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**ARTICLE**

## Sense of Family Coherence in Parents of (Sub) Optimally Developing Children

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### ABSTRACT

The theoretical basis of the paper is Aron Antonovsky's salutogenetic model of health, which is based on the salutogenic orientation and the sense of coherence understood as the central concept and the most important resource. The primary aim of the study is to determine the strength of the sense of family coherence in parents of optimally developing children and in parents of suboptimally developing children and their correlation with: family satisfaction and family orientation to crisis situations. The study was done using parents (N = 394) sampled from the population of the Republic of Serbia. Questionnaire for Obtaining Basic Data, The Family Sense of Coherence Scale, The Family Adaptation Scale and Family Crisis-oriented Scales were used for the purposes of this study. The findings of the study showed that parents of optimally developing children have a more heightened sense of family coherence than parents of suboptimally developing children. Also, the findings showed positive correlation with: family satisfaction and family orientation to crisis, and family sense of coherence. More precisely, the sense of family coherence in the parents who participated in the research correlates positively with satisfaction with one's own family and family orientation to crisis.

### KEYWORDS

Sense of family coherence; optimal development; suboptimal development; parents; family

## 1 Introduction

Disease as a universal experience befalling all families can exert a dramatic impact on their functioning on different levels: (family, marital, parental, individual, as well other systems that families are connected with). Chronic diseases, terminal illnesses [1], disabilities of one or more family members [2], acute illnesses, and the sudden onset of an illness, pose a threat to the family's proper functioning. Furthermore, birth of the child with some kind of disability, subsequent diagnosing that the child's development is not in harmony with his/her age, presents a major challenge and threat to the family's overall functioning, and parents in particular [3]. In this paper, parents of suboptimally developing children are denoted as parents whose child (or children) has some kind of developmental disorder, shows delay in development in one or more aspects in relation to their peers and defined standards of optimal development for a given age. Parents of suboptimally developing children have to endure considerable hardships, some of which are as follows: development of the parent-child relationship, the



emotional response to the child's diagnosis, parents' relationship to their child's health, parents' adaptation and involvement, marital problems, challenges relating to family life cycles [4], and threats to further development of the family system [5], etc.

The findings of certain studies [6–15] have indicated that parents of suboptimally developing children compared to parents of optimally developing children differ in terms of various indicators examined. Thus, parents of suboptimally developing children increasingly run the risk of succumbing to depression [6–8,15], more frequently suffer from various psychological problems [12], and display an increased level of stress [11]. Also, parents of suboptimally developing children are beset with growing marital problems, as they divorce more frequently [9,10]. Moreover, the studies on the sense of coherence (as the central resource of resilience within the salutogenetic model of health of Aron Antonovsky) that were done using a group of parents of suboptimally developing children and parents of optimally developing children indicated certain differences between the two groups of parents [11,13]. These differences, primarily, relate to the intensity of the sense of coherence and coping with times of crisis. More precisely, parents of suboptimally developing children, irrespective of their child's diagnosis, displayed a less heightened sense of coherence [11,13]. Also, the findings showed that parents (fathers in particular) having a poor sense of coherence resort to avoidance as a way of confronting crisis situations [12], unlike parents who display a keen sense of coherence and thereby employ more effective strategies [14].

This paper strives to highlight the importance of examining the resource of parents' resilience. It is worth mentioning that this is particularly significant if one bears in mind that the findings of the survey showed that family resources can have an impact on parenting, and the outcomes of child's development [16,17], which take on major significance in suboptimally developing children. More precisely, the adequate growth and development of suboptimally developing children requires discovering, stabilizing and maintaining the preserved capabilities of the child, as well as mitigating and eliminating the consequences of suboptimal development. First and foremost, early diagnosis, medical intervention, and timely stimulation of development are of the essence, implying that parents are to abide by the intervention measures proposed, possess adequate resources and employ appropriate strategies for coping with crisis situations [18].

