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Balancing between professional and private life Analysis of psychological determinants in family context

Balansowanie pomiędzy pracą a życiem osobistym
Analiza uwarunkowań psychologicznych
w kontekście rodzinnym

Abstract

The idea of reconciling work with personal life was in its heyday at the turn of the 20th century when people realised that it was impossible to completely separate these inextricably linked spheres of human existence. Neglecting either of them, and not only in the scientific discourse but also in everyday life, is in many aspects detrimental to close relationships and to the performance at work. Nevertheless, a perfect combination of these two dimensions of human activity seems almost unattainable, as a growing number of contemporary studies show. Becoming involved in one entails some negligence in the other. The family context represents a relevant example of the attempts to reach the work-life balance. It is increasingly frequent that the contemporary young adults' generation prioritise work, individual career, and personal development in their hierarchy of values. They delay their decisions on starting a family, having children, or simply settling down until they have achieved an adequate status and prosperity. Seeking to satisfy the need for close bonds, many young adults engage in only temporary relationships (cohabitation, swingers), but also create substitutes thereof. This generation succumbs to a growing sense of loneliness, despite the fulfilling careers or satisfying material and social statuses.

Keywords: work-life balance, generation Z, close relationships, family, career.

Introduction

More and more women and men of this day and age adopt a holistic approach towards career and private life, enabling them to pursue fulfilment in both the professional and the family sphere. What becomes increasingly emphasised in the contemporary culture and economy is the growing participation of women in employment, and it gave birth to a social policy promoting work-life balance (WLB) which has developed since the 1980's. This state of matters has been affected by a number of trends, such as the declining fertility rate and its impact on the general population and workforce resources, women's increasing commitment to bearing and raising children, as well as their growing demand for formal child care from the state, women's increasing participation in higher education, and the impact of the latter on women's professional careers (*Ministerial Task Force on Work and Family*, 2002).

The aim of the article is to analyze the process of balancing professional work and personal life from the perspective of selected psychological conditions. This analysis indicates both the consequences of the described balance and to present solutions to emerging problems of a personal and professional nature. The main question of this analysis is whether it is a search for a balance or whether there are actually attempts of balancing between involvement in professional work and involvement in family life and close relationships. The theorem of "balancing" leads to the belief that attempts to find a balance are neither simple nor guarantee easy solutions, they also require more social effort than previously assumed. Considering the problem of balancing between work and family life will focus on specific questions about how young adults perceive work and career, create close relationships, build a family structure and try to combine these two important areas of life.

1. The prime and twilight of the work-life balance concept

The policy commonly referred to as family friendly employment has brought some effects to both employers and employees (Borkowska, 2003). Changes to the employment system have made it possible to combine tasks representing diverse spheres of life in a more flexible manner, which has raised the overall quality of life of individuals and families, and boosted the performance of people employed in different sectors of the economy. It also appears that the group which has benefitted from the WLB-related offering the most is that of women, and mothers in particular. Flexible employment modes have provided them with opportunities

to pursue professional success, earn money, and seek fulfilment in the spheres of personal development and improvement (Teow *et al.*, 2020). According to Sadowska-Snarska (2008) the improving social conditions, including the growing selection of crèche and kindergarten services, regulated working time, remote work opportunities, and benefits rendered to families, have brought significant advantage of more effective and efficient work performance.

Some interesting results related to the impact of the WLB concept were obtained by Greenhaus *et al.* (2003) involvement balance (equal involvement in work and family as they studied the relations between the professional/private life balance and the quality of life among public sector employees. As regards the work-life balance, those who invested more effort and time in the family life scored the best in terms of quality of life. In contrast, those to whom professional life was the priority performed the poorest in the quality-of-life score, which also coincided with more conflicts between the spheres of work and family (high level of pressure). The cross-cultural research by Kryś's team (2019) based on data from over 60 countries substantiated similar conclusions, showing that family well-being perceived as a source of one's personal welfare was twice as likely to be chosen as individual well-being. Among the six important aspects of life (family, friends, leisure, politics, work, and religion), family was indicated as the most important value (*World Values Survey*, 2016).

