Familism – the concept, measure and importance for mental health

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Summary

Aim. The aim of the conducted research was to determine the psychometric properties of the Polish adaptation of the Scale of Familism.

Method. The research included 580 persons (339 women and 241 men) aged 18–81 years ($M = 35$; $SD = 15.49$). The applied research tools included the Scale of Familism, the Scale of Materialism and the Agentic and Communal Orientation Scale.

Results. The factor structure analysis of the Scale of Familism performed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) did not confirm the adequacy of the fit of the assumed model to the data. The results of the exploratory principal component analysis (EFA) indicated the existence of five dimensions that explained 51.14% of variance in results. They included: Respect ($\alpha = 0.91$), Material success and achievements ($\alpha = 0.87$), Religion ($\alpha = 0.95$), Individualism ($\alpha = 0.63$), and Family support ($\alpha = 0.70$). Construct validity of the Scale of Familism was verified by analyzing correlations between the separate scales and the scores on the Agentic and Communal Orientation Scales and the Scale of Materialism. The obtained correlation coefficient values were weak, yet in line with the expected direction.

Conclusions. The Polish adaptation of the scale designed for examining familism is a tool characterized by good psychometric properties, which enables a multidimensional measure of the psychological aspects of familism in adulthood. It can be recommended for use in scientific research as well as therapeutic practice.

Key words: family, adulthood, the Scale of Familism

Introduction

The socio-cultural changes taking place in Poland as a result of the modernization, industrialization and westernization process are leading to the unification of families and bringing them closer to the western model of functioning. It has been stressed that together with the transformations occurring in the socio-economic sphere of a country, there are changes to be observed in the family structure and functioning [1–3]. What is

interesting, the research results show that whereas financial dependence in the family has weakened, emotional ties have not changed significantly. It has been assumed that this fact mainly results from the system of values adopted by family members. However, the researchers [4] notice that currently there is a strong conflict in this respect between the need of autonomy and dependence. On the one hand, family members appreciate individualism and, in their system of values, tend to give priority to personal achievements. On the other hand, people reveal a desire to enter into relationships with other people and demonstrate attachment behaviors aimed at building and maintaining social bonds. In the related literature [5], five types of such behaviors are mentioned: behaviors in favor of the partner and the relationship, sexual behaviors, maintaining intimacy as well as conciliatory behaviors and behaviors aimed at impressing.

Family specialists [6] indicate that the conflict between the values of community and autonomy concerns a lot of modern families. It is emphasized that the community attitude is associated with a greater possibility of providing and receiving social support from family members than in the family model based on autonomy. Family support is especially important in a situation when the number of persons suffering from mental disorders is increasing. Researchers indicate [7] that the first analysis of mental health of the Polish people, whose results were presented in the report of 2012, has shown that more than six million adult Polish citizens is affected by one of the mental disorders included in ICD-10 and DSM-IV. In light of the data obtained by the Central Statistical Office in 2014–2016, it was found out that only 4% of the people (1.4 millions) used psychological or psychiatric outpatient services.. The diagnosed problems mainly included neurotic disorders and mood disturbances. They were found in over 47% of all the patients [8].

Analyzing data from the two consecutive years, starting from 2014, it was noticed that in 2015 the number of people with mental illnesses had grown significantly [9]. Nevertheless, this problem is commonly considered to be statistically underestimated. What is more, experts think [10] that the majority of the people suffering from mental problems never use specialist medical services. Looking for the causes of this phenomenon, multi-faceted determinants have been indicated [11]. But, in the first place, the following factors are mentioned: poor level of knowledge on mental disorders in the population, biases of the society against mentally ill people and their overt discrimination.

In the context of the above considerations, especially valuable actions of the researchers are those aimed at protecting and improving mental health through seeking protective factors against disorders in this respect. As it was proved in the research [12], one of such protective factors is familism. The term familism is understood as a cultural value assuming a strong identification with and attachment to the family group. Familism is revealed in demonstrating loyalty behaviors and trust towards family members, expressing positive family feelings and solidarity with each other.

Familism also shows the strength of the relationship between an individual and their family group, measured against the strength of bonds with other social groups existing in a society. It can occur with different intensity in various social contexts, for instance, in family companies [13, 14].

