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## ARTYKUŁY

[*Articles*]

### LEVEL OF ROLE CONFLICT BETWEEN PARTNERS IN DUAL-CAREER COUPLES AND A SENSE OF PURPOSE IN LIFE. MEDIATING ROLE OF STRESS AND SATISFACTION WITH ONE'S ACHIEVEMENTS

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**Summary.** As different areas of life and an individual's life roles undergo transformation and intermingle increasingly, the ways that people get married and start up families change as well. A dual-career marriage is a modern family model, within which both spouses realize, on the one hand, broadly defined professional careers under conditions of competitive job market and competitive forms of employment, often occupying managerial positions; and life careers on the other hand, those related to family, marital roles, housekeeping and earning the livelihood. As compared with traditional models and egalitarian partnerships, a dual-career marriage involves more sacrifices and threats, but can also provide many benefits. In the study it was attempted to make inquiries in that matter, rooted in our wish to examine this specific link between dual-career couples and a subjective sense of partners' quality of life, particularly in the aspect of its meaning – as compared with that of spouses in traditional marriages and egalitarian partnerships. Then a more detailed purpose of this study was to verify whether satisfaction with one's own achievements in partners of a dual-career marriage, both in their professional and extraprofessional life, together with the level of experienced stress are possible significant factors influencing the relation between role conflict and a reported level of sense of purpose in life. The study was conducted during 2013-2014 and involved examining a total of 150 couples in dual-career marriages (300 participants), i.e. relationships within which both partners realized their professional career in the competitive job market, oftentimes they occupied managerial posts and reconciled professional life with the role of a parent. All investigated participants in dual-

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career relationships had higher education, their age varied from 28 to 40 years and each marriage had at least 1 child. The control group was composed of 160 egalitarian partnerships and 135 traditional marriages. In order to verify the research questions and hypotheses stated above, four diagnostic tools were used: Purpose in Life test, "Work-Life Balance" Questionnaire, Stress Level Questionnaire and Sense of Happiness Questionnaire. The analysis of empirical material presented that partners in dual-career relationships reported the highest level of experienced stress, fatigue, tension and role conflict, but also the highest levels of satisfaction with one's achievements or the family's financial situation – factors which can neutralize the negative impact of experienced stress and conflicts on the general sense of life meaning. Also presented that experiencing role conflicts is negatively correlated with a general sense of purpose in life and with satisfaction with one's accomplishments, at the same time being positively correlated with experienced stress. It can be noticed, however, that in the calculated model a (high) level of satisfaction with one's achievements acts as a specific buffer against the influence of experienced role conflict and stress.

**Key words:** dual-career couples, work-life balance, purpose in life, stress

## Introduction

The transformations that are presently affecting the social, ethical and cultural areas of human life translate into changes in the scope of fulfilling life roles, including professional career or preferred consumption patterns. They also affect the degree to which an individual is involved in various social roles that he/she takes over in life and forms of realizing oneself on the job market. According to Bańka (2004), an individual's simultaneous involvement in life's multiple roles is the most efficient predictor of the quality of one's growth and life. The lack of experiences which should result from changeable and diversified roles is, as the author suggests, the largest threat that can lead to low mobility – both psychical and in life in general (Gustafson, 2002). An individual's involvement in fulfilling simultaneously life's multiple roles is therefore the essential condition for the proper and harmonious human growth, it favors the formation of the mature personality (Bańka, 2004; Rostowska, 2008), and it also positively influences life's general well-being (Bańka, 2005). Moreover it is conducive to income growth and improving one's financial situation, which certainly translates into a greater freedom in satisfying one's own and one's family's needs and provides opportunities to experience success in many areas of life (Bańka, 2005). Success in life's various areas determines, in turn, a conflict-free flow of life experiences between separate domains of human life, makes it possible to go smoothly from one form of activity to another, and that seems to be particularly important from the contemporary point of view, which is characterized by a multidimensional approach to interpreting life and professional career.

## **Life's multiple roles and the quality of life**

The analysis of the available literature describing issues of life quality points out to the multidimensionality and many-sidedness of this concept. The notion of life quality was many years ago associated exclusively with financial satisfaction, determined by the possessed goods and financial resources. The understanding of life quality was later gradually expanded to include non-material values, mainly freedom, health and happiness. Many terms are used to describe it presently: well-being, prosperity, satisfaction with one's life and health – by some treated as synonyms, by others as concepts connected with a general quality of our lives. Some also try to examine the quality of life in its cultural context and to relate it to the expectations an individual may have towards the chosen dimensions of his/her life, evaluated on the basis of objective conditions in a given country and specific culture (Rapley, 2003). What correlates subjectively with satisfying one's needs and with a sense of achieving the set out goals, mostly comes down to perceiving the aspects of life quality tangled with objective conditions. Therefore they make up the result of assessing one's achievements as well as failures in coping with reality (Ratajczak, 2006). So the quality of life is a category changing over time, as it is influenced by daily experiences (Bańka, 2005). Alongside with happiness and well-being, it is an effect of progressive human growth, which is a special process of working out the standards and criteria serving to compare the information obtained in time. According to Bańka (2005), these experiences reflect – on the one hand – how life is mentally represented, and – on the other – how the processing of incoming information is regulated. So in order to evaluate the quality of one's life it is necessary to comprehensively analyze many varying pieces of incoming information i.e. those concerning emotional states, experienced situations and events, fulfilling goals and expectations towards the future, as well as social comparisons.

