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Quality of family life of spouses with children and couples childless by choice

Jakość życia rodzinnego małżonków posiadających
dzieci i małżeństw bezdzietnych z wyboru

Abstract

Aim. Today, we observe changes to the institution of marriage and family (Kwak, 2012; Strawińska, 2019; Szymczak, 2022). Researchers assessing the condition of contemporary marriages and families have divided themselves into opposing camps. Some believe that we are currently dealing with a crisis of marriage and family. Couples divorcing or deciding to choose an alternative form of life is on the increase. A child is a matter of conscious choice, not an obligation, which contributes to the growth of the phenomenon of conscious postponement of procreative decisions or a complete renunciation of it. It seems interesting in this context to determine the mutual interactions between motivation, the intention to remain childless, and the benefits and costs of having children of people entering into marriage, as well as to determine the perception of the quality of relationships between marriages with

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children and marriages childless by choice. The aim of the research is to characterize the psychological characteristics of couples childless by choice and to compare them with couples with children, which will allow for an assessment of the quality of the relationships they create in such dimensions as marital communication and conflict resolution style.

Methods and materials. The research aims to compare and contrast the psychological characteristics of marriages childless by choice with marriages with children. Analysis of the relations between marriages with children and marriages childless by choice will allow for an assessment of the quality of relationships created by them on such dimensions as: communication, conflict resolution, styles,

Results and conclusion. The conducted research revealed significant differences.

Keywords: family, child, marriage, relationship quality, childlessness.

Abstrakt

Cel. Współcześnie obserwujemy liczne przemiany, którym podlega instytucja małżeństwa i rodziny (Kwak, 2012; Strawińska, 2019; Szymczak, 2022). Badacze, którzy oceniają kondycję współczesnych małżeństw i rodzin, podzielili się zasadniczo na przeciwstawne fronty. Jedni uważają, że obecnie mamy do czynienia z kryzysem małżeństwa i rodziny czy wręcz zanikiem tych instytucji, natomiast inni mówią jedynie o nieuniknionym procesie ich przemian. Systematycznie spada liczba osób, które zawierają związek małżeński, wzrasta natomiast liczba par rozwodzących się czy decydujących się na wybór alternatywnej formy życia, takiej jak kohabitacja czy życie w pojedynkę. Urodzenie dziecka jest kwestią świadomego wyboru, a nie obowiązku, co przyczynia się do wzrostu zjawiska odsuwania w czasie decyzji prokreacyjnych albo też całkowitej rezygnacji z potomstwa. Ciekawe zatem wydaje się w tym kontekście ustalenie wzajemnych oddziaływań pomiędzy motywacją do pozostania bezdzietnym a korzyściami i kosztami z posiadania dzieci u osób zawierających małżeństwo, a także określenie różnic w jakości związków pomiędzy małżeństwami posiadającymi potomstwo i małżeństwami bezdzietnymi z wyboru. Badania mają na celu dokonanie psychologicznej charakterystyki małżeństw bezdzietnych z wyboru przy równoczesnej próbie ich porównania z małżeństwami posiadającymi potomstwo. Analiza relacji pomiędzy małżeństwami posiadającymi potomstwo i małżeństwami bezdzietnymi z wyboru pozwoli na ocenę jakości związków tworzonych przez nie w wymiarach komunikacji małżeńskiej i stylów rozwiązywania konfliktów.

Metody i materiały. Ankieta (przygotowana w dwóch wersjach – dla małżeństw z potomstwem oraz małżeństw bezdzietnych z wyboru), Kwestionariusz Dobranego Małżeństwa (KDM-2) M. Plopy, Kwestionariusz Komunikacji Małżeńskiej (KKM) M. Plopy.

Wyniki i wnioski. Przeprowadzone badania wykazały istotne różnice.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, małżeństwo, dziecko, bezdzietność, jakość związku.

