

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Emotional state of “young” fathers

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BACKGROUND

The birth of the first child begins a new stage in family life, and the woman and the man must adopt new roles in society. However, adapting to the new conditions of life and the requirements of the new role can be difficult.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The main tools used in the study were the SUPIN scale, the STAI inventory and a questionnaire constructed by the authors. The participants were 90 men who became first time fathers in the period of 6 months prior to the study.

RESULTS

The results indicate that the first time fathers show a medium level of state anxiety related to the current situation and a low level of trait anxiety understood as an enduring disposition. The level of anxiety is related to the age of the

child, but only in the men who fathered a son: the older the son was, the greater was the intensity of state anxiety in the father.

CONCLUSIONS

The deep conviction that the father should be a role model for the son can be a source of anxiety about the ability to manage and the ability to meet the related responsibility. According to the tradition of our culture, the father has to prepare the son to be a man, to assume a man's roles in society and teach him how to live. The lower intensity of positive emotions related to the birth of a daughter can be explained from the point of view of the true man stereotype – a daughter does not fulfil it.

KEY WORDS

emotions; young father; sex of a child

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

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Liberska, H., Deja, M., Janicka, M., & Dąbek, K. (2016). Emotional state of “young” fathers.
Current Issues in Personality Psychology, 4(4), 217–227.

RECEIVED 19.09.2016 · REVIEWED 03.10.2016 · ACCEPTED 17.10.2016 · PUBLISHED 26.10.2016

BACKGROUND

The following research questions were asked. Starting a family and bringing up children is considered as one of the main developmental tasks faced by a young adult (Havighurst, 1981; Gurba, 2011; Liberska, 2011). Bringing the first child to the world initiates a new stage in the family life (Ziemska, 1999; Kuryś, 2011; Liberska, 2014), closely related to undertaking parental roles (Liberska & Matuszewska, 2006). It changes the sense of many events in which the parents participate (Opozda, 2011). According to the concept of structuration and restructuring proposed by Tyszkowa (1990), “the experience of parenthood produces results of different character, affecting all aspects of psychological and social development” (Bakiera, 2013, p. 119). Consequently, the conception of life and everyday activity of many young adults is reorganised and subordinated to the needs of the child (Liberska, Miluska, & Freudenreich, 2011; Tremblay & Pierce, 2011; Trempała, 2014; Carlson, Kendall, & Edleson, 2016).

The pregnancy and expectation of the first child are considered as a complex psychological situation for both parents, even as a critical event (Kuryś, 2011; Liberska et al. (in print)). It is a time of existentially significant events in human life and a time of confrontation with the role of a parent (Opozda, 2011). It has been indicated that the conception of the first child imposes changes in the identity (Bakiera, 2013). The maturity to parenthood implies taking responsibility for the new family member and sometimes requires giving up some hitherto practised forms of activity or putting them off for later to take care of the child (Liberska & Malina, 2011). After Plopa, “The researchers studying the transition to parenthood since the late 1950s have been continuously writing about the potential stress factors (or stressors) of young parents (breaking from earlier routine, tiredness, excessive occupation, growing financial problems, excessive interference from other family members)” (Plopa, 2011, p. 21). Many researchers have focused on changes in the biological and psychosocial behaviour of a woman related to pregnancy treated as a stressful event or stressor (Terry, 1991; Terry, Maycocci, & Hynes, 1996). Pregnancy holds the 12th position in the list of the most stressful life events of adults, ordered according to the intensity of stress related to them (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Rahe, 1993). In the modified list of stressful life events in non-adults position no. 6 is *fathering a child* ([http://www.tmswiki.org/ppd/The_Holmes_and_Rahe_Social_Readjustment_Rating_Scale_\(SRRS\)](http://www.tmswiki.org/ppd/The_Holmes_and_Rahe_Social_Readjustment_Rating_Scale_(SRRS))). However, the psychological knowledge on the stress related to the pregnancy of the partner or wife and fathering a child as well as the birth of the first child is still incomplete (Bidzan, 2013).

