



## *The Hope for Success and the Sense of Happiness in Men Dealing with the Divorce Crisis*

### ABSTRACT

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**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:** The aim of the research conducted among men dealing with the divorce crisis was to examine the correlation between the fathers' hope for success, understood as their confidence in the willpower and competence to overcome difficult situations, and their sense of happiness.

**THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS:** The main aim of the research was to address the question of whether there exists a correlation between the hope for success and the sense of happiness in fathers dealing with the divorce crisis and, if so, what is the nature of this connection. The study employed Hope for Success Questionnaire (the Polish adaptation of C. Snyder's Hope Scale). The level of happiness was determined with the use of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire.

**THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION:** The disquisition consists of five parts. First, the author introduces the problem and discusses the situation of contemporary fathers dealing with the divorce conflict. The second part outlines the assumptions of the research. Then, the article offers the theoretical framework regarding the hope for success and the sense of happiness. This part is followed by the analysis of the research material. The final part contains a conclusion.

**RESEARCH RESULTS:** The results revealed significant interdependence between the general level of hope for success and willpower, and the sense of happiness of the fathers participating in the study. The analysis of the material concerning the differences in the level of hope for success and the sense of happiness that took into account socio-demographic profile of the respondents displayed statistically significant differences as far as the financial situation of the fathers is concerned.

**CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS:** It may be assumed that in the case of fathers interested in the improvement of their relationship with the child after the divorce, the hope for success and conviction about their effectiveness and persistence foster their mental well-being, encourage the adoption of a more optimistic approach, and help find self-acceptance.

→ **KEYWORDS:** HOPE FOR SUCCESS, SENSE OF HAPPINESS, DIVORCE CRISIS

## STRESZCZENIE

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*Nadzieja na sukces a poczucie szczęścia mężczyzn przeżywających kryzys rozwodowy*

**CEL NAUKOWY:** W podjętych badaniach wśród mężczyzn przeżywających kryzys rozwodowy dążono do określenia związków między nadzieją ojców na odniesienie sukcesu, rozumianą jako przekonanie o posiadaniu silnej woli oraz kompetencji pozwalających na znalezienie rozwiązań w trudnej sytuacji życiowej, a ich poczuciem szczęścia.

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**PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE:** Główny problem badawczy został określony w postaci pytania o to, czy istnieją, a jeśli tak to jakie, zależności między nadzieją na sukces ojców przeżywających kryzys rozwodowy a ich poczuciem szczęścia. W badaniach wykorzystano Kwestionariusz Nadziei na Sukces (polska adaptacja The Hope Scale C. Snydera). Narzędzie to służy do pomiaru wyniku ogólnego nadziei na sukces oraz dwóch jej składowych – umiejętności znajdowania rozwiązań i siły woli. Do pomiaru poczucia szczęścia zastosowano natomiast Oksfordzki Kwestionariusz Szczęścia.

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**PROCES WYWODU:** Wywód składa się z pięciu części. Pierwsza stanowi wprowadzenie w podjętą problematykę, obejmującą sytuację współczesnych ojców przeżywających konflikt rozwodowy i dążących do poprawy swojej sytuacji życiowej. W drugiej części zaprezentowano założenia badań własnych. Następnie przedstawiono teoretyczne podstawy dotyczące nadziei na sukces i poczucia szczęścia. Kolejna część stanowi analizę materiału badawczego. W ostatniej części dokonano podsumowania.

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**WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ:** Uzyskane wyniki badań ujawniły istotny związek między wynikiem ogólnym nadziei na sukces oraz silną wolą a poczuciem szczęścia badanych ojców. Analiza materiału badawczego dotycząca zróżnicowania nadziei na sukces oraz poczucia szczęścia ze względu na cechy społeczno-demograficzne wykazała różnice istotne statystycznie w odniesieniu do sytuacji materialnej mężczyzn.

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**WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE, REKOMENDACJE:** Należy sądzić, że wyższemu poczuciu nadziei oraz przekonaniu o własnej skuteczności i wytrwałości ojców zainteresowanych poprawą swoich relacji z dzieckiem po rozwodzie towarzyszy silniejsze poczucie dobrostanu psychicznego, optymistycznego nastawienia oraz akceptacji samego siebie przez badanych mężczyzn.

