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Marital satisfaction – a literature review

Zadowolenie z małżeństwa – przegląd badań

Abstract

Introduction. In recent decades, marital satisfaction has received considerable attention in the subject literature, being probably the most frequently analysed dependent variable in the field. Whereas the studies of the analysed issue have a long, and well-documented history, statistics indicate that marital satisfaction is often difficult to achieve and maintain, proving a need for identifying determinants of marital success.

Material and methods. This article is a review. Inclusion criterion was that the article was published in English in a peer-reviewed journal. Article relevance and quality assessments were made by at least two independent reviewers.

Aim. The paper presents a literature review on determinants of marital satisfaction and underlines a need to include the importance of the premarital period for spousal relationships in future research.

Results. Love, patience, reciprocity, communication, understanding, personal identity, religious, orientation, commitment, intimacy, flexible boundaries, shared responsibility,

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persistence, hopefulness, and congruence, have been suggested as the most significant components of marital success.

Conclusion. It may be advantageous for programmes of support services for couples to assist them through the process. Levels of marital satisfaction are likely to be increased as a result of the support services offered. Further study in this area would be useful on account of rising divorce rates. As the present review shows, many determinants of marital success have been identified. However, there are others which should be analysed, such as partners' hierarchies of values, the division of domestic labour, the number of children. Findings of research on marital satisfaction can hopefully provide useful guidelines on counselling couples how to achieve a higher level of marital satisfaction.

Keywords: family, marital satisfaction, marriage.

Abstrakt

Wprowadzenie. W ciągu ostatnich dekad, w literaturze, znaczną uwagę poświęca się poczuciu zadowolenia z małżeństwa, które jest prawdopodobnie najczęściej analizowaną zmienną zależną w obszarze życia rodzinnego. Podczas gdy badania analizowanej kwestii są dobrze udokumentowane i mają długą historię, statystyki wskazują, że satysfakcja z małżeństwa jest często trudna do osiągnięcia i utrzymania. Potwierdza to potrzebę identyfikacji determinantu małżeńskiego sukcesu.

Materiał i metody. Artykuł ma charakter przeglądowy.

Cel. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie przeglądu piśmiennictwa na temat wyznaczników satysfakcji małżeńskiej, a także podkreślenie potrzeby włączenia znaczenia przedmałżeńskiego okresu relacji partnerskiej w przyszłych badaniach rodziny.

Wyniki. Okazuje się, że takie czynniki jak: miłość, cierpliwość, wzajemność, komunikacja, zrozumienie, tożsamość osobista, religijna, orientacja, zaangażowanie, intymność, elastyczne granice, wspólna odpowiedzialność, wytrwałość, optymizm oraz kongruencja zostały zaproponowane jako najbardziej istotne elementy małżeńskiego sukcesu.

Wnioski. Wyłonienie źródeł małżeńskiego sukcesu jest przydatne ze względu na zmiany w funkcjonowaniu rodzin, w tym rosnące wskaźniki rozwodów. Jak pokazuje niniejszy przegląd, zidentyfikowano wiele czynników warunkujących powodzenie małżeństwa. Istnieją jednak inne, które należałoby poddać analizie, np. hierarchia wartości partnerów, podział prac domowych, czy liczba dzieci. Wyniki badań nad satysfakcją małżeńską mogą dostarczyć użytecznych wskazówek w zakresie doradzania parom, jak osiągnąć wyższy poziom satysfakcji małżeńskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, zadowolenie z małżeństwa, małżeństwo.

Introduction

In the last decades, marriage has been a focus of numerous studies by researchers and therapists. The concept of marital adjustment has taken a prominent place in the literature of family, and marriage, and relationships. Spanier stated that it had been probably the most frequently analysed dependent variable in the field. Researchers have used, almost interchangeably, descriptive phrases, such as "marital cohesiveness", "marital happiness", "dyadic adjustment" and "marital stability" (Anthony, 1993).

The quality of life can be evaluated on different levels. One can take into consideration a generalised quality or the quality of specific areas of life. At times, the components of each area of life are considered, at other times, it is the conditioning factors or the subject's current situation that is taken into account. According to Jadwiga Daszykowska (2007), the evaluation of the quality of life reflects the state of balance between the general quality and the subject's current situation. The degree of life satisfaction becomes the indicator of the level of the quality of life.