The results of the research clearly show that familism plays an important part in maintaining good mental health. That has been proved by the results of the research carried out among Latinos showing that higher scores of the value of familism allow us to predict a lower risk of externalizing and internalizing disorders in teenagers [15, 16]. The researchers mention [17] that in some cases the values of familism can also protect adolescents against undertaking risky behaviors. Referring to the results of the longitudinal studies, the authors indicate [18] that there is a correlation between the family values demonstrated by the Latino teenagers and lower alcohol consumption, engagement in criminal activity and sexual activity in late adolescence. Moreover, a negative correlation was discovered between the values of familism and the level of depressive symptoms in the group of adolescents of Mexican origin. However, it is emphasized [19] that although a protective influence of familism has been noticed, still not much is known about the underlying mechanisms.

On the Polish ground, there are no scientific findings referring to the problems of familism in the psychological aspect. Also, there are hardly any psychological tools with good psychometric properties designed for measuring family values in the cultural context. All of that was an inducement to take up research on this issue.

Aim of research

The process of adaptation of the MACVS (Mexican American Cultural Values Scales for Adolescents and Adults) [20] to the Polish conditions assumed the implementation of the three main research aims. The first of them was determining the factor structure of the tool based on the results of the performed principal component analysis. The next stage of the study concerned determination of reliability of the Polish version of the MACVS. The last aim was associated with verification of construct validity of the Polish version of the MACVS.

Material

The research, which was of a self-descriptive nature, was carried out in years 2017–2018 in the Lodz Province in Poland. It was both of an individual and group nature. The instruction was each time read out by the researcher. The respondents were also informed about the goal of the research and that its results will be used exclusively for scientific purposes. The research was based on the principles of anonymity and voluntary participation. It was conducted by the paper-pencil method. It took the respondents approximately 30 minutes to complete the set of tests. In the data analysis,

the following specialist software was used: IBM SPSS 25 and IBM SPSS AMOS 25. The hypotheses were verified at the significance level of $\alpha < 0.05$.

In total, the research covered 580 adults aged 18–81 years – 339 women (58.3%) and 241 men (41.5%) from the Lodz Province. The mean age of the examined persons was 35 years (SD = 15.49). The period of early adulthood (18–35 years) was represented by 380 persons, the period of middle adulthood (36–54 years) was represented by 100 persons and the one of late adulthood (55+ years) by 91 persons. Therefore, the examined sample, which was formed using the snowball sampling, can be defined as cross-sectional. The vast majority of the respondents were residents of urban areas (81.8%; n = 475). In the surveyed sample, most of the respondents had higher (37.1%; n = 215) and secondary education (35.5%; n = 206). The examined persons with a bachelor degree accounted for 15.5% (n = 90) of the sample whereas the persons with vocational and primary education respectively accounted for 6.9% (n = 40) and 5.0% (n = 29) of the respondents. The marital status of the surveyed persons was mostly referred to as single (60.2%; n = 349). 31.3% (n = 182) of the respondents were married. 5.9% (n = 34) and 2.6% (n = 15) of the whole sample were respectively divorced and widowed.

Method

The following tools were applied in the research:

1. The Mexican American Cultural Values Scales for Adolescents and Adults (MACVS) designed for measuring different aspects of familism [20]. The scale consists of 50 items, to which a respondent is to refer on the Likert scale, where 1 – means "I strongly disagree" and 5 – "I definitely agree" [20]. The factor analysis (CFA) proved the existence of nine scales representing specific value categories. Six of them were related to traditional values, associated with the system of beliefs, behaviors as well as the cultivation of traditions, which are typical of collectivistic cultures, such as Familism Support, Familism Obligations, Familism Referents, Respect, Religion, and Traditional Gender Roles. On the other hand, the three other MACVS scales reflected the contemporary mainstream values of individualistic culture. They include: Material Success, Independence & Self-Reliance and Competition & Personal Achievement. The familism dimensions as well as their components were identified by the researchers mainly based on the analysis of the results of two large studies of Mexican American families [21–23] and generated as a result of focus group research carried out on a representative sample of participants [20]. The persons taking part in the focus research (fathers, mothers, adolescents) came from collectivistic (Mexicans) and individualistic (Americans) cultures. The authors of the MACVS emphasize that determining the 9 familism dimensions and items for each of the subscales of family values were developed

during their research. It is noted that they are not culturally related to the values identified in the previous studies [24, 25].

