

Relationship with the mother and closeness to grandparents in relation to resilience in adolescents in families of single mothers. Significance of the absence of the father

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Summary

The father leaving the family is undoubtedly an example of those new experiences, and one that disturbs functioning of the family members. Observations confirm that children suffer most as a result of changes in the family life and in an atmosphere of conflict. Such changes often lead to separation and divorce, after which the parents remain in conflict and the mother experiences negative emotional states, which might be harmful to the children. The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between a subjective assessment of adolescents' relationship with the mother and emotional closeness with the grandparents, and resilience in adolescents from single mother families, with consideration of the context provided by the role of the absence of father. The study was conducted on a sample of 309 participants, with the Questionnaire of Family Relationships, Resilience Scale (SPP-18), and the original Scale of Closeness to Grandparents. The results indicated that, aside from consistency with the mother, closeness with the grandparents also stimulates resilience in adolescents. The dimension of control over an adolescent significantly lowers resilience of the individual. The duration of the absence of the father was not a significant determinant of resilience in young people. The results obtained in the study may prove useful to psychologists in constructing assistance programs for youth and families of single mothers; they can also be treated as a starting point for future research.

resilience, relationship with the mother, grandparents

INTRODUCTION

Researchers studying resilience in children from single-parent families pay close attention to the significance of supportive relationships with close relatives for the development of that capacity. For children, their interactions with relatives are opportunities to gain new experiences [1]. The father leaving the family is undoubtedly

an example of those new experiences, and one that disturbs the functioning of the family members [2]. Observations confirm that children suffer most as a result of changes in the family life and in an atmosphere of conflict. Such changes often lead to separation and divorce, after which the parents remain in conflict and the mother experiences negative emotional states which might be harmful to the children [3]. Parents are who teenagers name as a significant source of mental resilience as well as a motivation to avoid risk behaviors [4]. In recent years, research has been focused on finding the mechanisms of connec-

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tions that support formation of resilience in adolescents from families of single mothers. Definition of resilience considers it in two aspects [5]. In the first aspect, resilience is a permanent, positive trait, or the ability to function effectively and to cope with difficult situations. From this perspective, resilience is a personal quality and a permanent resource which is a result of interaction between the person and the environment [6]. Some studies assess resilience using Erikson's eight stages of ego development: the strength of ego is a suitable assessment tool because the strengths of an individual's ego represent the results of a dynamic development process. This, in turn, shows how the individual copes with crises and how they adapt to new situations, maintaining their mental wellbeing [7]. Resilience as a complex personality trait is also a factor that protects the individual in stressful situations [8].

Literature presents various definitions and various ways of identifying resilience. One of those definitions is a group of risk factors and protective factors which facilitate a positive adaptation in stressful situations [9]. Risk, in the context of the resilience theory, is interpreted in terms of the influence of a specific risk factor on the life of an individual. Risk is defined as a higher likelihood of appearance of a problem in the future, under the condition of the presence of a specific factor or a group of factors [10]. Risk factors are always negative [11]. In studies on resilience, typical risk factors include social and family problems, such as poverty, mental illness, or parental divorce [12]. Discussions on risk factors also name protective factors which include the following: warmth, close relationships between family members [13], communication patterns, effective social networks, and economical resources [14]. These factors may change the relationship between risk and its consequences and directly impact the functioning and development of an individual.

In studies on resilience, researchers refer to Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological concept of human development [15], in accordance with which research includes factors connected with the four basic dimensions which influence an individual: individual traits, influence of peers, family relationships, and the specificity of the individual's place of residence. Authors who sub-

scribe to the ecological concept of human development emphasize that resilience is not a permanent trait [16], but a multi-faceted process which occurs within the model of balancing of risk. In this model, the protective factors directly influence an individual's behaviour, thus balancing the impact of the risk factors.

