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A study prepared as part of the project:

The concept of marriage from the perspective of the theory of imperative requirement

Title of the study:

*Psychopedagogical determinants of the permanence of marriages
(expert opinion)*

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Introduction

The issue of the permanence/impermanence of marriage addressed in the expert report is in line with the issues cited in the literature, the media and the teaching of the Catholic Church. Observation of daily life, media reports, statistical studies conducted in various Western countries and the social science literature justify the formulation of the conclusion that the reluctance of young people to marry and the impermanence of the institution of marriage is a very topical problem. Although, as experts predict, we are unlikely to see a plague of divorces in the coming years, and their number will even decrease, as marriages are becoming less frequent, each divorce means the failure of previous life plans tied to marriage and a series of negative psychological, social and economic consequences for the spouses themselves and especially extensive and lifelong consequences for their children.

In his meta-analysis of divorce issues, Paul R. Amato (2010) pointed out that the first decade of the 21st century saw more than 2,000 publications on family life issues. While the United States has the highest divorce rate of any Western country, the rates have increased in almost all European countries. Although a considerable variation is observed across European countries in the number of divorces, there are many similarities in the causes and consequences of divorce (Amato, 2010).

Currently in Poland, with statistics from 46 district courts taken into account, these courts received a total of nearly 19,900 divorce petitions in the first quarter of 2022, almost the same as a year earlier. The number of petitions, however, does not reflect the scale of marriages breaking up, as many couples are postponing filing them due to the cost of litigation, jointly paid and growing mortgages, and searching for new ideas for life after losing their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is still the case that ‘few Poles who come for legal advice on divorce work on their personal relationships beforehand, such as through therapy or family mediation, investing in repairing their ties’, ‘there is a growing number of people who, through widely available workshops, webinars and online courses, or rapidly growing online support groups, are individually deepening their knowledge of the causes of relationship crises, thereby recognizing the situation in which they find themselves. However, it is to a large extent to be expected that it is economic considerations, rather than the desire to grow in nurturing proximity, that holds back the number of petitions, adds attorney



Małgorzata Sokołowska.¹

The largest number of divorce petitions are filed in courts located in the most populated metropolitan areas, because people live there for whom religious factors and so-called ‘social shame’ are less important than in small towns and villages. These people determined to quickly dissolve the marriage if, in their opinion, it is a source of frustration. The divorce rate is considerably lower in less urbanized areas, where residents’ religiosity and attachment to traditions are strongly reflected in potential divorce decisions.²

When discussing the issue of the permanence of the marriage relationship, one can focus on factors that favour this permanence, as well as factors that do not favour it, and thus lead to separation or divorce. By showing the causes of divorce, knowledge of the determinants of the permanence of marriage can also be enriched. Consequently, the current study aims to characterize the factors that serve the stability of the marital relationship, as well as identify some of the risk factors that can lead to its breakdown. However, it should be taken into account that the literature on this subject is so extensive that it is impossible to cite here even the most important Polish positions, not to mention foreign ones; therefore, only the author’s selection of some publications representing recognized in science statements on the determinants of the durability of marriage will be presented here.

¹ Liczba rozwodów w Polsce. Wzrosła od wybuchu pandemii? 05.05.2022. <https://www.infor.pl/prawo/nawosci-prawne/5462745,Liczba-rozwodow-w-Polsce-od-wybuchu-pandemii-koronawirusa.html>. Accessed on: 30.08.2022.

² Ibid.



Determinants of the permanence of marriage in the light of theoretical analyses and empirical studies

This section of the paper will point out some of the factors that have been described in the light of psychological research as important determinants of the permanence of marriage. They show the specific aspects of addressing this issue from the point of view of the psychological and partly sociological literature. They will be presented in chronological order, illustrating the development of scientific thought related to this topic.