By examining the family sense of coherence in parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally the paper strives to answer the basic research question: can the intensity of the sense of family coherence indicate that there are certain differences between parents depending on whether or not they rear suboptimally developing children. Also, after reviewing the surveys one gets the impression that the sense of coherence in individuals is examined more frequently with the aim of determining correlation with family life [19,20], than the family sense of coherence itself. Promoting the application of the salutogenetic model of health is of crucial importance, as it is readily apparent that this model of health has become increasingly important and widely applicable in numerous fields and to diverse age groups over the last few decades [21]. Numerous surveys conducted by salutogenetic-oriented researchers, who found that there was a positive correlation of the sense of coherence and family sense of coherence with a series of diverse indicators of mental health and functioning of the individual and family, bear witness to the above mentioned [21–31].

The problem of the research is to determine the strength of the sense of family coherence in parents of children developing optimally and parents of suboptimally developing children and their correlation with: family satisfaction and family relation to crisis situations. Present study examined the intensity of the sense of family coherence in parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally in the Republic of Serbia. The sense of family coherence has been analyzed as the central resource of parents' resilience and a significant health resource, which is vital to coping strategy [32].

The specific aims and tasks of the study are as follows: to analyze of the correlation of the sense of family coherence in parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally with family

satisfaction and family orientation to crisis; to determine if there are differences in the intensity of the sense of family coherence between parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally with regard to: parents' sex, family economic circumstances, parents' educational background, and the number of children in the family. The study was based on the assumption that parents of children developing optimally have a more heightened sense of family coherence (in the aggregate and by dimensions) in comparison with parents of suboptimally developing children. Furthermore, we worked on the following assumptions: there is a positive correlation of the sense of family coherence with family satisfaction and family orientation to crisis in both groups of parents, and there are differences in the intensity of the sense of family coherence in both groups of parents with regard to: parents' sex, parents' educational background, family economic circumstances, and the number of children in the family. The hypotheses were formulated based on the salutogenetic model of health of A. Antonovsky, with the sense of coherence as its central concept and most significant resource [33,34]. Also, the strength of the sense of family coherence is a significant factor and resource contributing to confronting and surmounting crisis situations in the family [35]. Additionally, the hypotheses were formulated based on the findings of previous studies on the sense of family coherence [19,32]. Some of the previous studies cited above [11–13] examined the individual sense of coherence of both parents of preschool children with certain developmental disabilities [11], only in fathers [13] or in both parents of children with specific difficulties, such as cerebral paralysis [12]. We believe that this research is much more comprehensive, given that parents of children having various developmental difficulties and problems were examined, and the obtained results were compared with the results of parents of optimally developing children. Furthermore, it can be argued that the examination of the sense of family coherence in both parents is significantly different in this paper, in contrast to some previous studies which examined the individual sense of coherence. This is especially important if we keep in mind the fact that there are significantly more studies that examine the individual sense of coherence [19,20] in relation to the sense of family coherence, especially on a specific sample, such as the sample in this study.

## 2 Materials and Methods

### 2.1 Participants and Procedure

The study was based on a sample of parents ( $N = 394$ , i.e., 197 fathers and 197 mothers) from the Republic of Serbia who were divided into two groups: parents of optimally developing children ( $N = 210$ ), and parents of suboptimally developing children ( $N = 184$ ). Parents of optimally developing children have a child whose development is in harmony with his/her age and has no identified developmental deviations. Parents of suboptimally developing children have a child whose development is not in harmony with his/her age and is characterised by certain developmental deviations, i.e., developmental risks, developmental delays, and developmental difficulties. More severe developmental deviations are classified into six groups: 1. sensory disorders, 2. body disorders, 3. inadequately developed intellectual abilities, 4. speech disorders, 5. motor disorders, and 6. marked behaviour disorders [35]. This study involved parents of children diagnosed with more severe development disorders. Parents of suboptimally developing children filled out the questionnaires on the premises of The Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities "Support me", whose members they are. The second group of the convenient sample consisted of parents of optimally developing children, which are reached with snow-ball sampling method [36]. Data were collected in their homes or apartments after the researchers contacted them and agreed on the time of the meeting, with the aim of filling out the questionnaire, as well as after their voluntary consent to participate in the research. Both groups of parents were middle-aged (parents of optimally developing children  $AS = 37,71$ ;  $SD = 9,31$ ; parents of suboptimally developing children  $AS = 44,23$ ;  $SD = 9,91$ ). The research was conducted during August and September 2019.