In the 21st century, more and more married couples choose to pursue a dual career, which increases the burden of work and home-related responsibilities carried by both spouses. Nevertheless, having analysed the current cultural trends, one should stress that it is men who can choose between competing priorities of work, family, and career more freely. Motherhood, on the other hand, requires greater alignment of the professional trajectory with family life (Kornaszewska-Polak, 2020). The fathers who choose to take parental leave following childbirth are ten times less numerous than mothers ('Rocznik statystyczny ubezpieczeń społecznych 2015–2017', 2019). This may result from the fact that mainly women are involved in caring for dependents, including children, the elderly, as well as the sick or disabled family members; women spend thrice the time per day caring for them compared to men (*Godzenie pracy z życiem rodzinnym jako warunek uczestnictwa w rynku pracy*, 2012). And despite the multitude of burdens, the workforce participation rates of women continue to rise, which also pertains to women with pre-school and school-age children (*Kobiety Na Rynku Pracy*, 2017). As the data from the McKinsey & Company report imply, businesses which display greater gender diversity outperformed those without women on managerial positions by 56% in terms of operating profits (Desvaux, Devillard and Sancier-Sultan, 2010).

At the same time, based on the research on work-life conflicts, one should notice clear correlation between them and physical or mental health problems, high stress levels, lack of control over work, more frequent alcohol use, and poor quality of life in general (Hildt-Ciupińska, 2014). The main factors which contribute to the lack of well-being in this respect are the increasing amount of time devoted to work – in both genders, dissatisfaction with the fact that women devote less time to family life – in men, and dissatisfaction with being overburdened with multiple tasks – in women (Szlendak, 2010, pp. 417–441). Middle-aged women (age 45+) representing what is commonly referred to as the sandwich generation experience particularly intensive burdening due to the responsibility of caring for maturing children, grandchildren, aging parents, and growing professional life commitments (Kryńska *et al.*, 2013)¹.

It may seem that there is no such thing as a perfect combination of professional and personal (family) life. Becoming involved in one of them entails neglecting the other. An employee exposed to a high level of stress caused by piling up of numerous responsibilities activates defensive behaviours which assume the form of avoiding more difficult professional tasks, denying the mistakes made, isolating from others, and delaying in the completion of the tasks at hand (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2008, p. 23). In the case of women, the difficulty in finding a fulfilling job and the fear of losing one are important reasons why they either postpone or sometimes even abandon procreation plans (*Ibidem*, p. 19)². Ultimately, what becomes particularly important in the discourse on the balance in life is the argument of using the internet for work and communication related purposes to a growing extent. This leads to nearly always being on-line, and consequently breeds difficulties in disconnecting from the web, causing people to perform their duties outside of regular working hours.

2. Career, work, and freedom of the youth – professional development in the young generation

The cultural and civilisational background of the turn of the 20th and 21st century exerts constant pressure on people to adopt further and further systems of values and to shape their attitudes *in the spirit of their times* (Bau-

¹ On average, the care of dependents takes more than 6 hours a day to one in four women aged 45/50+. This care very often constrains their professional activity (either continued or resumed) (Hildt-Ciupińska, 2014).

² In light of the aforementioned arguments, further changes to the law (especially the EU law) and a new WLB Directive on the principles of equal treatment of women and men have become necessary (Półtorak, 2019).

meister, 2011). What develops under the impact of such trends is the *identity of a modern man*, initially referred to as that of the Millennial generation (Generation Y), while now it is attributed to Generation Z. The main principles of the young generation are becoming the ideas of freedom, equality, and independence, leading an individual to adopting the attitudes of individualism and autonomy while striving for self-development and the peak of one's own capabilities. Jean Twenge (2014) highlights such characteristics of Generation Me as self-centeredness, conformism, high self-esteem, and the right to self-determination. The process of intensification of individualism has separated individuals from the communities (e.g. family) which used to support them, and condemned them to constantly making autonomous choices (Popenoe, 1993) the thesis of this article is that family decline since 1960 has been extraordinarily steep, and its social consequences serious, especially for children. Drawing mainly on U.S. Census data, family trends of the past 3 decades are reviewed. The evidence for family decline is appraised in 3 areas: demographic, institutional, and cultural. It is argued that families have lost functions, power, and authority, that familism as a cultural value has diminished, and that people have become less willing to invest time, money and energy in family life, turning instead to investments in themselves. It is concluded that this recent family decline is more serious than any decline in the past because what is breaking up is the nuclear family, the fundamental unit stripped of relatives and left with 2 essential functions that cannot be performed better elsewhere: childrearing and the provision to its members of affection and companionship. (PsycINFO Database Record (c (Bushman, Gollwitzer and Cruz, 2015)³.