On the other hand, the birth of a child has a positive effect on self-esteem of the young adults (Kornas-Biela, 2009). The appearance of a child is a source of joy, fulfilment and a sense of the purpose of life (Plopa, 2008). Being a parent increases the understanding of oneself (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2008) and stimulates the achievement of personal maturity (Oleś, 2011). The appearance of children also influences the set of values and views assumed (Janukowicz, 2010). In the past a man was the breadwinner of the family, and his ability to earn money was used as a measure of his manhood (Bania, 2012). Subsequently the roles and tasks of men, including those related to fatherhood, have been modified and transformed (Liberska & Freudenreich, 2011).

Also the value of fatherhood has changed (Dąbrowska, 2003), while the contemporary family seems to deviate from the traditional model of family (Liberska & Matuszewska, 2014; Szlendak, 2010).

According to available results, the perception of pregnancy and evaluation of home atmosphere during pregnancy influence the later character of fulfilment of being a parent (Kuryś, 2010). Perception of pregnancy in the life of an intimate couple is affected by many environmental and subjective factors, so it can take values from extremely negative to extremely positive. This evaluation can change in response to a complex configuration of biopsychical and social factors (Kuryś, 2010).

According to clinical observations and results of studies to date, adaptation to parenthood is not simple and the period after the birth of a child can bring many problems besides the joy and fulfilment. The problems with adaptation to being a parent may lead to difficulties in performing other roles and may even contribute to the occurrence of emotional disturbances (Kaźmierczak, Gebuza, & Gierszewska, 2010).

The literature provides many reports on pregnant women and young mothers concerning their emotions, moods or level of anxiety. As follows from the studies, during the period of pregnancy, besides the positive emotions related to establishment of emotional ties with the unborn child, the pregnant women begin to fear for the child’s health and life (Ciesielski, Michałek, Szlapo, & Ścisłowicz, 1994; Kwaśniewska, Kraczkowski, Wartacz, Robak, & Semczuk, 1996; Pawełczyk, Cypryk, & Bielawska-Batorowicz, 1999). About 80% of women in the near childbirth period experience changes in mood, while 2530% of women reveal symptoms of depression (Błaszczak, Pilch, & Szamlewska, 2011). The pregnant women showing an elevated level of trait anxiety also reveal an elevated level of state anxiety (Błaszczak et al., 2011). Many women immediately after childbirth suffer from different emotional disturbances characterised by a high level of anxiety (Dayan & Yoshida, 2007; Lonstein, 2007). The reports also mention the sense

of loneliness and isolation (Barclay, Everitt, Rogan, Schmied, & Wyllie, 1997) and a high state of stress (Lu, 2006; Bakiera, 2013), frustration (Brannon, 2002), depressed mood and emotional lability (Bakiera, 2013).

Much research has been devoted to the mother-child relationship (Włodarczyk, 2012) and emotions experienced by young mothers. Thus the question arises whether men who have recently become fathers also experience such emotions and reveal an elevated level of anxiety.

Anxiety accompanies man for the entire life (Kępiński, 2002; Zimbardo & Gerrig, 2012). The intensity of anxiety is different and depends on the type of personality, current psychophysical state and environmental conditions (Aleksandrowicz, 2002). The sense of anxiety is of fundamental importance for psychosocial functioning of the individual. A high level of trait anxiety, in the understanding of a relatively enduring disposition, and state anxiety induced by a current situation, can affect the behaviour and the way of thinking, hampering the tackling of life problems (Rutkowska, Rolińska, Kwaśniewski, Makara-Studzińska, & Kwaśniewska, 2011).

Spielberger introduced the division into state anxiety and trait anxiety, to distinguish between anxiety as a temporary and situation-caused state and the relatively enduring disposition of an individual (Wrześniewski & Sosnowski, 1996). The appearance of a child may increase the level of state anxiety. According to the studies, the intensity of state anxiety depends on the number of children and is the highest when having one child (Wenzel, Haugen, Jackson, & Brendle, 2005).