The psychometric properties of the MACVS were determined on a sample of 598 teenagers (295 males and 303 females) with a mean age of 12 years and their parents (573 mothers and 331 fathers).

The Cronbach's α coefficients for individual dimensions, respectively for females and males, were as follows: Familism Support (0.58; 0.60), Familism Obligations (0.55; 0.46), Familism Referents (0.63; 0.53), Respect (0.52; 0.45), Religion (0.78; 0.78), Traditional Gender Roles (0.66; 0.67), Material Success (0.78; 0.78), Independence and Self-Reliance (0.35; 0.40), and Competition and Personal Achievement (0.65; 0.62) [20].

2. The Materialistic Orientation Scale designed for measuring materialistic orientation understood as focusing of an individual on purchasing goods and linking the act of purchase and the state of possession with happiness as well as life success. The scale consists of 5 statements, to which a respondent is to refer on the Likert scale, where 1 means "I strongly disagree" and 5 – "I definitely agree". The psychometric properties of the Materialistic Orientation Scale are good and enable the conduction of research (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.70$) [26].

3. The Agentic and Communal Orientation Scale used for measuring agentic orientation understood as focusing on one's own self and own goals and communal orientation understood as an interest in other people and interpersonal and community relationships. The scale consists of 30 feature definitions, which refer to the two scales: Agentic and Communal one. Surveyed persons give their answers on a 7-point scale with the indifference point, i.e., from 1 ("definitely not"), through 4 ("difficult to say, to some extent yes, to some extent no") to 7 ("definitely yes"). The internal consistency rates measured by Cronbach's α coefficient is high and have the following values: 0.92 for the Communal scale and 0.90 for the Agentic scale, respectively [27].

In order to measure variables of a demographic and social nature, the survey (age, gender, place of residence, marital status, education) was applied.

Based on the related literature, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H_1: The 9-factor structure of the tool will be confirmed in the Polish version of the MACVS.

H_2: The scales referring to collectivistic values (Respect, Religion, Support) are positively correlated with Communal Orientation.

H_3: The scales referring to individualistic values (Material Success and Achievements, Individualism) are positively correlated with Agency.

H_4: The scale of Material Success and Achievements is positively correlated with Materialism.
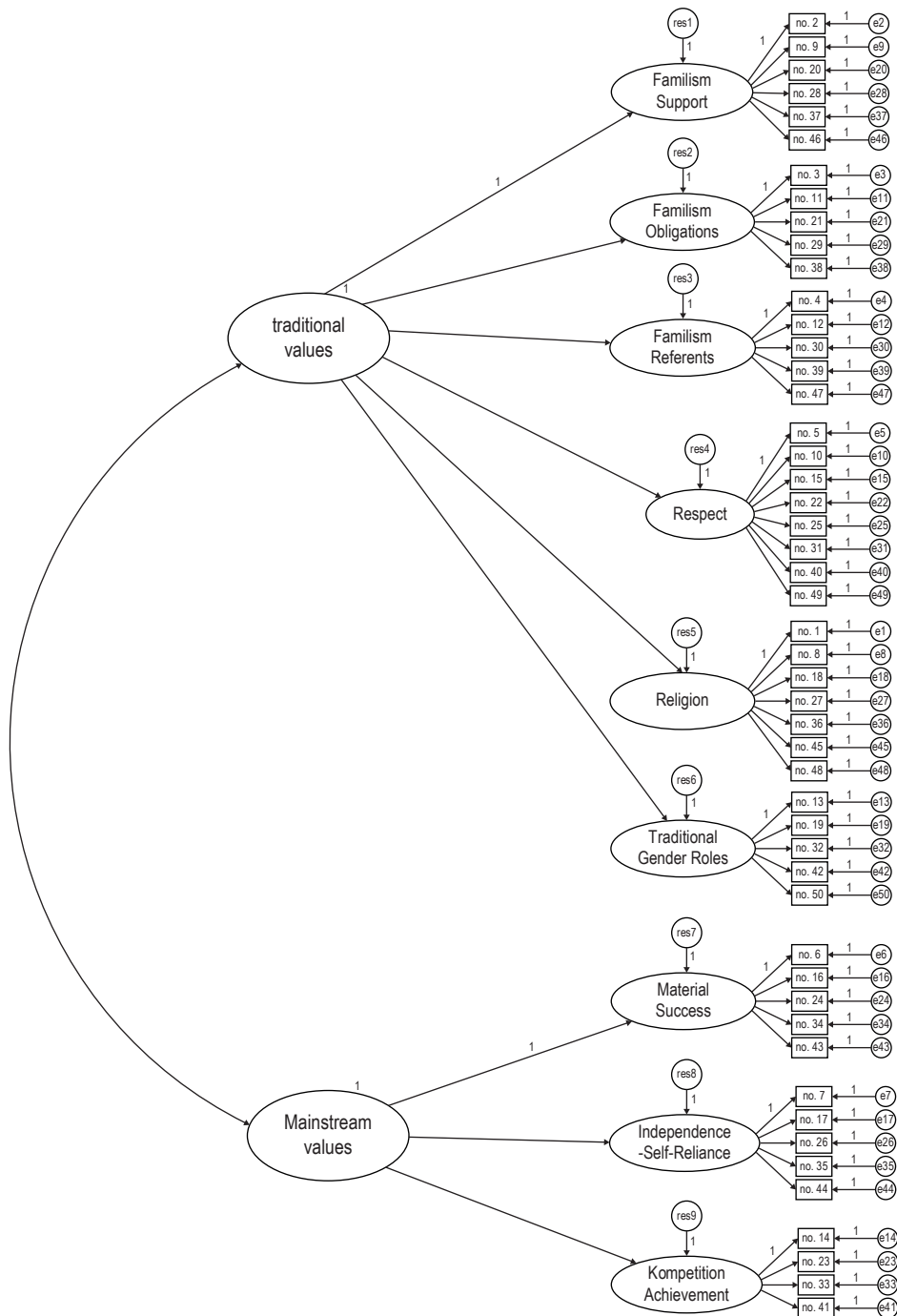
Figure 1. **The expected factor structure of the analyzed tool**

