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## **Experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose in life vs professional activity of parents of children with intellectual disabilities**

**Doświadczenie szczęścia i poczucie sensu życia a aktywność zawodowa  
rodziców dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną**

### **Abstract**

**Aim.** The paper presents the author’s original research concerning the frequently ignored issue of mental well-being of parents raising children with intellectual disabilities, manifested in experiencing happiness and a sense of purpose in the context of their professional activity. It is commonly known that every child, especially one with a disability, needs loving, happy parents able to help them build self-esteem and faith in people, and give them hope and the awareness of the value of life. The aim of this work was to empirically verify the relationships between experiencing happiness, a sense of purpose, and professional activity connected with the education, and financial standing of parents of children with intellectual disabilities. The study involved 720 parents of children with intellectual disabilities.

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**Methods and materials.** The sense of purpose was measured with the Purpose in Life Test (PIL) by Crumbaugh and Maholick, and experiencing happiness was tested with the Scale of Experiencing Happiness (SEH).

**Results.** The obtained results showed that full-time working parents of children with intellectual disabilities working had a significantly higher level of experienced happiness than parents who did odd jobs or were unemployed. Furthermore, the respondents' experienced happiness and sense of purpose increased along with the education level and financial standing. The findings may be useful in preparing assistance and therapeutic programs for parents of children with intellectual disabilities and provide the basis for constructing interventions aimed at improving those families' functioning and facilitating the active participation of parents and children with intellectual disabilities in social and educational life, thus counteracting social exclusion.

**Keywords:** children with intellectual disability, experiencing happiness, sense of purpose, special needs parenting, professional activity, raising children with disabilities.

### **Abstrakt**

**Cel.** Artykuł stanowi prezentację wyników badań własnych dotyczących – często pomijanej w literaturze przedmiotu – kwestii dobrostanu psychicznego, którego istotnym wyznacznikiem jest doświadczanie szczęścia i poczucie sensu życia, rodziców wychowujących dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w aspekcie podejmowanej przez nich aktywności zawodowej. Powszechnie wiadomo, iż każdemu dziecku, a zwłaszcza dziecku z niepełnosprawnością, potrzebni są kochający oraz szczęśliwi rodzice, którzy potrafią zbudować w dziecku wiarę w ludzi oraz samego siebie, jak również dać nadzieję i ukształtować świadomość wartości życia. Celem badań była empiryczna weryfikacja zależności pomiędzy doświadczaniem szczęścia, poczuciem sensu życia a aktywnością zawodową pozostającą w związku z wykształceniem i sytuacją materialną badanych rodziców. Badaniem objęto 720 rodziców dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną.

**Metody i materiały.** Do pomiaru poczucia sensu życia wykorzystano Test PIL (PLT) J. Crumbaugh'a i L. Maholicki, do pomiaru doświadczania szczęścia Skalę Doświadczania Szczęścia (SDS) własnego autorstwa.

**Wyniki.** Na podstawie uzyskanych wyników stwierdzono, że rodzice dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną pracujący na pełen etat różnili się istotnie i mieli wyższy poziom doświadczanego szczęścia oraz poczucia sensu życia w porównaniu z rodzicami pracującymi dorywczo i niepracującymi. Okazało się również, że wraz ze wzrostem poziomu doświadczanego szczęścia i odczuwanego sensu życia rośnie poziom wykształcenia oraz poprawie ulega sytuacja materialna badanych rodziców. Uzyskane rezultaty badań mogą być przydatne do opracowywania programów pomocowych i terapeutycznych dla rodziców wychowujących dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną i stanowić tym samym

podstawę do konstruowania interwencji mających na celu poprawę funkcjonowania tych rodzin oraz włączanie do aktywnego uczestniczenia w życiu społecznym i edukacyjnym zarówno rodziców, jak i dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną, przeciwdziałając tym samym wykluczeniu społecznemu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną, doświadczanie szczęścia, poczucie sensu życia, rodzicielstwo specjalne, aktywność zawodowa, wychowywanie dzieci z niepełnosprawnością.

