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**Parentyfikacja w grupie polskich adolescentów: opracowanie narzędzi  
badawczych i eksploracja procesu**

Rozprawa doktorska napisana pod kierunkiem  
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Gdańsk, 2021

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## Streszczenie

Pracę doktorską pt. *Parentyfikacja w grupie polskich adolescentów: opracowanie narzędzi badawczych i eksploracja procesu* - stanowi cykl pięciu monotematycznych artykułów, głównie o charakterze empirycznym, opublikowanych w wysokopunktowanych czasopismach w języku angielskim.

Celem zaprezentowanych prac będących przedmiotem rozprawy doktorskiej było opracowanie narzędzi badawczych oraz eksploracja procesu parentyfikacji w grupie polskich adolescentów. Aby zrealizować postawione cele, prace nad projektem badań doktorskich podzielono na trzy etapy:

### 1. Przegląd literatury:

Na tym etapie usystematyzowano doniesienia na temat procesu parentyfikacji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem relacji między parentyfikacją doświadczaną w okresie dzieciństwa i adolescencji a realizacją zadań rozwojowych w grupie późnych adolescentów/osób wkraczających w dorosłość. Efektem pracy była Publikacja 1.

### 2. Konstrukcja narzędzi badawczych:

Podjęcie prac nad polskojęzycznymi narzędziami było niezbędnym krokiem z uwagi na ówczesny brak polskich kwestionariuszy/adaptacji testów zagranicznych, które umożliwiłyby badania nad procesem parentyfikacji z udziałem polskich prób (rozpoczęcie prac w latach 2015-2016).

- Badanie 1 (Publikacja 2):  $N = 641$  (wiek:  $M = 14.96$ ,  $SD = 0.36$ ; dziewczęta: 60.7%, chłopcy: 38.8%, brak informacji nt. płci: .5%; Borchet i in., 2020a)

Na podstawie wyników Badania 1 przygotowano autorski *Kwestionariusz Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży* umożliwiający wielowymiarowy pomiar parentyfikacji aktualnie doświadczanej przez adolescentów. Proces tworzenia kwestionariusza i jego właściwości

psychometryczne opisano w Publikacji 2. Kwestionariusz został wykorzystany w badaniach zaprezentowanych w Publikacjach 3 i 4. Dodatkowo, dokonano adaptacji zagranicznego narzędzia – *Parentification Inventory* (Hooper, 2009), które pozwala na retrospektywną ocenę parentyfikacji doświadczanej w okresie dzieciństwa i dorastania. Adaptację wykorzystano w Publikacji 5, artykuł prezentujący adaptację jest w recenzji.

### **3. Prace eksploracyjne:**

Najważniejszym elementem pracy doktorskiej było przeprowadzenie trzech badań poprzecznych eksplorujących problematykę parentyfikacji doświadczanej przez polskich adolescentów.

- Badanie 2 (Publikacja 3):  $N = 169$  (wiek:  $M = 14.57$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ; dziewczęta: 62.1%, chłopcy: 37.3%; brak informacji nt. płci: .6%; Lewandowska-Walter i in., 2017)

Celem Badania 2 było sprawdzenie, w jaki sposób płeć różnicuje nasilenie parentyfikacji na różnych jej wymiarach, a także jakie są związki między wymiarami parentyfikacji a sposobami radzenia sobie ze stresem u wczesnych adolescentów. Wyniki badania wskazały, że chłopcy deklarowali wyższy poziom instrumentalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodziców oraz wyższy poziom zadowolenia z roli pełnionej w rodzinie niż dziewczęta. Z kolei dziewczęta deklarowały wyższy poziom emocjonalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzeństwo. Na poziomie tendencji statystycznej dziewczęta wykazywały również wyższy poziom emocjonalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodziców. Dziewczęta i chłopcy podejmowali różne strategie radzenia sobie, zarówno w przypadku parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodziców, jak i na rodzeństwo (Lewandowska-Walter i in., 2017).

- Badanie 3 (Publikacja 4):  $N = 191$  (wiek:  $M = 14.61$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ ; dziewczęta: 55%, chłopcy: 44.5%; brak informacji nt. płci: .5%; Borchet i in., 2021)

Celem Badania 3 była eksploracja relacji między aktualnie doświadczaną przez adolescentów parentyfikacją (na różnych wymiarach) a ich osiągnięciami szkolnymi, z uwzględnieniem kontekstu jakości ich życia. Wyniki wskazały, że końcoworoczna średnia ocen szkolnych była pozytywnie związana z poziomem doświadczanej przez adolescentów instrumentalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej zarówno na rodziców, jak również na rodzeństwo. Dodatkowo, relacja ta była mediowana przez ogólną jakość życia adolescenta. Otrzymane wyniki zwracają uwagę na to, jak ważny dla następstw parentyfikacji jest sposób w jaki adolescent postrzega role pełnione w swojej rodzinie oraz wskazują na ważną rolę ochronnych czynników pozarodzinnych, które mogą składać się na jakość życia nastolatka (Borchet i in., 2021).

- Badanie 4 (Publikacja 5):  $N = 218$  (wiek:  $M = 21.37$ ;  $SD = 2.49$ ; kobiety: 86.2%, mężczyźni: 13.8%; Borchet i in., 2020b)

W Badaniu 4 udział wzięły osoby w okresie późnej adolescencji/wchodzące w dorosłość. Wyniki badania wskazały na pośredniczącą rolę jakości relacji z rodzeństwem w związku między retrospektywną oceną parentyfikacji doświadczanej w okresie dzieciństwa i dorastania a bieżącą samooceną. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że relacje z rodzeństwem mogą stanowić ważny czynnik chroniący przed negatywnymi następstwami doświadczanej parentyfikacji (Borchet i in., 2020b).

Efekty wszystkich prac opublikowano w cyklu pięciu spójnych tematycznie publikacji naukowych w wysoko punktowanych czasopismach anglojęzycznych. Badania 1-4, zaprezentowane odpowiednio w Publikacjach 2-5, miały charakter poprzeczny, natomiast Publikacja 1 miała charakter przeglądowy.

## Abstract

The aim of the presented works, being the subject of the doctoral dissertation, was to develop research tools and explore the parentification process in Polish adolescents. In order to achieve these goals, the doctoral research project was divided into three stages:

### 1. Literature review:

This stage of the doctoral research project aimed to systematize reports on the parentification process, with particular emphasis on the relationship between parentification experienced during childhood and adolescence and performing developmental tasks in late adolescence/emerging adulthood (Publication 1).

### 2. Psychometric studies:

Preparing Polish-language parentification research tools was a necessary step due to the lack of Polish questionnaires/adaptations of foreign tests at the time. New questionnaires would enable research on parentification among Polish participants. Thus the psychometric work started in the academic year 2015/2016).

- Study 1 (Publication 2):  $N = 641$  (age:  $M = 14.96$ ,  $SD = 0.36$ ; girls: 60.7%, boys: 38.8%, no information on gender provided: .5%; Borchet et al., 2020a)

Based on the results of Study 1, an original *Parentification Questionnaire for Youth* (PQY) was prepared. The questionnaire enables a multidimensional measurement of parentification currently experienced by adolescents (the process of creating the questionnaire and its psychometric properties are described in Publication 2; the PQY was used in the studies presented in Publications 3 and 4).

Additionally, an international questionnaire was adapted - the *Parentification Inventory* (Hooper, 2009), which allows for a retrospective assessment of parentification

experienced during childhood and adolescence (the adaptation was used in Publication 5, the article presenting the adaptation is currently under review).

### **3. Exploratory studies:**

Three cross-sectional studies exploring the phenomenon of parentification experienced by Polish adolescents were conducted.

- Study 2 (Publication 3):  $N = 169$  (age:  $M = 14.57$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ; girls: 62.1%, boys: 37.3%; no information on gender provided: .6%; Lewandowska-Walter et al., 2017)

The aim of Study 2 was to investigate how gender differentiates the intensity of parentification, and the relations between the parentification dimensions and the ways of coping with stress in early adolescents (Publication 3). The study results indicated that boys declared a higher level of instrumental parentification directed at parents and a higher level

of satisfaction with the role they performed in their families than girls did. On the other hand, girls declared a higher level of emotional parentification directed at siblings. At the level of statistical tendency, girls also showed a higher level of emotional parentification directed at parents than boys did. Moreover, girls and boys undertook different coping strategies, both in case of parentification focused on parents and on siblings (Lewandowska-Walter et al., 2017).

- Study 3 (Publication 4):  $N = 191$  (age:  $M = 14.61$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ ; girls: 55%, boys: 44.5%; no information on gender provided: .5%; Borchet et al., 2021)

The aim of Study 3 was to explore the relations between parentification currently experienced by adolescents (on various dimensions) and their school achievements, taking into consideration the context of their quality of life. The results indicated that the mean school grade at the end of the school year was positively related to the level of instrumental

parentification experienced by adolescents, directed both at parents and siblings. Additionally, this relation was mediated by the adolescent's overall quality of life. The obtained results emphasize how important for the consequences of parentification may be way the adolescent perceives her/his own role in the family system and indicate the important role of protective non-family-related factors that can build the adolescent's quality of life (Borchet et al., 2021).

- Study 4 (Publication 5):  $N = 218$  (age:  $M = 21.37$ ;  $SD = 2.49$ ; girls: 86.2%, boys: 13.8%; Borchet et al., 2020b)

The participants of Study 4 were late adolescents/emerging adults. The results indicated a mediating role of sibling relationship in the relation between the retrospective assessment of parentification experienced during childhood and adolescence and the current self-esteem. The obtained results indicate that relationships with siblings may constitute an important factor protecting against experienced parentification's negative consequences (Borchet et al., 2020b).

The results of the doctoral research project were published in a series of five thematically coherent scientific publications. Studies 1-4, presented in Publications 2-5, were cross-sectional, while Publication 1 was a literature review.

## Spis publikacji naukowych stanowiących rozprawę doktorską

1. Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., & Rostowska, T. (2018). Performing developmental tasks in emerging adults with childhood parentification – insights from literature. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*, 6(3), 242–251.  
<https://doi.org/10.5114/cipp.2018.75750>
2. Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., & Peplińska, A. (2020). Construction of a Parentification Questionnaire for Youth. *Health Psychology Report*, 8(2), 175–188. <https://doi.org/10.5114/hpr.2019.89492>
3. Lewandowska-Walter, A., Borchet, J., Rostowska, T., Połomski, P., & Peplińska, A. (2017). Parentification and coping in Polish adolescents. *Polish Journal of Social Science*, 12(1), 157–176.
4. Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., Peplińska, A., & Hooper, L. M. (2021). The relations among types of parentification, school achievement, and quality of life in early adolescence: An exploratory study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.635171>

Czasopismo wyróżnione na liście JCR, IF = 2.067

5. Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., Peplińska, A., & Hooper, L. M. (2020). We are in this together: Retrospective parentification, sibling relationships, and self-esteem. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29(1), 2982–2991.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01723-3>

Czasopismo wyróżnione na liście JCR, IF = 1.310

## **Skrócony opis rozprawy doktorskiej przedstawionej w formie spójnego tematycznie zbioru publikacji naukowych**

Parentyfikację można zdefiniować jako odwrócenie ról w rodzinie zachodzące między dzieckiem a jego rodzicem (Haxhe, 2016; Jurkovic, 1997). Zgodnie z typologią stylów rodzicielskich Bakiera (2018) parentyfikacja jest formą awersyjnego stylu pełnienia roli rodzicielskiej, co oznacza, że jest przejawem nieprawidłowego rozwoju dorosłych i niesie konsekwencje dla rozwoju dziecka (zob. także: Bakiera i Harwas-Napierała, 2016). W następstwie tego procesu dzieci i młodzież spełniają role i obowiązki, których rodzaj i zakres jest nieadekwatny do ich wieku oraz możliwości rozwojowych, a także takie, które w obrębie danej kultury są przypisane osobom dorosłym (Boszormenyi-Nagy i Spark, 1973; Hooper, 2011a; Jurkovic, 1997; Kerig, 2005). Normatywnie to rodzice czują odpowiedzialność za swoje dzieci, nawet jeśli w toku rozwoju dzieci i młodzież podejmują coraz więcej obowiązków. Odwrócenie ról tej sytuacji staje się normatywne, gdy rodzice tracą samodzielność w związku z np. podeszłym wiekiem i chorobą – wówczas dorosłe już dzieci pomagają im i przejmują kontrolę (Kościelska, 2011).

Parentyfikacja jest złożonym i wielowymiarowym procesem. Wpisane w naturę parentyfikacji przekraczanie granic międzypokoleniowych, zaburzenia hierarchii rodzinnej oraz niedostatek rodzicielskiej uwagi i opieki mogą mieć swoje źródło w międzypokoleniowej transmisji parentyfikacji jako wzorca pełnienia ról rodzinnych (Macfie i in., 2005; Nuttall i in., 2012; Rostowska, 1995) lub niemożności pełnienia roli rodzicielskiej i wycofania się z niej, np. z powodu uzależnienia rodzica (Chase i in., 1998; Pasternak i Schier, 2012; Tedgard i in., 2019), choroby przewlekłej rodzica lub rodzeństwa (Stein i in., 1999; Tomeny i in., 2016; Tompkins, 2007), migracji (Kuperminc i in., 2013; Toro i in., 2018) lub rozvodu bądź silnego konfliktu między rodzicami (Błażek, 2016; Nuttall i in., 2019; Peris i in., 2008).

Parentyfikacja może wystąpić zatem w bardzo różnych systemach rodzinnych, w których czynnik ryzyka jest czasem bardziej wyrazisty, a czasem nie jest łatwo identyfikowalny, co sprawia, że zjawisko to może być szeroko rozpowszechnione na całym świecie, (Byng-Hall, 2008; Hooper i in., 2020), szerzej niż sugerowałyby statystyki dotyczące rodzin z powyżej wymienionych grup.

Trzy najważniejsze klasyfikacje zjawiska parentyfikacji dotyczą jej typu, tego, kim opiekuje się dziecko oraz konsekwencji jakie to zjawisko ze sobą niesie (Hooper i in., 2011b; Jurkovic, 1997). Ze względu na rodzaj zadań pełnionych przez dziecko wyróżnić można parentyfikację emocjonalną oraz instrumentalną. Emocjonalny wymiar parentyfikacji odnosi się do zaspokajania przez dziecko emocjonalnych i społecznych potrzeb członków rodziny. Taka troska może wyrażać się na przykład poprzez dbałość o dobre samopoczucie i wyczulenie na nastroje rodzica (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper i in., 2008; Hooper i Wallace, 2010; Hooper i in., 2011b). Dziecko bądź nastolatek doświadczający emocjonalnej parentyfikacji, w celu utrzymania w rodzinie pozytywnej atmosfery, może pełnić w niej różne role: mediatora konfliktu między rodzicami, kozła ofiarnego, terapeuty rodzica lub jego powiernika (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper i in., 2008; Hooper i Wallace, 2010; Hooper i in., 2011a). W przypadku instrumentalnego (egzystencjalnego) wymiaru parentyfikacji obowiązki dziecka związane są z organizacją życia rodzinnego, troską o gospodarstwo domowe oraz o warunki bytowe rodziny (Chen i Panebianco, 2019; Hooper i in., 2008). W tym przypadku dziecko ofiarowuje rodzinie swoje zaangażowanie i pomoc w postaci fizycznej pracy, takiej jak np. sprzątanie, gotowanie, pranie, opiekowanie się rodzeństwem, a w pewnych sytuacjach również zarabianie pieniędzy. Parentyfikacja instrumentalna jest opisywana jako mniej szkodliwa dla rozwoju dzieci i młodzieży (Byng-Hall, 2008; Hooper i in., 2008), gdyż dzieciom i młodzieży łatwiej jest zaadaptować się do ról instrumentalnych niż do ról emocjonalnych. Te drugie narażają dzieci i młodzież na większe koszty psychiczne związane

ze stresem, jaki wiąże się chociażby z odpowiedzialnością za drugiego człowieka, przy jednoczesnym posiadaniu niewystarczających, bo wciąż rozwijających się kompetencji emocjonalnych (Byng-Hall, 2008).

Należy jednak zwrócić uwagę, że wyróżnione przez Jurkovicę (1997) typy parentyfikacji nie wykluczają się wzajemnie. Dzieci mogą pełnić w rodzinie wiele różnych ról równocześnie, przez co oba rodzaje parentyfikacji (emocjonalna i instrumentalna) mogą występować w tym samym czasie, pozostając jednak odrębnymi konstruktami, które niosą ze sobą różne skutki (Hooper i in., 2011a; Khafi i in. 2014).

Dodatkowo, parentyfikację można rozważać pod kątem tego, kto jest adresatem działań i troski dziecka. W swoim modelu Hooper (2009; Hooper i in., 2011b) rozróżnia parentyfikację skierowaną na rodzica/rodziców (*parent-focused parentification*) oraz skupioną na rodzeństwie (*sibling-focused parentification*). Sparentyfikowane dzieci i młodzież mogą opiekować się swoimi rodzicami, rodzeństwem albo wszystkimi członkami rodziny jednocześnie (Burton i in., 2018; Hooper i in., 2008; Jurkovic, 1997). Prowadzenie badań nad parentyfikacją skupioną na rodzeństwie jest szczególnie ważne z uwagi na to, że doświadczenie to może oddziaływać na jakość relacji między rodzeństwem (Borchet i in., 2020b; Lewandowska-Walter i in., 2016), która z kolei istotnie wpływa na funkcjonowanie społeczne jednostki, również w okresie dorosłości (np. Wałęcka-Matyja, 2017).

Parentyfikacja może stanowić poważne zagrożenie rozwoju, ponieważ sparentyfikowane dzieci i adolescenty nie tylko doświadczają niedostatku rodzicielskiej opieki, wykonują zadania i pełnią role nieadekwatne do swojego wieku, opiekują się własnymi rodzicami i często również rodzeństwem, ale też niejako wychowują samych siebie (Boszormenyi-Nagy i Spark, 1973; Chase i in., 1998; Hooper, 2007; Schier, 2014). Pełnienie ról, które przekraczają możliwości rozwojowe dzieci i adolescentów oraz wyczerpują ich zasoby osobiste może skutkować licznymi negatywnymi konsekwencjami, takimi jak

zaburzenia lękowe, depresja, zaburzenia osobowości, zaburzenia odżywiania (Arellano i in., 2018; Burton i in., 2018; Hooper, 2011a), używanie substancji psychoaktywnych (Chase, 1998; Dragan i Hardt, 2016), trudności w relacjach z innymi (Shaffer i Madden, 2016), słabe wyniki w nauce (Burton, 2007; Chase, 1998; Siskowski, 2006) oraz niskie umiejętności rodzicielskie w dorosłości (Nuttall i in., 2019).

Istnieją jednak badania, z których wynika, że z doświadczeniem parentyfikacji mogą być związane korzyści takie jak zwiększone poczucie własnej skuteczności, wzrost samooceny, poczucie kompetencji i prężność (Borchet i in., 2020b; DiCaccavo, 2006; Tompkins, 2007), zadowolenie z życia (Burton i in., 2018), potencjalne obniżenie zachowań antyspołecznych (Chen i in., 2018) oraz sprzyjanie pozytywnym relacjom z członkami rodziny (Borchet i in., 2020b; Tompkins, 2007).

Z uwagi na wielowymiarowość procesu parentyfikacji, jej liczne potencjalne uwarunkowania oraz bimodalność konsekwencji, wskazane jest badanie jej w różnych grupach – nie tylko zidentyfikowanych w literaturze grupach ryzyka (np. dzieci osób z uzależnieniem od alkoholu czy rodzeństwa osób ze spektrum autyzmu; zob. Chase i in., 1998; Tedgård in in, 2019; Tomeny i in., 2016), ale także w populacji ogólnej. Po pierwsze, w literaturze światowej brakuje danych na temat natężenia zjawiska w populacji (Siskowski, 2006). Po drugie, z uwagi na zależność od rodziców/opiekunów, dzieci i młodzież są szczególną oraz wrażliwą grupą, która z uwagi na mechanizmy lojalności wobec rodziny i rodziców, a także lęk przed opiekunami i stygmatyzacją może nie ujawniać swoich problemów rodzinnych (np. niechęć wobec zgłaszania przemocy w rodzinie, zob. Ipsos Loyalty, 2014; Szredzieńska i Włodarczyk, 2019). Otoczenie dziecka (rówieśnicy, szkoła) może nie być świadome tego, że w jego rodzinie występują czynniki narażające je na doświadczanie parentyfikacji.

## Proces parentyfikacji w okresie adolescencji

Dzieci i adolescenti doświadczający parentyfikacji często wykonują zadania, które przekraczają ich możliwości rozwojowe, jednocześnie nie otrzymując adekwatnego wsparcia od swoich opiekunów. W związku z tym wiek dziecka i okres rozwojowy, w jakim się ono znajduje stanowią istotny czynnik warunkujący przebieg procesu parentyfikacji oraz jego następstwa (Chase, 1999; Jurkovic, 1997; Kerig, 2005; Schier, 2014). Im wcześniej dziecko zacznie doświadczać parentyfikacji oraz im więcej ról i obowiązków wobec rodziców będzie ono pełnić, tym poważniejsze (długotrwałe, traumatyczne i destruktywne) są rozwojowe następstwa parentyfikacji (Jurkovic, 1997; Schier, 2014). Młodsze dzieci zazwyczaj nie posiadają wystarczających zasobów, aby poradzić sobie z tymi samymi obowiązkami co nastolatki lub dorośli, niezależnie od tego, jaką „pseudodojrzałość” i kompetencje prezentują (Jurkovic, 1997). Dzieci doświadczające parentyfikacji często określane są jako „dojrzałe/dorośle dzieci” (ang. *mature minors*; Garber, 2011), ponieważ na pierwszy rzut oka sprawiają wrażenie kompetentnych, silnych, zorganizowanych i zaradnych (zob. Chee i in., 2014; Tedgård i in., 2019). Niezależnie od tego, dzieci i adolescenti, którzy doświadczają parentyfikacji zasługują, żeby zauważyć ich wysiłek i zaoferować im pomoc, aby udało im się uniknąć przyszłych trudności wynikających z obciążenia rolą dorosłego w rodzinie, które mogą rzutować na całe ich dorosłe życie (zob. Chee i in., 2014).

Z uwagi na poziom dojrzałości i umiejętności radzenia sobie ze stresem, młodsze dzieci zdają się być niejako predestynowane do tego, aby odczuwać więcej stresu w związku z opiekowaniem się członkami rodziny (East, 2010). Adolescenti z kolei mają więcej obowiązków szkolnych oraz zajęć dodatkowych niż młodsze dzieci. Łączenie tych zadań z opieką nad rodziną może być bardzo trudne i stanowić dodatkowe obciążenie (East, 2010; McMahon i Luthar, 2007). Parentyfikacja doświadczana w okresie adolescencji stanowi

raczej utrwalony wzorzec rodzinny. Badania longitudinalne przeprowadzone przez Khafi wraz z zespołem (2014) wykazały, że poziom parentyfikacji w okresie wczesnej i późnej adolescencji pozostaje względnie stały i jednocześnie wiąże się z jakością relacji między adolescentem a rodzicem oraz występowaniem objawów psychopatologicznych u nastolatka.

Osoby znajdujące się w okresie późnej adolescencji (około 18-22 r.ż; Erikson, 1986) lub nakładającego się na nią okresu wyłaniającej się dorosłości (około 18-29 r.ż; Arnett, 2014), mogą być podatne na zaangażowanie w parentyfikację emocjonalną (Hughes, 2007) oraz poświęcać radzenie sobie z własnymi problemami i dbanie o siebie na rzecz niesienia troski i pomocy rodzicom (Mikucki-Enyart i in., 2018). Nawet wówczas, gdy dziecko jest już dorosłe, a rodzic przekracza granice i na przykład traktuje dziecko jak powiernika, jest to psychicznie krzywdzące dla dziecka i może negatywnie wpłynąć na relację między nim a rodzicem (Mikucki-Enyart i in., 2018).

Warto zauważyć, że wraz z wiekiem wzrastają zasoby, które mogą ułatwić dziecku lub adolescentowi radzenie sobie z wymaganiami i potrzebami rodziców. Mikucki-Enyart i in. (2018) zauważyli, że pomimo doświadczenia parentyfikacji w okresie adolescencji, dorosłe dzieci rozwiedzionych rodziców były w stanie uniknąć obowiązków związanych z procesem parentyfikacji dzięki temu, że nie mieszkały już w domu rodzinnym. Jednakże, wyprowadzka z domu rodzinnego może przynieść ze sobą zmianę dynamiki procesu parentyfikacji, ale nie ją zakończyć. Opuszczenie rodzinnego gniazda może spowodować wzrost parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzeństwo, z uwagi na nadmierne martwienie się o ich stan i nastroj wywołane tym, że młody człowiek nie jest w stanie jak dotychczas opiekować się rodzeństwem, które pozostało z niewydolnymi wychowawczo rodzicami (Borchet i Lewandowska-Walter, 2017).

Zgodnie z dotychczasowymi doniesieniami okres rozwojowy, w którym dochodzi do parentyfikacji jest ważnym czynnikiem kształtującym przebieg i konsekwencje tego procesu

(Jurkovic, 1997; Schier, 2014). Doświadczenie parentyfikacji w okresie adolescencji jest mniej destruktywne niż w okresie dzieciństwa prawdopodobnie z tego względu, że silne w tym okresie relacje z rówieśnikami lub wspierające środowisko szkolne mogą być buforem chroniącym przed wpływem struktur rodzinnych i rodzinnych lojalności typowych dla procesu parentyfikacji (Byng-Hall, 2002; Hooper, 2007; Tomek i in., 2017). Dodatkowo więzi z rówieśnikami mogą stanowić także źródło zaspokojenia potrzeb emocjonalnych adolescentów oraz kompensować niedostępność lub brak uwagi ze strony rodzica, który wycofał się ze swojej roli rodzicielskiej. Podobną rolę może spełniać również rodzeństwo, które jednak w odróżnieniu od rówieśników jest częścią systemu rodzinnego i może przez to wpływać na zmniejszenie lub zwiększenie obciążenia adolescenta obowiązkami przez jego rodziców (Borchet i in., 2020b; Feinberg i in., 2013). Z jednej strony, rodzeństwo może dzielić się codziennymi obowiązkami i ciężarem opieki nad członkami rodziny (np. uzależnionym rodzicem, niepełnosprawnym bratem lub siostrą). Z drugiej strony, rodzeństwo może być skonfliktowane i niewspierające, a opieka nad nim może być dla sparentyfikowanych nastolatków dodatkowym obciążeniem oraz źródłem poczucia opuszczenia i niesprawiedliwości. Poraj i Poraj-Weder (2018) zwracają także uwagę, że w związku z frustracją wywołaną doświadczaniem trudności w relacji z rodzicami, rodzeństwo może przejawiać wobec siebie agresję. Problematyka związków agresji oraz parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzeństwo wymaga uwagi badaczy.

### **Uzasadnienie podjęcia tematyki badań**

Mimo iż parentyfikacja jest stosunkowo powszechnym zjawiskiem (por. Hooper i in., 2011a; Mayselless i in., 2004), to piśmiennictwo dotyczące problemu odwrócenia ról w rodzinie jest wciąż dość skromne. W przypadku badań z udziałem polskich uczestników jest wręcz nieliczne. Większość doniesień opublikowanych w czasopismach o otwartym dostępie odnosi się do badań przeprowadzonych w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki

Północnej. Z tego powodu w 2014 r. Hooper wskazała potrzebę badania zjawiska parentyfikacji poza USA i spojrzenia na problem z globalnej perspektywy. Prowadzenie badań poza USA pozwala na przygotowanie dostosowanych kulturowo metod określenia nasilenia parentyfikacji, a dalej odpowiednich metod interwencji oraz sposobów zapobiegania negatywnym skutkom parentyfikacji (Cook, 2012; Hooper, 2014). Co więcej, dostępne zagraniczne narzędzia pomiaru parentyfikacji z reguły umożliwiają jedynie jej retrospektywną ocenę u osób dorosłych (np. Hooper, 2009; Jurkovic i Thirkield, 1998; Mika i in., 1987). Dlatego też ważnym elementem niniejszej rozprawy było przygotowanie narzędzi do pomiaru parentyfikacji dostosowanych do polskiej kultury, z jednoczesnym uwzględnieniem tego, aby opracować nie tylko narzędzie do retrospektywnego pomiaru parentyfikacji (zob. Borchet i in., 2020b), lecz także tej doświadczanej aktualnie przez adolescentów (Borchet i in., 2020a).

Światowe badania na temat parentyfikacji (np. Chase, 1998; Tomeny, 2017), a także metaanalizy (Hooper i in., 2011a) skupiają się raczej na negatywnych konsekwencjach parentyfikacji. Z tego powodu prowadzone przez doktorantkę i współpracowników badania dotyczące następstw i uwarunkowań parentyfikacji skierowane były na eksplorację potencjalnych mechanizmów adaptacyjnych i czynników ochronnych, tj. sposobów radzenia sobie ze stresem, generalnej oceny jakości życia i relacji z rodzeństwem (Lewandowska-Walter i in., 2017; Borchet i in., 2020; Borchet i in., 2021). Mimo iż przywiązanie dzieci do rodziców i zapewniana przez nich opieka ma znaczenie przez całe życie, dzięki wzrastającej wraz z wiekiem roli rówieśników i rodzeństwa, relacja ta może tracić na znaczeniu (np. w przypadku późnych adolescentów) i jej niedostatki mogą być kompensowane przez inne relacje. Jednym z eksplorowanych w niniejszej pracy doktorskiej mechanizmów adaptacyjnych w sytuacji parentyfikacji był właśnie wzmacniający wpływ relacji z rodzeństwem (Borchet i in., 2020b).

## **Cele badań własnych**

W ramach niniejszej pracy doktorskiej opartej na cyklu pięciu opublikowanych i powiązanych tematycznie prac zawarto jedną pracę przeglądową oraz cztery prace empiryczne. Przed przystąpieniem do badań uzyskano zgodę Komisji Etyki działającej przy Instytucie Psychologii Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego (06/2017).

W pracy przeglądowej nakreślono rozwojowy kontekst zjawiska parentyfikacji. Badania własne skupiły się na eksploracji procesu parentyfikacji w grupie polskich adolescentów. W tym celu przygotowano dwa narzędzia służące do pomiaru parentyfikacji – jedno przeznaczone dla pomiaru aktualnie doświadczanej parentyfikacji (Badanie 1), drugie zaś do jej retrospektywnej oceny (zob. Badanie 4). W kolejnych badaniach eksplorowano ekspresję parentyfikacji wśród dziewcząt i chłopców (Badanie 2) oraz poszukiwano różnych korelatów i mechanizmów adaptacji do procesu parentyfikacji: zweryfikowano relacje między parentyfikacją a strategiami radzenia sobie ze stresem (Badanie 2), przeanalizowano wpływ nasilenia parentyfikacji na osiągnięcia szkolne adolescentów (Badanie 3) oraz ich samoocenę (Badanie 4), a także zidentyfikowano potencjalne czynniki ochronne takie jak relacje z rodzeństwem (Badanie 4) oraz ogólna jakość życia (Badanie 3).

### Cel przeglądu literatury:

- Usystematyzowanie wyników dotychczasowych badań nt. parentyfikacji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem relacji między retrospektywną parentyfikacją a problemami z realizacją zadań rozwojowych w grupie późnych adolescentów/osób wkraczających w dorosłość.

### Cel badania 1:

- Przygotowanie pierwszego w Polsce narzędzia do pomiaru parentyfikacji aktualnie doświadczanej przez adolescentów.