Preliminary adaptation work

The MACVS adaptation process was implemented in accordance with the translation accuracy principles. The applied translation method assumes that the original version is translated faithfully, however, with a possibility to introduce changes wherever they are necessary due to the specifics of a given language [28]. The MACVS translation work order included the following steps: translation of the original version into Polish together with the correction, back translation into English and its approval by the authors of the MACVS.

Describing the first stage of the work, it has been indicated that the translation of the original version of the MACVS was provided by three translators with an experience in psychological studies. Next, the obtained results were compared and the statements differentiating the proposed translations (six items) were marked. The translators were asked to translate the marked statements again. During the second comparison, there were differences found only in two statements. The doubts were explained at a joint meeting, following which a common version of the MACVS was developed. The next stage concerned back translation of the final version into English provided by a professional translator. Then, the translation was submitted to the authors for approval. Having obtained approval of the submitted version of the questionnaire by the authors, the research was launched.

Picture 1. The expected factor structure of the analysed tool.

Results

Factor structure of the Familism Scale

In order to verify the latent factor structure of the Polish version of the MACVS, in the first place, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. The method of maximum likelihood was applied. The expected factor structure is presented in Figure 1.

The conducted confirmatory analysis resulted in revealing statistically significant differences between the expected model and the obtained results, $\chi^2(1167) = 4462.55$; $p < 0.001$. Based on the affinity index values, it was found out that the model was not sufficiently fit to the data. The index values were CFI = 0.77; AGFI = 0.69; NFI = 0.71; RMSEA = 0.07. Table 1 presents the obtained factor loading values.

Table 1. **Factor loading values obtained in the confirmatory factor analysis**

Analyzed correlations					
TRADITIONAL VALUES	f	p	MAINSTREAM VALUES	f	p
Familism Support	0.90	0.001	Material Success	0.86	0.001
Familism Obligations	0.88	0.001	Independence and Self-Reliance	0.07	0.200