The notion of a sense of life meaning, whose integrity can be treated as an indicator of one's mental health (Plopa, 2005), is inevitably connected with a sense of quality of life and constitutes a basis for considerations presented in this article. As demonstrated by the results of numerous studies (Rook, Dooley, Catalano, 1991; Rostowska, 2008), individuals experiencing satisfaction with their own life and its particular areas, are able to set out clear and realistic life goals, take pleasure in their own accomplishments, and cope with the toil of every-day reality and stress more effectively. According to Popielski (1998), the structure of a sense of purpose in life is built up of four components: intellectual, emotional, volitional/aspirational and existential/active. The first one, by referring to understanding the nature of human life, one's environment and personal goals, determines the capacity to know oneself, the history of one's life, social relations and surroundings; the second is closely tied with man's individual abilities to experience himself and respond to values, including achievements and failures, aspirations and successes. The third component takes into account human competence to make choices and adopt attitudes, while the last one is formulated as a cause of realizing one's purpose in life and the effect of its existence. The sense of life's purpose, in the author's opinion (Popielski, 1998; Peplińska, 2011), is directly related to personal experiences of an individual,

determined by his or her personality, goals and aspirations, and is characterized by individualized development and considerable stability.

According to some researchers (Peplińska, Rostowska, 2013), the ability to balance various life roles underlies a broadly defined success in life, which determines a subjective sense of quality of life, its meaning and life satisfaction. This ability is at the base of the experienced sense of satisfaction and happiness and consequently it indeed determines the quality of one's life (Rostowska, 2009; Peplińska, Rostowska, 2013). Coping with life's multiple roles can therefore positively influence an individual's quality of life, reduce the probability of experiencing stress, however one must still bear in mind that the variety and multitude of challenges pursued, particularly in the context of contemporary expectations, is also accompanied by certain sets of requirements and standards that are necessary to be met, and these are, not uncommonly, extremely difficult to reconcile. They can therefore make stress grow more intense by acting as a source of fatigue and overload, and thus influencing negatively an individual's general well-being.

### **Work-family interactions**

Undoubtedly, the basic areas of human functioning, specifically and many-sidedly interrelated, are one's professional work and personal life, including – first of all – family life (Peplińska, 2012). Both the areas of one's family and professional life make up two basic environments where important needs determining the level of satisfaction for most of us are fulfilled (Barnett, 2008). These two domains involve specific tasks and requirements an individual will confront, and the level of commitment in realizing them is determined by factors of personal and social nature. Regardless of sex, these are therefore important areas of self-realization for a present-day individual (Whitehead, 2008). Conventional theories that used to disengage professional and family life and treat them as independent can today be considered obsolete and out-of-date because, as proved by new investigations, a constant spillover of both positive and negative experiences takes place between the two (Duxbury, Higgins, 2001; Rostowski, 2006; Janicka, 2008; Peplińska, 2012). That spillover is a natural and dynamic process that evolves over the course of one's entire life, and its shape, strength and form is a result of the fluency and penetrability of the boundaries between these two areas (Rostowski, 2006; Zalewska, 2008; Peplińska, Rostowska, 2013).

Grzywacz and Marks (2000; Grzywacz, 2000) emphasize the complexity of the relationship between said areas of human functioning, pointing out to the twofold nature of this dependency – either conflicting or facilitating.

In addition, authors show that the complexity of analyzed interactions can also apply to factors mediating this process. This occurs because it is possible for a single factor to be a source of conflict and facilitation at the same time, and experiences stemming from life's multiple roles can generate both positive and negative results of its impact. For example, long working hours can lead to a growing sense of fatigue and the spillover of job-related stress into family life, but on the other hand

can also guarantee financial safety and the possibility of further career development or promotion, ultimately leading to shorter working hours (Zalewska, 2008).

Having analyzed the available literature on the issues of how professional and family life interact, one can notice two main theoretical perspectives: i.e. negative and positive spillover between the two domains (Lachowska, 2008, 2010, 2012). As far as the negative influence is concerned, "role conflict" is the basic concept – introduced by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal (1964) – it describes the situation where requirements connected with participating in one organization/group collide with the requirements of participating in others.

Later Greenhaus and Beutell (1985; Baka, 2012) defined role conflict as incoherent requirements at work and in family life, the problem being that they mutually make it difficult to accomplish various tasks. Duxbury and Higgins (1994, 2001) define work-family conflict as one occurring when requirements connected with different life roles are incoherent and incompatible, and committing to one of the roles makes it difficult to commit to the other. So fundamentally three forms of work-family conflict are singled out: a conflict based on the time criterion and fueled by the fact that the time devoted to realize one of the roles reduces the possibility of dedicating it to any other; a conflict of strains, which takes place when problems generated in one role are transferred to the second one; and a conflict of behaviors occurring when a behavioral pattern used in one of the roles is inappropriately applied to another one (Greenhaus, Beutell, 1985; Duxbury, Higgins, 2001; Rostowski, 2006; Janicka, 2008).