Terminological distinctions

The discussion about the determinants and factors of the permanence of marriage involves many other terms in the psychological and sociological literature. Andrzej Dakowicz addresses the variation in terminology of this issue as follows: *The most common are: marital success (Szczepański, 1965), satisfaction with marriage (Janicka, Niebrzydowski, 1994), marital happiness (Pospiszyl, 1991; Tsang et al, 2003), marital integration (Rembowski, 1986), marital success (Braun-Gałkowska, 1985; Gałkowska, 1999), marital quality and permanence (Spanier, Lewis, 1980; Ryś, 1994), matched marriage (Rostowski, 1987; Płopa, 2005; Dakowicz, 2017, p. 97).*

Similarly, Magdalena Dziedzic (2016) reports on the multiplicity of terms used in the literature regarding the issue at hand, when touching upon *the proposal of this dimension characterizing the marital relationship as: marital adjustment; marital happiness; marital satisfaction; marital constancy; matched marital relationship; compatibility in marriage; intra-marital integration; mutual adaptation of spouses; success, marital success and many other terms that are used in different meanings by different authors* (Dziedzic, 2016, p. 54).

Others, such as Joanna Różanska-Smith (2002), pointed to consensual living as a term for the factors that contribute to the stability of a marriage. Sławomir Bukalski has also listed ‘permanence of marriage’ among terms similar to the concept of marriage quality (Bukalski, 2016, p. 252).

Since all the terms used by the authors are not precisely defined in terms of their scope of meaning and refer to the qualitative characteristics and evaluation of the marital relationship, therefore the more general term used most often is ‘quality of the marital relationship’ (Dziedzic,



2016, p. 55). Thus, ‘the concept of marriage quality is a multidimensional variable that includes within its scope marital adjustment, happiness, satisfaction the constancy of marriage, as well as the adequate functioning of marriage as a system’ (Rostowski, 1987, pp. 25–26). Marriage quality is a subjective assessment of relationship satisfaction made by spouses. The quality of a relationship is high if both spouses rate their relationship as successful, are satisfied with it and have a sense of marital happiness.

The author of this expert opinion will employ this general term *marriage quality* in the reminder of the text, understanding that it does have different meanings. In addition, it is important to remember that the spouses’ assessment of the quality of the relationship does not always translate into its stability. Marriages can actually be classified into four categories: 1) high quality and high stability; 2) high quality and low stability; 3) low quality and low stability; 4) low quality and high stability (Ryś, 1994). Long-lasting relationships are not only attributed to the couples with high quality of life. Although some married couples are dissatisfied with the relationship that unites them, they do not see any further sense in being together, and thus rate the quality of their relationship low, they may persist in it for various reasons, despite feelings of hopelessness and lack of happiness (Rostowska, Żylińska, 2009, p. 121).

The quality of marriage

Jan Szczepański (1965), a sociologist, in defining the quality of the marital relationship, used the term marital success, which determines the permanence of the marriage, and which he believes is achieved through:

- gaining personal happiness,
- full adaptation of the spouses,
- sexual satisfaction,
- harmonizing the personalities of both spouses;
- emotional balance and emotional satisfaction from mutual relationships;
- satisfaction with the joint achievement of goals and success in achieving them;
- fulfilling the tasks of marriage, i.e., having and raising children to become full citizens,
- achieving economic success, i.e., accumulating wealth,



- meeting the expectations of religious institutions,
- full participation of spouses in social life, social and cultural activities in the local environment and achieving success in these activities.

Almost half a century ago Maria Ziemska (1975, p. 63), while describing the quality of the marital relationship as marital success, distinguished factors that she described as conditions for such success. They are:

- appropriate choice of spouse;
- the correct attitude toward one's own sex and the opposite sex;
- mature love;
- mutual acceptance and understanding of the spouses;
- fulfilling the goals of marriage.

A few years later, Maria Trawińska (1977, p. 284) detailed four factors determining the success of a marriage:

- love;
- the cohesiveness of the family, or a sense of community;
- mutual security that includes concern for the family's well-being;
- development prospects, a sense of freedom.

The relationship between satisfaction with marriage and spouses' psychological bonding and their sense of marriage cohesiveness was also studied by Józef Szopiński (1981, pp. 17–21). The psychological bond, in his view, consists of the ability to empathize, understand and cooperate with each other. Couples with low levels of bonding had problems in these three areas. The lowest level of satisfaction with marriage was obtained by spouses rating the marriage bond as low.

According to Józef Rembowski (1987), the durability of a marriage depends on its integration, and its indicators include:

- the adaptation of spouses to their marital and parental roles;
- a sense of belonging to the family in each of its members and shared responsibility for its fate;
- material security, i.e. confidence that the family, is able to support itself and that its material situation will steadily improve;
- spouses' performance of social roles;



- healthy and happy children;
- the ever-increasing ability of family members to understand other people, as well as the ability to take responsibility for the development of the family and the shape of life;
- family members' satisfaction with living with each other.