Another perspective on resilience focuses on seeking protective factors which support an individual in coping with the consequences of a significantly stressful event [17]. It defines resilience as a process in which the individual efficiently copes with difficult situations and circumstances throughout their life. Resilience as a trait is a quality that is shaped by elements of the context of an individual's life and is one of the traits that can be perfected and strengthened as the individual grows [18]. The variety of perspectives allows for the concept of resilience to be explored in its different aspects; it is made possible especially in the context of an individual's ability to cope with difficulties and stress, interpreted as a result of many factors present in the social ecosystem in which the individual functions [19]. As an attempt to explain why and how some young people are able to cope with hardships and function in adult life, while others become victims of their difficult experiences and background, the concept of resilience is attractive to both researchers and practitioners [20]. Adolescents may have a different experience with protective factors, which may affect their resilience to varying degrees.

PREDICTORS OF RESILIENCE IN YOUTH

Numerous researchers have identified positive relationships between resilience and protective factors, such as support offered by grandparents [21], social support [20], and the individual's own traits [22]. Factors contributing to low resilience in young people include high-risk circumstances such as living in poverty [20], poor communication in the family, and insufficient parental control (especially of boys) [23]. Positive relationship with a parent and closeness with the relatives are particularly important during adolescence. The relationship with the mother acts as a matrix for relationships with people in later life [24].

Relationships are defined as a sum of interactions and activities [25] occurring over a certain period. Their character is relatively permanent, and communication is one of their essential elements [26]. Communication is not only an indicator of the quality of the atmosphere in the family [27] but also a variable determining the educational effect of the parents' behavior. Most researchers stress the positive role that communication with the mother plays in development of her bond with the child. Effective communication in the family facilitates the functioning of adolescent children. Studies on communication have revealed a number of characteristics that determine closeness of the young person's relationship with their mother. Crocket and associates [28], in their study on Cuban-American teenagers have shown that the participants valued their mothers' willingness to keep the secrets they shared with them. Literature supports the view that higher quality of communication in the family positively correlates with how young people perceive their value, their mental and physical health [29], their positive attitude towards the experienced difficulties, their ability to solve conflicts, their sense of satisfaction with the family, as well as their bigger satisfaction with life [30]. Absence of one of the parents means presence of a deficit of parental authority [31]. Other negative consequences of the father's absence include social inadequacy, lack of sense of security, and criminal activity [32]. Boys who are raised without a father are less financially successful as adults and their social and material status is threatened. They might also be at risk of entering conflict with the law, and drop out of school more frequently than their peers [33]. Absence of the father is an acute loss for the child; it does not, however, have to determine their future. McLanahan and Sandefur [34] indicate that children who grow up in a one-parent household function worse than those from two-parent families, regardless of the education of the parents and whether the parents are married. Some studies suggest that the experience of the loss of father is positive for some individuals, while for others it is a source of temporary or permanent stress [35]. In case of divorce, the time that passes from the dissolution of the marriage is a factor that facilitates adaptation to the new situation [36]. Studies of children of di-

vorced parents have indicated that they gradually become less important to their fathers. Similarly to adults, children find it difficult to accept the loss of a parent. Most children from divorced marriages cope with family-related problems within two or three years after the divorce; this ability to cope does not depend only on personal traits, but on the relationships between different family members [37].

Absence of the father in the family provokes, in the mother, a stronger tendency to discipline the adolescent children and to raise her expectations. Control is manifested in concentration on the child and interest in its development, and the image of the child in the parent's mind becomes more important to them than the child's real thoughts and feelings. The child is constantly controlled, corrected, and overly protected. Autonomy is characterized by an understanding and tolerant attitude that leaves the child freedom; it can, however, go beyond many people's emotional capacity. Cooperation and participation of the child in family-related issues shapes positive attitudes and develops the child's initiative [38].