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→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:**      **NADZIEJA NA SUKCES, POCZUCIE SZCZĘŚCIA,  
KRYZYS ROZWODOWY**

## Introduction

Marital conflict is becoming an increasingly popular problem in the contemporary world, and, consequently, it has been investigated in numerous studies that have attempted to indicate the reasons for the increasing family tensions, as well as to discuss the situation

children who witness the arguments between the parents and its consequences for the child's mental development. Marital conflict, depending on its duration and intensity, may cause disorganization of the family, separation of the spouses, or even family breakup that ends in divorce. Thus, divorce is seen as, among others, a critical life event that destabilizes the relationship between the individual and the community, requires changes in the individual's functioning, increases the risk of pathology, creates significant emotional tension, and upsets the individual's routine (Beisert, 2000, p. 44).

Increasingly more attention has been paid also to the feelings and the needs of men who suffer marital crisis. This interest has been triggered by the changing perception of family roles and the departure from the traditional division of these roles. Also, the awareness of the difficult situation of the fathers fighting for custody of their children after the divorce and striving to establish contact arrangements with their children has increased. This growing interest in the situation of the fathers who are aware of their paternal role and who see it as a means of self-actualization stems from the fact that the society has started to acknowledge that men can also be caring, sensitive, and attentive, and it is more willing to accept less "manly" men. However, the more involved men still suffer the effects of the stereotypical beliefs held by the majority of people, namely that these are mothers who are better qualified to raise children and so they should be granted custody of the children (Dudak, 2006, p. 38). Because courts and representatives of social services continue to be biased against the fathers, custody is usually granted to the mother, and many fathers undertake activities in order to improve their situation. They seek institutional support of associations advocating fathers' rights, increase their knowledge of family law, and engage in social and media campaigns promoting involved fatherhood. It should be remembered that the situation of men going through the divorce crisis is difficult not only because they have to overcome the sense of failure connected with the family breakup, but they also need to deal with the lack of contact with their children and struggle to regain or maintain the bond.

Undertaking activities aimed at improving their situation, fathers hope for success, which results from their conviction that they can overcome difficulties and can, owing to their perseverance, achieve their major aim: stabilize their circumstances. Many of them, despite the experienced stress, remain optimistic about the effectiveness of their actions; they believe that they can improve not only their own circumstances, but also help fathers who are struggling with problems and are suffering stress by showing them possible solutions and bringing hope.

## The assumptions of the research

The aim of the research was to investigate the correlation between hope for success and the sense of happiness in fathers struggling with the divorce crisis. The main research problem was the question of whether there exists a correlation between the hope for success and the sense of happiness in fathers dealing with the divorce crisis and, if so,

what is the nature of this connection. In order to provide an answer to this question, also the following questions required closer consideration:

1. What is the level of hope for success in the fathers participating in the study?
2. What is their level of happiness?
3. What is the connection between hope for success and the level of happiness in the respondents?

Since it would be unjustified to hypothesize about the diagnostic questions, the only formulated hypothesis concerned the connection between the analyzed variables. It has been assumed that there exists a significant correlation between the hope for success seen as the sense of efficiency and determination to achieve one's goals, which, in the case of the respondents, concerned maintaining contact with their children after the divorce, and the fathers' sense of happiness (see Argyle, 2004; Argyle & Martin, 1991; Ryś, 2010).

The study employed *Kwestionariusz Nadziei na Sukces* (KNS, Hope for Success Questionnaire) that is the adaptation of C. Snyder's *Hope Scale* into Polish made by M. Łaguna, J. Trzebiński, and M. Zięba (2005). The tool measures the general level of hope for success and its two components – individual's problems-solving skills and willpower. The level of happiness was determined with the use of the *Oxford Happiness Questionnaire* that assesses the subjective sense of happiness, mental well-being, satisfaction with one's life, and the factors conditioning their achievement (Poprawa, 2012, p. 38). The research was conducted between January and May 2017, and used the diagnostic survey – an online questionnaire available on the website of the Center for Fathers' and Children's Rights Association. A total of 189 men participated in the study; they were fathers who experienced divorce conflict, yet strove to maintain contact with their children after the divorce and who seek the legal and psychological counseling offered by the Association.

## Hope for success and the sense of happiness – theoretical background

Hope is usually discussed in the context of some crisis or a difficult situation that requires strength to overcome it or to survive. Hope affects the quality of one's internal experiences, professional and educational achievements, as well as the perception of oneself and the surrounding world (Kwiatek, 2012, p. 158, after: Cutcliffe, 2004).