Nowadays, marriage and family institutions are undergoing numerous changes (Kwak, 2012; Strawieńska, 2019; Szymczak, 2022). In 2021, *Narodowy Spis Powszechny Narodowości i Mieszkań* [the National Census of Nationality and Housing] was conducted (GUS, 2024). Thanks to the census, we can trace how Polish families have changed. Data from the census mentioned above also shows changes in the lifestyle of Poles. There is even talk of a global revolution in this sphere of life (Szymczak, 2022). The number of people getting married is steadily declining, while the number of couples divorcing or choosing alternative forms of living, such as cohabitation or living alone, is increasing. According to CBOS data, over the last 10 years, the number of marriages has decreased, while the number of couples in informal relationships has increased. In 2021, there were nearly 553,000 such couples, compared to 316,500 in 2011. There are 4.2 million married couples with children in the country and 3 million childless married couples. The theory of the so-called “second demographic transition” is popular today. It refers to changes in marriage and the family, drawing attention to the changes that have been taking place in Europe since the early 1960s (Slany, 2008; Szlendak, 2010; Szymczak, 2022). According to this theory, the main cause of the changes observed today is modernisation processes caused by phenomena such as urbanisation, industrialisation, the dominance of the service sector, the development of medicine, easy access to cheap contraception, democratisation and the increase in individual autonomy. These changes, taking place at the technical, economic, transformational and moral levels, were later reflected in changes at the personal level, expressed in a focus on self-development and individualisation at the expense of commitment to family and having children (Szlendak, 2010). Researchers who assess the condition of contemporary marriages and families are broadly divided into opposing camps. Some believe that we are currently experiencing a crisis of marriage and family, or even the disappearance of these institutions, while others speak only of an inevitable process of change. Those who talk about a crisis of the family base their views mainly on statistics concerning the number of marriages, the number of divorces, attitudes towards having children and women’s participation in the labour market (Szlendak, 2010). A contrary view was expressed by D. M. Newman (1999), who spoke of “the family adapting to social conditions” (Kwak, 2005, p. 46), which does not necessarily mean the disappearance of the family, but rather its greater complexity and diversity (Kwak, 2015). This indicates that the family is not and never will be a static organisation (Kwak, 2015). In this context, one can only venture to say that the concept of the family and its functions are undergoing significant changes (Żurek, 2010; Gorbaniuk, 2007; Kawula, 2006; Wróblewska, 2011; Liberska, Matuszewska, 2001; Wójcik-Skwarska, 2023). In this context, it seems interesting to examine the qualitative differences between different types of marriages. The analysis covered childless marriages by choice and marriages with children.

In the literature on the subject, there is ambiguity surrounding the concept of marriage quality, as well as a multitude of related terms which, despite their similar meanings, are not identical (Ryś, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2010; Rostowski, 1987; Janicka, Niebrzydowski, 1994; Janicka, Liberska, 2014; Strawińska, 2019). This is due to the complexity of the concept, which translates into a variety of factors determining it, as well as a lack of consensus on how to identify it (Jankowiak, 2007). Among the related terms used to describe the quality of marriage, the most common are: marital well-being (Braun-Gałkowska, 1992), marital success (Adamski, 2009), maturity for marriage (Ziemska, 1979), marital integration (Janicka, Niebrzydowski, 1994), marital selection (Rostowski, 1987), marital happiness (Janiszewski, 1986), and marital satisfaction (Janicka, Niebrzydowski, 1994; Plopa, 2011). Graham Spanier and Robert Lewis, who coined the term “marriage quality,” define it as “a subjective assessment of a married couple’s relationship, taking into account several dimensions and evaluations” (Spanier & Lewis, 1980, p. 827). This term encompasses a sense of integration, satisfaction, happiness and communication, which were previously considered dependent variables in research (cf. Ryś, 1996; Rostowski, 1987). Iwona Janicka and Leon Niebrzydowski describe marital quality as an ambiguous concept referring to marital happiness, satisfaction, stability and integration. Mutual openness, sexual satisfaction and empathy have a significant impact on the level of interpersonal contact between spouses (Janicka, Niebrzydowski, 1994). Jan Rostowski (1987), who is the creator of the concept of a well-matched marriage, assumes that this concept is in many ways similar to the concept of marital quality. In both cases, one can speak of the existence of a continuum on which individual marriages can be located. A well-matched marriage is “[...] a specific process, the results of which are determined by the appropriate degree of love, interpersonal bond, intimacy, similarity, sexual life, attitude towards children, and the type of motives for choosing a marriage partner” (Rostowski, 1987, p. 30). Maria Braun-Gałkowska (1985), on the other hand, introduced the concept of marital success. According to this author, it is “[...] a lasting relationship, subjectively assessed positively by the spouses” (p. 22).

