood, adolescence, and youth of Witold Pilecki by Krzysztof Tracki (2014).

Witold Pilecki (1901-1948) came from a noble family with the coat of arms Leliwa. The Pilecki family’s ancestral home was in the vicinity of Nowogródek. As a result of the repressions for Józef Pilecki’s (Witold’s grandfather) involvement in the January Uprising, the Tsarist authorities confiscated nearly all of the family’s property (Pawłowicz, 2017, p. 25). In search of work, the Pileckis dispersed throughout the Russian Empire. Julian Pilecki, Witold’s father, obtained the position of a forest inspector in northern Russia (in the Karelia region), in the town of Olonets. Julian married Ludwika Osiecimska, with whom he had five children, including his son Witold. After a few years, Ludwika Pilecka moved to the vicinity of Vilnius with her children. There, Witold met Maria Ostrowska (1906-2002), with whom he had two children: Zofia and Andrzej. The Pilecki family lived in the family estate of Sukurcze, rebuilt from ruins, and was the only estate that remained in the hands of the Pilecki family after the Tsarist confiscations (Pilecka-Optułowicz, 2017, p. 24, 27).

The historical context of these analyses coincided with a period of repression (and memories of them) following the January Uprising. The Tsarist authorities’ policy towards Poland was decidedly reactionary, based on the principles of Tsarist autocracy, Orthodoxy as the state religion and politically privileged, and state centralism that was completely hostile to any aspirations of the Polish nation (Buszko, 2000, p. 67).

Tsarist repressions were drastic. The members of the uprising’s authorities and commanders of the units were sentenced to death, which often also affected lower-ranking soldiers. As Jerzy Zdrada emphasises, for those up in arms, death was anticipated; for instance, in the territory

of the Kingdom of Poland, no less than 475 people were executed, and in Lithuania, 180 (Zdrada, 2015, p. 497). At least 38,000 people were exiled to forced settlement or hard labour deep in Russia, widespread land confiscation and high tributes were imposed, as well as orders for the sale of land (especially in Lithuania, which allowed for extensive abuses by officials and gendarmes), (Zdrada, 2015, p. 497).

The process of shaping patriotic attitudes in the Pilecki family was analysed at three levels: emotional, behavioural, and cognitive.

2. Shaping patriotic attitudes in the Pilecki family – emotional level

Witold's emotionality was positively influenced by the warm, friendly, and cheerful atmosphere of the multi-generational family. Witold and his siblings often spent their holidays at the estate of their maternal relatives in Hawryłków, located at the eastern edge of Belarus.

"The summer in Hawryłków was like a ray of sunshine, a brief and idyllic episode, like one that occurs in the midst of a cold and cloudy day, as in Karelia" (Tracki, 2014, p. 56).

The young Pileckis spent their summer months there from early childhood. Carefree play, the affectionate approach of relatives, and the beauty of idyllic landscapes shaped the children's sensitivity, including their connection to their homeland's nature.

Researchers studying the theme of love for the homeland emphasise that in the biographies of well-known patriots (such as Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Karol Wojtyła, Jerzy Popiełuszko), one can observe the phenomenon of linking the notion of patriotism with an emotional bond to one's nation and its history, as well as a spiritual belonging to the community that constitutes the homeland (Gronkowska-Kozia, 2021, p. 207; Rynio, 2019, p. 106)³.

In educating for patriotism, the Pilecki family often referred to the child's emotions, creating a family atmosphere full of warmth and emotional moments,

which occurred, for example, during family celebrations expressed through singing patriotic songs. Zofia, Witold's daughter, recalled the time spent with her parents in the 1930s at the family estate in Sukurcze:

"Sometimes we played scenes where a little girl invites a hussar into the house to sing patriotic songs with the family. These historical images were close to us because we were raised in an atmosphere of patriotism and love for our homeland" (Pilecka-Optułowicz, 2017, p. 81).

In the Pilecki family, patriotic emotions were aroused in children from early childhood through constant references to the January Uprising. This uprising caused a significant shock throughout the family, among Witold's ancestors on both the paternal and maternal sides. Krzysztof Tracki, the author of the biography dedicated to Witold's youth, states that the uprising, including the tragic fates of its participants and their heroism, was continuously revived in the memory of his father, Julian Pilecki, and in the fervent stories of his mother, Ludwika. These stories ignited the children's imagination, shaped their sensitivity, and provided many emotional moments.

The Tsarist repressions left a lasting mark on the Pileckis' emotional landscape, intensifying negative feelings towards the Russians, such as bitterness, resentment, and grief. Following the January Uprising, the Polish nobility was perceived by the Russians as a strongly reactionary class that was a source of continuous unrest. In quoting Tracki's words:

"It is worth recalling that these were times of far-reaching depolonisation, when in the eyes of Russian elites the words Pole and Catholic meant the same as revolutionary and troublemaker. The Tsarist regime stubbornly pursued the Russification of the lands assigned to it and the complete 'de-Polonisation' of offices" (Tracki, 2014, p. 33-34).

The confiscation of property was a devastating blow to the Polish nobility. This blow also affected the Pileckis. In March 1864, six months after the fall of the January Uprising, Witold's grandfather, Józef Pilecki, was arrested and, after several months in prison, was exiled to Siberia, where he spent six years. This exile was associated with the loss of the

³ This emotional trait of patriotism, filled with feelings of love for the homeland, can be seen in the life of e.g. Stefan Wyszyński, who emphatically stated „I love my homeland more than my own heart” (Wyszyński, 2020).

family estate in Starojelnia. The family retained only the estate in Sukurcze, which, after years, was developed and rebuilt by Witold⁴.

The memory of the Tsarist repressions was very strong among Poles. In honour of this memory, Witold's mother instilled in her children recollections of the so-called "Hangman" notorious for his cruelty towards Poles⁵, whom he ordered to be murdered, proclaiming the terrifying thesis that the most useful for the Russian Empire were "Poles who are hanged" (Tracki, 2014, p. 25):

"When in 1898 this *prochvost* (scoundrel) received a monument in Vilnius (erected in front of the palace of the governor-general of Lithuania), it became the target of unrefined attacks from the city's residents. The young Pileckis found themselves among the fervent opponents of this monument" (Tracki, 2014, p. 25-26).

The persecution of Poles had results contrary to the Tsarist regime's intentions and strengthened the repressed in their patriotic attitudes. They undertook actions that reinforced patriotic attitudes in their charges. One such action was signing children up for membership in scouting organisations. These initiatives, fitting into the behavioural aspect of shaping attitudes, were a manifestation of parents' concern for the continuous, unwavering reinforcement of the spirit of independence in their children.

The following part of the article will describe how the Pileckis shaped patriotism at the next, behavioural level.

3. Shaping patriotic attitudes in the Pilecki family – behavioural level

At the behavioural level, the promotion of patriotic attitudes occurred through participation in scouting organisations. These organisations aimed to develop courage, acuity, skill, and bravery in the youth. During the partitions, just before the First World War,

when Polish scouting was just beginning to emerge, the readiness to fight for independence was regarded as extremely important, alongside the previously mentioned qualities. Andrzej Małkowski (1911), often considered the symbolic founder of scouting in Poland, claimed that Polish scouting is "scouting + independence".

Witold Pilecki was involved in scouting from an early adolescence. As his daughter Zofia recalled:

"He became a scout and a troop leader at the age of fourteen. Kids had to grow up, and mature very quickly those days" (Pilecka-Optułowicz, 2017, p. 143).

At the behavioural level, the shaping of patriotic attitudes in the Pilecki family was inseparably linked to the care for preserving the Polish language, customs, and traditions. In this regard, as Zofia noted in her memories, the grandparents decided to move to Vilnius. For financial reasons, Julian Pilecki did not change his family's place of residence and remained in Karelia, continuing to work for the State Forest Management (Pawłowicz, 2017, p. 24).

As great patriots, the Pileckis made a significant effort to protect their offspring from Russification and to relocate to another region of Eastern *Kresy* (borderlands), where the process was less intensified. It is worth quoting Zofia Pilecka-Optułowicz's words, who described the actions taken by her grandmother (Witold's mother):

"To prevent the Russification of the children, she sent the two oldest, Maria and Witold, to a Polish school in Vilnius to receive an education; at that time, she also moved with her four children to Vilnius to stay with her relatives. The grandfather remained in Olonets for financial reasons" (Pilecka-Optułowicz, 2017, p. 142).

Zofia further recounted her grandmother's efforts:

"She was very careful that the children did not succumb to Russification, that they did not even adopt a Russian accent. Witold's father was also a great patriot and cared about the upbringing of the children, but he worked a lot, so the greatest

4 At the Sukurcze estate, rebuilt after years by Witold, his family spent several wonderful years. Unfortunately, as a result of further wartime turmoil, this Pilecki estate was also completely destroyed.

5 Mikhail Muravyov (1796-1866) – Russian count, governor-general of Vilnius during the suppression of the January Uprising, known for his brutal eradication of Polish influence in Lithuania and Belarus. For Poles, he was a symbol of cruelty, nicknamed 'Wieszatiel' – or „the Hangman”.

role in their upbringing was played by their mother. The values instilled by her shaped their future lives and influenced their attitude towards their homeland” (Pilecka-Optułowicz, 2017, p. 142).