It should be mentioned that emotional reactions of parents can differ depending on the age and sex of the child. According to many researchers, sex is one of the most intriguing questions related to the birth of a child (Intons-Peterson & Reddel, 1984), determining among other things the behaviour of parents, in particular the father. Newborns and infants of different sex are differently treated, evaluated and stimulated to activity by parents (Bielawska-Batorowicz, 1995). When a boy was born the fathers wanted to stay longer in the labour ward and kept them in their hands twice as long as girls. Moreover, fathers talked to them or commented on them more than on girls (Woollett, White, & Lyon, 1982; Giuliano, 2007). This observation was explained by the fact that men in general want the first child to be a boy (Matlin, 1993), as a boy has a chance to pass the name to the next generation and to continue the family. It has also been experimentally shown that the fathers of sons were more sensitive to the signals from three-month-old babies than the fathers of daughters as they reacted faster and in more appropriate ways to the signals from boys (Cox, Holden, & Sagovsky, 1987). Although the majority of men declared that the sex of children has no significant importance

for them, the observations revealed that they spent much more time with boys (Kornas-Biela, 2004; Rouyer, Frascarolo, Zaouche-Gaudron, & Lavanchy, 2007). Moreover, the sex of the child can influence the relations between parents. It has been shown that the parents of sons less frequently get divorced, and if a given couple is not married, the mothers of boys are more likely to marry the father of the child (Giuliano, 2007).

AIM OF THE STUDY

The study was undertaken to investigate the emotion of men who had become fathers of their first child in the 6-month period prior to the study. A particularly interesting question was whether they showed elevated levels of positive or negative feelings and state anxiety related to the new social role of being a father. We also wanted to find out whether the emotional state of young fathers is related to the sex and age of the first child.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Do the men who became first time fathers in the period of 6 months prior to the study have an elevated level of state or trait anxiety?
2. Do the young first time fathers experience more positive or negative emotions?
3. Is the level of state anxiety in young first time fathers related to the sex or age of the child?
4. Is the level of positive or negative emotions experienced by young first time fathers related to the age and sex of the child?

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

MEASURES

To find answers to the above questions, a study was performed on a group of first time young fathers using the SUPIN scale, STAI inventory and a questionnaire constructed by us.

1. *Negative and positive emotions.* Negative and positive emotions was assessed with Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson & Clark, 1994; Polish adaptation – Brzozowski, 2010). SUPIN is the Polish adaptation of PANAS. This tool is used for measurement of the intensity of positive and negative emotions. The scale can be used for measurement of the current emotional state and permanent affective states.

Two versions of the SUPIN scale were applied: version S30 for measurements of current emotional states and C30 for measurement of relatively enduring

ing dispositions. Each version is composed of a list of adjectives. The person taking part in the study is asked to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5 the degree (intensity) to which these adjectives describe his current state (version S) or his enduring dispositions (version C). The results are calculated separately for positive (PU subscale) and negative (NU subscale) emotions.

On the basis of the factor analyses, cluster analyses and correlations with the results obtained by other tools and intergroup differences, the SUPIN scale could be treated as appropriate. The reliability of the results evaluated by the internal consistency of the scales is high or satisfactory, the Cronbach α varies from .73 to .95 (depending on the version and type of sample). Moreover, version C is characterised by high absolute stability (Brzozowski, 2010).

2. *Anxiety*. Intensity of anxiety was assessed with the State and Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) (Spielberger et al., 1970; Polish adaptation – Wrześniewski & Sosnowski, 1996). STAI is used to measure the intensity of anxiety in the sense of the passing state induced by the current situation and in the sense of a relatively enduring disposition.

This tool is composed of two subscales, of which X1 is used to measure state anxiety and X2 measures trait anxiety. Each of the subscales is composed of 20 statements; the respondents are asked to react to them by choosing one of the four answers: 1 – *almost never*, 2 – *sometimes*, 3 – *often*, 4 – *almost always*. The reliability of the tools for a sample of adult men from 21 to 40 years old was .89 for state anxiety and .82 for trait anxiety. The STAI results were found to significantly correlate with the results provided by the tools measuring theoretical constructs similar to anxiety (Wrześniewski & Sosnowski, 1996).