## Introduction

While it is commonly believed that having a child with an intellectual disability and experiencing happiness is impossible, in the analysis of the complex problem of the mental well-being of parents raising children with intellectual disabilities, manifested *i.e.*, in experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose, we need to stress that the ability to experience joy and the need of purpose in life are among the principal drivers for human activity, which motivate people to act, give them orientation in the reality, and help choose the goals and methods of activity. According to Krystyna Barłóg (2017), human goals and plans are

[...] the most individual personal space of a human, which affects their well-being in the form of health and expected mood, quality of life, satisfaction and fulfilment, human happiness and conscious creation of behaviours with a view to responsibility and the adopted values (Barłóg, 2017, pp. 255–256).

Experiencing happiness is also regarded as the fundamental criterion of mental health (Mohr, Kramer-Roy, & Boyle, 2023; Sheldon, Lyubomirsky, 2007), essential in the situation of parents of children with intellectual disabilities, as emphasised by Zofia Sękowska, who argues that “mental and physical health of parents is important for the health of the child” (Sękowska, 1998, p. 218). It must be stressed that positive states of mind, such as happiness, having a purpose in life, mental well-being, and satisfaction, serve an important motivational function: they give you the strength to deal with adversities, which is extremely necessary if you have a child with an intellectual disability. Hence, “happiness is like a lottery ticket: it gives you a chance for success” (Czapiński, 2004, p. 237). It means that positive emotional states contribute to life’s successes (Cohn, Fredrickson, 2009), which make the person happy. According to many scientific works, happy people have better lives: more satisfying interpersonal relations, higher income, successes at work, better health, and even longer life, just because they

are happy (Czapiński, 2004; Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001; Fredrickson, 2002; Harker, Keltner, 2001; Peterson, Bossio, 2001). Therefore, it is so important to study the mental well-being of parents of children with intellectual disabilities, manifested *i.e.*, in experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose.

One factor greatly affecting the sense of happiness of most people is professional activity, which is often limited or even discontinued altogether in the case of parents of children with intellectual disabilities. A job is of central importance for a person's well-being, because apart from obvious profits such as income, it ensures other benefits, *i.e.*, a sense of identity, an opportunity to establish social contacts and receive social support, and participation in the achievement of broader goals, which gives people the feeling of purposefulness and meaningfulness of their activities. Moreover, the job organizes and fills one's time, offering challenging tasks and a social status (Diener, Biswas-Diener, 2010; Henry, 2007). Thus, work is more than money. A satisfactory job adds structure and purpose to life and is a source of happiness (Diener, Biswas-Diener, 2010), ensuring intellectual and emotional stimulation. It makes people feel strong, active, and motivated (Hoggard, 2006), which is of special importance for parents of children with intellectual disabilities, because in such families professional activity can be treated as a source of emotional support for the parents: it allows them to detach themselves from the child's disability and approach life from a distance (Komorowska, 2018), which gives them the strength to provide care with acceptance, love, patience, understanding, and engagement toward the child. It is especially important for families raising children with disabilities because the subjectivity, engagement, responsibility, and endurance of parents can help improve the child's functioning (Barlóg, 2017, 2018). Parents' positive emotions are a resource generating children's experience of such emotions, and as argued by Martin Seligman (2017), positive emotions result in the enhancement and development of intellectual, physical, and social resources, which is especially important for children with intellectual disabilities. A job is usually associated with education, and financial standing (Argyle, 2004a), and parents' professional situation and education may be an opportunity for the development of their child with a disability (Tomczyszyn, 2010).

The study of issues concerning parents of children with intellectual disabilities experiencing happiness and having a purpose in life is also justified by the fact that most studies devoted to families of such children focus on the negative aspects of the functioning of those families and problems resulting from the disabilities, such as the loss of or giving up the job by one of the parents (usually the mother). The authors' attention mainly concentrates on the problem of failure to cope with the difficult situation of having a child with a disability, the sense of helplessness and pessimistic perception of the position, often involving the loss of job, almost completely ignoring the aspect of mental well-being, satisfaction, happiness, or the sense of purpose of parents

caring for children with disabilities, although it is commonly known that every child, especially those with a disability, needs loving, happy parents able to help them build self-esteem and faith in people, give them hope and the awareness of the value of life (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2020).