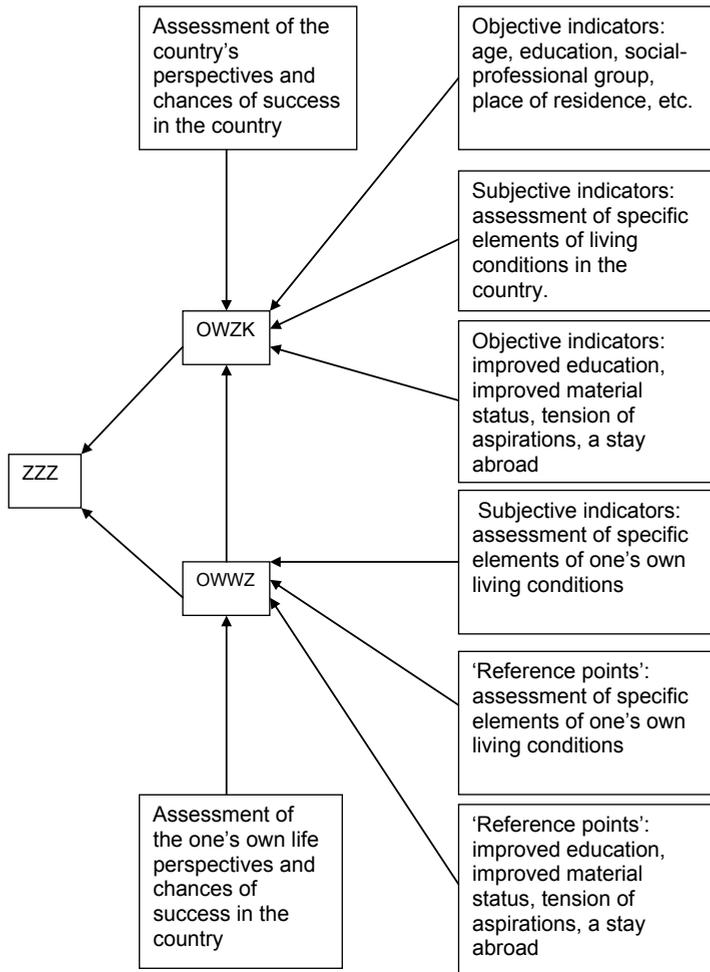


Figure 1. Diagram of the correspondences between variables in the model of the quality of life.

Note: ZZZ – life satisfaction, OWZK – the assessment of the living conditions in the country, OWWZ – the assessment of one's own living conditions.

Source: Ostasiewicz, 2002, p. 45.

Walenty Ostasiewicz (2002) claims that there are three aspects determining the quality of life i.e., an economic one, a social one, and a mental one. In order to describe the basic correspondences between different determinants, the author constructed a certain model. In it, he pointed to global indicators of the quality of life (life satisfaction, the assessment of the living conditions in the country, and the assessment of one's own living conditions) as well as subjective and objective indicators.

The author draws attention to the subjective, and objective, dimensions of the quality of life. The objective indicators refer to the reality in which the studied population lives, and to its social, economic, and demographic structure. The subjective indicators are concerned with notions connected with life satisfaction, expectations, the perception of the future, and the assessment of one's own perspective (Ostasiewicz, 2002).

Helena Sęk (1993) treats the objective quality of life as a combination of one's living conditions and one's objectively measured attributes connected with the living and social status. The objective indicators of the quality of life also include the constitution of the body and health, treated as a level of proper functioning of all biological organs. The subjective quality of life is the outcome of the inner evaluation of various spheres of life, and of life as a whole. The method of the evaluation is dependent upon the structure of the needs and the individual value system, and especially, upon the individual understanding of the meaning of life.

The objective and subjective aspects of the quality of life are interconnected. The quality of life is a multidimensional entity which comprises one's general physical and mental state, possibilities of self-realisation and a positive social engagement. According to Straś-Romanowska, people are capable of feeling life satisfaction despite the existence of objectively unsatisfying circumstances. The author justifies this by the existence of psychological strategies, and mechanisms that people possess, enabling them to lessen the effects of frequent adversities. An individual is able to raise the level of the quality of one's life through the combination of the four dimensions: biological, social (the level of social adaptation), subjective (possibilities of self-realisation, authenticity, self-consciousness) and transcendental (values, conscience).