Meanwhile the perspective of positive influence has postulated the processes of mutual enrichment and facilitation between multiple roles. According to that view, performing one role, e.g. the professional one, is facilitated by performing a different one, e.g. the role in one's family, and resources connected with one role improve fulfilling the other one, e.g. through acquired experiences and skills. Among the first ones to acknowledge positive influences within life's multiple roles was Marks (1977, after: Lachowska, 2010, 2012). He noticed that fulfilling many roles not only does not necessarily consume one's resources, but can even strengthen them, improving one's general well-being. In opposition to the "resource drain theory" by Hobfoll (1989), experience gained within one performed life role can provide an individual with resources possible to be used while performing a different one (Greenhaus, Powell, 2006). As a result, positive overspill between one's professional and family life may lead to a specific skill-gaining and acquiring maturity, through enriching one's personality structure and some positive influence on health and a general psychical well-being.

When discussing mutual interactions between professional and family life, one is not to forget about the directivity of those relations. Initial studies on the subject were focused only on the impact that one's professional work had on family functioning, having taken into account that the boundaries of a family system are more penetrable than those of any job or organization (Rostowski, 2006). The issue was therefore presented as a one-way relationship (Parasuraman, Greenhaus, 2002). A reversal in this approach took place towards the end of XX century. It was then that the bidirectional nature of influence between professional and family life was

empirically verified, i.e. it was found that work influences family life, and family life affects work (Lachowska, 2008).

### **Work-family relationship and quality of life**

When considering two aspects of the emotional impact of one's professional and family domain of that individual's functioning, i.e. the positive and negative one, specific profits and losses resulting from this process can be indicated. From both the perspective of an organization and an individual, the growth of professional and social competences is an invaluable asset stemming from the process of balancing life roles. For example, professional activity of women, having grown over the last years, determines their increasing education levels, professionalism and competitiveness on the job market, consequently becoming a challenge for men. And it is not limited only to developing expert professional competences, but interpersonal and intrapersonal competences as well, where individuals get the chance to improve specific skills within themselves, e.g. time management, organizing actions, planning, flexibility and the skill of adapting to external requirements, skillful and effective communication in relationship-building, negotiating and conflict-solving (Bańka, 2007). All these potentialities are closely tied with the above-mentioned phenomenon of transferring experiences, which can bring in the development of one's resources, not only drain them (Marks, 1977, after: Lachowska, 2010). Another unquestionable advantage resulting from the process of balancing life roles are personality changes, such as a boost in self-esteem, a sense of agency, confidence in one's own abilities, more effective styles of coping with stress.

Undertaking gainful employment by both partners is undoubtedly favorable to the family's financial position, and thus to the quality of life within that family, among other things through increasing chances of development (both for partners and their children), more attractive forms of recreation and entertainment, higher material and social status and a sense of financial security (Barnett, Hyde, 2001). A significant positive link was shown to exist between job satisfaction and marital satisfaction in the process of coping with problems and stress (Rostowski, 2006). The pictures of partial satisfaction with human life as mentioned before are strongly tied to a growing likelihood of experiencing success which would result from one's functioning in both analyzed areas, i.e. one's family and job, and consequently to a growth in the sense of self-efficacy and possibilities of self-realization.

All the profits mentioned above can indeed determine the quality of relationships with one's partner and children, and consequently forge closer emotional bonds (Barnett, Hyde, 2001; Zalewska, 2008). One should also not forget about the important issue of supplying positive standards for the youngest family members, standards that foster activity, resourcefulness, expand ambitions, and stimulate intellectual development. As shown by research studies, all of the above-mentioned positive aspects of balancing family and professional roles are closely tied with one's psychical and physical health, and have a preventative effect against depression-like disorders (Frone, Russell, Cooper, 1997; Janicka, 2008). However, the process of adapting oneself to the professional environment is not always successful,