#### Cel badania 2:

- Ocena różnic międzypłciowych w zakresie doświadczanej parentyfikacji oraz związków między nasileniem wymiarów parentyfikacji a strategiami radzenia sobie ze stresem w grupie wczesnych adolescentów z populacji ogólnej w schemacie badań poprzecznych.

#### Cel badania 3:

- Ocena związków między nasileniem aktualnie doświadczanej parentyfikacji, jakością życia a poziomem osiągnięć szkolnych w grupie wczesnych adolescentów z populacji ogólnej w schemacie badań poprzecznych.

#### Cel badania 4:

- Ocena związków między nasileniem postrzeganych korzyści parentyfikacji doświadczanej w okresie dorastania, jakością relacji z rodzeństwem a samooceną w grupie późnych adolescentów/osób wkraczających w dorosłość z populacji ogólnej w schemacie badań poprzecznych.

## Publikacja 1

**Opublikowano w:** Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A. & Rostowska, T. (2018). Performing developmental tasks in emerging adults with childhood parentification – insights from literature. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*, 6(3), 242–251. <https://doi.org/10.5114/cipp.2018.75750>

W niniejszej pracy dokonano przeglądu literatury na temat retrospektywnej parentyfikacji doświadczanej przez osoby w okresie wyłaniającej się dorosłości. Jednocześnie zwrócono uwagę na wymiary parentyfikacji (emocjonalny i instrumentalny; Jurkovic, 1997), jej potencjalne pozytywne i negatywne następstwa (Jurkovic, 1997; Chase, 1999, Hooper i in., 2011a) oraz terminy spokrewnione z parentyfikacją. Terminy takie jak „dorosłe dzieci”, „dziecko rodzicielskie (w roli rodzica)” (ang. *parental child*; Minuchin 1974), „mali rodzice” (ang. *little parent*; Byng-Hall, 2008) czy też „mali dorośli” są z reguły traktowane synonimicznie w stosunku do parentyfikacji (Schier, 2014). W swojej pracy teoretycznej Haxhe (2016) wyróżnia także procesy przypominające parentyfikację, które jednak znacząco się od niej różnią, tj. aduptyzację<sup>1</sup> (ang. *adulthood*), parentalizację<sup>2</sup> (ang. *parentalisation*) oraz delegowanie<sup>3</sup> (ang. *delegation*). Kryteriami różnicującymi parentyfikację oraz wymienione zjawiska są: nasilenie oczekiwań rodzica wobec dziecka, stopień uznania potrzeb dziecka, rodzaj obciążeń/zadań pełnionych przez dziecko, ich adekwatność wobec kompetencji dziecka, postrzeganie dziecka, jego oddania rodzinie oraz czynniki kontekstowe (zob. Haxhe, 2016).

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<sup>1,2,3</sup> tłumaczenie własne

Zgodnie z klasyfikacją Haxhe (2016), w przypadku parentyfikacji potrzeby dziecka nie są brane pod uwagę. Od dziecka oczekuje się, by realizowało emocjonalne potrzeby rodzica, zapewniało mu wsparcie, obdarzało go swoją uwagą i zawsze stawiało go na pierwszym miejscu (czyli było dla niego dobrym rodzicem, zob. Haxhe, 2016). Realizacja zadań i obowiązków pełnionych przez dziecko ma w swojej podstawie wklanie dziecka przez rodzica w relację i opiera się na poczuciu lojalności oraz powinności dziecka wobec rodzica. W związku z tym rola pełniona przez dziecko jest nacechowana emocjonalnym ciężarem i nie jest adekwatna do jej/jego możliwości rozwojowych. Najważniejszym kontekstem występowania parentyfikacji w rodzinie jest jej obecność w dzieciństwie samego rodzica oraz wcześniej także jego rodziców (międzypokoleniowa transmisja wzorca relacji). Rodzic nieświadomie postrzega swoje sparentyfikowane dziecko jako dorosłą osobę, od której może uzyskać opiekę (czyli jak własnego rodzica), a jednocześnie nie dostrzega jego/jej poświęceń (Haxhe, 2016).

Okres wyłaniającej się dorosłości nakłada się na dwa tradycyjnie wymieniane w literaturze etapy rozwoju człowieka – późną adolescencję oraz wczesną dorosłość. Późna adolescencja bywa rozumiana jako okres od około 16 r.ż do około 20 r.ż. (Erikson, 1986), natomiast wczesna dorosłość umiejscawiana jest między 20-23 r.ż. a 35-40 r.ż. (Gurba, 2000). Granica między późną adolescencją a wczesną dorosłością jest zatem bardzo płynna i często umowna. Współczesne przemiany życia społecznego (np. dłuższy okres zamieszkiwania z rodziną pochodzenia, wydłużenie czasu nauki, późniejsze podejmowanie pracy zarobkowej, późniejsze zakładanie własnej rodziny) zaowocowały wyróżnieniem okresu pośredniego między tymi etapami, czyli wyłaniającej się dorosłości (ang. *emerging adulthood*; Arnett, 2007). Okres ten umieszcza się między późną adolescencją a wczesną dorosłością, najczęściej podając umowny czas od 18 do 29 roku życia (Arnett i in., 2014). Charakteryzuje się tym, że młody człowiek poszukuje swojej tożsamości, ale osiągnął już znaczną niezależność od

rodziców i podjął role zawodowe, jednak nie podejmuje wszystkich ról społecznych typowych dla okresu dorosłości, np. zobowiązań partnerskich i rodzicielskich (Arnett, 2007).

### **Cel przeglądu literatury**

Celem zaprezentowanego w pracy przeglądu literatury był opis stanu badań na temat realizacji ról rozwojowych przez osoby w okresie wyłaniającej się dorosłości, które doświadczyły parentyfikacji na wcześniejszych etapach swojego rozwoju. Doświadczenie parentyfikacji w okresie dzieciństwa i dorastania może zaburzać realizację zadań rozwojowych (zob. Erikson, 1968) i utrudniać pełnienie różnych ról społecznych w życiu dorosłym, np. roli partnera, rodzica, studenta/ucznia lub pracownika (Wolska, 2000; Schier, 2014).

Doświadczenie parentyfikacji w okresie dorastania oraz kontynuowanie takiego wzorca relacji między młodą osobą a jej/jego rodzicami może zaburzać jej/jego funkcjonowanie w roli partnera(ki) (por. Macfie i in., 2005), małżonka(ki) czy rodzica (por. Shaffer i Egeland, 2011; Nutall i in., 2012; Wolska, 2000). Silne zaangażowanie w realizowanie potrzeb rodziców może ograniczać emocjonalne możliwości zaangażowania się we własny związek (Wolska, 2000). Sparentyfikowany młody dorosły, mimo założenia własnej rodziny, może być w dalszym ciągu obciążany obowiązkami nakładanymi przez swoich rodziców, przez co w sposób niepełny poświęca się swojej własnej rodzinie (de Barbaro, 1994; Wolska, 2000). Rozdarcie między tymi dwiema lojalnościami może powodować kryzysy w relacjach intymnych lub zerwanie kontaktu z rodziną pochodzenia, a przeżywany konflikt uzewnętrznić się w postaci zaburzeń psychicznych (Bowen, 1978; Wolska, 2000).

Badania przeprowadzone przez Chase i zespół (1998) sugerują, że doświadczenie parentyfikacji w rodzinie pochodzenia wiąże się z niższym osiągniętym poziomem edukacji

w dorosłości (Chase i in., 1989). Dzieci i adolescenti, którzy są obciążeni potrzebami członków rodziny i nadmiernymi wymaganiami z ich strony, mogą mieć trudności z wywiązywaniem się z obowiązków szkolnych, przez co osiągają wyniki poniżej swoich możliwości (ang. *underachievement*). Trudności z nauką doświadczane przez dziecko, adolescenta, czy w okresie późniejszym podczas studiów, mogą odzwierciedlać problemy na poziomie systemu rodzinnego, nie zaś być objawem na przykład niedostosowania lub braku zaangażowania w naukę. Jednocześnie, należy wspomnieć, że szkoła może być w życiu młodego człowieka obszarem, w którym doświadcza on sukcesów, nawiązuje dobre więzi z nauczycielami i rówieśnikami i otrzymuje od nich wsparcie. Umożliwia to wykształcenie w adolescencji odporności psychicznej mimo trudnych doświadczeń rodzinnych (Barnett i Parker, 1998).

Rodziny o niskim statusie socjoekonomicznym są szczególnie narażone na występowanie parentyfikacji (Lackie, 1983; Burton, 2007; Hooper, 2011a; Schier, 2014). Niewystarczające zasoby ekonomiczne rodziny sprzyjają pojawieniu się u dziecka przedwczesnej dojrzałości (ang. *pseudomaturity*), która ma być strategią przetrwania w trudnym środowisku (Lackie, 1983). Dzieci i młodzież chcący wspomóc trudną sytuację finansową rodziny mogą szybko podjąć swoją pierwszą pracę (Burton, 2007). Przedwczesne podjęcie przez adolescenta roli pracownika jest przejawem instrumentalnej parentyfikacji (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper i in., 2008; Hooper i in., 2011a). Doświadczenie parentyfikacji w okresie dorastania może wpłynąć także na wybór przyszłej ścieżki zawodowej związanej z pomaganiem innym (Lackie, 1982, 1983, Byng-Hall, 2008). Terapeuci często pełnili wobec swoich rodziców role rodzicielskie (Byng-Hall, 2008). Pełnienie w rodzinie roli dziecka troskliwego i pomocnego, czyli z perspektywy dziecka „dobrego” dla wszystkich jej członków (zob. Schier, 2014; Winton, 2003), może być związane z późniejszym funkcjonowaniem zawodowym, co wykazały m.in. badania z udziałem pracowników

socjalnych. W badaniach Lackie udział wzięło 1 577 amerykańskich pracowników socjalnych, z czego ponad 2/3 potwierdziło, że w swoich rodzinach pochodzenia doświadczyli różnych form parentyfikacji (1982).

### **Wnioski**

Na podstawie przeglądu literatury wskazano, że doświadczenie parentyfikacji w okresie dorastania może zakłócać realizację zadań rozwojowych w okresie wyłaniającej się dorosłości/późnej adolescencji. Wnioskiem do dalszych badań, wyprowadzonym na podstawie przeglądu i analizy dotychczasowej literatury była potrzeba podjęcia prac badawczych nad procesem parentyfikacji doświadczalnej w okresie dorastania, aby zrozumieć mechanizm odpowiedzialny za pojawienie się jego konsekwencji w dorosłości.

## **Badanie 1 (Publikacja 2)**

**Wyniki badania zostały opublikowane:** Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., & Peplińska, A. (2020). Construction of a Parentification Questionnaire for Youth. *Health Psychology Report*, 8(2), 175–188. <https://doi.org/10.5114/hpr.2019.89492>

### **Cel badania**

Celem badania było opracowanie pierwszego w Polsce kwestionariusza umożliwiającego pomiar parentyfikacji przeznaczonego do prowadzenia badań z udziałem polskich adolescentów.

### **Metoda**

**Osoby badane i przebieg badań.** W badaniu udział wzięło 641 adolescentów zamieszkujących województwo pomorskie, z czego 61.2% próby stanowiły dziewczęta. Swojej płci nie określiło .5% osób badanych. Badani nastolatki byli w wieku od 12 do 18 lat ( $M = 14.96$ ;  $SD = 0.36$ ) i pochodzili z rodzin zróżnicowanych pod względem struktury. Z rodzin pełnych pochodziło 82.1% badanych nastolatków, 10% mieszkało z jednym rodzicem, a 7.3% wychowało się w rodzinach zrekonstruowanych. Danych na temat struktury rodziny nie udzieliło 0.6% badanych nastolatków. Jedynacy stanowili około 25% badanej próby.

Badania zostały poprzedzone uzyskaniem zgody dyrekcji szkół na zorganizowanie badań na terenie szkoły oraz zgody rodziców na udział ich dzieci w badaniu. Badania miały charakter grupowy, odbywały się w klasach szkolnych. Na początku uczniom zostały udzielone podstawowe informacje dotyczące wypełniania arkuszy i zapewniono ich o dobrowolności oraz anonimowości udziału w badaniu. Każdy uczeń uzupełniał

kwestionariusze samodzielnie. Cała procedura trwała około 20-25 minut. Na koniec podziękowano młodzieży za udział w badaniu.

**Zastosowane narzędzia.** W badaniu wykorzystano kwestionariusz wywiadu zawierający pytania dot. zmiennych demograficznych, statusu socjoekonomicznego rodziny oraz nasilenia konfliktu rodzicielskiego, a także eksperymentalną wersję *Kwestionariusza Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży* (KPdM). Wersja ta składała się z 66 twierdzeń ocenianych na skali od 1 (nigdy tak nie jest) do 5 (zawsze tak jest). Podczas projektowania KPdM inspirowano się dwoma kwestionariuszami amerykańskimi – *Filial Responsibility Scale* (FRS; Jurkovic i Thirkield, 1999; Jurkovic i in., 2005) oraz *Parentification Inventory* (PI; Hooper, 2009). Pierwszy z nich zawiera podskale takie jak: poczucie sprawiedliwości, emocjonalna opieka i instrumentalna opieka (Jurkovic i Thirkield, 1999; Jurkovic i in., 2005). Drugi z kolei wyodrębnia wymiary takie jak parentyfikacja skierowana na rodziców, parentyfikacja skierowana na rodzeństwo oraz postrzegane korzyści procesu parentyfikacji (Hooper, 2009). Tworząc KPdM postanowiono połączyć założenia leżące u podstaw obu tych metod, dzięki czemu kwestionariusz umożliwia 1) analizę typu parentyfikacji pełnionej przez adolescenta (emocjonalna vs. instrumentalna), 2) sprawdzenie nad kim opiekę sprawuje adolescent (rodzice vs. rodzeństwo), 3) sposób, w jaki postrzega swoją sytuację rodzinną (zadowolenie z roli pełnionej w rodzinie oraz poczucie niesprawiedliwości i bycia wykorzystywanym).

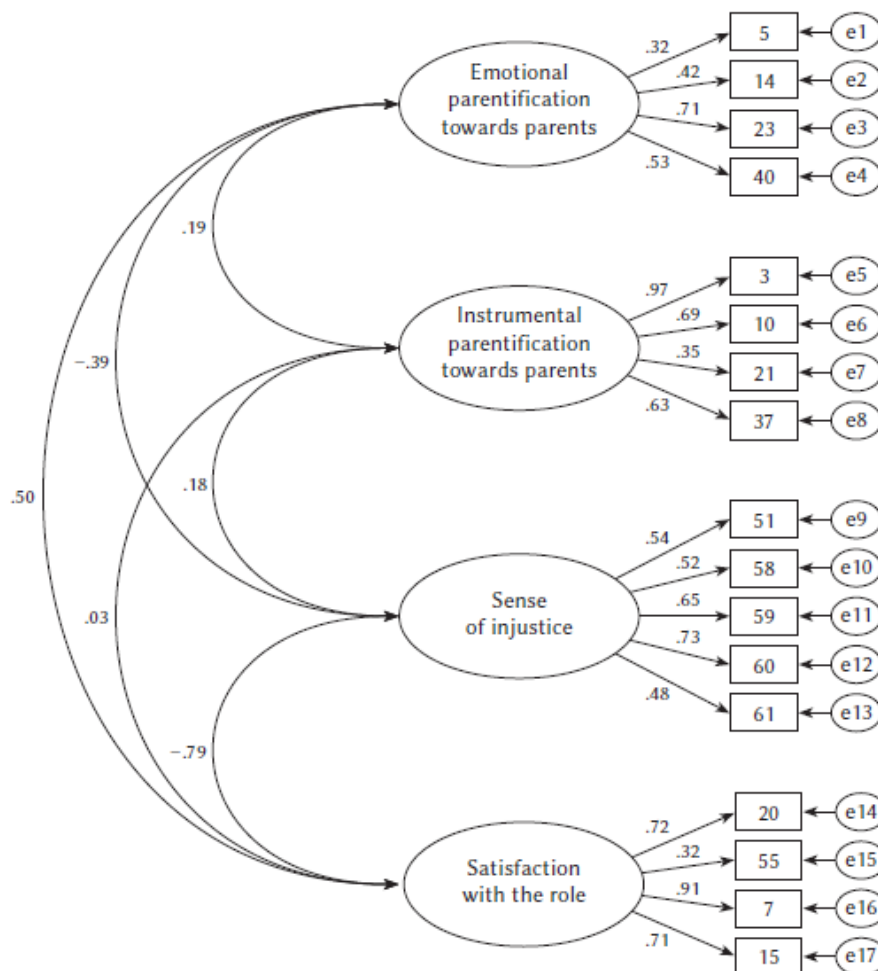
## **Wyniki badania**

Na podstawie confirmacyjnej analizy czynnikowej wyodrębniono twierdzenia, które weszły w skład ostatecznej struktury kwestionariusza. Założoną strukturę narzędzia przetestowano zarówno w grupie osób, które mają rodzeństwo, jak i w grupie jedynaków. W grupie osób mających rodzeństwo testowany model był wzbogacony o 2 podskale dot. parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzeństwo. W obu grupach testowany model okazał się

akceptowalnie dopasowany do danych. Wersja podstawowa składa się z 4 podskal: emocjonalna parentyfikacja skierowana na rodziców (4 itemy), instrumentalna parentyfikacja skierowana na rodziców (4 itemy), poczucie niesprawiedliwości (5 itemów) oraz zadowolenie z roli pełnionej w systemie rodzinnym (4 itemy). Wersja przeznaczona dla osób posiadających rodzeństwo jest wzbogacona o 2 dodatkowe podskale: emocjonalna parentyfikacja skierowana na rodzeństwo (5 itemów) oraz instrumentalna parentyfikacja skierowana na rodzeństwo (4 itemy). Schematy struktur czynnikowych obu wersji KPdM przedstawiają Figura 1 i Figura 2.

**Figura 1**

*Schemat struktury czynnikowej KPdM w wersji podstawowej*



**Figura 2**

*Schemat struktury czynnikowej KPdM w wersji w wersji rozszerzonej (dla osób posiadających rodzeństwo)*



## **Dyskusja wyników badania**

Prezentowany kwestionariusz jest rzetelnym (wartości CR dla poskal mieszczą się w przedziale od 0.7 do 0.8) i trafnym narzędziem służącym do pomiaru nasilenia parentyfikacji doświadczanej przez adolescentów w wieku od 12 do 18 lat. Kwestionariusz zwraca uwagę na wielowymiarowość zjawiska parentyfikacji, skupiając się na tym, jakiego typu role i zadania są pełnione przez nastolatka (tj. parentyfikacja emocjonalna oraz instrumentalna) a także jaki jest poziom poczucia niesprawiedliwości oraz zadowolenia z roli pełnionej w systemie rodzinnym. Dodatkowo, kwestionariusz umożliwia skupienie się także na tym, kto jest adresatem opieki adolescenta (rodzice czy rodzeństwo). KPdM umożliwia prowadzenie badań zarówno z udziałem jedynaków jak i osób posiadających rodzeństwo, a także porównania między nimi. Kwestionariusz może znaleźć cenne zastosowanie w badaniach naukowych oraz w diagnostyce rodzin, relacji dzieci z rodzicami, a także z rodzeństwem.

## **Badanie 2 (Publikacja 3)**

**Wyniki badania zostały opublikowane:** Lewandowska-Walter, A., Borchet, J., Rostowska, T., Połomski, P., & Peplińska, A. (2017). Parentification and coping in Polish adolescents. *Polish Journal of Social Science*, 12(1). 157–176.

### **Problemy badawcze**

Niniejsze badanie miało na celu eksplorację związków między parentyfikacją a strategiami radzenia sobie ze stresem w grupie nastoletnich dziewcząt i chłopców. W związku z tym postawiono dwa pytania badawcze: 1) czy między dziewczętami a chłopcami występują istotne statystycznie różnice w zakresie wymiarów parentyfikacji, oraz 2) jakie strategie radzenia sobie są związane z nasileniem wymiarów parentyfikacji w grupie dziewcząt oraz w grupie chłopców.

### **Metoda**

**Osoby badane i przebieg badań.** W badaniu udział wzięło 169 uczniów trójmiejskich gimnazjów. Uczniowie byli w wieku od 12 do 17 lat ( $M = 14.57$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). Dziewczęta stanowiły 62.1% próby, chłopcy 37.3%, a informacji na temat swojej płci nie udzieliła jedna osoba (.6%). Wszystkie badane osoby miały przynajmniej jednego brata lub siostrę. Większość uczestników badania wychowywała się w rodzinach pełnych (81.7%). Z rodzin zrekonstruowanych pochodziło 8.9% próby, natomiast 7.7% mieszkało z jednym rodzicem.

Badania zostały poprzedzone uzyskaniem zgody dyrekcji szkół na prowadzenie badań na terenie szkoły oraz zgody rodziców/opiekunów prawnych na udział ich dzieci w badaniu. Badania miały charakter grupowy, odbywały się w klasach szkolnych w trakcie lekcji

wytypowanej przez dyrekcję szkoły. Jednocześnie kwestionariusze wypełniała jedna klasa (od 20 do 30 osób). Na początku uczniom zostały udzielone podstawowe informacje dotyczące wypełniania arkuszy i zapewniono ich o dobrowolności oraz anonimowości udziału w badaniu. Każdy uczeń uzupełniał kwestionariusze samodzielnie. Cała procedura trwała około 20-25 minut. Na koniec podziękowano młodzieży za udział w badaniu.

**Zastosowane narzędzia.** W badaniu wykorzystano kwestionariusz osobowy zbierający dane demograficzne, Kwestionariusz Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży (Borchet i in., 2020) oraz Inwentarz do Pomiaru Radzenia Sobie ze Stresem Mini-COPE (Juczyński i Ogińska-Bulik, 2009).

## **Wyniki badania**

Najważniejszym wynikiem niniejszej pracy było wykazanie różnic między dziewczętami a chłopami w zakresie nasilenia wymiarów parentyfikacji. Po pierwsze, dziewczęta doświadczały istotnie wyższego poziomu parentyfikacji emocjonalnej (skierowanej na rodzeństwo) niż chłopcy. Po drugie, chłopcy raportowali istotnie wyższy poziom parentyfikacji instrumentalnej (skierowanej na rodziców). Po trzecie, chłopcy byli istotnie bardziej zadowoleni z pełnionych przez siebie ról rodzinnych niż dziewczęta.

Dodatkowo, nasilenie parentyfikacji doświadczanej przez chłopców i dziewczęta pozostawało związane z wybranymi sposobami radzenia sobie ze stresem. W podobnych sytuacjach chłopcy i dziewczęta zdawali się stosować nieco inny wachlarz sposobów radzenia sobie. Na przykład, im więcej emocjonalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzica doświadczały dziewczęta, tym chętniej poszukiwały wsparcia dla siebie w sytuacji doświadczania stresu. W analogicznej sytuacji chłopcy częściej dodatkowo stosowali unikanie, które u dziewcząt nie było istotnie związane z nasileniem parentyfikacji emocjonalnej skierowanej na rodzica.

## Dyskusja wyników badania

Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że w pracy z młodzieżą doświadczającą parentyfikacji i narażoną na nią warto brać pod uwagę fakt, że dziewczęta i chłopcy mogą pełnić w swoich rodzinach nieco inne role i zadania, a także sięgać po inne strategie radzenia sobie ze stresem. Doświadczana przez nich parentyfikacja może przybierać formę innych zadań i obowiązków – u chłopców częściej będą to działania o charakterze instrumentalnym, u dziewcząt – emocjonalnym. Jednocześnie, w polskiej kulturze dziewczęta zdają się być grupą bardziej narażoną na doświadczanie destruktywnych konsekwencji parentyfikacji, gdyż doświadczają one wyższego natężenia parentyfikacji emocjonalnej. Ten typ parentyfikacji jest jednoznacznie identyfikowany w literaturze jako najbardziej szkodliwy (Byng-Hall, 2008; McMahon i Luthar, 2007; Tompkins, 2007).

Niniejsza publikacja, wczesna w dorobku doktorantki, stanowiła bardzo ważny krok determinujący dalszą pracę. Różnice międzypłciowe w zakresie wymiarów parentyfikacji zaobserwowane w małej próbie stanowiły inspirację do podjęcia dalszych badań, opisanych m.in. w badaniach nad częstotliwością występowania parentyfikacji w grupie polskich nastolatków (*prevalence studies*; Borchet i in., w recenzji-a; Borchet i in., w recenzji-b). W ogólnopolskim badaniu (Borchet i in., w recenzji-a) z udziałem 47 984 uczniów udało się m.in. potwierdzić występowanie różnic międzypłciowych w zakresie ekspresji parentyfikacji. Mianowicie, dziewczęta osiągały istotnie wyższe wyniki na wymiarach emocjonalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzica oraz emocjonalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzeństwo, natomiast chłopcy osiągnęli istotnie wyższe wyniki na wymiarach instrumentalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzeństwo, instrumentalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzica, zadowolenia z roli pełnionej w rodzinie oraz poczucia niesprawiedliwości (Borchet i in., w recenzji-a; Borchet i in., w recenzji-b).

### **Badanie 3 (Publikacja 4)**

**Wyniki badania zostały opublikowane:** Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., Peplińska, A., & Hooper, L. M. (2021). The relations among types of parentification, school achievement, and quality of life in early adolescence: An exploratory study. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.635171>

#### **Problemy badawcze**

Wyniki nielicznych badań na temat związku między parentyfikacją a osiągnięciami szkolnymi zazwyczaj sugerują, że ma on charakter negatywny (Chase i in., 1998; Siskowski, 2006). Jednakże badania Gilford i Reynolds wykazały, że młodzież doświadczająca parentyfikacji również wykazywała się osiągnięciami edukacyjnymi (2010). W świetle niejasnych wyników, jednocześnie podkreślających rolę czynnika kulturowego w kształtowaniu następstw parentyfikacji, postanowiliśmy przyjrzeć się temu problemowi w polskim kontekście kulturowym. Za badawczym podjęciem tematu przemawiał również fakt, że badania poprzedników przeprowadzone z udziałem prób amerykańskich najczęściej miały charakter retrospektywny i nie podejmowały próby wyjaśnienia owego związku.

Celem badania opisanego w Publikacji 4 było sprawdzenie, czy osiągnięcia szkolne nastolatków są związane z poziomem aktualnie doświadczanej przez nich parentyfikacji, a także czy mediatorem tej relacji jest jakość życia nastolatka. Nadanie relacji między parentyfikacją a osiągnięciami szkolnymi ramy interpretacyjnej w postaci jakości życia umożliwiło umiejscowienie uzyskanych wyników w szerszym kontekście funkcjonowania badanych nastolatków. Osiągnięcia szkolne mogą maskować towarzyszące im negatywne następstwa parentyfikacji. Już Jurkovic (1997) oraz Winton (2003) zwracali uwagę na to, że dzieci i młodzież doświadczający parentyfikacji mogą wykazywać tendencje do

perfekcjonizmu, pracoholizmu oraz dążenia do osiągnięcia ponadprzeciętnych wyników (ang. *overachieving*).

## **Metoda**

**Osoby badane i przebieg badań.** W badaniu uczestniczyło 191 uczniów dwóch gimnazjów publicznych mieszczących się w Gdańsku. Osoby badane były w wieku około 14 lat ( $M = 14.61$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ ). Dziewczęta stanowiły 55% badanej próby, chłopcy 44.5%, a informacji na temat swojej płci nie podała 1 osoba (.5%). Wszystkie osoby w badanej próbie posiadały rodzeństwo.

Badanie przeprowadzono na terenie szkół, po wcześniejszym uzyskaniu zgody opiekunów prawnych/rodziców dzieci oraz zgody dyrekcji szkoły. Uczniowie wypełniali zestaw kwestionariuszy w czasie jednej ze swoich lekcji. Każda osoba pracowała samodzielnie. Procedura badania trwała około 25-30 minut. Po zakończeniu badania uczestnikom podziękowano.

**Zastosowane narzędzia.** W badaniu wykorzystano kwestionariusz wywiadu, który uwzględniał zmienne demograficzne oraz osiągnięcia szkolne (zoperacjonalizowane jako średnia ocen końcoworocznych w roku szkolnym 2016/2017). Do pomiaru parentyfikacji wykorzystano Kwestionariusz Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży (Borchet i in., 2020a). Jakość życia zmierzono przy pomocy polskiej adaptacji Kwestionariusza do Badania Jakości Życia Związanej ze Zdrowiem Dzieci i Młodzieży KIDSCREEN-27 (Mazur, 2008).

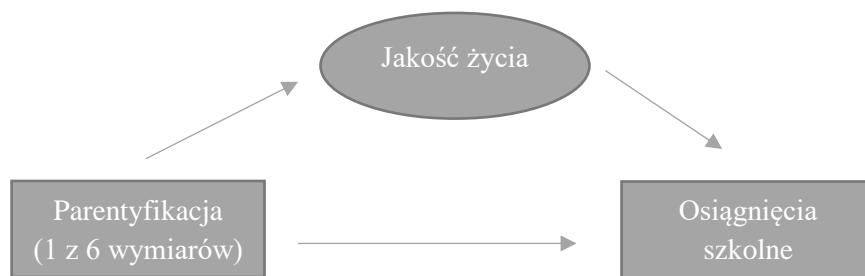
## **Wyniki badania**

Strategia analityczna była oparta o systematyczne testowanie założonego modelu mediacji dla każdego z 6 wymiarów parentyfikacji w roli zmiennej niezależnej (tj. emocjonalna parentyfikacja skierowana na rodzica, instrumentalna parentyfikacja skierowana na rodzica, poczucie niesprawiedliwości, zadowolenie z roli pełnionej w rodzinie,

emocjonalna parentyfikacja skierowana na rodzeństwo oraz instrumentalna parentyfikacja skierowana na rodzeństwo). Testowane modele zakładały, że jakość życia będzie mediatorem relacji między parentyfikacją a osiągnięciami szkolnymi (Figura 3).

### Figura 3

*Uproszczony schemat testowanych modeli mediacyjnych*



Wyniki przeprowadzonych analiz wykazały, że dwa z sześciu testowanych modeli okazały się dobrze dopasowane do danych: model z instrumentalną parentyfikacją skierowaną na rodziców w roli zmiennej niezależnej oraz model z instrumentalną parentyfikacją skierowaną na rodzeństwo w roli zmiennej niezależnej. Pozytywna relacja między instrumentalną parentyfikacją skierowaną na rodzica/rodzeństwo a poziomem osiągnięć szkolnych jest mediowana przez jakość życia nastolatka.

### Dyskusja wyników badania

Doświadczanie instrumentalnej parentyfikacji, przy jednoczesnej dobrej percepcji jakości własnego życia, może się przyczyniać do wzrostu sprawności młodzieży w wykonywaniu zadań instrumentalnych, w tym obowiązków szkolnych. Być może doświadczenie umiarkowanej parentyfikacji instrumentalnej ukształtowało w badanych nastolatkach umiejętności przydatne również w szkole, np. efektywne planowanie zadań, strategie radzenia sobie zorientowane na cel (Hooper, 2008; Thastum i in., 2008) oraz budujące poczucie własnej skuteczności (Maysless i in., 2004).

Należy podkreślić, że w badanej próbie poziom emocjonalnej parentyfikacji, która jest uznawana za destruktywną, był niski. Ta charakterystyka badanej próby, wraz z wysokim statusem socjoekonomicznym rodzin osób badanych, mogły stanowić jeden z powodów dla którego nie zaobserwowano opisanego przez amerykańskich poprzedników negatywnego związku między parentyfikacją emocjonalną a poziomem osiągnięć akademickich (Chase i in., 1998; Siskowski, 2006).

