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# **The influence of parenting styles on preschoolers' social behaviours**

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**Abstract.** Romanian society still faces a number of problems in the field of child rearing, care, health and education. Parenting education is the set of programmes, services and resources aimed at parents/legal guardians/caregivers to support them in the upbringing and education of their children, to raise their awareness of their roles and to develop and improve their parenting skills. In this paper we aim to analyse the predictive and explanatory role of parenting styles (authoritarian, democratic and permissive) in relation to prosocial behaviours or aggression of children (overt and relational).

**Keywords.** children, parental education

## **I. Introduction**

### **I.1. Parental education**

Parental education is the set of programs, services and resources for parents/legal guardians to support them in raising and educating their children, in raising awareness of their roles and in developing and improving their parenting skills. The main objective of the parental education activities is to raise the awareness of the parents/legal guardians/caregiver about the importance of their role in supporting the child's growth and development, so that they can improve or modify some of their knowledge, attitudes, understandings/views and practices of care and upbringing according to the recommendations of modern psycho-pedagogy. In recent years in Romania, various forms have been developed to promote positive parenting, aiming at the development of skills (mainly through information services) and parenting competences (through pilot parenting education projects). In general, these are addressed to parents with young children and adolescents (offered by medical, educational or social staff).

Authoritarian parents, control the behavior of their children with rigid rules and limitations shaped with the excessive level of authority. What the valuable is for those kind of parents are the child' obeying the existing rules without asking questions and parents' interfering and limiting behavior without hesitation for the good of the child.

Young children are not passive recipients of adult guidance in problem solving, they seek, select and structure the help they receive from those around them as they learn to solve problems. Once they have learned problem-solving strategies, they will try to apply them themselves. Parental involvement influences children's confidence in their problem-solving ability, motivation and ability to learn and perform well in school (Sălceanu C., 2015).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the first organized parenting education programs were set up, which aimed to train parents in child development and only began to gain momentum after



the Second World War. Other initiatives focused on disadvantaged families whose children were failing at school or dropping out. Head Start is one such program, which began in the mid-1960s.

Similarly, in Europe, parenting education developed in the second half of the 20th century in Western European countries, although isolated attempts existed earlier. The first parenting magazines appeared in Europe between 1830 and 1850 - Mother's Magazine, Mother's assistant and Parent's magazine. In the early 1960s, Thomas Gordon developed the Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T) course for parents. Based on the model he developed, Gordon taught parents, teachers, educators and leaders over 50 years to build effective relationships.

In this millennium, the importance of parenting education has been recognized by various European Union documents: the "Lisbon Declaration" (2005) states that "economic development in contemporary societies is also conditioned by the education of the population; 'human capital' becomes as important for the development of a society as natural resources or physical capital.

In April 2006, at the Monaco Conference, the Council of Europe launched a three-year programme "Building a Europe with and for children", aimed at ensuring an integrated approach to the promotion of children's rights in the Member States. In December 2006, the Committee of Ministers of the Member States of the European Union adopted Recommendation No 19 (2006) recognising the importance of parenting education and recommending to EU Member States measures to create special policies to support parenting. And as parenting education is a mission that the state must assume, we believe that it cannot be seen in any other way than in close correlation and interdependence with the education system.

In this context, the creation of a system of parental education, focused not only on the education of the child but also on the care and protection of the child, on stimulating interest in a new family culture and on the idea of social inclusion, open to young people as potential future parents and to the parents of children between the ages of 0 and 18, appears to be an immediate necessity.

## **I.2. Parental education in Romania**

A research initiated by ISE (2006) - taking into account the theoretical principles and methodological guidelines recognized in the field - has proposed as objectives: "conceptual foundation of parental education; determination of parents' educational needs and educational offer in the school-family relationship; elaboration of principles and methodologies for the foundation of alternative strategies of parental education; offering ideas, proposals for educational reform (concerning legislation, structures, contents)".

In recent decades, the status and role of parents, including physical, psychological, social, cultural and economic duties, have evolved rapidly, under the influence of technological and informational development of the whole world and the diversification of family and educational models, always adding new skills and abilities.

The fact is that "parenting" is something that can be learned. This is why one of the definitions of parenting education in the literature states that it is 'a formal attempt to increase parental awareness and use parenting practices' to educate children mentions parenting as a quality of parent-child interactions. (David Chamberlain, 1987.)

Intervention programs for families with children are characterized by their particular diversity and their adaptation to each target population. In this sense, if we analyze the main programs that are carried out in families for the prevention and resolution of children's



developmental problems, we will generally notice contents depending on the theoretical explanatory orientation as well as on the expected results.

Romanian society is still facing a number of problems in the field of child growth, care, health and education, presented and analyzed in numerous official documents, studies and specialist publications as being largely caused by a total or partial lack of parenting skills (increased infant mortality rate through non-attendance at the emergency doctor, relatively high school dropout rate, low level of knowledge in parenting education, especially in rural areas, still strong influence of traditions with impact). In this context, a proposal for a National Integrated Parenting Training and Development Strategy was drafted in 2008 with support from UNICEF. The document considers lifelong learning to be the central focus of the strategy and is aimed in particular at improving the lifelong personal, social and professional development of individuals with a view to improving the quality of life of both individuals and their communities.

Since 2000, the Ministry of National Education, in partnership with the organization Our Children with assistance from UNICEF Romania, has been running the National Parenting Education Program based on the 'Educate Like This' method developed and tested by the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare at Utrecht University. The program gradually developed at national level and, following very good results, was taken over in 2004 by the Ministry of National Education, with the database and monitoring remaining under the responsibility of Our Children Organization.