## 2.2 Instruments

The survey used: Questionnaire for Obtaining Basic Data (designed for the purposes of this research), The Family Sense of Coherence Scale [32], The Family Adaptation Scale [32], and Family Crisis-oriented Scales [37]. The instruments used in the research are available for public use.

The Questionnaire for Obtaining Basic Data was used to acquire data about the following: parents' sex, economic circumstances of the family (subjective estimate of the respondent), parents' educational background (level of education respondents achieved at the time of the examination), and the number of children in a given family.

*The Family Sense of Coherence Scale* measures the family sense of coherence, which represents the overall relationship a person has with his/her family and is defined as perceived comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness of family life [32]. The Scale consists of 26 items, where response alternatives are a semantic scale of 1 point to 7 points. The items are divided into three subscales measuring the sense of family coherence: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. Comprehensibility is the cognitive dimension referring to the extent of understanding different events occurring in the family [32]. Manageability is the instrumental or behavioral dimension referring to the degree to which one feels that there are resources at one's disposal that can be used to cope with events occurring in the family, manage family situations and events [32]. Meaningfulness is the motivational dimension providing one with motivation to find meaning in the family, use the existing resources and find new ones. The questionnaire yields a summed score with a range from 26 to 182, where the score ranges from 8 to 56 on the subscale measuring comprehensibility, whereas the score ranges from 9 to 63 on the subscales measuring manageability and meaningfulness. In this study the reliability expressed by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient amounts to 0.94 (subscales measuring comprehensibility 0.78, manageability .88 and meaningfulness 0.89).

*The Family Adaptation Scale* measures family adaptation and refers to subjective evaluation of family satisfaction [32]. The scale consists of 10 questions measuring family satisfaction, family relations and family relation to the environment. The response alternatives are a semantic scale of 1 point (dissatisfied) to 7 points (completely satisfied). The score ranges between 10 and 70, where a higher score indicates greater life satisfaction. In the course of this research, high reliability of the scale has been obtained, amounting to  $\alpha = 0.94$  (measured by Cronbach's alpha).

*Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales–Serbian version* (abbrev. F-COPES) [37] is an instrument designed to identify ways to solve problems that represent the family's response to a particular difficulty or crisis. The items within the instrument refer to two levels of interaction [37]: 1) the interaction of the individual and the family system, i.e., solving problems among family members (so-called internal strategies), and 2) family interaction with the social environment, i.e., solving problems whose cause is outside the family (so-called external strategies), which spring come from the social environment, but affect family members. Families employing a number of coping strategies at both levels will adapt far better to stressful situations. The original version consists of 29 items [37], and a modified version comprising 34 items and 1 open-ended item was used in this study. The respondent rate the offered items on Likert's five-point scale (1-almost never to 5-almost always). Subscales are as follows: 1. providing social support (the family's ability to provide support from relatives, friends and neighbours), 2. redefining (evaluation of the family's ability to redefine a stressful event to make it more meaningful), 3. seeking spiritual (religious) support (refers to religious beliefs and involvement in church activities), 4. mobilizing the family to seek and accept help (the family's ability to find social resources and accept help), and 5. passive evaluation is avoiding reacting to a problem at hand. In this study, the reliability expressed by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient amounts to  $\alpha = 0.85$ .

### 2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, *t*-test, and analysis of variance–ANOVA. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages, the arithmetic mean (AM) and standard deviation (SD) were used to determine the intensity of variables. Statistical significance testing (*t*-test and analysis of variance-ANOVA) was also used to determine differences among certain groups within the entire sample. Correlation analysis (the Pearson correlation coefficient) was used to determine the connection between variables included in the study.