Contact of grandchildren with grandparents is common, but regular contact is more frequent between grandchildren and maternal grandparents, in particular in families of single mothers. The theory of attachment (which is an ethological model) as well as theories of family systems allow to illustrate and emphasize the significance of the presence of grandparents in the family, when considered in the context of the structure of the social system as well as an independent system. Grandparents serves as a source of emotional support for the parents and the grandchildren and directly participate in the process of socialization of adolescent children [39]. Emotional closeness between grandchildren and grandparents is a consequence of the frequency of contacts between them [40]. Grandparents are perceived as having influence on the grandchildren's choice of values and goals in life and have a positive impact on the psychosocial functioning of both the mother and the child [41]. It is particularly important in the families deprived of the role model which in other families is provided by the father. The results of the studies to date allow one to assume that young people from families of

single mothers have more frequent contact with grandparents, if they are available, and the relationship between them is healthy enough to build closeness. Grandparents are able to offer their grandchildren closeness more often if they know that the young person does not have contact with the father. In other words, absence of the father can activate contacts and support, and strengthen the bond in different ways. This increases the frequency of contacts with grandparents, thus probably increasing and strengthening resilience in young people. The role of the grandparents and their contribution to the family's efforts to reestablish psychological and functional balance among its members need to be emphasized in this context. Observations show that single mothers are often affected by lowered mood, uncertainty, or reserve.

According to the research paradigm that interprets the functioning of youth from families of single mothers as a source of stress, effectiveness of coping in youth depends on numerous factors, an important one being access to social resources. A satisfying relationship of an adolescent with the mother and closeness to grandparents are treated as resources that help build the young person's resilience. Studies to date did not analyze the relationship between the assessment of the relationship with the mother, closeness with the grandparents, and resilience in adolescents from families of single mothers. There are no known studies that consider the significance of the absence of the father in the household for the relationship between the assessment of the relationship with the mother and the closeness with the grandparents, and resilience in young people. Two research objectives have been formulated: to determine the difference in resilience in adolescents with consideration of the length of the absence of the father, and with consideration of the relationship with the mother and closeness with the grandparents after the loss of the father. Finding these connections in families of single mothers deserves to be treated as a priority.

METHOD

The studied sample included 309 participants from families of single mothers. The studied sample consisted of 164 (53.1 %) women and

145 (46.9 %) men. The average age of the participants was $M= 16.43$ ($SD= 1.89$; $Me = 17$). 155 (50.3 %) participants live in the countryside and 153 (49.7%) live in the city. The average number of siblings the participants have was $M= 1.4$ ($SD = 0.96$, $Me = 1$). The average duration of the absence of the father was $M = 7.45$ ($SD = 3.73$, $Me = 7$), with the shortest period being two years, and the longest being seventeen years. The highest number of individuals assessed the material situation of their family as moderately satisfying (35.3%; $n = 109$); the lowest number of participants assessed their family's material situation as very good (4.2%; $n = 13$).

Measuring tools are a set of the following questionnaires: resilience was estimated with the Resilience Scales SPP-18 [5]. The scales allow to measure the overall level of resilience; the participant responds to statements on a five-item Likert scale (from 0: definitely not, and 4: definitely yes). The tool assesses individual strength of resilience in its four dimensions: optimistic attitude and energy, perseverance and determination, sense of humor and openness to new experiences, personal competences, and tolerance of negative affect. Cronbach's α was at 0.89. The relationship with the mother was assessed with the Family Relationship Questionnaire (KRR) [42]. KRR allows to assess the following dimensions of family: communication (a high level indicates openness), flexibility in communication of the mother with the child in various situations, as well as mutual understanding and acceptance. A low level suggests a rigid attitude and low sensitivity to the needs of the family members. A high level of coherence means the ability to express positive emotions among the members of the family; a low result suggests no ability to solve conflicts, or a tendency to deny their existence, and lack of mutually exchanged support. Autonomy and control with a high level of autonomy (which means a low level of control) are connected with a rational acceptance of independence and encouraging the child to be self-sufficient. A high level of control (and a low level of autonomy) is connected with limitations imposed on the child's privacy and freedom, as well as rewards for obedience and dependence [42]. Closeness to grandparents was estimated with the specifically designed, one-question Scale of Closeness to Grandparents, with 0 meaning that the respondent did not have any

contact with grandparents, and 5 meaning very close contact. The socio-demographic data (age, sex, duration of the absence of the father, place of residence, and the material status of the family) was collected with a survey.