This article is a review of selected research findings. Article relevance and quality assessments were made by at least two independent reviewers.

The following inclusion criteria were applied:

- Exposure: marital satisfaction;
- Study design: quantitative study;
- Publication type: peer-review journal articles;
- Publication language: English;
- Time period: no restriction.

Findings from the articles were summarised in a narrative synthesis.

Before analysing research findings on marital satisfaction, the term “marriage” should be defined. In their work, Richard A. Mackey and Bernard A. O’Brien (1995) report that marriage, which occurs in adulthood, is a developmental process. Probably the most widely used notion of marriage is the concept of marital adjustment described as the most significant human relationship (Larson & Holman, 1994). Throughout the subject literature, marital quality is defined as the multidimensional process with the outcome depending on:

- troublesome marital differences;
- dyadic cohesion;
- marital satisfaction;
- personal anxiety and interspousal tensions;
- consensus on matters of importance to marital functioning (Spanier, 1976).

Marital satisfaction has received considerable attention in the subject literature. Whereas the studies of the analysed issue have a long and well-documented history, statistics indicate that marital satisfaction is often difficult to achieve and maintain,¹ proving a need for identifying determinants of marital success. This review is based mainly on the topical literature, and reference is made only to selected aspects of early studies. Such an approach was adopted for two reasons. Firstly, the modern world is subject to rapid changes, and people tend to adapt to it, either out of necessity or by choice. Therefore, the main focus in the paper is what makes people feel satisfied nowadays, whereas the results of early studies form the background to the discussed issue. Secondly, while casting light on specific indicators of marital satisfaction, the studies to date have not taken account of the complex interrelationships between them. Among factors which have received little attention in the literature on marital satisfaction, family-of-origin functioning, and parental alcoholism, should be mentioned. For instance, Linda C. Robinson and Priscilla W. Blanton (1993) indicated that love, patience, reciprocity, communication, understanding, personal identity, religious orientation, commitment, intimacy, flexible boundaries, shared responsibility, persistence, hopefulness, and congruence were the most significant components of marital success.

Romuald Kolman (2002) points to six areas of human life which undergo evaluation to determine the quality of life. The author enumerates them as: psychological, functional, somatic, environmental, residential, and family life. In the last area, the author comments on, among other things, the motivation for entering into marriage

¹ In recent years there has been an alarming growth of divorce and separation rates (Tucker & O’Grady, 1991). According to Brubaker and Kimberly (1993), even two thirds of all first marriages in the United States end in divorce.

(e.g. love, reason, pregnancy), the spouses' former marital status, the atmosphere at home, the distribution of chores, sexual satisfaction, and the possession of offspring.

Robert H. Lauer et al. (1990) studied couples that had been married more than 45 years. They identified the key characteristics of happy marriages as: (a) They were married to someone they liked, b) they had a sense of humour c) they had a commitment to the person as well as to the marriage, and (d) they were able to reach consensus (i.e., agreement).

Randal Collins and Scott Coltrane (1991) identified the most important characteristics of successful marriages. These were as follows (in order from most to least important): faithfulness, understanding, a good sex life, children, common interests, sharing household chores, having enough money, and sharing similar backgrounds. Lawrence Kurdek (1991) found that three personality variables: motives to be in the relationship, psychological distress, and satisfaction with social support were associated with success in marriage.

Selected determinants of marital satisfaction

One of the earliest important empirical studies on marital satisfaction was conducted by George Hamilton (1929). However, the earliest, most widely used, and significant, instruments to measure marital adjustment were developed by Ernest Burgess and Leonard Cottrell (1936). Paul Wallin (1957) studied the association between religion, marital satisfaction, and sexual gratification. At the same time, Lee Burchinal (1957) examined the relationship between regularity of attending church and marital satisfaction.

Studies on determinants of marital satisfaction conducted in the 1980s included, among other things, cohabitation, duration of marriage, and spouses' intelligence. According to Alfred DeMaris and Gerald Leslie (1984), spouses who cohabitated before marriage had a significantly lower level of marital satisfaction. Clifford Swensen and Geir Trahaug (1985) conceded that marital satisfaction was associated with the length of marriage. The level of marital satisfaction tended to decline over time. A few researchers have considered some aspects of intelligence as determinants of marital satisfaction. Findings showed an inverse relationship between marital separation rates and educational attainment levels (Glick, 1957; Udry, 1966). Relatively few attempts have been made to ascertain how intelligence affects marital satisfaction (Murstein, 1976). Janusz Czapiński and Tomasz Panek (2007) concluded that people with higher education perceive a higher quality of their lives than those with primary education.