### 2.4 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in compliance with all ethical norms and principles related to the collection and use of the data obtained. Namely, the respondents voluntarily participated in the study, the data were collected anonymously, with researchers emphasizing that the results obtained will be used exclusively for scientific purposes. The study used instruments that have already been used in the research on a sample of the population from the Republic of Serbia. All instruments are available for public use, and the authors of the paper have used them in their research before.

## 3 Results

In order to test differences in terms of the strength of family sense of coherence (as a whole and by dimensions) in groups of parents of children developing optimally and suboptimally, we performed the *t*-test. These results are shown in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1:** The results of *t*-test sense of family coherence (as a whole and by components) in parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally

		N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>
Sense of family coherence	Optimal development	210	147,74	16,51	11,846	392	0.000
	Suboptimal development	184	115,44	35,35			
Comprehensibility	Optimal development	210	39,28	6,37	8,027	335,41	0.000
	Suboptimal development	184	33,12	8,52			
Manageability	Optimal development	210	53,46	7,19	12,551	258,33	0.000
	Suboptimal development	184	38,55	14,64			
Meaningfulness	Optimal development	210	55,00	5,99	10,019	239,81	0.000
	Suboptimal development	184	43,76	14,13			

Based on the results shown in [Table 1](#), it can be noticed that there is a statistically significant difference in the intensity of the sense of family coherence (in general and by components) between parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally. More precisely, parents of children developing optimally have a more heightened sense of family coherence in general and by dimensions: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness unlike parents of suboptimally developing children. The results indicate that the family as a system for parents of children developing optimally is more comprehensible, more manageable and meaningful in comparison to the families with suboptimally developing children.

[Table 2](#) shows the results of the analysis of correlation of the sense of family coherence in parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally with family satisfaction and family orientation to crisis.

**Table 2:** Correlation of the sense of family coherence (general score) in parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally with family satisfaction and family orientation to crisis

	The sense of family coherence in parents of children developing optimally	The sense of family coherence in parents of children suboptimally developing
Family satisfaction	0.537**	0.825**
Family orientation to crisis	0.255**	0.540**

Note: \*\*correlation significant at the level 0.01.

The results shown in [Table 2](#) indicate that there is a positive correlation of the sense of family coherence with family satisfaction and family orientation to crisis in both groups of parents. It is important to mention that correlations are higher in the suboptimally developing group.

The results also indicate that parents having a more heightened sense of family coherence are more satisfied with their family and have a more noticeable orientation to crisis and vice versa.

[Table 3](#) shows the results of the analysis of correlation of the sense of family coherence (by subscales) in parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally with family satisfaction and family orientation to crisis.

**Table 3:** Correlation of dimensions of the sense of family coherence (by subscales) in parents of suboptimally developing children and those developing optimally with family satisfaction and family orientation to crisis

Sense of family coherence	Comprehensibility	Manageability	Meaningfulness
<b><i>Family satisfaction-optimal</i></b>	0.402**	0.544**	0.402**
<b><i>FOC aspects-optimal</i></b>			
Acquiring social support	0.119	0.092	0.234**
Reframing	0.221**	0.287**	0.319**
Seeking spiritual support	0.166*	0.114	0.160*
Mobilizing family to acquire & accept help	0.053	-0.017	0.068
Passive appraisal	0.021	-0.009	-0.029
<b><i>Family satisfaction-suboptimal</i></b>	0.750**	0.778**	0.805**
<b><i>FOC aspects-suboptimal</i></b>			
Acquiring social support	0.489**	0.530**	0.576**
Reframing	0.591**	0.724**	0.753**
Seeking spiritual support	-0.260**	-0.285**	-0.271**
Mobilizing family to acquire & accept help	-0.055	-0.009	-0.037
Passive appraisal	-0.031	0.119	0.102

Note: \*correlation significant at the level 0.05; \*\*correlation significant at the level 0.01.

