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The importance of resources in the personal adaptation of people taking OTC drugs

Abstract: Over-the-counter medication has become a common phenomenon in Poland. Every fifth person uses them contrary to the instructions, often exceeding the permissible doses. This problem concerns various social and professional groups. However, it is not always connected with addiction and can lead to losses in many different areas. Undoubtedly, the search for psychological connections that determine the need to reach for medications without a medical recommendation becomes a priority.

The Theory of Conservation of Resources (COR) by Steven E. Hobfoll can provide an alternative approach to understanding the phenomenon of over-the-counter drugs. It is based on the assumption that human activity is focused on gaining, maintaining and protecting resources. Their gain or loss is fundamental to the quality of life and is a source of motivation for specific behavior. From the perspective of the COR theory, the loss of resources or the impossibility of gaining them may explain the high percentage of people taking medications without medical recommendation.

The main aim of the paper is to answer the question on what are the functions of resource distribution in personal adaptation. Moreover, it is equally important to determine what are the dependencies between psychosocial factors and personal adaptation in people taking OTC drugs.

Material and methods: A questionnaire survey of 300 people taking medications without medical recommendation was used. The tools used were S.E. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources-Evaluation (COR-E) questionnaire, the Rotter Incomplete Sentences Blank (RISB)

test, the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) by G. Zimet.

Results: The structural equation modeling indicated a causal relationship between gain in resources and personal adaptation ($p = 0.001$) as well as loss of resources and personal adaptation ($p = 0.003$). The increasing pool of resources and lesser experience of their loss are predictors of adaptation. The hypothesis that the process of positive adaptation in people taking OTC drugs depends on the distribution of resources has been confirmed.

Conclusions: People using over-the-counter drugs in a situation of experiencing a loss of resources show symptoms of personal maladjustment. The ability to properly adapt to changing living conditions and deal with problems depends primarily on the ability to gain resources.

Key words: over-the-counter drugs, OTC, personal adaptation, Resources, Conservation of Resources Theory.

Portrait of people taking over-the-counter drugs

Taking over-the-counter (OTC) drugs by adults is now a common and disturbing phenomenon. Every fifth Pole in 2016 took drugs as they saw fit in a manner inconsistent with the instructions, and 9% continued taking them despite experiencing side effects. This has often led to exceeding the acceptable doses (CBOS 2016). The question arises as to what factors influence healthy people to buy and use, or even abuse, medicinal substances. Is it a problem of social pressure, marketing of pharmaceutical companies or internal needs?

The drugs most often used without consultation with a doctor (Figure 1) are cold medicines, analgesics and anti-inflammatories. More than half of Poles regularly take vitamins and minerals supporting the immune system. This category includes both drugs and dietary supplements. Other dominant categories are: joint and bone supplements, nail, hair and skin supplements, anti-allergic drugs, sedatives and hypnotics, but also cardiac drugs, drugs improving blood circulation and drugs for better concentration (CBOS, 2016). At the same time, very frequent is the misuse of the drug, overdose or other practices that result in negative health consequences (Łukasik 2017).

Nowadays, we can distinguish four factors that influence self-treatment. The first is the availability of over-the-counter drugs. There is a growing offer of medications, which allow for improving our health condition on our own. The second issue is better access to medical knowledge. This is primarily due to the technical advancement in the form of the expansion of the Internet. This is because on the web there are many materials that not only do not support the treatment process, but are actually a huge threat to the patient who believes in untested, often anti-scientific and purely harmful content (Borek 2016). The third element is strengthening of the position of the patient. It is an effect of a wider process connected with weakening the position of authorities in the everyday functioning of man. People – also because they have access or an illusion of