The behavioural aspect of shaping patriotic attitudes resonated particularly strongly in the case of the January insurgents. This was, after all, the most significant expression of patriotic actions – participating in the uprising knowing that one could face severe penalties. Witold’s grandfather was punished with six years of exile to Siberia and property confiscation. His descendants were thus compelled to fight, to continuously mobilise their strengths to endure repressions, drastic declines in living standards, and separation from their families. The January Uprising, the largest and longest-lasting Polish national uprising, resulted in enormous persecution of Poles.

As previously mentioned, the shaping of attitudes in the young engages all spheres of their personality: both emotions (emotional level), intellect (cognitive level), and behaviour (behavioural level). This shaping will be all the more effective the more it engages each of these spheres. The strength and durability of these three spheres are also vital. Here, it is worth mentioning the process of modelling, one of the three types of classical learning. The fact that Witold’s parents served as models of patriotic actions (as well as representatives of earlier generations – grandparents and great-grandparents) fits perfectly into the substantive aspect of the modelling process, according to which it is more effective the closer the learner is in an emotional relationship with the model.

As previously stated, in the analysis of shaping patriotic attitudes, it is essential to consider the coherence of the components of attitudes, i.e., the consistency between them. Low coherence of attitudes takes place when, for instance, at the behavioural level, a child is compelled to take patriotic actions (learning a given language), but at the emotional level, they feel a constant, significant reluctance towards them.

For the coherence of patriotic attitudes in a child, the consistency of the parents’ attitudes is of significant importance. In other words, the more parents agree on raising a child towards love for the homeland, the more the child internalises this value conveyed by them. As many researchers emphasise, parental

attitude consistency on crucial issues provides the child with the best conditions for development, while significant discrepancies result in ambiguity in the upbringing situation (Plopa, 2008, p. 227).

Witold’s parents were characterised by significant consistency regarding patriotism. In other matters, they sometimes differed, for example, in the parenting tactics employed. Andrzej Pilecki, Witold’s son, stated that his father inherited the best traits of the Pilecki family, including courage, patriotism, and a willingness to sacrifice for the homeland, while avoiding the flaws: obstinacy bordering on stubbornness, a harshness in his relations, and emotional coldness (Pilecki et al., 2015, p. 53). Witold’s father, Julian, was known for his great diligence and conscientiousness, particularly in his professional sphere. The position of forest inspector, achieved through systematic advancement in his career, allowed the family to live relatively comfortably (considering, of course, the geographical location of distant Karelia, where living conditions were challenging). However, he was a very strict father with a volatile and explosive temperament, so the children were often afraid of him (Tracki, 2014, p. 55).

Witold’s mother is described in the literature as an incredibly hard-working person with a great sense of organisation, open to others, and kind-hearted. A significant advantage which she was known for was her ability to combine the demands of strict discipline in raising her offspring with warmth and kindness. Biographers of Witold Pilecki highlight this fact: Ludwika Osiecimska was imbued with a sense of duty and love for her family and homeland (Mandrela, 2019; Tracki, 2014, p. 40). She had a profound sense of educational mission, which she carefully and lovingly fulfilled. Krzysztof Tracki emphasises that her role as the main transmitter of national and patriotic values was indeed impressive (Tracki, 2014, p. 42). Zofia Pilecka-Optułowicz expressed her views on the women of that time, of whom her grandmother was a prominent representative:

“I believe that in our Polish history, the family home constituted the steadfast root concerning our existence, and it was often thanks to the role that women played in the home” (Pilecka-Optułowicz, 2017, p. 143).

Witold's parents, although they significantly differed in various matters, were very consistent regarding shaping patriotic attitudes. Tracki summarised the issue of the consistency of Witold's parents' educational attitudes concerning patriotism:

"Both lines, the Pileckis and the Osiecimskis, left in him, however, an essential trait of personality – an extremely strong sense of connection with the fate of his homeland" (Tracki, 2014, p. 43).

Eleonora Ostrowska, a relative, stated that Witold's patriotism was shaped by the history of his ancestors hailing from a military family, where duties performed for the good of the homeland were fundamental, something instilled from childhood (Tracki, 2014, p. 43).

4. Shaping patriotic attitudes in the Pilecki family – cognitive level

In shaping patriotism in the young, Ludwika Pilecka tried to influence various components of attitudes, including intellectual ones, for example, by providing her children with knowledge about Polish history. She showed tremendous initiative in this regard – reading them literature by the most famous Polish writers, referring to the memories of the January insurgents (both from her family and the accounts described in contemporary influential magazines). She stimulated the children's imagination using images by Artur Grottger, a leading representative of Polish Romantic painting, who depicted, often allegorically, the nation's struggle for the independence of their homeland. Grottger's paintings became symbols of the fight and resistance of the Polish nation against the Russian oppressor. As Zofia Pilecka-Optułowicz recalls (2017, p. 142):

"My grandmother cared about instilling patriotism in the children; she did this in every possible way, through literature and patriotic painting, reading them Sienkiewicz's Trilogy, and stories about the January Uprising illustrated with drawings by Artur Grottger. She told them about the immense sufferings of the Poles and about exiles."

In promoting patriotic attitudes in the Pilecki family, one can observe a remarkable authenticity – Ludwika Pilecka read to her children about the

January insurgents. However, she herself also experienced repression (the confiscation of property). She endured these repressions patiently; she did not blame her ancestors for them – she was proud of her parents and their decisions and passed this pride on to her children. Thus, such a strong impact from the oppressors (and later communists) on the most valiant, steadfast, and resilient Poles was aimed at breaking them, for they are the core of Polish identity.

The transmission of knowledge fostering patriotism had been a planned effort. The literature on the subject emphasises that planning introduces the necessary order and fluidity in the execution of subsequent actions. The pursuit of fulfilling a previously outlined plan serves a motivational function and acts as a driving force for the individual's activities (Mądrzycki, 1996).

Tadeusz Mądrzycki, a Polish psychologist who passed away in 2002, studied the psychological principles of attitude formation for several decades. He emphasised the crucial role of planning, defined as the process of setting goals and actions enabling their achievement. Mądrzycki argued that planning is one of the most important of personality traits (Mądrzycki, 1996). The creation and implementation of plans (especially life plans) confirm, in Mądrzycki's view, that an individual is future-oriented while being firmly grounded in the present. A person's life largely consists of setting subsequent goals, as they lend meaning to that life (Mądrzycki, 1996).

In the Pilecki family, the shaping of patriotic attitudes had precisely this planned character. A defined daily plan and the successive activities, including reading to the children, introduced a specific order and provided a sense of security. As Zofia Pilecka-Optułowicz recalls:

"In families, care was taken to create family bonds; it wasn't the case that everyone did what they wanted; there was a certain daily plan. Even the aforementioned reading to the children was done at specific hours, so it was planned throughout the day. Father absorbed all these stories. Moreover, he adored his mother for providing him with so much" (Pilecka-Optułowicz, 2017, p. 143).

An example of developing patriotic attitudes cognitively were the intellectual games and activities during annual summer stays in Hawryłków. Alongside

carefree, spontaneously undertaken banter, there were also activities led by the mother's niece, Wanda Winnicka (Tracki, 2014, p. 59). Wanda, a graduate of the Faculty of Pedagogy at Moscow University and a teacher at a Russian gymnasium, was known for getting children involved in a self-educating group, part of which was studying Polish history in groups, examining maps, and reading books, including Sienkiewicz's "Trilogy" (Tracki, 2014, p. 60). Tracki writes about the children playing in Hawryłków:

"(...) they sought various ways to broaden their mental acuity. This last goal was served, among other things, by so-called constructive games, puzzles, and daily work with books" (Tracki, 2014, p. 59).

Physical activities, often of a military nature, played an enormous role, especially in the case of boys (Tracki, 2014, p. 59).

In analysing the shaping of attitudes in the Pilecki family, one cannot overlook the issue of autobiographical memory. This memory, being one of the topics in cognitive psychology (specifically memory psychology and memory processes), is responsible for storing material related to an individual's life history: events and facts that build identity (Nęcka, Orzechowski, Szymura, 2007, p. 369).

Researchers of autobiographical memory emphasise that the primary distinguishing feature of its recordings is the type of memory material. This material is characterised by specific properties: a particular organisation (utilising the principle of hierarchy), the involvement of semantic and episodic elements, a strong connection with context as one of the components of autobiographical recording, and a low degree of generalisation, as this record usually takes the form of a specific event (Nęcka et al., 2007, p. 370). The fourth property of autobiographical memory is the substantial emotional charge of the recorded contents.

In analysing the issue of shaping patriotic attitudes in well-known Polish families, it is worth noting the role played by the first and last distinguishing feature mentioned. Regarding the hierarchical nature of the recorded memory material, the January Uprising and the descendants of the insurgents, was one of the most distinguishing themes. Many other issues took on an episodic, secondary character concerning

it – as this uprising represented a category that was paramount to them. In other words, the January Uprising was at the top of the hierarchy of interests and societal references.

The second distinguishing feature was associated with a profound saturation of the memory material with emotions regarding the uprising. These emotions continued to resonate in the memories of the insurgents, which was thoroughly described in the section dedicated to the emotional level of shaping patriotic attitudes.

