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Original Scientific Article

## **PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FAMILY TODAY<sup>1</sup>**

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*Abstract:* This paper examines parent-child relationships in contemporary families in Skopje. The participants were students from one city school, 85 from third grade (nine years old, in middle childhood), and 109 from seventh grade (thirteen years old, in early adolescence). The results show that the students from third grade highly estimate the quality of family interaction, and they also highly estimate the acceptance and emotionality of both parents, while control and rejection of the mother and the father were generally perceived as very low. The results obtained from seventh grade students show similar values to those from third grade. Comparing the two groups of students with regard to perceiving parental behavior results, it could be concluded that third grade students perceived higher quality of family interaction than seventh grade students, and the same is true for parental acceptance and emotionality, but they estimate the parental control and rejection significantly lower than adolescents. All this leads to the conclusion that younger children perceived their parents differently than adolescents. The parents may show more physical and verbal love for the younger children than for adolescents, but because of the process of individuation adolescents experience greater control by parents.

*Keywords:* parents, child, adolescent, family

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## Introduction

### **„Home is where we start from“** W. D. Winikot

The title of Winikot's book is very inspiring and encourages reflection on the importance of parents in a child's life and further as an adult. What is their perceived impact?

Studies of parenting and its important role were found throughout history, from ancient philosophy to contemporary theories that marked the twenty-first century. Thus, a most widely used definition of parenting or childrearing is that it is a process in which parents encourage and support the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parents obviously and daily treat their children with love, support, but also with negligence and strictness. There are numerous parenting styles, some are based on a model that requires strict obedience to the rules, while others are based on empathy with the emotional state of the child. Parenting styles are a psychological construct representing standard strategies that parents use in raising their child.

There are many theories and opinions about what is the best way to bring up a child, such as the extent to which you should invest energy, time that should be devoted to the child, etc. Many parents create their style by a combining of many strategies and it may evolve over time as children grow and develop their own personality and move through life.

Parents' style influences the temperament of the child, and parents are heavily influenced by their own parents and culture. Most of the parents learn their practices from their own parents, but some of them don't, and they can behave contrary to how they were brought up.

According to theories of psychosocial development of children, two dimensions of parental behavior are particularly important: parental warmth and parental control (Vizek-Vidović et. al., 2003). Parental warmth refers to the support, care, love and encouragement that parents give a child. This one-dimensional characteristic of parental relationship is defined by Rollins and Thomas (Deković, 1991) as manifested behavior between parents and children, resulting in a feeling of comfort in the presence of parents, and includes awareness of the child that it is accepted as a person.

The second dimension of the parental relationship is parental control. This educational style is described by management, discipline, power, punishment and deprivation. Features of this dimension are setting high demands

and control, defined as coercion by way of punishment, intimidation and fulfilling parental requests.

Exploring the impact of certain proceedings on parental behavior and the child's personality, Siers, Becker and Bronstein (Vizek - Vidović et al., 2003) revealed the existence of three dimensions of parental behavior: acceptance versus rejection, control versus autonomy and consistent vs. inconsistent behavior.

In his theory, Rohner describes the dimension: acceptance versus rejection (Rohner, 1984, according to Shurbanovska, 2013), and indicates that parental rejection is defined by the absence of warmth and emotionality, as opposite to parental acceptance defined as the presence of warmth and emotionality.

Rohner describes two types of parents. The first type is the parent who accepts the child, showing physical and/or verbal love for him/her. He/she kisses, caress and hugs the child, giving compliments, and rewards. The other type is the parent who refuses to show any friendship and aggression toward the child on the one hand, or shows indifference and neglect the other side. The dimension "control versus autonomy" refers to the limitations which parents set to their children in different areas (decent behavior, neatness, obedience, aggressive behavior etc.). Studies have shown that the openly expressed limiting parental behavior prevents the development of the child's independence, but lack of control leads to undesirable consequences. In terms of consistency and clarity of the procedures between parents and children, it is said that successful cases are consistent and clear. In other words, the child knows why he/she is punished or rewarded, and the parents always respond, in more or less the same way.

Studies show that inconsistent punishment generally fails to reduce or eliminate a behavior that is punished. The most aggressive are those children whose parents sometimes allow and sometimes punish aggressive behavior. Instead of exploring the individual dimensions of parental actions, some psychologists have investigated their combined impact. Scheffer and Baker (1964, according to Vizek - Vidović et al., 2003) described the actions of parents and the behavioral consequences in children by four parenting styles that are actually a combination of the above described dimensions of parental behavior.

