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Work involvement and the quality of two-career marital relationships – the mediating role of stress and role conflicts

Abstract: *A two-career marriage is a modern family model, within which both partners pursue a career as employees, often in leadership positions, but also a career associated with holding specific roles in the family, marriage and the household.*

The aim of this study was to verify the relationship between the level of work engagement and the subjective quality of marital relationships. Moreover, the research attempted to find variables which may mediate the relationship, such as levels of occupational stress experienced, conflict / facilitation of occupational and personal roles and gender.

The study was conducted among 150 two-career married couples, with both partners working actively on the competitive labour market, often holding leadership positions and balancing their professional and family roles. All of the participants, aged 28 to 40, had completed higher education and had at least 1 child. The study used the Work-related Behaviour and Experience Pattern Test (AVEM), Well-Matched Marriage Questionnaire (KDM-2), Stress Questionnaire and the Questionnaire of Work and Family Balance.

Statistical analysis indicated that work involvement of two-career couples positively contributes to increasing the subjectively perceived quality of their marital relationships. The level of occupational commitment also has a positive relationship with the level of stress experienced and work – family conflicts. Such stress and conflicts are important mediators in the positive relationship between work involvement and the quality of marital relationship. Therefore, if the partners' work is linked to significant stress, generating additional work-family conflicts, it may consequently negatively affect the quality of marital relations of the dyads.

Keywords: *two – career couples, work involvement, role conflict, quality of life, occupational stress*

Introduction

Changes observed nowadays on social and cultural levels generate a number of challenges for modern people, but also give raise to multiple threats. In particular, such changes concern the performance of the many roles in our lives, including roles connected to a professional career. They mostly affect the level of one's involvement in individual roles taken on in the course of their life. At the same time, this involvement in multiple roles constitutes the most effective predictor of the quality of an individual's life and development (Bańka, 2004; Sariçam, 2015), while a lack of experience connected to the changing and varied roles may lead to a low personal and mental mobility

(Gustafson, 2002). Therefore, a person's involvement in the performance of numerous roles simultaneously therefore constitutes a necessary condition for their correct and harmonious development and facilitates the development of a mature personality (Bańka, 2004; Rostowska, 2009). However, on the other hand, the multitude of roles, especially a high level of involvement in some of them, may create a range of negative consequences on both physical and mental levels, creating the feeling of being overwhelmed by the roles performed, stress and tensions, negatively affecting mental wellbeing. Without a doubt, one of the main areas of human operation is professional career and personal life, mainly family life (Peplińska, 2012). There is an ongoing flow between the individual

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spheres of one's functioning, which determines the level of one's engagement with the individual roles and creates a number of consequences arising from the nature of such an engagement. An example of relationships where this flow is especially intense are two-career couples. As the phenomenon is very complex, the article will aim to describe it in the context of the work involvement of partners in a two-career relationship as well as present their subjective evaluation of the quality of marital relations, the level of work-related stress and role and gender conflict. The research in this area is scant, particularly where it relates to the Polish realities. It is possible to assume, however, that a relation exists between work involvement and partner relationship quality, in terms of the role conflict experienced by two-career couples in the work-family sphere (Peplińska et al., 2014). Overwork, coping with the career as well as family life and living under time pressure may contribute to experiencing increased levels of stress. (Rostowski, 2006; Abele, Volmer, 2011; Mäkälä, Känvälä, Suutari, 2011; Peplińska et al., 2014). Considerable stress and strain are mentioned by Skinner (1980) as significant features of dual-career lifestyle. Research shows that the negative consequences are mostly felt by women. (Skinner, 1980; Rostowski, 2006). Though there are some differences and similarities connected with work-life conflict for men and women (Greenhaus et al., 1989). For example role ambiguity is a source of work-family conflict more for men than women, but a woman's work-life conflict depends on job involvement.