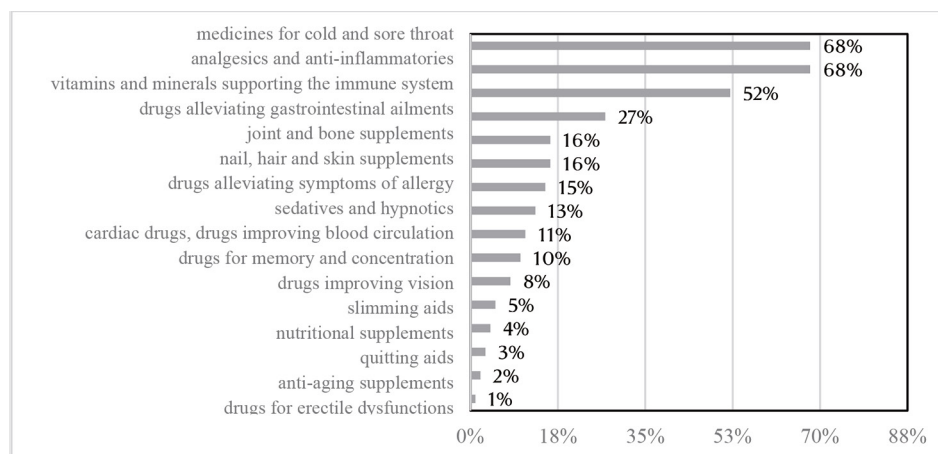


Fig. 1. Drugs most often taken without prior consultation with a doctor

Source: CBOS 2016.

access – consider themselves to have such knowledge that makes them able to understand medical issues on their own. As a result, they resign from professional help or question doctor's recommendations and modify the treatment as they see fit (Syrkiewicz-Świtała 2015; Sobolewska 2015).

S. E. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory – a new perspective on stress and adaptation

The Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) by S. Hobfoll offers a broad understanding of both resources and their importance in the mechanism of dealing with stress. He assumes that man's adaptation and the way in which we adjust is closely linked to our resources (Hobfoll 2006, 2012, 2015; Holgrem 2017; Ehrlich 2010). The basic assumption of the COR theory is possessing and maintaining at a certain level of what is considered valuable, that is, resources: things, personality traits, conditions and energy reserves. This is the general purpose of most human activities. The gaining of resources or their loss is fundamental to the quality of life and the functioning of man. Hobfoll suggests a list of 74 resources that are important for achieving life satisfaction and divides them into 4 categories (Figure 2).

When analyzing a list of the most stressful events in man's life, such as the death of a spouse, divorce, separation, imprisonment or loss of job, Hobfoll noted that the common element is a sudden lack of important resources. This was the basis for the most important rule of his theory that the factor that most threatens the proper functioning of man is the loss of resources. The loss of resources has a powerful impact on human functioning, but with an expanding pool of

OBJECT RESOURCES	CONDITION RESOURCES	PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	ENERGY RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •physical objects •an element of socioeconomic status, which has a protective function against the harmful effects of stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •they determine the access to other resources. Among them are health, job, marriage. •gained slowly or can be inherited, but their loss is quick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •skills, personality traits, self-efficacy, professional and social competences, self-esteem •most of them are developed in a family environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •time, money, knowledge understood as a ground for acquiring other resources or for protecting the resources already gained

Fig. 2. Resource categories according to the COR theory

Source: own study.

possessed resources it can be prevented or stopped. For example, time and energy invested in family can prevent a later divorce, and loss of job feels less painful if savings have been accumulated earlier. Are we able to predict human behavior based on the distribution of resources. Hobfoll says we are. These dependencies have been gathered into a set of implications. They are as follows:

1. People with more resources are less likely to lose them and have more possibilities for gain. Conversely, people with fewer resources are more likely to lose them and less able to gain.
2. Insufficient resources not only increase the risk of their loss, but also cause the initial loss to be followed by another.
3. People possessing resources are more capable of further gains, and the initial gain brings further gains.
4. Those who lack resources are willing to take a defensive attitude in order to protect what they already have.