Any combination of dimensions of parental behavior constitutes a parenting style. Thus, the combination of parents' acceptance and control makes for an over-protective parenting style. Parents with this style accept their children, they are emotionally warm, show love and care, give support, but they also show great control over the child, they influence the child in guiding and making choices, so the child is confused about what he/she is doing, which causes feelings of guilt. The consequence of this parenting style is a child who is obedient, submissive, polite, dependent, and uncreative.

Authoritarian parenting style is characterized by high demands on the one hand, and insensitivity to children's needs on the other. These parents set high demands that are not accompanied by an explanation. In relation to their children, they use power and authority. Anger and frustration are common in the parental behavior towards the child. This category includes parents who offend, but Baumrind (Baumrind, 1973) points out that not all authoritarian parents are offensive-minded. Anger and frustration are common in parental behavior towards the child. That kind of parent behavior results in low level of social behavior of the child (Deković, 1991, Deković and Janssens, 1992). However, studies have shown that in some cultures and ethnic groups the authoritarian style can be associated with positive outcomes. And the fourth style is called neglectful parenting. Such parents are indifferent, aloof, reject and neglect the child, and as a result of this the child is impulsive, aggressive and disobedient. Diana Baumrind (Baumrind, 1973) adds another style i.e. permissive parenting style. This parenting style is characterized by low demands and high sensitivity to the needs of the child. Those parents are emotionally warm and sensitive to the child, but the rules and restrictions are not clearly defined in their relationship. It is also called free guardian indulgent parent, non-directive (nondirective) or mild parent. A permissive parent is too sensitive to the needs of the child, and rarely encourages respect for the rules, she/he has only few expectations of the child in terms of his behavior. This parenting style does not include requirements of the child to regulate his/her behavior and act appropriately to the situation. Pampered child or so-called "rotten sweet" usually has permissive parents. These children are more impulsive, and as adolescents may have misconduct, and they can even abuse drugs. These children never learn how to control their behavior and always follow their own path. But in some cases they are emotionally secure, independent and willing to learn and accept defeat. They mature quickly and are able to live their lives without help from anyone else. Children of these parents can be similar to children of authoritarian parents (impulsive and immature).

Finally, the purpose of this study is to give an answer to the question: Of what kind are relationships between parents and children/adolescents, in today's modern families, in terms of the following methods of parental behavior: quality of family interaction, parental acceptance, parental rejection, emotionality and control (from mother and father, respectively). From everyday life experience and from the results of the other similar studies, the relationship of mother and father with their children and adolescents are characterized by higher quality of family interaction, parental acceptance and emotionality and low levels of parental rejection and control.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Data from 194 students were obtained. They were students from third (85 students, 40 male and 45 female) and seventh grade (109 students, of which 49 male and 60 female). All participants in the study were students of one urban school in Skopje and classes were chosen appropriately. The research was conducted in the second half of the 2006/2007 school year.

### **Instruments**

The following questionnaires were used to measure variables in the study: Scale for the quality of family interaction and Scale for perception of family relationships.

The scale for quality of family interaction "My family" in its basic version is designed for teens, but is modified for younger age (Vulić-Prtorić, 1998). The questionnaire includes three subscales. The first measures the general atmosphere in the family (quality of family interaction) through 11 assertions, while the second and third subscales measure the interaction with the mother and with the father, respectively in 22 assertions, which by their contents are identical. The interaction with the mother and the father is represented by two dimensions: rejection and acceptance. The students were asked to state to what extent each of these claims applied on a Likert's scale, ranging from 1 to 5 to estimate to what extent each of the claims is true.

The minimum score on the scale of the general atmosphere in the family (the quality of family interaction) is 11 and the maximum scores 55. The theoretical minimum scale for acceptance from the mother and father is 10, while the highest score which can be obtained is 55. The theoretical minimum score on a scale of rejection for the mother and the father is 12, while the theoretical maximum score is 60.

The reliability of the original scale for quality of family interaction was Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0,89$ . The scale of the interaction with the mother and the father shows equal consistency in the results, reliability is Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0,90$ . In the test phase of this instrument was got Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0,91$  and for subscales relating to the child's mother and father Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0,90$ . According to these indicators, the instruments can be considered reliable.