3. *Sociodemographic questionnaire* – the questionnaire proposed by the authors permits collection

of basic data such as the age, place of residence, level of education, participation in prenatal classes, presence at childbirth, sex and age of the child as well as the support of extended family members in taking care of the child.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 90 men who became first time fathers in the period of 6 months prior to the study. The age of the men varied from 21 to 44 years ($M = 29.56$, $SD = 3.96$). The data on the level of education and place of residence are given in Table 1.

From among the participants, 14 men are in an informal relationship with the child's mother, while 76 are in marriages. The time from getting married/starting the relationship to the childbirth varied from 0 months (the woman got pregnant on the first night) to 192 months (the mean value was 25.33 months, $SD = 26.84$). Forty-one (45.60%) of the participants were the fathers of a boy, while 49 men were the fathers of a daughter (54.40%).

The majority of children (79; 87.80%) were born on time, and none had any birth defects or diseases. Twenty-eight men (31.50%) took part in the prenatal classes with their partner, while 55 (61.10%) were present at the childbirth. In response to the question on the support from family in taking care of the child, 80 men (88.90%) reported having such support, while 10 (11.10%) reported not having it.

RESULTS

1. The first research question concerned the level of state anxiety and trait anxiety experienced in the period of half a year prior to the study.

Table 1

Level of education and place of residence of the participants

Place of residence	Level of education (<i>n</i> ; %)				Total (<i>n</i> ; %)
	Elementary	Job training	High school	University	
Village	2 (2.20%)	7 (7.80%)	18 (20.00%)	8 (8.90%)	35 (38.90%)
Town of up to 50 thousand citizens	0	2 (2.20%)	1 (1.10%)	3 (3.30%)	6 (6.70%)
Town of up to 100 thousand citizens	0	1 (1.10%)	5 (5.60%)	4 (4.40%)	10 (11.10%)
Town of up to 250 thousand citizens	1 (1.10%)	0	3 (3.30%)	9 (10.00%)	13 (14.40%)
Town of more than 250 thousand citizens	0	3 (3.30%)	2 (2.20%)	21 (23.30%)	26 (28.90%)
Total	3 (3.30%)	13 (14.40%)	29 (32.20%)	45 (50.00%)	90 (100.00%)

Table 2
Level of anxiety in first time fathers

	M	SD	Sten	Level
STAI-X1	35.84	8.47	5	average
STAI-X2	34.42	7.87	4	low

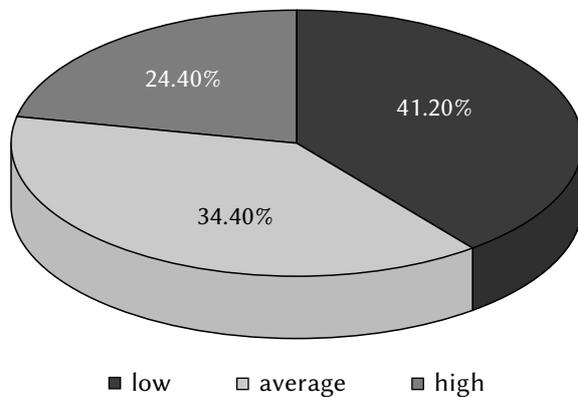


Figure 1. Distribution of state anxiety intensity in the scale STAI-X1.

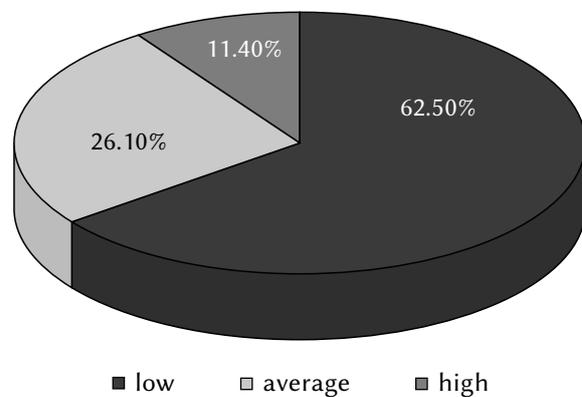


Figure 2. Distribution of trait anxiety intensity in the scale STAI-X2.

According to the results, the first time fathers studied showed an average intensity of state anxiety, related to the current situation ($M = 35.84$, $SD = 8.47$) (Table 2). They also showed low intensity of trait anxiety ($M = 34.42$, $SD = 7.87$). The percentage distribution of results is presented in Figures 1 and 2.