Relacje między wymiarami parentyfikacji a osiągnięciami szkolnymi można określić jako złożone. Ich interpretację warto prowadzić w szerszym kontekście (np. jakość życia, motywacja osiągnięć szkolnych). Relacje i przynależność do grup oraz systemów wspierających rozwój adolescenta oraz dostarczające mu satysfakcji z życia mogą stanowić ważny czynnik zapobiegający negatywnym skutkom parentyfikacji (Borchet i in., 2021; Chee i in., 2014). Wzmacnianie zadowolenia adolescentów z ich życia w różnych obszarach, także tych niezwiązanych z życiem rodzinnym, może stanowić potencjalny czynnik równoważący negatywny wpływ parentyfikacji.

## **Badanie 4 (Publikacja 5)**

**Wyniki badania zostały opublikowane:** Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., Peplińska, A., & Hooper, L. M. (2020). We are in this together: Retrospective parentification, sibling relationships, and self-esteem. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29(1), 2982–2991. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01723-3>

### **Problemy badawcze**

Celem badania opisanego w publikacji była eksploracja retrospektywnie ocenianych postrzeganych korzyści procesu parentyfikacji doświadczanego w okresie dzieciństwa i dorastania w grupie późnych adolescentów. W pracy udzielono odpowiedzi na dwa pytania badawcze: 1) czy postrzegane korzyści parentyfikacji są związane z poziomem samooceny polskich późnych adolescentów, oraz 2) czy jakość relacji z rodzeństwem jest mediatorem związku między postrzeganymi korzyściami parentyfikacji a samooceną w grupie polskich późnych adolescentów.

### **Metoda**

**Osoby badane i przebieg badań.** W badaniu udział wzięło 218 późnych adolescentów mieszkających w Polsce (wiek:  $M = 21.37$ ;  $SD = 2.49$ ), z czego 86.2% stanowiły kobiety. Badanie zrealizowano metodą internetową wykorzystując platformę *LimeSurvey*. Badania online mają swoich zwolenników i przeciwników, jednakże okazują się bardzo efektywne w przypadku badań dotyczących wrażliwych tematów zapewniając ich uczestnikom poczucie anonimowości (zob. Milton i in., 2017). Dodatkowo, taki sposób zbierania danych umożliwił bezkosztowe dotarcie do osób zamieszkujących różne części Polski.

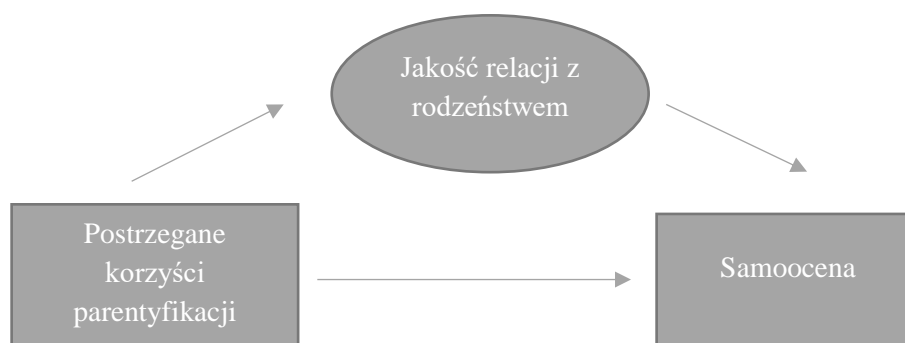
**Zastosowane narzędzia.** W badaniu wykorzystano kwestionariusz wywiadu osobowego oraz trzy kwestionariusze: polską adaptację *Parentification Inventory* (oryg. Hooper, 2009; Borchet i in., w recenzji-c), Kwestionariusz Relacji z Rodzeństwem (Lewandowska-Walter i in., 2016) oraz polską adaptację Skali Samooceny Morrisa Rosenberga (Łaguna i in., 2007).

### **Wyniki badania**

Aby udzielić odpowiedzi na postawione pytania badawcze przeprowadzono analizę mediacji wykorzystując program AMOS 24. Testowany model okazał się dopasowany do danych. Wyniki przeprowadzonych analiz wykazały, że postrzegane korzyści parentyfikacji były pozytywnie związane z samooceną osób badanych. Relacja ta była pośredniczona przez jakość relacji z rodzeństwem.

### **Figura 3**

*Schemat testowanego modelu mediacyjnego*



### **Dyskusja wyników badania**

Uzyskane wyniki zwracają uwagę, jak ważny dla samooceny młodego człowieka jest sposób w jaki ona/on postrzega swoje doświadczenia rodzinne związane z okresem dorastania, także te trudne i obejmujące przyjmowanie nieadekwatnych rozwojowo ról rodzicielskich przez dzieci. Dodatkowo, ważnym elementem postrzegania doświadczenia

parentyfikacji w dzieciństwie oraz samooceny młodego człowieka są jej/jego relacje z rodzeństwem. Dobre relacje z rodzeństwem mogą stanowić czynnik ochronny w sytuacji doświadczania parentyfikacji w okresie dzieciństwa i dorastania. Rodzeństwo może zapewniać sobie wzajemnie wsparcie, dzielić ze sobą obowiązki, a także umożliwić budowanie zdrowego obrazu siebie.

## Dyskusja i podsumowanie badań własnych

Poprzedzone przeglądem literatury badania własne skupiły się na eksploracji procesu parentyfikacji w grupie polskich adolescentów.

Wyniki Badania 1 wykazały, że opracowany Kwestionariusz Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży jest narzędziem o zadowalających wskaźnikach psychometrycznych, które umożliwia wielowymiarowy pomiar parentyfikacji w grupie polskich adolescentów (Borchet i in., 2020a). W toku dalszych prac udało się również przygotować polską adaptację *Parentification Inventory* (Hopper, 2009), która jest przeznaczona dla osób dorosłych i umożliwia retrospektywny pomiar parentyfikacji. Mimo iż sam tekst z adaptacją jest w obecnej chwili w recenzji (stan na 30.03.2021), to narzędzie udało się już z sukcesem wykorzystać w innym badaniu zaprezentowanym w niniejszym cyklu, gdzie również zaraportowano wskaźniki psychometryczne oraz opisano proces prac nad tłumaczeniem skali (Badanie 4; Borchet i in., 2020b).

W badaniach z udziałem wczesnych adolescentów zaobserwowano różnice międzypłciowe w zakresie wymiarów parentyfikacji (Badanie 2; Lewandowska-Walter i in., 2017). Z uwag na typ zadań związanych z opieką nad członkami rodziny, dziewczęta zdają się sprawować więcej emocjonalnej opieki, chłopcy zaś instrumentalnej, co może wynikać ze stereotypów dotyczących płci. Dodatkowo, w grupie dziewcząt i chłopców nasilenie aktualnie doświadczanej parentyfikacji było związane z różnymi strategiami radzenia sobie (Badanie 2; Lewandowska-Walter i in., 2017). Kolejne badanie przeprowadzone z udziałem tej samej grupy wykazało, że nasilenie instrumentalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodziców oraz instrumentalnej parentyfikacji skierowanej na rodzeństwo jest pozytywnie związane z poziomem osiągnięć szkolnych (Badanie 3). Jednocześnie, związki te były mediowane przez jakość życia adolescenta (Borchet i in., 2021).

Wyniki badania przeprowadzonego z udziałem posiadających rodzeństwo późnych adolescentów/osób wkraczających w dorosłość wykazały, że im więcej korzyści płynących z doświadczanej w okresie dorastania parentyfikacji postrzegały osoby badane, tym wyższa była ich samoocena. Dodatkowo, mediatorem tej relacji była jakość ich relacji z rodzeństwem (Borchet i in., 2020b). Uzyskane wyniki wskazują na potencjalną ochronną rolę relacji z rodzeństwem u osób doświadczających odwrócenia ról i hierarchii w rodzinie.

W Tabeli 1 zebrano najważniejsze dane dotyczące opisanych powyżej publikacji wchodzących w skład cyklu.

**Tabela 1***Zbiorcza charakterystyka publikacji zawartych w cyklu doktorskim*

Numer publikacji	Numer badania	Badana grupa	Pomiar parentyfikacji	Wykorzystane narzędzie pomiaru parentyfikacji	Wyniki	Wnioski
1*	–	–	–	–	doświadczenie parentyfikacji w okresie dorastania może zakłócać realizację zadań rozwojowych w okresie wyłaniającej się dorosłości/późnej adolescencji	konieczność prowadzenia badań nad procesem parentyfikacji w okresie adolescencji, w celu oceny, jaki mechanizm jest odpowiedzialny za trudności w realizacji ról w dorosłości
2	1	adolescenci	w czasie terażniejszym	Kwestionariusz Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży	opracowany kwestionariusz posiada zadowalającą strukturę czynnikową oraz jest trafny i rzetelny	opracowany kwestionariusz umożliwia wielowymiarowy pomiar nasilenia parentyfikacji aktualnie doświadczanej przez adolescentów
3	2	wcześni adolescenci	w czasie terażniejszym	Kwestionariusz Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży	dziewczeta i chłopcy różnią się w zakresie wymiarów parentyfikacji i stosują nieco inne strategie radzenia sobie w ich obliczu	konieczność dalszych badań nad parentyfikacją w grupie polskich adolescentów; rola socjalizacji w pełnieniu ról rodzinnych
4	3	wcześni adolescenci	w czasie terażniejszym	Kwestionariusz Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży	jakość życia mediuje związek między instrumentalną parentyfikacją (zarówno skierowaną na rodziców jak i na rodzeństwo) a osiągnięciami szkolnymi	konieczność dalszych badań nad parentyfikacją w grupie polskich adolescentów; osiągnięcia szkolne jako potencjalnie pozytywne następstwo parentyfikacji; rola pozarodzinnych czynników ochronnych
5	4	późni adolescenci	retrospektywny	polska adaptacja <i>Parentification Inventory</i>	jakość relacji z rodzeństwem mediuje związek między postrzeganymi korzyściami parentyfikacji a samooceną	relacja z rodzeństwem może być czynnikiem ochronnym wobec parentyfikacji; dla konsekwencji parentyfikacji ważna jest ocena swojej roli w systemie rodzinnym

*Nota.* \* praca przeglądowa

## **Implikacje dla teorii**

Przeprowadzone badania miały charakter eksploracyjny i warto poddać je replikacji. Niemniej z kilku powodów, wnoszą one ważny wkład w teorię oraz mogą stanowić teoretyczne podparcie dalszych badań. Po pierwsze, przeprowadzone badania umożliwiły zaobserwowanie w polskich próbach po raz pierwszy efektów opisanych w literaturze anglojęzycznej, takich jak wysoka samoocena jako potencjalne następstwo konstruktywnej parentyfikacji (Byng-Hall, 2008; Walker i Lee, 1998) oraz zidentyfikowanie relacji z rodzeństwem jako ważnego zasobu, który może umożliwiać adaptację osobom doświadczającym parentyfikacji (zob. Callaghan i in., 2016).

Po drugie, wyniki przeprowadzonych badań wskazują na potencjalnie specyficzne dla polskiej kultury uwarunkowania procesu i następstw parentyfikacji. Zaobserwowany w próbie polskich adolescentów efekt dotyczący różnic między dziewczętami i chłopcami w zakresie nasilenia poszczególnych wymiarów parentyfikacji jest bardzo ciekawy na tle niejednoznacznych badań amerykańskich dotyczących tej problematyki. W literaturze można znaleźć badania wskazujące na brak różnic między płciami (Cho i Lee, 2019; Vulliez-Coady i in., 2013), badania sugerujące, że kobiety doświadczają większego nasilenia parentyfikacji niż mężczyźni (Byng-Hall, 2008; Stein i in., 1999; Schier i in., 2015; Thomas, 2017) lub że mężczyźni doświadczają większego nasilenia parentyfikacji niż kobiety (Arellano i in., 2018; Hooper i in., 2015). Jednocześnie badacze zwracają uwagę, że parentyfikacja u chłopców może być niedoszacowana, ponieważ mogą oni niechętnie przyznawać się do wykonywania zadań, które są uznawane za niezgodne ze stereotypem płci. Ponadto, chłopcy mogą być bardziej skłonni przyznawać się do wykonywania zadań, które są zgodne z pojęciem „tradycyjnych” dla ich płci ról (East, 2010; Khafi i in., 2014; McMahon i Luthar, 2007).

Po trzecie, uzyskane wyniki dotyczące pozytywnej relacji między parentyfikacją a osiągnięciami szkolnymi okazały się nie do końca zbieżne z dotychczasowymi badaniami

na ten temat. Nie wykazano opisanego w literaturze negatywnego związku między emocjonalną parentyfikacją a osiągnięciami szkolnymi (zob. Chase i in., 1989; East, 2010; Siskowski, 2006). Mogło to wynikać nie tylko ze specyfiki badanej próby, lecz także być związane z mechanizmami obronnymi skierowanymi na utrzymanie pozytywnego obrazu rodzica (Schier i in., 2015) lub być przejawem kulturowo zakorzenionego niedoszacowania emocjonalnej parentyfikacji w Polsce. W polskiej kulturze panuje znaczny dystans władzy, także w zakresie rodzinnej hierarchii i lojalności (Hofstede i in., 2010). W połączeniu ze skłonnością do utrzymania wiedzy o problemach rodzinnych w kręgu najbliższych osób oraz niechęcią do zgłaszania przemocy w rodzinie (Ipsos Loyalty, 2014), polscy adolescenti mogli być mniej chętni do tego, aby dzielić się swoim doświadczeniem emocjonalnym parentyfikacji niż instrumentalnej parentyfikacji (Borchet i in., 2021).

Jednakże, podobnie jak w badaniach poprzedników, także poczucie niesprawiedliwości oraz zadowolenie z roli pełnionej w rodzinie były związane z osiągnięciami szkolnymi adolescentów. Im bardziej badani adolescenti postrzegali swoje role rodzinne jako niesprawiedliwe, tym gorsze były ich oceny (por. Jurkovic i in., 2005). Odpowiednio, im bardziej byli zadowoleni z roli, jaką pełnią w rodzinie, tym lepsze wyniki osiągnęli w szkole (por. Burton i in., 2018). Również pozytywna relacja między instrumentalną parentyfikacją a osiągnięciami szkolnymi była zgodna z badaniami poprzedników, gdyż ten typ parentyfikacji jest identyfikowany jako mniej szkodliwy i mogący prowadzić do potencjalnie konstruktywnych następstw. Instrumentalna parentyfikacja może przyczynić się do sprawnej realizacji innych zadań instrumentalnych, w tym również obowiązków szkolnych. Poprzez realizację instrumentalnych zadań w domu, badani adolescenti mogli nabyć przydatne w szkole umiejętności takie jak efektywne zarządzanie zadaniami czy też wykształcić skupione na zadaniu strategie radzenia sobie (Hooper i in., 2008; Thastum i in., 2008).

## **Implikacje dla przyszłych badań**

Wyniki przeprowadzonych badań wyznaczają tory dalszych prac badawczych nad parentyfikacją w Polsce. Po pierwsze, dzięki opracowanym narzędziom badawczym możliwa jest realizacja badań dotyczących powszechności zjawiska parentyfikacji w Polsce (dwie kolejne publikacje w recenzji). Problem parentyfikacji w Polsce jest wciąż mało zbadany, a dostępne publikacje nie przedstawiają mechanizmów występowania zjawiska na poziomie kulturowym, lecz raczej jego występowanie w jakimś konkretnym kontekście (np. dzieci osób z uzależnieniem od alkoholu). Ponadto, bardzo często opierają się głównie na danych retrospektywnych lub studiach przypadku. Z tego powodu warto zwrócić szczególną uwagę na to, aby przyszłe badania miały nie tylko retrospektywny charakter, lecz dotyczyły parentyfikacji aktualnie doświadczanej przez dzieci i młodzież.

Wyniki uzyskane w Badaniu 3 sugerują, że zadania realizowane w związku z doświadczaną w rodzinie parentyfikacją są nieco inne w przypadku dziewcząt i chłopców. Wątek ten wart jest pogłębienia, na przykład poprzez włączenie w badania zagadnienia stereotypizacji płci przez młodzież, w tym także autostereotypizacji.

Innym wątkiem wartym pogłębienia jest relacja między osiągnięciami szkolnymi a nasileniem instrumentalnej parentyfikacji. W przyszłych badaniach warto uwzględnić to, jakimi motywami kieruje się młodzież podczas realizowania zadań szkolnych, np. czy rzeczywiście była to motywacja zewnętrzna, a celem młodzieży było zaspokojenie potrzeb rodziców. Innym możliwym wyjaśnieniem wartym sprawdzenia mogą być perfekcjonizm i tendencja do nadmiernego dążenia do osiągnięć (*overachievement*) ukształtowane w następstwie doświadczania parentyfikacji.

W przyszłych badaniach nad procesem parentyfikacji należy poświęcić szczególną uwagę roli rodzeństwa w procesie jej przebiegu, uwarunkowaniach oraz następstwach.

Publikacje na ten temat są zaskakująco nieliczne i skupiają się raczej na parentyfikacji u osób, które opiekują się rodzeństwem chorym przewlekle lub z całościowymi zaburzeniami rozwojowymi, a przecież rodzeństwo może stanowić także potencjalne źródło wsparcia i budować razem koalicje w obliczu trudności doświadczanych w rodzinie.

Aby lepiej poznać mechanizmy działania procesu parentyfikacji, w przyszłości warto przeprowadzić więcej badań z udziałem rodzin (zob. Borchet i in., 2016), a także badań z udziałem samych rodziców. W przyszłości należałoby również przeprowadzić badania podłużne, które pozwoliłyby na eksplorację destruktywnych i konstruktywnych następstw parentyfikacji w perspektywie długoterminowej. Jak dotąd nie przeprowadzono w Polsce ani jednego lonigtudinalnego badania procesu parentyfikacji, a na świecie są one nieliczne (np. Khafi i in., 2014; Van Loon i in., 2015). Niewątpliwie jest to kierunek, który chciałabym podjąć w swojej przyszłej pracy.

### **Implikacje dla praktyki**

Wyniki badań własnych mogą znaleźć praktyczne zastosowanie w pracy specjalistów pracujących z dziećmi i młodzieżą. Po pierwsze, wskazują że ważne jest zwiększenie wrażliwości specjalistów na zjawisko parentyfikacji, które w wielu rodzinach może być problemem ukrytym i nieidentyfikowanym nawet przez samo dziecko oraz jego rodzica (którzy po prostu realizują w swoim systemie rodzinnym znane im wzorce pełnienia ról rodzinnych). Należy zwrócić uwagę również na dzieci i młodzież, którzy nie znajdują się w klasycznie rozumianej grupie ryzyka parentyfikacji (zob. Schier, 2014). Parentyfikacji mogą doświadczać na przykład dzieci i młodzież, których rodzice oczekują wybitnych osiągnięć szkolnych i sukcesu. Wówczas dziecko realizuje niespełnione potrzeby rodzica, a doświadczana parentyfikacja ma charakter emocjonalny (Winton, 2003).

Innym ważnym wnioskiem płynącym z badań jest to, że dziewczęta i chłopcy doświadczający parentyfikacji mogą w swoich rodzinach realizować zadania innego typu (Lewandowska-Walter i in., 2017), na co warto zwrócić uwagę na przykład podczas przeprowadzania wywiadu diagnostycznego. W szczególności w przypadku chłopców, którzy deklarują mniej emocjonalnych obowiązków niż dziewczęta, warto rozszerzyć zestaw pytań o dodatkowe pytania dotyczące instrumentalnych zadań dziecka w rodzinie. Przy braku równowagi między pytaniami dotyczącymi parentyfikacji emocjonalnej i instrumentalnej wzrastać może ryzyko niedostrzeżenia parentyfikacji u chłopców. Wiedza ta może być przydatna podczas planowania programów prewencyjnych i interwencyjnych dla dziewcząt i chłopców, którzy doświadczyli odwrócenia ról w swoich rodzinach pochodzenia.

Ponadto, innym ważnym wnioskiem z przeprowadzonych badań, który może mieć zastosowanie praktyczne jest identyfikacja relacji z rodzeństwem jako ważnego zasobu w pracy z osobą, która doświadczyła lub doświadcza parentyfikacji (Borchet i in., 2020b).

Dodatkowo, ważnym efektem prac nad niniejszą rozprawą doktorską są przygotowane dwa narzędzia do pomiaru parentyfikacji – *Kwestionariusz Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży* (Borchet i in., 2020a) oraz polska adaptacja przeznaczonego do badania osób dorosłych *Parentification Inventory* (Borchet i in., w recenzji-c). Mogą one być wartościowymi narzędziami, wykorzystywanymi przez badaczy oraz praktyków działających w obszarach takich jak: psychologia rodziny, psychologia szkolna, psychologia sądowa, poradnictwo psychologiczne, psychologia rozwojowa lub psychoterapia.

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Prace nad niniejszą rozprawą doktorską w formie spójnego tematycznie cyklu publikacji stanowiły ważny etap w moim rozwoju naukowym. Mam nadzieję, że postępujący przyrost wiedzy na temat parentyfikacji, wytrwałość i konsekwencja w zakresie prowadzonych

badania, doskonalący się warsztat badawczy oraz proces rozwoju umiejętności pisania prac naukowych jest widoczny w zaprezentowanych publikacjach. Wyrazem tego rozwoju może być fakt, że z roku na rok publikowałam prace w coraz lepiej punktowanych czasopismach naukowych, w tym także zagranicznych.

Zgłębianie tematyki parentyfikacji owocowało rozszerzeniem perspektywy prowadzonych dociekań, między innymi o zrealizowanie szerokich badań nad natężeniem parentyfikacji w populacji polskich adolescentów ( $N = 47\ 984$ ; dwa artykuły w recenzji) oraz badań z udziałem triad rodzinnych ( $N = 170$ ; publikacje w przygotowaniu/recenzji).

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## Oświadczenia współautorów publikacji

**Publication #1:** Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A. & Rostowska, T. (2018). Performing developmental tasks in emerging adults with childhood parentification – insights from literature. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*, 6(3), 242–251. <https://doi.org/10.5114/cipp.2018.75750>

**Name of the candidate:** Judyta Borchet

We, the undersigned, co-authors of the above publication, confirm that the above publication has not been submitted as evidence for which a degree or other qualification has already been awarded.

We, the undersigned, further indicate the candidate's contribution to the publication in our joint statement below.

**Statement indicating the candidate's contribution to the publication:** The candidate contributed to the conception of the paper, conducting literature review, and drafted the manuscript.

**The contribution of co-authors:** The co-authors contributed to the conception of the study, and drafting and revising the manuscript.

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**Publication #2:** Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., Peplińska, A. (2020). Construction of a Parentification Questionnaire for Youth. *Health Psychology Report*, 8(2), 175–188. <https://doi.org/10.5114/hpr.2019.89492>

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We, the undersigned, co-authors of the above publication, confirm that the above publication has not been submitted as evidence for which a degree or other qualification has already been awarded.

We, the undersigned, further indicate the candidate's contribution to the publication in our joint statement below.

**Statement indicating the candidate's contribution to the publication:** The candidate contributed to the conception of the study, participated in its design, collected the data, participated in interpretation of the data, performed the part of the statistical analysis, and drafted the manuscript.

**The contribution of co-authors:** The co-authors contributed to the conception of the study, interpretation of the data, statistical analysis, and contributed to drafting and revising the manuscript.

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**Publication #3:** Lewandowska-Walter, Borchet, J., A., Rostowska, T., Połomski, P. & Peplińska, A. (2017). Parentification and Coping in Polish Adolescents. *Polish Journal of Social Science*, 12(1). 157–176.

**Name of the candidate:** Judyta Borchet

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**Publication #4:** Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., Peplińska, A., & Hooper, L. M. (2021). The Cost of Competence: School Achievement, Parentification, and Quality of Life in Early Adolescence. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.635171>

**Name of the candidate:** Judyta Borchet

We, the undersigned, co-authors of the above publication, confirm that the above publication has not been submitted as evidence for which a degree or other qualification has already been awarded.

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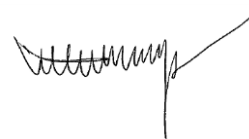
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**Publication #5:** Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., Peplińska, A., & Hooper, L. M. (2020). We are in this Together: Retrospective Parentification, Sibling Relationships, and Self-Esteem. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29(1), 2982–2991. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01723-3>

**Name of the candidate:** Judyta Borchet

We, the undersigned, co-authors of the above publication, confirm that the above publication has not been submitted as evidence for which a degree or other qualification has already been awarded.

We, the undersigned, further indicate the candidate's contribution to the publication in our joint statement below.

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**The contribution of co-authors:** The co-authors contributed to the conception of the study, interpretation of the data, statistical analysis, and contributed to drafting and revising the manuscript.

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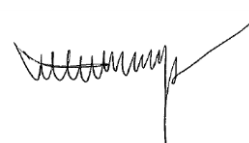
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## **Publikacja 1**

REVIEW ARTICLE

## *Performing developmental tasks in emerging adults with childhood parentification – insights from literature*

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Parentification is the process of role reversal between the child and the parent, whereby the child provides support and acts as the caregiver for the parent, instead of being supported and taken care of. The phenomenon of parentification may afflict families at diverse stages of development, including those before as well as after the phase of *empty nest*. Parentification may then pertain a threat to the development of a young person by impeding or preventing him or her from fulfilling developmental tasks. Furthermore, it

can be a distracting factor in his/her future role as a partner, parent, or employee. The purpose of this review is to examine the current literature concerning the effects of retrospective parentification on young adults' difficulties in performing developmental tasks and roles.

KEY WORDS

retrospective parentification; young adults; reversing family roles; social roles

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS – A: Study design · B: Data collection · C: Statistical analysis · D: Data interpretation · E: Manuscript preparation · F: Literature search · G: Funds collection

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., & Rostowska, T. (2018). Performing developmental tasks in emerging adults with childhood parentification – insights from literature. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology*.

RECEIVED 02.10.2017 · REVIEWED 28.10.2017 · ACCEPTED 31.01.2018 · PUBLISHED 30.05.2018

## BACKGROUND

Developmental concepts assigning particular tasks and roles to early adulthood lose their relevance in modern society (Baumann, 2008). After interviewing 300 young people Arnett noticed that all of them reported the “feeling of being in-between”, not a child but not having adult responsibilities like marriage, parenthood, or a stable job yet. Therefore, he proposed a new period of life-span development that he called “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2004). Post-industrial societies do not define unambiguous expectations towards young people, therefore they may enjoy freedom of choice in terms of deciding on professional activity, entering into relationships and formalising them, and whether or not they want to become parents (Arnett, 2000; Baumann, 2008). However, the lack of a generally imposed “recipe for life” does not mean that the developmental tasks listed by theoreticians are entirely outdated. It is rather the time point of their performance that has become flexible due to the prolonged time of coming to adulthood in comparison to previous generations, for example, due to the possibility of education, migration, and gaining professional qualifications (Ziółkowska, 2005). Furthermore, young people enjoy a broader range of choices in respect of the roles they perform: for example, marriage alternatives such as consensual union, or even giving up on an intimate relationship and remaining single. Prior to taking up a full-time job, they can prolong their time spent on education or part-time work, or – referring mostly to people with high socio-economic family background status – remain financially dependent on their families (Gurba, 2002).

Parentification is a term introduced by Boszormenyi-Nagy (1973). The author defined his concept as a situation where the children or adolescents perform adult roles even though they are not emotionally and developmentally ready to deal with those challenges (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). In this pattern of family interactions, the child (also as an adult) provides care and support towards his/her parent instead of receiving it from the parent (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper, Marotta & Lanthier, 2008; Hooper, DeCoster, White, & Voltz, 2011; Schier, 2010, 2014). The phenomenon of parentification appears when, due to a family system disadvantageous for the child, the child must shoulder a burden of responsibilities, so that he/she is unable to entirely engage into his/her own developmental tasks (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper, 2007; Schier, 2010; Rostowska & Borchet, 2016; Borchet & Lewandowska-Walter, 2017). Research on young adults indicates various outcomes of parentification. The problems may appear in many areas of life and can result from failures in performing developmental tasks (such as work, cre-

ating a relationship, and shaping one’s identity). It is worth taking a look at the extent to which the experience of parentification inhibits or precludes taking them up, and whether it happens more often than in people who do not experience parentification. The main developmental task in emerging adults is shaping the identity, what is based on two main processes – exploration and commitment (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1963). These processes are hindered while experiencing parentification. One is unable to explore identity and prematurely commits to the set of values expected by his or her parents (Fullinwider-Bush & Jacobvitz, 1993). The body of literature on parentification is still insufficient (see: Byng-Hall, 2008; Shaffer & Madden, 2016). Further research with emphasis on intercultural factors is required (Hooper, 2014). This review is therefore not chronologically structured. The agenda of the review is based upon Erikson’s theory of psycho-social development, which allows examination of the impact of retrospective parentification on the performance of subsequent social roles by young adults.

According to Erikson’s (1963) theory of psycho-social development, each stage of human life involves resolving relevant crises and executing particular developmental tasks. The experience of parentification may interfere with the performance of tasks at every stage of development, even when the adult child has already left the family home or intends to do so in the near future. The research of literature hitherto has instead examined the situation of children and adolescents experiencing parentification, who are still living in family households. This review, however, focuses attention on how past experience of parentification may distort the normative order of events within the family in the context of young adults performing their social roles consistent with the stage of development in the frame of Erikson’s theory.

## PARENTIFICATION – TYPES AND CONSEQUENCES

The most widely known classifications of parentification concern its mode (Jurkovic, 1997) and possible outcomes (Chase, 1999). The distinction made by Jurkovic (1997) identifies emotional and instrumental parentification. The emotional subtype of parentification requires the child to fulfil social and emotional needs of other members of the family. The child must then devote him/herself to maintaining a good family atmosphere. Concern for the emotional needs of parents or siblings can be expressed, for example, by caring for their well-being and being alert to their moods. In the case of instrumental parentification, the main concern of the child is taking care for the family’s living conditions (Hooper et al., 2008; Hooper & Wallace, 2010; Hooper, Doehler, & Han-

nah, 2011; Schier, 2010, 2014). In such a situation, the child provides family support by taking care of the general logistics of running a household and his/her own physical work (e.g. cleaning, cooking, laundry, shopping, taking care of his/her siblings, or earning money).

Some researchers believe that instrumental parentification is less of a threat to the child than emotional parentification (Hooper et al., 2008). It should be noted, however, that Jurkovic's (1997) distinction of parentification types are not mutually exclusive. Children may perform many different roles in the family at the same time, so both parentification dimensions (emotional and instrumental) can occur simultaneously (see Schier, 2010).

Chase's (1999) classification of parentification focuses on the consequences of experienced parentification, which may be positive or negative. Thus, the author distinguishes constructive (adaptive) and destructive (pathological) parentification. A situation that is beyond the child's capabilities and its comprehensive resources often results in numerous negative consequences. A meta-analysis of the studies on this phenomenon revealed that parentification is connected with anxiety disorders, personality disorders, and eating disorders (Hooper et al., 2011b). Literature reviews indicate that the phenomenon of parentification is associated with increased use of psychoactive substances (Chase, Demming, & Wells, 1998), mental disorders (Jones & Wells, 1996 after: Hooper et al., 2008), difficulties in relationships (Valleau, 1995 after: Hooper et al., 2008), posttraumatic stress disorder (Cicchetti, 2004), and poor parental skills in adulthood (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Chase et al., 1998). People who have experienced parentification are more likely to repeat the abnormal patterns of relationship and hierarchy within their own family because parentification is transmitted between generations (Schier, 2010, 2014).