The notion of hope was introduced by R. Snyder (Snyder, 1994; Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997) and it is understood as the individuals' expectations that their actions will bring positive effects, which result from two assumptions: 1) that they have willpower and 2) that they have sufficient competence to succeed (Matczak & Salata, 2010, p. 19).

It can be, therefore, assumed that a person filled with hope for success undertakes activities aimed at improving their situation. Hence, the first assumption refers to the individual's capacities to finalize their plans despite obstacles and doubts. The second

element of hope concerns the perception of oneself as a resourceful and effective person (Łaguna, Trzebiński, & Zięba, 2005, p. 7).

According to C.R. Snyder, the author of the theory of hope, hope is pivotal for the proper functioning of a human being in many different fields of life, including finding the meaning of life, physical fitness, health, interpersonal relations, as well as academic and professional achievements. Empirical studies conducted by T.C. Bailey and C.R. Snyder (2007) revealed that there exists a strong correlation between hope for success and life satisfaction among people in different age and marital status groups. In general, people who feel satisfied with their lives exhibit higher hope for success (Klimkowska, 2013, p. 196). Fathers who are aware of their importance in children's life and who deal with the sense of failure connected not only with the failed marriage but, most importantly, with the separation with the child, undertake actions to improve this difficult situation. They strive to establish contact arrangements with the child, promote the importance of contemporary fatherhood, they become involved in various activities within organizations advocating fathers' rights and in the media, and they pursue educational activities to extend their knowledge of paternal competence and family law. To them, the hope that they can change their lives and also help other men in a similar situation is of crucial importance (see Dudak & Klimkowska, 2017, p. 166).

Another issue indispensable for the present study is happiness. M. Argyle (2004) considers it to be a subjective notion since whether a person is happy or not is determined by their own evaluation of their circumstances. M. Argyle perceives happiness as 1) positive emotional equilibrium, and 2) satisfaction with life as a whole and with its different aspects. A happy person is generally satisfied with who he/she is and with his/her life (Poprawa, 2012, p. 38).

Many researchers emphasize the importance of individuals' qualities conditioning happiness. The general sense of happiness depends mostly on satisfaction, finding the meaning of life, optimistic approach, satisfactory close relations with others, one's self-esteem, self-acceptance, and one's health. Happy people, in comparison with those less happy, tend to have higher self-esteem, are more optimistic about life, and they tend to better cope with whatever happens to them (Poprawa, 2012, p. 39, after: Argyle & Martin, 1991; Argyle, 2004). Men striving to maintain contact with their children and fighting for their rights despite unfavorable family court ruling, see the source of life satisfaction in the possibility to maintain contact with the child and being a parent as important as the mother (see Dudak, 2013).

## Analysis of the results

A detailed analysis of the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents (Table 1) revealed that over 50% of the men were between 30 and 39 years of age and that a significant majority lived in big cities: 31.16% of the respondents lived in the cities with 500,000 or more population, while only 8.46% lived in towns or in the rural areas. The

majority of the respondents completed higher education (42.85%) or secondary education (40.21%). A vast majority of the respondents, that is 95.24%, were employed, and as far as the financial status is concerned, nearly half of the respondents assessed their financial situation as good or very good.

Table 1  
*Socio-demographic profile of the respondents*

Socio-demographic profile	N	%
<b>Age</b>		
Under 29	32	16.93
30-39	106	56.08
40 or more years of age	51	26.98
<b>Place of residence</b>		
City with 500,000 or more population	57	30.16
City with 100,000 or more population	50	26.45
City with 50,000 or more population	19	10.05
City with 10,000 or more population	47	24.87
City with population under 10,000	16	8.46
<b>Education</b>		
Primary	11	5.82
Secondary	76	40.21
Higher	81	42.85
Other	21	11.12
<b>Employment</b>		
Unemployed	9	4.76
Employed	180	95.24
<b>Financial situation</b>		
Very good / good	86	45.50
Average	70	37.04
Difficult / very difficult	33	17.46

Source: Author's research.

The data concerning the general level of hope in the respondents (Table 2) demonstrates that over half of them (53.44%) were filled with hope for success as far as the improvement of their life situation after the divorce is concerned. Slightly over ¼ of the respondents exhibited average level of hope for success, while 17.98% of the interviewed fathers did not have much hope that they would overcome difficulties connected with the divorce and share custody of the child, and thus maintain emotional bond with the child and be involved in the decisions regarding the child's life.