Familism Referents	1.03	0.001	Competition and Achievement	0.93	0.001
Respect	0.94	0.001			
Religion	0.60	0.001			
Traditional Gender Roles	0.68	0.001			
Familism Support – item number	f	p	Familism Obligations – item number	f	p
2	0.83	0.001	3	0.69	0.001
9	0.75	0.001	11	0.53	0.001
20	0.77	0.001	21	0.57	0.001
28	0.67	0.001	29	0.72	0.001
37	0.73	0.001	38	0.50	0.001
46	0.39	0.001			
Familism Referents – item number	f	p	Competition and Achievement – item number	f	p
4	0.69	0.001	14	0.56	0.001
12	0.56	0.001	23	0.73	0.001
30	0.80	0.001	33	0.43	0.001
39	0.74	0.001	41	0.73	0.001
47	0.42	0.001			
Respect – item number	f	p	Religion – item number	f	p
5	0.71	0.001	1	0.84	0.001
10	0.66	0.001	8	0.82	0.001
15	0.75	0.001	18	0.87	0.001
22	0.59	0.001	27	0.89	0.001
25	0.83	0.001	36	0.91	0.001
31	0.67	0.001	45	0.92	0.001
40	0.65	0.001	48	0.86	0.001
49	0.72	0.001			
Traditional Gender Roles – item number	f	p	Material Success – item number	f	p
13	0.74	0.001	6	0.81	0.001
19	0.60	0.001	16	0.81	0.001
32	0.70	0.001	24	0.74	0.001
42	0.58	0.001	34	0.83	0.001
50	0.69	0.001	43	0.83	0.001

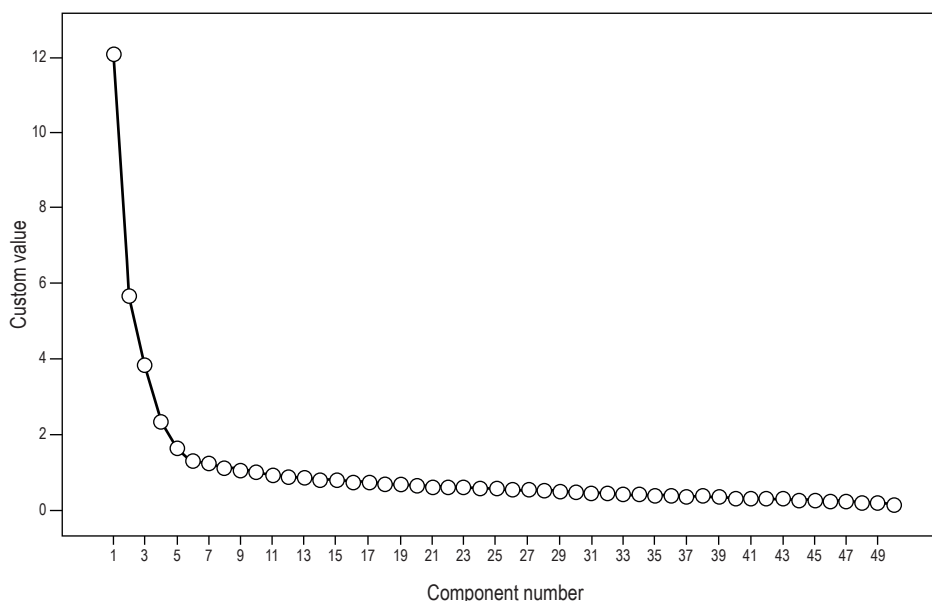| Independence and Self-Reliance – item number	f	p			
7	0.65	0.001			
17	0.45	0.001			
26	0.57	0.001			
25	0.23	0.001			
35	0.56	0.001			
44	0.65	0.001			

f – factor loadings; p – statistical significance

Figure 2. **Scree plot obtained as a result of principal component analysis**

While analyzing factor loadings values obtained in the confirmatory factor analysis, no statistically significant correlation was revealed between the second order factor (traditional values), mainstream values and the assumed component of this factor, i.e., Independence and Self-Reliance. The coefficient value of the correlation between the second order dimensions, i.e., traditional values and mainstream values was $r = 0.55$; $p < 0.001$.

Due to the unsatisfactory level of affinity between the expected correlation image and the obtained results, we also carried out exploratory principal component analysis. Figure 2 shows the obtained scree plot.

As a result of the exploratory factor analysis, five dimensions of familism were identified, which explained 51.14% of variance. The Oblimin oblique rotation was performed. Table 2 presents the obtained model matrix with the factor loading values for individual items, without values lower than 0.40 [29]. The table also includes the Cronbach's α coefficient values.