Much research has focused on possible relationships between marital satisfaction and having children, with no conclusive results, though. On the one hand, numerous studies indicate that the presence of children is associated with a high level of marital success (Collins & Coltrane, 1991; Czapiński & Panek, 2007; Kurdek, 1995). However, some aspects of parenthood seem to correlate negatively with a level of marital satisfaction (Glenn, 1990).

A review of the literature on marital satisfaction from a “religious” point of view suggests that there is a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and particular aspects of religiosity. Some researchers suggest that sharing religious orientation is the most important value (Craddock, 1991; Schumm, 1985). Some research has found that religious homogamy between spouses is associated with higher marital stability, marital satisfaction, and marital quality (Glenn, 1984; Heaton, 1982; Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Ortega, Whitt, & William, 1988).

The analyses by Lynn Sussman and Charlene Alexander (1999) concentrated on the association between religiosity and marital satisfaction in Jewish-Christian couples (in their first marriage). The researchers demonstrated that parental participation in daily life and other family members’ interfaith marriages were associated only with husbands’ marital satisfaction. Moreover, according to these authors, ethnic identity, religiosity, and other-group orientation failed to predict the marital satisfaction of spouses in an interfaith marriage.

The study by Michael J. Anthony (1993) was based upon 400 marital dyads from major Protestant denominations (Baptist, Evangelical, Independent, Free, and Congregational). The results of this investigation showed that individuals who manifested intrinsically oriented religiosity² experienced the highest levels of marital satisfaction. Nonreligious individuals enjoyed significantly higher marital satisfaction than those who were extrinsically oriented. Anthony explained that these people supported their marital relationships without maintaining traditions and strict standards. Indiscriminately pro-religious individuals³ had the third highest level of marital satisfaction. Moreover, the findings indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between marital satisfaction and the variables of income, age, religious homogamy, children, or premarital cohabitation.

The analysis of the literature on marital satisfaction from a *health* perspective suggests that people confronted with a serious illness (e.g. cancer patients) felt less satisfied in comparison to those with healthy spouses. Besides, it was found that when

² Intrinsically motivated people are those for whom the needs of others are more important than their own.

³ Indiscriminately pro-religious individuals are those who are not capable of differentiating between motives. They like anything that sounds like religion, and they view religion as an important value in their lives.

partners of patients felt equitably treated in their relationship, they were most satisfied with their relationship (Kuijer et al., 2002).

Norm O'Rourke et al. (2001) examined older married adults. They found that perceived health contributes significantly to marital satisfaction. It is noteworthy that low ratings of subjective physical well-being contributes to improved marital satisfaction. Moreover, heightened self-deception may enhance perceived marital success among those men who perceive that their health is getting worse. Interestingly, the connection between perceived health and marital satisfaction is not driven by selective recall of one's marital history. Instead, a significant gender difference in self-deception may be associated to this paradoxical connection between perceived health and marital satisfaction.

James L. Campbell et al. (1998) conducted a survey on female and male clients from outpatient counselling centres for alcoholics. Participants expressed a wide range of mental health concerns. The authors indicated that family-of-origin functioning was positively associated with marital satisfaction, i.e., higher perceived levels of family-of-origin functioning were associated with higher reported levels of present marital satisfaction). Moreover, spouses with alcoholic parents (brought up in an alcoholic home) declared lower family-of-origin functioning, and a relation between gender and parental alcoholism was found for respondents' marital satisfaction. That is, women with history of parental alcoholism declared lower levels of marital satisfaction than men without such history. These findings are consistent with results of previous research which indicated that a level of marital satisfaction was relatively lower in spouses with adverse experiences in their families of origin (e.g., parental divorce) (Booth & Edwards, 1989; Wamboldt & Reiss, 1989). Campbell et al. (1998) concluded that, although family-of-origin functioning was connected to marital satisfaction and that parental alcoholism was associated with family-of-origin functioning, there was no direct correlation between marital satisfaction and parental alcoholism.