Generation Z comprises those born after 1995, although some even point at the early 21st century, which makes these people about 25 years old or younger, only now entering the labour market. A more in-depth glimpse into descriptions of the characteristics and behaviour patterns of young Generation Z implies that they appear to be more socialised and better educated, especially considering their proficiency in using the internet and the related tools, i.e. computers, laptops, smartphones, tablets, applications, and social games. Ashley Oeken (2018) has distinguished between the following characteristics of this generation:

³ One can currently observe a shift in the behaviour patterns of the young generation from individualistic towards narcissistic attitudes, where everything that does not fit an individual's subjective point of view is rejected. The narcissistic attitudes diagnosed by Bazinska and Drat-Ruszczak (2000) were associated with: demanding admiration, self-sufficiency, vanity, desire for leadership and independence, and waiving the relational nature of life, manifesting itself in unwillingness to build and maintain relationships.

- They are educated and inclined to making further progress in education;
- They are the first generation to be fully digital, using the internet since birth, spending ca. 4–5 hours a day using a smartphone, and 40% of them claim they are completely addicted to electronic devices;
- They make the most of modern technologies, and their main source of information is the internet (having replaced books or other people);
- They are multitaskers, working simultaneously on two or more computer screens, doing several things at once;
- They have trouble focusing attention, which requires constant stimulation;
- They are driven by an entrepreneurial spirit, which is why ca. 75% of them plan to start their own business in the future;
- They are cautious, spend less and save more, having been raised in times of great global economic recession;
- They are socially-minded – they spend a great deal of time connecting with their peers;
- They desire to do good – by nature, they are philanthropists, people of ideas, dreaming of a better world for all.

Young people are also very practical, reluctant to work as hard as their parents, but wish to outperform them instead. They believe that attaining balance between work and personal life is an increasingly complicated task if the two spheres are treated as separate. Consequently, besides WLB, another concept which has attracted their attention is the idea of combining and complementing the roles performed, i.e. *work-life blending*⁴ (McDonald and Bradley, 2005). Both spheres of life, namely the professional and the family, become intertwined when job-related duties can be combined with the private ones (e.g. when running family businesses based at home or nearby). Having noticed the advantages behind this idea, employers focused on flexible forms of employment, remote working (especially in the COVID-19 era), and flexible work time schemes. To achieve higher efficiency and reduce employee frustration, employers have focused their creative output on the younger generation, creating organisations of generational intelligence, integrating both spheres: the professional and the private.

The young people of Generation Z make up more than 25% of the current US population; 49% of them identify themselves as non-white, 40% are addicted to smartphones, and 80% feel stressed when not interacting with electronics (Desjardins, 2019). They were raised by Generation X (born in the 1960's and 1970's),

⁴ In this context, the English verb *blend* means roughly the same as to mix, combine, or put together. Hence the name of the popular kitchen appliance, also in Poland known as *blender*.

and they prefer Snapchat and Instagram to Facebook, using them mainly to take pictures (selfie) and record short videos of themselves (TikTok). Their work-related preferences are as follows: they prefer to work for medium-size to large companies (80%), expect to work harder than older generations (77%), pursue multiple roles at workplace (75%), choose face-to-face conversations at work (72%), prefer to stay in their own work space (69%), and believe equality to be the most important factor in terms of employer support (36%). Their two main aspirations upon graduating from a higher education school are gaining financial stability and finding the dream job. What they expect of the workplace is opportunities for professional growth and development of skills considered competitive in the market. They believe that good communication and problem-solving skills are those which guarantee professional success.