The study was conducted in 2016. Specially trained interviewers, who were sent to randomly chosen schools, carried out the survey. Individuals who agreed to participate in the study received a set of questionnaires with instructions. Participation was anonymous and individual; it had no time limit and the respondents did not receive financial gratification for completing the questionnaires.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS

The purpose of the study was to analyze the relationships between an adolescent's resilience (with regard to the duration of the absence of the father in the family as an interactive variable) and their subjective assessment of their relationship with the mother and their closeness with the grandparents. The goal was to determine the predictors of resilience and examine the effects of interactions between the variables. The relationship with the mother, closeness with the grandparents, and the duration of the absence of the father were treated as the predictors of resilience. The study analyzed the relationship between these variables and resilience in adolescents in families of single mothers with regard to the duration of the absence of the father. Three research issues have been formulated:

- 1) which of the different dimensions of the relationship with the mother (communication, consistency, autonomy-control) are significant predictors of resilience in adolescents from families of single mothers?
- 2) is closeness with the grandparents a statistically significant predictor of resilience in the studied individuals?

- 3) is the duration of the absence of the father a predictor of resilience in adolescents?
- 4) how does the duration of the absence of the father interact with the relationship with the mother and closeness with the grandparents in estimation of resilience in the studied individuals?

The formulated hypotheses assumed the following:

- 1) the relationship with the mother and closeness to grandparents, as well as the duration of the absence of the father in the family are significant predictors of resilience in adolescents
- 2) the duration of the absence of the father moderates the relation between the relationship with the mother and resilience in the studied individuals
- 3) the duration of the absence of the father moderates the relationship between closeness with the grandparents and resilience in the participants of the study

RESULTS

In order to answer the research questions, the obtained data was analyzed with the program PQStat 1.6.6.246. The results were presented in tables.

Predictors of resilience in adolescents

The data in Table 1 and Table 2 allowed to answer the question which aspects of the relationship with the mother are significant predictors of resilience in adolescents. It also presented an answer to another question: can resilience in the participants be estimated on the basis of closeness with the grandparents and the duration of the absence of the father?

Table 1. The relationship between research variables

	Variables	Pearson correlation coefficient						M	SD
		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.		
1.	Resilience		0.22 *	0.29 **	-0.25 **	0.14	-0.05	56.99	10.12

2.	Communication	0.22 *		0.85 ***	-0.53 ***	0.08	-0.23 *	32.65	5.65
3.	Consistency	0.28 **	0.85 ***		-0.51 ***	0.05	-0.22 *	32.99	5.82
4.	Autonomy – control	-0.25 **	-0.53 ***	-0.51 ***		-0.10	0.25 **	17.42	7.69
5.	Closeness	0.14	0.08	0.05	-0.10		-0.30 **	3.02	0.99
6.	Duration of the absence of father	-0.05	-0.23 *	-0.22 *	0.25 **	-0.30 **		7.46	3.72

M – mean; SD – standard deviation; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Model of regression estimating resilience in adolescents

Predictors	coefficient b	error b	β	standard error β	t(301)	p
absolute term	44.13	6.84			6.45	<0.001 ***
Communication	-0.28	0.23	-0.15	0.12	-1.25	0.213
Consistency	0.64	0.22	0.35	0.12	2.87	0.004 ***
Autonomy – control	-0.22	0.11	-0.16	0.08	-2.05	0.041 *
Closeness	1.49	0.71	0.14	0.07	2.08	0.038 *
Duration of the absence of father	0.18	0.19	0.06	0.07	0.91	0.361

Abbreviations as in Table 1.