Due to the multitude of criteria determining the quality of marriage proposed by various authors, it is impossible to create a uniform set of characteristics describing the ideal marriage. This difficulty also stems from the fact that the concept of a successful marriage is subjective, interpreted differently by spouses, and often subject to change during the marriage (Liberska & Matuszewska, 2001). Happiness in marriage is not a permanent state, but is constantly changing (Pielka, 1998). The quality of a marriage depends on many factors. The most important ones include: subjective satisfaction of the spouses, intimacy, ways of resolving disputes, shared interests, personality types of the spouses, mutual physical attraction, motives for choosing a spouse, sexual satisfaction, maturity for marriage, support, empathy, similarity of needs, intra-marital communication, attachment style, self-esteem (Jarończyk, 2011; Braun-Gałkowska,

1992; Chmielewska, 2012; Plopa, 2008; Janicka, Niebrzydowski, 1994; Wojciszke, 2009). Mieczysław Plopa (2011) describes the quality of marriage using dimensions such as intimacy, self-fulfilment, similarity and disappointment.

The desire to have children has been considered one of the main motives for entering into marriage. The procreative function has an important role not only as a task assigned to marriage, but also as part of social expectations towards partners (Przybył, 2000, 2003). On the one hand, it can fulfil the desires and dreams of spouses, and on the other, it can hinder or prevent the achievement of other goals (Rostowski, 1987). We can talk about mature and immature motives for having children. Mature motives are related to treating the child as a value in itself, superior to the marriage itself, where the child is a desired being whom one wants to provide with the necessary conditions for life and development. At the same time, a child is a representative of a species, community and nation, and through offspring, humans can fulfil their need for parenthood. These are motives of a social, biological, psychological, national and sometimes religious nature. The opposite of these are instrumental motives, where the decision to have a child is an attempt to save a relationship, please a partner, gain approval from those around them, or secure their old age. Most often, both types of motives intertwine, but it is important that the mature motives ultimately prevail over the instrumental ones. It is also extremely important whether the child was planned and wanted. If this was not the case, it could be a source of numerous difficulties, negative emotions and stress for the parents, which could even lead to the breakdown of the marriage. On the other hand, having a planned child correlates positively with marital adjustment and happiness (Rostowski, 1987). Currently, as research suggests, children are considered valuable, but relative, something that can be possessed, but not at any cost and not under all circumstances (Lesińska-Sawicka, 2007; Banasiak-Parzych, 2009; Blackstone, Steward, 2012; Dźbik-Kluge, 2023). It is a matter of conscious choice rather than obligation, which contributes to the increase in the phenomenon of consciously postponing or completely abandoning the decision to have children (Wacławik, 2012; Garncarek, 2013). Voluntary childlessness is defined as not having biological or adopted children by choice, rather than for reasons beyond one's control (Sakman, 2021; Szelewa, 2021; Garncarek, 2017), and it can be said that it is an increasingly common phenomenon. Publications on this topic have appeared in the literature relatively recently, but there is a growing body of research in this area (Michalska, 2005, Owsiejczyk, 2009; Jarmołowska, 2009; Garncarek, 2017; Dybowska, 2018; Strawińska, 2019; Kulinicz, 2022; Dźbik-Kluge, 2023). Research conducted over many years in the United States indicates that a significant proportion of the population (5–6%) identify themselves as voluntarily childless (Martinez, Daniels, & Chandra, 2012). A similar trend can be observed in Poland, where, according to the Central Statistical Office [GUS], birth rates have been steadily declining in recent decades. On 1 March 2021, the popula-

tion of Poland was 38,036,100. This means that it was 475,700 (1.2%) smaller than during the 2011 census. Until around the end of 2012, Poland recorded positive natural growth. Since then, positive natural growth has occurred sporadically, and since 2018, the demographic situation has begun to deteriorate significantly. In 2018, the number of Poles decreased by 25,800. In 2019, it was already 34,800, and over the last year and a half, approximately 40,000 people. A survey conducted by CBOS on a representative sample of 1,084 adult residents of Poland in 2022 shows that among the youngest respondents (aged 18–24), the percentage of people who do not want to have children at all is 21%. In the entire sample, the percentage of those who do not plan to have children is lower, at 15%. Some childless people decide to remain childless of their own free will, rather than due to factors beyond their control, such as infertility. Voluntary childlessness has not only very significant psychological consequences, but also social and demographic consequences (Sakman, 2021; Abma, Martinez, 2006; Kelly, 2009; Avison, Furnham, 2015; Garncarek, 2008, 2017; Laszewska-Hellriegel, 2011).