Władysław Tatarkiewicz (1990) proposes the evaluation of the quality of life in the past, present, and future perspectives. The author makes an assumption which states that a person's quality of life encompasses their past events, which bind them to the present, and, at the same time, determine the trends for future actions. An outlook onto the past makes it possible to understand the experience having been accumulated by the person.

Lilly Dimitrovsky et al. (2002), compared women who had not experienced pregnancy and women in the last trimester of their first pregnancy (both married). They did not find a difference in a level of marital satisfaction between the two groups.

Sexual life

A wide range of studies highlight an association between sexual life and marital satisfaction. For example, it has been confirmed that satisfied spouses engaged in sexual intercourse more often than couples who were not satisfied (Barnett & Nietzel, 1979; Birchler & Webb, 1977). Simultaneously, a strong relationship has been found between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction (Barnett & Nietzel, 1979; Perlman & Abramson, 1982).

Samantha Litzinger and Kristina Gordon (2005) examined the association between communication and sexual and marital satisfaction. Their analyses revealed that married individuals who were satisfied with their sexual life and, at the same time, had difficulty in communicating, enjoyed greater marital success. According to the authors, sexual satisfaction may partially compensate for problems in communication on marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with earlier results by Linda Ade-Ridder (1990) who concentrated on the connection between marital satisfaction and sexual activity. He concluded that couples who continued their sexual interest and relations maintained a high-quality marriage in later life.

Patricia J. Morokoff and Ruth Gilliland (1993) conducted a survey which examined the correlation between sexual functioning, stress, and marital satisfaction. They found that satisfied spouses engaged in sexual intercourse more frequently than unhappy ones. Moreover, their study showed a strong association between sexual and marital satisfaction. It is interesting that frequent sexual activity was not a prerequisite for marital success (some couples were happy with little or no sexual interaction). Additionally, marital satisfaction was not significantly correlated with any aspects of stress. Besides, their results indicate that frequency of sexual relations was negatively associated with marital satisfaction only for men, but frequency of sexual intercourse of women and men was positively associated with their marital satisfaction. Furthermore, for women who had unemployed partners, a low level of marital satisfaction was related with husbands' erectile dysfunction).

Spouses' levels of education

Jerry M. Lewis et al. (1993) studied characteristics of physicians, dentists, and their spouses. They found that a view of marriage is positive because the majority of professionals and their spouses were satisfied with their marriages. The findings of this study negate the opinion that physicians' marriages are more likely to be dysfunctional than those of other persons. High levels of marital satisfaction were connected with low work stress, high work satisfaction, and fewer psychiatric symptoms. The physi-

cians' spouses declared higher levels of marital satisfaction when the doctors were more content with medical practice. The authors added that one out of four physicians and their spouses declared having participated in family or marital therapy (participation in marital or family therapy was reported by physicians with low levels of marital satisfaction). Dentists and their spouses declared similar levels of participation in that sort of therapy. Lewis et al. (1993) explain that well-educated persons accept formal efforts to develop their key relationship systems.

Rebecca G. Brannock et al. (2000) examined the impact of doctoral study on marital satisfaction. They found a significant difference in the marital satisfaction of spouses involved in marital therapy. Couples who underwent marital therapy (during or before the study) had significantly lower levels of marital satisfaction than those who never experienced this kind of treatment. Spouses of graduate students reported less marital satisfaction. Discord in marital satisfaction could be observed in affection, philosophy of life, and sexual relations. Levels of marital satisfaction in graduate students did not appear to depend on the duration of their study.

Gender

As far as gender is concerned, to date there have been no conclusive results concerning female and male marital satisfaction. Robert D. Ryne (1981) found no differences in marital satisfaction between men and women. In the light of other studies, differences in marital satisfaction turned out to be largely nonsignificant for both genders (Kurdek, 2005). In contrast, Jane R. Rosen-Grandon et al. (2004) revealed some gender differences in marital satisfaction.

Other aspects

Blaine J. Fowers and Brooks Applegate (1996) studied a sample of 1124 couples who belonged to a large fraternal association and participated in a larger research of family functioning (from 31 states). They found that conventionalization and marital satisfaction are best understood in dyadic terms. The couples reported a similarity of their levels of marital satisfaction.