nor does always an individual possess adequate resources, competence or skills to balance life roles. The overspill between the areas of work and family is frequently negative in character. According to Janicka (2008) negative consequences of balancing professional and family roles can be divided into four main categories – behavioral, psychological, health-related and a social one. Within the behavioral category difficulties in time management and external pressures should be mentioned in the first place (Janicka, 2008), but what also falls here are the related changes in one's eating habits, smoking, turning to stimulants such as alcohol and drugs, which can act as a mechanism of releasing one's tension. Among the discussed consequences we should also single out giving up activities other than work-related, both in the area of one's personal life – where people forgo getting married, starting up a family or becoming a parent (Duxbury, Higgins, 2001), as well as in one's social life – when people have no time to spend with their friends, abandon rest time, recreation, sport and the like. Closely corresponding with the consequences in the behavioral category are the effects falling into the psychological one, which particularly come down to building up chronic stress and frustration, and as a result – to tension, fatigue, overload and irritation, which, if prolonged, cause long-lasting changes in levels of subjective quality of life, sense of well-being, satisfaction with one's job and intimate relationships, eventually leading even to a burnout in the area of professional career or family life (Frone, Russell, Cooper, 1997). These in turn impinge on one's health (Janicka, 2008). Many researchers have found that in individuals who cannot balance the domains analyzed here, the described dependencies include increasing depression symptoms, suicidal thoughts and psychosomatic disorders (circulatory, respiratory or alimentary disturbances; Duxbury, Higgins, 2001). Conflicts experienced between areas of work and family can also significantly impinge on the quality of marital relationships and determine tensions between partners, particularly when accompanied by mutual competition and burdening with domestic duties, as is presently the case in two-career relationships (Duxbury, Higgins, 1994; Rostowska, Rostowska, 2005; Rostowska, 2009). Despite many social and cultural transformations, for many men their women-partners' greater income remains a source of intense stress and numerous misunderstandings, which can later on lead to changes in how they perceive themselves, and to erode their self-esteem, a sense of self-worth and agency.

Conflicts resulting from the work-family relation generate difficulties also in its social aspect (Frone, Yardley, Markel, 1997, after: Janicka, 2008). Getting involved in a conflict between the discussed areas of one's functioning, a sense of overload, fatigue and tension can be coupled with giving up life roles related to one's discretionary activity, e.g. assuming the role of a familiar, friend, sportsman or social activist. This can result in significant weakening of one's social bonds and deprive an individual of sources of support, as well as in deteriorating a general sense of condition, intensifying the feeling of loneliness and bitterness (Janicka, 2008).

## Specific character of dual-career couples

As different areas of life and an individual's life roles undergo transformation and intermingle increasingly, the ways that people get married and start up families change as well (Rostowski, 2009). A dual-career relationship is a situation where this intermingling occurs in its extreme. Economic and social transformations we have been witnessing since the mid-XX century, as well as related processes: rising levels of education and professional aspirations in women and the transformation of gender roles, saw the gradual decline of traditional models of marriage involving a clear division (Kosakowska, Petrus, 2006), i.e. husband who works professionally and wife who is engaged in housework and upbringing children. More and more common are egalitarian partnerships or dual-career couples where both spouses are professional workers and bear the responsibility of upbringing children and housekeeping (Rostowski, Rostowska, 2005). However, when women engage more in professional work, it does not always mean that men take up more responsibilities at home; it rather means the scope of activities broadens for wives, more seldom for husbands. This peculiarly comprehended "equality" can be particularly observed in egalitarian partnerships, where, in spite both partners working regularly, men are not equally involved in household chores, and their job is still of greater significance than that of women. A dual-career marriage is a modern family model, where both partners, on the one hand, pursue their professional careers – under conditions of a competitive job market and competitive forms of employment – which can be viewed as sequences of posts related to employment, roles, activities and experience acquired by an individual (Arnold, 1999, after: Bańka, 2007). On the other hand, however, they realize life careers associated with family, marital roles, maintaining the home and earning the family's livelihood (Rostowski, 2009). Therefore the "dual-career" component has a double meaning – one of reconciling professional careers of both partners, the other of balancing professional career with family life for each of them separately. Three subtypes of this kind of relationships can be singled out: dual-career marriage including a rather traditional division of gender roles, where the professional work of a husband is valued more than that of wife; marriages where spouses do not fall into traditional gender roles, and the professional work of a wife is placed above that of husband; finally, dual-career marriages where duties are distributed evenly between the two partners and their jobs are equally important. As compared with traditional models and egalitarian partnerships, a dual-career marriage involves more sacrifices and threats, but can also provide many benefits. Among undeniable advantages are: higher family income, supplying positive standards for children, forming proactive attitudes in children, greater possibilities of experiencing success, developing professional and social competences, a wider spectrum of sources of support, the possibility to transfer positive experiences, and turning to new possible ways of entertainment, recreation and spending one's spare time (Anderson, Spruill, 1993). Nevertheless, it is very often emphasized in the literature of the subject that negative consequences coming from the specific character of these relationships occur as well. Most often they come down to physical and emotional strains, time pressure, a considerable quanti-



ty of duties, lack of free time or the necessity to endlessly negotiate and renegotiate how the household chores should be divided. Also mentioned are: negative dietary changes (“eating on the go”), abandoning time for entertainment and recreation, little sleep, resignation from undertaking important developmental tasks, lowering one’s subjective quality of life and – particularly – increasing stress, and not uncommonly depression or various health problems (Janicka, 2008). Success in marriage understood in this way, and consequently high levels of partners’ subjective quality of life, is possible in a dual-career relationship if a specific equilibrium between individual areas of functioning is maintained, individual needs and life roles are mutually understood, life priorities are settled, and compromises are worked out in a partner-like way. Such success is, no doubt, a hard-earned one and requires both partners to be tolerant and mature.