In the process of storing memory material, the recalling of the most important events in Polish history plays an extremely significant role. This takes place, for example, in the context of school education and encouraging young people to read literary works. Andrzej Nowak asserts that if, in the name of stripping Polish history of so-called artificial pathos, we detach it from its martyrological past and wish to forget tragic, cruel events, we will not understand their significance for subsequent generations which shaped Polish history after 1863 for at least the following 50-60 years (Nowak, 2022, p. 251). Only by reminding younger generations of what happened through uprisings and national movements can we confront the questions regarding the relationships between the pursuit of independence and the emergence of great national projects (ibidem, p. 251).

Summary

The aim of this article was to analyse how, over several decades following the January Uprising, patriotism was shaped in well-known Polish noble families. The Pilecki family was chosen, renowned through its distinguished representative, Witold.

The results of the analysis revealed that in the Pilecki family, the process of shaping attitudes occurred on three levels: emotional (the atmosphere of the family home brimming with patriotism, the nurturing of memories about the injustices of the Tsarist regime and feelings of resentment and disgust towards the Tsarist authorities), behavioural (membership in scouting organisations, care for preserving

the Polish language and customs, relocations to areas with weaker Russification, voluntary participation in the January Uprising, and courageously facing repressions and persecutions), and cognitive (conducting interesting discussions about Polish history and passing on knowledge in this area, reading literature, viewing richly illustrated albums together, planning cognitive activities, shaping the mental acuity of children during constructive games and

reading; ensuring the preservation of Polishness in the autobiographical memory of the descendants of the January insurgents – both their children as well as their grandchildren).

The results of the analysis demonstrated how patriotic attitudes were formed in the Pilecki family. A challenge for the future remains the application of the findings obtained in the upbringing of subsequent generations of Poles.

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Differentiation of self and relational mindfulness in the dyadic adaptation model in the face of stressful external factors¹

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Abstract: *Introduction:* The functioning of couples in today's world is increasingly associated with experiencing a growing number of external stressors, such as professional responsibilities, family member illnesses, or global crises. These stressors negatively affect the quality of romantic relationships, leading to reduced satisfaction and increased conflict within the relationship. The aim of this article is to present a modified model of dyadic adaptation in the face of external stressors, integrating differentiation of self and relational mindfulness. The model is based on family systems theory, the theory of mindfulness shaping processes in romantic relationships and their outcomes and is framed by the assumptions of the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) Model. *Method:* A systematic literature review of the last five years (since 2020) was conducted, analyzing quantitative and qualitative studies on differentiation of self, relational mindfulness, and their correlations with romantic relationship quality, satisfaction, and couples' coping and adaptation in the face of external stressors. The review utilized databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, Science Direct, Scopus, Springer Link, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library. Results: The literature review indicates that a high level of differentiation of self can positively influence the quality of romantic relationships and enhance couples' ability to cope with external stressors. Relational mindfulness may be a better predictor of relationship quality than dispositional mindfulness; however, its connections to couples' coping with stress require further research. A modified theoretical model of dyadic adaptation in the face of external stressors was proposed, which incorporates psychological variables such as differentiation of self and relational mindfulness. The outcomes of adaptation in the model include a high level of romantic relationship quality and stability. *Conclusions:* Empirical verification of the proposed model's assumptions and longitudinal studies could contribute to the development of effective therapeutic programs supporting couples in managing stress, which may translate into building stable and satisfying relationships.

Keywords: differentiation of self, dyadic coping, relational mindfulness, romantic relationship, romantic relationship quality

Introduction

In the face of increasing challenges posed by contemporary life, couples are increasingly encountering external stressors such as demanding professional obligations, family illnesses, life transitions, and even the threat of epidemics or war. Effective adaptation to such challenges is linked not only to individual coping skills but also to the ability to jointly manage the emotions arising from these circumstances (Weitkamp & Bodenmann, 2022). Daily stress affects the quality of romantic relationships, potentially weakening the sense of closeness and increasing conflict within dyads. This phenomenon becomes particularly evident during periods of heightened tension, such

as the COVID-19 pandemic, where stress has been associated with a decline in relationship quality and an increase in emotional difficulties (Kozakiewicz, Izdebski, Białorudzki, & Mazur, 2023; Totenhagen, Randall, Bar-Kalifa, Ciftci, & Gleason, 2022). Marital stress may contribute to divorce decisions, especially when it negatively impacts the quantity and quality of shared time. Studies indicate that couples with lower incomes experience a higher number of stressors, which in turn increases the risk of divorce compared to couples with higher incomes, who are less exposed to external stressors (Williamson & Schouweiler, 2023). Although research on stress

¹ Article in Polish language: https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/61P_Debs.pdf

coping and adaptation in couples has been intensively conducted for the past three decades, the increasing threats affecting dyads necessitate continued research focusing on predictors, trajectories, and specific behaviors that individuals and couples can implement (Weitkamp & Bodenmann, 2022).

The primary aim of this article is to present a modified model of dyadic adaptation in the face of external stressors. This model is based on the theoretical framework of M. Bowen's (1978) family systems theory and the mindfulness-based model of relational processes and outcomes (Karremans, Schellekens, & Kappen, 2015). It applies to romantic relationships, including married, engaged, and non-married couples.

The first theoretical concept applied in describing, explaining, and predicting human behavior is M. Bowen's (1978) family systems theory, which provides a framework for analyzing the mechanisms influencing diverse family responses to stress. The central concept of this theory, differentiation of self, plays a crucial role in stress management and the maintenance of healthy family functioning, as it affects how individuals respond to both internal family dynamics and external sources of stress (Bronner, Archibald, Lindong, & Laymon, 2019). Although initially developed for analyzing and supporting family processes, this theory has also been applied to other systems at risk of dysfunction or heightened anxiety (Noone, 2017). A romantic relationship constitutes one such system within this conceptualization. The application of this theoretical framework to dyads focuses on a subset of processes and systems within the broader model. Family systems theory enables the examination of both child-rearing and child-free couples, married or non-married (Pollard & Rogge, 2022).

The second theoretical framework underpinning the proposed model of dyadic adaptation to external stressors is the mindfulness-based model of relational processes and outcomes (Karremans et al., 2015). This theory considers the role of mindfulness in couples' coping with external stressors such as demanding professional commitments or the illness of a partner or child. An individual aware that external factors contribute to their stress and potential reactions toward their partner can separate these stressors

from the relational experience. Mindful awareness of stress sources enables open communication between partners and the provision of necessary support.

This study integrates research findings from the last five years (2020 – 2024) that relate to the proposed psychological variables: differentiation of self, relational mindfulness, and their associations with relationship quality and satisfaction. Both quantitative and qualitative studies are considered. Differentiation of self may be a universal psychological construct, although its components, such as fusion, are sensitive to cultural context. Notable differences exist between collectivist and individualist cultures (Lampis, Catuadella, Agus, Busonera, & Skowron, 2019). Given this, the literature review focuses on studies from Western cultural contexts.

The systematic review includes articles from high-impact psychology journals such as *PLOS ONE*, *Clinical Psychology Review*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. Data sources include JSTOR, ProQuest, Science Direct, Scopus, Springer Link, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library. The search terms used were: "differentiation of self," "romantic relationship quality," "stress," "stressful life events," "mindfulness," "relational mindfulness," "romantic relationship," "coping with stress," and "romantic relationship satisfaction." References from selected publications were also reviewed for relevant studies.

This article begins by presenting the proposed model of dyadic adaptation to external stressors. It then discusses research findings on the relationship between differentiation of self and romantic relationship quality and satisfaction. Next, studies examining the role of differentiation of self in couples' coping with stressful events are reviewed. The relationship between relational mindfulness and romantic relationship quality and satisfaction is also explored, followed by studies on the role of relational mindfulness in couples' stress management. The final section presents conclusions.

Throughout the article the terms are used interchangeably: dyad, couple, romantic relationship, as well as mindfulness understood as a trait and dispositional mindfulness.

1. The dyadic adaptation model in the face of external stressors

In the 1980s, researchers acknowledged that external factors could be sources of stress; however, stress and coping were predominantly conceptualized as individual phenomena (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Most scholars at that time did not yet associate stress coping with dyadic or community-based processes. It was not until the 1990s that psychologists began to emphasize the impact of stress experienced by individuals in romantic relationships on the dyad and the fact that coping with stress is a shared experience that affects relationship outcomes, such as relationship quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

One of the models addressing couples' stress coping from both an individual and dyadic perspective is the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) Model, developed by B.R. Karney and T.N. Bradbury (1995). Within this model, adaptation is defined as a couple's ability to effectively manage stress, contributing to both high relationship quality and stability. This dynamic process results from interactions among partners' individual vulnerabilities, external stressors, and adaptive processes. Vulnerabilities include various individual characteristics that partners bring into the relationship, such as demographic factors, past romantic experiences, family background, personality traits, or attachment styles. These individual differences shape how partners interpret stressors, events or situations that may be chronic or acute and require adjustment at both individual and relational levels. According to the VSA model, vulnerabilities and external stressors influence adaptive processes, which encompass strategies for managing individual differences, relationship challenges, and life transitions. Adaptive processes, such as conflict resolution strategies, communication quality, and mutual support, play a key role in overcoming difficulties and maintaining relationship stability. A positive adaptation outcome in romantic relationships involves achieving both high relationship quality and stability. In line with the conceptualization proposed by Lewis and Spanier (1979), utilized in the VSA model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), these two dimensions – quality and stability – are treated as independent aspects of relationships.