Work involvement and quality of life

Work involvement reflects the relationship between an individual and the type and place of work performed, i.e. the organisation (Czerw, Grabowski, 2015). A high level of work involvement may generate a number of tangible benefits for both the employee and the organisation. However, in order to achieve that, there may be no signs of work addiction or compulsive work, which indicate workaholism (Wojdyło, 2015). From the organisation's perspective, the employee's professional engagement may manifest itself in exceeding the scope of allocated tasks, showing initiative in the work place, reduced absence from work and a high level of motivation to work (Łaguna, Mielniczuk, Żaliński, Wałachowska, 2015). As a result of this active attitude, we can observe an increased efficiency of the employee and of the organisation itself. A number of studies aimed at verifying the relation between work involvement as defined above and the health and quality of life of employees also point to a number of benefits for the individual (Schaufeli, Bakker, 2004). Most often they include an improved wellbeing, less health-related problems, higher subjective quality of life and a lesser risk of work-related burnout (Peterson, Demerouti, Bergström, Samuelsson, Asberg, Nygren, 2007). According to the concept of work involvement developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, Taris, 2008), it reflects the individual's basic attitude towards the work performed. It is therefore defined by the authors as

a "positive relation with work or a state of mind which is a source of satisfaction" (Łaguna et al., 2015, p. 281). The concept distinguishes between three components of so-called work involvement, i.e. vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Bakker, 2004; Łaguna et al., 2015). The definition of work involvement adopted in this paper sees it as a general involvement in work, which results from considering work as an important value in life. So defined work involvement is reflected in the subjective significance of work and the work place in one's life, in professional ambitions as a tendency to pursue continuous professional development, readiness to make an effort and to pursue perfection understood as a belief that the work performed is sound and accurate (Rongińska, Gajda, 2003).

Work involvement is defined by expending a large amount of effort into completing an assignment, perceiving one's work as highly important and focusing fully on work to the extent where one finds it difficult to take a break. (Schaufeli, Bakker, 2004). Such an approach to work-related duties affects other areas of a person's life.

Interactions between work and family

Both professional work and personal life (including family life) create an environment where vital needs are satisfied, which influences the general level of satisfaction with life (Barnett, 2008). However, they are also linked to specific tasks and expectations imposed on the individual, while the level of involvement in their performance is determined by personal and social factors. They constitute important areas of human self-realisation, irrespective of sex, age or education (Whitehead, 2008). Moreover, according to modern research, there is a constant flow of both negative and positive experiences between those areas (Duxbury, Higgins, 2001; Rostowski, 2006; Janicka, 2008; Peplińska, 2012). This flow is a natural and dynamic process, developing over the course of one's life, while its form, intensity and character result from the liquidity and permeability of the borders between both spheres (Rostowski, 2006; Zalewska, 2008; Peplińska, Rostowska, 2013). According to J.G. Grzywacz and N.F. Marks (2000; Grzywacz, 2000), the relationships between the abovementioned areas of human operation are complex, which is evidenced by the dual character of the correlations – as a source of conflict and support. The researchers also indicate that the complexity of the interactions may also be linked to the mediating factors in this process, such as sex, age, number of years in employment, education, type of work and challenges faced by the worker, number of children, assets held, personality variables, as well as the relationship model and its formal status. Each of the factors may be a source of conflict as well as a source of support, whereas experiences gathered while performing numerous roles can generate both positive and negative consequences.

Based on source literature analysis and current research on the relation between work and personal life, we encounter two basic perspectives, i.e. negative and positive effects occurring between both spheres (Lachowska, 2008; 2010; 2012). In terms of the negative effects,

the basic term is a “conflict”, introduced by R.L. Kahn, D.M. Wolfe, R. Quinn, J.D. Snoek and R.A. Rosenthal (1964) – referring to a situation where the expectations related to participation in one organisation/group clash with the expectations related to participation in other groups. Whereas I.M. Greenhaus and N.J. Beutell (1985) define a conflict as inconsistent expectations at work and in the family, mutually obstructing the performance of tasks. In the view of L. Duxbury and Ch. Higgins (1994, 2001) a work-family conflict occurs when the expectations linked to individual roles are inconsistent and incompatible, while performance of one of the roles obstructs the performance of another.

By comparison, the positive effect perspective talks about processes of mutual enrichment and facilitation occurring between individual roles. Therefore, holding a certain role, for example linked to one’s profession, may be made easier by holding another role, for instance in the family, while resources linked to one role facilitate a more effective performance of another role, for example by using the experience and skills gathered. One of the first researchers to point to the positive relations between multitude of roles was N.F. Marks (1977 as cited in: Lachowska, 2010, 2012). He observed that holding multiple roles does not have to exhaust the individual’s resources, but it can even strengthen them and improve the individual’s general wellbeing. As opposed to the “resource draining” theory developed by S.E. Hobfoll (1989), experiences gathered while performing one role may create resources which can be used to perform another (Greenhaus, Powell, 2006). Therefore, if the professional and family sphere are positively intertwining, new skills may be gained and maturity may develop, contributing to a good general and mental wellbeing of the individual. Some research goes as far as to prove that work-family conflict and work role stressors are not related to family satisfaction, but only to job satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1992).