Table 2  
*Respondents' hope for success*

Level of hope for success	N	%
Low (1-4 stens)	34	17.98
Average (5-6 stens)	54	28.58
High (7-10 stens)	101	53.44
Total	189	100.00

Source: Author's research.

Table 3 presents the results regarding the level of the respondents' belief in their problem-solving skills. As many as nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the respondents claimed high level of such skills, 19.58% – average, while only 5.82 – low level of problem-solving skills. Thus, it may be assumed that a vast majority of the respondents believe that they have the ability to produce effective solutions and sufficient resources (knowledge, skill, competence) to deal with a difficult situation. Such a percentage may stem from the fact that the respondents voluntarily and with great determination undertook activities to improve their circumstances after the divorce, especially regarding their relationship with children, and they sought psychological and legal counseling of the association fighting with discrimination against fathers in the courts of law. It should be emphasized that the aid and support offered by the Association encourage positive thinking.

Table 3  
*Problem-solving skills of the fathers participating in the study*

Problem-solving skills	N	%
Low (1-4 stens)	11	5.82
Average (5-6 stens)	37	19.58
High (7-10 stens)	141	74.60
Total	189	100.00

Source: Author's research.

It has been revealed, however, that regarding the level of hope for success seen as the faith in one's efficiency and persistence, or willpower, the highest percentage of men – 38.62% exhibited low level, 34.92% – average level, while only 26.46 – high level of hope. It may be assumed, therefore, that only one in four men believe in their capability to deal with a difficult situation of the divorce and exhibit willpower that allows him to pursue his goals. Most fathers assessed their level of hope in this respect as low, which means that the respondents have no or little faith in their efficiency, determination, and willpower. Such results may suggest that fathers dealing with a divorce crisis experience the sense of failure and loneliness resulting from the lack of or limited contact with their children, and they are aware that custody of the child or favorable contact arrangements

are difficult to achieve. This is especially painful for fathers who are aware of their importance in the child's life.

Table 4  
Willpower of the respondents

Level of the respondents' willpower	N	%
Low (1-4 stens)	73	38.62
Average (5-6 stens)	66	34.92
High (7-10 stens)	50	26.46
Total	189	100.00

Source: Author's research.

Table 5  
*Hope for success and the demographic profile of the respondents*

Hope for success and the socio-demographic characteristics	Spearman's rank-order correlation	
	R	p
Age		
Total score	0.030	0.681
Problem-solving skills	0.092	0.203
Willpower	-0.018	0.797
Place of residence		
Total score	-0.057	0.431
Problem-solving skills	-0.055	0.451
Willpower	-0.064	0.376
Education		
Total score	-0.016	0.825
Problem-solving skills	0.018	0.799
Willpower	-0.038	0.600
Financial situation		
Total score	-0.118	0.103
Problem-solving skills	-0.051	0.485
Willpower	-0.147	0.043*

Source: Author's research. \* Statistically significant difference –  $p < 0.050$ .

As shown by the research, fathers claiming custody of their children face difficulties connected mainly with the stereotypical assessment of their upbringing competence, and the court rulings are usually favorable for the mothers. Such a situation may be discouraging for the fathers and may undermine their faith in their abilities (see Dudak, 2013). In turn, high levels of problem-solving skills declared by the respondents stem mostly

from the fact that the fathers seek help in, among others, associations advocating fathers' rights, and from the faith in their capabilities to cope with unfavorable circumstances.

The analysis of the hope for success in fathers regarding the fathers' socio-demographic profiles revealed statistically significant differences only in the case of willpower and the financial situation of the respondents ( $p = 0.043$ ). This correlation suggests that the better the fathers' assessment of their financial situation, the better their perception of efficiency and persistence in pursuing the goal regarding the establishment of contact arrangements with children after the divorce. It should be emphasized that the financial capabilities weigh heavily on the judge's decision concerning custody of the child.

Table 6  
Sense of happiness and socio-demographic profiles of the respondents

The sense of happiness and the socio-demographic characteristics	Spearman's rank-order correlation	
	R	P
Age		
Sense of happiness	-0.025	0.724
Place of residence		
Sense of happiness	0.027	0.711
Education		
Sense of happiness	0.067	0.352
Financial situation		
Sense of happiness	-0.150	0.039*

Source: Author's research. \* Statistically significant difference –  $p < 0.050$ .