Drawing on the VSA model and the literature review, the author of this article presents a modified model of dyadic adaptation to external stressors. This model integrates Bowen's (1978) family systems theory and the mindfulness-based model of relational processes and outcomes (Karremans et al., 2015). In the proposed model, vulnerability is represented by differentiation of self, a central concept in the systemic approach. The adaptive process is relational mindfulness. The outcome of successful adaptation is a high level of relationship quality and stability.

Most existing models of dyadic adaptation to stressful events, incorporating either differentiation of self or mindfulness as a trait, have focused on the role of each psychological variable separately (Dębska & Wałęcka-Matyja, 2024; Karremans et al., 2015). The proposed modified dyadic adaptation model is the first to include relational mindfulness, a construct specifically referring to mindfulness in romantic relationships.

Differentiation of self involves balancing autonomy and the need for close connections in relationships, whereas relational mindfulness focuses on being present and nonjudgmental in interactions with others. The author's proposal is the first to integrate differentiation of self and relational mindfulness. This research gap may stem from the lack of studies on the relationship between these psychological variables. Interpersonal mindfulness has been a subject of scientific inquiry since 2009 (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009), while relational mindfulness, understood as being mindful in romantic relationships, has only been explored since 2018 (Kimmes, Jaurequi, May, Srivastava, & Fincham, 2018). The relationships between relational mindfulness and other psychological variables remain largely unexplored. However, as demonstrated in empirical studies cited later in this article, both high levels of differentiation of self and relational mindfulness contribute to positive romantic relationship outcomes, even for couples exposed to external stressors. Psychological work focused on differentiation of self and relational mindfulness aims to enhance self-awareness and improve emotional regulation, ultimately fostering more harmonious and conscious relationships both with oneself and others (Aristegui, Campayo, & Barriga, 2021; Lachowska, 2020).

Differentiation of self is a multidimensional construct related to emotional self-regulation. It encompasses intrapersonal abilities, such as distinguishing between cognitive and affective processes, and interpersonal abilities, such as maintaining autonomy while forming intimate bonds with significant others (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Stressful life events play a crucial role in Bowen's (1978) theory, influencing how individuals and couples navigate their relationships. This concept suggests that individuals with higher differentiation of self are better equipped to cope with stress and protect their relationships from its negative effects (Rodríguez-González et al., 2023). Differentiation of self functions as a moderator in the relationship between anxiety and triangulation behaviors, where higher differentiation of self weakens the link between anxiety and triangulation behaviors, reducing the severity of psychological symptoms (Murdock, Flynn, & Bresin, 2022). Given that this key concept in family systems theory influences how individuals manage relational stress, the author deemed it essential to incorporate it into the VSA model.

Mindfulness is a particular state of attention deliberately focused on the present moment without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). Mindfulness training programs, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1982), aim to reduce stress and improve quality of life, with their effects supported by empirical evidence (Querstret, Morison, Dickinson, Copley, & John, 2020).

As research on coping mechanisms expanded beyond individual-level approaches to dyadic and broader community-based contexts, the need arose to apply mindfulness in both individual and relational contexts. Before the emergence of the term relational mindfulness, Duncan et al. (2009) attempted to define interpersonal mindfulness, which consists of four key dimensions: (1) full attention while listening to others, (2) awareness of one's own and others' emotions during interactions, (3) openness, acceptance, and willingness to acknowledge others' thoughts and feelings, (4) self-regulation, including low reactivity and reduced automaticity in responses to others' behaviors, and (5) compassion toward oneself and others. Khoury, Vergara, and Spinelli (2022) developed the Interpersonal Mindfulness Questionnaire (IMQ), which is

based on four dimensions: (1) cognitive distancing, (2) bodily awareness, (3) attention to and awareness of others, and (4) mindful responding.

Relational mindfulness, however, specifically pertains to mindfulness in the context of romantic relationships. Kimmes et al. (2018) proposed a measure to operationalize this concept. As the authors highlight, romantic relationships evoke strong emotions, and mindfulness in solitary or platonic interactions may significantly differ from mindfulness in the presence of a romantic partner. Thus, increasing one's general mindfulness tendencies does not necessarily translate into heightened mindfulness in romantic contexts. Kimmes et al. (2018) identified the need for a mindfulness measure specific to romantic relationships, as the lack of such a tool may limit our understanding of its role in this context. Empirical studies have shown that relational mindfulness is a better predictor of relationship quality than mindfulness as a trait (Morris, McDowell, Tawfiq, Outler, & Kimmes, 2023). This justifies the choice of relational mindfulness, rather than dispositional mindfulness, as a psychological variable in the model proposed in this article. Incorporating a relational variable allows for the consideration of both individual contributions to dyadic adaptation and the processes occurring within the dyad.

The outcome of adaptation in the model proposed by the author is a high level of relationship quality and stability. Relationship quality includes satisfaction, integration, adjustment, happiness, and communication, whereas stability is understood as the durability of the romantic relationship (Ryś, 1994). Given that relationship quality as a psychological variable integrates several dimensions, in the following sections, the study will analyze not only relationship quality but also one of its components: satisfaction.

2. Differentiation of self and its association with relationship quality and romantic satisfaction

Most existing research confirms the association between differentiation of self and relationship outcomes such as quality, satisfaction, commit-

ment, dyadic adjustment, and relationship stability (Price & Allsop, 2020; Stapley & Murdock, 2020). M. Calatrava, M.V. Martins, M. Schweer-Collins, C. Duch-Ceballos, and M. Rodríguez-González (2022) conducted a review study comparing findings from 56 articles testing the hypothesis that higher differentiation of self is linked to higher relationship quality and satisfaction. A significant proportion of studies (39) confirmed this hypothesis, while 12 reported mixed results, and 5 provided findings that contradicted it. Among the three of five studies rejecting the assumed relationship between Bowen's construct (1978) and relationship outcomes, the sample characteristics appeared to be a determining factor. These studies included couples seeking services at a university-based clinic, military couples where one partner may have had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and parents raising children with special needs.

J. Lampis et al. (2019) conducted a study on 137 Italian couples, demonstrating that a high level of differentiation of self is associated with high dyadic adjustment in marriage and serves as a significant predictor of it. The researchers used the self-report measure *Dyadic Adjustment Scale* (Spanier, 1976), which consists of four components: consensus, relationship satisfaction, cohesion (degree of relationship commitment), and affectionate expression. Differentiation of self was measured using the *Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised* (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003), composed of four subscales: *I-position*, *emotional reactivity*, *fusion with others*, and *emotional cutoff*. The researchers hypothesized that dyadic adjustment could be shaped both by an individual's differentiation of self (actor effect) and by their partner's differentiation of self (partner effect). Using the *Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM)*, the study found that men's dyadic adjustment was solely associated with their own *I-position* level, whereas in women, dyadic adjustment was influenced by both their *I-position* and emotional cutoff, as well as their partners' levels of these traits. However, the study did not account for reciprocal interactions between the analyzed variables. M. Kerr and M. Bowen (1988) distinguished two levels of differentiation of self: *basic* and *functional*.

Functional differentiation refers to aspects of the self that are susceptible to environmental changes. According to this theoretical model, the relationship between differentiation of self and dyadic adjustment is bidirectional. Lampis et al. (2019) emphasized that future research should focus on verifying causal relationships between these variables and determining the direction of influence.

R. Finzi-Dottan (2023) conducted a study investigating the mediating effect of fear of intimacy on the relationship between differentiation of self and romantic satisfaction. The study included 144 married couples (N = 288) from Israel. For both partners, differentiation of self was linked to relationship satisfaction, with fear of intimacy mediating this relationship. Higher differentiation of self was associated with lower fear of intimacy, which in turn correlated with greater relationship satisfaction. These findings align with Bowen's (1978) theory, which suggests that differentiation of self serves as a foundation for establishing intimate and mutual marital relationships. Fear of intimacy in one partner was also correlated with their spouse's fear of intimacy. Additionally, wives' fear of intimacy affected their husbands' relationship satisfaction, whereas husbands' fear of intimacy did not impact their wives' satisfaction. Analysis of the partner effect showed that higher differentiation of self in wives was associated with lower fear of intimacy, which in turn led to higher relationship satisfaction for their husbands. The study confirmed Bowen's (1978) premise that individuals with high differentiation of self experience greater marital satisfaction due to their ability to form intimate bonds. Finzi-Dottan (2023) emphasized the significant role of wives in shaping satisfying marital relationships. The results provide valuable insights into marital dynamics; however, they should be interpreted with caution, as the study's cross-sectional design does not allow for definitive conclusions regarding causal relationships. Additionally, the sampling method was based on convenience rather than representativeness. The study participants were primarily individuals with high educational attainment and socioeconomic status. Another limitation was that data were collected at a single point in time. A more optimal approach

would involve conducting a longitudinal study to observe the same group of couples at different time points. Such an approach would allow for an examination of whether the interactive effects of fear of intimacy on relationship satisfaction are linked to partners' long-term adaptation to each other.