### **Purpose of the study**

The analysis of the literature on the subject clearly shows that it lacks research studies and scientific publications on dual-career marriages in Poland, particularly in the context of partners’ quality of life and consequences resulting from the specific character of this kind of relation. In the study here presented it was attempted to make inquiries in that matter, rooted in our wish to examine this specific link between dual-career couples and a subjective sense of partners’ quality of life, particularly in the aspect of its meaning – as compared with that of spouses in traditional marriages and egalitarian partnerships. Then a more detailed purpose of this study was to verify whether satisfaction with one’s own achievements in partners of a dual-career marriage, both in their professional and extraprofessional life, together with the level of experienced stress are possible significant factors influencing the relation between role conflict and a reported level of sense of purpose in life.

### **Research questions and hypotheses**

Considering the purposes formulated above, the following research questions were put forward:

1. Does the sex of partners in a dual-career relationship determine differences within the degree to which each of them experiences a sense of purpose in life, stress, role conflict and satisfaction with individual areas of life?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences in levels of a sense of purpose in life, experienced stress, role conflicts and satisfaction with individual areas of life between spouses in dual-career relationships, traditional marriages and egalitarian partnerships?
3. Can satisfaction with one’s own achievements and the level of experienced stress be significant mediators of the link between the role conflict and a sense of purpose in life among partners in dual-career relationships?

Formulating these questions implied following research hypotheses:

H1: Taking into account the previous results on the matter (Neault, Pickerell, 2005; Kosakowska, Petrus, 2006) it was expected that women in dual-career relationships

will report higher ratings of experienced stress and tension, they will more often feel role conflicts and have lower levels of a sense purpose in life and satisfaction – when compared with their life partners. Women who wish to reconcile intensive professional career with family roles often try to fulfill these roles at the expense of resting, sleeping or entertainment, which consequently can bring their mind and body to a state of emotional and physical exhaustion, and later on to lower well-being (Janicka, 2008).

H2: Taking into consideration the specific character of dual-career marriages (Anderson, Spruill, 1993; Rostowski, Rostowska, 2005) and the level of commitment of both partners to fulfill two life roles it was expected that the spouses in dual-career relationship, as compared with the control group, would be the ones to report the lowest levels of well-being, among other things due to intense stress, experiencing role conflicts more often and lacking a sense of purpose in life. On the other hand, it was predicted that this very group would at the same time demonstrate the highest level of satisfaction with one's own achievements, since the spouses in dual-career marriages have the greatest chance of becoming a success (Bańka, 2005).

H3: Having considered the possible over spills, either positive or negative, between different areas of an individual's life (Duxbury, Higgins, 2001; Peplińska, 2012) a hypothesis was formulated that the levels of satisfaction with one's own achievements and – what follows – the reported level of experienced stress (also stemming from the reported level of satisfaction with one's accomplishments), will act as significant mediators in the link between a sense of purpose in life and role conflicts for spouses in dual-career relationships, weakening or intensifying the link depending on the level of that satisfaction.

### **Participants**

The study was conducted during 2013-2014 and involved examining a total of 150 couples in dual-career marriages (300 participants), i.e. relationships within which both partners realized their professional career in the competitive job market, oftentimes they occupied managerial posts and reconciled professional life with the role of a parent. All investigated participants in dual-career relationships had higher education, their age varied from 28 to 40 years and each marriage had at least 1 child. The control group was composed of 160 egalitarian partnerships and 135 traditional marriages. The category of egalitarian partnerships included those relationships in which both spouses were regular workers, but the professional career of women was not considered significant, wives were to a greater degree concentrated on household and parental duties, professional position of either spouses was not a managerial one, and the specific character of their jobs did not penetrate strongly their extraprofessional life or spare time. Into the category of traditional marriages fell the relationships with an apparent traditional division of gender roles, i.e. professionally active husband, and professionally inactive wife whose actions concentrated on family commitments and domestic chores. The age of participants within control groups ranged between 25 and 43 and each marriage had at least 1 child. 53% of those included in the control groups had higher education,

while the remaining 47% had secondary education. All examined persons were inhabitants of an urban agglomeration.

## Methods

In order to verify the research questions and hypotheses stated above, four diagnostic tools were used. The purpose in life was measured with the Purpose in Life Test in Polish adaptation by Płużek (Popielski, 1998). It is based on Frankl's concept of neogenic neurosis (Frankl, 1972; after: Popielski, 1998) which makes it possible to analyze to what extent an individual is aware of his/her life purpose and goals, measure affirmation of life, self-evaluation, evaluation of one's life, sense of responsibility and freedom, and the attitude towards death and suicide (Cronbach's *alpha* varies between 0.64 and 0.70, depending on the population). The conflict between professional and family roles was measured with the "Work-Life Balance" Questionnaire created by Karasiewicz, Godlewska-Werner, Lewandowska-Walter, Piotrowski; its revised version specifies 5 factors of work-home balance and these are: overwork and lack of time (Cronbach's *alpha* = 0.72), diffusion of boundaries between work and home (Cronbach's *alpha* = 0.78), avoiding personal subjects in one's workplace – placing one's family above work (Cronbach's *alpha* = 0.74), penetration of family life by work (Cronbach's *alpha* = 0.72), and modifying one's plans due to work-home/home-work conflicts (Cronbach's *alpha* = 0.78). After having conducted research on a diverse sample of Polish population, the authors found their tool to be sufficiently valid and internally reliable. Reported stress levels were measured with the Stress Level Questionnaire created by Plopa and Makarowski (2010). Within the questionnaire we can single out one global scale whose result determines a generalized stress level and additionally subscales for measuring emotional tension, external stress, intrapsychic stress and a lie scale. The reliability coefficient, Cronbach's *alpha*, for individual scales ranges from 0.70 to 0.81.