The need for reconciling different roles poses a great challenge in the modern world. The consequences of the most important two aspects of human life, i.e. home/family and work, particularly affect partners in two-career relationships.

Characteristics of two-career relationships

Transformations related to the merging of different spheres in an individual’s life and different roles in life are also linked to changes in marriages concluded and families established (Rostowski, 2009). An example of relationships where these spheres are the most intertwined are two-career couples. Economic and social changes observed since mid-20th century and the growing level of education and professional aspirations of women, as well as changes in the roles assigned to both sexes, contribute to a gradual departure from the traditional family model with clearly allocated roles (Kosakowska, Petrus, 2006). More and more often we can find egalitarian-partner relationships and two-career relationships, where both

spouses are actively employed and bear the responsibility for raising children and running the household (Rostowski, Rostowska, 2005; Hermann, 2016). The abovementioned role transformations are not only connected to an increased professional activity of women, accompanied with growing professional aspirations and ambitions, and a growing need for self-realisation outside the family system experienced by women, but also to changes in the value system and needs of the modern man (Kosakowska, Petrus, 2006; Gilbert, 2014). Source literature more and more often talks about an increased activity of men in terms of household chores and parental obligations (Gilbert, 2014; Hermann, 2016). The transformations in social and gender roles lead to an increased participation of men in playing the role of the father, raising and caring for the child, as well as participation in household chores. Such changes do not result only from the necessity created by an increased professional engagement of women and the division of household duties based on partnership, but also from an increased awareness and motivation of men to participate actively in the family life, to build relations with children and spend time with them, to contribute to the way they are raised and to their development (Gilbert, 2014).

According to I. Janicka (2014), it is important to distinguish between classic two-income marriages and two-career couples. Growing expectations and competition on the labour market make it more difficult to distinguish clearly between those two types of relationships. In both cases we can observe a growing involvement in professional duties while limiting or giving up on family duties. A factor which facilitates the distinction is the level of an individual’s engagement in the development of their own professional competence and the pursuit of a better and better professional position, achieved, for example, by way of promotion. What allows us to distinguish between the two types of relationships is the professional position of the partners; in case of two-career couples, the partners hold leadership positions, work on the competitive labour market, in competitive forms of employment. Involvement in professional career includes such variables as: responsibility, obligation, loyalty and dedication, as well as investing time and energy (Schoebi, Karney, Bradbury, 2012; Janicka, 2014). Source literature also refers to a quantitative and qualitative dimension of a career (Crossfoeld, Kinman, Jones, 2005), as well as its horizontal and vertical dimension (Paszowska-Rogacz, Dudek, 2012). In terms of the quantitative dimension, the key factors are the number of hours spent on work and at work, place in the organisational hierarchy and the number of tasks and duties performed (Janicka, 2014). Whereas the qualitative dimension usually focuses on the level of engagement in work and satisfaction from work. The horizontal dimension of a career is understood as the process of expanding one’s scope of competence, development and building up career resources (Bańka, 2004), whereas the vertical dimension (so-called upward career) is understood as a vertical movement in the organisational structure, i.e. so-called vertical promotion (Paszowska-Rogacz, Dudek, 2012; Janicka, 2014).

In the view of Markman et al. (2006; Janicka, 2014), two-career marriages can be divided based on the stage of their professional career at the time of entering into the relationship. Thus we can distinguish between early and late career relationships. The first group consists of marriages where both partners at the time of entering into the relationship or formalising the relationship were highly involved in their professional career. They are people who, when entering the relationship, showed a high level of work involvement, while both partners showed a similar level of aspiration, ambition and professional goals. Markman uses the term “married to the job” while talking about this category, as according to the author entering this type of a relationship also involves getting married to the partner’s job. The second group are partners who have egalitarian–partnership (two-income) relationships, where the high-level of work involvement occurs after entering the relationship.