A unique psycho-sociological study on the permanence of the marital community was conducted in Poland by Jerzy Laskowski (1987). He surveyed 130 drawn couples during their fiancé period, among whom he studied the development of bonds during the first five years of marriage. He applied research techniques from sociology and psychology, focusing on capturing a wide range of variables affecting the longevity of the marriage bond, including demographic, psychological and social ones. This study did not confirm the hypotheses of a significant relationship between the quality of marriage and housing and material situation, degree of extraversion, education, age of initiation of sexual intercourse, number of children in the family and religiosity of spouses. Such a relationship did occur between the quality of marriage and factors concerning the formation of personality (the atmosphere of the family of origin, the quality of the parents' marriage) and with the period of engagement (the length of 'dating' period, learning about the personality of partner, motives for choosing a spouse and emotional commitment).

One of the psychologists working on the issues concerning marriage over the years was Jan Rostowski (1987). He proposed the concept of a matched marriage, which is determined by such factors as:

- love;
- interpersonal bond;
- intimacy;
- similarities between the spouses;
- sexual intercourse;
- attitude toward children;
- motives for choosing a marriage partner (Rostowski, 1987).

This author discussed multidimensional models for research on the quality of marital life in an article published a few years later (Rostowski, 1991).

A qualitative classification of marriages and their characteristics was presented by Iwona Janicka



(1991). According to her and Leon Niebrzydowski (1994), the most important criterion for the quality of the marital relationship is the partners' subjective satisfaction with the relationship, which depends on three factors that determine the nature of interpersonal contacts in the marital dyad. These are openness, empathy and sexual satisfaction.

One of the researchers who engaged in research and reflection on the issue of marital success and failure for many years was Maria Braun-Gałkowska. The author conducted a psychological study of the family systems of people satisfied and dissatisfied with their marriages (1992). It turned out that success in marriage depends, among other things, on a subjective sense of satisfaction with it, and this, in turn, depends on comparing the spouses' ideas about the 'ideal marriage' with the image of their own marriage. The more the characteristics of the 'ideal marriage' correspond to those of the respondents' 'real marriage', the higher the success rate of the marriage.

In a 2003 publication. Maria Braun-Gałkowska (pp. 15–16) listed the conditions for a successful marriage, which depend on each spouse's social skills, mutual attitudes toward each other, and joint action for the good of the relationship. These conditions are:

- the ability to express feelings, gentleness, tenderness and cultivate closeness, including sexual closeness,
- the ability to set proper boundaries,
- the ability to communicate correctly,
- a belief in the need for continuous development in the skills that determine the success of a marriage,
- adherence to moral norms.

In 2008. M. Braun-Galkowska published results concerning the determinants and factors of marital success and sense of marital happiness. These studies concluded that the degree of similarity in personality traits between spouses does not matter for marital happiness, while maturity, activity for marriage, and their consensual beliefs, primarily religious, play an important role, as decisions made in marriage about, for example, ways to regulate conception, approaches to the permanence of marriage, and attitudes toward the well-being of the spouse, and not just the search for one's own satisfaction, depend on these aspects (2008, pp. 124–126).

In a study conducted by Maria Ryś (2004) in two groups of spouses (30 couples each) differing in relationship quality, the conclusion was that 'marriages with high relationship quality are



characterized by high levels of emotional, intellectual and action intimacy, while marriages with low relationship quality experience a lack of intimacy in the mentioned aspects' (p. 65). In high-quality marriages, the person is always separated from their behaviour in conflicts, so the value of the person (neither their own nor their spouse's) is never denied, even in disagreements the other party is treated in a friendly manner. Conflicts, on the other hand, concern facts and current issues and are resolved together as soon as they arise, with respect for the partner's feelings and for his or her views, so they can even lead to strengthening the relationship integration. In marriages with low relationship quality, partners hurt each other, which creates a sense of harm. True feelings are hidden and tensions are built up to violent, sudden outbursts, in which long-gone events are recalled (pp. 65–66).