Advances in information technology have provided many opportunities for people to connect (stay in touch), both at work and in their personal lives, thus reducing the employee stress. However, since global markets are highly volatile, employers continue to face challenges such as global competition, aging workforce, and growing importance of employees' personal lives (Lockwood, 2007). While creating a new organisational culture based on the *blending* concept, i.e. blurring the lines between work and family life, employers in the USA have effectively made the actual working hours longer, and caused their employees to bring their work home (Stephens *et al.*, 2007). Studying Polish employers, Hild-Ciupińska (2016) found out that, in their opinion, the work-life balance was mainly a problem specific to employees, affecting such spheres as commerce, construction, or health care and social assistance. What mattered most for the employed, on the other hand, was to have enough time for family and friends, to avoid taking work home, and to be able to use their annual leave. What employers offered in this respect included the possibility to leave work at any time (in cases of emergency), flexible working hours, and task-based billing, but these were primarily private sector employers.

3. Alternative forms of close relationship

The progress of modern civilisation has contributed to raising the quality of life nearly all around the planet (especially in the *rich north* countries), and has reoriented people towards the higher-order needs such as good health and well-being (welfare), proper mental condition and spiritual development. Contemporary men and women derive increasingly more satisfaction from professional activity than from family life, especially if they hold prominent positions

or receive high wages (Kornaszewska-Polak, 2020). Raised in prosperity at the turn of the millennium, Millennials are predominantly driven by self-interest and ideals, and they are more confrontational in attitude and less willing to accept divergent viewpoints (Desjardins, 2019). The subsequent young generation, on the other hand, namely Generation Z, perceive accessibility, expression of individual identity, and increased environmental awareness as their core values. Seeking authenticity, they prefer freedom of self-expression, openness to diversity (including sexual diversity), experimenting with identity, and introducing changes. They are also called *identity nomads* (especially with regard to gender identity), since 20% of them do not consider themselves fully heterosexual, compared to 10% of Millennials who would share this standpoint.

The young generations actively seek to change their environment, culture, and social relationships, including interpersonal and romantic relationships, which Giddens (2007) referred to as a “global revolution” in lifestyle. The changes in question pertain to such spheres as personal life and emotional relationships, marriage, family, as well as understanding oneself and one’s intimate relationships. These relationships are becoming increasingly short-lived and volatile, and their most crucial component is romantic love expressed through affection and passion. According to Szlendak (2010, p. 413) “a couple forms because it does not break up.” In search for happiness, young people are guided by what is good and appropriate for them, while romantic relationships become a means to achieve self-fulfilment and happiness for the two, which is why they are supposed to be aligned with the principle of pleasure seeking, and if they fail to do so, the relationship deteriorates and eventually falls apart (Dion and Dion, 2007). What can be observed in such behaviour patterns is the reflection of the contemporary idea of fluidity of life forms and relationships, as proposed by Bauman (2006), which concentrates on the continuous change process and the lack of constancy in intimate life. New forms of romantic relationship are the symbol of the age of individualism, independence, and personal freedom.

Romantic relationships have changed, especially in terms of their structure, forms, and rules by which they function. Next to a traditional heterosexual family with children, various alternative forms of marriage and family have emerged. Similarly to internet-based networks, where the opportunities to connect are countless, a variety of relationships that are constantly broken and revived have begun to develop (Tanenbaum, 2004). The acceptability of diverse lifestyles has made people postpone their decisions on entering into a formal relationship, leaving their original family homes, starting a family, and having children. Alternative to marriage, the contemporary relationships referred to as *transitional* include, for instance, swingers’ relationships, circles of friends, cohabitation,

or remaining single (Kornaszewska-Polak, 2021). In such forms of relationship, love must be satisfying and ideal, because if it is not, it leads to frustration and ultimately to a break-up decision (Kernberg, 1998). The main characteristics of these relationships, as opposed to the formally established ones, include lack of exclusivity (open relationships), easy formation and dissolution of the relationship, lack of personal obligations towards the partner (including the obligation to support and care for each other), as well as hetero- and homosexuality (Szlendak, 2010, p. 462). Such intimate arrangements are preferred by young and well-educated people, especially young men (Kwak, 2005, p. 85).