In comparison with traditional and egalitarian–partnership (two-income) marriage models, two-career relations bear more risks and sacrifices, but can also bring about many benefits (Abele, Volmer, 2011). They may include a higher income, creating positive role models for children, developing proactive attitudes in children, more likelihood of success, higher professional and social competences, wider range of sources of support, ability to transfer positive experiences, as well as changes in free-time activities, entertainment and recreation (Anderson, Spruill, 1993). As mentioned before, there may be a positive flow between professional and personal life, contributing mutually to the level of satisfaction experienced by the partners (Compos, Shu-wen Wong, Plaksina, Repetti, Schoebi, Ochs, Beck, 2013). These relations may also be of a circular character, i.e. satisfaction from the professional sphere may increase satisfaction with one’s close family relations, while strong family bonds may secondarily contribute to a higher satisfaction with one’s work. However, it has been stated that the multitude of benefits connected to playing multiple roles, in particular to balancing professional and family roles, is not unconditional. One of the key determinants is the quality of the relations between the partners, affecting the level of support, love, understanding experienced and the quality of communication between the partners (Skowroński, Otham, Tan Wen Siang, Lum Wei Han, Wong Jia Yang, Waszyńska, 2014). We should also consider that potential benefits or losses related to the multitude of roles and to balancing different spheres of life are determined by a range of additional factors, such as having children and the number of children, stage of the relationship, personal assets of the partners, socioeconomic status of the partners, as well as external factors, for instance the state family support system.

Source literature very often highlights the negative consequences attributed to the nature of two-career relationships. Most often they concern physical and emotional stress, time pressure, multitude of duties and obligations, a lack of free time and the need to constantly negotiate and renegotiate the allocation of

responsibilities in the family (Rostowski, 2006; Abele, Volmer, 2011; Mäkälä, Käsälä, Suutari, 2011). Literature also mentions negative changes in eating habits, giving up on entertainment and recreation, insufficient amount of sleep, giving up on engaging in important developmental activities, lowered subjective quality of life and – in particular – increasing stress, often depression and various health issues (Janicka, 2008). A study conducted by A. Peplińska et al. (2014) shows that people in two-career relationships, as compared to other relationship models (i.e. traditional and egalitarian–partnership relations), show higher levels of stress, exhaustion and tension, and experience role conflicts much more frequently while also experiencing lower levels of life affirmation and satisfaction with their free-time activities. On the other hand, the partners also show higher levels of satisfaction with their own achievements and satisfaction with the family’s economic situation, which may neutralise the negative impact of stress and conflicts experienced. Of course the potential losses mentioned earlier, associated with two-career relationships, may depend on the sex of the partners. It is often stressed that in case of two-income couples, so also two-career couples, women are significantly much more often at risk of becoming overwhelmed with their roles and duties (Rostowski, 2006). This may be a result of the dominant gender ideology. There are some women who follow the modern lifestyle and perform their social roles, with the traditional gender role model embedded internally. This duality and conflict (between the role performed and the feeling of a social duty) may contribute to significantly more common conflicts between work and family or family and work (Peplińska, Sadowska, 2014). In the studies presented above, analysis based on the sex of partners in two-career relationships confirms the validity of such statements. Thus women in two-career relationships, as compared to their partners, showed a significantly lower level of life affirmation and satisfaction with their life with significantly higher levels of exhaustion, gender conflict, tension and stress (Peplińska et al., 2014). Work role stressors and work-life conflict are connected with higher stress among men, while work and family role stressors increase life stress among women (Parasuraman et al., 1992).

As part of abovementioned studies it was also observed that the gender conflict experienced by partners in two-career relationships (irrespective of their sex) had a negative relationship with the sense of life and a positive relationship with stress experienced. Therefore, experiencing a conflict between professional and family roles and experiencing stress may have a negative impact on the sense of life, resulting in gradually decreasing wellbeing (Peplińska et al., 2014).

The present research

Analysis of source literature shows clear deficits in the scope of research and scientific publications dedicated to two-career marriages in Poland, especially in the context of the quality of life parameters, their functioning as part

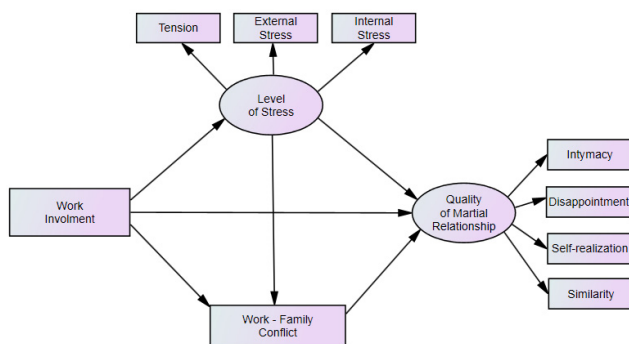
of individual roles played in life and the consequences resulting from the nature of the relationship. The paper attempts to verify the correlations between the level of work involvement of two-career couples and the subjective quality of their marital relationship. Another goal was to find variables mediating the correlations observed, such as the level of stress experienced and gender conflict, taking account of the gender of the respondents as an additional moderator.