Marriage relationship researchers also point to such factors, important to the bonding community, as:

- showing affection to each other;
- sexual contact;
- emotional dependence between spouses;
- compatibility in terms of temperament and personality traits;
- common goals, interests;
- willingness to actively participate in home life;
- faith in the permanence of marriage;
- joint decision-making (Bryk et al., 2011, p. 31);

A noteworthy approach to the issue of the permanence of the marriage relationship was presented by John M. Gottman and Nan Silver (2006, pp. 43–237), who proposed the following seven principles to guarantee happiness in marriage and thus its permanence:

- updating the partner's 'world map' – remembering all the dates that are important for them;
- cultivating feelings of affection and admiration for the partner – two of the most essential elements of a satisfying and lasting relationship;
- turning spouses towards each other, rather than turning away from each other – this prompts the accumulation of good feelings towards the spouse and in case of difficult moments it is much easier to forgive and think warmly of them;
- susceptibility to succumb to the influence of a partner;



- resolving conflicts that are resolvable;
- overcoming paralysing conflict – finding a logical consensus in a situation of disagreement that divides spouses;
- finding a community of feelings – sincerity and respect towards the spouse.

A study by American sociologists shows that while marital happiness and the propensity to divorce have changed little between 1980 and 2000, marital interaction has declined significantly. Increases in marital heterogamy (variation in traits between spouses), premarital cohabitation, extended working hours for wives, and work demands of wives have been associated with declines in many dimensions of marriage quality. In contrast, increases in economic resources, equality in decision-making, non-traditional attitudes toward gender³ and support for the norm of marriage as a lifelong union have been associated with improvements in many dimensions of marriage quality (Amato, Johanson, Booth, Rogers, 2003).

The fact that there is a correlation between the length of wives' working hours and the durability of the marriage was also pointed out by Deniz Yucel (2012). Based on data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), he came to the conclusion that the effect of wives' working hours on marriage breakdown is weak and depends on the length of the marriage. The effect of wives' working hours is variable over the duration of the marriage, i.e. it intensifies as the marriage goes on, but can be completely reduced as long as the couple takes care of mutual interaction and communication.

Family of origin

The importance of the family of origin for the quality of the marriage of adult children has been dealt with by many people in Poland over the past few decades, including Ryś (1993), Stępnia-Łuczywek (2004), Jundził (1993) and Patkowska (1984), after: M. Dziedzic (2016, s. 56–57). Magdalena Dziedzic (2016) also investigated this relationship, based on family systems theory and her own study of 158 people (79 couples). Statistical analysis of the results showed that a normal family

³ e.g., the partnership-oriented division of household chores, with the fact that an increase in husbands' participation in household chores has been shown to lower the quality of marriage among husbands, but improve the quality of marriage among wives.



system formed by both spouses yields a higher quality of marriage in the women's group. A link was also identified between an abnormal family system on the father's part and poor marriage quality in the male group. In addition to the normal family, based on the theory of D. Field (1996, pp. 27–92), the author identified four types of family systems that can be the cause of adult children forming abnormal marital relationships that are bad for their sustainability. These include: the power-based family (love expressed through fulfilling duties and fulfilling assigned tasks), chaotic (lack of close ties, mutual interest and proper communication), overprotective (focus on children, at the expense of mutual bonding and marital closeness) and overly dependent *entangled* family, parents unhappy in marriage, possessive towards children, using them to satisfy their needs – especially emotional ones (2016, pp. 52–54).

Religiousness of spouses

One of the important factors determining the durability of a marriage is the degree of religiosity of the spouses. This issue has been addressed in Polish literature, including Maria Braun-Gałkowska (1984), Krzysztof Cieślak (1991), Patrycja Żylińska (2009), Brudek, Lachowska (2014).

A review of the literature by Marta Komorowska-Pudło (2017) made it possible to conclude that regardless of the type of monotheistic religion, in which, in addition to Catholicism, marriage is severable under certain conditions, the higher the level of religiosity presented by the respondents, the more the spouses adhered to the requirements of their own religions. They were more likely to build quality marriages and were more concerned with its permanence, resulting in less frequent divorces. The lower the level of religiosity characterized respondents of all religions, the more often the spouses deviated from norms and rules related to the functioning of marriages.