Therefore, a very significant goal of positive psychology, which can also be applied in special needs pedagogy, is to extend knowledge on ways of assisting families with intellectual disabilities in increasing the frequency and level of experienced happiness, strengthening the sense of purpose, positive approach to special needs parenting, and intensifying parents' development by stimulating their professional activity, because a modern support system should make it easier for parents raising children with disabilities to fulfil various social roles, including professional roles (Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2015). These issues are given relatively little attention in source literature and in practice (Sheldon, King, 2001; Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This low interest in positive emotional aspects results from the fact that most psychological interventions focus on reducing suffering, anxiety, or weaknesses, not on intensifying the sense of purpose or experiencing happiness and enhancing mental well-being (Sheldon, Lyubomirsky, 2007). Unfortunately, this also refers to parents of children with intellectual disabilities, which often results in ignoring issues of positive aspects of special needs parenting, which seem to be important also from the perspective of including children with special needs in social and educational life, especially that, as Stanisława Byra stresses, "applying the assumptions of positive psychology into research on disability and its consequences [...] definitely ensures advancement in understanding the condition of people with disabilities" (Byra, 2019, p. 16). Issues related to improving the quality of life, counteracting marginalization and social exclusion, and the concepts and strategies of action developed in this area are part of the normalization process, which covers various areas of social life, including professional activity (Gandecka, 2015).

For this reason, research into positive aspects of special needs parenting is an extremely important area, being the foundation of promising programs to promote active participation of children with intellectual disabilities in social and educational life as well as their well-being. Such research may also be vital in preparing social campaigns to enhance the well-being and prevent disorders in children with intellectual disabilities and their parents and may contribute to fighting stereotypes connected with intellectual disabilities.

This article presents research concerning experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose of parents of children with intellectual disabilities in the context of their professional activity. The research aimed to investigate differences in experienced happiness and sense of purpose between parents working full-time, part-time, doing odd jobs, and unemployed. Relationships between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose of parents of children with intellectual disabilities and their education, and

financial standing were also analysed. The research was based on the belief that an important factor underlying differences in the level of experienced happiness and the sense of purpose of such parents is their professional activity, associated with education, and financial standing.

The theoretical background for this research is the assumptions of positive psychology, health psychology, and special needs pedagogy. The interpretation of differences in experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose depending on professional activity, education, and financial standing of the respondents refers to the “flow theory” by Mihály Csikszentmihalyi (2008, 2022) and to the “concept of sense of meaning” by Viktor Frankl (2021).

## **Methods and materials**

### ***Research problem***

The starting point for the original study designed and presented hereafter is many scientific reports describing positive relationships between having a job and mental well-being (Argyle, 2004b; Diener, Biswas-Diener, 2010; Henry, 2007). On the other hand, some studies show that socio-economic status is only weakly related to the person’s sense of happiness (Czapiński, 2017). Therefore, the author chose to analyse the relationship between these variables concerning the special group of parents raising children with intellectual disabilities.

Based on the assumptions, the research problem investigated in this original study was formulated as the following questions:

- How does professional activity differentiate between parents of children with intellectual disabilities as regards experiencing happiness and a sense of purpose?
- What are the correlations between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and the age, education, and financial standing of those parents?
- Does the strength of correlation between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and the age, education, and financial standing of parents of children with intellectual disabilities differ between groups differing in professional activity?

### ***Study hypotheses***

Based on the findings of previous empirical studies devoted to relationships between experiencing happiness and sense of purpose and the respondents’ age, professional activity, education, and financial standing, and with reference to the research questions, the following study hypotheses were formulated:

*H1*: Parents of children with intellectual disabilities working full-time have a higher level of experienced happiness and sense of purpose in life than parents doing odd jobs or unemployed.

*H2*: Parents of children with intellectual disabilities working part-time have a higher level of experienced happiness and sense of purpose in life than parents doing odd jobs or unemployed.

*H3*: Higher levels of experienced happiness and sense of purpose lead to higher levels of education and improved financial standing of parents of children with intellectual disabilities.

*H4*: Experiencing happiness and a sense of purpose are not related to the age of parents of children with intellectual disabilities.

Additional analyses involved an attempt to check whether the relationships between the variables described in hypothesis 3 differ in strength between groups of parents differing in professional activity.

### ***Characteristics of the respondent group***

The study involved 720 parents (81.25% women) of children with diagnosed different levels of intellectual disability. The mean age in the group of parents was 39.96 ( $SD = 7.54$ ). The declared education level of the parents was: a) elementary 5 (0.69%); b) vocational: 130 (18.06%); c) secondary: 271 (37.64%); d) higher: 314 (43.61%). The declared professional activity was: a) I work full-time: 341 (47.36%); b) I work part-time: 112 (15.56%); c) I do odd jobs: 77 (10.69%); d) I don't work: 190 (26.39%). The self-evaluated financial standing was: a) bad: 3 (0.42%); b) quite bad: 21 (2.92%); c) average: 289 (40.14%); d) quite good: 338 (46.94%); e) very good: 69 (9.58%).