According to a recent study, Generation Z avoid lifelong commitment in relationships, while preferring short-lived relationships instead, and this for a number of reasons (Orchard, 2020). What affects this situation to a considerable extent is the patterns created and promoted by the culture, but also one's unstable economic condition leading to the absence of regular supply of material goods, which is considered necessary to start a family. On the other hand, despite young people's apparent independence and relatively high resilience when facing changes, they lack the skill to cope with serious difficulties in life. They establish contacts with other people mainly via social networks, and even use the internet for dating. They avoid becoming involved in a relationship because they do not want to get hurt. Suffering turns out to be a very unpopular and undesired feeling in the present. At the same time, they seek intimacy which mainly manifests itself in erotic experiences and sexual contacts.

A brief study on the sexual preferences of the young generation implies that lasting romantic relationships, i.e. having a boyfriend or a girlfriend, are no longer trendy (Orchard, 2020). Young people prefer relationships with acquaintances or friends, while in terms of intimate contacts, they are more inclined towards "occasional and casual sex." They are reluctant to use terms such as *dating*, *meeting*, *going out*, or *being together*. This reveals their anxiety about a failure to maintain the relationship, absence of trust, and a necessity of breaking up. Consequently, they choose fleetingness in relationships, and prefer sex to genuine intimacy. Particularly the latter dimension has recently become the main showpiece of identity, a social and cultural resource, and a ticket to many environments and new contacts. Sexual flexibility and diversity of sexual experience are even considered required to gain acceptance and affiliation with circles of friends. Quoting Orchard, "everything is just about sex, everyone should be hypersexual, and such are the expectations."

The need for intimacy and closeness in relationships is at its highest among the young generation, which is precisely why their sexual initiation happens relatively early. This need seems to be all the greater the more difficult it is to

fulfil it in a satisfying and lasting relationship. Young people are afraid to communicate their desire for closeness, their need to be hugged, and to simply spend time together without being sexually active, because they do not want to be perceived as old-fashioned and out of trend. The need for intimacy is clearly opposite to the desire for independence, self-reliance, and self-development. This is a choice between belonging and personal freedom, which is quite difficult for young adults. The need for intimacy is particularly strong in women, for whom relationship building and maintaining represents a part of their identity (Kornaszewska-Polak, 2020). Young women demand partnership and emotional closeness, being the needs which young men are often unable to satisfy. Women often perceive marriage and family as viable opportunities for entering the adult life, and they are frustrated by their inability to find the right partner (Szlendak, 2010). In many cases, there are simply no matching mates for well-educated and ambitious women.

4. Families of young adults

It was already in the 1990's that some opinions about a crisis or even decline of the traditional family form began to emerge, promoting such values as self-fulfilment, right to freedom, and egalitarianism instead. The degree to which family members identify with the family, stay loyal to it, and support each other has declined significantly, and so has the durability and stability of families (Popenoe, 2017). Women have become independent in many spheres of life, which is why many less educated and affluent young men find it difficult to successfully search for a life partner⁵. "Men are becoming fathers at a later and later age, and fewer and fewer of them experience the phenomenon of being a father, and once they already are fathers – fewer and fewer of them live together with their children in a shared household. (...) Men's involvement in typical household tasks is that they have begun to cook or clean occasionally, but it still them who choose what they would like to be occupied with, and they prefer not to undertake tasks which need to be done at once" (Kornaszewska-Polak, 2020, p. 156).

The revolution of lifestyles and functioning modes of families modes has given birth to families of diverse structures, whose members are both persons related in a biological sense as well as those who simply share a household. It entails the perception of cohabiting relationships as families (Kwak, 2005, p. 10),

⁵ Szlendak (2010, p. 420) calls them "modern men who have run aground".

and this also applies to such new family forms as reconstructed families, single parents, partnerships (including homo-families)⁶, circles of friends, or LAT and DINKS type families⁷ (Szlendak, 2010, pp. 457-501). The decline of the durability and stability of families has caused them to perform fewer and fewer functions, and to ensure increasing autonomy to their members. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) claim that young people live “together, but apart.” The relationships between family members have weakened, and even assumed the nature of caregiving, while physical contact has been largely replaced by virtual contacts. Even the nuclear family has also been changing its structure, evolving from two parents and two children to parents or a parent and one child (sometimes even substituted by a pet).