2. The second research question concerned the intensity of positive and/or negative emotions related to taking up the role of a father.

The mean intensity of positive and negative emotions experienced by the first time fathers studied is given in Table 3.

According to the results, the first time fathers showed a high level of positive emotions both related to the current situation ($M = 51.56$, $SD = 10.20$) and those described as an enduring disposition ($M = 55.36$, $SD = 10.02$) (Table 3). The intensity of negative emotions related to the current situation was described as on a medium level ($M = 22.00$, $SD = 8.38$). The intensity of negative emotions in the sense of an enduring disposition was also at the medium level ($M = 23.12$, $SD = 7.31$).

Table 3
Intensity of positive and negative emotions experienced by the first time fathers

	M	SD	Sten	Level of intensity
SUPIN (S30)-PU	51.56	10.20	8	high
SUPIN (S30)-NU	22.00	8.38	6	average
SUPIN (C30)-PU	55.36	10.02	8/9	high
SUPIN (C30)-NU	23.12	7.31	4/5	low/average

The percentage distribution of results is displayed by the plots in Figures 3-6.

3. The third research question concerned a possible relation between the level of anxiety in first time young fathers and the sex and age of the child. To answer this question, the correlations between the intensity of anxiety experienced by the study participants and age of the child, separately for boys and girls, were evaluated.

In the group of young fathers of boys a significant correlation was found between the age of the son and the level of state anxiety experienced by the fathers: the older the son was, the greater was the state anxiety experienced by the first time father ($r = .32$, $p = .045$) (Table 4). The correlation was observed only for state anxiety, related to the current situation. No correlation was observed between the age of the daughter and the intensity of state anxiety as well as trait anxiety experienced by their first time fathers.

4. The fourth research question concerned the relation between the intensity of positive and negative emotions experienced by the first time fathers and the sex and age of the child. To answer this question

Emotions of young fathers

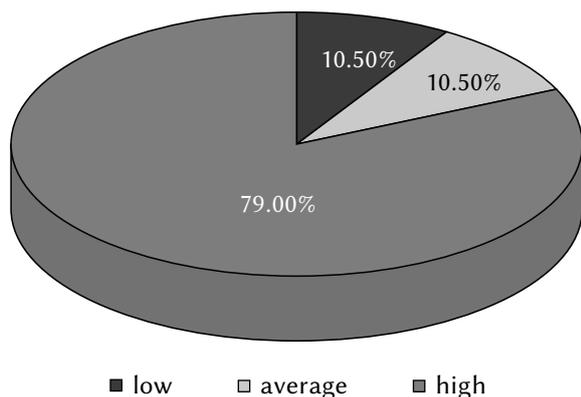


Figure 3. Percentage distribution of results on positive emotions in the SUPIN S30 scale.

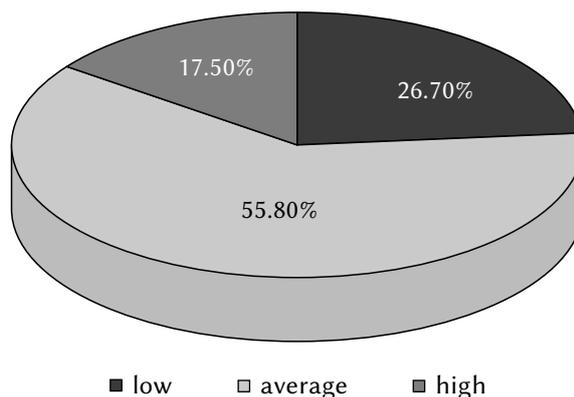


Figure 4. Percentage distribution of results on negative emotions in the SUPIN S30 scale.