The inclusion criterion was a diagnosed intellectual disability of the child. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous, preceded by an explanation of the character and aim of the study and a request of consent for completing the questionnaires. The respondents received a set of questionnaires with detailed instructions and response sheets.

## **Research tools**

The sense of purpose was measured with the PIL test by James C. Crumbaugh and Leonard T. Maholick, translated into Polish by Zenomona Płużek. The test was developed

based on the existential frustration theory and noogenic neurosis concept proposed by V. E. Frankl. The PIL test has three parts. The first part of the test is interpreted quantitatively; the raw score obtained by the respondent in this part is an indicator of the intensity of the sense of purpose in life (Popielski, 1987), and the second and third parts can only be interpreted qualitatively (Pilecka, 1986). In the original study, only the first part of the test (analyzed quantitatively) was used. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for the PIL test by J. C. Crumbaugh and L. T. Maholick was 0.95.

Experiencing happiness was tested with the original Scale of Experiencing Happiness (SEH) by Anna Porczyńska-Ciszewska (2013). This instrument was based on the concept of happiness by M. Csikszentmihalyi (2022), referred to as flow experience. The questionnaire is a useful instrument to diagnose individual mental well-being on the basis of self-assessment of the frequency of having flow experience. To estimate the psychometric properties of the SEH, a separate pilot study and statistical analyses have been done. The results of the study showed that the Scale of Experiencing Happiness is a reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.95$ ) and valid instrument. The scale has 40 items. The maximum score for each item is 7, and the minimum – 1. The theoretical range of the scale is between 40 and 280 points. Individual scores are calculated by summing up (according to the key) the respondent's points obtained in each item. Scores ranging between 201 and 280 are treated as high and show a high level of mental well-being. Scores between 121 and 200 show an average level of mental well-being, and scores below 120 reveal a low level of mental well-being, *i.e.*, a bad psychological state (Porczyńska-Ciszewska, 2013). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for the SEH was 0.96.

### ***Procedure***

The respondents were recruited from centres for people with intellectual disabilities and nursing homes in the southern part of Poland. Before the respondents completed the questionnaires, they were informed that the study was anonymous and voluntary. They were also informed they could stop completing the questionnaires without providing a reason. They were not offered any compensation. All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Silesia.

### ***Statistical analysis of data***

Before analysing independent groups, the assumptions concerning the use of parametric tests were checked. Because some assumptions were not met, the ANOVA and its non-parametric counterpart (Kruskal-Wallis H test) analyses were conducted. Both analyses gave similar results (experiencing happiness:  $F(3,716) = 13.24, p < 0.001$ ;  $H(3) = 34.45, p < 0.001$ ; sense of purpose:  $F(3,716) = 14.54, p < 0.001$ ;  $H(3) = 31.03,$



$p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, the results of comparisons between groups (based on parents' professional activity: I work full-time, I work part-time, I do odd jobs, I don't work) concerning experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose obtained in one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) are described in the main text. The Bonferroni post-hoc test ( $p < 0.05$ ) was used in multiple comparisons. The results of non-parametric analyses are presented in Table 1. The analyses using the Kruskal-Wallis test resulted in a statistically significant effect of the "professional activity" variable both as regards experiencing happiness ( $H(3) = 34.45$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and the sense of purpose ( $H(3) = 31.03$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Multiple comparisons revealed statistically significant differences between the groups (table 1).

Table 1

*Multiple comparisons for the sense of happiness and the sense of purpose in life*

I work full-time (I)	I work part-time (II)	I do odd jobs (III)	I don't work (IV)	p
Experiencing happiness <i>Mdn</i>				
203.00	198.50	191.00	183.50	I vs II I vs III** I vs IV*** II vs III II vs IV* III vs IV
The sense of purpose <i>Mdn</i>				
114.00	108.50	105.00	106.50	I vs II I vs III*** I vs IV*** II vs III II vs IV III vs IV

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: Author's own study.

The Spearman's rank correlation analysis (Spearman's *rho*) was used to analyse the correlations between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and the respondents' age, education, and financial standing. Analysis of correlations between the above-mentioned variables were done both in the whole group and in groups based on the parents' professional activity.