Following the estimates of Poland’s Central Statistical Office (GUS), the number of marriages drops each consecutive year, while the number of divorces, cohabiting couples, and people living alone, known as singles, has been increasing (Stańczak, Stelmach and Urbanowicz, 2016). The age of becoming married for the first time has been gradually changing, and it is now nearing 27 in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Finland, or Poland, and even 30 in Denmark (Slany, 2002, p. 73). What has also changed is the pattern of procreation, as evidenced by the declining number of births (particularly with regard to the second, third and subsequent children) and birth rate, which now comes to 1.32 in Poland (for comparison, it ranges between 6 and 7 in Africa, and equals ca. 0.8 in South-East Asia) (Juroszek, 2015, pp. 18–22). A recent study conducted in the UK revealed that only 65% of families consisted of children living with both parents, while 3.3 million couples with children were cohabiting, a quarter of all households were sustained by a single mother only, and 7% of children lived with their grandparents (Edwards *et al.*, 2016).

Delaying the decision on actually entering the mature life and starting a family by young people can be associated with numerous reasons, including the threat of unemployment among graduates of high education schools and the desire to first gain the material status needed to support the family (Slany, 2002). As Szlendak (2010, pp. 418–423) has pointed out, most young people living off their parents are in fact young men (particularly uneducated ones). Many young couples, while getting formally married, also postpone their family-related decisions, being focused on developing professionally on two paths of career. Spouses must negotiate

⁶ In Poland, such relationships are not formally recognised by the law, which does not mean that they do not exist unofficially.

⁷ LAT (living apart together) – formal long-distance relationships, where spouses reside in different households, often in different cities/countries. DINKS (double income no kids) – formal relationships of two adults with double income, intentionally childless.

and agree on the terms of division of household responsibilities, which may entail having not enough time to fully pursue career related goals while adhering to the household obligations at the same time (Gerson and Jacobs, 2004). Therefore, according to Szlendak (2010, p. 424), young adults are under pressure applied from two sides, clamped by what may be referred to as a *time vice*.

However, what comes to the rescue of young multitasking adults is yet another tool conceived with the pursuit of work-life balance in mind, namely *total life planning* (Lockwood, 2007). This tool helps them to analyse the important aspects of professional and personal life and to identify the relationships which link individual spheres, i.e. emotions, welfare, spirituality and financial benefits. By designing a tailored life plan, one creates a meaningful goal-oriented environment which makes it possible to introduce changes in life. Such a social paradigm shift was supposed to boost the energy, induce enthusiasm, and increase performance among employees, while at the same time they would be offered various kinds of insurance schemes by employers.

Unfortunately, on countless occasions, blending work and personal life apparently caused undesirable consequences. One of them is the building of trust towards co-workers who ultimately begin to flirt at work. Horan and Chory's (2011) research implies that people who have sex with their supervisors are perceived as less caring and trustworthy, an opinion being attached particularly to female employees. On the other hand, there is greater acceptance towards men having sex with female colleagues or their supervisors. Another consequence of blending work with private life, and of the resulting excess of responsibilities, is a higher divorce rate, especially in cases where husbands fail to meet their wives' expectations (Rogers and DeBoer, 2001) psychological well-being, and the likelihood of divorce. We use data from a sample of 1,047 married individuals (not couples. Young, independent and financially self-reliant wives are more daring and guided by a higher sense of security when making the decision to split up by considering the financial security based on their own earnings as well as the maintenance to be paid by the child's father. Another serious consequence of *blending* is the threat to the positive atmosphere of marital bonds, since satisfying relationships depend on commitment and effort, and these are depleting due to stress and excessive job demands. Following a study of the marital relationships of police officers, it was concluded that husbands were particularly inclined to becoming emotionally withdrawn, when they were considerably burdened by a heavy workload, as well as to suppressing hostility (Lavee and Ben-Ari, 2007). Such withdrawal was negatively evaluated by the spouses, since it led to misunderstandings, and actually triggered outbursts of aggression in the aftermath.