It should be noted that parenting education is an activity encouraged by many strategies in the educational, social and medical fields: the National Reform Program 2016, the Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child 2014-2020, the Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2015-2020, the Strategy on Reducing Early School Leaving 2014-2020, the National Health Strategy 2014-2020, the National Strategy for Child and Adolescent Mental Health 2016-2020; in the National Education Law no. 1/2011, as amended and supplemented, Art. 3 letter q) states the principle of parental participation and responsibility, and Art. 79 para. 2 parents are considered secondary beneficiaries of pre-university education.

It should be pointed out that in these policy documents there are explicit provisions on the provision of parental education services, but there are no explicit provisions on how parental education can be organized at the level of educational institutions, social or medical institutions, or as a process of empowering parents with knowledge, attitudes and positive practices for the upbringing and development of the child/student, nor any mention of initial and ongoing training of staff to carry out parental education.

## **II. Research objectives and methodology**

### **II.1. Research objective**

To analyze the predictive and explanatory role of parenting styles (authoritarian, democratic and permissive) in relation to preschoolers' prosocial behaviour or aggression (overt and relational).

### **II.2. Research hypotheses**

- It is assumed that there is an indirect correlation between authoritarian parenting style and prosocial behaviour of preschoolers.



- Presumed direct correlation between authoritarian parenting style and preschool children's aggression

- Presumed direct correlation between democratic parenting style and children's prosocial behaviour

### **II.3. Sampling**

As far as parents/legal guardians of children are concerned, only mothers or grandmothers who are responsible for their upbringing and education participated in the experiment: 54% of the subjects are aged between 31-35 years, and 21% are aged between 26-30 years. Only 8% (one mother and one grandmother) are over 51 years old. Most of the children are mainly cared for by their mother, with only one girl being cared for by her grandmother.

### **II.4. Research tools**

The Parenting Styles & Dimensions Questionnaire was developed by Robinson, Mandelco, Olsen & Hart (1995) - it consists of 62 items that describe behaviours that parents display when interacting with their children. These behaviours are divided into three scales that assess: authoritative, democratic and permissive parenting styles.

Parents of preschoolers were asked to rate how often they display certain behaviours towards their children from the list presented. Each statement was to be rated on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 indicates a low degree of manifestation of the rated behaviour and 3 indicates a high degree of manifestation of that behaviour. A high score on the scale assessing one of the parenting styles indicates that parents practice the behaviours described by the items forming the scale with increased frequency. For example, a high score on the scale assessing authoritarian parenting style will reflect the fact that the parent constantly uses authoritarian behaviours in interactions with the children. The teacher completed the Prosocial Behaviors of Children scale, McConnell' Strain' Kerr' et al. ' 1984 Four subscale scores are computed by summing individual items: Prosocial Behavior and Social Competence subscale (all 19 items); School Adjustment subscale (items 2' 7' 10' 11' 15' 18 and 19); Peer Preferred Behavior subscale (items 1' 3' 8' 9' 13' 16 and 17); and Teacher Preferred Behavior subscale (items 5' 6' 7' 12 and 14). A high score on any subscale indicates a great amount of prosocial behavior.

### **II.5 Research results**

Next, we are interested in checking whether there is a correlation (association, link) between the variables authoritarian parenting style and democratic parenting style on the one hand and prosocial behaviour and aggression on the other.

We further examine whether there is a linear relationship between authoritarian parenting style and prosocial behaviour and aggression of preschoolers in the experimental group.



**Table 1. Correlation between authoritarian parenting style and children's prosocial behaviour**

		Authoritarian parenting style	Prosocial behaviour
Authoritarian parenting style	Pearson Correlation	1	-.824**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	24	24
Prosocial behaviour	Pearson Correlation	-.824**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	24	24

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the results obtained, there is a negative correlation between authoritarian parenting style and prosocial behaviour of preschoolers  $r(24) = -0.824, p < 0.001$ ; it follows that preschoolers whose parents/legal guardians adopt an authoritarian parenting style will show less prosocial behaviour.

**Table 2. Correlation between authoritarian parenting style and children's aggressiveness**

		Authoritarian parenting style	Relational aggression
Authoritarian parenting style	Pearson Correlation	1	.571**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	24	24
Relational aggression	Pearson Correlation	.571**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	24	24

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



According to the results obtained, there is a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and preschoolers' aggressiveness,  $r(24) = 0.571$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; it follows that preschoolers whose parents/legal guardians adopt an authoritarian parenting style will show aggressiveness in relation to peers and/or themselves to a great extent.

**Table 3. Correlation between democratic parenting style and children's prosocial behaviour**

		Democratic parenting style	Prosocial behaviour
Democratic parenting style	Pearson Correlation	1	.435*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	24	24
Prosocial behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.435*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	24	24

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to the results obtained, there is a positive correlation between democratic parenting style and prosocial behaviour of pre-schoolers ( $24$ ) = 0.435,  $p < 0.001$ ; it follows that preschoolers whose parents/legal guardians adopt a democratic parenting style will manifest prosocial behaviour to a great extent.

### Conclusions

The development of educational programs at the level of civil society and the community that provide the necessary support for the family, and the design of a school curriculum that takes into account the need for parental education from an early age, are two fundamental coordinates of parenting education. This underlines the concern to make parenting school a reality, but also to raise children in such a way that they will one day be the best parents they can be.

In conclusion, in order to influence children's development and behaviour in a favorable way, it is important to act on parents' beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, because parents are the closest educators of their children from an early age.



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