In a study conducted by M. Mozas-Alonso, J. Olivera, and A. Berástegui (2022), the relationships between differentiation of self, marital satisfaction, and parenting styles were examined in a Spanish sample of parents raising adolescent children. The study also aimed to explore gender differences in these variables. Participants included 140 Spanish adults aged 37 – 62, with 64.3% (n = 90) being women and 35.7% (n = 50) men. The majority had higher education and came from nuclear families. Four measurement tools were used: the *Differentiation of Self Scale (DSS)* for assessing various aspects of differentiation of self; the *satisfaction subscale of Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)* for measuring marital quality; and the *Warmth Scale-Parents* and the *Rules and Demands Scale-Parents*, which evaluate warmth-communication, criticism-rejection, and other parenting practices. The findings revealed significant correlations between differentiation of self and marital quality. Individuals with higher differentiation of self reported higher marital satisfaction, supporting Bowen's (1978) theoretical framework. Emotional cutoff, a component of low differentiation, was particularly negatively correlated with marital satisfaction, indicating that difficulties in building intimacy and closeness can significantly lower relationship quality. Women exhibited higher emotional reactivity than men, which may influence their conflict resolution and interpersonal dynamics. Marital satisfaction was also a significant mediator between differentiation of self and parenting styles. Higher differentiation of self was associated with more positive parenting practices, such as warmth-communication and inductive discipline, partially due to increased marital satisfaction. However, the study had some limitations. The relatively small sample with an uneven gender distribution restricted generalizability. The use of self-report tools may have introduced response biases. The study's cross-sectional nature prevented the establishment of causal relationships, and the reliance

on the DSS limited comparability with studies using the *Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised (DSI-R)*. The authors suggested future research with larger, more diverse samples that include both partners' perspectives and children's assessments of parenting styles. Additionally, longitudinal studies are recommended to explore causal relationships and cultural aspects of differentiation of self, which would allow verification of Bowen's theory's universality across different sociocultural contexts.

The studies reviewed in this section support Bowen's (1978) assumptions that a high level of differentiation of self positively influences romantic relationship quality and satisfaction.

3. The role of differentiation of self in couples' responses to external stressors

Bowen (1978), the creator of the differentiation of self concept, originally posited that differentiation levels remain stable over time. However, he acknowledged that differentiation could be enhanced through psychotherapy or influenced by significant stressful life events. M. Rodríguez-González et al. (2023) conducted a study on 137 Spanish and 342 American couples, confirming that a high level of differentiation of self is associated with greater relationship satisfaction and stability, even when the dyad is exposed to external stressors such as the death of a loved one, illness in the family, or relocation. However, it is important to note that these samples consisted of non-clinical, presumably more stable relationships, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

In another study, R. Lev-Ari, Z. Solomon, and D. Horesh (2020) examined whether different components of differentiation of self moderated the relationship between psychological distress and dyadic adjustment among wives of former prisoners of war and combat veterans. The study included 161 Israeli women, measuring differentiation of self through three dimensions related to spousal relationships: *fusion* (excessive involvement with the partner leading to a loss of individual identity),

emotional cutoff (focus on self and autonomy with emotional detachment from others), and *balance* (the ability to acknowledge a partner's experiences without losing personal identity, and maintaining autonomy while sustaining emotional connection). The results indicated that *fusion* played a moderating role in the relationship between psychological distress, secondary post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and dyadic adjustment. A mixed differentiation of self style, characterized by high fusion and high emotional cutoff, was associated with higher levels of distress. However, a key limitation of this study was that it only assessed the wives' perspectives, without measuring their husbands' levels of distress, differentiation of self, or dyadic adjustment.

Given these findings, the author argues that differentiation of self, conceptualized as a vulnerability factor in the modified VSA model, may serve as a moderating variable between stressors and adaptation outcomes.

4. Relational mindfulness and its association with relationship quality and romantic satisfaction

Mindfulness in romantic relationships enhances partners' ability to fully engage in dyadic interactions based on acceptance and non-judgment. Rather than avoiding difficult emotions or withdrawing during conflicts, individuals with higher mindfulness levels tend to recognize, understand, and accept their feelings, enabling them to respond openly and constructively to emerging challenges (Park, Harris, & Fogarty, 2023).

Most studies to date support the hypothesis that mindfulness, understood as a trait, positively correlates with relationship quality and satisfaction. Ch. Quinn-Nilas (2020) conducted a meta-analysis comparing results from 28 studies examining the relationship between mindfulness and romantic satisfaction. The meta-analysis confirmed a positive association between these variables. Similarly, E. Mandal and M. Lip (2022) tested the hypothesis that dispositional mindfulness is positively related to romantic relationship quality. Their study included

153 Polish respondents in romantic relationships (39.2% married, 20.9% engaged, and 39.9% in non-marital romantic relationships). The results indicated that mindfulness was a significant predictor of relationship quality. Positive associations were observed between mindfulness and the overall relationship quality score, as well as its components measured by the *Dyadic Adjustment Scale* (Spanier, 1976). However, a limitation of this study was that participants had no prior mindfulness training experience. A more valuable comparison would have included individuals who regularly practice mindfulness techniques alongside those who do not. C. Park et al. (2023) examined whether an individual's mindfulness level predicts romantic relationship quality (H1), whether self-care mediates the relationship between mindfulness and relationship quality (H2), and whether couple engagement in shared activities mediates the relationship between mindfulness and relationship quality (H3). The study, conducted on 1,331 married American participants, confirmed all three hypotheses. However, the authors themselves noted that, in research on romantic relationship quality, relational mindfulness, defined as a tendency to be mindful specifically within romantic relationships, would be a more appropriate measure than general mindfulness.

Existing studies suggest that relational mindfulness is a stronger predictor of relationship quality than dispositional mindfulness. K.L. Morris, C.N. McDowell, D. Tawfiq, C. Outler, and J.G. Kimmes (2024) conducted a study on 116 American couples examining the relationship between relational mindfulness, negative relationship quality, and physical health. The results indicated a negative association between women's relational mindfulness and their negative assessment of relationship quality, supporting prior findings that higher relational mindfulness correlates with improved relationship quality (Kimmes, Jaurequi, Roberts, Harris, & Fincham, 2020). Additionally, a negative correlation was found between women's relational mindfulness and their male partners' negative assessments of relationship quality. Earlier studies indicated that relational mindfulness in women reduces relationship

conflicts (Morris, Kimmes, & Marroquin, 2023). Given that intensified conflicts can lower romantic relationship quality (Feeney & Fitzgerald, 2019), it can be inferred that an increase in women's relational mindfulness contributes to improved male partner assessments of relationship quality.

In a study by J.G. Kimmes et al. (2024), the researchers investigated relationships between self-reported intrapersonal and interpersonal mindfulness, perceived partner mindfulness (an individual's assessment of their partner's mindfulness level), and relationship outcomes (positive and negative relationship quality, positive communication during conflicts, and intimacy) among 115 married American couples. Perceived partner mindfulness emerged as a stronger predictor of relationship outcomes than self-reported mindfulness. Women's perceptions of their partner's mindfulness were positively correlated with both their own and their partner's relationship outcomes, whereas men's perceptions of their partner's mindfulness were only correlated with their wives' relationship outcomes.

The studies discussed in this section highlight that relational mindfulness may be a better predictor of relationship quality than dispositional mindfulness. Further research is needed to validate these relationships, as relational mindfulness and associated therapeutic practices may effectively support couples in enhancing relationship quality and stability.

5. The role of relational mindfulness in couples' responses to external stressors

Findings on the relationship between individual mindfulness and stress coping remain inconclusive. While most studies indicate that mindfulness serves as a protective factor against daily stress and stressful life events (Hepburn, Carroll, & McCuaig, 2021; Kriakous, Elliott, Lamers, & Owen, 2020), some researchers challenge this assumption. In a study by T.L. Saltsman et al. (2020), mindfulness and its components did not predict more positive experiences during stressor exposure; however,

mindfulness was positively correlated with more favorable retrospective evaluations of those stressors. Similarly, a study by O. Borghi, M. Voracek, and U. Tran (2024) questioned previous claims regarding mindfulness as a stress-buffering factor.

Despite these inconsistencies, the majority of studies support the beneficial role of mindfulness in couples facing stressors (Monin et al., 2020; Winter, Steffan, Warth, Ditzen, & Aguilar-Raab, 2021). These findings align with the theoretical framework proposed by J.C. Karremans et al. (2015), which highlights that dispositional mindfulness, mindfulness-based interventions, and meditation enhance relational mindfulness, leading to greater awareness of underlying processes, improved emotional regulation, executive control, and an increased sense of self-connection. Relational processes, such as behavioral, affective, and cognitive responses specific to romantic relationships, facilitate stress coping by reducing stress spillover effects. This ability to separate external stressors from relational experiences helps couples prevent conflict escalation and improve relationship quality, ultimately leading to higher relationship satisfaction for both partners.

A notable study by M. Vich, M. Lukeš, and J. Burian (2020) examined the impact of an eight-week *Relational Mindfulness Training (RMT)* on self-compassion, perceived stress, happiness, compassion, and mindfulness among 128 management students. It is important to note that in this study, relational mindfulness was conceptualized as interpersonal mindfulness rather than mindfulness specific to romantic relationships. Participants who completed the training reported sustained improvements in mindfulness, perceived stress, and self-compassion. However, improvements in happiness and compassion were only short-term. Long-term effects were minimal for happiness and absent for compassion.