Aim of the study

To determine the quality of life of spouses functioning within a family, the following question was posed: What distinguishes childless marriages by choice from marriages with children in terms of quality? Within the framework of the chosen objective, two research questions were identified:

- Are there significant differences in the assessment of the quality of marriage between couples who are childless by choice and couples with children?
- Are there significant differences in the way spouses with children and spouses who are childless by choice communicate with each other?

Methods and materials

The research tool used in the study was a questionnaire (prepared in two versions – for married couples with children and childless couples by choice). The questionnaire aimed to gather basic information about the respondents, their relationship, their motives for getting married, as well as their motives for having children or choosing to remain childless. The Married Couples Questionnaire (KDM-2) by M. Plopa and the Marital Communication Questionnaire (KKM) by M. Plopa were also used.

The sample in this study was purposive. The study involved 124 people living in cities located in the Silesian Province. The age of the respondents ranged from 25 to 39 years. Half of the sample (31 couples) were married couples with at least one

child, while the remaining couples (31 couples) declared themselves to be childless by choice. The married couples were recruited for the study by posting an announcement about the study on an internet forum and through the voluntary participation of students from the University of Bielsko-Biala (formerly ATH).

Analysis of the results received

To compare married couples with kids and childless couples by choice, we matched them based on similar demographic variables like age, education, and how long they've been together. The data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic data

	Marriages with a child/ children		Childless marriages by choice	
Age	n	%	n	%
under 25	4	6.45	4	6.45
25–29	30	48.38	30	48.38
30–34	20	32.25	20	32.25
36+	8	12.90	8	12.90
Education				
primary	6	9.67	4	6.45
secondary	25	40.32	23	37.09
higher	31	50	35	56.45
Length of relationship				
2–3 years	28	45.16	30	48.38
4–5 years	26	41.93	22	35.48
more than 6 years	8	12.9	10	16.12
Type of family of origin				
Complete	43	69.35	35	56.45
Incomplete	7	11.30	19	30.64
Reconstructed	12	19.35	8	12.90

Source: Author's own research.

The data presented in Table 1 concerning the age of the respondents indicate that the most numerous age group was that of 25–29-year-olds (48.38%). The age of the remaining respondents ranged from 30 to 34 years (32.26%), while the smallest group were people over 36 years of age (12.90%).

The largest number of couples in the study were those who had been in a relationship for 2–3 years (45.16% of married couples with children and 28.38% of childless couples by choice). A smaller group were marriages lasting 4–5 years (41.93% of marriages with children and 35.48% of childless marriages by choice). The smallest group were marriages lasting over 6 years (in both groups surveyed).

Most of the respondents had higher education (50% of marriages with children and 56.45% of childless marriages by choice) or secondary education (40.32% of marriages with children and 37.10% of childless marriages by choice). A small proportion had primary education (9.68% of married couples with children and 6.45% of childless couples by choice). 11.30% of marriages with children and 30.65% of marriages without children by choice were raised in incomplete families. 19.35% of marriages with children and 12.90% of marriages without children by choice were raised in reconstructed families.

The next step in analysing the quality of marriage was to determine the motives that guided spouses when deciding to have children. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Motives related to having children among married couples with children

Factors that influence the decision to have children	Women		Men	
	N	%	N	%
Social pressure (family, friends)	1	3.23	3	9.68
Support in old age	3	9.68	2	6.45
The desire to pass on one's traits, values, surname, and wealth	14	45.16	22	70.89
The love of children as a value in itself	23	74.19	19	61.29
The belief that a child strengthens a marriage	16	51.61	10	32.26
Need for fulfilment in the role of parent	14	45.16	9	29.03
The belief that children are the true meaning of life	5	16.13	3	9.68
Fear of loneliness	3	9.68	2	6.45
Partner's pressure to have children	2	6.45	3	9.68

Factors that influence the decision to have children	Women		Men	
	N	%	N	%
Religious obligation	1	3.23	1	3.23
The belief that offspring are a source of pride and an opportunity to raise personal and social prestige	7	22.58	14	45.16
The natural course, the main purpose of marriage	4	12.90	5	16.13

Note: The numbers do not add up.