With regard to the aims set out above, the following research questions were formed:

1. Is there a correlation between the level of professional involvement of two-career couples and the subjective quality of their marital relations?
2. Can the level of stress experienced and conflicts encountered mediate the relation between the level of work involvement and the quality of marital relations of two-career couples?
3. Is the sex of partners in two-career relationships a significant mediator of the correlations observed?

The questions established reflect the basic aim of the study and constitute the basis for creating a theoretical model of relationships between the selected variables.

Figure 1. Block diagram of the relationship between work involvement and quality of marital relations mediated by stress and work-family conflict



The established research questions implied the following research hypotheses.

According to the professional development theory by D. Super (1980), over the course of their life people play a number of roles simultaneously, maintaining mutual relations between the roles as they influence one another. The level of involvement in one role determines the level of involvement in others. It can be assumed that a high level of involvement in the professional role, characteristic for two-career couples, obstructs the performance of other roles, especially in the personal sphere. Research carried out to date on two-career relationships suggests that partners in such relationships experience work-family conflicts significantly more often (Peplińska et al., 2014). Therefore, their level of work involvement, i.e. participation in playing the professional role, often clashes with playing roles in the family, which can therefore weaken the emotional relations in the family and affect their quality.

H1: It seems justified to assume that the level of work involvement of two-career couples has a negative relationship with their subjective assessment of the quality of their marital relationship.

Analysis of source literature dedicated to two-career relationships and research conducted in that regard often point to the negative consequences associated with the functioning of the partners in such relationships (Janicka, 2014). They report a high level of stress, tension, pressure, as well as work-family and family-work conflicts significantly more often.

H2: Taking the above into consideration, it may be assumed that also with regard to the analysis presented below, the level of stress experienced and gender conflicts mediate negatively and significantly the relationship between work involvement and the quality of marital relations, decreasing the latter.

Analyses of the relationship between professional work and personal life often stress that the gender of the respondents constitutes a significant moderator of the correlations observed (Janicka, 2014). Also studies dedicated to two-career couples often indicate that women in such relationships experience negative flow between work-family more often, that they report a high level of tension, overload and exhaustion significantly more often and that they assess their quality of life as significantly lower (Peplińska et al., 2014).

H3: Therefore, it seems justified to assume that in the scope of the analysis presented, the sex of the respondents will be a significant moderator of the correlations observed. Therefore, the expected negative consequences of work engagement with stress and role conflict as mediating variables mostly affects women.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted over 2013–2016 and involved the total of 150 two-career married couples (300 people), where both partners pursued their career on the competitive labour market, held leadership functions and balanced their professional roles with parental roles. All of the participants in two-career marriages had higher education, their age ranged between from 28 and to 40 years old ($M=33.24$) and they had at least 1 child. An important factor which qualified the participants as two-career couples was the level and pattern of their professional activity. Apart from holding leadership positions in large companies in the private sector, it involved working over 12 hours per day, bringing work home and working during free time, as well as the necessity to perform professional duties on weekends (outside working hours). Moreover, an important factor was the area of work of the respondents, which indicated a high level of independence in the work performed, accompanied by time pressure, responsibility for task completion, complexity of work and a highly-specialised character of work, requiring high qualifications. Additional

factors related to the operation of two-career couples were a high level of involvement in continuous improvement of skills, development, self-learning and participation in specialist training completed by sacrificing free time and family time.

Materials and procedure

In order to verify the questions and hypotheses established, four measurement tools were used:

- Work-related Behaviour and Experience Pattern Test AVEM by K.U. Scharschmidt and A.W. Fisher (Gaida, Rongińska, 2003) to verify three experience patterns: work involvement, mental resilience and strategies of dealing with problematic situations, emotional attitude to work. Cronbach's α for the individual scales ranges between 0.71 and 0.84.
- The test consists of 66 questions to be answered on a 5-step Likert scale. Example questions include: *My life is all about work*, *I work until I am completely exhausted if necessary* and *My partner (or another close person) is understanding of my work*.
- Well-matched Marriage Questionnaire (KDM-2) developed by J. Rostowski and M. Plopa, which describes the quality of marital relations from the perspective of each partner (Plopa, 2005). The tool can facilitate a general measurement of the relations and specific factors, i.e. intimacy, self-realisation, similarity and disappointment. Cronbach's α for the individual scales ranges between 0.82 and 0.90. The questionnaire consists of 32 statements referring to marriage, for example, *My spouse's personality suits me*, *As the years go by, we are building intimacy, trust and unity* (Intimacy), *At the workplace I feel better than at home* (Self-realisation), *I have often thought of divorce* (Disappointment). The respondents answered on a 5-step Likert scale.
- Work-Family Fit Questionnaire – developed for a research project conducted in the US by J.D.I. Catherine T. MacArthur Research Network on Successful Midlife Development, adapted for Poland by B. Lachowska (2008). The Questionnaire consists of 16 items which help verify the level of gender conflict experienced (effects of work on family and of family on work), as well as role facilitation (W-F and F-W). For example, *Stress at work makes you feel nervous* (work – family conflict), *A good day at work makes you more sociable after coming back home* (work – family facilitation), *Stress at home makes you feel nervous at work* (family – work conflict), *Your domestic life helps you relax and get ready for another day at work* (family – work facilitation). The respondents answered on a 5-step Likert scale.

Cronbach's α for the individual scales ranges between 0.72 and 0.81.

- Stress Level Questionnaire created by M. Plopa and R. Makarowski (2010), which verifies the general level of stress experienced on the basis of three basic areas – emotional tension, external stress (resulting from the individual's confrontation with the burdens found in their surroundings) and intrapsychic stress (resulting from one's confrontation with themselves). The questionnaire also contains a lie scale which, helps identify people who try to present themselves in a very positive light. Cronbach's α for the individual scales ranges between 0.69 and 0.81.
- The questionnaire consists of 27 statements to be answered on a 5-step scale to evaluate the match between the statement and the respondent's subjective view of self, e.g. *I feel anxious that more and more things are annoying me* (emotional tension), *I am fed up with constant conflicts with other people* (external stress), *I cannot let go of what I have been through in the past* (intrapsychic stress).

The study was conducted through direct and indirect contact (through HR departments) with the respondents. The study used the "paper – pencil" method, was anonymous and voluntary. The respondents were informed about the general purpose of the analysis conducted.

Results

In order to evaluate the mediating role of stress experienced and conflict between professional and family roles in the relationship between work involvement and the respondents' marriage quality assessment, structural equation modelling was employed with Direct and Indirect effect analysis performed through 1000-fold bootstrap simulation with the AMOS 24 package. To verify the role of the respondents' gender, an analysis was performed of the differences between parameters which describe the relationships between variables in the adopted model (Fig. 1) for the male and female subgroup.

In the context of the results obtained, the parameters – χ^2 test = 37.840, $df = 23$, $p = 0.37$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.07; goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.92; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.95 (Tab. 1) – showed the model was an acceptable fit to the data and confirmed its interpretability (Konarski, 2010). A positive correlation was observed in the adopted model between work involvement and the respondents' assessment of their marital relation ($\beta = 0.31$; $p < 0.01$). This result does not corroborate Hypothesis 1. This relationship (Direct Effect) is, however, mediated (Indirect Effect) by the level of stress experienced and the presence of a possible

Table 1. Results of global fit of the model to the data

CHI ² (23) = 37.840; p = 0.367	RMSEA = 0.069	CFI = 0.952	GFI = 0.918
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CHI² – χ^2 test; RMSEA – root mean square error of approximation; CFI – comparative fit index; GFI – goodness of fit index

Table 2. Mediation parameters in the relation between work involvement and marital quality assessment in the adopted model

		Quality of Martial Relationship	
		Direct Effect	Indirect Effect
Work Involment		0.310***	-0.129
95% confidence intervals	Lower limit	0.195	-0.740
	Upper limit	0.419	-0.920

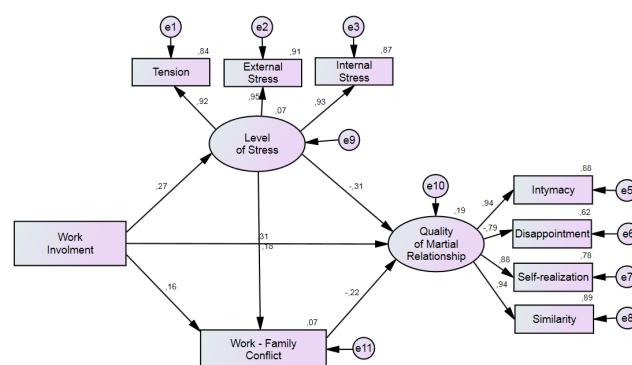
Note. *** $p < 0.01$

conflict between family and professional life (Tab. 2), full mediation was observed (Indirect Effect). Therefore, the important relationship between the independent variable (work involvement) and the dependent variable (quality of marital relations) ceases to be statistically significant due to the effects of the direct mediator (level of stress experienced) and the indirect mediator (work-family conflict). The conflict between work requirements and family life expectations, as a mediating indirect variable in this relation, is reinforced directly by the level of stress experienced ($\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.05$).