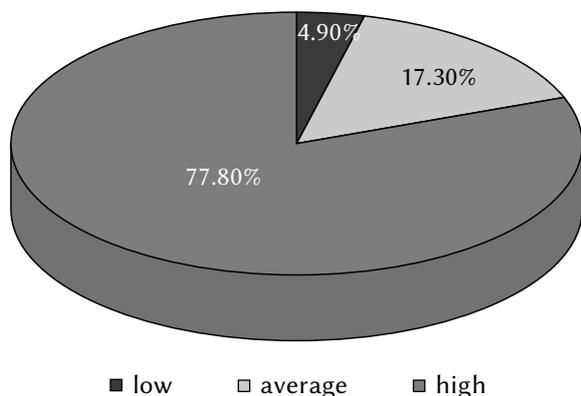


Figure 5. Percentage distribution of results on positive emotions in the SUPIN C30 scale.

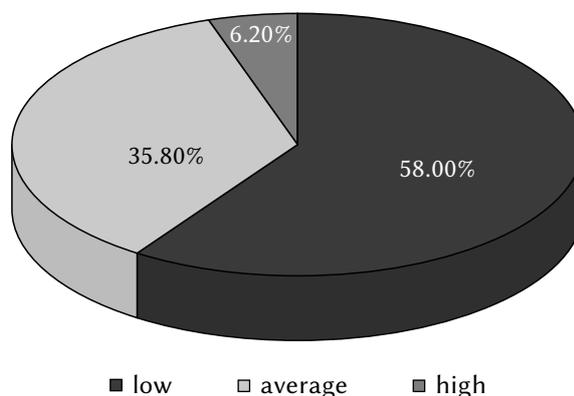


Figure 6. Percentage distribution of results on negative emotions in the SUPIN C30 scale.

the correlations between the intensities of positive and negative emotions of the fathers and the child's age were evaluated, separately for boys and girls.

As follows from the results, in the group of first time fathers of daughters there is a negative correlation between the age of the first child and the intensity of positive emotions (Table 4). The older the first daughter is, the lower is the intensity of positive emotions experienced by the first time fathers, both related to the current situation ($r = -.50, p < .001$) and in general ($r = -.30, p = .047$) (Table 4). No correlation was noted between the age of daughters and the level of negative emotions.

No correlations were established between the age of the first son and the intensity of positive and negative emotions experienced by the first time fathers

(Table 4), both related to the current situation and as an enduring emotional disposition.

DISCUSSION

The experience of fatherhood is related to many unique emotions that can be treated as a resource or developmental potential of a man. However, it may not be noticed by the first time father because of the chronic regret after the lost freedom (Milska-Wrzościńska, 2005, p. 16), related to the appearance of a large number of new responsibilities and falling out of the centre of interest of the child's mother. The fact of becoming a first time father can definitely contribute to man's development (cf. Liber-

Table 4

Correlations between age of the child (for sons and daughters separately) and level of positive and negative emotions and anxiety experienced by the first time fathers

Age of children	STAI-X1	STAI-X2	SUPIN (S30)-PU	SUPIN (S30)-NU	SUPIN (C30)-PU	SUPIN (C30)-NU
Age of daughter	-.12 (n.s.)	-.05 (n.s.)	-.50***	-.22 (n.s.)	-.30*	-.12 (n.s.)
Age of son	.32**	.31 (n.s.)	-.29 (n.s.)	.09 (n.s.)	-.04 (n.s.)	.15 (n.s.)

Note. * $p = .047$, ** $p = .045$, *** $p < .001$, Pearson's correlation coefficient; n.s. – non-significant

ska, Matuszewska, 2006). However, the preliminary condition for this event to initiate positive developmental changes is the earlier reached certain level of emotional and social maturity. It helps taking up the tasks related to being a father (Rostowska, 2008), which – at least in some men – can induce an elevated level of anxiety (Pospiszyl, 1980; Oleś & Oleś, 2001).

Results reported by many authors suggest that fathers devote less time to their children than the mothers and that professional work is for them more important than the activity related to becoming a father. This attitude is explained by the social expectations of men in a given culture (Tyszka, 2002; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Men are rarely expected to sacrifice their professional career in order to get engaged in taking care of the child. On the other hand, it can be observed that men increasingly often want to be engaged in being a father. A standard of a 'new father' appears, a father who wants to spend more time with children, who is engaged in family life and a father who thinks in another way about his role in society (Szlendak, 2010; Liberska & Freudenreich, 2011; Bakiera, 2013; Suwada, 2014; Humberd, Ladge, & Harrington, 2015; Kosakowska-Berezecka, Korzeniewska, & Kaczorowska, 2016; Rosińska & Tylka, 2016).