Source: Author's own study.

The data in Table 2 show that both women and men indicated the following as the main motive for having children: love for children as a value in itself (74.19% of women and 61.29% of men), the desire to pass on their characteristics, values, surname, and wealth (45.16% of women and 70.89% of men), the belief that a child strengthens a marriage (51.61% of women and 32.26% of men), the need to fulfil oneself as a parent (45.16% of women and 29.03% of men), the belief that offspring are a source of pride and an opportunity to raise one's personal and social prestige (22.58% of women and 45.16% of men). These results also indicate a certain difference in reproductive decision-making between women and men. Men more often chose motives related to social status, the inheritance of traits, surname and property, which may be related to the need to provide financial security and property for their children. Women, on the other hand, are more concerned with emotional aspects and providing proper care for their children. Other motives include the belief that children are the true meaning of life (16.13% of women and 9.68% of men), the natural order of things, the main purpose of marriage (12.9% of women and 16.3% of men), support in old age (9.68% of women and 6.45% of men), fear of loneliness (9.68% of women and 6.45% of men), and the partner's insistence on having a child (6.45% of women and 9.68% of men). The least common motives were social pressure (3.23% of women and 9.68% of men) and religious obligation (3.23% of women and 3.23% of men).

The results show that nowadays, spouses mainly base their decision to have children on emotional factors. They treat children as a source of joy, fulfilment, comfort and an opportunity to fulfil themselves in their role as parents. Motives related to material benefits in the form of security in old age take a back seat. Religion and society are not a significant source of pressure when making procreative decisions, which remain an individual matter for spouses.

The next step was for partners in marriages declaring intentional childlessness to indicate their motives for choosing a childless lifestyle. The motives were identified

based on a review of the literature (Garncarek, 2013; Rostowski, 2009; Waclawik, 2012). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Motives related to the decision to remain childless among childless couples by choice

Factors that influence the decision not to have children	Woman		Man	
	N	%	N	%
Negative attitude towards children	7	22.58	4	12.90
Fear of deterioration in the quality of marriage	18	58.06	21	67.74
Traumatic childhood experiences	1	3.26	0	0
Fear of pregnancy and childbirth	5	16.13	0	0
Inadequate pro-family policies	1	3.26	0	0
Economic considerations	14	45.16	17	54.84
Environmental considerations	0	0	0	0
Need for self-development, focus on professional career	16	51.61	25	80.65
Lack of emotional need	6	19.35	12	38.71
Reluctance to combine work and parenthood	3	9.68	4	12.90
Lack of personality traits	11	35.48	6	19.35
Fear of losing physical attractiveness	9	29.03	0	0
Convenience	2	6.45	4	12.90

Note: The numbers do not add up.

Source: Author's own study.

The results suggest that among men, the most common reason for choosing a childless lifestyle is the need for self-development and focusing on their career (80.65% of men). Among women, this motive ranked second (51.61% of women), just behind fear of marital breakdown (58.06% of women), which in turn ranked second among the men surveyed (67.74% of men). This was followed by economic considerations (45.16% of women and 54.84% of men), lack of personality predisposition (35.48% of women and 19.35% of men), lack of emotional need (19.35% of women and 38.71% of men), negative attitude towards children (22.58% of women and 12.90% of men), reluctance to combine professional work with parenthood (9.68% of women and 12.90% of men), convenience (6.45% of women and 12.90% of men). Some of the motives were chosen only by women. These include fear of pregnancy and childbirth (16.13%), fear of losing physical attractiveness (29.03%), insufficient pro-family policies (3.26%),

and traumatic childhood experiences (3.26%). The results obtained are consistent with the findings of studies conducted on this subject (Jarmołowska, 2009; Waclawik, 2012), which indicate that among the main motives for choosing a childless lifestyle, spouses refer to the need for self-development and the need to focus on their professional career. An important role is played by women's fear of losing their physical attractiveness (Waclawik, 2012; Muszyński, 2009). The birth of a child may be perceived by women as a factor that weakens their body, makes them look unattractive, which gives rise to complexes and affects their self-esteem (Muszyński, 2009). Personal motives, such as lack of personality predisposition, lack of emotional need, negative attitude towards children, reluctance to combine work and parenthood, or convenience, played a significant role in the remaining positions. This indicates the dominance of selfish, individualistic motives, in which the fulfilment of one's own needs prevails over others.