The author of the second scale "Perception of family relationships" is Ivana Macuka (Macuka, 2005). It measures the styles of parental behavior through dimensions of emotionality and control. The questionnaire consists of two subtests for the perception of the relationship with the mother and the perception of the relationship with the father. Each of these dimensions reflects

the specific behaviors of the mother and the father with the child. The scale consisted of 25 assertions relating to the mother and assertions referring to the father.

The task of the students was to assess to what extent any assertion of interaction with each parent applied on a scale of Likert's type, ranging from 1 (fully true for me) to 3 (fully not true for me). The minimum possible score for the dimension of emotionality of the mother and the father is 15 and the maximum possible score is 45. For the dimension control of mother and the father, the minimum possible score is 10 and the maximum is 30. The coefficient of reliability of the original scale was Cronbach  $\alpha$  0,84. In the test phase test of this instrument Cronbach's  $\alpha$  0,75 was obtained. This means that the instrument meets the feature reliability and it can be used in the research.

## Results

The results of arithmetic means and standard deviations will be shown first in the younger students from the third grade, then for the students of seventh grade.

**Table1.Arithmetical means and Standard deviations assessments of family relationships among students from third grade (N =85)**

family relationships	minimum theoretical score	maximum theoretical score	M	SD
quality of family interaction	11	55	50,56	4,76
acceptance by the mother	10	50	47,51	3,55
acceptance by the father	10	50	46,03	6,99
rejection by the mother	12	60	16,54	5,08
rejection by the father	12	60	16,83	5,89
mother's emotionality	15	45	38,41	3,78
father's emotionality	15	45	38,11	3,78
mother's control	10	30	15,55	3,09
father's control	10	30	16,63	4,21

From the data in the Table1 it can be observed that the mean of the quality of family interaction is high (50.56) if we consider the theoretical maximum score. The relationship of acceptance from the mother and the father children is evaluated as high, and the mean is 47.51 for acceptance of the mother and 46.03 of the father. In regard to the rejection of parents, the children estimate it as relatively low (16.84 mother's rejection and 16.83 for the father rejection).

In the questionnaire which measured assessment of emotionality by the mother and the fathers, students gave high evaluations in terms of the theoretical maximum score. The arithmetic mean of the emotionality of the mother is 38.41 and 38.11 of the father. Control of the mother and the father is assessed as relatively low (control of the mother 15.55, and of the father 16.63).

The results of the assessment of the quality of interaction in the family (family atmosphere) with students from seventh grade are listed in Table 2. The arithmetic mean is 47.45. The arithmetic mean of mother's acceptance is 44.25 while the father's is 41.48, which again shows the tendency of the higher estimation of acceptance of the both the mother and the father. The rejection from the mother is estimated as lower (21.37) than that from the father 21.90. In line with previous data, the emotionality of the mother is estimated as being higher 39.84 than emotionality by the father 37.09. Also the control of the father is estimated higher than the control of the mother (the mean of control of the mother is 14.85 and of control of the father 15.10).

**Table 2. Arithmetical means and Standard deviations for assessments of family relationships among students from seventh grade (N =109)**

Family relationships	Min. theoretical score	Max. theoretical score	M	SD
quality of family interaction	11	55	47,45	5,48
acceptance by the mother	10	50	44,25	6,34
acceptance by the father	10	50	41,48	8,05
rejection by the mother	12	60	21,37	7,38
rejection by the father	12	60	21,90	9,76
mother's emotionality	15	45	39,84	3,93
father's emotionality	15	45	37,09	4,09
mother's control	10	30	14,85	2,88
father's control	10	30	15,10	3,38

According to these results, our hypothesis is confirmed, i.e. the relationships of parents (mother and father separately) towards the children are characterized more by acceptance and emotionality, rather than by rejection and control of both ages of the children.

In Table 3, where the correlations between the dimensions of family relationships among students from third grade are shown, it may be noted that the significant correlations are lower. The quality of family interaction positively correlated with maternal acceptance, but negatively with the rejection of the mother and of the father.