Therefore, stress and work-family conflict reduce significantly the direct effect of work involvement on marital relations, which fully confirms Hypothesis 2.

Next, a comparative analysis was performed of the path parameters in the model in sub-groups established on the basis of the respondents' sex (Tab. 3). It turned out that the adopted model of the relationships between variables in terms of parameter values did not show significant differences between the male and female group examined – as a result, Hypothesis 3 proved false. However, males only showed a significantly stronger negative relationship between stress and marital life quality assessment ($z = -2.92$; $p < 0.001$), as well as (result of borderline significance) a stronger relationship between professional life and stress experienced.

Figure 2. Result block diagram showing the relation between work involvement and marital relationship quality mediated by stress and work-family conflict in the general group of respondents



Discussion

The basic aim of the research presented herewith was an attempt to find relationships between the level of work involvement of two-career couples and the quality of their marital relations taking account of the additional variables mediating the relation, i.e. the level of stress experienced and role conflict. With regard to the correlation between work involvement and the quality of marital

Table 3. Analysis of the significance of the difference (z-score) between path parameter values in the female and male subgroup in the model adopted

			Females		Males		z-score
			Estimate	P	Estimate	P	
Level of Stress	←	Work Involvement	0.075	0.025	0.159	0.000	1.788*
Work-Family Conflict	←	Work Involvement	0.046	0.013	0.045	0.094	-0.023
Work-Family Conflict	←	Level of Stress	0.104	0.027	0.134	0.041	0.375
Quality of Martial Relationship	←	Level of Stress	-0.196	0.034	-0.635	0.000	-2.922***
Quality of Martial Relationship	←	Work Involvement	0.182	0.000	0.161	0.000	-0.358
Quality of Martial Relationship	←	Work-Family Conflict	-0.554	0.000	-0.255	0.073	1.395

Note. *** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.1$

relations it was assumed that the work involvement would have a negative effect on the quality of the relationship between the parameters. This assumption was based on source literature overview and studies conducted in this regard. However, against the hypothesis established, it was found, based on the analyses carried out, that in case of two-career couples this relationship is positive and the level of work involvement has a positive effect on an increased subjective quality of the marital relation. It may also be associated with social support from a spouse or the whole family, who can understand partner's occupational needs according to the findings described by Parasuramen et al., suggesting that support from the partner translates into satisfaction with family life (1992). The support applies to emotional, informational, appraisal and instrumental aid so it may concern not only personal but also professional area. However, the Authors did not control for the support aspect. On one hand, we can therefore talk about positive flows which may exist between the area of professional activity of these specific dyads and the quality of their relations. It can be therefore assumed that this will be connected to the partners' level of self-realisation, satisfying their important needs at work, aspirations and ambitions, which can have a general effect on their personal life sphere, including intimate relations with their partner. On the other hand, we should consider the character of the relationships studied. They exist between individuals with high work involvement levels, for whom work is an important value in itself. This may have a positive effect on the subjective level of happiness, satisfaction and thus influence positively other areas of their activity, including personal life. A similar explanation was offered for the findings proposed by Greenhaus et al. (1989), suggesting that men with high levels of job involvement experience significantly low levels of time-based conflict. As mentioned above, according to D. Super's rainbow lifestyle model (1980), individual roles performed by people influence each other, and positive emotions may be transferred between the different spheres (Grzywacz, Marks, 2000; Lachowska, 2012). Taking into account also the type of two-career couples, we are unable to say whether the couples examined were at the so-called early or late career stage (Janicka, 2014). If we assume that the majority, if not all of the couples examined, were so-called early-career relationships, then both partners may have entered the relationship with a high level of work involvement. Such relationships are created by individuals who enter the relation with a high level of work involvement, and quite often that aspect, i.e. a strong work involvement, was the factor which brought the partners closer while they were building their bond. Both partners were characterised by a similar level of aspiration, ambition and professional goals, which may have been one of the factors that determined the conclusion of the relationship. According to Markman's theses (2006), entering into such a relationship also involves marrying the partner's work. Unfortunately, that aspect was not verified during the study, which represented a certain limitation on the study, thus it remains a speculation which may serve as the basis for

interpreting the study results. It seems important to consider this area in future research and monitor that aspect as part of further studies on the subject.