Table 2. **Factor loading values obtained in the principal component analysis and their corresponding scale position numbers (in brackets)**

Identified dimensions				
Respect	Material Success and Achievements	Religion	Individualism	Familism Support
0.78 (25)	0.81 (34)	-0.93 (36)	0.71 (26)	-0.73 (11)
0.75 (5)	0.77 (43)	-0.91 (45)	0.67 (7)	-0.65 (21)
0.72 (15)	0.74 (6)	-0.91 (27)	0.65 (44)	-0.47 (28)
0.65 (30)	0.73 (16)	-0.88 (1)	0.49 (35)	0.46 (46)
0.63 (2)	0.68 (24)	-0.87 (8)	0.48 (17)	-0.45 (29)
0.61 (4)	0.59 (32)	-0.84 (48)	-	-0.40 (12)
0.61 (40)	0.58 (23)	-0.82 (18)	-	-
0.60 (49)	0.54 (13)	-	-	-
0.56 (39)	0.53 (50)	-	-	-
0.55 (10)	0.48 (33)	-	-	-
0.54 (9)	0.48 (41)	-	-	-
0.54 (31)	0.41 (14)	-	-	-
0.50 (3)	-	-	-	-
0.42 (20)	-	-	-	-
α = 0.91	α = 0.87	α = 0.95	α = 0.63	α = 0.70

Based on the contents of the items included in the individual dimensions, it was indicated that the first obtained dimension was Respect, the second one – Material Success and Achievements, the third one – Religion, the fourth one – Individualism, and the fifth one – Familism Support. Thus, three dimensions of familism in the Polish version of the MACVS referred to collectivistic values whereas two dimensions to individualistic ones (Material Success and Achievements and Individualism).

Familism Support is demonstrated in a desire to maintain and support the people from the close family circle. Respect is understood as the need to maintain proper intergenerational relationships and shape the significance of the parents for their children, regarding both the attitudes and taking into account the parents' wisdom while making decisions. Religion covers the sphere of spirituality and demonstrating belief in a higher power. On the other hand, the familism dimensions based on individualistic values included those which emphasize the importance of material achievements,

success reflected by the priority of earning money as well as winning in competition (Material Success and Achievements) and gaining independence and self-reliance (Individualism).

Reliability

Discussing the internal consistency index values measured by the Cronbach's α coefficient, it was discovered that they were high for the scales of Respect (0.91), Material Success and Achievements (0.87) and Religion (0.95). Reliability of the scale of Individualism was lower (0.63). Reliability of the scale of Familism Support was optimal (0.70).

External validity

External validity was verified by analyzing correlations between the identified scales and the scores on the Agentic and Communal Orientation Scale and the Materialistic Orientation Scale. The obtained correlation coefficient values are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. **Pearson's r correlation coefficients between the scores obtained on the identified subscales of the Familism Scale and the ones obtained on the Agentic and Communal Orientation Scale and the Materialistic Orientation Scale**

	Agency	Communal Orientation	Materialism
Respect	0.136**	0.132**	0.137**
Material Success and Achievements	0.226**	-0.263**	0.593**
Religion	0.025	0.169**	-0.033
Individualism	0.203**	0.056	-0.005
Familism Support	0.002	0.206**	-0.007

** $p < 0.01$

Statistically significant positive correlations, although in majority of weak strength, were found between the scores on the scale of Respect and the scores on the scales of Agency, Communal Orientation and Materialism. The scores on the scale of Material Success and Achievements were positively correlated with Agency and Materialism (high correlation) and negatively – with Communal Orientation. The scores on the scale of Religion were positively correlated with Communal Orientation. The scores on the scale of Individualism were positively correlated with Agency. The scores on the scale of Familism Support were positively correlated with Communal Orientation.

Discussion of results

The present study has provided significant, though preliminary findings concerning the term of familism and the psychometric properties of the scale designed for measuring it on the Polish ground. Familism is defined as an important cultural value, assuming a strong identification with and attachment to the family group. It is reflected in the attitudes toward the family (cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspect) based on both traditional values associated with the system of beliefs, behaviors as well as the cultivation of traditions typical of collectivistic cultures, and the ones that come from the mainstream of individualistic culture. In the Polish version of the MACVS, five dimensions of familism have been identified, which does not confirm the nine-factor structure of the original tool. In the original version of the MACVS, the authors identified six familism dimensions based on traditional values (Familism Support, Familism Obligations, Familism Referents, Respect, Religion, Traditional Gender Roles) and three dimensions related to individualistic values (Material Success, Independence and Self-Reliance, Competition and Personal Achievement) [20]. Therefore, the first hypothesis was rejected.