Finally, levels of satisfaction with individual areas of one's life, particularly with own achievements, were measured with the Sense of Happiness Questionnaire by Czapiński a method based on the onion theory of happiness created by the same author. Reliability figures (Cronbach's *alpha*) for the examined sample varied between 0.67 to 0.78.

## Results

In the first research problem it was attempted to verify if sex has any influence on how the spouses in dual-career marriages score on a sense of purpose in life, stress, role conflict and satisfaction with life scales. Comparative analysis in this matter indicated that it was reasonable to pursue this kind of research, and also gave evidence supporting the hypothesis postulated in the corresponding section of the study (H1). As it turned out, women in dual-career relationships significantly more often (as compared with their partners) reported a sense of overwork ( $t = 4.72$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ), penetration of family life by work ( $t = 2.42$ ;  $p \leq 0,02$ ), experiencing tension ( $t = 6.44$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ), external stress ( $t = 4.03$ ;  $p \leq 0.0001$ ), intrapsychic stress ( $t = 5.48$ ;

$p \leq 0.0001$ ) and the global stress index ( $t = 6.43; p \leq 0.0001$ ), at the same time having a lower sense of affirmation of life ( $t = 4.65; p \leq 0.0001$ ) and the evaluation of life ( $t = 5.22; p \leq 0.0001$ ). There is also a statistical tendency for women to report a lower level of general sense of purpose in life ( $t = 1.82; p \leq 0.07$ ) and a more distinct sense of diffusion of boundaries between work and family ( $t = 1.79; p \leq 0.07$ ). No significant differences in reported levels of happiness were observed in spouses in dual-career relationships.

Comparative analysis based on the model of marriage and using ANOVA and Tuckey's *post hoc* analysis revealed that spouses in dual-career relationships, as compared with those in egalitarian partnerships or traditional marriages, reported the highest level of experiencing: general stress ( $F = 4.15; p \leq 0.002$ ), tension ( $F = 4.45; p \leq 0.005$ ), fatigue ( $F = 11.48; p \leq 0.0001$ ), diffusion of work-home boundaries ( $F = 5.42; p \leq 0.001$ ), penetration of home life by work ( $F = 6.68; p \leq 0.0001$ ), but also satisfaction with one's own achievements ( $F = 4.75; p \leq 0.003$ ) and with financial situation of the family ( $F = 2.98; p \leq 0.03$ ), at the same time reporting the lowest level of affirmation of life ( $F = 3.05; p \leq 0.03$ ) and satisfaction with how one spends his/her free time ( $F = 6.15; p \leq 0.0001$ ). Therefore the results obtained are in concert with the postulated hypothesis (H2). It is intriguing, though, that despite significant differences in experiencing stress, role conflict and satisfaction between discussed groups, significant differences in the general index of a sense of purpose in life did not appear. It seems all the more reasonable then to search for significant mediators of the link between role conflict and a sense of purpose in life in examined spouses in dual-career relationships – and that is what constituted the last of our research problems presented above.

In the model presented below it has been assumed that satisfaction with professional accomplishments and stress level can act as mediating variables in the link between how the participants manage to reconcile their professional and family roles and to what degree they have a sense of purpose in life. Drawing on the existing knowledge we expected that satisfaction with one's achievements might be a proximal mediating variable (direct, close to independent variable), and stress on the other hand would prove to be a distal mediating variable (indirect, distant, depending on satisfaction with own achievements). Therefore satisfaction with one's accomplishments, while mediating work-life balance and a sense of happiness, is also significant in shaping the level of stress experienced within these relations.

The results, as analyzed with the Amos 21 statistical package (figure 1, table 1) indicate that the model generally fits the data acceptably well and its statistical power is satisfactory.