D.L. Kelley and H.M. Nichols (2023) investigated how participants described their experiences in various interpersonal situations, including stress-related contexts, using terms indicative of their partners' relational mindfulness. Three components of relational mindfulness were analyzed in participants' narratives: (1) *being present* with

the partner (presence, emotional expression, and feeling understood), (2) *awareness* (attention, observation, defining and understanding), and (3) *being nonjudgmental* (acceptance, sensitivity, and non-reactivity). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was used to identify these patterns. One of the examined contexts was grief. Participants reported recognizing their partners' sensitivity during bereavement, particularly through the unintentional display of negative emotions and a deviation from their usual self-image. They highlighted the importance of acceptance and non-judgment in these moments, which facilitated open emotional expression. Additionally, they emphasized the significance of presence and support from loved ones, which allowed them to navigate their emotions more freely. Among participants describing romantic relationship conflicts, the intensity of these interactions, often perceived as *pivotal* or *critical*, was highlighted. These interactions were characterized by immediate reactions, both in terms of physical proximity and emotional expression. Conflict situations required heightened partner awareness, with some participants noting that such experiences deepened their understanding of their partner's emotions. All components of relational mindfulness, except non-reactivity, were identified in participants' descriptions of relationship conflicts.

Given the mixed findings on the role of dispositional mindfulness in stress coping, further scientific exploration is warranted. This is particularly crucial as mindfulness-based techniques are widely used in therapeutic interventions and stress management training. The research reviewed in this section suggests that Relational Mindfulness Training may reduce perceived stress. Further studies are needed to investigate the relationship between relational mindfulness and stress reduction for individuals and couples.

Conclusion

The literature review findings support Bowen's (1978) premise that higher differentiation of self fosters improved relationship quality and satisfaction. The reviewed studies confirm that differentiation of self positively correlates with relationship quality, even in the presence of external stressors. Additionally, the findings highlight the significant role of mindfulness in romantic relationships, while dispositional mindfulness is positively linked to relationship quality, relational mindfulness appears to be a stronger predictor of relationship success. The relationship between dispositional mindfulness and stress coping remains ambiguous. However, relational mindfulness may serve as a protective factor in stress-exposed relationships. Currently, research on the impact of relational mindfulness on dyads' ability to cope with external stressors is limited. Given its predictive advantage over dispositional mindfulness in relationship quality, further studies in this area are recommended. It is also essential to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms through which differentiation of self and relational mindfulness influence dyads' adaptive capacities in stressful situations. Longitudinal studies will be key to observing these changes over time.

The proposed modified model of dyadic adaptation to stress, integrating differentiation of self and relational mindfulness, represents an innovative approach to this topic. Empirical validation of its assumptions, as well as longitudinal research, may contribute to the development of effective therapeutic programs and psychological support interventions for couples facing life challenges. Interventions combining differentiation of self work with relational mindfulness training could support the development of stable and satisfying relationships, particularly in the face of stressors such as prolonged occupational stress, chronic illness of a partner, or loss of loved ones.

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“What’s new about emotional intelligence?” A review of selected theoretical models of emotional intelligence and research on its significance in human social functioning^{1, 2}

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Abstract: It has been 35 years since the publication of the first paper by Salovey and Mayer on emotional intelligence in 1990. Over this period, thousands of theoretical papers and empirical studies have been dedicated to the construct, significantly contributing to the expansion of knowledge on the topic. Interest in emotional intelligence remains strong, as evidenced by the consistent increase in scholarly works on the subject. This article provides a review of selected publications from the past few years on emotional intelligence. The starting point is a discussion of the 2016 revision of Salovey and Mayer’s ability model, carried out by researchers, and its implications for future research. The article then presents a new theoretical model – the concept of meta-emotional intelligence proposed by D’Amico. The final section of the article reviews selected studies on the significance of emotional intelligence in human social functioning, drawing from each of the two previously outlined research strands. The presented empirical data lead to the general conclusion that emotional intelligence is one of the dispositions that significantly contributes to improving human effectiveness in interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, ability model, meta-emotional intelligence, social functioning, interpersonal relationships

Introduction

Ever since the concept of emotional intelligence was introduced into psychology almost 35 years ago, it has been seen as a predictor of proper human functioning in various areas of life. It has been linked to, among other things, school success, professional success, mental well-being or physical health. Most often, however, its role in human social functioning was emphasised. Summarising several decades of research on emotional intelligence, it can be said that although it has not proved to be the most important predictor of life success, happiness and psycho-physical well-being in the broadest sense, it has not disappointed researchers. The data obtained in studies conducted in different countries and in different populations,

quite consistently indicate that emotional intelligence contributes significantly to the effectiveness of human functioning, while its deficits are associated with a range of difficulties experienced.

Still, as at the beginning of reflections on emotional intelligence, a lot of attention is given to its relationship with various indicators of social functioning. The article describes examples of recent work on this topic. However, before describing the directions of research, the results obtained and the conclusions drawn from them, the current understanding of emotional intelligence will be discussed, as the construct has evolved over the years and new theoretical models have emerged.

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1. Revision of the ability model of emotional intelligence by P. Salovey and J. Mayer

Over the 35 years of reflections on emotional intelligence, two trends have emerged that define the construct differently. Representatives of the first trend define emotional intelligence very broadly, including within its scope personality traits, motivational properties, mood, coping styles, and similar properties that, while they may contribute to effective human functioning, go far beyond the traditional understanding of intelligence. Although this way of looking at the construct has now entered the canon of scientific consideration and has been well accepted both in the scientific community and in psychological practice, it is still somewhat controversial. The second line of reasoning conflicts less with traditional definitions of intelligence. In its framework, emotional intelligence is understood as a set of emotional abilities. The most important theoretical concept in this trend is Salovey and Mayer’s ability model. It was described in their 1990 paper entitled: *Emotional intelligence*. In their model, Salovey and Mayer (1990) listed four main components of emotional intelligence: the ability to perceive and express emotions, the ability to emotionally support thinking, the ability to understand emotions and the ability to emotionally regulate. Each of these components is divided into a number of capabilities with a narrower scope. The original version of the ability model has already been described in detail in the Polish literature, so this characterisation is omitted here and the reader is invited to familiarise themselves with other publications (see e.g. Matczak, Knopp, 2013; Mayer, Salovey, 1997; Śmieja, 2018).

Over the decades of research into emotional intelligence, understanding of the topic has advanced significantly, and the extensive data led Mayer and Salovey to revise their ability model. In their 2016 paper, the researchers, joined by Caruso, among others, described their current understanding of emotional intelligence, revised their description of the abilities that make up its main components, and defined the place of emotional intelligence among

what they call other “broad intelligences” (mainly social and personality intelligence). They also discussed the impact of the ability model on research and its implications for the future (Mayer, Caruso, Salovey, 2016).

Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) make a strong case that emotional intelligence is a mental capacity or a system of mental abilities, which is in line with the traditional understanding of the term “intelligence” itself. This way of defining emotional intelligence implies the way it is measured. Central to the researchers’ approach is the belief that, like other mental abilities, emotional intelligence is best measured by posing problems to be solved and analysing patterns of correct responses. The use of performance tests is a more correct way of operationalising emotional intelligence than measuring it using self-report tools, as people find it difficult to assess their own level of intelligence. This is because they lack knowledge of what effective problem solving means. Instead, they base their assessments on unreliable grounds, such as, for example, self-confidence, self-esteem, misinterpretation of successes in reasoning and wishful thinking. These non-intellectual characteristics introduce distortions in the assessment of one’s own abilities, making self-report measures unreliable indicators of actual abilities (see e.g. Boyatzis, 2018; D’Amico, Geraci, 2023). In order to measure emotional intelligence well, tests need to include relevant material. According to researchers, the correct measurement of emotional abilities will be possible when the content of the test reflects the given area of emotional problem-solving (Mayer, Caruso, Salovey, 2016).

In their article Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) point out another aspect – intelligent problem solving does not always translate into intelligent behaviour, as a person may have high emotional intelligence but not use it. This demonstrates the need to distinguish between emotional capacities and behaviour. However, although emotional intelligence is not a reliable predictor of a single behaviour because of the influence of other personality and social variables, in the long term and when aggregating different behaviours, more emotionally intelligent people achieve different outcomes in life than less emotionally intelligent people. This issue will be described more extensively

in the second part of this article, in the context of the importance of emotional intelligence in human social functioning.

Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) perceive emotional intelligence as “broad” intelligence. The notion of “broad” intelligence derives from the hierarchical model of intelligence Cattell-Horna-Carroll (see e.g. McGrew, 2009). In this model, general intelligence (g) is at the top of the hierarchy and is subdivided into “broad” intelligences located at the second level, which in turn are subdivided into more specific mental abilities with a narrower scope, which are at the lowest, i.e. third, level of the model. According to the creators of the ability model, emotional intelligence fits into the characteristics of “broad” intelligence.

At the same time, Mayer, Caruso and Salovey believe that broad intelligences – especially those defined by their content – can be divided into “hot” and “cold” categories. “Cold” intelligences operate on impersonal knowledge. These include, for example, mathematical abilities or visual-spatial intelligence. “Hot” intelligences, on the other hand, involve reasoning with information that is relevant to the individual – matters that can elicit strong reactions. People use “hot” intelligences to manage what is most important to them, such as a sense of social acceptance, self-identity consistency and emotional well-being. Repeated failures to reason in these areas lead to psychological pain, which – at an intense level – is processed in the same areas of the brain as physical pain (Eisenberger, 2015, after: Mayer, Casuso, Salovey, 2016).