Coefficient of determination: $R^2 = 0.121$

Corrected coefficient of determination: $R^2 = 0.102$

Standard estimation error: 10.181

Significance of the equation: $F(9, 218) = 6.131$; $p < 0.001$

The results show a statistically significant positive correlation between the resilience in an adolescent and consistency with the mother ($\beta = 0.345$; $p = 0.004$) and closeness with the grandparents ($\beta = 0.137$; $p = 0.038$). A decrease in resilience in adolescents is negatively and statistically significantly connected with an increase of control from the mother ($\beta = -0.155$; $p = 0.041$). The remaining variables (communication with the mother and duration of the absence of the father) are not statistically significant predictors for resilience in the studied individuals. The model of regression was statistically significant ($F(9,218) = 6.131$; $p < 0.001$); the

corrected coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.102$ explained the 10.2% variability for the resilience variable.

The relationship with the mother and closeness with the grandparents and their relationship with resilience in adolescents with regard to interaction with the duration of the absence of the father

The results illustrating the connection between the interaction of the duration of the absence of the father and the dimensions of the relationship with the mother and closeness with the grandparents have been presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Model of regression with regard to the interaction

Predictors	coefficient b	error b	-95% CI	+95% CI	t	p	β	standard error β
Absolute term	42.69	14.69	13.72	71.65	2.90	0.0041 ***		
Communication	-0.53	0.53	-1.59	0.52	-0.99	0.320	-0.28	0.28
Consistency	0.94	0.51	-0.07	1.96	1.83	0.068 ten.*	0.51	0.28
Autonomy – Control	-0.06	0.24	-0.53	0.41	-0.26	0.795	-0.04	0.17
Closeness	0.36	1.66	-2.91	3.64	0.22	0.826	0.03	0.15
Duration of absence	0.32	1.77	-3.18	3.82	0.18	0.857	0.11	0.62
A x E	0.04	0.08	-0.11	0.19	0.56	0.572	0.48	0.84
B x E	-0.05	0.06	-0.19	0.10	-0.63	0.528	-0.54	0.85
C x E	-0.02	0.03	-0.08	0.03	-0.75	0.456	-0.20	0.27
D x E	0.14	0.19	-0.23	0.51	0.74	0.460	0.16	0.21

Symbols.: A – communication with mother; B – consistency with mother; C – autonomy-control; D – closeness with grandparents; E – duration of the absence of the father

Abbreviations as in Table 1.

Coefficient of determination: $R^2 = 0.128$

Corrected coefficient of determination: $R^2 = 0.092$

Standard estimation error: 10.234

Significance of the equation: $F(9, 218) = 3.557, p < 0.001$

Consistency with mother has, statistically, slightly weaker significance ($p < 0.068$) for resilience in adolescents. The low value seems to stem from a good relationship with the mother and satisfaction with her support and the assistance she provides. The duration of the absence of the father in the family does not interact with any of the analyzed predictors. Communication with mother, autonomy-control, closeness with grandparents, and the duration of the absence of the father, as well as all interactions between the variables have been revealed to be insignificant in this model. Thus, this combination of variables explained 9.2% of the variability of the analyzed dependent variable. The remaining variability was explained by other variables which were not included in the model. The model itself is statistically significant $F_{(9, 218)} = 3.557, p < 0.001$

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to determine predictors of resilience and examine the effects of

interaction which occurs between the variables. The model of regression was applied in the analyses, with regard to interaction in estimation of resilience in adolescents from families of single mothers. Hypothesis 1, which assumed that the relationship with the mother (in the following aspects: communication and consistency with the mother), closeness with the grandparents, and duration of the absence of the father are significant predictors of resilience in adolescents, has been partially confirmed. Consistency with the mother and closeness with the grandparents have been revealed to be statistically significant determinants of the adolescents' ability to cope despite difficulties. Assuming that the relationships between family members are a determinant of the quality of family life, adolescents stressed their trust in their mothers and the freedom to be themselves. The mechanism which stimulates the development of an individual is the interaction with an adult [43]. A strong relationship between the mother and the adolescent protects those young people who grow up in families of single mothers from developing a low mental resilience.