5. Consequences of imbalance and the solutions proposed

Attaining a balance between the professional sphere and the family life seems to be a task worth the effort, and yet it is impossible to achieve to the fullest. This situation may be compared to a duvet that is too short, which either covers one side of the body while leaving the other uncovered, or the other way around⁸. Becoming preoccupied with one of the spheres leaves the other vulnerable to deficits. Thinking that one can achieve such a balance for good is simply wishful and profoundly unrealistic. It was already in the 19th century that Herbert Spencer believed that the states of balance which one can achieve are transitory in nature, leading to accumulation of issues and chaos in subsequent stages.

In situations where people experience difficulties and a sense of danger, they tend to choose the easiest solutions in order to get rid of the unwanted tension as quickly as possible. It is then that the matters of material standing, survival, or pursuit of status become important, while close relationships recede into the background. In such cases, close relationships are often substituted with mere artefacts of personal bonds. These may include various kinds of addiction, including behavioural addictions, but also relationships with objects or material items (Kornaszewska-Polak, 2015) and (2020). One virtually cannot list all such substitutes, however, with regard to the subject addressed in this paper, some of the most important artefacts are addictive activities, including workaholism.

Professional work can consume a great deal of time, including free time, due to extra hours spent at work, bringing work home, or resolving workplace conflicts at home. Everyone can experience similar issues, but in the case of workaholics, they become permanent. For these people, work related tasks are so consuming that they tend to forget about all the other problems and tensions in their lives (Griffiths, 2011). Being overly preoccupied with work exerts a negative impact on various spheres, especially on relationships with the loved ones, for whom one has less and less time to spend. In a workaholic's life, conflicts may arise both at home and at the workplace, and moreover, there are collisions emerging between diverse activities: professional and social, interests and hobbies. Becoming completely consumed by work is an option to change an unfavourable mood and to escape distressing life events (Andreassen, 2014), but in no way does it solve the issues which accumulate.

Similarly to all other serious addictions, according to Kohut, workaholism results from deficits in the organisation of the self, and is a means of compensating for them (Wyrzykowska, 2012). Persons affected by this phenomenon are incapa-

⁸ For comparison, Piłśniak (2010) refers to a similar set of symbols in his article on marriage.

ble of achieving internal cohesion and alleviating their inner states in a healthy manner, which is why they resort to dysfunctional behaviours. Work addiction may sometimes be rewarding because it provides a sense of security and is predictable, unlike unstable close relationships (Maciek-Haściło, 2019). Nevertheless, such addiction triggers devastating consequences as the loved ones and acquaintances move away from the addict, while the workaholics themselves rupture their social relationships.

One of the most painful feelings experienced as the relationships with the loved ones are deteriorating is that of loneliness. It affects both the aforementioned workaholics and all those persons, also referred to above, who are unable to build satisfying and lasting bonds with their relatives and life partners. It is experienced even when one has achieved professional fulfilment and a satisfactory material or social standing. Loneliness is a subjective sensation which appears when one is seeking help and support, and there is nobody to whom one could turn or who could show them understanding. It is among the most painful experiences of the generation growing up in the era of individualism, freedom, and success (Edwards *et al.*, 2016). The lack of time and the inability to engage in relationships triggers an anxiety that the bonds and relationships one has built are inadequate and unsatisfying (Śliwak, Zarzycka and Dzduch, 2011) (Karbowa, 2012).