Reporting on his research on the relationship between religiosity and marriage quality (indirectly, also durability), Sławomir Bukalski (2016) relied on the model of quality and durability of marital life of R. A. Lewis and G. B. Spanier (1979). In doing so, he stressed that this relationship is not simple, as it depends on the type of religion, the degree of religiosity, religious maturity, and religious commitment. Basically, the higher the level of religiosity, and the greater the religious commitment, the less hedonistic and eudaimonistic the attitude towards life, the greater the consideration of the other person's well-being, and the higher the quality of the marriage. Spouses with similar religious attitudes



are more satisfied with their relationship. The compatibility of religious beliefs between spouses affects the sense of marital success, marital success expressed in its durability, especially when both accept the indissolubility of marriage.

Marital communication

One of the most important factors that determine the stability of the marital relationship is marital communication, also known as marital dialogue (Baniak, 2004).

One of the ways of marital communication is sexual intercourse. Spousal satisfaction with sexual intercourse is a very important dimension that determines happiness in marriage (cf. for example: Foremniak, 2004a, 2004b; Janicka, Niebrzydowski, 1994, pp. 175–196; Rostowski, 1987, pp. 286–292 – after: D. Dziedzic, 2016, p. 59). Dariusz Krok and Anna Preis (2016) studied the relationship between marital adjustment in terms of emotional intelligence (which has a relationship with the permanence of marriage,) and spouses' communication styles and their level of psychological well-being.

Based on empirical studies, many authors clearly emphasize that communication, next to satisfying sexual intercourse, is the most important factor in developing love and strengthening the bond between spouses (Ryś, 1999, p. 72n). According to Jan Rostowski (1987, p. 82), if there is a lack of adequate and proper communication in a marriage, love alone as an emotion is not able to guarantee the permanence of this relationship for long. In the absence of proper communication, the quality of the marital relationship decreases, as there is a misinterpretation of the behaviour of the spouse, thus increasing the possibility of conflicts between them. In turn, proper communication allows spouses to clarify contentious issues with each other, and this in turn allows them to avoid conflict-inducing situations and resolve difficult problems in a constructive manner. Even when the affection between spouses wanes, but the communication between them is going well, their relationship has a chance to survive, while even 'hot love' cannot sustain a relationship where there is no understanding.

Mieczysław Plopa (2008), stressed that open and deep communication in a relationship is especially important for women. He distinguished three types of communication between spouses:

- supportive communication, which involves rejoicing in the partner's existence, recognizing them as a special person in the relationship, expressing appreciation and respect towards him and awareness



of his importance to the relationship, approving of the partner's way of expressing themselves, that is, among other things, taking an interest in their needs and problems, solving the difficulties of everyday life together;

- committed communication is expressed in the sense of mutual closeness, importance and uniqueness of the connecting relationship, striving to learn about each other better, creating an atmosphere of warmth and intimacy, making the spouse happy, preventing conflicts;
- communication that depreciates the spouse or partner, which, contrary to the previous two, is a negative system of communication in the marital relationship, causing the spouses to distance themselves from each other. It is characterized by a lack of respect for the dignity of the other person, aggressive, domineering or controlling behaviour toward them.

From the results of the empirical study obtained by M. Jankowska (2016) on the relationship between the types of marital communication listed by M. Plopa and their assessment of the quality of marital life, it appears that the studied relationships reveal themselves to be highly statistically significant. The direction of these relationships is as follows:

- the higher the respondents rated themselves as supportive and committed to marital communication, the higher they perceived the overall quality of the relationship;
- the more the participants perceived themselves as depreciating in their spouse's communication, the lower they rated the quality of their marriage;
- there are statistically significant positive correlations between evaluating oneself as supportive of one's spouse's communication and higher intimacy, self-realization and similarity between spouses, as well as their lower disappointment from the relationship;
- there are positive statistically significant relations between self-perceptions of one's communication as involved in the marriage and perceived intimacy and similarity between spouses, and lower perceived disappointment from their marriage.
- the more the respondents perceive themselves as depreciating in their communication with their spouse, the higher they rate the disappointment from their marriage, as well as the lower they rate the intimacy and similarity between themselves and their spouse.

Concluding the above-mentioned results of the study by Jankowska (2016) on the relationship between the types of communication between spouses and the dimensions of their perceived quality



of their own marriage, it can be concluded that there are two types of communication between spouses that can play an important moderating or mediating role in the development of important bonding spheres in marriage – intimacy, love and self-realization. These are: (1) communication in support of the spouse, and (2) communication committed to the good, that is, to the development of WE in the marriage as a basic community. The type that depreciates the spouse, emphasizing their real or exaggerated or even imaginary shortcomings in contacts with them, should be considered a decidedly negative type of communication in marriage. Diagnosis of this type of depreciative communication should indicate a clear state of alarm, warning spouses of serious consequences for their marital relationship, the continuation of which is at risk.