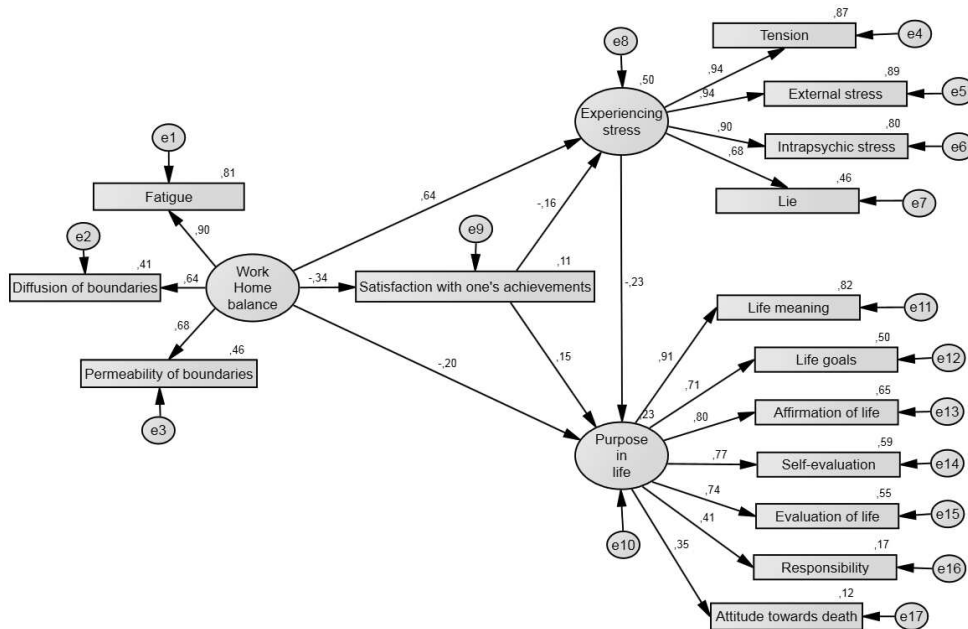


Figure 1. Output path diagram presenting a model of relation between role conflict and a sense of purpose in life, including the mediating role of a sense of happiness and experienced stress

Table 1. Indicators of global model fitting

CHI <sup>2</sup> (85) = 116.619; <i>p</i> = 0.013	CFI = 0.881	RMSEA = 0.041	GFI = 0.915	AGFI = 0.864
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CFI – comparative fit index; RMSEA – root mean square error of approximation  
 GFI – goodness of fit index; AGFI – adjusted goodness of fit index

In order to calculate the mediating role of satisfaction with one's achievements and stress in the process of forming the relation between the work-life balance and a sense of purpose in life, an analysis testing the significance of direct and indirect effects was carried out by applying a bootstrap simulation of 1000 trials.

As demonstrated in figure 1 and in table 2, work-life balance significantly and negatively (direct effect), influences a sense of purpose in life ( $\beta = -0.204$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ), this influence, however, varies depending on the level of satisfaction with one's achievements and experienced stress (indirect effect), which by acting as mediating variables (partial mediators), significantly weakens the strength of this link ( $\beta = -0.061$ ;  $p = 0.05$ ). Experienced stress is in the examined pattern of interdependencies a distal (distant) mediator, as it mediates the relation between work-life balance and a sense of purpose in lives via the satisfaction with one's achievements and is substantial-

ly connected to it ( $\beta = -0.16$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ). In the model here presented it is therefore a mediator whose level is dependent on the influence exercised by the closer (proximal) mediator of the independent variable (here: reported satisfaction with one's achievements). Findings describing such a pattern of variables are also supported by the fact that satisfaction with one's achievements, when analyzed, turned out to mediate the link between work-life balance and a sense of stress among participants (direct effect:  $\beta = 0.639$ ;  $p = 0.01$ , indirect effect:  $\beta = 0.053$ ;  $p = 0.154$ ), significantly reducing the strong and direct effect ( $\beta = 0.642$ ;  $p = 0,01$ ) in this respect (figure 1), while the level of experienced stress turned out to significantly mediate the relation between a sense of happiness in participants and their sense of purpose in life (direct effect:  $\beta = 0.150$ ;  $p = 0.01$ , indirect effect:  $\beta = 0.036$ ;  $p = 0.148$ ). All in all, these results confirm the proposed relationships between variables in the presented model, together with the emphasized mediating role of satisfaction with one's own achievements and, related to it, a sense of stress. No significant differences between women and men were observed.

In view of the obtained results it is justifiable to conclude that the influence of work-life balance on a sense of purpose in life is among participants significant but mediated both by satisfaction with one's achievements and by experienced stress. It can be said that a high level of satisfaction with what one managed to accomplish in life, by reducing significantly the level of daily stresses and strains, mediates the process of forming the link between how one reconciles his/her professional life with family role and a sense of purpose in one's life. So depending on how one evaluates it, it can either be a specific buffer against this link, or – in case of shortcomings in this respect – significantly aggravate (also by intensifying stress) the negative correlation between balancing work and family life on a daily basis and meaningful reflection on one's life.

Table 2. Role conflict and purpose in life mediating role of purpose in life and stress

Independent variable: Work-Life Balance			
Dependent variable: Purpose in Life			
Mediating variables: Satisfaction with one's Achievements, Stress			
	Indirect effect	Direct effect	Total effect
Estimate	-0.061*	-0.204**	-0.265**
Lower boundary	-0.211	-0.520	-0.352
Upper boundary	0.125	0.168	0.237

