Summary

Among many various family roles, parenting plays a special role. Being a mother or

a father brings many different challenges. Their nature changes and their intensity increases

when a child is born or diagnosed with disability. Although the pervasive developmental

disorders have been recognised more often and despite a change in how the society perceives

the role of the father and his engagement in the process of raising children, there is still not

enough empirical analysis of the fathers' perspective. Furthermore, the amount of support

offered currently to the fathers of autistic children seems highly insufficient.

The aim of the conducted research was to diagnose the ways in which the fathers raising

children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders perform their parental role, as well as the

factors affecting this role.

The author of the dissertation intended to put a special emphasis on the need of

supporting the fathers of children with ASD in a professional and specialist manner. Such an

intervention may lead to their full and conscious engagement in the relationship with a child as

well as in the therapeutic process, which is crucial for their mutual development.

The Parental Role Questionnaire by Ż. Stelter was used in a study. On the grounds of

the questionnaire, five ways of performing the father's role towards a child with autism

spectrum disorders were distinguished. These include: role trap, identifying with the role,

accepting the role, losing oneself in the role, and rejecting the role. In addition, the Self-

Perception of Parental Role Questionnaire was used. It was originally developed by D.

MacPhee, J.B. Benson and D. Bullock and adapted to the Polish grounds by M. Zaczyńska and

J. Kobosko. It allowed for assessing the sense of parental identity of the surveyed fathers within

four dimensions: the importance of the parental role, satisfaction with being a parent,

commitment to the parental role and parental competence. The Additionally, the My Child

Questionnaire, constructed by Ż. Stelter, and the BHI-12 questionnaire by J. Trzebiński and M.

Zięba were used in the research.

There were 180 fathers of children with autism spectrum disorders involved in a study.

They were divided into groups according to the criterion of the child's nosological diagnosis in

terms of pervasive developmental disorders. Thus, there were three groups of respondents

obtained: fathers of children with autism, fathers of children with atypical autism and fathers

of children diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome.

The analysis of the research results led to the following conclusions: the adaptive ways

of performing the parental role undertaken by the fathers of children with ASD are determined

by the combination of various factors. Among them, those of a socio-demographic nature, those

related to the child, as well as those related to the father and his parental role are important.

These factors include: perceiving the importance of one's role in the child's life; a sense of

paternal competence and satisfaction with one's role; the ability to cope with the child's

challenging behavior related to these dimensions, and the strength of the paternal basic hope.

Moreover, the analysis of the results revealed that the fathers of children on the autism

spectrum feel less confident in their role, as it is difficult for them to see how important their

role is and how important it is to participate actively in their child's life and support their

development.

The results obtained from the analysis allowed for achieving cognitive goals established

in the study. They also contributed to constructing a theoretical model of support for the fathers

of children with autism spectrum disorders. Such a model determines the possible direction in

which the therapeutic interactions with fathers should head, and thus it increases their chances

of developing the adaptive ways of fulfilling their parental role.

Key words: autism spectrum disorder, parenting, parenting role, father role