## Results

### *Comparison of experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose in groups of parents of children with intellectual disabilities based on their professional activity*

The analyses using ANOVA resulted in a statistically significant effect of the variable “professional activity” both for experiencing happiness ( $F(3.716) = 13.24, p < 0.001, \eta^2p = 0.053$ ) and for the sense of purpose ( $F(3.716) = 14.54, p < 0.001, \eta^2p = 0.057$ ). The Bonferroni post-hoc test comparisons showed statistically significant differences between the groups (table 2).

Table 2

*Multiple comparisons for experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose of parents of children with intellectual disabilities*

I work full-time (I)	I work part-time (II)	I do odd jobs (III)	I don't work (IV)	p
Experiencing happiness <i>M (SD)</i>				
202.39 (29.24)	197.22 (28.16)	186.48 (33.00)	185.86 (37.59)	I vs II I vs III** I vs IV*** II vs III II vs IV* III vs IV
The sense of purpose <i>M (SD)</i>				
111.43 (15.26)	107.14 (16.41)	100.00 (20.78)	102.73 (21.32)	I vs II I vs III*** I vs IV*** II vs III* II vs IV III vs IV

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: Author's own study.

### *Analysis of correlations between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and the respondents' age, education, and financial standing in the entire group of parents of children with intellectual disabilities and groups based on parents' professional activity*

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of correlations between experiencing happiness and a sense of purpose and the respondents' age, education, and financial standing

in the entire group. Table 4 presents results concerning these same correlations, but the analyses were done separately for groups based on the respondents' professional activity.

Table 3

*Experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose vs age, education level, and financial standing among all parents of children with intellectual disabilities (N = 720)*

	Age	Education level	Financial standing
Experiencing happiness	0.00	0.26***	0.36***
The sense of purpose	0.05	0.24***	0.38***

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: Author's own study.

Concerning table 3, the level of education grows, and financial standing improves in the whole group along with the increase in experienced happiness and sense of purpose. The relation between experiencing happiness and sense of purpose and the respondents' age is insignificant.

Table 4

*Experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose vs age, education level, and financial standing of parents raising children with intellectual disabilities depending on their professional activity*

	Age	Education level	Financial standing
I work full-time (n = 341)			
Experiencing happiness	0.03	0.17**	0.26***
The sense of purpose	0.11	0.10	0.27***
I work part-time (n = 112)			
Experiencing happiness	0.05	0.31**	0.34***
The sense of purpose	-0.08	0.36***	0.36***

I do odd jobs (n = 77)			
Experiencing happiness	0.01	0.42***	0.34**
The sense of purpose	0.10	0.36**	0.37**
I don't work (n = 190)			
Experiencing happiness	0.02	0.16*	0.43***
The sense of purpose	0.07	0.17*	0.45***

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: Author's own study.

Regarding table 4, the analysis conducted in groups based on parents' professional activity shows that the significance (and direction) of correlations between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and respondents' education and financial standing were confirmed in almost all groups. The only exception is the correlation between the sense of purpose and education in the group of parents working full-time. This correlation seems to be insignificant. Furthermore, age is not significantly correlated to any variable in all the groups.

## Discussion

This work presents empirical verification of correlations between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and the professional activity of parents raising children with intellectual disabilities, as well as their financial standing and education. Differences in experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose between parents working full-time, part-time, doing odd jobs or unemployed were also analysed. Although there are similar studies concerning the general population, so far, the unique group of parents of children with intellectual disabilities has never been studied this way. Therefore, this study with its findings may be considered one of the first studies on the determinants of mental well-being, manifested in experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose, among parents raising children with intellectual disabilities. Several key findings are presented in this work. Most of the assumed hypothetical correlations proved to be significant and agree with the assumptions.

Based on the conducted analyses, there are significant differences in experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose between parents working full-time and parents doing odd jobs or unemployed. Parents working full-time more often experience

happiness and have a higher level of sense of purpose than parents doing odd jobs or unemployed. Significant differences in experiencing happiness were also found between parents working part-time and those unemployed. Parents working part-time experience happiness more often than unemployed parents. Significant differences in the sense of purpose were found between parents working part-time and parents doing odd jobs. Parents working part-time have a higher level of sense of purpose than parents doing odd jobs.