According to Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016), emotional intelligence fits into the category of “hot” intelligences, as emotions are organised responses involving physical changes, cognitive processes and action plans – all with strong evaluative elements. Other intelligences in this category are social intelligence and personality intelligence. Social intelligence is “the ability to understand social norms, customs and expectations, social situations and the social environment, as well as the ability to recognise manifestations of social influence and power in social hierarchies. It also includes an understanding of in-group and inter-group relationships” (Mayer, Caruso, Salovey, 2016, p. 10). The concept of personality intelligence

is the most recent of the three. It encompasses the ability to reason about personality – both one’s own and other people’s – including motives, emotions, thinking and knowledge, plans, styles of action, as well as awareness and self-control (see e.g. Mayer, Skimmyhorn, 2017).

In their work, the researchers revise their understanding of the similarities and differences between these three types of intelligence. In their view, social intelligence is “hot” because it conditions social acceptance, and this is fundamental for people. Personality intelligence is also described as “hot” intelligence because a person’s sense of self is the primary source of either inner satisfaction, contentment and pride (on the positive side) or pain, self-contempt and negative thoughts (on the negative side; Greenwald, 1980, after: Mayer, Casuso, Salovey, 2016) Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) argue that the aforementioned intelligences can be “positioned” in relation to each other in different ways. On the one hand, they may be comparable in terms of complexity, as they all involve human cognitive reasoning of an equally sublime nature. On the other hand, however, the problems they involve (emotions, personality traits or social processes) involve systems at three different levels of complexity: emotions are relatively small psychological systems (the lowest level), personality exists at the level of the whole individual (the higher level), and social organisations involve whole social systems (the highest level). For this reason, it is sometimes argued in the scientific community that emotional intelligence may be a subset of social or personality intelligence, rather than a separate intelligence. Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) partly share these doubts, but at the same time believe that, in the absence of conclusive empirical arguments, the aforementioned intelligences should nevertheless be treated – at least temporarily – as distinct from each other, since their subject areas are sufficiently different to make the ability to reason in each area independent of the other. The researchers acknowledge that most people will use these intelligences in a combined way (it is easier, for example, to understand other people’s emotions if you understand their personality and the social systems in which they

function), hence the correlations revealed in the research between different intelligences. Nevertheless, there will also be individuals with strongly varying levels of these intelligences, e.g. they will have high social intelligence and at the same time low emotional intelligence. Evidence of the distinctiveness of the aforementioned intelligences is also provided by neuropsychological research. For example, the work of Heberlein and colleagues (Heberlein, Adolphs, Tranel, Damasio, 2004, after: Mayer, Caruso and Salovey, 2016; Heberlein, Saxe, 2005, after: Mayer, Caruso and Salovey, 2016) shows that the areas of the brain responsible for recognising emotions such as happiness, fear or anger are different from the areas responsible for recognising personality traits such as shyness, kindness and rudeness. Researchers do not deny that further research may find that emotional intelligence is nevertheless part of a broader personality or social intelligence (Mayer, Caruso, Salovey, 2016).

Drawing on the gathered empirical data, the creators of the ability model verified the specific abilities included in each of the four main components of emotional intelligence. They separated some of the previously mentioned abilities into several more specific ones, and also added abilities to the model that were not previously included in it. After the update, the “Emotions Perception” component includes, according to them, the following more specific abilities: identifying insincere or false emotional expressions, distinguishing between accurate and inaccurate emotional expressions, understanding emotional expressions according to context and culture, expressing emotions openly if desired, perceiving emotional content in the environment, visual arts and music, recognising emotions in others in their voice, facial expressions, language and behaviour, and identifying emotions in their physical states, feelings and thoughts. The following abilities are included in the component “Using emotions to support thinking”: the ability to select problems according to an emotional state that can facilitate cognition, using mood changes to generate different cognitive perspectives, prioritising thinking by directing attention according to the emotions experienced, generating emotions in order

to relate to another person’s experience, generating emotions for the purpose of better evaluation and memory. The “Understanding Emotions” component includes: recognising cultural differences in the evaluation of emotions, understanding how a person is likely to feel in the future or under certain conditions, recognising likely changes in emotions (e.g. moving from anger to satisfaction), understanding complex and co-occurring emotions together, distinguishing between moods and emotions, assessing situations that are likely to trigger emotions, identifying the cause, meaning and consequences of emotions, and naming emotions and recognising relationships between them. As for the final component, “Managing emotions”, the researchers included the following: managing other people’s emotions effectively to achieve the desired outcome, managing one’s own emotions effectively to achieve the desired outcome, evaluating strategies to maintain, reduce or intensify emotional reactions, monitoring emotional reactions to assess their validity, engaging with emotions if they are helpful or withdrawing when they are not, remaining open to pleasant and unpleasant emotions depending on the need and the information they convey (Mayer, Caruso and Salovey, 2016).

Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) acknowledge that the structure of the four components of emotional intelligence outlined above is not reflected well in the factor structure found in studies by various authors. The most objectionable component is the second one, “Using emotions to support thinking”. There have even been calls in the scientific community to omit these capabilities in the ability model. However, the creators of the concept believe that, despite the poor empirical evidence, it is still worth considering these abilities as an integral part of emotional intelligence. However, the researchers acknowledge that the problem is not sufficiently empirically verified and requires further exploration, whereby the postulated structure of intelligence may change.

Revising their model, Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) concluded that, despite decades of research on emotional intelligence, many questions remain unclear and the ability model will probably still need further revision.

2. The concept of meta-emotional intelligence by A. D'Amico

In 2013, a Spanish-language article by D'Amico (2013, after: D'Amico, Geraci, 2023) was published in which the author describes a new construct – meta-emotional intelligence. The researcher's starting point was Salovey and Mayer's previously described ability model and Flavell's concept of metacognition (1979, after: D'Amico, Geraci, 2023). The latter defined metacognition as knowledge about cognitive phenomena, consisting of metacognitive knowledge as well as metacognitive experiences, tasks or goals and strategies. Since this first conceptualisation, a number of other models of metacognition and the sub-processes involved have emerged (see e.g. Drigas, Mitsea, 2021). However, as D'Amico (2013, after: D'Amico, Geraci, 2023) has rightly pointed out, in considering metacognition little attention is paid to emotions.

In developing the construct of meta-emotional intelligence, D'Amico focused on the abilities mentioned in Mayer and Salovey's model and on three specific metacognitive processes: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive self-evaluation and metacognitive beliefs, relating them all to the emotional sphere. Thus, meta-emotional knowledge is, according to the researcher, self-awareness and knowledge of one's own emotional capacities in everyday functioning. Metacognitive self-evaluation is the ability to self-assess one's own performance and effectiveness in specific tasks. D'Amico argues that those who are able to correctly assess their performance will be able to correct their mistakes and practice what they have not yet mastered, thus improving their performance in similar tasks they will face in the future. The term meta-emotional beliefs refers to a person's beliefs (correct or incorrect) about the nature, controllability and usefulness of emotions. It should be added that these beliefs are mainly formed as a result of cultural and educational influences. D'Amico gives the example of emotional suppression promoted in many environments as a way of dealing with emotions. Such interactions may contribute to the individual's belief that this is the only way to

regulate emotions, and this belief will motivate them to try to suppress their emotions. If successful, this reinforces the belief that one can control one's emotions in this way (D'Amico, 2018, after: D'Amico, Geraci, 2023; also see Brockman et al, 2017; Tsai, Lu, 2018). Deficits in meta-emotional intelligence can significantly affect a person's emotional functioning and behaviour. For example, low awareness of one's own emotional abilities combined with misconceptions about emotions can contribute to poor meta-emotional control. Such a person may choose situations in which he or she is unable to cope or, conversely, avoid situations that he or she could easily manage. A harmonious meta-emotional intelligence profile, on the other hand, allows people to choose situations that they can handle and avoid those that are beyond their control (D'Amico, Geraci, 2023).

Although D'Amico's conceptualisation mainly refers to the ability model, she does not reject the way of defining intelligence as a trait (trait emotional intelligence; see e.g. Bucich, Maccann, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2019). As mentioned earlier, emotional intelligence is measured differently in each of the two trends, and correlation coefficients between performance test scores and self-report tools are low or not statistically significant. The concept of meta-emotional intelligence is an excellent platform for reconciling the two positions. Performance tests measure actual emotional capacity, while self-report questionnaires measure the respondent's perceived emotional capacity. According to D'Amico (2018, after: D'Amico, Geraci, 2023), the latter, even if they do not correspond to actual abilities, can influence the individuals' behaviours and choices, and the discrepancy found in research between perceived and actual abilities can provide valuable information about a person's level of meta-emotional intelligence, i.e. their meta-cognition of emotional intelligence. For example, low knowledge and meta-emotional self-evaluation may be responsible for greater discrepancies between performance test results and self-report measures, as the self-report will then be less accurate (it may be distorted by a distorted perception of one's own abilities in everyday life or when dealing with specific emotional tasks).

3. Examples of research on the importance of emotional intelligence in human social functioning conducted in the trends of the ability model and meta-emotional intelligence

The following section will describe examples of research dedicated to the role of emotional intelligence in human social functioning, which is carried out within the two trends of consideration of the construct described earlier.