We studied a group of 90 men who had become first time fathers in the period of half a year prior to the study. The aim of our study was to find out which emotions, and to what degree, accompany the fact of becoming a father. In particular we were interested to determine whether the first time fathers show an elevated level of anxiety related to the fact of becoming fathers and the necessity to undertake a new social role and what is the intensity of positive and negative emotions related to this situation. Moreover, we wanted to establish whether the levels of anxiety and emotions are related to the age and sex of the child.

According to our results, the first time fathers showed a medium level of state anxiety related to the current situation and a low level of trait anxiety understood as an enduring disposition. The level of anxiety was related to the age of the child, but only in the men who fathered a son: the older the son was, the greater was the intensity of state anxiety in the father. No analogous relation was noted in the fathers of daughters. It seems that it is related to the fact that the sex of the child is important for the early parent-child relationships (Giuliano, 2007). Sex is an important factor determining the activity of the newborn and its development (Matlin, 1993), both biological and psychological (cf. Trempała, 2011). Sex affects the process of the child's socialisation from the first moments of its life (Hargreaves & Colley, 1986; Lewis, Pelosi, Araya, & Dunn, 1992). It determines the parents' behaviour, and expectations of parents towards the child and themselves.

The results of our studies have shown that the first time fathers have a high level of positive emotions related to the current situation and described as an enduring disposition. The intensity of negative emotions related to the current situation and treated as an enduring disposition were at a medium level. The intensity of emotions experienced by the first time fathers was correlated with the age of the child but only in the fathers of daughters; the older the girl was, the lower was the intensity level of the father's emotions.

These results seem surprising. According to the stereotype widespread in some cultures, the true man should father a son, build a house and plant a tree. The results interpreted assuming this approach would imply that the father experiences strong fear of the son because the loss of the son would mean the loss of the status of a real father and a true man.

Another interpretation is that the emotions may be the response to realisation of the responsibility for bringing up and shaping a new man. The deep conviction that the father should be a role model for the son can be a source of anxiety about the ability to manage in such a situation and the ability to meet the related responsibility. According to the tradition of our culture, the father has to prepare the son to be a man, to assume a man's roles in society and teach him how to live (Lamb, 1997; Kornas-Biela, 2004). Considering the differences in the parents' reactions to the child related to the child's sex, it should be mentioned that newborn boys are more delicate, require more attention and more frequently develop diseases than girls. The male fetus is weaker and develops more slowly (Jones, 2003). The realisation of potential threats to the health and life of boys in the earliest period of development can also contribute to the elevated level of anxiety experienced by the first time fathers of sons.

The lower intensity of positive emotions related to the birth of a daughter can be explained from the point of view of the true man stereotype – a daughter does not fulfil it. A daughter represents 'the other' sex, and the first time fathers may realise that they have little or no knowledge on the upbringing of a daughter, her needs, shaping of her personality and attitudes. The fathers of daughters may doubt their abilities to cope with bringing up a daughter. Moreover, the father is aware of the fact that a daughter will not fulfil his dreams and will not share his interest. Many fathers of daughters fear that they will have a smaller influence on her behaviour and way of thinking than on the son, and in later developmental stages of her life the contact and understanding with a daughter may be more difficult. In other words, the first time fathers realise the difference between the roles they will play in the life of daughters and sons. The decrease in the positive emotions experienced by the fathers of daughters

in their earliest developmental stage observed with increasing age of daughters can also be explained by the fact that the men may gradually realise that the mother will have a much more important role in bringing up a daughter. The young fathers may have problems with their emotion after the birth of the first child, but we intend to study the emotions of young mothers. This problem will be taken into consideration in our future research.

The subject of the study and the results obtained seem to be very interesting. Discussions on the differences in upbringing of children depending on their sex have been vivid in literature and public debate for a long time (Giuliano, 2007). The results obtained in our study confirmed that the sex of the child is important for the emotional functioning of men as fathers. The authors are continuing studies in the field.

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