Generally, an important dimension of our functioning is the character of the relations with other people (Dębska, 2006; Oleś, Chmielnicka-Kuter, & Oleś, 2006). The extent to which we feel satisfied with our lives depends on the discrepancy between the perceived importance of our needs and the sense of their fulfilment. A sense of low quality of life means there is a significant discrepancy between a high perception

of the importance of a given need and, at the same time, a low perception of its fulfilment. On the other hand, a sense of a high quality of life arises from the difference between a high importance, and a high fulfilment, level of the need, or from a low importance, and a low fulfilment, level of the need (Brzezińska, Stolarska, & Zielińska, 2001). The authors, on examining people of different ages, concluded that, in each period of the adulthood, there is a different hierarchy of the importance of one's needs. Interpersonal bonds are the most important for people aged between 20 and 30. It was this particular group that were the most critical in the assessment of various dimensions of the functioning of a partner relationship.

The study by Rosen-Grandon et al. (2004) was focused on the chances of having a successful marriage. They noted that marital satisfaction was linked to loyalty in the relationship, but that a loving relationship was not sufficient to achieve a high level of marital quality. According to these authors, loving relationships are those in which agreement on the expression of affection and open communication are of central importance. The most significant characteristics of loving marriages were identified as: forgiveness, respect, sensitivity, romance, and support. An important aspect was also the awareness of possessing certain character traits or competences, and among these: abilities and faith in one's strength, or inner peace (Oleś, Chmielnicka-Kuter, & Oleś, 2006).

The authors also concluded that spouses who placed a high value on 'traditionality' (i.e., traditional gender roles), were satisfied with their marriage. Similarly, other studies (e.g., Craddock, 1991; Greenstein, 1995; Zvonkovic et al., 1994) found that some aspects of "traditionality" can lead to increases in marital satisfaction.

Michael W. Tucker and Kevin E. O'Grady (1991) investigated which factors spouses (undergraduate psychology students) perceive as determinants of marital satisfaction. They concentrated on the effect of similarity of a married couple in terms of intelligence, attractiveness, and age at marriage, on the perception of the partners' satisfaction. They found that intelligent, attractive, and older people were all perceived more favourably than were their spouses. The results also indicated that partners may have different beliefs about success in marriage. Furthermore, it is interesting that cohabitation had little impact on subsequent marital satisfaction. The study also found that although attractive spouses were more likely to have a partner who was satisfied with the arrangement, this attractive person was less likely to be happy about it. It is noteworthy that spouses perceived similarity of intelligence as a crucial factor in marital satisfaction. Moreover, Tucker and O'Grady (1991) noted that women who had a lower level of marital satisfaction were more intelligent. This is a particularly significant result, because the numbers of women receiving higher education shows a steady upward trend.

In an attempt to explain the association between expressiveness and marital satisfaction, Paul J. E. Miller et al. (2003) analysed characterizations of 168 newlywed

couples. They noted that the analysed trait contributed to satisfaction because expressive spouses idealized their partners and behave affectionately.

Duane W. Crawford et al. (2002) suggested that leisure liked by husbands and disliked by wives is associated with marital satisfaction – wives' dissatisfaction was connected with husbands' involvement in activities, even if they pursued it together.

Susan Sprecher (2001) described that under-benefiting inequity was related with a lower level of satisfaction. In addition, this study concluded that spousal satisfaction was linked with relationship stability.

According to Chalandra M. Bryant et al. (2001), discord with in-laws eroded marital success. The authors also revealed a reversal causal direction: marital satisfaction predicted low levels of conflict with in-laws (it was only true for husbands).

William P. Sacco and Vicky Phares (2001) indicated that people have higher levels of satisfaction when their partners view them in a favourable light and lower levels of satisfaction when their partners perceive them negatively.

Daphne Stevens et al. (2001) studied dual-earner couples in order to investigate domestic labour and marital satisfaction. This study identified predictors of marital satisfaction. For women, these turned out to be: satisfaction with the division of household tasks, their contribution to household, emotion work and status-enhancement tasks, whereas for men: satisfaction with the division of labour with housework and emotion work.

Kristina Möller et al. (2006) focused on a sample of 251 Swedish individuals – mothers and fathers. According to these authors, dissatisfaction in the couple relationship of second-time parents was predicted by attachment styles.