As mentioned earlier, both Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (2016) and other researchers (see e.g. Matczak, Knopp, 2013; Miao, Humphrey, Qian, 2017; O’Connor et al., 2019) point out that a high level of emotional intelligence, understood as a set of abilities and therefore as a certain instrumental disposition, does not always translate into a person’s functioning in real-life, everyday situations, as not every person uses the emotional abilities they possess. The correlations found between emotional intelligence understood in this way and performance indicators of functioning are therefore generally lower than for emotional intelligence understood as a trait. However, in the long term and when aggregating many individual behaviours, a positive effect of emotional intelligence is observed. The greatest consensus among researchers is that high emotional intelligence contributes significantly to the effectiveness of a person’s social functioning. Although we already have a fairly substantial body of empirical data on this issue, there are still many questions that remain unresolved. Furthermore, it should be noted that most research is conducted within mixed models or concepts that understand emotional intelligence as a trait (trait emotional intelligence). Significantly less research has been devoted to emotional intelligence, defined according to the ability model as a set of emotional abilities, and the least is known about the importance of meta-emotional intelligence. Therefore, it seems useful to present some illustrative reports on the role of emotional intelligence in human social functioning, in terms of the two models presented earlier.

It is worth starting the description of the studies with those conducted in Poland. Klinkosz, Iskra and Artymiak (2021) were interested in the relationship

between young adults’ emotional intelligence and their social competence and interpersonal relationships. They surveyed 173 psychology students from three Polish universities. The results showed the existence of positive associations of emotional intelligence with both social competence and positive interpersonal relationships. The ability to express emotions openly and the ability to empathise, i.e. to understand other people’s emotions, proved to be most important here. The former was positively associated with relationship skills, negatively with assertiveness (which involves setting one’s own boundaries and expressing one’s own needs or objections) and providing social support. In contrast, the ability to empathise with others fostered negative assertiveness and giving support, as well as conflict resolution skills. Interestingly, neither the ability to understand emotions nor the ability to control emotions were found to be significantly related to indicators of students’ social functioning (Klinkosz, Iskra, Artymiak, 2021).

There is relatively little research on the importance of emotional intelligence in interpersonal relationships among seniors. This makes the results of the study by Petrican, Moscovitch and Grady (2014) all the more interesting. Researchers looked for a link between a spouse’s ability to recognise positive and negative emotions and their partner’s well-being. To this end, they conducted two studies involving neurologically healthy older couples and an age-matched clinical trial involving couples in which one spouse had received a diagnosis of Parkinson’s disease, which impairs the expression of emotions. Respondents were asked to recognise positive and negative emotions based on body posture. Their subjective well-being was also measured. Among neurologically healthy spouses, greater proficiency in recognising positive (but not negative) emotions was associated with greater life satisfaction for their partner. In addition, we found that spouses of Parkinson’s disease patients showed greater proficiency in recognising positive emotions compared to the control group, which the researchers believe may reflect compensatory mechanisms. At the same time, this group showed reduced proficiency in recognising negative emotions and a tendency to underestimate their intensity. Importantly, all of these effects diminished with the years following the onset

of Parkinson's disease. Finally, there was evidence to suggest that it was the partner's increased ability to recognise negative (rather than positive) emotional states that was a predictor of higher levels of life satisfaction for both Parkinson's disease patients and their spouses. This is an important finding because the results obtained by Petrican, Moscovitch and Grady (2014), on the one hand, show how important the ability to recognise a spouse's emotions is in a close relationship for his or her subjectively perceived well-being, and, on the other hand, suggest that positive and negative emotions may play different roles in the dynamics of close interpersonal relationships depending on the partner's neurological condition and disability trajectory.

Concerning the subject of marital relationships, it is worth devoting some time to the work of Jardine, Vannier, and Voyer (2022). The researchers conducted a systematic review of dozens of studies conducted in recent years on the relationship between the partners' emotional intelligence and various parameters of their satisfaction with the romantic relationship. The meta-analysis conducted showed a significant positive effect of emotional intelligence for each of the satisfaction indicators. There are several arguments in the literature that support these positive relationships. People with high emotional intelligence can cope with emotional problems that arise in their relationship better. For example, they can communicate better with their partner, collaborate with them and resolve conflicts more effectively (see e.g. Hajihasani, Sim, 2018). In addition, these people find it easier to empathise with and understand their partner's emotions. The aforementioned skills – communication, conflict resolution, understanding perspectives, collaboration – have been shown in research to increase relationship satisfaction (see e.g. Bannon et al., 2020).

There is ample evidence in the literature that high emotional intelligence prevents interpersonal conflicts or promotes their constructive resolution (see e.g. Winardi, Prentice, Weaven, 2022). This applies to different age groups and different environments, such as school or work. The negative relationship between emotional intelligence and violence and various types of aggressive behaviour is also well

proven (see e.g. Schuberth et al., 2019). The ability to regulate emotions is of particular importance here (see e.g. Camodeca, Coppola, 2017; Godleski et al., 2015). Many researchers see emotional intelligence as a protective factor against destructive and anti-social behaviour. In this context, a growing number of reports on the effectiveness of psychological interventions aimed at developing emotional capacity seem promising. As an example, Wong and Power's (2024) study can be cited. The aim of these researchers was to test the impact of the *Peace Ambassador Project* educational programme, which stimulates the development in children of, among other things, emotional intelligence. The project was implemented in a dozen schools in Hong Kong, with groups of children aged between 4 and 5 years (N = 302). A quasi-experimental procedure was used to evaluate its results. In each school, the teachers of one class implemented the programme and the other class acted as a control group. Data were collected among children, their parents and teachers before the programme started and one week and three months after the programme ended. Preliminary analyses showed that, prior to the implementation of the programme, children in the experimental group showed lower emotional intelligence and, at the same time, less competent responses to peer aggression than children in the control group. However, these differences disappeared after the intervention ended. The emotional intelligence of children in the experimental group increased, as well as their ability to take action to stop bullying. There was also a decrease in avoidance of difficult situations and aggressive responses. These findings suggest that educational programmes that shape emotional intelligence and social skills, may be an effective method of dealing with aggressive behaviour. At the same time, they are coherent with other studies that confirm that emotional intelligence trainings are effective interventions (see e.g. Hodzic et al., 2018).

The positive correlations found in research between emotional intelligence and various indicators of social functioning are not surprising. Emotional intelligence, on the one hand, allows one to gain deeper and more relevant insights into one's own emotional experiences generated by interactions with

other people, to understand and cope with them, and on the other hand, enables one to understand the emotions and behaviour of social interaction partners. Researchers point out that such components of emotional intelligence as sensitivity and openness to one’s own and other people’s emotions, the capacity for adequate emotional expression, the ability to understand, recognise and identify other people’s emotional states and the ability to regulate emotions, especially negative ones, form the basis for establishing and maintaining positive relationships with other people (see e.g. Klinkosz, Iskra, Dawidowicz, 2017; Matczak, Knopp, 2013). Thus, emotional intelligence facilitates functioning in social situations and conditions coping with conflict and interpersonal difficulties.

Although the construct of meta-emotional intelligence has only recently appeared in the literature, we already have the first empirical data on the importance of such intelligence in human functioning. D’Amico and Geraci’s (2021) study of a sample of 105 secondary school students (55 girls and 50 boys) aged between 10 and 16 years showed that those with higher emotional ability (as captured by the ability model) have higher sociometric status, i.e. are more popular among peers. The relationships between group position and meta-emotional abilities are of particular interest. It was found that those with adequate meta-emotional knowledge are more accepted by their peers compared to classmates who tend to overestimate their emotional abilities. The latter are more likely to be rejected. Similarly, adolescents who presented adequate meta-emotional self-esteem enjoyed higher levels of acceptance and lower levels of peer rejection. On the margins of the reflections carried out here, it is worth mentioning that D’Amico and Geraci also found that respondents’ correct beliefs about emotions were a significant predictor of their psychological well-being. These findings shed new light on the relationship between emotional ability and social success in adolescents. As the researchers conclude, having emotional capacity is not the only condition for adolescents to engage in correct social relationships. In addition, they must be aware of the aforementioned capacities and the self-assessment in this respect should be adequate. It should also be

noted that those individuals who overestimate their emotional abilities are more likely to be rejected compared to those who underestimate their abilities. This is probably because the former tend to get involved in situations they cannot control. On the other hand, underestimating one’s abilities also has some negative sides, as it can lead to avoiding situations that young people could easily master. So why are they less rejected by their peers? According to D’Amico and Geraci (2021), this is because, compared to overestimators, underestimators are less “visible” to other members of the peer group.

Of course, it is necessary to collect a broader set of empirical data on the importance of meta-emotional intelligence in human functioning. However, the first results we already have are extremely promising. All the more so because research shows that psychological intervention programmes are even more effective for components of meta-emotional intelligence than for emotional intelligence in terms of the ability model (D’Amico, Geraci, 2022).

Summary

Almost 35 years of research into emotional intelligence has produced a substantial body of data on it. One of the most important models of emotional intelligence, the ability model, has already seen its second revision, and its developers suggest that new empirical data will probably lead to further modifications. New concepts are also being developed on the basis of existing knowledge, such as the concept of meta-emotional intelligence. In general, it can be said that there has been a shift in the field of emotional intelligence research towards more integrated, possibly complementary approaches.

Subsequent work expands the knowledge of emotional intelligence, its place among other instrumental dispositions, and the ways in which it can be operationalised. The increasingly precise understanding of the nature of emotional intelligence is inspiring researchers to further explore its role in various aspects of life, such as education, working life, psycho-physical health and, above all, effective functioning in relationships with other people.

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