Fulfilling marital roles

An important determinant of a successful marriage is also the sharing of roles. The more satisfied spouses are with their tasks, the more compatible their expectations of each other's roles are, and the more easily they can complement each other in their roles, the higher the quality of their relationship (Fitzpatrick, Ritchie, 1993).

Mieczysław Plopa (2008) believes that the permanence of the marital relationship depends, among other things, also on how marital roles are defined and what strategies are established to effectively carry out the numerous tasks that appear before the spouses. This author distinguishes several basic dimensions on which the harmonious development of the marital relationship and, consequently, its high quality depend. These are determinants of marital and family happiness and thus factors in the sustainability of any marriage. They are:

- intimacy, or the level of satisfaction from being in a close relationship with another person,
- self-realization in marriage,
- the level of similarity in adopting different strategies for managing the family system,
- the level of perceived disappointment from the marriage.

Intimacy in marriage means a high level of satisfaction from being in a close relationship with one's spouse. There is then a need to build a relationship based on full openness, trust, closeness, not hiding important things from each other, either directly or indirectly concerning their relationship. Spouses are highly motivated to work for their relationship and care about its quality. They feel close



to each other and are convinced that they share an authentic and genuine feeling of love.

Self-realization in marriage, according to M. Plopa, includes a sense of satisfaction with marriage, the ability to manifest oneself, one's value system, one's life tasks. Spouses are satisfied with their marital and family roles, they develop themselves and their potential, and their marriage is a way of living a successful and happy life. The similarity between spouses, in turn, indicates the existence in them of a high level of compatibility in achieving important marital and family goals. The spouses have similar views on how to develop and enrich their relationship, how to spend their leisure time, how to organize family life, how to set external family boundaries, how to cultivate family traditions and how to raise their children.

The last factor mentioned by M. Plopa – ‘disappointment’ – is clearly destructive in nature. Disappointment occurs when one or both spouses feel a sense of failure in life resulting from marriage. Being in mutual closeness in such a situation gives no satisfaction. Evasive tendencies in solving current problems are also prevalent. Then, too, the sense of responsibility for the relationship diminishes. In such a situation, it is very important for the quality of the marriage to properly manage the emotional atmosphere of the relationship by, among other things, having the spouses balance their own needs with those of their partner.

Similar views on family, work and career

A study conducted by the Department of Sociology, Stockholm University in a group of 1,055 married or cohabiting heterosexual couples found that similarity in attitudes related to work and family affects relationship satisfaction. Couples who have similar ideas about the importance of being successful at work, the importance of having children and/or the importance of having enough free time are more likely to be satisfied with their partnerships than couples who have different attitudes. In contrast, separation was not influenced by similarity regarding views on the importance of living in a good partnership or coping with economic problems. Having similar priorities regarding work, career and family thus seems to make a difference in the quality of a relationship, at least in terms of partners' satisfaction with the relationship (Brandén, Bernhardt, 2022).

Equal division of domestic tasks

One of the factors that contribute to the success of a marriage through a sense of satisfaction



with it is a fairly equal division of household duties between husband and wife. Research in Japan on the number of hours of housework done by spouses and the perceived fairness about the division of this work and joint decision-making has shown that these variables affect ratings of marriage quality, but husbands' ratings differ from those of wives – husbands who claim their wives do more hours of housework than they do rate the quality of their marriage higher than their wives do. In contrast, fairness in the division of household chores has a positive impact on the positive assessment of marriage quality only for wives. Regardless of gender, shared decision-making, having an association with greater empathy and less tension, positively affects the assessed quality of the marriage, although this effect is greater in the female group (Taniguchi, Kaufman, 2018).



Factors conducive to marital breakdown in the light of psychological research

Most of the research conducted on the causes of separation and divorce comes from the United States, but almost every country has such studies conducted. However, there is little information on how to effectively deal with this problem. Among the reasons cited are women's independence, marrying too early, economic factors, low levels of intellectual, emotional and social development, low education, liberal divorce laws, incompatibility in sexual selection, role conflicts, alcoholism and substance abuse, engaging in risky behaviour, differences between partners leading to hostility and fierceness, poor religiosity, liberal attitudes toward divorce (Lowenstein, 2005).