Research on people addicted to alcohol allowed for the selection of factors serving as predictors of the ability to maintain abstinence. Particular resources that determine whether the patient will have a greater or lesser chance of maintaining abstinence were identified. It was discovered that the level of condition resources and personal characteristics of the patient at the beginning of the therapy determines their ability to maintain abstinence during the treatment. The level of resources – such as a sense of achieving one's own goals, growth through education or professional development, a sense of control over one's own life, a sense of pride in oneself, recognition of one's achievements, assistance in caring for children, children's health – determines success in maintaining abstinence (Modrzyński 2017). While, according to the principle of „the more the better”, the impact of personal characteristics on the course of treatment is understandable, in the case of object resources it is not relevant. Experiencing both an improvement or a sudden deterioration in the material situation at the time of starting the treatment indicates a high probability of failure to maintain abstinence in the future (Radoń 2018).

A group of studies conducted on the adaptation of prisoners indicates that personal characteristics, which enable the inmate to function effectively in the family sphere, are of key importance. Thus, a high degree of adaptation of a prisoner is a condition increasing the chances that they will not return to crime. The adaptation itself, on the other hand, is related to factors such as: the type of interpersonal relationships, deficits and competences in the pursuit of values, the ability to organize personal values into a coherent and homogeneous system, proper valuation or its crisis related to disintegration. Also important are individual characteristics, the ability to acquire personal characteristics, past successes in this respect, and the type of personality. Personal characteristics affecting an individual's ability to achieve their goals, which is directly related to the ability to adapt to the social and institutional environment, are of great importance here. Here essential are the resources such as self-esteem, self-confidence, optimism and hope of achieving a goal (Niewiadomska 2010a, 2010b, 2013).

The main aim of the paper is to answer the question on what are the functions of resource distribution in personal adaptation. Moreover, it is equally important to determine what are the dependencies between psychosocial factors and personal adaptation in people taking OTC drugs. The following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1 : The increase in the level of resources is accompanied by higher personal adaptation.

H2 : The perceived gain of resources correlates with higher personal adaptation.

H3 : Reduction of experiences in the form of loss of resources is accompanied by higher personal adaptation.

H4: A sense of social support is accompanied by personal adaptation.

H5: The assessment of one's own socioeconomic status is connected with personal adaptation.

H6: The severity of depressive symptoms is linked to the level of personal adaptation.

Material and methods

The questionnaire-based cross-sectional studies were conducted in the period from May 2019 to January 2020. The group of participants consisted of 300 people. The research was conducted using three methods. In the traditional paper-pencil method (50 people), online – by filling in the questionnaire in an online link (116 people), and by asking questions to the respondents by interviewers-psychologists (134 people).

The tools used to measure dependent and independent variables resulted from the adopted theoretical perspective and methodological requirements. Independent

variables meant the level of resources, the perceived loss of resources and the perceived gain in resources, and the dependent variable was the personal adaptation. Additionally, moderators were introduced to the model in the form of the severity of depressive symptoms, socioeconomic status and a sense of social support.

The basic tool was S.E. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources-Evaluation (COR-E) questionnaire and the Rotter Incomplete Sentences Blank (RISB) test by J. Rotter. Additional tools include the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) by G. Zimet and a survey prepared by A. Radoń containing information on taking OTC drugs and sociodemographic data.

The main method used to analyze the collected data was structural equation modeling. The IBM SPSS/Amos statistical software package was used for this purpose.

Characteristics of respondents

The study involved 269 women and 30 men. The mean age of the respondents was 28 years ($M = 28$, $SD = 7$). The oldest respondent was 65, the youngest 18 years old. The education of the respondents was as follows: primary education was declared by 1 person (0.3%), secondary education by 76 persons (25.4%), higher education by 218 persons (72.9%), doctoral degree by 4 persons (1.3%). 51 respondents (17.1%) lived in a city and 248 respondents (82.9%) in a village.