In order to check whether there are differences in the subjective assessment of the quality of marriage between married couples with children and childless couples by choice in the study group, statistical calculations were performed using SPSS software. Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for the scales analysed in the study.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics for the scales analysed in the study

Scale	M	Me	SD	Min	Maks	S-W	P
The level of a well-matched marriage							
Intimacy	5.98	6	1.23	4	9	0.93	< 0.001
Self-fulfilment	5.83	6	1.13	3	8	0.92	< 0.001
Similarity	6.50	6.5	1.33	4	9	0.94	< 0.001
Disappointment	4.24	4	1.21	1	7	0.93	< 0.001
Level of marital communication							
Own behaviour – support	5.95	6	1.48	3	9	0.94	< 0.001
Own behaviour – commitment	6.26	6	1.43	3	9	0.94	< 0.001
Own behaviour – depreciation	3.30	3	1.18	1	6	0.93	< 0.001
Partner's behaviour – support	6.58	7	1.22	4	9	0.92	< 0.001
Partner's behaviour – commitment	6.52	7	1.33	3	9	0.94	< 0.001
Partner's behaviour – depreciation	3.42	3	1.24	1	6	0.94	< 0.001

Note: M – mean; Me – median; SD – standard deviation; Min – minimum; Max – maximum; S-W – Shapiro-Wilk test; p – significance level.

Source: Author's own study.

To verify whether there are differences in the subjective assessment of marital quality between married couples with children and childless couples by choice in the study group, the Married Couples Questionnaire (KDM-2) was used to determine the level of intimacy, self-fulfilment, similarity and disappointment in the relationship. The analyses were performed using the Mann-Whitney U test. Table 5 presents descriptive statistics for the variables analysed in the study.

Table 5

Comparison of married couples with children and childless couples by choice – Kwestionariusz Dobranego Małżeństwa [Married Couples Questionnaire]

Scale	Having children	Mean	Standard deviation	Z-score	Significance level
Total	No	107.69	6.00	1.02	0.307
	Yes	106.71	5.96		
Intimacy	No	6.21	1.24	2.09*	0.036*
	Yes	5.74	1.19		
Self-fulfilment	No	6.02	1.06	1.78	0.075
	Yes	5.65	1.17		
Similarity	No	6.24	1.45	2.05*	0.040*
	Yes	6.76	1.17		
Disappointment	No	4.35	1.22	1.06	0.289
	Yes	4.13	1.21		

Note: Significant results are marked with *.

Source: Author's own study.

The results of the independence test indicate statistically significant differences in scales such as intimacy and similarity. Marriages with children scored lower on the intimacy scale than childless marriages by choice, which may indicate less satisfaction with being in a close relationship with a spouse, as well as less motivation to work on the relationship, its quality and the happiness of both partners. It can be assumed that in childless marriages by choice, there is a greater focus on the relationship and maintaining intimate relations with the partner than in marriages with children. Raising children often causes spouses to shift their focus from being a partner to being a parent. Married couples often forget about their partner, about showing each other support, tenderness and security, and transfer all their feelings to their child, which is not conducive to building intimate relationships. Marriages with children, on the other hand, scored higher on the similarity scale,

suggesting that partners in these relationships have more similar views on developing the relationship, cultivating traditions, and spending free time than is the case in childless marriages by choice. The results are consistent with data showing that childless marriages by choice are less religious and less attached to tradition than marriages with children (Slany, 2008).