Parentification may also allow the child to develop self-reliance despite emotional or physical stress (see Chase et al., 1998; Hooper et al., 2008). It is important to note that in the case of constructive parentification, the family expresses gratitude towards the child and appreciates him/her for taking care of other members of the family system. Performing certain functional responsibilities and roles adapted to his/her capabilities affects the emotions of the child, who feels needed, loved, and important. It frames his/her sense of competence and perception of self-agency and shapes future target-oriented action strategies (Schier, 2014). Reversing the roles with parents can foster the development of relationship-building competencies because children need to devote their time and attention to one another, and learn responsibility and how family members should care for each other (Gladstone, Boydell, & McKeever, 2006; Hooper et al., 2008). Parentification can also help frame resistance

to adversity, i.e. resilience. This type of psychic resistance is associated with functional coping strategies, healthy mental development, and the ability to shape healthy emotional bonds (Hooper et al., 2008).

Literature review indicates the need to distinguish between parentification and related processes that may be very similar or even overlapping. Terms such as "parentified child", "parental child", or "adult child" are often treated as synonyms (see: Schier, 2014). However, some researchers consider them as different processes that have different consequences for the development of the child. For example, Stephanie Haxhe distinguishes three processes related to parentification – *adultisation*, *parentalisation*, and *delegation* – due to the parent's expectations for the child, the child's needs, the type of burden for the child, its relevance to the child's competencies, perception of the child's dedication to the family, and the context (see more: Haxhe, 2016).

The literature review allows us to follow the differences in defining the phenomenon of parentification by different authors. Some researchers decided to avoid pathologising connotations of the term *parentification* and replaced it with the neutral term *filial responsibility* (see: Jurkovic et al., 2004; Kuperminc, Jurkovic, & Casey, 2009). That term refers to the intensity of children's family caregiving efforts (Jurkovic et al., 2004). Other researchers define only emotional responsibilities and burden as parentification, explaining that "instrumental responsibilities without emotional burden don't lead to parentification" (Haxhe, 2016, p. 4). However, another researcher, Lisa Marie Hooper, in her model of *parentification* pays attention to whom the child is taking care of: his/her parents and/or siblings, not the type of child's responsibilities (emotional vs. instrumental) (Hooper et al., 2011a). The authors of this article share Hooper's view of parentification because emotional and instrumental parentification often co-exist (i.e. Schier, 2014). Moreover, being physically overburdened may also affect the child's self-esteem and mood. That is why the further paragraphs presented beneath include various examples of childhood parentification and its outcomes in early adulthood without dividing them by its type.

## EMERGING ADULTS AND RETROSPECTIVE PARENTIFICATION

There are many typologies of the periodisation of stages in human development. Late adolescence is understood as the period from about 16 to about 20 years (Obuchowska, 2002), whereas early adulthood is rated between 20-23 and 35-40 years (Gurba, 2002). Therefore, there is a fine line between late adolescence and early adulthood, and it is often contractual. One of the most famous theories of psycho-so-

cial development of the human throughout his/her lifespan is Erikson's theory (1963), which identifies eight stages of human development. At each stage, the individual experiences a particular type of developmental crisis that needs to be resolved. A successful completion of the crisis determines passing through to the next development phase. If a challenge of a stage is not successfully completed, it may be expected to reappear as problems in future life.

According to Erikson (1968), the most crucial task of adolescence (12-18 years old) is to achieve an integrated and coherent sense of self, constituting the individual's identity. If the individual does not master this crisis between identity and role confusion, it may result in uncertainty about the self-image and involves the individual not being sure about his/her place in society. In turn, during emerging adulthood (19-30), the key task is to form intimate partnerships. At this age the individual explores love, understood as the ability to care for others. Young adults are also faced with the developmental conflict between the need for intimacy and isolation. Not mastering this stage can lead to loneliness and isolation from society. The successful completion of this and previous developmental stages allow the individual to create stable relationships (marital roles) as well as parenting (parental roles) and other social roles (i.e. as an employee or citizen) (Erikson, 1968).

Other theoreticians and human development researchers state similar tasks young adults have to face. According to Birch (2005), at this stage of life young people focus on individual development in the context of their social functioning and relationships. The individual determines his/her identity and takes on new social roles (the employee, the parent, and the spouse) (Birch, 2005). Havinghurst (1981 after: Ziółkowska, 2005), however, as the developmental responsibilities relevant for early adulthood, indicates the choice of a spouse, learning how to live with him/her, setting up a family, running the household, getting a job, and exercising civil duties. Recently, the cultural changes demand to distinguish a specific developmental period between childhood and adulthood where individuals have not tried to make commitments of adult life but are becoming increasingly independent from their parents. That is where the term "emerging adulthood" came from. It describes a developmental state that extends from the late adolescence through one's twenties (Arnett, 2004). There are five features of emerging adulthood being distinguished: (a) exploration in relationships and occupation; (b) instability; (c) self-focus; (d) feelings of being in-transition, such as not being a child but not yet an adult; and (e) consideration of possibilities for one's future (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adults have the opportunity to leave a parentified environment and separate from their parents. Moreover, in emerging adulthood people are no longer considered to be

children, so the roles that they perform within their families are no longer considered as developmentally inappropriate (Arnett, 2006). Therefore, emerging adults are an interesting group in which to examine the outcomes of parentification.

Concluding, the developmental theories stated above place the key roles and developmental tasks of emerging adults within the area of intimate relationships, parenting, and work.

## DISTORTIONS IN THE SEPARATION-INDIVIDUATION PROCESS

The phenomenon of parentification affects families at all stages of their developmental cycles, including those families with children coming to adulthood – adolescents and young adults. Adolescence constitutes a challenge for the family system because family loyalty bonds are verified at this time (Wolska, 2000). Family loyalty is an invisible network of relationship bonds that are based on the rules applied within the family and make it possible to survive. The family would not be able to exist in the form of a relationship if its members were not loyal to the people who gave them life. Loyalty is a sense of solidarity and commitment to the relatives (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Wolska, 2000). It is manifested through the repetition of family relations patterns by successive generations, passing along family myths or the similarity of family rituals (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). In late adolescence, conflicts in this area are most frequently encountered. Young adults leave the family home, enter into partnerships, and become independent, which can be perceived by some parents as a threat to the existing balance of the family system.

A shift in the relationship between an adolescent child and a parent is essential in order to change adolescence into adulthood by weakening the child's dependency degree and his/her self-creation. The separation-individuation process can, however, be disturbed by the inter-generational transfer reversing the hierarchy in the family, resulting in parentification. The separation process will not be conducted accurately if the child is made to feel guilty that the family system will not be capable to work without him/her, which is the case in families where the phenomenon of parentification occurs (Radziwiłłowicz, 2015). Some parents expect that a parentified adolescent child will express his/her loyalty towards them by staying in their existing family and not changing the strength and quality of the relationships, which overburdens a young person to individuate his/her developmental stage (Wolska, 2000). The parentified teenager develops a sense of "false self" (Wells, Glickauf-Hughes, & Jones, 1999), which impedes the performance of his/her developmental tasks congruent

for the adolescence period, and primarily the separation from his/her parents. Another reason why they have difficulties with boundary dissolutions may be the fact that the experience of childhood parentification may hinder identity development in young adulthood due to less identity exploration, especially in terms of interpersonal relationships (Fullinwider-Bush & Jacobvitz, 1993). Failure in the process of separation-individuation is a risk factor for the occurrence of psychopathology, which may result during adolescence and later life in internalisation disorders (e.g. depression), externalisation disorders, and behavioural and personality disorders (Jurkovic, 1997; Byng-Hall, 2008; Hooper et al., 2008; Hooper et al., 2011b), manifested in, for example, self-destructive tendencies in the form of self-harm or suicide attempts and eating disorders (Namysłowska, 2011; Radziwiłłowicz, 2015).

### ADVERSITIES IN ACTING AS SPOUSE AND PARENT

The experience of parentification acts in two ways as a threat to the family that the parentified person will start in his/her future life: by delaying the performance of a matrimonial or parental role or, once the person has already established a family, threatening the newly formed family system due to the process of transferring patterns of family roles (intergenerational parenting transmission).

Parentification imposed in late adolescence by the family of origin may delay or distort the development of new roles relevant to his/her developmental stage, i.e. the role of the partner, the spouse, and eventually the parent (Wolska, 2000; Schier, 2010). The term “family role” is most often used to describe patterns of behaviour (or ideas about them) that we undertake in social situations related to the functioning of the family. First of all, departing from the parents may inflict a sense of guilt in late adolescent, which lowers his/her capability of emotional involvement in his/her own relationship (Wolska, 2000). Secondly, the parentified young adult, despite starting his/her own family, may still be burdened with obligations imposed by his/her parents, so he/she cannot entirely devote him/herself to his/her own family (de Barbaro, 1994; Wolska, 2000).

The young person may, however, respond oppositionally towards family expectations. The more intense is his/her connection with the family environment, the stronger is his/her will to resist the bonds, and sometimes it even becomes a struggle for emotional isolation from the loved ones (Bowen, 1978). This is necessary to reconcile the previous vertical loyalties that bind him/her to the family and the horizontal loyalties that connect him/her with peers and life partners. The necessity of choosing between

these two loyalties may cause crises in relationships or even lead to breaking off contact with the family. Finally, the experienced conflict may expose itself in mental disorders (Wolska, 2000).

If the conflict of loyalty is not solved, it is transferred to the family of procreation. In this situation, it becomes a source of tension between the spouses. Departing from parents can be a source of guilt feelings. For this reason, a young person has fewer emotional opportunities to engage in his/her own relationship, which will be noticed by the partner and recognised as a lack of interest in him/her (Wolska, 2000). Furthermore, there may be a situation in which a young person is caught up in conflict with his/her family and compensation for past mistakes to the extent that he/she will not be capable to make commitments to his/her partner and children (Wolska, 2000).

A parentified young adult, despite starting his/her own family, may still be so burdened with obligations towards his/her parents that he/she will not be able to entirely devote him/herself to his/her own family. Parentification imposed by the family of origin disturbs functioning as a partner (Macfie, McElwain, Houts, & Cox, 2005), spouse or parent (cf. Shaffer & Egeland, 2011; Nuttall, Valentino, & Brokowski, 2012; Wolska, 2000). The second way in which parentification threatens the family of a person who has experienced it is through transmission between generations. Parentification sources origins from three generations ago, which means that this phenomenon has to be considered in the context of grandparents, parents, and children, even if they have already become adults. According to this presumption, parents may repeat the patterns of behaviour that they have been subjected to by the child’s grandparents. Another generation, by taking care of his/her parents, compensates the “debt”, which is related to old traumas involving other family members (Schier, 2010). The pattern of requirements for care from one’s own children is repeated by the person who him/herself as a child had to bear responsibility for his/her family members (Barnett & Parker, 1998; Schier, 2014).

The body of literature also includes reports on maternity decision making by women who have experienced parentification. The results of this study are ambiguous. Marshall (1993, after: Barnett & Parker, 1998) in her book *Not having children* postulated that such women voluntarily give up on maternity (*voluntary childlessness*), which is caused by their negative image of parenting, childhood experiences, being overly responsible for the family, and often being the eldest of siblings. However, her research did not confirm this theory, which she explained with the complexity of the problem. Still, Marshall’s idea is still a living issue (Barnett & Parker, 1998). A similar approach was presented by Kaltreider and Margolis (1977, after: Lackie, 1983), who in 1977 stated that

people who have experienced parentification may choose to be childless.

The experience of parentification in the family of origin threatens therefore not only the family of procreation, but also the bonding with the family of origin. The departure from the family system may take the form of not only separation, but also a complete escape, which refers particularly to rejected, abused, and used children (Radziwiłłowicz, 2015). One of the forms of emotional separation from the family of origin and physical distancing from the family home may be the escape of a young person into a marriage (Barnett & Parker, 1998). Girls who, due to family responsibilities, had a low attendance at school not only suffer from insufficient level of education or challenges on the employment market, but are also more likely to face adolescent pregnancies, unsatisfactory marriages, and difficulties in raising their children (Barnett & Parker, 1998).

Furthermore, taking on an inadequate care role in a family of origin may affect the choice of romantic partners in the future. The experience of emotional parentification in childhood is negatively related to the quality of communication in the romantic relationships of young adults and positively related to the occurrence of conviction revealing a lack of sense of security in close relationships (Shaffer & Madden, 2016). These individuals may act as self-sufficient people and seek partners who are similar to their parents, i.e. needy, demanding their care and concern (Barnett & Parker, 1998; Byng-Hall, 2008). The described mechanism of partner selection by individuals who have experienced parentification is consistent with the concept of collusion (Willi, 2014). This is an unconscious phenomenon where partners are complementary to each other, whereby their partner selection criteria are based upon their unresolved issues, e.g. one of the partners is dominant and the other is subordinate. Moreover, the distortion in the process of shaping the identity may also affect choosing the partner. Due to unconscious motives (such as unmet childhood needs) the person does not sufficiently explore (escape into a relationship or marriage) or does not undertake any exploration because of loyalty and their obligation towards the parents (the decision about being in a relationship).

#### ADVERSITIES IN ACTING AS STUDENT AND EMPLOYEE

Experience of parentification in the family of origin results in a lower level of education in the future (Chase et al., 1998). Persons who are burdened with fulfilling the requirements and needs of family members find it difficult to meet their academic responsibilities and thus achieve results below their predispositions (*underachievement*). Such difficulties may

reflect problems at the level of the family system and not pertain to symptoms of, for example, maladjustment or lack of involvement in learning. It would be very interesting to carry out research for analogous mechanisms within the group of adults already in the work environment and to analyse whether people who have experienced high levels of parentification towards parents/siblings along with the negative consequences of this phenomenon also face issues with job performance and career paths. This theory is consistent with the assumption that the imbalance between family requirements and work is the cause of the labour–family conflict, resulting in lower level of feelings of satisfaction with life (Rostowska, 2008).

At the same time, it must be noted that school may constitute in the life of a young person an area in which he/she is experiencing success, encouraging him/her to form proper relationships with teachers and peers and receiving support from them. These factors enable the development of resilience in an adolescent despite difficult family experiences (Barnett & Parker, 1998).

On the other hand, the past experience of parentification may direct a person to become involved in professional development at the expense of family roles. A study by Fullinwider-Bush and Jacobvitz (1993) found that the mother–daughter dissolution was associated with the daughter’s tendencies to commit herself prematurely to a career and relationships based on a simple acceptance of parental expectations and values. Additionally, father–daughter dissolution resulted in a lower level of commitment to beliefs and values about work, romantic relationships, and friendship. A similar mechanism has been examined in studies involving young, childless adults conducted by Black and Sleight (2013). Participants with a high sense of injustice in relation to their childhood parentification also ranked career as a more important priority than caring for their future spouse or children. According to the authors of the study, these participants may be attempting to compensate for the unfairness they experienced in their childhood home, as lower family income is one predictor of parentification (Black & Sleight, 2013). This idea is consistent with the hypothesis of scarcity – one of the materialism explanations. According to it, by striving to possess money, fame, and success, people compensate for the deprivation of economic needs and the need for the sense of safety from their childhood (Zawadzka & Lewandowska-Walter, 2016).

Families with low socio-economic status are particularly vulnerable to the occurrence of the parentification phenomenon (Lackie, 1983; Burton, 2007; Hooper et al., 2011a; Hooper et al., 2011b; Schier, 2014). Insufficient economic resources of the family are conducive to the development of premature adulthood (*pseudomaturity*) based upon street-wisdom

(*street-wise*), which helps the child to develop survival strategies in difficult environments (Lackie, 1983). Apart from the difficulties in earning a living, a low socio-economic status of the family affects its daily life, which may cause children to become subjected to parentification. First of all, a lack of money forces parents to take up jobs with long hours because they strive to improve the family's financial situation. Simultaneously, due to a lack of funds, the family is unable to provide paid care for the children at that time. For this reason, children are burdened with taking care of the home and their siblings (Burton, 2007). On the other hand, families in financial distress may face housing difficulties, where the family members may lack privacy (for example due to a small apartment or flat shared with grandparents – authors' note). In such a situation, it is easy to expose children to sensitive adult matters (Burton, 2007). It is important to note that young people and children, in an effort to support the family's difficult financial situation, can quickly take up their first job (Burton, 2007). Premature child labour is a manifestation of instrumental parentification (see Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper et al., 2008; Hooper et al., 2011a; Schier, 2010, 2014).

The experience of parentification may also influence the choice of any professional pathway connected with helping others (Lackie, 1982, 1983; Byng-Hall, 2008). Therapists often perform a parental role towards their patients (Byng-Hall, 2008). Acting in the role of a caring and "good" child for all the family members is related to professional work later in life, as demonstrated by studies involving social workers. Of 1577 American social workers who participated in Lackie's research, over two thirds confirmed that they had experienced different forms of parentification in their families (1982). Providing care for family members can lead to a choice of professional life in which the person "heals" other families because he/she was not capable of fixing his/her or her own family (Lackie, 1983). A social worker may even experience symbolic gratification and reduce his/her own sense of lack of care by identifying with the client he/she is helping (Lackie, 1983). On the other hand, the patient's past parentification experience can sensitise the therapist to the processes taking place in the family (Byng-Hall, 2008), and the supervision may assure the correctness of the therapy process.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

At various stages of life, a person can perform many roles at the same time, such as the role of his/her parents, sibling, student, employee, spouse, or parent. However, some of these roles are more important or more typical for a given period of life, and therefore a person undertakes particular developmental tasks

(Rostowska, 2008). Emerging adults who experienced parentification during childhood (and may still be enmeshed with their families) may undertake developmental tasks prematurely, procrastinate, or not implement them at all as well as have difficulties with exploring their identity and commit to certain values prematurely or insufficiently (Fullinwider-Bush & Jacobvitz, 1993). Additionally, in his concept of "emerging adulthood" Arnett (2006) underlines that it is the age of identity exploration. This means that the childhood experience of parentification may lead to a breach of the timeliness norm for developmental tasks in early adulthood. This norm assumes that in the course of the development of the family and its members certain developmental tasks should be implemented within a certain period of time, with respect to the social norms (Wojciechowska, 2011). Due to the overburdening by the preoccupation of the family system, the individual cannot fulfil the developmental tasks of late adolescence, i.e. separation from the family system (see Namysłowska, 2011). Thus, at a later time, he or she is unable to fulfil a socially sanctioned sequence of life events in a timely manner: getting education – getting a job – starting a family. Transgression of the normative order of events in the family can lead to disturbances in the way of life of the young person and his/her entire family (Wojciechowska, 2011; Klein & White, 1996). In the life of a young person, work and education can become a kind of escapee from everyday life and chores (Black & Sleigh, 2013). On the other hand, the role of the caregiver of the family may preclude the person's educational development (Chase et al., 1998). For this reason, these individuals may face particular difficulties in achieving a family-work balance. According to the assumptions of the socio-ecological model of health (as well as roles), the achievement of a dynamic state of balance, which is one of the sources of mental health, is possible when there is a correct relationship between the various spheres of life (and the roles). Disorder in one area of a person's life leads to distraction in another (Sęk, Ścigala, Beisert, & Bleja, 1992). Therefore, it can be expected that people experiencing parentification are particularly exposed to labour-family conflict. This area requires special attention from researchers because the capacity to balance family and work life affects the quality of human life (cf. Peplińska & Rostowska, 2013). Similarly, Ziółkowska (2005), who distinguished work, family, and leisure as the three main areas of activity of young adults, emphasises that in order for a young person to experience a high quality of life, his/her identity must be based on at least two of these three spheres. This gives young adults the opportunity to select from a variety of resources in difficult situations, as well as to develop social, psychological, and physical security and a sense of stability (Ziółkowska, 2005).

Notwithstanding that it is difficult to unequivocally determine the moment of reaching maturity (Gurba, 2002), it is well known that flexibility in performing many roles simultaneously is a manifestation of human maturity (Bańka, 2005; Rostowska, 2008). When a young person experiences parentification and is not capable of taking on suitable developmental roles and responsibilities due to excessive engagement into family issues and its members, he/she cannot achieve maturity.

The experience of parentification can have different outcomes for the psycho-social development of an individual. Numerous factors determine whether they will be more or less negative; factors such as the age of the child, the person the child is caring for, the duration of the parentification process (Schier, 2010), followed by the type of work the child performs or the family's approach to talking about the child's tasks (Jurkovic, 1997). Therefore, a straightforward answer whether the experience of parentification may completely preclude or only hinder young adults from taking up social roles relevant to their stage of development is not easy to state. According to the authors, the answer to the question about the outcomes of parentification is aptly concluded by Barnett and Parker (1998, p. 146): "The final outcome for any individual will be judged at the end of his/her life-span and the judgment will be largely subjective". After the literature review we recommend that in the future, research should put a special emphasis on the analysis of the mechanisms responsible for taking up the role of an adult in the family by a child, in which individual differences, personality traits, and the mechanisms of shaping the identity (exploration and commitment) would explain the diversity of the consequences of parentification.

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## **Publikacja 2**

# Construction of a Parentification Questionnaire for Youth

## BACKGROUND

Parentification is defined as a pattern of family interactions in which a child or an adolescent provides excessive care to the parents instead of receiving it from them. The phenomenon is linked to family difficulties, personality disorders or abuse of psychoactive substances, yet in some circumstances, it may be a factor contributing to an increase in mental resilience and one's independence.

## PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The aim of the study was to prepare a parentification questionnaire for adolescents, adapted to Polish cultural conditions. The study involved 641 teenagers.

## RESULTS

On the basis of confirmatory factor analysis, two versions of the tool were created: for adolescents without siblings (4 basic subscales) and for adolescents with siblings (4 basic and 2 additional subscales).

## CONCLUSIONS

The questionnaire draws attention to the multidimensional character of the phenomenon of parentification, focusing on the type of roles and tasks performed by a teenager (i.e. emotional and instrumental parentification), the level of a sense of injustice and satisfaction with the role played in the family system. Additionally, the test allows us to focus on the recipient of the care provided by the child (parents or siblings) while maintaining a structure that allows for conducting research with both only children and persons with siblings and facilitates comparison between them.

## KEY WORDS

family role reversal; measurement; adolescents; only children; siblings

ORGANIZATION – Institute of Psychology, University of Gdansk, Gdansk, Poland

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS – A: Study design · B: Data collection · C: Statistical analysis · D: Data interpretation · E: Manuscript preparation · F: Literature search · G: Funds collection

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Borchet, J., Lewandowska-Walter, A., Połomski, P., & Peplińska, A. (2019). Construction of a Parentification Questionnaire for Youth. *Health Psychology Report*. <https://doi.org/10.5114/hpr.2019.89492>

RECEIVED 12.07.2019 · REVIEWED 17.09.2019 · ACCEPTED 18.09.2019 · PUBLISHED 31.10.2019

## BACKGROUND

The term “parentification” was coined by the authors of the family systems theory. Minuchin et al. (1967) drew attention to the weakness of a family in which the parental competence of the adult is insufficient and, as a result, the child is delegated to fulfil their roles. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) pointed to the neglect of the needs of the child in a family in which he or she performs the duties of others, which may favour intergenerational transmission of the role reversal mechanism. The way of fulfilling roles in the family is repeated in the next generation – a parent who was parentified in their childhood expects instrumental and emotional support from his or her children. Parentification is a violation of internal family boundaries and means that the child is bound by others or feels bound to take emotional, instrumental and sometimes financial responsibility for other family members (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper, Marotta, & Lanthier, 2008; Hooper, DeCoster, White, & Voltz, 2011a; Hooper, Doehler, Wallace, & Hannah, 2011b; Hooper, 2012; Schier, 2010, 2014). A situation is created in the family in which the balance of the system is maintained by reversing the parent-child hierarchy. A system in which the parent is unavailable to the child and the child is to be available to the parent and siblings becomes a source of stress for the child (Bowen, 1978) and interferes with the accomplishment of age-appropriate developmental goals. Parentified children incur double losses because not only do they lose an opportunity to develop their relationship with parents and siblings properly, but also they experience difficulties in carrying out non-family tasks such as school education and developing relationships with their peers. Parentification as a permanent pattern of family functioning is a form of child neglect. In contrast to more open forms of child abuse, however, it can be more difficult to identify, partly because of the desire of the family members to protect the image of the family (see: Tedgård, Råstam, & Wirtberg, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to create tools allowing for a multidimensional diagnosis of the phenomenon, including from the perspective of the child.

Parentification is a common phenomenon experienced by children worldwide (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Bying-Hall, 2008; Hooper, 2007; Żarczyńska-Hyla, Zdaniuk, Piechnik-Borusowska, Karcz-Taranowicz, & Kromolicka, 2016). The development of works dedicated to the construct of “parentification” in the empirical dimension and an assessment of the phenomenon in many countries was made possible by the emergence of tools created by Jurkovic and his collaborators (1998, 2001) and by the Hooper questionnaire (2009). In Poland, due to the lack of available tools to diagnose parentification in the population, the prevalence of the phenomenon can only

be estimated indirectly, on the basis of statistics on the number of children growing up in dysfunctional families and/or placed in care due to insufficient care and educational competences of their parents. Polish families are undergoing huge transformations (Slany, 2002; Szredzinska, 2017; Kolankiewicz, 2017), while at least some of the forms of the transformation are conducive to the emergence of parentification, i.e. to imposing the burden of the tasks and roles of adult family members, who are physically or emotionally absent, on the child. They include, among others: 1) increase in the number of divorces, 2) increase in the number of single-parent families, 3) economic migration of parents (East, 2010; Schier, 2014).

Divorce is a worrying social phenomenon. In 2008, the total number of divorces in families with children amounted to 43,173 (Cudak, 2011), and in 2015 over 67,000 spouses separated while bringing up 39,100 minor children, more than half of whom were 7-15 years old at the time of the divorce (Szredzińska, 2017). In recent years, the number of divorces has stabilised in Poland, which, compared to other European countries, maintains one of the lowest levels of marriage breakdowns. In sociological terms, divorce is an indicator of family breakdown, and in psychological terms, it is a threat to the functioning of the family and the stability of its structure (Cudak, 2011). In Poland, the number of single parents is increasing (in 2011, one in five children were being brought up in such families). However, it is worth noting that the number of families in which fathers are single parents is growing dynamically (cf. Szredzińska, 2017). Today’s single parents are often well-off individuals who, as one may assume, often consciously choose lone parenthood. However, the second group of single parents is still made up of people in difficult economic and living conditions, such as unmarried women abandoned by the fathers of their children (Sikorska, 2009).

After Poland’s accession to the European Union, the number of labour migrations increased, including in the case of individuals bringing up children. More families chose the option of one parent leaving their children in Poland under the care of the other parent. Research conducted in 2014 on behalf of the Polish Children’s Rights Ombudsman shows that about 20% of children aged 10-19 experienced temporary separation from at least one parent, with the father (68% of children) leaving more often than the mother (14.8% of children). Periodic absence of both parents due to economic migration was experienced by 17.2% of children from this group. The purpose of the parents’ travel was of course to improve the living conditions of their families, but it had a negative impact on the sense of security of their children, weakening the bonds between the spouses and the relationship between the absent parent and the child. In families separated due to migration, educational problems were also more common (Tarka, 2014).

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In addition to these three risk factors of parentification, there is a high – and still growing – number of children and young people whose parents experience such serious difficulties with their upbringing that a family court needs to interfere in the manner they exercise parental authority. The number of children under judicial supervision has been growing for years (Kolankiewicz, 2017). The main reasons for court interference in the exercise of parental authority and for placing children in foster families and care and educational institutions, with significant negligence on the part of the parents, are alcoholism of the parents (or one of them), physical and psychological abuse towards family members, somatic or mental illnesses of the parent, helplessness with regard to care and educational matters and other everyday matters, parents leaving the country, and death of both parents or one of them (Szymańczak, 2016). These factors have been identified as a threat to parentification by many researchers (Hooper et al., 2011b; Macfie, Brumariu, & Lyons-Ruth, 2015; Nuttall & Valentino, 2017; Schier, 2014; Grzegorzewska, 2016).

An analysis of available parentification measurement tools shows that their authors focus on different dimensions of the phenomenon, which is reflected in the construction of the questionnaires. The most widely known dimensions of parentification are divided by its type (i.e. instrumental and emotional parentification) and possible consequences (Jurkovic, 1997). The author distinguishes two types of parentification – the emotional and instrumental one. The emotional type of parentification refers to the child satisfying the emotional and social needs of other family members as well as attempting to maintain a positive family atmosphere. Caregiving for the emotional needs of parents or siblings may be evidenced through attention to their well-being and sensitivity to the other family members' moods (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper et al., 2008; Hooper & Wallace, 2010; Hooper et al., 2011b). In order to maintain positive feelings within the family, a child experiencing emotional parentification may be cast in various roles, for example, as a mediator for conflicted household members, a caregiver looking after a sick family member, scapegoat, parental therapist, confidant or a partner substitute (i.e., *spousification*; see Kerig & Brown, 1996; Sroufe & Ward, 1980) in a situation where parents have separated (Hooper et al., 2008; Hooper & Wallace, 2010; Hooper et al., 2011b). The main concern in the case of instrumental parentification is to care for the family's material well-being (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper et al., 2008; Hooper & Wallace, 2010; Hooper et al., 2011b). In such situations children offer assistance to the family by organizing their everyday life and do so through their own physical work (e.g., cleaning, cooking, doing the laundry, shopping, looking after their siblings, or earning money). Some researchers believe that instrumental parentification is less deleterious than emotional

parentification (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper et al., 2008). Byng-Hall (2008) points out that children find it easier to adapt to instrumental roles and responsibilities than emotional roles, as the latter exposes them to a higher degree of stress-related psychological costs. The stress follows from a sense of responsibility for another person. However, it must be noted that the dimensions of parentification distinguished by Jurkovic (1997) are not mutually exclusive. Children may serve in a variety of roles within the family, with both types of parentification (i.e., emotional and instrumental) occurring simultaneously (cf. Jurkovic, 1997; Kerig, 2005).

The second classification of parentification proposed by Jurkovic (1997) also concentrates on the positive and negative consequences of parentification as experienced by the child. Jurkovic (1997) differentiates between constructive (adaptive) and destructive (pathological) parentification. Parentification may be understood as a form of emotional violence if it overburdens the child with roles normally reserved for adults, and in so doing, prevents children from pursuing their own developmental tasks (Jurkovic, 1997) or enjoying childhood (Schier, 2010). A situation that is beyond children's or adolescents' scope, draining their mental resources, usually brings negative – and sometimes traumatic – consequences. A survey of the body of research on parentification showed a link between parentification and anxiety disorders, personality disorders, and eating disorders (Hooper et al., 2011a). In addition, the literature suggests that parentification is related to abusing psychoactive substances (Chase, Deming, & Wells, 1998), mental disorders (Jones & Wells, 1996), relationship dysfunctions (Shaffer & Madden, 2016) as well as poor parenting skills in adulthood (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Bowen, 1978; Chase et al., 1998; Nuttall, Zhang, Valentino, & Borkowski, 2019). Children who experience parentification are raised under unfavourable conditions affecting their ability to form positive relationships as well as impacting their mental growth. An impoverished environment may become a source of trauma (cf. Cichetti, 2004; Schier, 2014). At the same time, a moderate intensification of parentification, as a normative response to a temporary family crisis, may bring positive long-term results for the child, such as an increase in self-esteem, empathy or altruism (Jurkovic, 1997; McMahan & Luthar, 2007). The child's assumption of the roles of an adult family member may have a positive impact on the child's development if the following conditions are met: 1) the hierarchy reversal is temporary and is not a permanent family functioning pattern, 2) the child is clearly informed about the duties to be undertaken and feels that the other family members are grateful for the work they undertake. Therefore, it is important when diagnosing parentification to include not only objective indicators of (what the child does in the family), but also a subjective assessment

of, the burden resulting from taking over the parent's tasks (the way the child perceives his/her role – as a factor threatening the fulfilment of other life roles and an expression of injustice on the part of the parent or as a situation allowing the child to acquire new skills and to develop positive personality traits). In the available tools, the authors describe that dimension of parentification as “perceived unfairness” (Jurkovic & Thirkield, 1999; Jurkovic, Kuperminc, Sarac, & Weisshaar, 2005) and “perceived benefits of parentification” (Hooper, 2009). Consideration of this dimension of parentification may be important in Poland due to the specific cultural conditions linked to the high distance of authority (Hofstede, 2011). With a strong parent-child hierarchy in vertical relations, the child accepts the assigned tasks as normative, even if they are burdensome and prevent the child from carrying out developmental tasks. By protecting the image of the family and by protecting themselves from discomfort, children can make positive changes to their lives and seek to benefit from tasks which they have been assigned at home.