No significant differences were found in experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose between parents working full-time and working part-time. These findings show that having a job, whether full-time or part-time, has a similar importance for experiencing happiness and a sense of purpose of the studied parents. No significant differences were also found in experienced happiness and sense of purpose between parents doing odd jobs and unemployed, which suggests that the lack of stable employment probably lowers the experienced happiness and sense of purpose. No significant differences in experiencing happiness were found between parents working part-time and doing odd-jobs, which may result from the fact that working part-time gives parents raising children with intellectual disabilities a similar sense of happiness as occasional jobs. No significant differences in the sense of purpose were also found between parents working part-time and unemployed, which may be connected with other factors, not considered in this study, and hence requires further analyses.

The presented results partially confirm the assumptions adopted in hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 and agree with previous findings, which confirm a positive impact of employment on the level of experienced happiness and show that unemployed people are less happy than professionally active ones (Argyle, 2004b; Henry, 2007). Analyses of correlations between mental well-being and employment described in the source literature point to the main direction of the cause-and-effect relationship from employment to mental well-being, but also emphasize that there is a weak cause-and-effect relation otherwise (Argyle, 2004a; Czapiński, 2004; Diener, Biswas-Diener, 2010).

However, regardless of the direction of these correlations, it must be assumed that professionally active individuals have higher mental well-being, manifested *i.e.*, experiencing happiness and a sense of purpose, than unemployed ones. Obviously, unemployment contributes to the family's limited capabilities of meeting the needs connected with rehabilitation and education of the child with a disability, and to the parents' sense of shame. This leads to withdrawing from active social life, which affects the child's integration with peers, and the lack of social contacts promotes marginalization and social isolation of children with disabilities, preventing their active participation in social life. This situation results from the lack of opportunities to be in situations promoting contacts with peers, *i.e.*, summer and winter camps, extra sports

or artistic activities, and contributes to the entire families spending time passively. The available research results show that the low quality of free time activity explains a low sense of happiness (Argyle, 2004a).

Professional activity can undoubtedly be one of the main sources of humans' life satisfaction, and in the case of parents of children with intellectual disabilities, it can also serve as a buffer allowing them to detach from their daily responsibilities resulting from care for the children, concentrate on things other than disability, and give opportunities for contacts with people and stimulate personal and professional development, promoting the parents' mental well-being, which is necessary to raise a child with an intellectual disability.

This study was initiated with the assumption that experiencing happiness and a sense of purpose among parents of children with intellectual disabilities are related to their education and financial standing. It was also assumed that experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose are not significantly related to the parents' age (Tse, Nakamura, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2022).

The results of the original research confirmed these assumptions. The findings of the study confirmed the lack of significant correlations between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and the respondents' age, which agreed with previous reports (Argyle, 2004a) suggesting that mental well-being does not change significantly with age.

It was also found that as the frequency of experiencing happiness grows, the level of education increases. Similar results were found with regard to the sense of purpose: as the sense of purpose grows, the level of education increases. Regarding the frequency of experiencing happiness and financial standing of parents of children with intellectual disabilities, it was found that as the sense of happiness grows, the financial standing of the parents improves. Identical results were found in terms of purpose in life: as the sense of purpose grows, the parents' financial standing improves. The observed correlations conform to previous reports that positive states of mind promote life successes, including better education and better financial standing, and show that happy people are more successful than less happy ones (Czapiński, 2004; Sheldon, Lyubomirsky, 2007). People with a positive outlook on life have higher self-confidence, self-esteem, competitiveness and energy, *i.e.*, qualities that help them attain better education, find better jobs and acquire more wealth (Czapiński, 2004), thus ensuring a better life for their children and the whole family. Therefore, it seems very important to focus on the mental well-being of parents of children with intellectual disabilities in therapeutic work with those families, aimed at the active participation of those children in social, cultural and educational life.

It must be stressed that parents' education is often a factor in mobilizing children to learn and achieve educational successes. Additionally, parents' level of education may influence the future prospects of their children, giving them challenges, promo-

ting the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education and establishing self-help associations or greater social activity aimed at helping the children. Good financial standing of the family, allowing to satisfy the needs of all the family members and use of various forms of assistance, rehabilitation and support for the child with a disability, also contributes to the mental well-being of their parents and facilitates better care for the child by including them in social life.