Interpreting the obtained results, it is indicated that it is culture that plays a significant part in experiencing familism. Poles can differ from other nations (e.g., Latinos, Americans) in not only the intensity and structure of the familism value but also its triggering factors and the social consequences of attitudes characterized by familism. The results obtained within the Polish population may indicate that the society, according to the convergence hypothesis [4], is heading for the model of culture emphasizing personalized achievements of an individual, but there are still to be seen roots in traditional values. The research results obtained in this respect are consistent with the findings of other researchers [1, 2, 6]. Therefore, the collection of values included in the MACVS shall rather be treated as a starting point for further research on familism in the Polish population than the matrix of these values. Currently, due to the scarcity of studies of familism in the Polish population, this issue remains open.

The results of the correlational research confirm the assumptions of the set hypotheses. It was found out that the familism dimensions based on traditional values (Respect, Religion, Familism Support) were positively correlated with the communal orientation emphasizing the importance of relationships with other people. The obtained results are confirmed by the findings of contemporary researchers. Wojciszke and Cieślak [30] indicated that the dimension of Moderate Communal Orientation can help to temper competitive orientation and emotional reaction to a stressful situation. On the other hand, it is positively correlated with the sense of happiness, satisfaction with close relationships as well as more intense experience of intimacy, passion and commitment.

In the presented study, it was confirmed that the material success and achievement orientation was positively correlated with a moderate level of the Agentic Orientation,

understood as focusing on one's own self and one's own goals, and the materialistic attitude. The results were consistent with the findings of other researchers [31–34], who had noticed that the materialistic orientation was positively correlated with seeking financial security, financial successes, hedonistic values, and the need for power, and negatively with a desire for warm relationships with other people, familism values and religion. It is stressed that it is the dimension of agency (not communal orientation) that is associated with various indexes of mental health. The higher the level of agency the greater the sense of happiness, self-esteem and the higher the degree in which we are able to use a task-oriented coping style in stress situations and the lower the susceptibility to depression and anxiety [30]. This confirmed the external validity of the Polish version of the Familism Scale. Due to the correlational nature of the research, test-retest reliability was not assessed, which is worth doing within future studies.

The developed tool gives the researchers interested in the issue of familism an opportunity to study it by means of its multidimensional nature. As it was confirmed in the presented study, the Familism Scale is characterized by good internal consistency, which is indicated by the Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.91 to 0.63. It was noticed that the internal consistency coefficient for the scale of Individualism achieved only satisfactory values, which might result from a small number of items in this scale. Therefore, while using this tool, we need to be careful with the interpretation of results. However, it is emphasized that in the case of the research findings presented by other authors, the MACVS subscale internal consistency coefficients are generally low (Cronbach's α 0.50 or lower) for the subscale of Independence and Self-Reliance, good (Cronbach's α 0.70 or higher) for the subscales of Religion and Material Success and satisfactory (Cronbach's α 0.60) for the remaining ones [20].

Compared to the original version of the MACVS consisting of 50 items, designed for examining adolescents and adults [20], the Polish Scale of Familism was developed as a 44-item tool meant to survey only adults. It is stressed that although the research was conducted on a large sample, which can be referred to as cross-sectional, it covered only adult people. Within the next stage of the research, we plan to gain knowledge on the value of familism demonstrated by Polish adolescents. Moreover, we perceive a need for conducting thorough research and analyses which would confirm the properties of the familism dimensions identified in this study in order to examine the usefulness of this tool in a greater degree.

Conclusions

The adaptation process of the MACVS reveals its good psychometric properties. This method can be recommended both to researchers and family therapists for diagnosing the familism values of patients.

Now, at the times of unrest, instability and unpredictability, the term of familism is taking on very special meaning since it is indicated by scientists to be one of the most

important protective factors for mental health [35]. Good mental health is essential not only for an individual but also for the whole society. It is one of the components of the definition of health by WHO, making it possible for an individual to function in a society and properly play their social roles [36]. Although the results of the epidemiological study concerning mental disorders [37] carried out in Poland allow for the conclusion that problems of this kind more and more often affect the Polish population, still a lot of families are hardly aware what to do to prevent their members against this kind of problems (e.g., through proper socialization process in respect of values, family communication) and how to support them to cope with this kind of functioning disorders (e.g., do not stigmatize, implement the idea of inclusive education). Increasing awareness of the importance of familism in the context of mental disorders can lead to a significant decrease in their incidence, especially among children and adolescents.

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