The issue investigated in the study required also the analysis of the sense of happiness in the fathers experiencing the divorce crisis. The analysis revealed that the respondents exhibited average level of happiness regarding mental well-being, satisfaction with their own life, and its determinants ( $M = 108.82$ ;  $Me = 105.00$ ;  $SD = 20.24$ ). The research aimed also to indicate whether the differences in the subjective sense of happiness are conditioned by the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents. It has been observed that such features as age, place of residence, and education do not affect the fathers' subjective sense of happiness. A significant difference was noted only regarding the financial situation of the respondents ( $p = 0.039$ ), as is the case with the hope for success. It was concluded that the better the financial situation of the respondents, the higher the level of their subjective sense of happiness (Table 6). Hence, the economic factor conditions the respondents' mental well-being and satisfaction with their life. The results obtained in the study are consistent with the paradigm of masculinity in which the material status constitutes a vital aspect of a man's life, since it determines his sense of independence, job satisfaction, and, frequently, his dominance over women. In the case of divorced fathers, a good financial situation and appropriate living accommodations

are important factors in favor of allowing the father to maintain contact with the child, as they guarantee that he can provide for the child.

Addressing the research problem, the author of the study sought correlation between the respondents' hope for success and their sense of happiness (Table 7). The author investigated the connection between the subjective sense of happiness and the general level of hope for success as well as two other components: problem-solving skills and willpower. The research revealed significant correlation between the general level of hope for success and the sense of happiness ( $p = 0.047$ ), and between willpower and the sense of happiness ( $p = 0.029$ ). Thus, it may be stated that those men who assess their sense of happiness as high, exhibit also higher hope and stronger willpower that allow them to successfully pursue goals connected with the improvement of their life circumstances. Moreover, the observed correlation between the variables, although very weak, suggests that the fathers' expectations regarding positive effects of their actions and their willpower may improve the level of life satisfaction despite the difficulties they experience.

Table 7  
*Correlation between the hope for success and the fathers' sense of happiness*

Hope for success and the sense of happiness	Spearman's rank-order correlation	
	R	p
General score and the sense of happiness	0.144	0.047*
Problem-solving skills and the sense of happiness	0.093	0.198
Willpower and the sense of happiness	0.158	0.029*

Source: Author's research. \* Statistically significant difference –  $p < 0.050$ .

## Conclusion

The outcome of the study indicates that half of the respondents – fathers dealing with the divorce and seeking the support of the Center for Fathers' and Children's Rights Association – despite their difficult situation, exhibit high level of hope for success, while almost one-third reveal average level of hope. As far as the problem-solving skills are concerned, as many as  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the respondents perceive themselves as men who are able to find solutions to their problems, and only 6% of the respondents feel otherwise. Regarding the second element – willpower, the research revealed differences in the fathers' level of determination regarding the activities they undertake. However, the most numerous group of the respondents declare low willpower and do not feel persistent enough to pursue their goals.

As far as the sense of happiness is concerned, the fact that the respondents assess it as average may suggest that although they are experiencing a difficult situation connected with the divorce and fear losing contact with the children, they still feel some satisfaction with life. It may be assumed that the activities undertaken by them as well

as interest in the possible forms of support for fathers battling for custody of their children, help them find satisfaction and meaning in their lives. The results of the empirical analyses regarding the difference in the hope for success and the sense of happiness regarding the demographic profiles of the respondents revealed statistically significant differences only as far as the financial situation is concerned. It turned out that better assessment of one's financial situation strengthens one's faith in their efficiency and ability to overcome difficulties and barriers connected with the divorce; it also increases the level of life satisfaction.

The outcomes of the correlation studies into the hope for success and the sense of happiness revealed a significant interdependence between the general hope for success and willpower, and the sense of happiness. It can be assumed, therefore, that higher level of hope and the belief in one's effectiveness and persistence translate into better mental well-being, more optimistic approach to life, and better self-acceptance. The conducted analyses imply that the fathers who are conscious of their role and determined to maintain their relationship with their offspring, in a difficult situation, namely, in a divorce crisis leading to a family breakup and – in the case of men – to the loss of contact with the child, undertake activities which reflect both hope and confidence that they can improve their situation.

The study contributes to the cause of contemporary fathers, especially those who, despite a failed marriage, perceive fatherhood as an important aspect of their self-actualization and as a means to find happiness. Such a discussion seems important and necessary from the social perspective due to the changing parental roles and tasks, as well as due to the approach of men who want to be fulfilled as fathers and find satisfaction in those areas of life that used to be reserved only for women.

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