Based on the results presented in [Table 3](#), it is apparent that there are positive correlations of the dimensions of the sense of family coherence-comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness with family satisfaction and some aspects of family orientation to crisis in both groups of parents. The obtained results indicate that parents having a more heightened sense of family coherence are more content with their family in both groups, with much higher correlations in the group of parents of

suboptimally developing children. In the group of parents of optimally developing children there are positive correlations between subscales of the sense of family coherence and some mechanisms of family orientation to crisis, and these correlations are rather small. However, in the group of parents of suboptimally developing children, there are significant correlations between all aspects of the sense of family coherence and the following mechanisms of family orientation to crisis: acquiring social support (moderate positive correlations), reframing (moderate to high positive correlations), and seeking spiritual support (small negative correlations).

Table 4 presents the results of between groups analysis of variance (two-way ANOVA), used to identify: a) differences in the family sense of coherence (FSOC) between parents with different educational level (EDU)-high school (HS), bachelor (BS), or master (MA), and b) interaction of educational level of parents and the type of child development-optimal or suboptimal (CHD) and their influence on the family sense of coherence.

**Table 4:** Results of the two-way ANOVA for the sense of family coherence with the factors: child development (optimal and suboptimal) and parents' education (high school, bachelor, and master)

	Optimal development			Suboptimal development			EDU <i>F</i> (2)	CHD <i>F</i> (1)	EDU × CHD <i>F</i> (2)
	HS (M)	BS (M)	MA (M)	HS (M)	BS (M)	MA(M)			
<i>FSOC</i>	141.16	148.56	151.73	105.27	118.61	139.23	11.46**	8.79**	3.25*

Note: \*correlation significant at the level 0.05; \*\*correlation significant at the level 0.01.

We have already showed that there are significant differences in the family sense of coherence depending on the type of child development. The two-way ANOVA calculated the effect of the type of child development ( $p = 0.00$ ,  $\text{Eta}^2 = 0.03$ ). The effect of educational level was also significant ( $p = 0.00$ ,  $\text{Eta}^2 = 0.08$ ). Based on the results presented in Table 4, it can be observed that there is a significant interaction between the type of development and educational level ( $p = 0.00$ ,  $\text{Eta}^2 = 0.03$ ). This means that the educational level of parents has a different impact on the family sense of coherence in groups of parents of optimally and suboptimally developing children. Tuckey *Post Hoc* test showed that there are significant differences between groups of parents who have a high school diploma, on the one hand, those with a Bachelor's degree ( $\text{MD} = -19.35$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and Master's degree ( $\text{MD} = -30.30$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), on the other hand. The highest level of education means the highest sense of family coherence in both groups, with optimally and suboptimally developing children. There were no significant differences between groups of parents with master and high school educational level.

Table 5 presents the results of the two-way ANOVA for the dependent variable of the sense of family coherence and the factors: the number of family members (No.FM), and type of the child development-optimal or suboptimal (CHD), and influence of their interaction with the family sense of coherence.

**Table 5:** Results of the two-factorial ANOVA for the sense of family coherence with factors: child development (optimal and suboptimal) and number of family members (No.FM)

No.FM	Optimal development			Suboptimal development			No.FM <i>F</i> (2)	CHD <i>F</i> (1)	No.FM × CHD <i>F</i> (2)
	3 (M)	4 (M)	5 (M)	3 (M)	4 (M)	5 (M)			
<i>FSOC</i>	148.54	148.32	142.93	120.05	119.74	83.05	9.81**	158.24**	8.06**

Note: \*correlation significant at the level 0.05; \*\*correlation significant at the level 0.01.



Based on the results presented in Table 4, it can be noticed that there are significant partial effects of the type of child development ( $p = 0.00$ ,  $\text{Eta}^2 = 0.29$ ), the number of children in the family ( $p = 0.00$ ,  $\text{Eta}^2 = 0.07$ ), as well as significant interaction between the type of development and the number of family members ( $p = 0.00$ ,  $\text{Eta}^2 = 0.04$ ). This means that the number of family members has a different influence on the family sense of coherence in groups of parents of optimally and suboptimally developing children. Tuckey *Post Hoc* test showed that there are significant differences between groups of parents from families consisting of five members, on one hand, and families comprising three (MD = -20.70,  $p = 0.000$ ) and four members (MD = -14.19,  $p = 0.000$ ), on the other hand. Parents from families comprising five members have a significantly higher sense of family coherence in both groups, with optimally and suboptimally developing child. There were no significant differences identified between groups of parents coming from families comprising three and four members.