The study also examined whether childless marriages by choice and marriages with children differed in terms of the level of marital communication. For this purpose, the Marital Communication Questionnaire (KKM) was used, consisting of two versions. The first version allows for the assessment of one's own behaviour, while the second version allows for the assessment of the partner's behaviour. The analyses were carried out using the Mann-Whitney U test. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Comparison of married couples with children and childless couples by choice – Kwestionariusz Komunikacji Małżeńskiej [Marital Communication Questionnaire]

Scale	Having children	Mean	Standard deviation	Z-score	Significance level
Own behaviour – support	No	6.05	1.48	0.68	0.498
	Yes	5.85	1.49		
Own behaviour – commitment	No	6.55	1.34	2.22*	0.026*
	Yes	5.97	1.47		
Own behaviour – depreciation	No	3.42	1.14	1.20	0.230
	Yes	3.18	1.22		
Partner's behaviour – support	No	6.60	1.25	0.14	0.886
	Yes	6.56	1.20		
Partner's behaviour – commitment	No	6.26	1.45	2.07*	0.038*
	Yes	6.79	1.16		
Partner's behaviour – depreciation	No	3.65	1.23	2.00*	0.046*
	Yes	3.19	1.23		

Note: Significant results are marked with *.

Source: Author's own study.

Analyses have shown that married couples with children rated their partner's commitment to the relationship higher than childless couples by choice, as manifested by showing affection and understanding and preventing conflicts in the relationship. The results obtained may stem from the very nature of the relationship formed by childless couples by choice. These are often mutual arrangements (including financial ones) between partners, where spouses are absorbed in their careers and put their marriage and partner on the back burner. Interestingly, at the same time, married couples with children rated their own commitment to the relationship lower than childless couples by choice. The results obtained can be explained in at least two ways. Firstly, it can be assumed that people with children require less commitment from their partners towards their offspring or try to justify shortcomings in this area by the presence of children, which translates into higher scores in the assessment of their partner's commitment. At the same time, when they assess their commitment to the relationship, they perceive real shortcomings in this area. In addition, married couples with children rated their partners lower on a scale of depreciation manifested by aggression and lack of respect towards their partner than married couples who chose not to have children. It can be assumed that spouses with children are less likely to allow themselves to have outbursts of aggression or arguments because they are aware that their children may witness these scenes.

Conclusion

Despite numerous discussions on the crisis and changes affecting the institution of marriage in modern times, it remains an important form of social life, which is given significant importance regardless of culture or historical period. The results of the analyses allow us to conclude that marriages with children and childless marriages by choice differ from each other. A qualitative analysis of the reasons for entering into marriage among married couples with children and childless couples by choice reveals a significant role of emotional and personality factors in the decision to marry. Among childless couples by choice, the motive of sexual satisfaction plays an additional important role, which among these people is focused on giving/obtaining pleasure, excluding the desire to have children. It can be assumed that this motive plays such an important role, especially among childless couples by choice (who are usually successful people, "living fast"), due to the influence of, for example, the mass media, which promotes an image of an ideal relationship full of passion and ardour, but this image rarely reflects the reality of marriage. The results confirm that marriages are mainly entered into for emotional and personality reasons, with love playing a key role. In the past, however, family connections and financial considerations played

a significant role. People who intend to get married are not motivated by selfish reasons, financial gain, or fashion.

The research also suggests that spouses base their decision to have children mainly on emotional factors, treating children as a source of joy, fulfilment, comfort and the opportunity to fulfil themselves as parents. Motives related to material benefits in the form of security in old age take a back seat. Religion and society are not currently a significant source of pressure when making procreative decisions, which remain an individual matter for spouses. In the case of childless marriages, the decision to remain childless is made by the spouses due to the need for self-development, focus on their professional careers, fears of marital deterioration, economic reasons and fears of not having the right personality traits.

At the same time, the analysis of marital quality also suggests that marriages with children were characterised by a lower level of intimacy than childless marriages by choice, which may be related to the increased focus of parents on raising their children and the transition from the role of partner to the role of parent, while neglecting the needs of their spouse. Marriages with children scored higher than childless marriages by choice on a similarity scale, which measures the compatibility of partners in terms of how they spend their free time, cultivate traditions and approach spirituality. Marriages with children also valued their partner's commitment to the relationship more highly than childless marriages by choice. At the same time, spouses with children rated their commitment lower than spouses who were childless by choice, which may reflect the real thoughts of those who realise that raising children is a time-consuming task, which can sometimes take a toll on marital relationships. The findings of this study may contribute to a better understanding of the functioning of childless marriages by choice, which will help combat stereotypical thinking about this group and provide a better understanding of the mechanisms involved in deciding to have children or remain childless.

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