Responses concerning the frequency of use and types of over-the-counter (OTC) drugs are divided into four general categories. The respondents, most frequently, used vitamin supplements (51.3%) and analgesics (35.4%). Sleeping pills and sedatives were used by 3.4% of the respondents, and 3.2% of people used slimming products. Among the most frequently declared reasons for using OTC were: improvement of concentration, stimulation, pain relief, immune support, treatment of cold, improvement of well-being, sedative and sleeping effects, reduction of appetite and improvement of metabolism. More than half of respondents take drugs at least once a month (52.8%) or several times over a period of one month (12.4%). The next most numerous group were people using OTC drugs several times a day. They accounted for as much as 18.1% of all respondents.

Results of the analyses

First, a correlation analysis was performed using the r-Pearson's coefficient. The results indicate that the level ($r = 0.157$; $p = 0.007$) and the gain ($r = 0.389$; $p = 0.000$) in resources significantly correlate with the sense of personal adaptation. The higher the level as well as the subjective feeling of gain

in resources, the higher the level of adaptation. The relationship between the loss of resources and personal adaptation is different. Experiencing fewer losses is co-existing with a positive process of adaptation of a person to the surrounding conditions ($r = -0.326$; $p = 0.000$). This confirms the existence of a statistically significant relationship between resource distribution and personal adaptation.

The analysis of the data showed a correlation between the severity of depressive symptoms and social support, and personal adaptation. It is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. R-Pearson correlation coefficient for symptoms of depression, social support and personal adaptation

Variables	Personal adaptation		
	r	p	n
Perceived social support	0.256	0.000	299
Severity of depressive symptoms	-0.333	0.000	299

Source: own study.

The next stage of the analysis was to check specific relationships between the distribution of resources, psychosocial variables and the degree of personal adaptation in people taking drugs without medical recommendation.

Testing of relationships was carried out using structural equations. Below is a drawing showing the relationships between the tested variables (Fig. 4). Observable variables are presented as rectangles, unobservable variables as ellipses. In the presented model, only random components are marked with ellipses. Cause-effect relationships are presented using an arrow pointing to an independent variable in a given relationship. An arc with an arrow on both sides corresponds to covariance and indicates a relationship between the two variables, which does not have cause-effect character. The causal relationships between the variables are expressed using a path coefficient. The significance of the entire model, as well as the significance of its individual parameters, was tested using the Bollen-Stine *bootstrap* technique.

The model of relationship between gain and loss in resources, personal adaptation, socioeconomic status, perceived social support and severity of depressive symptoms of people taking OTC drugs indicates a good fit to the data ($CFI < 0.95$; $SRMR < 0.08$).

The analysis of its individual paths indicated a causal relationship between gain in resources and personal adaptation ($p = 0.001$) as well as loss of resources and personal adaptation ($p = 0.003$). The increasing pool of resources and less experience of their loss are predictors of adaptation. It can therefore be concluded