The last classification, taken into account by Hooper (2009), distinguishes parent-focused parentification and sibling-focused parentification. In families where there is a disturbed hierarchy and border blurring, and consequently a reversal of roles, the child takes on the duties of an adult carer and performs them 1) directly towards the parent, in an instrumental form if the parent is ill or disabled or by emotionally supporting them in case of a crisis such as divorce, 2) or indirectly, caring for his or her siblings and performing practical tasks or caring for the well-being of their brothers and sisters. The author thus emphasizes the multitude of roles that a child can play in relation to various family members and their influence on the functioning of the whole family system, individual subsystems (e.g. siblings) and the parent-child dyad. The situation of an only child in the family is special when considering the phenomenon of parentification. Such children usually receive huge amounts of everything the parents have to offer: love and care, but also criticism, anger, fear, and anxiety. An only child has to confront the feelings of adults on his/her own and in many cases it can be a burden for him/her. If the parents are emotionally mature, it is a very advantageous situation for the child – he or she has a sense of support, acceptance and feels safe in the family; but if the parents are prone to conflict or incompetent, the fact that the child is the only recipient of their reaction can be very traumatic for him/her (Richardson & Richardson, 1999). An only child does not have a brother or a sister to confide in and is therefore much more burdened with a family crisis situation, which results in a higher level of aggressiveness and depression in only children than in children with siblings and in an increase in school difficulties (Roberts & Blanton, 2001; Sorensen, 2008).

## AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the research was to prepare the first tool in Poland for measuring parentification intended for adolescents. The authors of the questionnaire were inspired by two American questionnaires: the Filial Responsibility Scale (FRS; Jurkovic & Thirkield, 1999; Jurkovic et al., 2005) and the Parentification Inventory (PI; Hooper, 2009). The first one consists of three subscales which are: perceived fairness, emotional caregiving and instrumental caregiving (Jurkovic & Thirkield, 1999; Jurkovic et al., 2005). The Parentification Inventory by Hooper (2009) distinguishes parentification directed to the parent, parentification focused on siblings and perceived benefits of parentification. Combining those two approaches while creating the Parentification Questionnaire for Youth (Kwestionariusz Parentyfikacji dla Młodzieży; KPdM) enabled us to examine not only the type of the child's caregiving (emotional and instrumental) and the care's recipients (parents and siblings) but also one's perception of his/her situation (satisfaction with the family role and the sense of injustice). Additionally, two versions of the tool were proposed – for only children and for children with siblings.

Due to the persistent strong attachment to the cultural norm, which is a reluctance in Poland to reveal family problems outside the family and a difficulty for children to report aggravating family situations (see: Schier, 2019), it was important to create a multi-dimensional tool which, taking into account different perspectives and different dimensions of the structure, would be helpful in assessing the intensity of the problem of parentification.

## PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

### PARTICIPANTS

The survey involved 641 teenagers living in Pomerania, 38.8% of whom were boys. 0.5% of the respondents did not specify their gender. The teenagers were aged between 12 and 18 ( $M = 14.96$ ,  $SD = 0.36$ ). Only children accounted for about 25% of the sample. Adolescents with siblings had between 1 and 8 brothers and/or sisters ( $M = 1.70$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ). The teenagers came from families with different family structures. 82.1% of the teenagers came from two-parent families, 10% lived with a single parent and 7.3% were being brought up in reconstructed families. Data on the family structure were not provided by 0.6% of the surveyed teenagers. The participants were students of 3 different schools who accepted the invitation to participate in the study ( $n_1 = 189$ ,  $n_2 = 49$ ,  $n_3 = 403$ ). Two of the schools were located in two different and distant parts of the city of Gdańsk ( $n_2$  – Dolne Miasto,  $n_3$  – Osowa), while one was located in Sztutowo

village ( $n_1$ ). Four other schools from Gdansk and one school from Masuria voivodeship rejected the invitation to participate in the study.

## PROCEDURE

Prior to the study, a positive opinion of the Ethics Committee for Research Projects at the Institute of Psychology of the University of Gdansk was obtained. The research was carried out at the schools attended by the examined children at the beginning of the school years 2016/2017 and 2017/2018. The survey was preceded by obtaining consent from the school management to hold the survey on the school grounds and consent from parents for their children to participate in the survey. The study was a group study and took place in school classrooms. Questionnaires were filled in by one class simultaneously (from 20 to 30 people). Initially, the pupils were given basic information on how to complete the forms and were assured of the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation in the survey. Each student completed the questionnaires on their own. The whole procedure took about 20-25 minutes. Finally, the young people were thanked for their participation in the survey.

## MEASURES

Participants were asked to complete a short set of measures: a researcher-designed questionnaire related to demographic data (such as sex, age, family type, mean grade from last year, number of siblings, birth order), family socioeconomic status measurement, parental conflict measurement, and the KPdM experimental version.

*Parentification Questionnaire for Youth* (KPdM) in the experimental version consisted of 66 theory-driven items. Sample items were: "Sometimes I think I am more responsible than my parents", "Most children my age have the same roles and responsibilities as me" and "I defend my siblings and excuse their actions to my parents". The source of the contents of the statements was an analysis of literature on parentification and items from the tools which served as inspiration for the authors (cf. Jurkovic, 1997; Jurkovic & Thirkield, 1999; Hooper, 2009). All the statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale and were preceded with the following instruction: *Below, there are statements about your thoughts, behaviours, and feelings about you and your family. Please read each of them carefully. Choose an answer based on how true the sentence is on a scale of 1 (never is) and 5 (always is). There are no right or wrong answers here. Make sure you answer each question as accurately as possible.*

*Parental conflict* was assessed subjectively. The participants were asked to grade the level of conflict be-

tween their parents on a Likert-type scale. Participants responded using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents no conflict or tension between parents and 5 represents very strong conflict and tension between parents.

*Socio-economic status of the family* (SES) assessed with an image of a 10-point ladder. The first one is the teen's subjective assessment of the family's economic situation inspired by MacArthur's Scale of Subjective Social Status (Goodman et al., 2001). Recipients are presented with an image of a ladder and follow the instruction: *Imagine that the ladder you see represents different people in society. At the top there are the richest people (10) and at the bottom of the ladder there are the poorest people (1). Indicate where on this ladder you would put your family* (Goodman et al., 2001). The teens participating in this study rated their families as being slightly above average ( $M = 6.48$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ). 23.6% of participants ranked their family 5 or lower.

## RESULTS

### CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

In order to verify the consistency of distribution of test items of the tool with theoretical assumptions, confirmatory factor analysis was carried out on the basis of the collected results based on structural equation modelling using AMOS 24 software. In the following models concerning the two versions of the tool, i.e. for young people with siblings and for only children (Figures 1 and 2), it was assumed that there were four basic latent variables (both versions) which determined the structure of the questionnaire items, i.e. "Emotional parentification towards parent", "Instrumental parentification towards parent" and "Satisfaction with the role" (seen as the benefits of parentification) and a "Sense of injustice" (cf. Jurkovic, 1997; Jurkovic & Thirkield, 1999; Hooper, 2009). The version of the tool which does not include only children in the study also has variables related to relations with siblings in the scope of the studied phenomenon, i.e. "Emotional parentification towards siblings" and "Instrumental parentification towards siblings" (cf. Hooper, 2009).

The assumed system of variables in the presented structural models was tested in terms of data matching quality parameters. It was found (Tables 1 and 2) that these data were satisfactory and showed an acceptable fit (Konarski, 2010) of the models to the data (the items qualified for the final version of the tool were those whose value of factor loadings was above 0.3). The final resultant path diagram for the two versions of the tool is presented in Figures 3 and 4.

At the next stage, the model quality analysis was carried out by examining the values of factor loads (standardized values of pathway coefficients for test items and latent variables) and the percentage of explained variance (multiple correlation coefficient). In

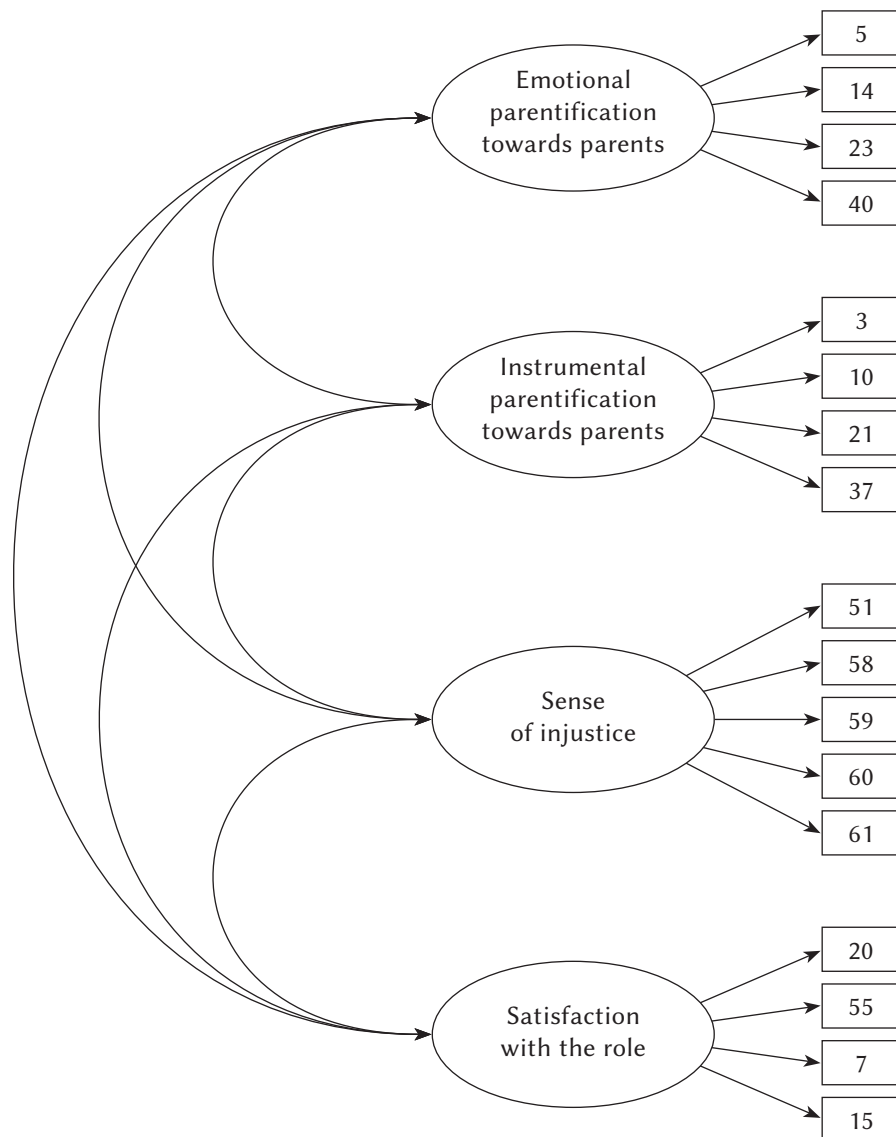


Figure 1. Path diagram of latent variables and test items for KPdM confirmatory factorial analysis model for adolescents without siblings based on theoretical assumptions.

the case of almost all test positions of each tool version (Tables 3 and 4) the values of factor loads exceeded 0.4, which is an average result (Konarski, 2010) and some of them 0.7 and 0.8, which constitutes a good and very good result. In the version of the tool for only children, questions 5, 21 and 55 (in the version for young people with siblings, also questions 21, 55 and 13) appear to be the weakest in this respect, but their loads are greater than 0.3 and, above all, statistically significant, which is an acceptable result (Bedyńska & Książek, 2012).

In general, the models in both tool versions are acceptable – the model fit parameters, as well as most of the load indicators for the tool items, reach the desired values.

The main version of the tool, which is intended for only children as well as children who have siblings, consists of 17 items based on 4 factors. The first fac-

tor, “Emotional parentification towards parents” includes 4 items referring to taking care of the parent’s emotional condition, e.g. helping solve the parental conflicts, assisting them when making decisions or solacing them (sample item: “I comfort my parents when they are sad”). The second factor, “Instrumental parentification towards parents” comprises 4 test items describing financial aid and housework that the child may do to support parents, which for example are giving money to the parents or doing the shopping for the family (e.g. “When I earn or get money, I give it to my parents”). “Sense of injustice”, the third factor, includes 5 statements that refer to the feeling of being used, unseen and unappreciated by the family members (for instance: “I sacrifice myself in my family, but it goes unnoticed by other family members”). The fourth subscale, “Satisfaction with the family role”

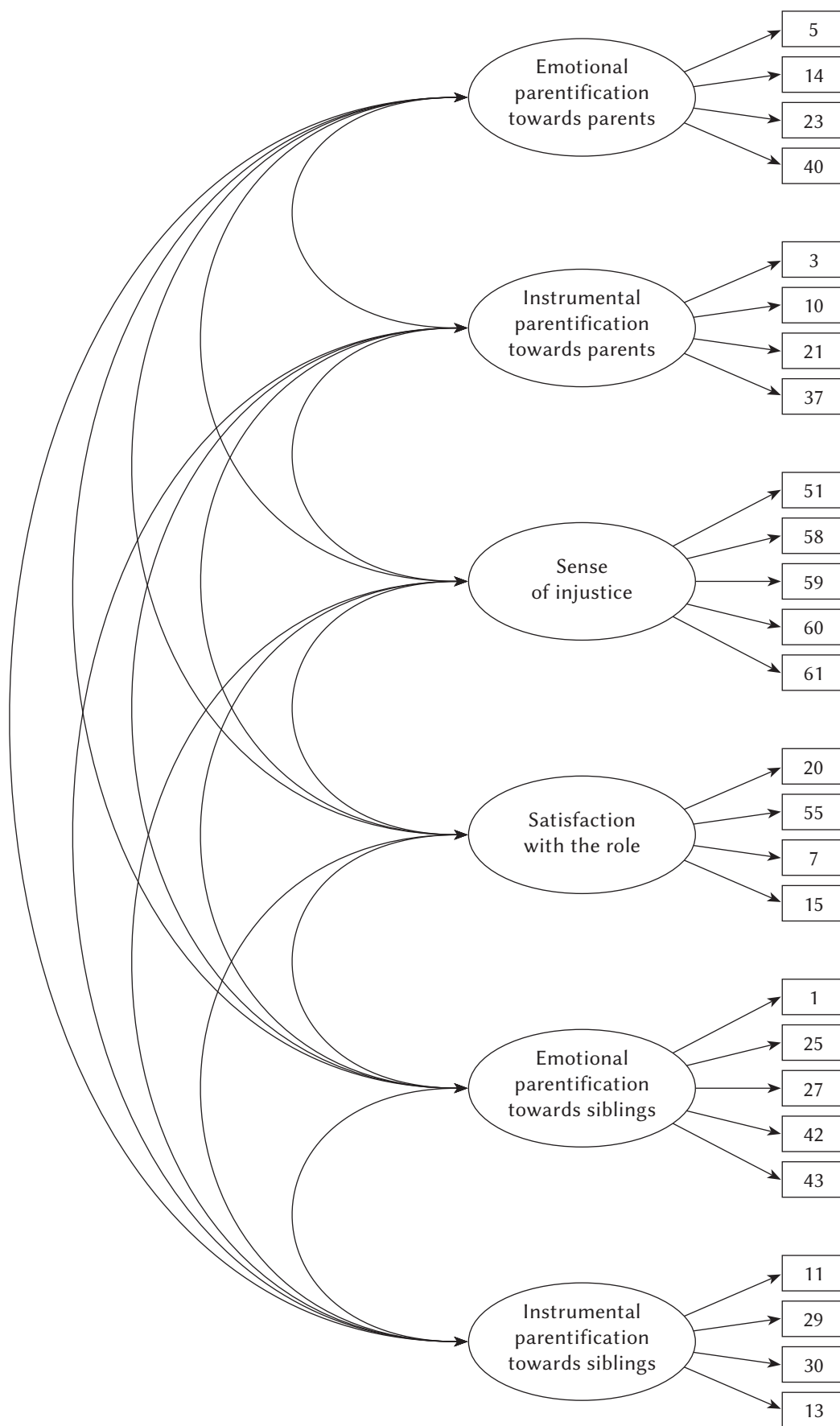


Figure 2. Path diagram of latent variables and test items for KPdM confirmatory factor analysis model for adolescents with siblings based on theoretical assumptions.

is composed of 4 items referring to assessment of one's role in the family. The items refer to feeling appreciated, perceived cooperation in the family as well as openness in talking about the child's role (e.g. "I am very happy with the role I play in my family").

The two additional scales ("Emotional parentification towards siblings" and "Instrumental parentification towards siblings") are designed for individuals with siblings. The "Emotional parentification towards

siblings" subscale consists of 5 items that cover comforting siblings, worrying about them and protecting them from the parents (e.g. "I defend my siblings and explain them to my parents"). The last factor, "Instrumental parentification towards siblings" includes 4 items referring to relieving the siblings from the housework, helping them with the school, as well as disciplining them (sample item: "I help my siblings in household chores, e.g. cleaning, walking the dog").

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Table 1  
Global model-to-data fit ratio for the only-child version

$\chi^2(113) = 162.18,$	RMSEA =	GFI =	CFI =
$p = .002$	0.061	0.841	0.886

Table 2  
Global model-to-data fit ratio for the child with siblings version

$\chi^2(284) = 693.82,$	RMSEA =	GFI =	CFI =
$p < .001$	0.054	0.901	0.901

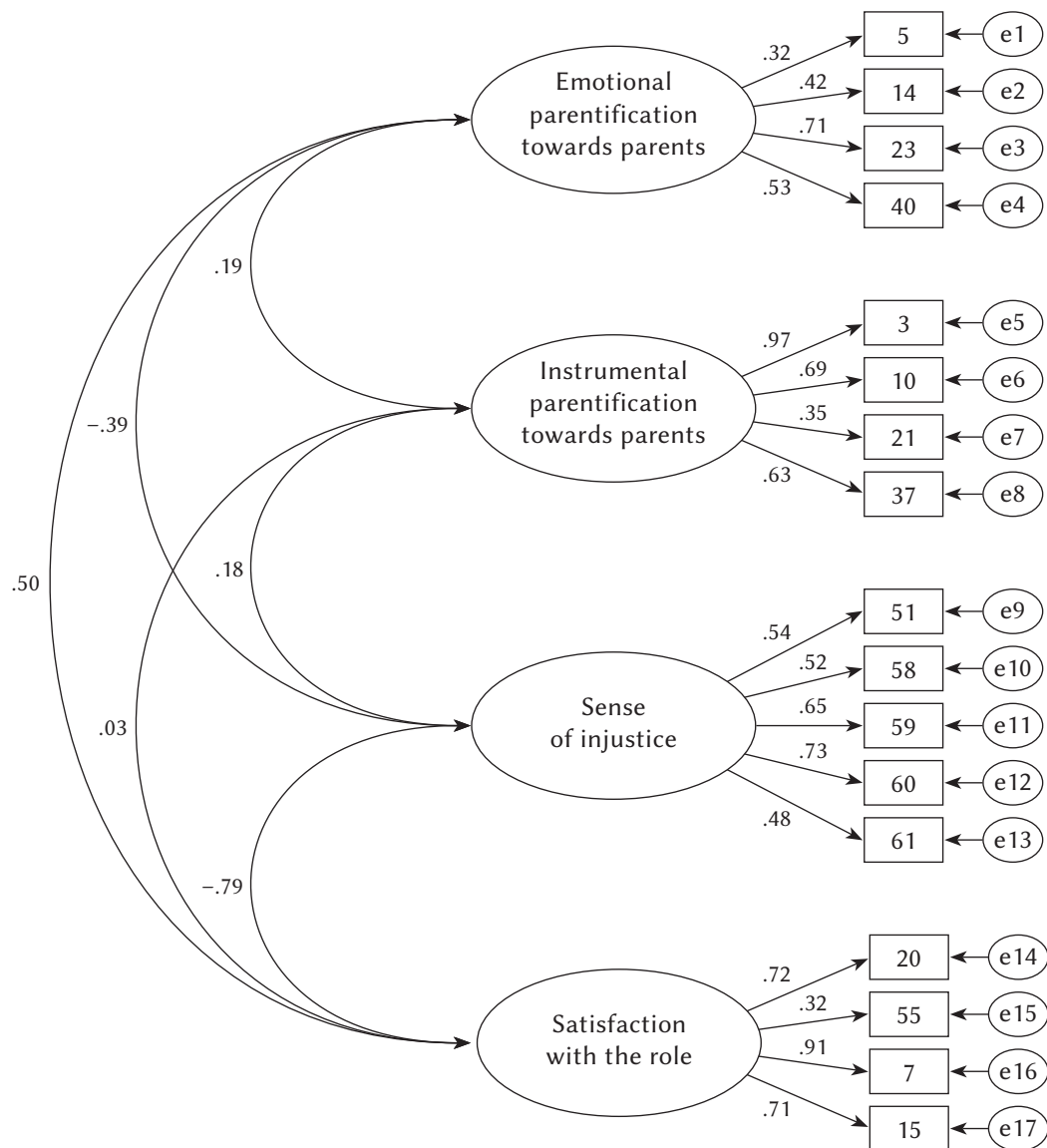


Figure 3. Resultant path diagram of latent variables and test items for the model of KPdM confirmatory factor analysis for only children.

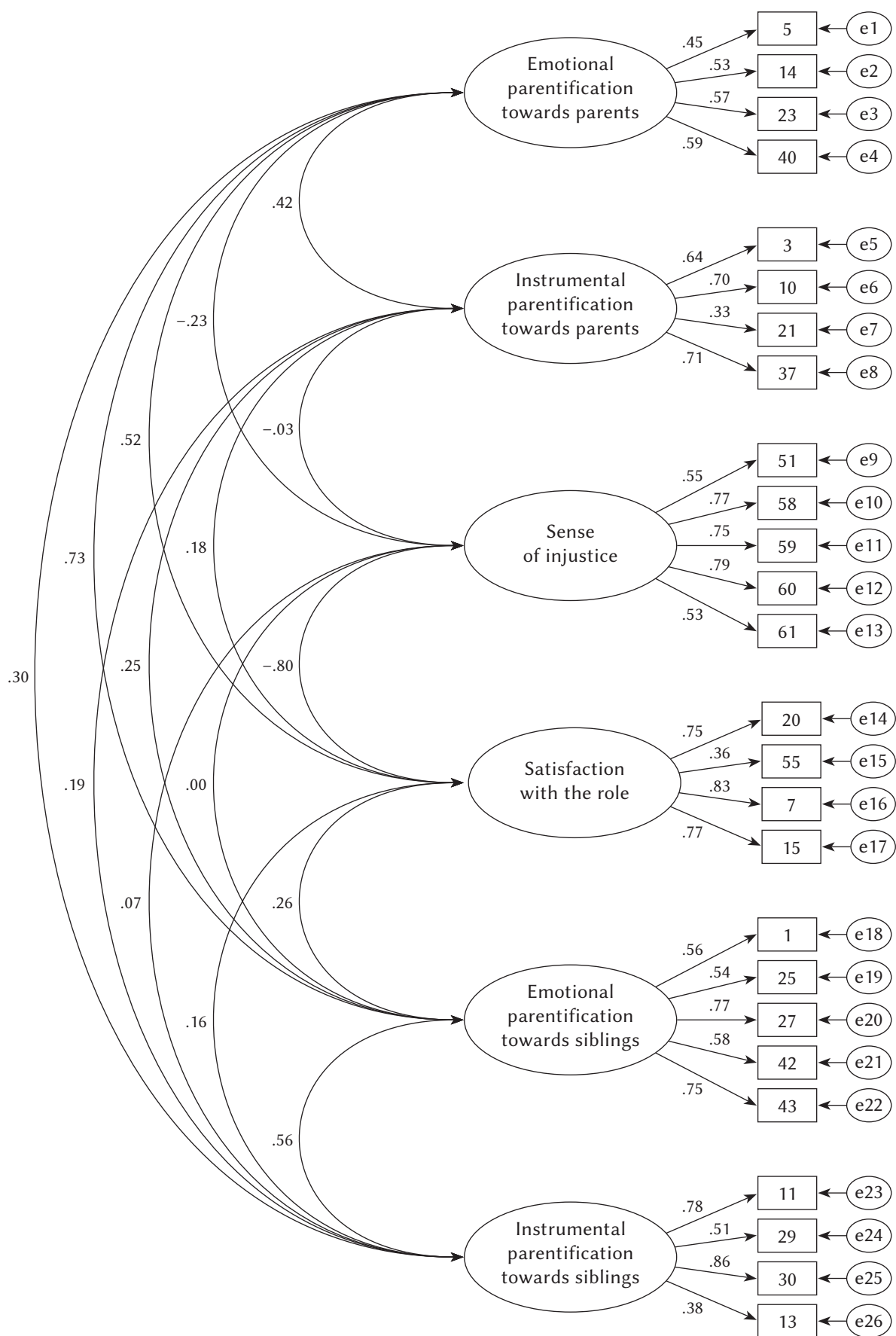


Figure 4. Resultant path diagram of latent variables and test items for KPdM confirmatory factor analysis model for adolescents with siblings.

Table 3

Standardized values of pathway coefficients ( $\beta$ ) in the model of KPdM confirmatory factor analysis (version for only children) for partial indices (test items) and latent variables (tool scales)

Test position	Latent variable	$\beta$
5 ←	Emotional parentification towards parents	.32
14 ←		.42
23 ←		.71
40 ←		.53
3 ←	Instrumental parentification towards parents	.97
10 ←		.61
21 ←		.35
37 ←		.63
51 ←	Sense of injustice	.54
58 ←		.52
59 ←		.65
60 ←		.73
61 ←		.48
20 ←	Satisfaction with the role	.72
55 ←		.32
7 ←		.91
15 ←		.71

#### RELIABILITY

In order to assess the reliability of the KPdM's scores, composite reliability (CR) coefficients were calculated, as recommended by Peterson and Kim (2013). Although the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) is the most widely used method for estimating the internal consistency, it is criticised as underestimating true reliability and being used without previously checking if its assumptions have been met (Osburn, 2000; Peterson & Kim, 2013; Cho, 2016).

The evaluation of the composite reliability (CR) coefficients indicated that the measured variables in both tested models were characterized by an acceptable level of reliability ( $\geq 0.7$ ). The results are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

#### VALIDITY

The test item distributions and the relations between the KPdM subscales were consistent with theoretical assumptions (see: Hornowska, 2001), which speaks for the test validity. Furthermore, test validity was

Table 4

Standardized values of pathway coefficients ( $\beta$ ) in the model of KPdM confirmatory factor analysis (version for adolescents with siblings) for partial indices (test items) and latent variables (tool scales)

Test position	Latent variable	$\beta$
5 ←	Emotional parentification towards parents	.45
14 ←		.63
23 ←		.57
40 ←		.59
3 ←	Instrumental parentification towards parents	.64
10 ←		.70
21 ←		.33
37 ←		.71
51 ←	Sense of injustice	.55
58 ←		.77
59 ←		.79
60 ←		.53
61 ←		.48
20 ←	Satisfaction with the role	.75
55 ←		.36
7 ←		.83
15 ←		.77
1 ←	Emotional parentification towards siblings	.56
25 ←		.54
27 ←		.77
42 ←		.58
43 ←		.75
11 ←	Instrumental parentification towards siblings	.78
29 ←		.51
30 ←		.86
13 ←		.38

also assessed as suggested by Dimitrov (2012). Specifically, we examined whether KPdM scores correlated with chosen measures in theoretically expected ways. The following measures were used: subjective parental conflict assessment and subjective assessment of family socio-economic status (SES). Results of Pearson's  $r$  correlations are presented in Table 7.

As parents in severe conflict are one of the high-risk factors for parentification in the family (Peris, Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Emery, 2008; Schier, 2014), we expected a positive correlation between

sense of injustice and parental conflict, which was confirmed by the analysis ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ). Also, satisfaction with the family role was negatively related to parental conflict ( $r = -.38, p < .01$ ). The more conflicted the parents were, the less satisfied were the adolescents with the role that they perform in the family and more sense of injustice they had. These results are consistent with the predictions and show the KPdM validity. Family SES was not significantly correlated with emotional and instrumental parentification either towards parents or siblings, yet it was slightly positively related to sense of injustice ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ) and negatively with satisfaction with the family role ( $r = -.15, p < .01$ ). The results are consistent with the previous studies' results which showed that low as well as high family SES promotes parentification (Lackie, 1983; Burton, 2007; Hooper et al., 2011a). Last but not least, the subscales referring to emotional and instrumental parentification were moderately positively correlated (effect sizes from  $r = .26, p < .01$  to  $r = .44, p < .01$ ). Those results also support the validity of KPdM as they are consistent with the accumu-

lated literature showing that children may serve in a variety of roles within the family, with both types of parentification (i.e., emotional and instrumental) occurring simultaneously (cf. Jurkovic, 1997; Kerig, 2005), as well as provide care to all members of the family (Hooper, 2009; Hooper et al., 2011b).

## DISCUSSION

The presented Parentification Questionnaire for Youth (KPdM) is available in two versions. The first one is intended for only children and consists of 17 items based on 4 factors: emotional parentification directed at parents, instrumental parentification directed at parents, sense of injustice and satisfaction

*Parentification  
Questionnaire  
for Youth*

Table 5  
*Reliability of KPdM subscales (version for only children)*

Variable	Number of items	CR
Emotional parentification towards parents	4	0.7
Instrumental parentification towards parents	4	0.7
Sense of injustice	5	0.8
Satisfaction with the role	4	0.8

Table 6  
*Reliability of KPdM subscales (version for adolescents with siblings)*

Variable	Number of items	CR
Emotional parentification towards parents	4	0.7
Instrumental parentification towards parents	4	0.7
Sense of injustice	5	0.8
Satisfaction with the role	4	0.8
Emotional parentification towards siblings	5	0.8
Instrumental parentification towards siblings	4	0.7

Table 7  
*Correlations between KPdM subscales, family SES and parental conflict*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Instrumental parentification towards parents								
2. Emotional parentification towards parents	.26**							
3. Sense of injustice	-.19**	.13*						
4. Satisfaction with the family role	.41**	.08	-.57**					
5. Instrumental parentification towards siblings	.44**	.30**	.04	.30**				
6. Emotional parentification towards siblings	.29**	.36**	.13	.24**	.63**			
7. Family SES	-.12	-.08	-.15*	.19**	.01	.00		
8. Parental conflict	-.09	-.02	.36**	-.38**	.00	-.06	-.12	

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

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with the role played in the family system. The version for individuals with siblings is expanded with 9 items based on two additional factors: emotional parentification towards siblings and instrumental parentification towards siblings.

A strength of the presented questionnaire is its high usability. Poland lacks research that would allow researchers to determine the severity of the problem of parentification in the population. Due to the unavailability of standardised questionnaire methods, Polish research in the area of parentification has been based, for example, on case studies, qualitative methods, experimental versions of questionnaires or interviews (e.g. Schier, 2010; Błażek, 2016; Chojnacka, 2018; Jarzębińska & Chojnacka, 2018).