The correlation model established also shows that a high level of work involvement has a positive relationship with the level of stress experienced and gender conflict but only between work-family. Taking into account the study results concerning the relationship between work involvement and human life quality, these results raise no doubts. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, work involvement may bring a number of benefits to the employee (Schaufeli, Bakker, 2003; Bakker et al., 2008; Laguna et al., 2015), but also generate a number of negative consequences both on the physical and psychological level. Most often they include a feeling of being overwhelmed with the roles played, external pressure, tension and numerous role conflicts (Duxbury, Higgins, 2001; Peplińska et al., 2014). The conflicts reported by the partners between work-family and the level of stress experienced are important mediators of the positive relationship between work involvement and the quality of marital relations, eliminating the correlation. We can therefore conclude, according to the hypothesis established, that the level of stress experienced, tension and role conflicts have an impact on other areas of human activity and the relationships between them, taking the form of a negative flow of emotions, tensions and problems (Kahn et al., 1964; Greenhaus, Beutell, 1985). Taking into account the entire model of correlations established, it may be concluded that if the level of work involvement of two-career couples is linked to strong stress, which also generates conflict between work-family, it may in consequence have a negative effect by weakening the bonds between the partners in the relationships examined. In reference to the first hypothesis on the negative relationship between the level of work involvement and the quality of marital relations it seems justified to conclude that it is also potentially influenced by the simultaneous exposure to high levels of stress and work-family conflicts. On the other hand, based on the nature of two-career couples and assumptions on their early-stage careers, it may be assumed that positive flows between work involvement and the quality of the relationship between the partners only occur if there is a lack of stress and conflicts arising from the high work involvement. Importantly, in the model examined, family-work conflicts proved to be insignificant, which highlights the significant role of experience related to the individuals' professional sphere.

Another aim of the study was to verify the existence of an additional moderator of the correlations analysed, in terms of the sex variable. The analyses performed showed that in case of two-career couples, sex did not constitute a significant moderator. It may therefore be assumed that the sex of the respondents did not constitute a significant variable in this regard. One of the causes may be the relatively young age of the females examined, linked to the gradual departure from the traditional gender roles and the female activity model based on such roles. The female respondents in two-career relationships showed a similar

level of work involvement to men. The level of absorption and significance of work may contribute to reducing differences between partners in terms of their involvement in family roles.

The experiment is question is not free from certain limitations. One of them is the method of selecting couples for the study. It is often difficult to clearly distinguish between classic two-career couples from egalitarian partner relationships in which both partners are highly involved in their work and self-improvement. The experiment presented here applies variables to filter out the relationships, but it is uncertain whether these are adequate. As mentioned earlier, no questions were asked about the stage when the relationship was formed. This means that it is unknown whether the studied couples represented early-career or late-career relationships. It seems essential, therefore, to monitor that variable in future research. It is also necessary to consider the voluntary nature of the experiment, i.e. whether the respondents took part in it of their own free will, as this may affect the results. This type of research uses questionnaires requiring declarative answers which are prone to possible defence mechanisms (suppression, favourable presentation) used by respondents. Therefore, it appears essential to repeat the experiment using a larger sample and modify the procedures for respondent selection. In further research on this issue, it would also be helpful to monitor the impact of other factors such as having children, the number of children, respondent age, and length of relationship, which also determine the subjective view of marital life quality.

Two-career couples are a very specific type of dyad, whose nature may be reflected in specific areas of threat, but also in benefits for the partners. Taking into account the abovementioned analyses, it seems justified to assume that the success of such a relationship is highly realistic. Similarly, we can assume that a high level of work involvement can be balanced with a high quality of relations between the partners. However, this success requires a lot of sacrifices and creates additional correlations. In case of the analyses presented above, such a correlation is the level and type of emotions experiences in connection with the sphere of professional activity and the transfer of its burdens into the personal sphere. Sadly, a high level of work involvement, work absorption and related flows often create a range of negative consequences, such as tension, stress and role conflict. Therefore, it may be concluded that the potential success of two-career couples described above may be difficult to achieve from a long-term perspective.

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