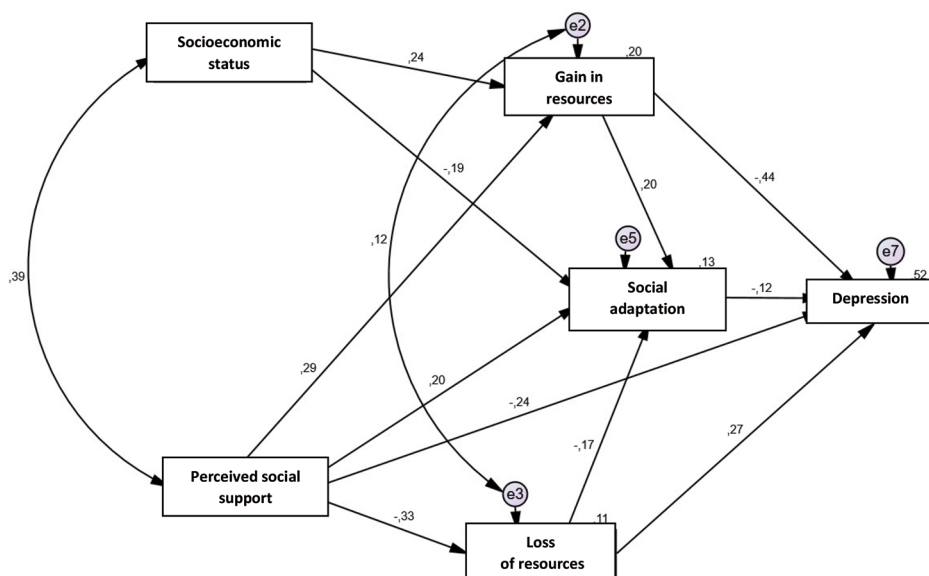


Fig. 3. The path model for the relationship between resource distribution, personal adaptation, socioeconomic status, perceived support and severity of depressive symptoms among people using OTC drugs

Source: own study.

that the process of positive adaptation in people taking OTC drugs depends on the distribution of resources. The results of the research confirm the H2 and H3 hypotheses concerning the basic relationship.

The constructed model also determines the relationship between perceived social support, socioeconomic status and social adaptation. The occurrence of significant relationships between these variables can be noticed. The level of social support shows a negative relationship with the sense of personal adaptation ($p=0.002$). The more often a person perceives his or her environment as supportive, the less often he or she shows signs of maladjustment. This relationship also proves the accuracy of the assumptions formulated in hypothesis H4.

In addition, personal adaptation is co-existing with the socio-economic status ($p = 0.001$). Differentiation in socio-economic factors affects the adaptation process of people using OTC drugs. This confirms the assumption that the assessment of one's own socioeconomic status is related to personal adaptation (H5).

From the results obtained, it can therefore be concluded that there is a clear spiral of interdependence between the distribution of resources and personal adaptation, which in turn results in the experience of depressive symptoms. There

is a significant relationship between the level of personal adaptation and the severity of depression in case of people who use OTC drugs ($p = 0.004$).

Summary and discussion of the results

The concept of the presented research work was based on the Theory of Conservation of Resources (COR) by S.E. Hobfoll, which assumes that human activity concentrates – regardless of whether we are talking about an individual, family or social group – on the acquisition, maintenance and protection of resources, i.e. all those objects that are considered valuable (Hobfoll 1989, 1993, 2006, 2012). COR embeds the notion of stress in a broad psychosocial space, in which owning, maintaining and multiplying resources is fundamental to the quality of life, sense of well-being and the way people function. It has been empirically confirmed in many studies (Brotheridge 2002; Neveu 2007; Alarcon 2011; Ojedokun 2014).

The aim of the research was to answer the question about the importance of dynamics and distribution of resources for personal adaptation of people taking drugs without medical recommendation.

This research project allowed to extend the application value of the Theory of Conservation of Resources to the mechanisms conditioning the process of positive adaptation among OTC drug users. The conclusions of the analyses are as follows:

Conclusion 1: The formation of personal adaptation is accompanied by psychosocial variables. The analysis of the data showed a correlation between resource distribution, severity of depressive symptoms and social support experienced, and personal adaptation

Conclusion 2:

The sense of resource gaining is a factor positively influencing the adaptation process. Those with the ability to gain resources showed a better adaptation in aspects such as: relationships with others, family relationships, attitudes towards themselves, aspirations and goals as well as problems experienced.

Conclusion 3:

People using over-the-counter drugs in a situation of experiencing a loss of resources show symptoms of personal maladjustment. The reduction of the loss spiral is a factor that enhances adaptability.

Conclusion 4:

Social support is a factor favoring the adaptation process. The ability to properly adapt to changing living conditions and deal with problems depends primarily on family and friends who are around. The opportunity to share one's „joys and sorrows” with others and talk about one's problems contributes to less non-adaptive behavior.

Conclusion 5:

The assessment of one's own socioeconomic status affects personal adaptation. It depends, among others, on such elements as: education, housing conditions or assessment of one's own material situation.