This questionnaire contributes to the development of diagnostic methods in Poland. KPdM will facilitate a broader diagnosis of the phenomenon of parentification in Poland. It is a short, easy-to-use scale that can be a useful tool for psychologists and psychotherapists working with young people, especially those growing up in families experiencing stress due to divorce, economic migration of parents, disease of parents, limited parental competence and foster care placements. It will help assess the intensity of children's emotional burden associated with the reversal of roles and responsibilities they feel towards parents and siblings. Currently, researchers also draw attention to the need to study the phenomenon of parentification outside the United States and to look at it from a global perspective (Hooper, 2014). The scientific value of the Parentification Questionnaire for Youth will allow researchers to conduct intercultural research 1) in the scope of defining common mechanisms, independent of the environment in which children are brought up, reflecting the dependence of the welfare of children and youth on the situation in the family related to the reversal of roles, and 2) allowing researchers to highlight the specific character of the parentification process in Polish society, so that it will be possible to design preventive and therapeutic programmes.

## CONCLUSIONS

The presented questionnaire is a reliable and valid tool allowing one to measure the intensity of parentification experienced by young people aged 12 to 18. The questionnaire draws attention to the multi-dimensional character of the phenomenon of parentification, focusing on the type of roles and tasks performed by a teenager (i.e. emotional and instrumental parentification), the level of a sense of injustice and satisfaction with the role played in the family system. Additionally, the test allows us to focus on the recipient of the care provided by the child (parents or siblings) while maintaining a structure that allows

research to be conducted with both only children and persons with siblings and facilitates comparison between them.

The questionnaire can be of use for research purposes and for diagnosing the situation of families, children's relations with parents and siblings. The team's further work will focus on the development of standards for the questionnaire.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by a Grant for young scientists and participants of doctoral studies at the University of Gdansk Faculty of Social Sciences for 2018 (538-7400-B185-18).

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## **Publikacja 3**

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## Parentification and coping in polish adolescents

### Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore the relationships between the level of parentification characteristics and coping strategies in the group of Polish teenage girls and boys. The results indicated that girls are more likely to experience emotional parentification whereas boys tend to experience instrumental parentification. In addition, both groups seemed to be reluctant to taking care for siblings. The more consistent with the conservative gender stereotype their roles and tasks were, the easier they were to cope. The obtained results indicate that when working with adolescents who experience parentification it is worth taking into account the fact that due to their gender, young people may apply different coping strategies and perform other duties in their families. However, it should be taken into account that these relationships can be shaped, for instance, through cultural differences and the parental traits such as their attitudes and views.

**Keywords:** parentification, coping strategies, adolescence, gender role, conservatism

Parentification is a relatively common and increasingly understood phenomenon that affects many children and adolescents (see Hooper, 2011; Mayseless, Bartholomew, Henderson, Trinke, 2004). Among various circumstances related to the functioning of the family, as risk factors for the emergence of a situation in which children take over the roles and tasks of adult family members, parent's disease is mentioned (Barnett, Parker, 1998, Knutsson-Medin, Edlund, Ramklint, 2007; Schier, 2014), as well as addiction to psychoactive substances by the parent (Chase, Deming, Wells, 1998; Grzegorzewska, 2016), divorce of parents (Jurkovic, Thirkield, Morrell, 2001; Peris, Emery, 2005; Young, Ehrenberg, 2007) and family migration (Jurkovic et al., 2004; Hooper, 2011; Oznobishin, Kurman, 2009). There are

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many studies in which the functioning of children and adolescents in families affected by one of the stressors mentioned above is analyzed, or retrospective studies that assess whether, how, and to what extent parentification experience in childhood affects taking roles in adulthood and the quality and satisfaction with their realization (Borchet, Rostowska, 2016). It is worth noting, however, that in many families where none of the four risk factors most commonly identified with parentification exist, children may also be burdened with adult duties. Then, when the educational and caretaking abilities and their parental competences are insufficient, the basic and emotional-social needs of children are neglected. In such situation, children or one of them may be burdened with duties that interfere with the tasks appropriate for the development phase in which they are – for example, take care of younger siblings in connection with parents' preoccupation with their professional work, comfort the parent and become his ally or coalition partner when he remains in conflict with his spouse (Błazek, 2016). Probably parentification in such situations is more often of a short-term nature, i.e. one that is assessed as less destructive for a child than a long-term commitment to perform tasks exceeding development opportunities (Schier, 2014). However, family circumstances still cause the child to devote his or her needs to another family member, which, according to the definition proposed by Chase (1999), means that it experiences parentification that promotes emotional and physical neglect (Williams, 2010) and is undoubtedly a source of stress for the child. It is worth then asking the question about how children evaluate the situation in their family in terms of hierarchy and roles performed by individual members and how they deal with parentification, regardless of the type of stressor that is the basis. In the current analyzes on the phenomenon in question, there is also a lack of research aimed at determining which strategies to cope with stress are used by children and younglings burdened with caring for other family members.

## ■ Parentification – construct and context

One of the first expressions that appeared in psychological literature, the meaning of which is close to the meaning of what parentification is, is the concept of '*parentified child*', proposed by Minuchin and colleagues (1967). This concept defines the situation of a child who is delegated by the mother to take care of siblings, although the influence of the "parentified child" on the socialization of brothers and sisters was mainly emphasized, the possibility of

neglecting one's needs by the person acting as an adult family member was also mentioned. Boszormeny-Nagy and Spark (1973) defined '*parentification*' as a disruption of relationships in the family, reversing the roles of parent and child. They distinguished short-term parentification, appearing to maintain balance in the family in a crisis and disappearing after the difficult situation and long-term parentification, which can be used to compensate for unmet needs in adulthood, and the child chosen for this role often has many skills that support such choice. The definition proposed by Chase (1999), in which she emphasizes that the reversal of roles may be expressed by the parents' attention to the child's functional or emotional dimension, drew attention to the two dimensions of parentification – instrumental and emotional. Each of the dimensions causes that the child to be involved in the appropriate stage of development of the task in a limited way, however emotional parentification is assessed as more destructive due to the fact that caring for a parent experiencing stress can be an emotional burden, stressful and predisposing to the appearance of dysfunctions in adulthood (Bying-Hall, 2008). It should be noted, however, that those two types of parentification were firstly distinguished by Minuchin (1967) and they are not mutually exclusive. Children may play many different roles in the family simultaneously, so that both types of parentification (emotional and instrumental) can occur together (see Schier, 2010).

The Chase (1999) concept, according to which the parentification experience can be divided into two types, depending on what role the child plays in his family, was developed and introduced as a research tool for Jurkovic and colleagues (Jurkovic et al., 1991; Jurkovic, Thirkield, 1999). Instrumental parentification means involvement in functional tasks whose aim is to care for the physical and living needs of the family members. The patterns of this parentification dimension include shopping, cooking meals, making money to support the family, or managing its finances. In large families, a child who takes on such duties may help reduce tension in the family system by relieving stress experienced by parents, e.g. in connection with the illness of one of them (Minuchin, 1976). It is emphasized, however, that in a situation where a child does not experience outside support or is not recognized and called it to be adult duties, then there are negative consequences for the child, including an internalized emotional distress (Earley, Cushway, 2002). In the case of emotional parentification, the child is involved in satisfying the emotional and social needs of family members, i.e. he becomes a trustee, he alleviates conflicts and provides psychological comfort to parents or siblings (Jurkovic et al., 1991). Emotional parentification is often more subtle than instrumental

and is not noticeable by the environment, that causes the child to become a destructive experience – the child does not receive support and suppresses its own needs to support other family members (Jurkovic, 1997; Hooper, 2007). In the Hooper and Wallace studies (2010), emotional parentification remained in relation to symptoms of depression and anxiety, while in the case of instrumentation parentification, no co-occurrence was recorded. The obtained results of the study are a sign of long-term stress being more strongly experienced by children caring for the emotional atmosphere in the family than children who performed more specific work. Therefore, they can point to a different mechanism related to experiencing stress, as well as coping with the burden of duties towards other family members in the case of both dimensions of parentification.

In the process of socialization, the attitudes of adults towards girls cause them to organize their behaviors, goals and individual predispositions to a greater extent in direction to the community members, towards strengthening communality expressed by taking over responsibility for others and taking care of family members (Larsen, Krumov, 2013). However, in only few parentification studies, gender differences in the intensity of the phenomenon have been debated, and in those studies that exist it is only allowed to be concluded that the results obtained are not consistent. In studies in which students participated, no gender differences in parentification were found (Castro et al., 2004; Jurkovic, Thirkield, Morrell, 2001; Hooper, DeCoster, White, & Voltz, 2011), while other researchers (Bying-Hall, 2008; Goglia, Jurkovic, Burt, Burge-Callaway, 1992) showed that young women reported that they perform more care and duties towards other family members than young men. Researchers of the parentification phenomenon at the same time pay attention to the possibility of underestimation in the case of boys and men who may be reluctant to admit that they carry out tasks that are stereotypically considered as 'unmanly' (East, 2010, Jurkovic, 1997; Chase, 1999; Schier, 2014). Commitment to household duties depending on gender, as well as the level of stress associated with it and strategies to cope with the burden may therefore depend on the type of tasks that children perform for the family (McMahon, Luthar, 2007), and thus empirically from the parentification dimension and the content of statements, to which the respondents refer.

The need to take into account the context of parentification (duration, dimension, type of tasks) in analyzing differences in the severity of its consequences is emphasized in today's research on parentification (Hooper, 2007). It may be assumed that the earlier a child suffered disruption in the family hierarchy, the longer it lasted, and the more often the child performed

inadequate tasks, the greater could be the feeling of injustice and the greater the severity of the stress. The emergence of obligations towards the family at a later age, short-term burden and less frequently tasks coherent with cultural norms, also concerning the roles of women and men, could have helped the perception of the situation as less stressful and more just by the child (Baltes, Reese, Lipsitt, 1980; Hooper, 2007; Hooper, 2011; Schier, 2014; Shifren, Kachorek, 2003).

## ■ Parentification and stress

In many studies the consequences of parentification were analyzed, indicating difficulties in the functioning of a child acting as a caretaker in the family and also a relationship with symptoms of psychopathology appearing in later developmental periods (Hooper, DeCoster et al., 2011). According to existing research results, parentification is associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety, decline in life satisfaction, chemical dependence, worse social functioning and disrupted identity development (Hooper, Wallace, 2010; Peris et al., 2008; Stein et al., 1999). Although most researchers focus on difficulties in functioning experienced by people who are 'parentified' (see Earely, Cushway, 2002), it is also apparent an increase in analyzes about the circumstances of parentification, which may be conducive to the execution and development of individual resources that increase the adaptability of the individual (see Hooper 2007).

In the Transaction Model of Stress by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress results from the imbalance between the individual's resources and the challenges that stand before it and the process of dealing with it contains two stages – 1) primary appraisal, which involves estimating the significance of an event for a person as potentially threatening, 2) secondary appraisal, which refers to the emotions associated with the event and reassessment of the threat in the context of the resolution resources to which the individual is turning its attention. In research on the functioning of the person caring for others, in which the concept of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) was used as the theoretical framework, three factors determining adaptation to the role of caregiver were distinguished: cognitive appraisal, resolution resources and strategies for coping with stress (Mackay, Pakenham, 2012; Pakenham, Chiu, Bursnall, Cannon, 2007). Studies in which young adults whose parents suffered from illnesses or were disabled participated turned out that the assessment of the caretaker's tasks as highly stressful was associated with

a higher level of distress and a lower sense of life satisfaction (Pakenham et al., 2007). Considering that caring is a central component of the parentification process, it can be assumed that the cognitive assessment of one's role in the family, i.e. 'sense of injustice', 'satisfaction with the role taking' will be important for the child's functioning, including resource mobilization and resolution strategies.

The term 'perceived fairness' means that the situation in the family and the child's caring behavior are assessed by them as insufficiently recognized, awarded and unrequited (Jurkovic, Thirkield, 1999, Jurkovic et al., 2001). Assessment of one's 'sense of injustice' is therefore significant not only for the child's functioning in the family, but also in other contexts outside of it (school, peer group). It is a concept close to the 'secondary assessment' (Lazarus, Folkman, 1984), that is, the child's assessment of his abilities, competences, experienced support and other resources that help to restore the balance between him and the environment. Parentification also causes other types of stress related to neglecting school duties, isolation from peers, physical fatigue and mental overload (Chase, 1989; Jurkovic, 1997; Chandra, Martin, 2010). 'Perceived fairness' mediated the parentification relationship with school achievements and the difficulties of behaving found on children who acted as a guardian towards other family members. The more they were burdened with household duties and family members, the better they scored and caused less problems in the classroom with their behavior when they perceived the situation as just (Jurkovic et al., 2005). Similar results were obtained by Kuperminic and colleagues (Kuperminic, Jurkovic, & Casey, 2009) in a group of immigrants – a high level of parentification allowed to predict a high level of control of their own behavior, including impulsive behavior when family relations were assessed by the child acting as a caretaker. It can therefore be assumed that children whose family role was appreciated and / or assessed positively in the context of family relationships were less affected by stress and were able to implement remedial measures to meet family responsibilities.

In the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus, Folkman, 1984), the assessment of the situation is the starting point for change, which is referred to as coping with stress (Juczyński, Ogińska-Bulik, 2009). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as a flexible time-sensitive cognitive and behavioral effort to overcome the challenges that exceed the individual's resources. The authors emphasize the subjectivity of the experience of the difficulty of the situation and the assessment of the effort undertaken to deal with it. Control over the situation and effective adaptation to it are

provided by task-based resolution strategies such as: defining the problem, generating solutions, developing the skills needed to solve the problem and reassessing the situation. Emotional remedial strategies, including distancing oneself from the problem, seeking emotional support, selective attention, using alcohol and outbursts of anger, can provide emotional control related to the stressor; however they more often cause difficulties in adaptation (Kneebone, Martin, 2003; Juczyński, Ogińska-Bulik, 2009). Endler and Parker (1990), referring to the concepts of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), proposed the distinction of three styles of coping with stress, adding to the remedial and emotional coping strategies a third style of coping – focus on avoidance. It serves primarily to reduce the tension associated with the stressor and may have an adaptive function in the case of difficult situations that last for a short time. The destructive consequences of parentification are described more often in the case of long-term stress related to the burden, and therefore it can be predicted that the use of avoidance strategies in a reversal of roles understood as a model of family relations will have a rather maladaptive function.

In one of the studies, parentification was included as one of the task-oriented ways of coping with stress. Thastum and colleagues (2008) examined children whose parents had oncological problems and checked how children learned about the parent's illness, how they perceived his/her mental state and how they dealt with the problem that an adult in the family experienced. Five coping methods present on the children were identified – helping others, parentification, distracting attention, focusing on the problem, wishful thinking. As part of parentification as a way of dealing with a difficult situation, the children suppressed their needs in order to support the parent and carry out for the family tasks that the adults could not undertake due to the illness. Parentification proved to be an adaptive strategy when the child experienced emotional support from other sources.

There are studies that indicate the relationship of family role reversal experienced during childhood with the use of psychoactive substances (marijuana, alcohol) during adolescence (Stein et al., 1999). Parentification towards parent and siblings is also associated with an increase in the risky use of alcohol and drugs during adulthood (Bekir, McLellan, Childress, Gariti, 1993; Hooper, Doehler, Wallace, Hannah, 2011). The abuse of psychoactive substances can be understood as a way to deal with unmet needs in childhood related to their parents (Hooper, 2007), to reduce stress related to the need to look after other family members (Stein et al., 1999), and furthermore with the function of regulating emotions.

## ■ Research problem

The aim of the research presented in the report is to determine the relationship between the intensity of emotional and instrumental parentification with strategies for coping with stress in an adolescent group. The relationship with the psychological distress of each of the variables – parentification and coping seems to be proven, hence the insufficient number of studies that would directly analyze their coexistence. Adolescents undoubtedly perceive caring as a stressful and challenging task (see Trondsen, 2012; van Loon et al., 2017). When the situation in the family contributes to the long-term realization of duties related to adult family members or when the reversal of roles is a pattern of relationships passed down from generation to generation, young people may present different strategies to deal with difficulties and emotional burden. Parentification is then understood not only as a stressor, but also as a way of dealing with stress caused by insufficient parental competences (Thastum et al., 2008, Titzmann, 2012).

According to the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus, Folkman, 1984), in adapting to taking over adult responsibilities by launching remedial resources, an important role will be played by assessing the situation as fair (in the context of family relationships) or as one that can bring benefits to children in the form of e.g. acquisition of new skills and competence development. ‘Sense of justice’ and ‘satisfaction with the role taking’ can therefore mediate parentification relations with remedial strategies. Social support, which is experienced by a child who plays the role of an adult in the family, is one of the strategies focused on emotions, and in the light of current research results is a protective factor for the negative consequences of parentification (Thastum et al., 2008). The risky use of alcohol, as reported above, may be a way to regulate emotions in the face of stress, which in this case is parentification, but also focuses on avoiding the problem, making it difficult to launch resource for its resolution. In connection with the inconsistent current research on gender differences in the extent of parentification, the aim of the analyzes was also to determine whether girls and boys differ in strategies for coping with the reversal of roles in the family.

Therefore, two research questions were stated:

1. Do boys and girls differ in the extent of parentification characteristics?
2. What coping strategies are related to the particular parentification characteristics in the group of boys and girls?

## ■ Methodology

### ■ Participants and procedure

The research study received the approval of the *Komisja Etyki ds. Projektów Badawczych przy Instytucie Psychologii Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego* (numer 06/2017). The research was carried out in 2017 in Polish junior high schools in the Tri-City. There were 169 adolescents aged 12 to 17 who participated in the study ( $M = 14.57$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). Girls constituted 62.1% of the sample, whereas boys – 37.3%. One person did not provide information about gender (0.6%). Only adolescents with siblings were included in the studied group in order to ensure sample homogeneity. The students usually had one brother or sister ( $Me = 1$ ,  $M = 1.56$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ). The students' declared average grade at the end of the last school year was  $M = 4.5$  ( $SD = 0.78$ ,  $min = 2.30$ ,  $max = 5.95$ ). When assessing the socio-economic status on the Likert scale from 1 to 10, the students described the wealth of their families at the level of  $M = 6.55$  ( $SD = 1.29$ ). Most of the teenagers surveyed came from full families (81.7%). The 8.9% of the group was brought up in reconstructed families, while 7.7% were children of the single parents.

### ■ Measurement tools

The Polish adaptation of *Mini-Cope* (Juczyński, Ogińska-Bulik, 2009) was used to measure **coping strategies**. The test consists of 28 statements included in 14 strategies, which in turn form the main 7 factors (active coping, helplessness, searching for support, avoidance, turn towards religion, acceptance and sense of humour). Although this test was created as a tool for adult research (Juczyński, Ogińska-Bulik, 2009), it has been successfully applied in studies focusing on adolescents in Poland (ie. Mataczyńska, 2013) as well as worldwide (ie. Stratta et al., 2014).

The measure of the intensity of **parentification characteristics** was the *Parentification Questionnaire for Youth* (Borchet, Lewandowska-Walter, Połomski, Peplińska, Rostowska, in preparation). Its full version is addressed to adolescents with siblings, and then the test distinguishes 6 factors: emotional parentification focused on parents, instrumentation parentification focused on parents, emotional parentification focused on siblings, instrumental parentification focused on siblings, sense of injustice and, satisfaction with the role taking. The test is also adequate for the only children and then contains

4 factors. The theoretical basis for the test are the parentification models proposed by Hooper (2009, 2011) and Jurkovic (1997, 1998). The integration of these theoretical approaches allows the test not only to state the child's care recipient (parent / siblings), the type of tasks the child performs performs (instrumental / emotional), but also enables assessing the severity of both destructive (ie. sense of injustice) and potentially positive aspects of parentification (ie. satisfaction with the role taking in the family). The test is the first parentification measurement tool designed for adolescents in Poland. The results of analyzes indicate the accuracy and reliability of the tool. Currently, the research team is preparing the manuscript for publication.

The analyses of reliability using Cronbach's alpha were conducted (Table 1). Nearly all of the obtained results were satisfying and enabled to interpret the results derived from the scale.

**Table 1.** Reliability of the used measures

<b>Subscale</b>	<b><math>\alpha</math>- Cronbach</b>	<b>Number of items</b>
emotional parentification focused on parents	0.64	4
instrumental parentification focused on parents	0.62	4
emotional parentification focused on siblings	0.80	5
instrumental parentification focused on siblings	0.76	4
sense of injustice	0.78	5
satisfaction with the role taking	0.78	5
active coping	0.66	6
helplessness	0.67	6
searching for support	0.87	4
avoidance	0.46	6
turn towards religion	0.80	2
acceptance	0.48	2
sense of humour	0.71	2

## ■ Results

In order to verify the first research question, the t-tests for independent group differences were performed. Statistically significant differences were found in instrumental parentification focused on parents: boys take more instrumental care over their parents than girls do, emotional parentification focused in siblings: girls take more emotional care for their siblings than boys do and satisfaction with the role taking: boys declare greater satisfaction with the role they play in their families than girls do.

Moreover, the result concerning the difference between boys and girls in the area of emotional parentification focused on parents was in the area of statistical trend. Girls tend to take more emotional care over their parents than boys do. The results of the analyzes are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The differences in parentification characteristics between boys and girls (N = 169)

Measures	Girls		Boys		t	df	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
emotional parentification focused on parents	2,94	0,86	2,73	0,76	1,562	166	0,120
instrumental parentification focused on parents	1,71	0,58	1,93	0,76	-2,003	103,684	0,048
emotional parentification focused on siblings	2,74	0,96	2,29	0,88	3,060	166	0,003
instrumental parentification focused on siblings	2,30	0,91	2,26	0,94	0,293	166	0,770
sense of injustice	2,12	0,99	1,99	0,76	0,966	156,298	0,335
satisfaction with the role taking	3,35	1,00	3,63	0,80	-2,007	152,86	0,046

Note. *M* – mean; *SD* – standard deviation; *N* – number of participants

Due to the differences in parentification characteristics among girls and boys, in the further analyzes, the correlations between parentification characteristics and coping strategies have been carried out separately in the group of girls and boys.

**Table 3.** The relations between the parentification characteristics and the coping strategies in the group of girls (N = 105)

	emotional parentification focused on parents	instrumental parentification focused on parents	sense of injustice	satisfaction with the role taking	emotional parentification focused on siblings	instrumental parentification focused on siblings
active coping	0,16 †	0,04	-0,14	<b>0,28**</b>	0,10	0,04
helplessness	-0,06	<b>0,25*</b>	<b>0,41**</b>	<b>-0,38**</b>	-0,02	0,14
searching for support	<b>0,26**</b>	-0,10	<b>-0,36**</b>	<b>0,47**</b>	0,17 †	0,03
avoidance	0,07	0,12	<b>0,24*</b>	-0,09	0,13	<b>0,32**</b>
turn towards religion	0,01	0	-0,14	0,06	0,06	0,06
acceptance	-0,03	0,04	0,05	-0,0	<b>-0,22*</b>	-0,02
sense of humour	-0,06	0,13	0,13	<b>-0,20*</b>	-0,08	0,02

Note. †  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The results of the analyzes are presented in Tables 3 and 4. It appeared that the more emotional care girls gave to their parents, the more support they were searching for and had the tendency to active coping. In turn, giving parents instrumental help was associated with a sense of helplessness in girls. It was also found that the more emotional care girls gave to their siblings, the less they accepted their situation and showed a tendency to seek for support. At the same time, the more girls dealt with their siblings instrumentally, the more they manifested their avoidance behaviors. Additionally, the more girls feel that their roles and tasks in their family are unfair, the more helpless they are, they perform avoidance behaviors and seek less support. However, the more satisfied with their role in the family they were, the more actively they coped, sought for more support, felt less helpless and, interestingly, were less likely to cope with stress referring to a sense of humor (Table 4).

In the boys group, the more emotional care they took over their parents, the more support they were looking for and the more frequently performed avoidance behaviors. On the other hand, while providing instrumental help to parents, the boys were coping very actively. Taking emotional care over siblings was associated with more frequent active coping, seeking support,

avoidance behaviors and turning to religion by boys. The more the boys took care of their siblings instrumentally, the more avoidance behaviors they used. The sense of injustice felt by boys was strongly associated with helplessness. In turn, satisfaction with the role played in the family was associated with active coping, seeking support and negatively with helplessness.

**Table 4.** The relations between the parentification characteristics and the coping strategies in the group of boys (N = 63)

	emotional parentification focused on parents	instrumental parentification focused on parents	sense of injustice	satisfaction with the role taking	emotional parentification focused on siblings	instrumental parentification focused on siblings
active coping	0,15	<b>0,37**</b>	-0,07	<b>0,32*</b>	<b>0,30*</b>	0,14
helplessness	0,11	-0,02	<b>0,52**</b>	<b>-0,36**</b>	0,05	0,06
searching for support	<b>0,36**</b>	0,20	-0,14	<b>0,30*</b>	<b>0,38**</b>	0,15
avoidance	<b>0,29*</b>	0,01	0,24	-0,05	<b>0,31*</b>	<b>0,26*</b>
turn towards religion	-0,03	0,10	0,11	0,08	<b>0,28*</b>	0,08
acceptance	0,06	0,14	-0,05	0,17	0,11	0,12
sense of humour	0,06	<b>0,26*</b>	0,12	-0,03	-0,02	-0,09

Note. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

In the boys group, the more emotional care they took over their parents, the more support they were looking for and the more frequently performed avoidance behaviors. On the other hand, while providing instrumental help to parents, the boys were coping very actively. Taking emotional care over siblings was associated with more frequent active coping, seeking support, avoidance behaviors and turning to religion by boys. The more the boys took care of their siblings instrumentally, the more avoidance behaviors they used. The sense of injustice felt by boys was strongly associated with helplessness. In turn, satisfaction with the role played in the family was associated with active coping, seeking support and negatively with helplessness.

## ■ Discussion

Parentification is a stressor resulting from inadequate parenting competences, in the face of which, in order to maintain balance in the system, a person who takes over the responsibilities of adults is their child. From the research conducted to date, little is devoted to the influence of parentification on emotional development during childhood and adolescence, including coping with stress, which belongs to the area of skills related to emotional regulation (Parke et al., 1992). Emotional competences are important for the child's psychosocial development and mental (Saarni, 1999, Southam-Gerow, Kendall, 2002) and physical health (Salovey, Rothman, Detweiler, Stewart, 2000). They develop in the interpersonal context (Saarni, 1999), and especially in the parent-child relationship (Malatesta, Haviland, 1982, Parke, 1992), which in the case of parentification does not develop properly. It can be said that a parentified child experiences a double dose of stress – firstly, because of a stressor who, when affecting the family, weakened parental care and education, and secondly because it undertakes tasks that usually exceed its developmental abilities and individual predispositions to help a parent. Therefore, the child is not able to learn how to properly regulate his or her emotions in the family, because parents are not a sufficient role model, and they do not support the child in dealing with stressful situations.

Three main conclusions were made on the basis of the presented analyzes. First of all, boys and girls turned out to experience a different type of parentification. Girls experience a greater intensity of emotional parentification. They took more emotional care over their siblings than boys did, with a simultaneous tendency to emotionally support parents more often. On the other hand, boys are more likely to experience instrumental parentification than girls. They physically care for their parents and help them by performing specific, visible work. The obtained result is consistent with reports of predecessors (Larsen, Krumov, 2013), but it does not mean that there was no underestimation of the level of emotional parentification in boys due to their reluctance to admit to behaviors stereotypically assigned to women (East, 2010). Due to this problem, in future research it is recommended to include variables related to gender stereotypes (see Wojciszke, 2010) to check whether this is a variable explaining the level of emotional parentification, especially in boys. The second important conclusion is that boys are more satisfied with the roles they play in their families than girls are. Considering the fact that they experience rather instrumental parentification, which is assessed as

less destructive than emotional parentification experienced by girls, this result is consistent with reports of predecessors (Byng-Hall, 2008). Thirdly, the intensity of parentification characteristics remained in relation to coping strategies for both girls and boys. The more consistent with the conservative gender stereotype their roles and tasks were, the easier it was to cope with them. The girls were more task-oriented while providing emotional support of parents than the boys. Taking emotional care for parents was associated with active coping and seeking support in girls, while boys evoked avoidance behavior and looked for support. Instrumental care for parents aroused helplessness in girls, whereas in boys it was associated with active coping.

Interestingly, both boys and girls apply avoidance coping strategies in the face of instrumental care for siblings. In turn, taking care of siblings emotionally is a situation unacceptable to girls and tends them to seek support. In the situation of emotional care for siblings, boys also seek support from other people, but at the same time they apply more diverse strategies than girls: they try to actively cope, seek support in religion and exhibit avoidance behavior. The situation when one sibling is taking care for another is difficult for both the child who provides the care and the child who receives it. Stress experienced individually by each parent or the crisis affecting the whole family (eg. divorce, parental conflict) favors the emergence of differences in the treatment of children, what is described as *parental differential treatment* (Richmond, Stocker, Rienks, 2005). Children notice these differences, which increases the level of conflict between them (Jenkins, Dunn, O'Connor, Rasbash, Behnke, 2005) and that may explain the reluctance while providing/receiving help within the siblings' subsystem. Moreover, while experiencing family crisis, the younger children underestimated the caring provided by their older siblings and described them as 'overprotection' (Noller, Conway, Blakeley-Smith, 2008; Błażek, Lewandowska-Walter, 2017).

Additionally, the sense of injustice associated with the role the child performed in the family in both groups was associated with feeling helplessness. Girls additionally tried to use avoidance behaviors and look for support, which the boys did not do. The more satisfied with their role in the family boys and girls were, the more often they use the same particular coping strategies (active coping, seeking for support and less helplessness they felt). It is interesting to note that the girls who were the most satisfied with their role in the family are also the least ones likely to use strategies based on a sense of humour. We believe that this may be a manifestation of their 'pseudomaturity' (Lackie, 1983) or 'false maturity' (Franke, 1983). In conclusion, girls tend to report the experience of emotional parentification more often than boys,

and boys reported the experience of instrumental parentification more often than girls. However, even though boys experience a type of parentification which is described as less destructive, while having the sense of injustice they use fewer coping strategies to protect themselves than girls do, which makes them in need of adult intervention, while remaining helpless. In addition, taking care for siblings seems to build more reluctance than caring for parents in both groups.

The results of the obtained research indicate that when working with teenagers who experience parentification it is worth taking into account the fact that due to the gender, young people apply different coping strategies and perform other duties in their families. It should be strongly emphasized that the obtained results may be the effect of cultural norms regarding the duties assigned to individual family members (cf., Miluska, 2014). For this reason, it would be worth replicating this research in other cultures. Parental traits, such as their parental attitudes and the level of gender role conservatism (see Garbula, 2009) may also be important. However, the study was not free of limitations. The first one is that the conclusions were formulated on the basis of self-report questionnaires. However, these studies were exploratory and indicated directions for further work, during which it would be worth enriching the quantitative analyses with qualitative materials (for instance interviews with children) to confront their results with previous reports. The constellations of siblings is also worth taking into account in the future research.

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## **Publikacja 4**



# The Relations Among Types of Parentification, School Achievement, and Quality of Life in Early Adolescence: An Exploratory Study

## OPEN ACCESS

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### Specialty section:

This article was submitted to  
Educational Psychology,  
a section of the journal  
Frontiers in Psychology

Received: 29 November 2020

Accepted: 14 January 2021

Published: 29 March 2021

### Citation:

Borchet J, Lewandowska-Walter A,  
Polomski P, Peplirska A and  
Hooper LM (2021) The Relations  
Among Types of Parentification,  
School Achievement, and Quality of  
Life in Early Adolescence: An  
Exploratory Study.  
Front. Psychol. 12:635171.  
doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.635171

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Children who experience parentification may have trouble performing developmental tasks due to being overwhelmed by their family caregiving roles and responsibilities. Past studies have found that parentification is negatively associated with academic achievement. However, most of these studies are limited in that they are retrospective and examine the association but not the mechanisms shaping them. The aim of the study was to explore to what extent diverse types of parentification relate to academic achievement and to what extent these relations are mediated by self-reported quality of life among adolescents. The study sample was composed of Polish early adolescents ( $N = 191$ ; age:  $M = 14.61$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ ). Types of parentification were measured with the Parentification Questionnaire for Youth, and quality of life was assessed with KidScreen27. School achievement was measured based on mean semester grade. We explored the associations among study variables and performed six mediation models in the planned analyses. Overall, bivariate relations were significant in a theoretically expected way, although the effect sizes for these associations were rather small. In the mediation analyses, the results showed that four of the six models were not significant. Different from previous studies, instrumental parentification was positively related to school achievement. Additionally, this positive association was mediated by adolescents' general quality of life. Taken together, the findings were similar and different from the empirical literature base on types of parentification and select outcomes.