**Table 3 .Matrix of correlation of results for the estimation of the dimensions of family relationships for students from third grade (N =85)**

Family relationships	quality of family interaction	acceptance mother	acceptance father	rejection mother	rejection father	mother's emotion.	father's emotion	mother's control	father's control
quality of family interaction	1,0	0,307**	0,108	-0,250*	-0,112	0,068	0,154	-0,060	-0,256*
mother's acceptance		1,0	0,107	-0,339**	-0,105	0,045	0,090	0,060	-0,055
father's acceptance			1,0	-0,004	-0,277**	0,280*	0,626**	-0,346**	-0,219*
rejection mother				1,0	0,213	-0,295**	-0,116	0,096	0,285**
rejection father					1,0	-0,189	-0,168	0,397**	0,274**
mother's emotionality						1,0	0,593**	-0,256*	-0,465**
father's emotionality							1,0	-0,267*	-0,424**
mother's control								1,0	0,696**
father's control									1,0

\*\*p<0,01 \*p<0,05

Mother's acceptance highly negatively correlates with mother's rejection, while the father acceptance highly correlates with father's emotionality. The rejection of the father highly correlated with control of the mother and the father. There is a significant correlation between emotionality of the mother and of the father and negative correlation between the emotionality of the mother and the father and the control of the mother and the father. The mother's control correlates highly with the father's control. Hence, it can be concluded that the association with the mother's and the father's emotionality is assessed highly. Also, the relationships with the parents are perceived as consistent, i.e. acceptance and emotionality by the parents is negatively correlated with rejection and control.

More significant correlations are observed from the results of the students from seventh grade (Table 4) than from the results of the younger students. In fact, almost all the correlations between dimensions of family relationships are significant, which means that assessing parents' behavior by children in early adolescence is more severe. From these data, it can be concluded that the quality of family interaction that children perceived depends on the mother's and father's acceptance and emotionality, but on the other hand it negatively correlated with their control and rejection (especially by the father).

**Table 4. Matrix of correlation of results for the estimation of the dimensions of family relationships for students from seventh grade (N =109)**

Family relationships	quality of family inter.	accept. mother	acceptance father	rejection mother	rejection father	mother's emotion.	father's emotion.	mother's control	father's control
quality of family interaction	1,0	0,458**	0,593**	-0,164	-0,314**	0,484**	0,500**	-0,189*	-0,345**
acceptance the mother	1,0	1,0	0,539**	-0,534**	-0,466**	0,572**	0,434**	-0,257**	-0,282**
acceptance the father			1,0	-0,321**	-0,457**	0,429**	0,554**	-0,085	-0,220*
rejection the mother				1,0	0,619**	-0,416**	-0,370**	0,401**	0,461**
rejection the father					1,0	-0,352**	-0,446**	0,360**	0,536**
mother's emotionality father's						1,0	0,675**	-0,436**	-0,447**
emotionality mother's control father's control							1,0	-0,244*	-0,392**
control father's control								1,0	0,734**
control									1,0

\*p<0,05

\*\*p<0,01

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The family as a factor of social behavior of the child, as well as its importance in childhood, adolescence, and throughout the life of a man was covered in many studies, but the aim of this study was to examine the relation between parents and children adolescents in today's modern family in Macedonia. The results showed that parents have a relationship with their children that is characterized by love, support and care more than control and rejection.

The above mentioned theories and research suggested that limiting parental behavior inhibits the development of the child's independence, and lack of control leads to undesirable consequences. On the other hand, parental warmth and acceptance (support, care, love and encouragement) result in a feeling of satisfaction in the presence of parents and include awareness in the child that he/she is accepted as a person. In the study of Savedra (Savedra, 1984 according to Rohner, 1984) the relationship between perceived parental acceptance or rejection with parental control and self-assessment of a child was examined. Self-assessment is an emotional evaluation itself. Positive feelings towards him/her are a sign that the individual wants to be accepted and sees himself as a person worthy of respect.

Self-esteem is self-assessment of one's own abilities to perform daily duties and tasks adequately and to meet one's own needs. It was also found that the combined effect of higher parental warmth interacts with moderate parental control (unlike extreme indulgent or restrictive control) increases the level of self-esteem among adolescents. Examining the quality of the parent-child relationship with the constructs: acceptance, attachment, involvement, understanding, alienation and surveillance, Dekovic and Meeus (Deković, Meeus, 1997) conclude that the style of parenting as well as peer relationships are significantly associated with an image for themselves among adolescents. While the relationship with the father is significantly associated with self-image and significantly contributes to the overall self-esteem, the quality of the relationship with the mother is associated with the general image of the child.

Decovic and Jensen (Deković, Janssens, 1992) concluded that popular and rejected children have different experiences in the family. The style of upbringing in the family among popular children was authoritarian-democratic, while for rejected children the authoritarian-restrictive educational style prevailed. Parents' style is not associated only to the status of the child's peer group, but also with the behavior of the child in that group. Children who are rejected by the mother in relations with siblings show more aggression, the same as in interaction with peers.