Conclusion 6:

A person's poor adaptability results in increased severity of depressive symptoms. People using over-the-counter drugs are more likely to struggle with depression when their adaptive skills have proved insufficient to cope with the surrounding reality.

The COR theory and the studies confirming it (Hobfoll 2001, 2002, 2006; Neveu 2007; Alarcon 2011; Ojedokun 2014) clearly indicate that the resources available to humans are of fundamental importance for their functioning. According to the Theory of Conservation of Resources, the source of motivation is the successful course of gains and losses. People are motivated to maintain such an amount of resources that will ensure not only survival, but also optimal functioning in the physical, social and spiritual sphere. An important part of human activity is the desire to improve one's own situation, but the key condition turns out to be the possession of a specific pool of resources to start a spiral of gains. In the absence of such a pool, we are inclined to take a defensive attitude, aimed solely at protecting what we already have. In other words, we have no motivation to make changes. This seems to coincide with the Miller's and Rolnick's theory of motivation, who emphasize that the importance of striving for change and making efforts to implement it is possible when we see the way and possibility of achieving it (Miller 2010, 2000). What Hobfoll believes to be this possibility is the resources one possesses and their effective acquisition.

On the one hand, the obtained results confirm the importance of the assumptions of the Theory of Conservation of Resources, on the other hand, they empirically support the analyses carried out so far on the basis of Polish research (Gruszczyńska 2016; Modrzyński 2017; Dudek 2007). At the same time, they provide empirical support for research on the role of factors supporting the adaptation process (Hunter-Reel 2009; Nordfjaern 2011). The spiral of interdependence between the ability to gain resources and minimize their loss and personal adaptation emerges. Experiencing failure in turn results in a depressive reaction. This is in line with the results of the research conducted to date to verify the COR assumptions (Hobfoll 2012; Dudek 2007; Seiling 2006; Greenglass 2009; Unal-Karaguguvun 2009; Curran 2010; Buchwald 2010).

The analysis of the results obtained in the conducted research underlines the importance of social support. Many psychosocial factors are associated with the adaptation process. According to the cognitive-motivation-relational theory of emotion, it runs in an interactive way (Gomes 2014). People supported by

close relationships with friends, family, work colleagues or other support groups are less prone to illness and premature death. Those who have close personal relationships are better at coping with various stressors, including grief, loss of job, rape and illness (Torończak 2007; Buszman 2017). Taking over-the-counter drugs is considered a sign of our times. The importance of social support in the process of adaptation may contribute to the creation of a range of impacts for this group of people. Taking into account the content available in the literature, it can be concluded that social support helps to reduce mental health problems. In today's world, which is changing rapidly, causing stress in many people in the pursuit of being up to date with everything, social support plays a key role. People communicate with each other, encouraging each other and thus reducing mental stress without leading to anxiety or depression. Thanks to social support, people with problems find people with the same problems, share them and thus discharge sometimes negative, accumulated emotions. It can be said that social support acts as a buffer protecting people from various negative aspects of their mental and physical health (Gurung 2006; Modrzewski 2010; Turner-Cobb 2012; Wiegel 2015).

The role of one's own socioeconomic status in their personal adaptation has been confirmed. Understood as a specific economic or social position of a given person is a kind of measure of their ability to cope with difficulties (Krieger 2001; Sahni 2017). Numerous studies have shown that the level of socioeconomic status also influences the frequency of diseases, especially cardiovascular diseases, kidney, lung diseases, diabetes or cancer (Chetty 2016; Shavers 2007; Morello-Frosch 2006). It should therefore be stressed that the socioeconomic status has a huge impact on the quality of life of people taking OTC drugs. In the literature, a direct link can be found between the level of personal adaptation and socioeconomic status. The authors claim that the subjective approach to one's own life in the form of its assessment is a consequence of the situations that have occurred and at the same time constitutes a psychological aspect of the quality of life (Kaczmarek 2017).