**Keywords:** school achievement, school grades, instrumental parentification, current parentification, quality of life, adolescence

## INTRODUCTION

The term parentification describes the family structure when a child is placed in a parental role toward the parent(s) (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1973; Haxhe, 2016). Carrying out parental duties by children is often highly challenging in particular when the level of family stress is high. Children also may serve other adult-like roles such as raising siblings, caring for other family members, and performing roles and tasks at a level that often exceeds the child's age, abilities, and resources (Hooper et al., 2011a). The phenomenon of parentification is most

often considered in the context of family development and the consequences of burdening children with age-inappropriate tasks implicated in their current and later development (Jurkovic, 1997; Kerig, 2005). On the other hand, there is a body of research that suggests that when a child is parentified, the resulting caregiving responsibilities may lead to an increase in maturity and the positive competences (Hooper, 2007; Kuperminc et al., 2013; Chee et al., 2014). The competence at cost template suggests the complexity of the process of parentification and the related outcomes can have both a positive and a negative impact on children's development (Hetherington, 1999).

Thus, parentification in the family may be related to the neglect of the child's individual and relational and bonding needs with the parent (Wasilewska and Kuleta, 2014) and serve as a benefit to the child or adolescent in various areas of functioning, including school achievement (Chase et al., 1998). Several clinical and theoretical models describe these dichotomous outcomes (see Hooper, 2017). According to some clinical models, the burden on the child is that the parent ceases to act as a regulator of the family system and the child's instrumental and emotional life. Through the abdication of the parent role, children are forced to try to manage, regulate, and stabilize the family system, robbing the children of the ability to focus on and use their resources for their development.

Parentification has also been explained through the prism of resiliency (Hooper et al., 2008; Macfie et al., 2015). According to the theory of resilience, when some of the family caregiving duties carried out by children do not exceed their developmental capabilities, the process of role reversal may engender the child's growth and positive outcomes. Research and clinical models suggest that the condition for positive outcomes of parentification for many children will, however, be contingent upon the parent's recognition and appreciation for the family caregiving tasks performed (Jurkovic, 1997; Schier, 2014). Also, the positive consequences of parentification may be present in some areas of life and development while coexisting with negative ones (e.g., the adolescent may be mature, socially developed, but have problems managing her or his emotions).

The results of an increasing number of studies also indicate the benefits that can emerge when children engage in some caregiving responsibilities—even parental responsibilities—when these roles and responsibilities are acknowledged, appreciated, and valued by the adults in the family system. These benefits include an increase in relational competences when the child supports the parent emotionally and instrumentally, an increase in individuation and differentiation in immigrant families (Walsh et al., 2006), and psychosocial adaptation (McMahon and Luthar, 2007). These benefits are often differentiated by the type of parentification or caregiving responsibilities. The accumulated research has shown that instrumental parentification may promote a child's competence, self-efficacy, and skills. In one study role reversal, in which adolescents instrumentally supported their parent, it contributed to their growth and self-efficacy (Maysseless et al., 2004).

Parentification is a culture-immersed phenomenon, meaning some of its antecedents, outcomes, perception, and measurement may vary across cultures (e.g., East, 2010; Gilford and Reynolds, 2010;

Kuperminc et al., 2013). Therefore, international studies on parentification are highly needed (Hooper, 2014). The current study focuses on young Polish adolescents and academic achievement. Specifically, we examine how types of parentification are related to academic achievement. In order to understand this relation in the broad context of the adolescent's situation, we examine the extent to which quality of life mediates the association.

Parentification often means that children are placed in the role of serving as a primary caregiver for the family system and its members. This can mean that the children and adolescents engage in various responsibilities and roles toward some (parents) or all of the family members. The tasks of parentified children and adolescents are developmentally inappropriate or excessive to the extent that enables them to perform their own developmental tasks (Hooper et al., 2011a).

Parentification is often differentiated by the type of caregiving activities (Jurkovic, 1997) and to whom the caregiving activities are directed (Hooper, 2009; Hooper et al., 2011b). This distinction helps to categorize the tasks that parentified children perform. Instrumental parentification consists of children performing parent-like household duties and helping care for—and in some cases raise—their siblings (Kościelska, 2007; Schier, 2014). Those may include, for example, managing family finances, earning money for the family, preparing meals, or cleaning. Instrumental parentification of adolescents may not be as easy to notice as it is in the case of younger children. The boundary between what is a fair duty that comes with age and expressive burden may not be that obvious. Therefore, it is important to remember that parentification is not only about the tasks themselves that the adolescents perform, but the fact that it is a stable pattern in their relationships with the parents and it is related to inverted family hierarchy and blurred boundaries between family members (Kerig, 2005). In this view, the housework related to parentification is not only a physical task and a duty, it is also a part of family loyalty (Byng-Hall, 2008; Haxhe, 2016).

Emotional parentification is primarily associated with the children fulfilling the emotional and social needs of their guardians (Byng-Hall, 2002, 2008; Peris et al., 2008; Schier, 2014). With this type of parentification, children can act as confidants, comforters or mediators. Both emotional and instrumental parentification are not exclusive and may coexist on various levels (Schier et al., 2015). Studies indicate that emotional parentification may be more deleterious and destructive than instrumental parentification (McMahon and Luthar, 2007; Tompkins, 2007; Byng-Hall, 2008). Ohntrup et al. (2011) contended emotional parentification is more severe because it is less explicit, overt, or possibly harder to detect than instrumental parentification. Additionally, the correlates and outcomes evidenced for these types of parentification may be different. The theoretical and empirical literature describes that instrumental parentification is not always a burden for the child, and later the adult, if the child's contribution to family life is revealed, temporary, named, and positively assessed by the environment (Jurkovic, 1997; McMahon and Luthar, 2007; Hooper et al., 2008).

Children who are placed at risk for experiencing parentification typically encounter similar family structures and have parents

and siblings diagnosed with physical and mental health disorders (Macfie and Swan, 2009). For example, family structures and parent hardships may include marital conflict (Peris et al., 2008), divorce (Wallerstein, 1985; Byng-Hall, 2008), substance abuse (Pasternak and Schier, 2014; Tedgård et al., 2019), economic hardship (Montalvo et al., 1967; Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1973), economic success (Winton, 2003), and immigrant status (Kuperminc et al., 2013; Toro et al., 2019).

Due to the complexity of the parentification process and the fact that it is embedded in culture, it is not surprising that studies present both a negative and a positive impact on children's development and well-being. Studies show that among the negative consequences of parentification are depression, increased levels of anxiety, propensity for risky behaviors associated with stimulants, as well as eating disorders and personality disorders of the borderline and dissociation type (Cicchetti, 2004; Hooper et al., 2011a; Jankowski et al., 2013; Obsuth et al., 2014). Although there is a lack of research indicating a direct association between current parentification and school achievement, it can be assumed on the basis of the literature that children who present with developmental challenges may have problems with learning. Additionally, it could be that these children may be living in a family context where parentification exists. On the other hand, constructive parentification may help adolescents learn efficient task management and thus facilitate school achievement or shape tendencies for compulsive overworking to fulfill tasks at home and school. Moreover, culture-specific factors may shape the relation between parentification and its bimodal outcomes (e.g., Gilford and Reynolds, 2010; Kuperminc et al., 2013; Burton et al., 2018).

While there are a lack of studies investigating the direct relationship between an adolescent's general quality of life and parentification, there are studies on parentification in association with constructs that are similar or related to the quality of life (e.g., well-being, life satisfaction, and positive and negative affect). Parenting behavior, including parentification, may predict family member's well-being (Burton et al., 2018). Parentification is generally negatively related to well-being, but those relations can be differentiated by the type of parentification. Parent-focused and sibling-focused parentification are negatively related to well-being while perceived benefits of parentification present positive association with satisfaction with life (Hooper et al., 2014). Moreover, negative indicators of emotional well-being were found to be linked to both emotional and instrumental parentification in the sample of Polish 16-year-olds (i.e., anger and depressive mood, no correlation with positive mood; Żarczyńska-Hyla et al., 2019). Including quality of life in studies on parentification can help contextualize the results and investigate bimodal consequences of parentification (see the study on parentification, psychopathology, and well-being; Hooper et al., 2014).

Parentification may have relevance to academic achievement too. Parents may burden their children with meeting their high expectations for academic achievement and success (Winton, 2003; Haxhe, 2016). In this case, parentification is often emotional in its nature, as the child appeases the parent by satisfying her or his unmet need for achievement (Winton, 2003).

Emotional parentification is often more difficult to detect, and similar to other role reversal situations, parentification can have short- and long-term consequences for the development of the child (Chase et al., 1998). Experiencing parentification, for example, caregiving for a parent who is disabled, substance-dependent, or experiencing a medical or emotional crisis is a very difficult situation for children and thus they often feel shame, isolation, and stigma. This may result in "secret keeping" related to parentification and family functioning, which in turn could prevent children from talking to anyone about what is happening in the family. Such conviction leads to the inability to seek help from people other than family members (Tedgård et al., 2019).

Although there is evidence of the association between parentification and outcomes over the course of a child's lifespan, there is a lack of research on the consequences of the adult task load on the functioning of the child in school (see, for review, Macfie et al., 2015). While investigating the consequences of parent-child role reversal on child and adolescent development at its various stages, problems with learning and peer relationships occurred most often at the school age (Macfie et al., 2015). Studies by Baldwin and colleagues (Baldwin et al., 1982) show that an imbalance in parent-child relationships is associated with lower level of academic competence (as measured by teacher's and parent's assessment) among youth. They contend that the imbalance where there is clear dominance of the child in the parent-child relationship is similar to role reversal seen in parentification. Research on adolescents taking care of parents diagnosed with various mental disorders showed that one-fifth of these adolescents present with school-related problems (Dearden and Becker, 2004), and half of them report difficulties with homework (Thomas et al., 2003). Other studies found that the impact of an imbalance in parent-child relationships on grades can also be observed (e.g., an association between poor grades and the length of time children were caregivers for parents; Cree, 2003). The author explains the results of the study, stating that a child caring for a sick parent has no time for other activities, including homework, and does not receive support from the parent in preparing homework.

One of the few studies in which a direct negative association between parentification and academic outcomes was carried out by Chase et al. (1998). They found that fulfilling the parental role by a child may disrupt the course of high school education and later result in lower academic outcomes among college students. The study, however, was limited in that it required emerging adults to recall their parentification experience retrospectively. Additionally, parentification was measured by a single score (i.e., no measure of the types of parentification). On the other hand, a study by Gilford and Reynolds (2010) showed that Black American emerging adults who grew up in single-parent households and with a history of instrumental and emotional parentification were successful in college and demonstrated a positive outlook, strength, and resilience. Many of the interviewed women were able to use the difficulties from their childhood to motivate themselves to complete college and to pass that motivation and inspiration onto their siblings (Gilford and Reynolds, 2010).

In the Polish cultural context, there is one recent study (Żarczyńska-Hyla et al., 2019) that examined whether Polish

adolescents attending different types of schools have different experiences related to the burden of reversing the roles in the family. Results in this study found no differences in emotional and instrumental parentification and study outcomes, although young people attending vocational schools perceived their situation in the family as being more unfair in terms of the burden of tasks and responsibilities of adults as compared to young people attending other types of schools (technical secondary school, high school). The results are difficult to interpret; however, the authors suggest that parentification experienced in the family may be associated with the choice of school by young people. Young people choosing vocational schools, due to their family situation, could receive less support from their parents in school education and choose at the next stage the apprenticeship, with the possibility of starting full-time work at the age of approximately 18 years (vocational schools in Poland are the last stage of education, usually without the possibility of continuing higher education).

School learning is a task that requires an appropriate level of development—not only cognitive—but also emotional and social. School problems may be a symptom presented by the child as a family delegate, pointing toward other difficulties derived from the functioning of the family as a system (Chase et al., 1998). Effective functioning at school requires children to focus on themselves and school tasks. Consistent parental support aids in this learning context and process. Unfortunately, the resources of parentified children are invested in and directed toward meeting the needs of others: family members, parents, and siblings (Chase et al., 1998; Siskowski, 2006). Children affected by parentification may show deficits in various areas of development, to varying degrees of severity, depending on whether they performed instrumental tasks and emotional tasks, support their parents and siblings, or satisfy their need for success. On the other hand, they may present with confidence, resilience, and high-level task management and coping skills. Instead of underachieving at school, parentified children and adolescents may do well at school and experience depression, anxiety, and low well-being. Therefore, the studied relations between parentification characteristics and school achievement have been put into the broad context of adolescent's general quality of life. Thus, the aim of the study was to explore the relation between types of parentification and school achievement and the extent to which quality of life mediates the association.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Procedure

Prior to beginning the study, the approval from the University's IRB was received. The study was conducted during the 2017/2018 school year (September to November). There were two public schools invited to join the study. These schools have participated in a broader research project conducted by the University of Gdańsk and the school's administration and teachers offered their assistance with the recruitment and administration phases of the study. The teachers helped to administer the informed consent forms to students' parents or legal guardians.

Prior to the administration of the survey, adolescents provided their informed assent for the study. After a brief introduction, the students completed paper-and-pencil questionnaires during one of their classes. The study procedures lasted approximately 25–30 min. After the students completed the survey, they were thanked for their participation.

### Participants

The study was performed in two public schools located in two districts of the city of Gdańsk, Poland. There were 191 adolescents who participated in the study. Every class member was invited to join the study but only the students whose parents provided consent and had siblings participated. Girls constituted 55% ( $n = 105$ ) of the sample, boys 44.5% ( $n = 85$ ), and 0.5% ( $n = 1$ ) of the study participants did not provide information on their gender. The participants were aged 12–18 years old, with a median of 14 ( $M = 14.61$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ ). All of the participants had siblings and 90.1% of them lived with both their parents. The participants were diverse based on their socioeconomic background. On a scale from 1 to 10, the mean family socioeconomic status was  $M = 6.6$ ;  $SD = 1.68$ .

### Measures

The study administered two questionnaires (PQY-Parentification Questionnaire for Youth, Borchet et al., 2020a; Polish version of KidScreen-27, Mazur et al., 2008) and a demographic information sheet.

### Demographic Information Sheet

The demographic information sheet asked participants to respond to several questions about their background. We collected information about the participant's gender (considered bivariate: female/male) and age (considered continuously). Information about their families such as socioeconomic status (SES) and family structure was also captured in the demographic sheet. Response options for family SES used a Cantril ladder ranging from 1 (*the poorest families in Poland*) to 10 (*the richest families in Poland*). The participants were also asked about their family structure (i.e., living with both parents, living with mother; living with father, living with a mother and her partner, living with a father and his partner). Students also reported information about their last school year's final mean grade.

### Parentification

Parentification Questionnaire for Youth (PQY; Borchet et al., 2020a) is a measure developed for adolescents that captures the multidimensional nature of parentification. The questionnaire consists of 26 items rated on a 1 (*never true*)- to 5 (*always true*)-point Likert-type scale. The scale consists of four subscales (emotional parentification toward parents, instrumental parentification toward parents, sense of injustice, and satisfaction with the role) and two subscales for adolescents who have siblings (i.e., instrumental parentification toward siblings and emotional parentification toward siblings). Scores are calculated as the mean of the ratings for the subscale items.

The questionnaire does not provide a total score (Borchet et al., 2020a). Reliability for the subscale scores was sound (i.e., Cronbach's  $\alpha$  from 0.70 to 0.80).

### School Achievement

This variable was operationalized as arithmetical mean grade for all the final grades obtained in all the subjects at the end of the former school year (it is reported on their yearly certificate of class completion). Grades that students can get in Poland vary from 1 to 6, with 6 being the best grade possible and 2 is the lowest grade that allows passing a class. In our sample, the mean grade varied from 2 to 6, with a median of 4.52 ( $M = 4.47$ ;  $SD = 0.79$ ). The mean final grades were student self-reported. The current study used mean final grades from the 2016/2017 school year.

### Quality of Life

To assess the student's overall perception of their lives, the Polish adaptation of KidScreen-27 was used (Mazur et al., 2008). It is a health-related quality of life measure that was developed in 13 countries by the KIDSCREEN Research Group (Robitail et al., 2007). The scale consists of 27 items referring rated from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "never" and 5 meaning "always." The KidScreen-27 measures five dimensions of quality of life, which are physical well-being, psychological well-being, parent relationships and autonomy, social support and peers, and school environment. The scale provides a total score that is generated by summing up all item responses (see Berman et al., 2016). The reliability coefficient for the quality of life total score was sound (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.777$ ).

### Data Analytic Procedures

In order to explore the association between types of parentification and school achievement, and the mediating role of the quality of one's own life in this relation, an analysis of direct and indirect effects in SEM models was carried out using the Amos 25 package. Model fit was judged using the comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), chi-square value (CMIN), as well as root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). With respect to the fit indices, GFI and CFI values greater than 0.90 were considered as well-fitted (Konarski, 2010).

RMSEA values lower than or equal to 0.08 indicate acceptable fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Ideally, CMIN would be statistically insignificant, but this value is sensitive to the sample size (Konarski, 2010). Full mediation was recognized consistent with Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria.

## RESULTS

Descriptive results, Pearson correlations between variables, and the reliability of the measures were assessed with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 24. They are presented in **Table 1**.

### Zero-Order Correlation Analysis

The correlation matrix (see **Table 1**) revealed statistically significant associations between school achievement, quality of life ( $r = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and most of the PQY subscales, although the effect sizes of these associations were low. Instrumental parentification toward parents ( $r = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), instrumental parentification toward siblings ( $r = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and satisfaction with family role ( $r = 0.17$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were positively related to school achievement. Sense of injustice was negatively related to school achievement ( $r = -0.16$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Emotional parentification, neither focused on the parents nor focused on the siblings, was associated with school achievement. Quality of life was positively related to satisfaction with the family role ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and negatively associated with sense of injustice ( $r = -0.53$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

### Mediation Analyses

Six mediation models were tested, with school achievement serving as the dependent variable, quality of life was the mediator, and one of the six parentification dimensions served the role of the independent variable. The results showed acceptable fitted and interpretable models in two cases related to instrumental parentification. Four of the six tested models did not present satisfactory model fit (see **Table 2**). The analysis revealed that the level of instrumental parentification toward both parents ( $B = 0.15$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and siblings ( $B = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) was significantly positively related to school achievement.

**TABLE 1** | Summary statistics and correlations between study variables ( $N = 191$ ).

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	<i>K-S</i>	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
SA	4.47	0.79	2.00	6.00	0.064	-	1							
QoL	93.59	17.03	37.00	130.00	0.052	0.777	0.172*	1						
IPTP	2.74	0.80	1.00	5.00	0.083**	0.710	0.176*	0.209*	1					
EPTP	1.82	0.62	1.00	3.75	0.156**	0.692	-0.070	-0.010	0.228**	1				
SI	2.16	0.92	1.00	4.60	0.135**	0.803	-0.160*	-0.528**	-0.228**	0.098	1			
SWR	3.43	0.93	1.00	5.00	0.095**	0.756	0.173*	0.649**	0.398**	0.033	-0.602**	1		
IPTS	2.45	0.89	1.00	5.00	0.089**	0.700	0.206**	0.156*	0.411**	0.240**	-0.001	0.282**	1	
EPTS	2.25	0.79	1.00	4.50	0.134**	0.767	0.138	0.138	0.250**	0.311**	0.072	0.225**	0.611**	1

SA, school achievement; QoL, quality of life; IPTP, instrumental parentification toward parents; EPTP, emotional parentification toward parents; SI, sense of injustice; SWR, satisfaction with the role (played in the family system); IPTS, instrumental parentification toward siblings; EPTS, emotional parentification toward siblings; K-S, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test;  $\alpha$ , Cronbach's alpha coefficient; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**TABLE 2** | Model fits for tested mediation models by the independent variable.

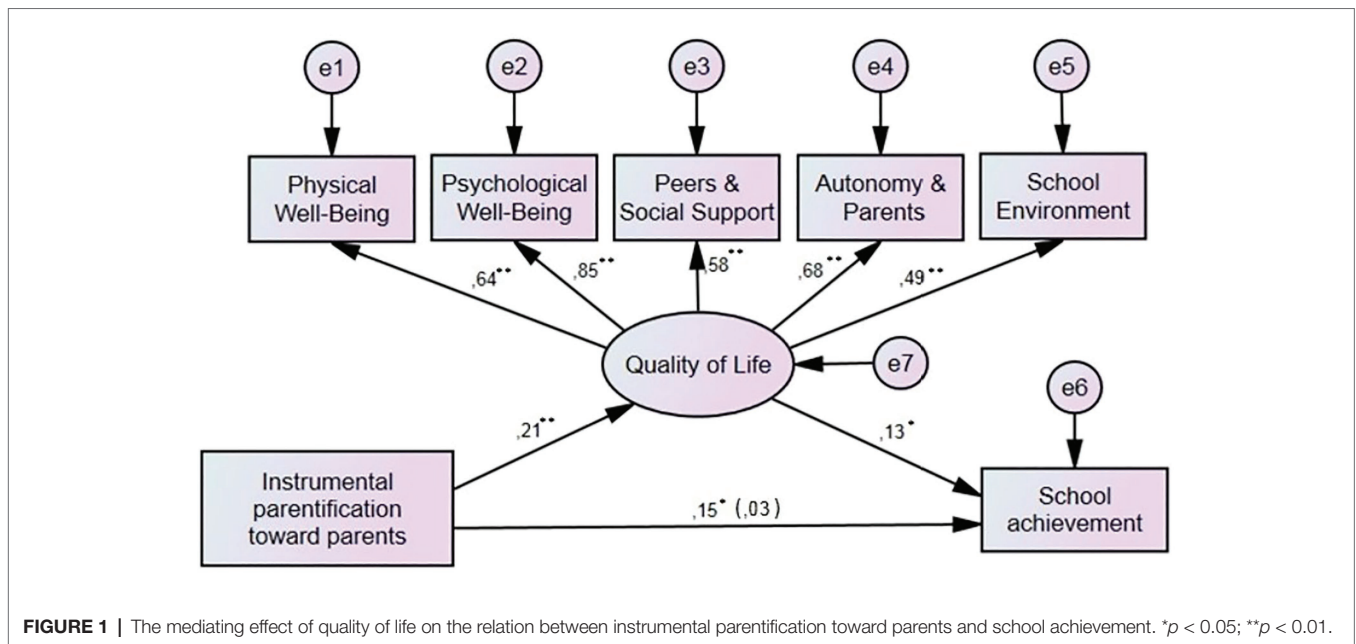
Independent variable	CMIN	RMSEA	GFI	CFI
IPTP	<b>110.751 (39), <math>p = 0.01</math></b>	<b>0.071, <math>p = 0.017</math></b>	<b>0.925</b>	<b>0.879</b>
EPTP	101.388 (39), $p = 0.00$	0.091, $p = 0.001$	0.919	0.889
SWR	129.963 (39), $p = 0.00$	0.089, $p = 0.001$	0.910	0.884
SI	190.613 (39), $p = 0.00$	0.101, $p = 0.001$	0.869	0.803
IPTS	<b>140.731 (39), <math>p = 0.01</math></b>	<b>0.083, <math>p = 0.020</math></b>	<b>0.910</b>	<b>0.836</b>
EPTS	142.488 (39), $p = 0.00$	0.095, $p = 0.001$	0.907	0.830

*IPTP, instrumental parentification toward parents; EPTP, emotional parentification toward parents; SWR, satisfaction with the role (played in the family system); SI, sense of injustice; IPTS, instrumental parentification toward siblings; EPTS, emotional parentification toward siblings. Bold values stand for well-fitted models.*

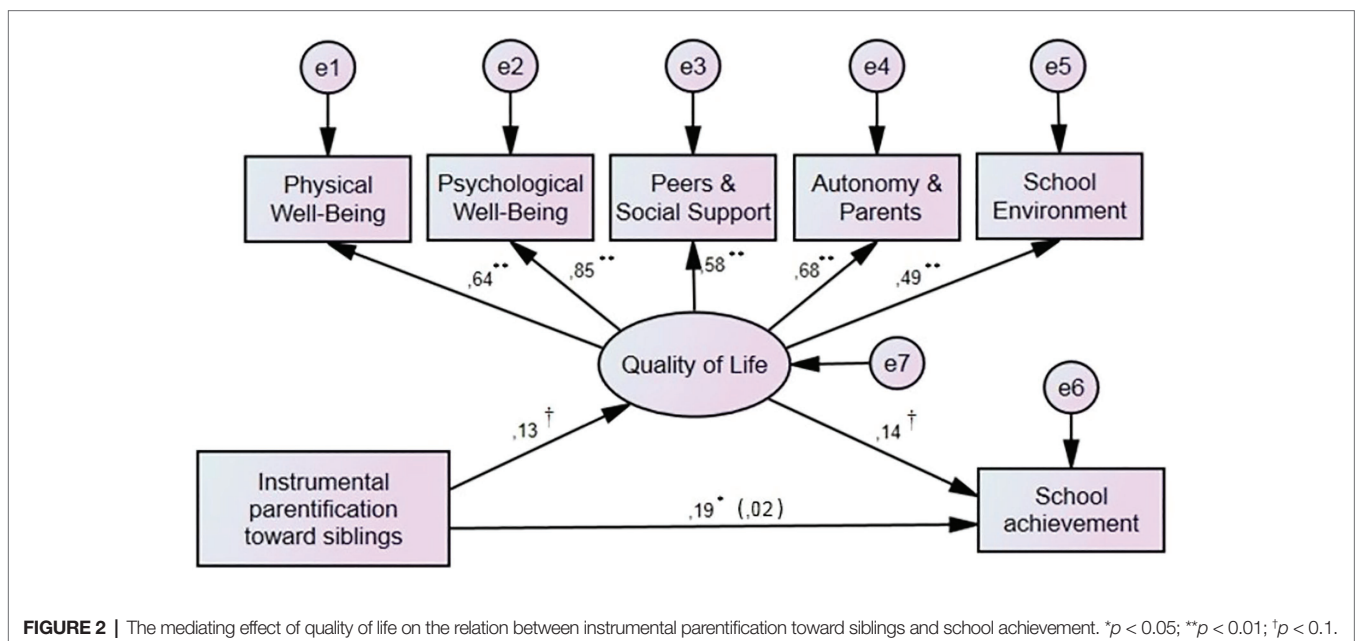
When quality of life was added to these two models, the relation between instrumental parentification, both toward parents and siblings, and academic achievement was statistically insignificant (see **Figures 1, 2**). The analyses of direct and indirect effects for both models indicated full mediation (Baron and Kenny, 1986; see **Table 3**).

## DISCUSSION

The study aimed to explore the relation between parentification and school achievement in the context of adolescent's quality of life. First, we explored bivariate relations between study variables.



**FIGURE 1** | The mediating effect of quality of life on the relation between instrumental parentification toward parents and school achievement. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .



**FIGURE 2** | The mediating effect of quality of life on the relation between instrumental parentification toward siblings and school achievement. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; † $p < 0.1$ .

**TABLE 3** | Direct and indirect effect in the tested mediation models.

Hypothesis	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Results
IPTP -> QoL -> SA	0.148*	0.03	Full mediation
IPTS -> QoL -> SA	0.187*	0.02	Full mediation

SA, school achievement; QoL, quality of life; IPTP, instrumental parentification toward parents; IPTS, instrumental parentification toward siblings. \* $p < 0.05$ .

Second, we performed mediation analyses. The study results indicated that among the six tested mediation models, only two of them were well-fitted and interpretable (i.e., models with instrumental parentification toward parents and instrumental parentification toward siblings as independent variables). Two important findings emerge from this study: (a) instrumental parentification toward parents and instrumental parentification toward siblings were positively related to school achievement and (b) these relations were mediated by adolescent's general quality of life. Not surprisingly, as instrumental parentification can lead to positive outcomes, in our sample, it was positively related to school achievement. Moreover, a positive opinion about one's life and its aspects, along with the circumstances of high level of instrumental parentification toward parents and siblings, may contribute to better fulfillment of other instrumental tasks such as educational tasks and outcomes. From the experience of instrumental parentification, the adolescents could have learned abilities useful at school such as how to manage their tasks effectively, shape task-oriented coping strategies (Hooper et al., 2008; Thastum et al., 2008), and build their self-efficacy (Mayseless et al., 2004).

The current findings are in line with the idea that one risk factor may not be destabilizing enough for the occurrence of any disturbance in the functioning of an individual. It is rather the coexistence of several risk factors that can cause maladjustment. For example, it has been shown that the action of one or two risk factors has a slightly negative effect on one's functioning, while when three or more factors are operating, the impact is already significant (Kumpfer, 1999; Masten and Powell, 2003; Greenberg, 2006). Additionally, according to Rutter (1987), the occurrence of both risk and protective factors is more related to turning points in human life than to factors as such. In other words, it is more important which processes are triggered by a certain risk factor than that factor itself. Nevertheless, the authors of the research on positive adaptation point out that the lack of disturbances at the behavioral level does not mean freedom from problems related to mental health (Luthar et al., 2000; Luthar and Zelazo, 2003). The results of some studies show that adults who coped with adversities in childhood and successfully function in social roles in adulthood are not fully happy and satisfied with their lives (Luthar and Zigler, 1991). It can be presumed that adolescents who perceive their life negatively may also experience additional adversities other than instrumental parentification that can disrupt their development and school achievement (e.g., bullying, low self-esteem). The instrumentally parentified adolescents that took part in the study achieved well at school, but their success still may be a competence gained at the cost of other domains (see Hetherington, 1999). Both Jurkovic (1997) and Winton (2003)

contend children and adolescents who experience parentification may present tendencies for overachieving, workaholism, and perfectionism, and those positive outcomes could mask the negative outcomes or go underreported.

Our study did not support the previous findings indicating that emotional parentification is negatively related to school achievement (see Chase et al., 1998; Siskowski, 2006; East, 2010). The lack of this effect may stem from the sample characteristics (i.e., urban and high SES). First, the family SES in the studied sample was rather high. Second, the mean scores achieved in the subscales emotional parentification toward parents and emotional parentification toward siblings were low. Also, the emotional parentification toward parents had a lower score range than other parentification variables. Therefore, students that took part in this study could have been specific and come from families where the level of emotional parentification was rather low. On the other hand, the level of emotional parentification could have been underreported in this sample [e.g., due to adolescents' defense mechanisms aimed to present a positive image of the parent despite the adversities (see Schier et al., 2015)]. The underreporting of emotional parentification in this sample could also be rooted in the culture. Polish culture holds a significant power distance, also in terms of family hierarchy and loyalty (Hofstede et al., 2010). Combined with the tendency to keep family problems in the close circle of relatives in order to protect family reputation, along with reluctance to report family violence (Ipsos Loyalty, 2014), those may be factors that decrease the Polish adolescent's willingness to share their emotional parentification experience.