The negative feeling of loneliness is an important risk factor in light of such consequences as social rejection, mental and physical problems, which can indirectly make this phenomenon chronic (Ernst and Caccioppo, 1999). When the need for closeness, love, and security (or attachment) remains unsatisfied, a void develops, which is easily filled with mere substitutes of bonding, such as addictions. Driven by fear, young adults are afraid to build meaningful intimate relationships, which is precisely why they choose to live alone as singles, becoming involved in fleeting acquaintances of sexual background (Bures, Koropeczyk-Cox and Loree, 2009). Such a lifestyle is non-committal and does not impose any responsibility. Nevertheless, the most serious health consequences of loneliness are physical disorders and illnesses, as well as disruptions to the immune and neuroendocrine systems (Cacioppo *et al.*, 2000) (Mushtaq *et al.*, 2014) loneliness is perceived as a global human phenomenon. Loneliness can lead to various psychiatric disorders like depression, alcohol abuse, child abuse, sleep problems, personality disorders and Alzheimer's disease. It also leads to various physical disorders like diabetes, autoimmune disorders like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and cardiovascular diseases like coronary heart disease, hypertension (HTN).

The balance between or successful *blending* of work and family life may not be entirely possible, but the importance of relationships with other people cannot

be overestimated in both these spheres. As evidenced by Elton Mayo's or John Storey's early research on workforce efficiency, employees perform better, not to mention that they feel better, when they are appreciated, have good relationships with co-workers, and the workplace atmosphere is friendly⁹ (Armstrong, 2007). Satisfaction with work seamlessly translates into satisfying relationships at home. However, what one requires to achieve this desired effect is co-operation of many actors – employers, managers, supervisors, co-workers, acquaintances, friends, relatives – which can be described as “a group process oriented towards finding a fair solution” (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2008). In such processes, it is important to align personal aspirations, expectations and opportunities with the requirements pertaining to the workplace, the family life, and the personal development dimension. This pursuit assumes the form of continuous negotiation with oneself as well as with one's closest and more distant environment, all in order to arrive at the optimal solutions.

Optimal functioning also depends on the relationships within the family. This is where such aspects as the appreciation for women in their diverse roles and plans become extremely important, but a dialogue between men and women as equal partners is also necessary. “What one needs is mutual understanding between the sexes, not only of the differences between them but also of the changes taking place in their identity, as well as jointly developing principles which support both women and men in their development and in their pursuit of complete self-fulfilment” (Kornaszewska-Polak, 2020). However, on the other hand, it is very important for women to appreciate men in their paternal functions, especially in times when women actively pursue their careers and are very committed to professional activity. Traditionally perceived as *secondary carers*, fifty years ago, fathers would spend but a few hours a week with their own offspring, while now they devote 4 or more hours a day to the children (Bianchi, 2000) mothers' time with children has tended to be quite stable over time. In the past, nonemployed mothers' time with children was reduced by the demands of unpaid family work and domestic chores and by the use of mother substitutes for childcare, especially in large families. Today employed mothers seek ways to maximize time with children: They remain quite likely to work part-time or to exit from the labor force for some years when their children are young; they also differ from nonemployed mothers in other uses of time (housework, volunteer work, leisure. The positive atmosphere around fatherhood makes fathers more involved and provides great support in children upbringing to women. Good relationships with the children and the wife constitute a factor which protects

⁹ This is referred to as a soft version of human resource management.

men against work-related stress and overburdening. Despite the evolving nature of family structures and work relationships, as well as parents' numerous efforts aimed at finding a relative balance between so many duties, it is the harmonious atmosphere of the family home that has proven to be a decisive factor for the well-being and happiness of many children.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the problems related to the idea of work-life balance presented in the article leads to the following conclusions:

1. Finding a satisfactory work-life balance seems impossible. More and more time is devoted to professional work, at the expense of neglect in the sphere of family life.
2. In the perspective of young adults, work and personal life spaces may mix or even blend, while research shows that the interests of employers and employees often do not mix.
3. Young adults want closeness, but are afraid of commitment and responsibility, as a result of which their relationships are fleeting, and they struggle with loneliness.
4. The idea of total life planning does not work at present due to overwhelming personal life with professional duties, leading to workaholism and overloading people with many tasks.

The solutions to the presented problems should be sought in the social consensus in view of the fact that family life should be protected to a greater extent in the face of various pressures resulting from professional life. Many employees prefer the good of the family over individual well-being, finding it a source of life well-being and a motive for efficient and effective work.

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