The results indicate the interactive role of the dependency between psychosocial factors and personal adaptation in people taking OTC drugs. They are part of the current trend of research on adaptability (Niewiadomska 2013; Bernat 2017; Stańczyk-Hugiet 2017). Successful adaptation in society is due to several factors and is the result of the distribution of resources on the one hand and the perception of one's own effectiveness on the other. These relationships are shown in the diagram below (Fig. 4).

Adaptation is the result of the raw materials (resources) owned, in terms of their importance, as well as the issue of gains and losses. These are primarily due to one's own effectiveness in the past. On the one hand, a part of the resources is assigned at the beginning and independently of successes (e.g. in the course of education from parents, and others are gained through successes

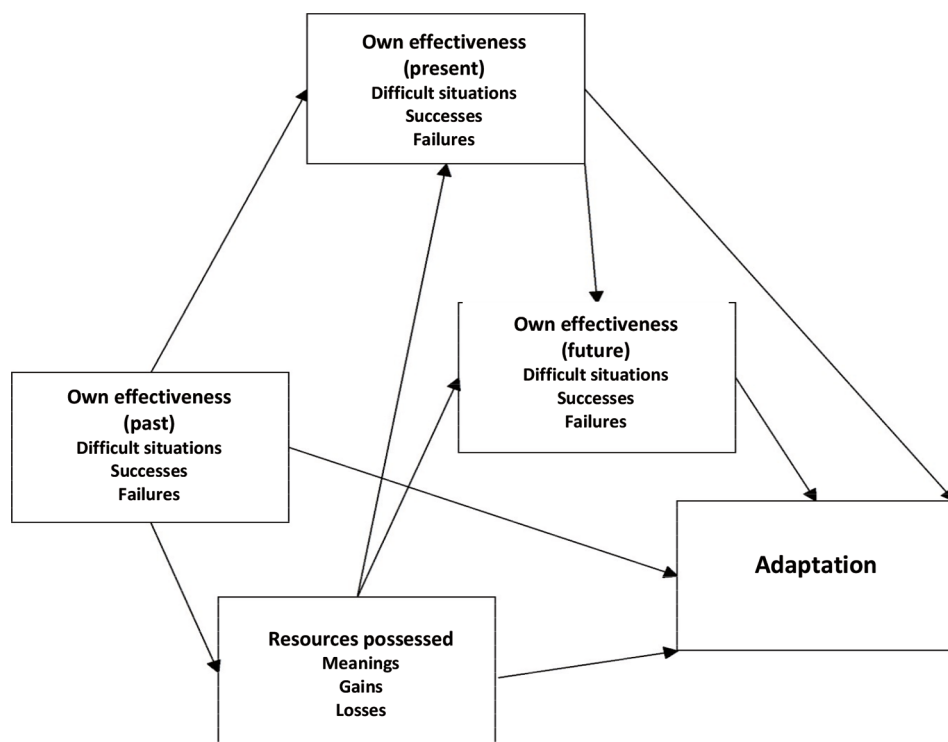


Fig. 4. The relationship between resource distribution, perception of one's own effectiveness and adaptability

Source: Niewiadomska et al 2013.

or lost through failures). Difficult situations are a moment when resources are at stake, and the key here is either to overcome the challenge or fail to deal with it, which is equivalent to loss. The resources possessed influence the current effectiveness, which is the basis for determining the future effectiveness, which is a consequence of the current state of affairs. So whether an individual will be able to cope in the future is determined by the resources they already have today. Adaptation is a constant process. It is influenced by the distribution of resources and both past and present, but in long-term perspective also future effects of actions (effectiveness).

To sum up, the results of the research mainly allowed to confirm the relationship between the distribution of resources and personal adaptation among people taking OTC drugs. This gives rise to further exploration of this relationship in terms of protective and risk factors. Deepening this type of analysis will help to identify the different categories of resources that play an important role in the process of adaptation of people taking OTC drugs. Continuing the research would allow to find out which resources influence the decision to take OTC drugs.

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