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

## Discussion

The functioning of dual-career couples is connected with many challenges and threats on the one hand, but also with many areas of possible successes on the other. Intense engagement in both professional and family roles often determines problems related to lack of time and time pressure; strong penetration of family life by work and vice versa; and the diffusion of boundaries between work and family (Janicka, 2008; Peplińska, 2012). This kind of relationship may lead to loosening emotional bonds among partners and disrupting one's relation with children, because if other family members highly value spending free time together, then the lack of it necessarily implies that frequent negotiations and settlements are made to improve the way family members communicate with each other (Rostowski, 2009) – this is an ordeal that tests the quality of both marital relations and family ties, an ordeal not everyone will pass successfully. High economic and social status of many such marriages is on the one hand conducive to some of the more sophisticated ways to spend one's free time or holiday or to engage in more sophisticated forms of entertainments and joint recreation, but on the other it may promote consumerism, putting higher values in the shade, or substituting physical presence of one's partner of parent with ever-new possessions. So even though these relationship can in spite of all that can bring high level of satisfaction with life, a sense of happiness and self-realization, it is frequently not without a series of negative consequences, both in the area of physical health and psychical well-being, such as e.g. an increasing feeling of fatigue, overload with roles and duties, frustration, worries and role conflicts, all causing disappointment, bitterness or a sense of lacking effectiveness (Anderson, Spruill, 1993; Rostowski, Rostowska, 2005).

The analysis of empirical material presented in this study is in keeping with the dichotomous picture of dual-career marriages, burdened with many threats and negative consequences, but also supported by many satisfying areas able to counter the influence of experienced stress, tension or role conflict (Kosakowska, Petrus, 2006). Compared with those in other models of marriage, partners in dual-career relationships reported the highest level of experienced stress, fatigue, tension and role conflict, but also the highest levels of satisfaction with one's achievements or the family's financial situation – factors which can neutralize the negative impact of experienced stress and conflicts on the general sense of life meaning. We can definitely say that success of a dual-career marriage is one hard-earned and involving many costs, but allowing a sense of happiness, satisfaction with one's life and a greater sense of its meaning. Our studies reveal that the costs resulting from the specific character of how dual-career marriages operate, affect women more acutely and they significantly more often report the feeling of fatigue, tension, stress, enjoying no affirmation of life or negatively evaluating their lives. The literature on the subject singles out three subtypes of these relationships – one involving a traditional division of gender roles, one involving a nontraditional division of roles and one based on an ideal partnership (Rostowski, Rostowska, 2005). One can wonder, then, if the obtained findings particularly apply to the first of those subtypes. Even though they pursue the contemporary model of professional career,

are highly committed to their professional roles, have lofty aspirations and the need for achievement, women still remain faithful to the gender patterns internalized in childhood, struggling with equal commitment and motivation to acquit themselves in household duties. Too often does fulfilling these duties and tasks take place at the expense of sleep, rest, or entertainment, leaving a negative imprint on their general psychical well-being (Peplińska, Rostowska, 2013). A peculiar paradox underlying the experienced stress and role conflicts can be noticed, one that consists in a specific split: standing with one leg in what is presently and what will be in the future, but with the other – in the past and the old-time gender roles. Unfortunately these deliberations remain a theory only. In the presented study we did not manage to monitor how the partners in two-career relationships regarded the issue of gender roles. Analyzing this dependency could reveal whether the traditional approach to gender roles is in a way one of the reasons for experiencing tension – as opposed to those more liberal and contemporary in their outlook. Research carried out in the field of experiencing role conflicts by women demonstrate that this problem affects particularly those who have traditional, and not modern, views on gender roles, consequently generating greater psychological costs (Zalewska, 2008). These analyses are therefore worth including in the studies yet to be conducted on this subject. As previously mentioned, negative psychological consequences reported by partners in dual-career relationships are coupled with a higher level of satisfaction with their lives, achievements or financial situation. Therefore it seemed justifiable to search for variables significantly mediating the relations between experienced role conflict, experienced stress and a sense of purpose in life. The introduced model of these dependencies allows for an elaborate analysis of relations under discussion. Experiencing role conflicts is negatively correlated with a general sense of purpose in life and with satisfaction with one's accomplishments, at the same time being positively correlated with experienced stress. So negative overspill between family and work, diffusion of boundaries between these areas, a sense of being overloaded with roles correlate positively with stress, in the form of tension, external stress and intrapsychic stress, which – when combined – further intensify the negative influence on one's general sense of life meaning. It can be noticed, however, that in the calculated model a (high) level of satisfaction with one's achievements acts as a specific buffer against the influence of experienced role conflict and stress. Both the role conflict and related stress will be perceived as specific costs of gaining a certain level of satisfaction with own achievements, thus protecting an individual's sense of purpose in life. Conversely, a low level of satisfaction can intensify the influence of the link "role conflict-stress", negatively affecting a reported general sense of life meaning. Therefore, as long as what is realized by spouses in dual-career marriages brings them pleasure and binds them to a subjective feeling of achieving successes, both professional and personal, their subjective sense of life quality and meaning is protected, determining that they see conflicts, stresses and tensions as costs which need to be paid in exchange for a broadly defined success in life. As previously mentioned, the model of two-career marriages can have many assets and lead to a sense of high life quality, but it happens for the price of experiencing stress and



tension. What seems important then, is that partners in such relationships are able to work out for themselves some effective ways of coping with stress plus some skills to hold off various tasks and duties, as well as to support each other in difficult times and care for the quality of marital bonds, so that they can achieve success in their relationship.

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