An impact of the polygamous family structure on marital satisfaction is reflected in the research by Alean Al-Krenawi and John R. Graham (2006). They studied 352 Bedouin-Arab women: 67% were in monogamous marriages and 33% in polygamous marriages. They suggested that women in polygamous marriages had significantly more problems in marital relationships, family functioning, and marital satisfaction; they also showed significantly more psychological problems, such as phobia.

The data collected from Turkish nonclinical married individuals revealed that the marital satisfaction of wives was positively associated with mind-reading beliefs. However, this study found no correlations between dysfunctional relationship beliefs and marital success (Hamamci, 2005).

One of the most interesting findings of the review by Jeffrey H. Larson and Thomas B. Holman (1994) refers to the successful marriage as accepted and positively perceived by friends.

A multitude of studies confirm that on the one hand, people have a tendency to marry someone similar to themselves, and on the other hand, spouses have a high

level of marital satisfaction when they are similar (Blazer, 1963; Murstein & Beck, 1972; Murstein, 1976; Schellenberg & Bee, 1960; White & Hatcher, 1984).

A wide range of studies highlight an association between marital satisfaction and physical attractiveness (e.g., Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Miller, 1970; Sigall & Landy, 1973; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottmann, 1966). Other authors (e.g., Dermer & Theil, 1975; Sigall & Ostrove, 1975) came to opposite conclusions, though.

As another determinant of marital satisfaction, age at the first marriage is recognized. Demographic analyses indicate a clear relationship between age and marriage failure rates. Marriages contracted when the spouses are over 20 years of age are far more likely to be maintained than those of younger partners (Booth & White, 1980; Bumpass & Sweet, 1972; Carter & Glick, 1970). Gloria Cowan (1984) emphasizes the effects of the couple's age discrepancy: the smaller difference in the partners' ages, the higher is their level of marital satisfaction.

Numerous attempts have been made to identify the components of marital satisfaction in studies with cohabitation included as a variable. This factor was sometimes understood as a test for marriage (Lewis et al., 1977; Macklin, 1972; Trost, 1975). Generally, in the light of existing evidence, there is only a small association between marital satisfaction and cohabitation (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Jacques & Chason, 1979; Newcomb & Bentler, 1980; Watson, 1983).

Conclusion

When indicating the conditioning of the spouses' quality of life, one must take into account the multidimensionality of the assessments made by the subjects. One ought to include the subjective and objective aspects of the quality of life. Arriving at an unbiased evaluation of life satisfaction may not be easy, due to the fact that contemporary society expects the fulfilment of material and cultural needs, attractive pastimes, work, and an increasingly greater level of safety (Daszykowska, 2007).

Establishing the level of the spouses' quality of life seems important not only in the context of the functioning of their relationships, but also with relation to the development of their children. Janusz Czapiński (1992) and Ewa Trzebińska and Aleksandra Łuszczynska (2002) claim that the higher the quality of life of those engaged in the upbringing process, the easier and the more successful the process becomes.

The results of one of the most extensive studies concerning Poles' quality of life, prove that its most significant indicators are: the mental state of the individual, marriage, and material status. Unfortunately, marital satisfaction has been in decline for the past decade (Czapiński & Panek, 2007).

According to Jane R. Rosen-Grandon (2004), future research should include the importance of the premarital period for relationships. They propose a study of the variables that influence marital success, such as the duration of the marriage, gender differences, and the dimensions of loyalty, love, and shared values. Despite the growing interest in remarriage satisfaction, few clear conclusions may be drawn from the empirical research on this subject (Vemer et al., 1989). Therefore, focusing on the number of marriages contracted by a person seems to provide a promising starting point for future study on marital satisfaction. One of the successful attempts was the research conducted by Jose Orathinkal and Alfons Vansteenwegen (2006) which proved a significant difference in marital satisfaction between first-married and remarried people.

It may be advantageous for programmes of support services for couples to assist them through the process. Levels of marital satisfaction are likely to be increased as a result of the support services offered. Further study in this area would be useful on account of rising divorce rates. As the present review shows, many determinants of marital success have been identified. However, there are others which should be analysed, such as partners' hierarchies of values, division of domestic labour, and the number of children. Findings of research on marital satisfaction can hopefully provide useful guidelines on counselling couples how to achieve a higher level of marital satisfaction.

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