A study conducted in the mid-1980s on a group of 437 divorcing men and women used a 27-item checklist of reasons for divorce. Factor analysis revealed nine dimensions underlying the checklist responses. The most frequently cited factors were unsatisfied emotional needs, differences in lifestyle or boredom with marriage, and conflicting, demeaning relationships (Gigy, Kelly, 1993).

A questionnaire survey of 56 Israeli Jewish couples two years after their separation and aimed at answering the question of why people in Israel divorce, yielded indications of three groups of reasons: extramarital affair, problems inherent in the relationship, and factors external to the relationship (Cohen, Finzi-Dottan, 2012).

In a retrospective study conducted by Marta Kuczyńska (2020, p. 140) in a group of divorcees at least 5 years after divorce, the author obtained indications of similar reasons for the breakup of a marriage as those from the CSO survey. The most commonly cited reasons included alcohol abuse by the spouse, failure to maintain marital fidelity, financial disagreements and character incompatibility. In isolated cases, the breakup of the marriage occurred as a result of long absences and the spouse's reprehensible attitude toward family members. Women emphasized almost exclusively the reasons inherent in the person of their spouse (his character traits, reprehensible behaviour, such as acts of verbal and physical violence against family members, brawls, quarrels, cheating, indebting the family). Marital infidelity is one of the most common causes of divorce and the most justifying in the social environment, the problem is that it is only one of the links leading to the breakdown of a marriage, which usually already showed poor quality before the infidelity (Przybył, 2020).

The multitude of studies conducted around the world on the factors identified as causes of divorce does not allow even a brief characterization of them. Hundreds of books and thousands of



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articles are devoted to this issue, published, among others, in magazines specifically dedicated to the problem of divorce.



Some Polish psychometric tools for diagnosis of marital condition

It may be useful for psychologists and other professionals involved in marriage and family counselling to know what research tools were used in the diagnosis of marital psychological well-being, communication and marital bonding.

A valuable psychometric tool of marital bonding in Poland proven both in psychological research and in psychotherapeutic practice may include the *Marital Bonding Scale*, by Józef Szopiński (1980), which boasts recognized psychometric and practical qualities, having served for several decades in marriage and family counselling.

Maria Ryś, who constructed the *Spousal Closeness Scale* and the *Conflicts in the Family* tool (Ryś, 1998) and the *Marriage Relationship Quality Scale* (2004, 2005), is also the author of several tools for examining dimensions that affect the quality and permanence of marriage.

Another frequently used technique for studying marital success is the *Marital Satisfaction Scale* by Maria Braun-Gałkowska (1985) with a modification by Agnieszka Gałkowska (1999).

To study the quality of the marital relationship, one can employ the *Questionnaire of a Good Marriage* (KDM – 2) by Mieczysław Płopa and Jan Rostowski, which examines the quality of the marital relationship as perceived by each spouse. The questionnaire makes it possible to obtain an overall measurement of quality and the dimensions of quality of this relationship, which are: Intimacy, Self-realization, Affinity and Disappointment. The *Attachment Styles Questionnaire* (including attachment styles vs. marital satisfaction, education, age, stress resistance – Płopa, 2008) may also be helpful.

In turn, the *Marital Communication Questionnaire* (KKM), authored by Maria Kaźmierczak and Mieczysław Płopa (2008), can be recommended for diagnosing communication between spouses. The questionnaire describes the types of communication between spouses, including an Assessment of Self Behaviour as well as an Assessment of Partner Behaviour and considering three dimensions of communication: Support, Commitment, and Depreciation.

Andrzej Dakovicz (2017), using the theoretical concept of Józef Koziński's psychotransgressionism, attempted to operationalize the five psychons (cognitive, instrumental, motivational, emotional, personal) and address them as conditions for a successful marriage. Concurrently, he developed or proposed tools to study these psychons, such as the Spouse Knowledge



Questionnaire, the Individual Needs Test, the semantic differential, and the Test of Conscious Personal Beliefs. In the author's own words: *The accomplished operationalization of network personality theory in relation to the marital relationship is a step towards the possibility of diagnosing specific married couples.* (Dakowicz, 2017, p. 105). And further: *The creation of well-developed diagnostic tools would provide the opportunity to quickly and accurately diagnose the strength of individual psychons in both spouses and to determine, in cooperation with the psychotherapist, the right direction for therapeutic action aimed at increasing the success of the marriage.* (ibidem, p. 106).