Similar to previous studies, the sense of injustice, as well as the satisfaction with the family role, showed associations with adolescents' school achievement. The more the adolescents perceived their family roles as unfair, the worse grades at school they had (comp., Jurkovic et al., 2005). Accordingly, the more they were satisfied with their family role, the more school achievement they had (comp., Burton et al., 2018).

## Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this study have to be seen in the light of some limitations. First, the study employed cross-sectional assessment. To address this limitation, it is important to carry out similar studies, including a longitudinal study in the future. This would enable clarification if, while growing up, the instrumentally parentified adolescents who perceive their lives positively are able to have positive school achievements over time. Typically, as youth age, adolescents are assigned more tasks, responsibilities, and developmental roles related to their age. Another design limitation is the fact that the information about last semester's mean school grade could have been distorted in some cases due to the fact that it was self-reported by the participants. Future studies could employ more objective source of information on the school achievement (e.g., retrieve them from the school archives). Also, adding additional informants to the study (e.g., headteachers' assessments) might have given more insight into the child's school performance (see Bauer et al., 2013). The sample might have been biased. Specifically, the study participants lived in the big city of Gdańsk (as measured by Statistics Poland, 2019).

Future studies on the effect of current parentification on adolescents' life should also include the participants of various backgrounds, for example, rural (see American study by Hooper et al., 2012), as well as living in small towns and middle-sized cities and family SES-diverse. That would increase the generalizability of the findings on the broad population of Polish adolescents as almost 40% of the total Polish population lives in rural areas (World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2019). Moreover, controlling for parental employment status (e.g., full time, part time, and more than full time) could provide important insight into the studies on instrumental parentification, as parents working long hours is one of the factors that may put their children in charge of the house (see Schier, 2014). This factor could have been very relevant to our sample as the participants came from rather high-SES families where parents could have been highly engaged in their careers and often absent from home. Therefore, their children could be in charge of many house chores. Also, it would be interesting to consider the adolescent's motives for achieving good grades in future studies, for example, whether it was self-motivated, aimed to impress others or satisfy parent's needs (see Winton, 2003; Haxhe, 2016). Another study limitation may be related to the use of a measure in a state of its infancy. Further studies should examine how does the PQY (Borchet et al., 2020a) act in various samples in order to make sure if future refinement of the questionnaire may be beneficial.

## CONCLUSION

The current study casts new light into the studies on the current experience of parentification in Polish adolescents. In contrast to the previous studies (Chase et al., 1998; Siskowski, 2006), the level of instrumental parentification was positively related to academic achievement. Associations with school achievement were also observed for the sense of injustice and the satisfaction with family role, which underlines the importance of how adolescents perceive one's family role in the outcomes of parentification. Surprisingly, emotional parentification was not related to school achievement. We believe that the relation between parentification dimensions and school achievement seems to be complex and should be interpreted with caution and in a broader context (e.g., quality of life and adolescent's motivation for school achievement). This result underlines how important it is for the parentified children and adolescents to belong to environments facilitating their development and to

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be satisfied with at least some areas of their lives. Those can enable them to perceive their situation positively and foster their development, also in the context of school achievement, despite the task overload and adversities they face at the family home. This buffering role may be served, for example, by the adolescent's good health condition, the school environment, friends, hobbies, and sibling relationships or other family ties (see Chee et al., 2014; Borchet et al., 2020b).

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets generated for this study are available on request to the corresponding author.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Komisja Etyki ds. Projektów Badawczych przy Instytucie Psychologii UG. Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

JB designed and executed the study. AL-W collaborated with the design of the study. JB and AL-W wrote the manuscript. LH reviewed, revised, and edited the manuscript. PP analyzed the data. AP collaborated with editing of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

## FUNDING

One of the co-authors received support and funding to conduct this work. JB was financed by the doctoral scholarship from the Polish National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki); project number 2019/32/T/HS6/00084.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by the Center for Educational Transformation at the University of Northern Iowa, United States.

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**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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## **Publikacja 5**



# We are in this Together: Retrospective Parentification, Sibling Relationships, and Self-Esteem

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## Abstract

Parentification occurs when children provide caregiving for family members that typically exceeds their capacity and developmental stage. Parentification roles and responsibilities are often linked with deleterious outcomes, including robbing children of age-appropriate opportunities, activities, and support. However, in some circumstances, such as caring for a sibling vs. caring for a parent, parentification may engender feelings of self-efficacy, competence, and other positive outcomes. The primary objective of the current study was to explore the possible benefits of parentification. Using an understudied, international population, the current study tested the benefits of parentification in the context of the sibling relationship. Two research questions guided the study: to what extent are perceived benefits of parentification positively associated with self-esteem among a sample of Polish late adolescents? And to what extent does the quality of the sibling relationship mediate the association between perceived benefits of parentification and self-esteem? Results from the current sample showed the quality of sibling relationships partially mediated the relation between parentification and self-esteem. The findings underline the importance of assessing the quality of sibling relationships when an individual or family presenting for clinical services related to past and current family discord and dysfunction. Future research might consider other factors in the sibling relationship, such as personality, that could relate to positive outcomes from parentification.

**Keywords** Benefits of parentification · Self-esteem · Sibling relationships · Late adolescence · International research

## Highlights

- Children and adolescents who experience parentification may employ various coping mechanisms.
- Quality relationships between siblings may reduce the negative outcomes of parentification.
- International studies on individuals who experience parentification are needed.
- Relationships other than the harmful ones with parents must be investigated.

Although adverse situations in the family system are commonly related to a negative and unstable self-esteem, there are instances when the same situations might facilitate feelings of resiliency, self-efficacy, and competency (Byng-Hall 2008). One systemic structure that may engender

positive outcomes is when roles are reversed between children and adults, and the hierarchy is inverted in the family system. This structure is commonly characterized as a dysfunctional family system and includes the family system process described as *parentification* (Minuchin 1974). Paradoxically, parentification, or young caregiving, can result in children experiencing an increase in self-esteem or forming new skills as a result of engaging in adult-like family roles and responsibilities, including caring for a parent or sibling in difficult situations (Schier 2014). A review of the literature suggests the parentified child's future development and the possible outcomes may depend on how the child feels about, and makes meaning of, the parentification experience (Jurkovic 1997).

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Family systems theory undergirds the idea that one pathway between parentification and its related outcomes may be differentiated based on the feelings one has about parentification. Jurkovic (1997) described this as the perceived fairness of parentification and Hooper (2009) describes this as the perceived benefits of parentification. Clinicians and researchers alike contend it is critical to determine how the individual views or assesses her or his roles and situation within the family system, separate and apart from the actual responsibilities performed within the family. For example, if a child sees the advantages of caregiving roles, responsibilities, and relationships, and maintains that view believing in the cultural appropriateness or deriving a sense of self-importance, then those views about the experiences can inform a positive self-evaluation. In addition to the recognition of the perceived benefits of parentification, questions have arisen about what conditions have to be met or what protective factors must be evidenced in the child's life in order for parentification to become a constructive experience (Jurkovic 1997; Schier 2014). The factors that may impinge upon the pathway between parentification and negative and positive valence and outcomes could be (a) to whom the parentification is directed (parent vs. sibling) and (b) the quality of those relationships (Burton et al. 2018; Fitzgerald et al. 2008). Given the ubiquitous nature of parentification in family systems, it is important to consider factors that may exacerbate and/or buffer the commonly evidenced negative outcomes and scantily observed positive outcomes (Byng-Hall 2008).

As defined in family psychology and attachment theory, parentification is a distortion of the division of roles and responsibilities in the family, in which those roles are reversed (Haxhe 2016; Hooper et al. 2008; Jurkovic 1997; Minuchin 1974). This non-normative pattern of interactions in most families, involves children or adolescents engaging in caretaking for their parents (or other family members) rather than the children being cared for by their parents. Children who are charged with taking care of their family members are often robbed of performing their own developmental tasks, as well as activities with their peers. In these cases, family caregiving is often problematic and disruptive to the child's personal development (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973; Hooper et al. 2011; Hooper and Wallace 2010; Mika et al. 1987; Schier 2010, 2014). Parentification takes place in families all over the world, irrespective of the culture of the family in which the child is being raised (Hooper 2014; Shih et al. 2010; Titzmann 2012), and it is related to both negative and positive consequences during adolescence and adulthood (Aldridge and Becker 1993; Carroll and Robinson 2000; Peris et al. 2008; Wells and Jones 2000). In one meta-analysis, adults who had experienced an inverted hierarchy during their childhood were prone to have a higher risk of substance abuse in adulthood (Hooper et al. 2011).

Although less commonly investigated, engaging in the role of a parentified child can facilitate positive outcomes. Additionally, the parentification process can be consonant with cultural expectations in the family, as well as socio-demographic factors, and to whom the caregiving is directed (parent vs. sibling). For example, Burton (2007) suggested parentification may facilitate the development of a sense of responsibility, self-agency, efficiency, and competencies among racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse individuals. Fitzgerald et al. (2008) conducted a study on instrumental parentification, which manifested itself as a form of caregiving for siblings. Their results showed that instrumental parentification was positively associated with psychosocial adaptation. The authors discussed that the increase in the children's competencies gained while engaging in caregiving resulted in their psychosocial adaptation. However, the positive impact of parentification in childhood, and later in adulthood, may depend on individual-level factors (e.g., child's personality and external factors). Williams and Francis (2010) suggested that an internal sense of control is an important protective factor for children against the commonly reported negative consequences of reversing roles within the family. Hooper et al. (2012) found that to a lesser extent, adolescents who carried out caregiving responsibilities within a family, due to the parent's addiction to alcohol, self-reported similar problems, and were much more prone to symptoms of depression. Therefore, parentification may produce both negative and positive outcomes simultaneously and the sibling relationship may be an important factor in mediating or moderating those outcomes.

From the perspective of family psychology, experiencing positive relationships with meaningful people, which includes sisters and brothers, is relevant for forming a positive sense of self and value. When parents are unavailable, uncaring, or neglectful, siblings may become important figures in one's development (Bowlby 1988; Byng-Hall 2008). In most cultures, sibling relationships are one of the longest-lasting because they start at the time of the birth of the younger sibling. In the case of twins, the relationship has already begun during the fetal period (Capodiecici 2006; Namysłowska and Siewierska 2009; Rostowska 2010). In most families, the sibling subsystem is two or more children with at least one common parent (Harwas-Napierała 2008; Noller 2005; Noller et al. 2008; Rostowska 2010). The functioning of the sibling subsystem is based on mutual interactions, feelings toward one another, and attitudes toward common or individual experiences. Irrespective of the stage of life, sisters and brothers may provide companionship, caring for and helping each other (Goetting 1986; Lempers and Clark-Lempers 1992). In adult life, they cooperate in caring for elderly parents, often trusting each other in the matters of their own

families, and share memories and experiences from their family of origin (Lewandowska-Walter et al. 2016). Siblings can also be important role models for each other. Therefore, sisters and brothers influence each other and have a mutual contribution to one's individual development (Buhrmester 1992; Furman and Buhrmester 1985).

The fact that sibling relationships typically last from the cradle to the grave does not mean they are unalterable or always positive. On the contrary, throughout life, sibling relationships are constantly evolving. Their intensity and degree of intimacy are changing, alongside with the ways in which siblings communicate and resolve conflict (Namysłowska and Siewierska 2009). Barbaro de (1999) described the sibling relationship as a *social laboratory* in which children experience their first peer interaction. Later social experiences may be modeled after the quality of relationships with sisters and brothers (Namysłowska 2001). Importantly, even though a parentified child may be limited in the interactions with their peers outside of the family system, the sibling relationship may afford the parentified child a similar developmental experience. Additionally, the specificity of the sibling relationship allows for the emergence of a range of interpersonal processes, which are likely different than the relationships evidenced with parents, which tend to be more hierarchical than sibling relationships (Lewandowska-Walter et al. 2016).

Indeed, sibling relationships can be a significant predictor of adolescent functioning as well as a pathway between childhood parentification and select outcomes, including the adaptation to the family life as well as to the society in general (Lewandowska-Walter et al. 2016). As a result of positive interactions with sisters and brothers, adolescents experience warmth, encouragement, acceptance, and support. Those interactions may increase the chance to discover one's own value, adequacy, and confidence, which in turn can contribute to high self-esteem (Amato 1990; Harter 1999; Yeh and Lempers 2004).

Social and family psychology theories provide a framework to inform the examination of the link between parentification and self-esteem. According to Rosenberg's (1965) classic theory, people have different attitudes toward various objects and subjects, and their own self is also one of them. Self-esteem describes someone's perception of *me* (Rosenberg 1965). Self-esteem may also be viewed as a concept of a hierarchical structure (Wojciszke 2002). Specifically, the lower levels of self-esteem include the elements of self-image located within specific areas (e.g., one's opinion on their own intelligence, personality traits, abilities, or physical attractiveness). Those unique aspects of self-esteem are also related to specific domains—and combined—represent one's overall or global self-esteem (Oleszkowicz and Senejko 2011; Wojciszke 2002). Wojciszke (2002) distinguishes the emotional component of

one's self-esteem and describes it as “an affective reaction to oneself” (p. 147). Conceptualized as an affective reaction, one's self-esteem may take the form of either a *cold* judgment based on rationality or a *hot* intense emotion. Therefore, self-esteem may be investigated in the context of one's permanent trait (e.g., judgment or attitude toward oneself) or as an ongoing motive or state that is being experienced by an individual (Wojciszke 2002). Rosenberg's (1965) view of self-esteem is closer to the concept of one's permanent characteristic.

Guided by the tenets of family systems theory, defense mechanisms, and posttraumatic growth, Borchet et al. (2016) found a positive relation between parentification and self-esteem. The authors contended that taken together, the act of childhood family caregiving and the participants' positive view of their caregiving roles and experiences (i.e., perceived benefits of parentification) facilitated self-reported beneficial outcomes of parentification. Self-esteem has emerged as a commonly investigated positive outcome of parentification as feelings of competence and self-efficacy, which could have been gained while performing family caregiving, are elements of one's positive self-image (Wojciszke 2002). This finding is in alignment with the literature suggesting that self-esteem may be one of the positive outcomes of experiencing adaptive/constructive parentification (e.g., Burton 2007; Chase 1999) or a long-term effect of adaptive coping skills gained while performing adult-like roles in the family (Stein et al. 2007). Walker and Lee (1998) examined the connections among parentification, self-esteem, and perceived advantages of engaging in role reversal in the family system where alcoholism existed. They found sibling relationships fostered resilience among the study participants. More specifically, “children of alcoholics” indicated sibling relationships were a relational resource. Walker and Lee (1998) asserted that “sibling studies are needed to find out if parentification with brothers and sisters leads to conventional belief systems, non-problematic use of substances, and ego strength” (pp. 532–533). Importantly, studies exploring the importance of sibling relationships on current and later relationships and outcomes have often produced interesting findings including a positive association between destructive parentification and low self-esteem (Wells et al. 1999), although more research is needed among international samples specifically.

## The Current Study

The deleterious effects of parentification are well documented (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973; Hooper et al. 2014). Thus, studies that explore factors that may disrupt the commonly seen negative outcomes are important. One factor that may buffer the relation between parentification

and negative family structures, events, and experiences is the relationship an individual has with her or his siblings (Burton et al. 2018; Fitzgerald et al. 2008; Milevsky and Levitt 2005). Relationships with siblings and caring for them may have a significant impact on the development of an individual. On the other hand, an individual compelled to engage in caregiving responsibilities may feel that the load assigned to them is inequitable and thus exacerbates conflicts among siblings based on the parents' differential treatment. As a consequence, an individual may experience difficulties in social adaptation (McHale et al. 2000). However, most adults who have experienced family difficulties and challenges in childhood view the relationship with their sisters and brothers in a positive manner (Jenkins 1992; Tomeny et al. 2016). Thus, this positive relationship may have a significant buffering effect on the connection between parentification and select outcomes such as self-esteem. Informed by the literature, the current study examined two research questions: (a) to what extent are perceived benefits of parentification positively associated with self-esteem (b) to what extent does the quality of sibling relationships mediate the relation between perceived benefits of parentification and self-esteem?

## Method

### Participants

Participants in the current study were 218 late adolescents from Poland ( $M = 21.37$ ;  $SD = 2.49$ ;  $Mdn = 21$ ). The majority were female (86.2%;  $n = 188$ ). Most participants self-identified as university students (84.9%;  $n = 185$ ) living outside the family home (62.4%;  $n = 136$ ). The remaining participants had secondary education (4.1%;  $n = 9$ ) or higher (11%;  $n = 24$ ). Approximately half of the group were in a casual relationship (52%;  $n = 113$ ), 43.6% ( $n = 96$ ) were single, and 4.1% ( $n = 9$ ) were married. More than half of the participants were unemployed (55%;  $n = 120$ ). However, some of them had full-time (16.5%;  $n = 36$ ) or part-time jobs (28.4%;  $n = 62$ ). Their families of origin were full (i.e., non-divorced nuclear families; 85.8%;  $n = 187$ ). The number of the siblings ranged from 1 to 6 ( $n = 1$ , 64.2%;  $n = 2$ , 22%;  $n = 3$ , 8.7%;  $n = 4$ , 3.2%;  $n = 5$ , 1.4%;  $n = 6$ , 0.5%).

### Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they started the questionnaire. The study used an online version of the questionnaire using the *Lime Survey* platform. The link to the questionnaire was distributed to social networking websites of universities across the

Poland region. Participants voluntarily completed the survey.

### Measures

Three questionnaires were used in the study: Polish adaptation of Hooper's Parentification Inventory (Hooper 2009), The Questionnaire of Relationships with Siblings (Lewandowska-Walter et al. 2016), and the Polish adaptation of Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale (SES; Łaguna et al. 2007).

### Parentification

The perceived benefits of parentification dimension were the predictor variable and it was assessed using the Parentification Inventory (PI; Hooper 2009). The PI was designed to retrospectively assess the extent to which the person performed caregiving roles toward family members while being a child, and to assess to what extent the experience of parentification is perceived to have been beneficial. The 22-item PI has three subscales: parent-focused parentification (12 items, e.g., "I often help solve problems between my parent(s)"), sibling-focused parentification (7 items, e.g., "I am the primary person who disciplines my siblings"), and perceived benefits of parentification (3 items, e.g., "I feel like our family is a team and works well together"). Participants self-reported the extent to which they experienced each statement on a Likert-type 5-point scale (1 = never true and 5 = always true), with higher scores indicating higher perceived levels of parentification or benefits of parentification.

The study used a Polish adaptation of the PI. The forward and backward translation process for the resulting PI was conducted as recommended by Sireci and Berberoglu (2000). Additionally, the backward translation was examined by a person with a degree in English. Factor analyses of the translated version of the PI showed a good model fit for the 12 item solution (Borchet et al. under review). Additionally, the resultant three factors, produced sound reliability (i.e., from 0.77 to 0.81). The study used the perceived benefits of parentification subscale score only. Its reliability in the current study was sound (i.e., Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.77).

### Relationships with Siblings

Sibling relationships served as a mediator variable. It was a latent variable composed of 3 measurable variables describing characteristics of sibling relationships—cohesion, communication, and rivalry. These dimensions were assessed using the Questionnaire of Relationships with Siblings (Lewandowska-Walter et al. 2016). The Questionnaire of Relationships with Siblings was designed to

**Table 1** Summary statistics and correlations between study variables ( $N = 218$ )

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived benefits of parentification	3.22	0.98	1.00	5.00	0.77				
2. Self-esteem	28.07	6.28	10.00	41.00	0.90	0.40**			
3. Cohesion	3.33	0.63	1.50	4.63	0.86	0.54**	0.36**		
4. Communication	3.17	0.77	1.17	4.67	0.85	0.47**	0.32**	0.85**	
5. Rivalry	2.02	0.70	1.00	4.17	0.79	-0.30**	-0.23**	-0.35**	-0.34**

Perceived benefits of parentification—Parentification Inventory (Hooper, 2009); Self-esteem—Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale (Łaguna et al. 2007); Cohesion, Communication & Rivalry—Questionnaire of Relationships with Siblings (Lewandowska-Walter et al., 2016)

\*\* $p < 0.01$

assess the relationship quality among Polish siblings (Lewandowska-Walter et al. 2016). The 20-item questionnaire is composed of three subscales: cohesion (8 items, e.g., “I have a feeling that my siblings are very close to me”), communication (6 items, e.g., “Even when I disagree, I listen to my siblings’ arguments”), and rivalry (6 items, e.g., “My siblings are trying to be better than me”). Cohesion determines the strength of bonding between siblings on a continuum from a strong bond to the absence of a bond. Communication is a dimension extending from normal to problematic communication between siblings. The third subscale, Rivalry, ranges from a positive competitive stance to envy. Participants rated how often they experience these behaviors and feelings about their sibling on a Likert-type 5-point scale (1 = never and 5 = very often). The scores of each subscale are calculated by summing the items for each subscale. Total scores for scores for the cohesion dimension ranged from 8 to 40, whereas for the communication and rivalry dimensions ranged from 6 to 30. Reliability in the current study was sound: cohesion (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.86), communication (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.85), and rivalry (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.79).

### Self-esteem

Self-esteem was the outcome variable for the study and was measured by the Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965). Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale was designed to measure overall levels of self-esteem. Participants responded using a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree). The Rosenberg's Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965) and the adapted scale (Łaguna et al. 2007) are comprised of 10 items. Total scores range from 10 to 40 points. Previous studies report sound reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.81–0.83) and theoretically valid scores derived from the adapted Polish version of the scale (Łaguna et al. 2007). Reliability in the current study was sound (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.90).

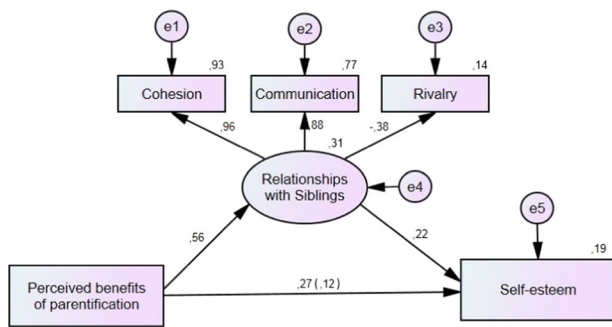
### Analytic Strategy

Descriptive statistics of the group, Pearson correlations between variables, and the reliability of the measures (see Table 1) were assessed with Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 24.

After initial analyses, structural equation modeling was performed using AMOS 24 software. Model fit was judged using the comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). With respect to the fit indices, GFI and CFI values greater than 0.90 were considered as well-fitted (Konarski 2010). RMSEA values lower than or equal to 0.08 or 0.06 indicate acceptable or good fit (Hu and Bentler 1999). Partial mediation was recognized consistent with Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria. In order to test to what extent perceived benefits of parentification are positively associated with self-esteem among a sample of Polish late adolescents, and to what extent does the quality of the sibling relationship mediate the association between perceived benefits of parentification and self-esteem, we examined the direct and indirect effects using SEM models (AMOS 24). The model tested was well-suited to the data and interpretable (Konarski 2010).

### Results

We found that the perceived benefits of parentification ( $B = 0.56$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) were highly related to the quality of sibling relationships (Fig. 1). In addition, the quality of sibling relationships was also positively ( $B = 0.22$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) associated with the level of self-esteem. Because both the A-path and B-path were statistically significant, the mediation analyses were tested using the bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence estimates (Preacher and Hayes 2008). In this study, the 95% confidence interval (CI) of the indirect effects was obtained with 1000 bootstrap resamples. The results of the analyses of direct and indirect effects for the assumed model indicated partial mediation in



**Fig. 1** The mediating effect of the sibling relationships on the relation between perceived benefits of parentification and self-esteem

relation to the perceived benefits of parentification and self-esteem. The perceived benefits of parentification and self-esteem in the context of sibling relationships remained positive ( $B = 0.124$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). In summary, the assumed model was confirmed due to statistically significant partial mediation effect (direct effect:  $0.272$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; indirect effect:  $0.124$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ; see: Baron and Kenny 1986). The model parameters were satisfying ( $CMIN = 52.735$  (42);  $p = 0.124$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.012$ ;  $GFI = 0.990$ ;  $CFI = 0.996$ ).

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore to what extent perceived benefits of parentification are positively associated with self-esteem, and to what extent the quality of sibling relationships mediates the relation between perceived benefits of parentification and self-esteem. The study yielded two important findings: (a) a positive view or perception of the benefits of family caregiving (parentification) was related to higher levels of self-esteem and (b) the quality of sibling relationships partially mediated the link between perceiving the advantages of parentification and self-esteem.

The first finding could stem from the fact that participants may have experienced constructive parentification (e.g., Chase 1999; Jurkovic 1997). For example, irrespective of being burdened with caregiving responsibilities in their families, it is plausible that they also received gratitude from their family members and this recognition boosted their confidence and positive view of self. The literature suggests children and adolescents performing certain caregiving functions and roles in the family system, and who also perform typical “adult-like” duties may feel appreciated, important, needed, and have a sense of well-being (e.g., Hooper et al. 2014). These roles and responsibilities might underpin or engender self-efficacy and feelings of competence, which in fact are positive components of one’s self-image (e.g., Wojciszke 2002). Having high levels of self-esteem, while also being parentified, may serve as a

defense mechanism, which sustains or increases a high level of positivity and beliefs about oneself (Borchet et al. 2016). In this context, a person builds her or his self-enhancement with favorable judgments about oneself and through various complex psychological mechanisms such as self-affirmation, performing social comparisons, cognitive dissonance reduction, auto-presentation, or biased processing of information about oneself (Wojciszke 2002). Self-enhancement, one of the most interesting strategies of self-affirmation, can be done in many ways. For example, engaging in moral action, success, or expressing the values with which the individual identifies (Wojciszke 2002). In positive psychology, Park et al. (2004) describe how the process of engaging in complicated tasks related to the need to adapt to life can be a trigger for shaping a strong character. With respect to the experience of parentification during childhood, positive reframing of the difficulties can be a conscious action aimed at protecting and strengthening one’s self-image, and can be an element of self-regulation (self-control) as one of the strengths of character (Park et al. 2004). This reframing or creating an alternate view allows for a meaningful life by those who have suffered in the past (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000).

In the families where the parent is not able to perform her or his parental roles and tasks, an unintended opportunity may emerge. Specifically, serving in the parentified role in the family of origin may enable a child to build their self-esteem through the identification with the role assigned and by performing parental roles and responsibilities, ultimately engendering feelings of self-enhancement, self-approval, or competence (e.g., Borchet et al. 2016; Schier 2014). Additionally, one’s perception of family relationships—and indirectly outcomes—are connected with the level of control over one’s own actions, self-efficacy, and beliefs about the ability to cope with severe situations and crises (e.g., Plopa and Połomski 2010). Thus, to maintain an attachment with the parent, the child adapts to the parent’s needs and creates a system of care for them while deserting one’s own *true self* (Schier 2010, 2014; Wells et al. 1999). As a result, children, who excessively take care of their parents, and other family members may build psychic structures that are unfavorable for their own identity yet adjusted to their deleterious environment, and thus their so-called *false self*. The false image of oneself is being presented to others (Winnicott 1958). Consistent with these theoretical assumptions, the link between high self-esteem and perceived benefits of parentification may be framed as a defense mechanism.

Results in the current study may have been impacted by counseling and psychotherapy. Specifically, it remains unclear to what extent participants had a history of treatment that addressed or lessened the later effects or possible negative effects of parentification. Thus, the period from

when childhood parentification took place to current functioning could have allowed for an adequate amount of time to reduce the negative outcomes and underscore the positive outcomes of parentification, which directly enhances the self-esteem of an adult person. This conclusion is inconsistent with the tenets of posttraumatic growth, which outline how an individual may experience development or psychological growth by overcoming adverse and traumatic experiences (Hooper et al. 2009; Taku and McDiarmid 2015; Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996). Findings from Taku and McDiarmid's (2015) study showed that self-esteem was connected to posttraumatic growth. Another study involving adolescents showed that self-esteem may buffer the negative aftereffects of stressful experiences (Moksnes et al. 2010).

The second hypothesis may have been supported due to the relationship between siblings. There is a plethora of research on social support (e.g., Sęk and Cieślak 2004) but the studies on the mutual support between siblings are still scarce. Experiencing parentification in the family may pose a threat to the child's development (e.g., Chase et al. 1998; Hooper et al. 2008, 2011; Schier 2010, 2014). However, in such situations, children are not always passive, rather in some families, they are capable and active participants in what is happening around them and in the family system. Their actions also may build up or have significant levels of competence or resilience. Their relationships with siblings and their related caregiving functions may, for instance, become the resource that helps them to cope with violence in the family home (Callaghan et al. 2016). In Callaghan et al.'s (2016) study, caring for siblings was one form of a caring relationship in which the children were engaged. The children who experienced domestic violence tended to manage their relationships with others in ways that enabled them to be agentic, as well as to create a resistant and resilient sense of self (Callaghan et al. 2016). Those findings seem to be consistent with the current study. The more positive the late adolescents' relationships with their siblings were, the higher their self-esteem and the more perceived benefits of parentification were reported. Perhaps their alliance with siblings and mutual support received during their childhood shaped their feeling of self-agency, and resilience boosting their self-esteem. This hypothesis was supported by Walker and Lee's study on children of alcoholics—COAs (1998). Walker and Lee (1998) revealed that supportive relationships with non-substance using parents and/or siblings, as well as positive parentification, may enable a significant proportion of COAs to experience high self-esteem, lack of excessive substance use, and adaptability. Furthermore, research conducted in the Taiwanese population revealed that the higher the level of parentification that children and adolescents reported, the more pro-social behaviors they performed (Chi-Yin and

Lee-Fang 2013). Moreover, taking care of siblings was found to be the most effective predictor of pro-social behavior (Chi-Yin and Lee-Fang 2013). This finding seems to be consistent with the fact that late adolescents who sustain good relationships with their siblings have high self-esteem and perceive their experience of parentification as beneficial.

## Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations of the study include a small sample size and an underrepresentation of male participants. Additionally, participants consisted of volunteers and thus it is unclear to what extent they had a particular interest in the topic and thus were motivated to participate. An additional limitation was that the survey was conducted using *Lime Survey*, an internet platform. However, the online survey methodology employed facilitated the recruitment of late adolescents from various cities in Poland. Finally, there were other variables that were not measured that may better explain pathways related to parentification, sibling relationships, and self-esteem. For example, other important variables that may have relevance to the structure of the sibling subsystem include, but are not limited to, the number of children in the family, age, birth order, the span of each child's age (Rostowska 2010), and personality. Such variables are recommended to be included in future research.

The current study demonstrated that the relations between self-esteem and perceived benefits of parentification may be considered through the prism of sibling relationships. The obtained results showed that it is important to consider the quality of the sibling relationship while assessing the perceived benefits of family roles, responsibilities, dysfunction, and difficulties (e.g., Tomeny et al. 2016). Importantly, in the context of client care and practice, the quality and strength of sibling subsystems are often still underexplored during psychological assessment and diagnostic interviews (e.g., Birch 2005; Walker and Lee 1998). As the current study shows, sibling relationships may serve as a buffer protecting children from the negative outcomes of parentification, enabling them to develop resilience, feelings of self-agency, and high levels of self-esteem. Further research on parentification and sibling relationships is recommended. Additionally, future research might consider other factors in the sibling relationship, such as personality, that could relate to positive outcomes from parentification.

**Acknowledgements** Grant Number: 538-7400-B185-18, Grant for young scientists and participants of doctoral studies at University of Gdańsk' Faculty of Social Sciences for 2018.

**Author Contributions** J.B.: designed and executed the study, wrote, and edited the paper. A.L.W.: collaborated with the study design and

writing of the paper. P.P.: analyzed the data and wrote part of the results. A.P.: collaborated in the writing. L.M.H.: collaborated in the writing and editing of the paper.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. This study received the approval of the Institutional Review Board from the Institute of Psychology, University of Gdańsk.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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