Rohner (Rohner, 1984) reports that parental acceptance and rejection is associated with behavioral problems, self-image, low school achievement,

anxiety, and uncertainty. The results of this research show that the forms of interaction between parents and children such as high demands, rudeness and neglect are significantly negatively related to satisfaction in the family. Parental rejection is associated with aggressive and unfriendly behavior with children, negative self-esteem and addictive behavior (Rohner, 1984). Rejected children are more oriented to peers, stay more outside the house, unlike accepted children (Dekovic and Meeus, 1997, and Rohner, 1984). Those children who have not satisfied the need of warmth and belonging remain dissatisfied and increase their efforts to find love and attention, and thus become dependent. These children are aggressive and are unable to control aggressive impulses. Children generalized the feelings of dissatisfaction and insecurity in other social environments.

Using the questionnaire for the actions of parents in some typical situations of interaction with children Lackovic - Grgin and Opachik (Lacković-Grgin, Opačić, 1988), realized that school achievement and motivation for learning among children from families with democratic (authoritative) upbringing are substantially greater than in authoritarian and indulgent families.

In the research of Todorovic (Todorović, 2004), it was found that the stability of self-esteem of adolescents is positively correlated with emotional warmth and acceptance of the mother, and unstable self-evaluations are related to an inconsistent and/or overprotective upbringing style. Rejection is associated with a low and stable self-esteem.

The data of the adolescent emotional closeness with parents reflected in gradual independence is interpreted as a sign of relative harmonization of relations between children and parents, while excessive dependency or rebellion occur in families in which the parents are too strict or too permissive (Joksimović, 1986). Parents influence their children's career choices, adoption of social norms and attitudes. Friends and latter partners become too important people in the life path of the individual.

According to the results of our research, it can be concluded that generally children and adolescents in modern families here (at least in the sample that was included in the research) perceive their parents as more warm, attentive, friendly, with high support, but exercising low control, which is characteristic of democratic (authoritarian) style of upbringing, and even of an overprotective style. Hence, it can be concluded that such parental relationship determines traits in children and adolescents such as high self-esteem, independence, more favorable social behavior than aggressive behavior, assertiveness and acceptance of the role of an adult. In fact, recent events (protests of university students and high school students) did confirm this view and have instilled pride and respect for youth.

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## ОДНОСИТЕ РОДИТЕЛ-ДЕТЕ ВО СЕМЕЈСТВАТА ДЕНЕС

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*Апстракт:* Овој труд ги истражува односите родител-дете во современите семејства во Скопје. Учесниците беа студенти од едно градско училиште, 85 од трето одделение (деветгодишни, во среден период на детство), а 109 од седмо одделение (тринаесетгодишни, во рана адолесценција). Беа употребени следниве прашалници: Скала на квалитет на семејна интеракција и Скала на перцепција на семејни односи. Се тестираа следниве варијабли: квалитет на семејна интеракција, прифаќање на мајката, прифаќање на таткото, отфрлање на мајката, отфрлање на таткото, емоционалност на мајката, емоционалност на таткото, контрола од страна на мајката и контрола од страна на таткото. Резултатите покажуваат дека учениците од трето одделение високо го вреднуваат квалитетот на семејната интеракција, исто така високо ги вреднуваат прифаќањето и емоционалност на двата родитела, додека контролата и отфрлањето од мајката и таткото генерално беа оценети како многу ниски. Резултатите добиени од седмоодделенците покажуваат слични вредности како оние на третоодделенците. Всушност, квалитетот на семејната интеракција и прифаќањето и емоционалноста на двајцата родители беа високо вреднувани, додека отфрлањето и контролата беа вреднувани помалку. Споредбата на двете групи ученици во поглед на тоа како го перцепираат родителското однесување укажува на тоа дека третоодделенците перцепираат повисок квалитет на семејна интеракција отколку седмоодделенците, а истото е точно и за прифаќањето и емоционалноста на родителите, но тие ја оценуваат контролата и отфрлањето од страна на родителите како значително помала отколку адолесцентите. Сето ова води кон заклучок дека помладите ги перцепираат своите родители различно отколку адолесцентите. Родителите може да покажат поголема физичка или вербална љубов кон помладите деца отколку кон адолесцентите, но поради процесот на индивидуализација, адолесцентите доживуваат поголема контрола од страна на родителите.

*Клучни зборови:* родители, дете, адолесцент, семејство