Additional analyses involved an attempt to check whether the strength of the correlation between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and the age, education, and financial standing of parents of children with intellectual disabilities differs between groups based on their professional activity. The analysis conducted in groups of parents of children with intellectual disabilities depending on their professional activity (working full-time, part-time, doing odd jobs, and unemployed) showed that in almost all groups there are significant, though not very strong, correlations between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and the respondents' education and financial standing. Moderate correlations were found between education and experiencing happiness in the group of parents doing odd jobs, between financial standing and the sense of purpose, and between the sense of purpose and financial standing in the group of unemployed parents. Other correlations between education, financial standing, experiencing happiness, and a sense of purpose are significant but weak.

The analyses show that the higher level of experienced happiness and sense of purpose, the better the education level and financial standing. The only exception is the correlation between the sense of purpose and education in the group of parents working full-time. This correlation is insignificant, which may result from the fact that a high education level is not always associated with high professional prestige and a good financial situation, and there are reports that people with high education and low income feel particularly hopeless (Czapiński, 2017). This issue, however, needs to be further investigated. In all groups based on parents' professional activity age was not significantly correlated with any variable.

To conclude, we can say that in light of the findings of original research, relations between mental well-being (manifested *i.e.*, in experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose) and the professional activity, education, and financial standing of parents raising children with intellectual disabilities are not yet clear and, in some situations, depend on other variables, which were not controlled in this study and must be further investigated. However, based on the obtained results we can say that the majority of professionally active parents of children with intellectual disabilities have better education and financial standing than parents who are unemployed or do odd jobs, and professional activity connected with financial standing, and education seems to be important for the respondents' purpose in life and happiness.

## Conclusion

The original research presented in this work is an important source of information on differences in experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose of parents raising children with intellectual disabilities in the context of their professional activity and shows correlations between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose and their education and financial standing. However, some methodological difficulties and limitations of the study reduce the possibility to generalize the obtained results.

Although professional activity is one of the most important sources of happiness (Argyle, 2004b), and many scientific reports confirm the strong relationship between job satisfaction and general satisfaction with life, the relation between mental well-being and professional activity, education, and financial standing is determined by many factors such as *e.g.*, social class, kind of job, support from the family, economic situation in the country, social comparisons, and others, which significantly complicates the empirical verification of the problem (Argyle, 2004a). Another methodological difficulty relates to identifying the direction of the observed relations: is it happiness that contributes to a good professional position or otherwise? Despite these limitations of this kind of research, the obtained results do show some significant tendencies, even if they do not fully reflect the real image of the issue.

To sum up, there is a correlation between experiencing happiness and the sense of purpose in life of parents raising children with intellectual disabilities and their professional activity, education, and financial standing. Although this correlation is not very strong, it seems to be important, especially for parents caring for children with intellectual disabilities. A job is not only a source of income, but it also promotes building supportive interpersonal relations, satisfies many emotional needs, and allows self-actualization, and professional and personal development, which is undoubtedly very important for mental well-being, playing a special role in the process of raising a child with an intellectual disability. Moreover, for parents caring for children with intellectual disabilities, work is a chance to temporarily detach from problems connected with disability, which allows them to regain the resources needed in the process of caring for the child, because “if the child is to feel loved, the parent must have the strength for it” (Komorowska, 2018, p. 71); tired, frustrated, and burnt-out parents are not able to give the necessary attention to their child. Thus, it is extremely important to support parents of children with intellectual disabilities in engaging in professional activity, which is one of the basic sources of mental well-being, because the more forms of support are directed to parents of children with intellectual disabilities, the fewer negative emotions they will experience (Roszkowska, 2022).

Definitely, knowing the mechanisms contributing to a happy life is a necessary condition of success of any preventive, educational, therapeutic, and corrective actions



that help include children with disabilities in active social life, so it should be taken into consideration while working with families raising children with intellectual disabilities. Including in preventive or therapeutic actions the mental well-being, satisfaction with life, and optimism of parents of children with intellectual disabilities seems important because the sense of happiness is a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, as it is a source of creative motivation for the person's activity, thus contributing to their life success and giving strength to cope with life's adversities, which the parents of children with intellectual disabilities have a lot of.

Therefore, further analysis of the determinants, mechanism, and role of subjective mental well-being of parents of children with intellectual disabilities seems to be a timely and very important issue, and its results may be useful in designing assistance and therapeutic programs for parents of children with intellectual disabilities.

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