Strategies for coping with stress in the perspective of the breakdown of the marital bond

For professionals working with couples and families, the key question in a situation of marital failure is – what should be done, how to counteract the definitive breakup of the relationship, how to counteract further destruction of the marriage and restore a sense of satisfaction with it?

Stages of marriage counselling in a crisis situation

The questions posed above are based on the assumption that spouses still have, though perhaps not necessarily equally, the will to act to save their marital bond. If this condition is not met on both sides of the relationship, then it would be necessary in the first stage of the marriage counselling, to obtain a consensus on the goodwill of the married couple. It can be expressed directly to each other or through a person acting as a mediator for the couple geared toward reaching a marital agreement on at least the duration of their marriage. The fulfilment of the condition of goodwill should be considered necessary but not sufficient in the work of 'resuscitating' the already severely damaged marital bond.

The second stage of the work should be a joint reflection by the spouses or under the guidance of a marriage and family counselling psychologist on saving what can still be saved in the existing relationship. This step could begin with the spouses' agreement on the custody of their children, which could result in a so-called parental agreement on custody reached in a consensual and formalized manner through the joint signing of a memorandum of understanding. This stage has been achieved in many psychological counselling centres for spouses and families. Married couples are usually very happy about this success as their joint achievement. This raises some hope that perhaps they can salvage something more together from their declining relationship and love.

The third stage of counselling when spouses are experiencing crisis stress, should be to answer



the question: what values are shared by the spouses? Which of them could be relied upon in further psychotherapeutic work to overcome the crisis situation? At this stage of counselling, no values can be excluded from the catalogue of values accepted by spouses. This stage can be described as: the constitution of common values for husband and wife.

The fourth stage can be described as: metadecision⁴ on the repair of the marriage bond. It means not only deciding to take reactive actions (as a reaction to the behaviour of the spouse), but also proactive ones, i.e. planning actions that foster the building of new dimensions of ties in the still existing (at least in the legal sense) marriage. It is a decision to direct one's attitude, attention, perception, thinking, emotions, imagination, motivation and, above all, one's own will in such a way as to develop a readiness to adequately anticipate future events and eliminate circumstances and situations (or statements in those situations) that would come into conflict with empowering one's spouse in family communication (Biela, 2014). At this stage, one should first try to gradually extinguish accents in their communication with their spouse that blame or discredit them, and learn to look for accents that support the other person.⁵

The fifth stage of counselling is aimed at leading the married couple to transcend each spouse's own individual 'I' toward the 'You' in order to build a common marital 'WE' from scratch. This stage can be described as: building a new marital WE.

These stages, or at least some of them, can be attempted by the spouses together in a constructive manner on their own, or they can take advantage of the mediation-psychotherapeutic role of a psychologist or counselling support during the crisis they are experiencing with the accompanying pre-divorce stress. Everything should be done so that divorce is not chosen by the spouses as a 'necessary evil', but that they instead choose the path of renovation of their own marital relationship with both psychological and/or psychotherapeutic support.

The above comments are remarkably important, due to the fact that 'still few Poles who come for legal advice on divorce work on personal relationships beforehand, such as through therapy or family mediation, investing in repairing ties. Nonetheless, there is a growing number of people who,

⁴ Metadecision was introduced into the literature by Japanese psychologist Masanao Toda (1983), illustrating it with the example of a directional decision to stop smoking cigarettes.

⁵ The idea of such a strategy comes from learning theory, where methods have been developed to acquire and extinguish certain behaviours, including verbal behaviour.



through widely available workshops, webinars and online courses or the rapidly growing online support groups, blogs, individually deepen their knowledge of the causes of relationship crises and find useful knowledge to deal with the situation they find themselves in.’ (Attorney Małgorzata Sokołowska).⁶

⁶ <https://www.infor.pl/prawo/nawosci-prawne/5462745,Liczba-rozwodow-w-Polsce-od-wybuchu-pandemii-koronawirusa.html>. Accessed on: 20.05.2022.



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