Furthermore, the study found no statistically significant difference in the sense of family coherence in relation to parents' gender and the assessment of economic circumstances of parents of children developing optimally and those developing suboptimally.

#### 4 Discussion

It can be inferred from the above-mentioned results that the hypothesis predicting that parents of children developing optimally have a more heightened sense of family coherence (as a whole and in terms of components) compared to parents of suboptimally developing children has been confirmed. The intensity of the sense of family coherence in parents indicates that rearing the suboptimally developing child was related to the observing of own family as less comprehensible, less meaningful, and less manageable. The sense of family coherence is an important resource of resilience for dealing with various crisis situations that individuals and the family as a whole face [32,38]. Moreover, it is important for family development and its functioning, and it is associated with adaptation [32], life satisfaction, better health [19] and the quality of life of the family as a whole [20,38]. Also, the results of the study indicate that families having a keen sense of family coherence remain healthy even after experiencing stressful events, in contrast to families having a poor sense of family coherence, who were found to have difficulty in coping with unfavorable crisis situations [15]. Families having a keen sense of family coherence support their members and enable them to use the resources needed to successfully deal with a variety of stressors, problems, and difficulties [19,32]. Furthermore, the sense of family coherence is the most important factor in the development of the sense of coherence of family members [32], and represents a better predictor of individual adaptation than the individual sense of coherence [19]. It can be inferred from the above-mentioned that parents of children developing optimally are closer to the positive pole of the health continuum in the salutogenic model of health of Antonovsky [33] and that rearing suboptimally developing children alters the functioning of the family [3]. Some previous studies also found that parents of suboptimally developing children have a poorer sense of coherence than parents of children developing optimally [11,12,39–41].

The second hypothesis on the positive correlation of the sense of family coherence with life satisfaction and family orientation to crisis in both groups of parents was also fully confirmed. The findings Zielinska-Wieczkowska et al. [42] obtained have confirmed that there is a significant correlation between the sense of coherence and life satisfaction. Correlations are higher in the suboptimally developing group and difference in terms of correlation between the two groups may be attributed to the fact that families functioning optimally may have smaller deviations in the sense of family coherence and life satisfaction because other situational, personal or life factors, which are not related to the family, may be interposed between these variables, thereby causing this relationship to seem less linear yet significant. Research on adolescents has shown that a number of factors such as gender, age, physical activity, and subjective health significantly influence feelings of family coherence and life satisfaction [43]. On the other hand, parents of children

developing suboptimally devote most of their life to the family system and care of the child developing suboptimally, and thus there are fewer external variables that reduce this linear effect. The findings of previous studies have also indicated that there is a positive correlation of the sense of family coherence with family satisfaction [32], and that the sense of coherence is associated with certain family characteristics [34]. The findings have indicated that the sense of family coherence is related to the mechanisms of family orientation to crisis in families with children who are developing optimally, but these values are low. Such findings can be justified by the fact that crises that families face in their daily lives are of different nature, and always depend on the type and intensity of stressors causing them, resilience developed by the family as a system, availability of external support, as well as coping mechanisms developed by individuals and stressors they personally face that are not related to the family system.

In the group of parents of suboptimally developing children, there are significant correlations between all aspects of the sense of family coherence and the following mechanisms of family orientation to crisis: acquiring social support (moderate positive correlations), reframing (moderate to high positive correlations), and seeking spiritual support (small negative correlations). These findings can be explained by the fact that the central crisis that the family with children developing suboptimally is faced with is precisely developmental difficulties that the child has, and that families with a high level of family coherence have developed family crisis orientation mechanisms. What is of paramount importance for the functioning of these families is the mechanism of social support that is necessary for the functioning of families faced with suboptimal development. Namely, in the course of their daily functioning, the family with children developing suboptimally rely on various types of social support, such as health services, day-care centers for children, and associations. The mechanism of social support proved important for the sense of coherence in other stressful life situations, as is the case with first-year students during their adjustment to them [44]. These families had to develop a redefinition mechanism as an important aspect in terms of the functioning of the family in times of prolonged crisis. This mechanism is critically important to the family's functioning on a daily basis. In the end, when all other mechanisms cannot be applied, the family with children developing suboptimally rely on the mechanism of spirituality, because faith and hope are what only remains when a person completely exhausts resources to cope with a crisis situation.