The determined role of consistency and closeness is based on these values being universal and able to satisfy various needs and deficiencies in the resources. The belief in self-efficacy is generated on the foundation of positive experiences in coping with difficulties. Due to higher empathy in women, mothers become less demanding partners, able to faster and more accurately understand what kind of assistance the child needs which might support the development of resilience in young people. The autonomy-control dimension has been shown to be negatively significant as a determinant of resilience. The result suggests that mothers, by limiting privacy and freedom of their adolescent child, and by praising their obedience and dependence, contribute to their low resilience. In this situation, a teenager cannot expect that their mother will understand them. The mother rarely supports their ideas, in particular those which are not compatible with her own vision and convictions, which also creates an environment unfavorable to the development of resilience in the young person. The obtained results have confirmed the conclusions from research on destructive influence of parents on children, conducted by Kowalski [44]. In particular, it is daughters (girls were the majority in the studied sample, which could have had impact on the results of the study) who frequently perceive their mothers as too invested in their lives - especially in their romantic relationships - and this kind of parental activity lowers the effectiveness of the child's activity. This may be caused by the regularity observed in older adolescents, when young people need more freedom and autonomy in making decisions [45], which makes them more critical towards their parents. This result is consistent with the reports on the absence of the father in the families of sailors. Danilewicz [46] concludes that to compensate for the absence of the father, mothers attach very closely to children and limit their activity, which causes them to become socially and emotionally immature. Children of single mothers as well as those from families of sailors similarly assess their mothers' tendency to control and the level of autonomy they allow them.

Including in the models predictors such as dimensions of the relationship with the mother, closeness with the grandparents, and duration of the absence of the father has shown the high sta-

tistical significance of the model. The obtained results allow to draw the conclusion that the higher the closeness with the grandparents and support from the mother (and the less control on her part), the higher becomes the likelihood that the adolescents will become more resilient. These results lead to the conclusion that an emotional bond between the members of a family, mutual support and sustaining a good atmosphere between the mother and the adolescent, as well as between the adolescent and the grandparents allow to anticipate the development of resilience in the young people.

The remaining hypotheses have not been confirmed by the obtained results. Overall, a more difficult family life caused by the absence of the father may lead to lowered satisfaction with life but also stimulate integration of the intergenerational bonds. A close and open relationship with the grandparents enriches the resources of the family, and the emotional bond contributes to alleviating anxieties and fears.

To conclude,

1. Support and assistance, as well as closeness with the mother and the grandparents have a positive influence on resilience in the studied adolescents.
2. An exception is the excessive control by the mother, which may negatively impact resilience in young people.
3. Communication with the mother and duration of the absence of the father are not determinants of resilience in adolescents.

Researches on resilience of adolescents from single mother families - taking into account time of father's absence and quality of their relationship with mother - is important problem according to change in society. Furthermore, those kind of researches are almost still not yet done or published. Young people, who have satisfying relationships with grandparents can have more problems in relationships with peers. Strong relationships with grandparents can protect adolescents from difficulties in those relations, especially from loneliness and peers' rejection. It may be possible, that obtained results have not only cognitive value, but also practical, according to creating psychotherapy programs, which increase resilience at adolescents from single mother families.

LIMITATION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It should be noted that the studied sample contained more women than men. Future research would benefit from being conducted on equal samples. Moreover, closeness with the grandparents was estimated with a specially designed, one – question scale. Employing a longer version of the scale might bring interesting results and help verify the results of the present study. It is also worth to stress the geographical coverage of the sample: the participants were selected in the Silesian Province and in the Łódź Province. Thus, the results cannot be generalized for adolescents in other regions. It is worth to explain that, even though the current study attempted to fill the gap created by lack of research on adolescents from families of single mothers and their resilience, further exploration of this topic is needed. Another issue that mentioning is the low internal consistency of the analyzed model of determinants. In reality, this result might not be sufficient due to the fact that a considerable part of the variance is explained by other factors, which lowers the credibility of the obtained results. Finally, a broader study – one of the entire family system – seems necessary; future research might shed more light on the family variables through integrating other psychological and contextual factors.

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