Moreover, the findings of certain studies indicate that families having a suboptimally developing member employ avoidance strategy as a means of confronting crisis situations which makes them less content with family and vice versa [25,45].

The third hypothesis on differences in the intensity of the sense of family coherence in both groups of parents in terms of parents' sex, parents' educational background, economic circumstances of the family and the number of children in the family was confirmed in part. Namely, the findings have revealed that there are differences in the intensity of the sense of family coherence in both groups of parents with regard to parents' educational background and the number of family members. This finding is to be understood in light of the fact that education represents one of the most significant resources of resilience [46]. The findings have indicated that the sense of family coherence is more measurable in parents of children developing optimally and who have received higher education and vice versa. Some previous research has shown that a low level of parents' education is associated with parents' poor sense of coherence [47], whereas a higher level of parents' education [48], is conducive to parents' heightened sense of coherence, and that the number of family members and interaction with them is important for the development of the sense of coherence [49]. On the other hand, no statistically significant difference was obtained with regard to the sex of the respondents and the economic circumstances of the family. Some previous studies also found no differences in the measurability of the sense of coherence with regard to the sex of the respondents [50]. As for the differences in the measurability of the sense of family coherence in relation to the economic circumstances of the family, differences are expected to arise, but they were not obtained in this study, which requires further research on this issue. Namely, Antonovsky [51] categorizes specific

means of livelihood having direct and indirect effects, as important resources of resistance. Direct effects of economic sources of health facilitate coping with stressors, thereby contributing to greater resilience to stressful events, and represent an important source of surmounting stress [49].

The conducted study has considerable implications for further research into the sense of family coherence in parents of children developing optimally and those developing suboptimally. However, present research deals with few limitations. First limitation was about size and structure of sample (for example, unspecified and lack of unification of child disability). Some future studies might focus on the examination of certain specific disorders in children (such as, for instance, autism, Down syndrome, behavior disorders etc.), as well as on the examination of the sense of family coherence depending on the stage of the family life cycle. Also, this research did not encompass other important variables, such as life satisfaction, general quality of life, and some negative indicators of functioning. The above-mentioned is seen as important not only for obtaining more concrete results that would serve as a basis for taking intervention and prevention measures, but also for developing necessary support programs intended for parents of suboptimally developing children. Also, bearing in mind the significance of the salutogenic model of health of Antonovsky [52], along with focusing on and strengthening health factors, but not risk factors, the salutogenic approach to health and the functioning of parents is vital to the adequate growth and development of children, especially young people suffering from chronic disorders [53].

## 5 Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the findings obtained in the study: parents of children developing optimally find their family more understandable, more manageable and more meaningful compared to parents of suboptimally developing children. Moreover, the family is more understandable, more manageable and meaningful for those parents who are more content with their family and who have a more adequate orientation to crisis. Parents who are highly educated consider their family more understandable, manageable and significant, regardless of whether they are raising children in an optimal or suboptimally developing condition. We can conclude that families that have parents with higher education and five members have experienced their families more understandable, manageable and meaningful regardless of whether they are raising children an optimal or suboptimally developing condition. Also, this research emphasizes some generalized resources of resilience which prove to be significant regardless of the family conditions in which the individual lives and which can be a significant resource of mental health and general functioning such as education, and the number of family members helping the individual to develop adequate mechanisms to combat stress. More precisely, the results indicate that there are certain differences between parents depending on whether they rear the child developing optimally or the child developing suboptimally and that it is necessary to continue doing research on this issue within the salutogenic model of health.

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