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Positive effects of family interactions on self-esteem in early adolescence

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Introduction

- Self-esteem = a person's evaluation of himself or herself, and his or her affective reactions to that evaluation.

- Contemporary researches show that self-esteem is developing through life, and family has an important role in that process, especially in early adolescence. It is also evident the greater disharmony between the needs of a child and the support he is getting from the environment, the poorer adjustment and general self-esteem.

- Low self-esteem is linked to different problems in school age children because they have the tendency to underestimate themselves and attribute their failures to own incompetence. On the other hand high self-esteem has a protecting function in development of different problems of child adjustment even in serious disorders like depression and anxiety

- Amongst different variables that referee to the family functioning and relations, the most common are influences of basic dimensions of parenthood behavior. Authors Maccoby and Martin pointed out two important dimensions of parenthood: emotionality and control.

- Combining those basic dimensions of parenthood, four general styles of parenting have been identified: authoritarian, indifferent, permissive and authoritative.

- **Emotionality** refers to the amount of support, love and encouragement that parent often to a child. It is opposite to rejection, hostility and neglect. **Control** refers to the level of discipline and supervision of a child, and it also has another extreme - total lack of control or indifference to child behavior.

Aims and problems

The aim of this research was to determine the contibution of the parent-child relationship quality to the level of child's self-esteem:

- To examine the gender differences in:
  - ⊃ perceptions of the various family variables: mother's and father's emotionality, family support and cohesion, and family satisfaction
  - ⊃ global self-esteem
  - ⊃ school success
- To determine the correlation between self-esteem and
  - ⊃ different variables of the family relations and family functioning
  - ⊃ school success
- To examine the variables of family relations that are significant predictors of the adolescent high self-esteem

Method

Participants and procedure

- The research was conducted on the community sample of 127 children in primary school in Zadar, Croatia. Their average age was 13 (M=13.71; sd=0.46).

- The participants completed the questionnaires during a regularly scheduled classroom period.

Measures

- Socio-demographic survey

- **Children and parents** self-report questionnaire

- **Family cohesion** questionnaire

- **Family support** questionnaire

- **Family satisfaction** scale

- **Self-esteem questionnaire**

Table 1. Scale Means, Standard Deviations and Cronbach Alpha for the scales used in this research

Scales	Number of items	Range	α	Psychometric carahteristics of scales in this research		
				α	M	Sd
«Children and parents"	25					
Emocionallity - mather	15	15-45	0.84	0.86	39.37	5.32
Emocionallity - father	15	15-45	0.85	0.82	38.14	5.05
Control – mather	10	10-30	0.75	0.74	15.26	3.48
Control – father	10	10-30	0.78	0.78	14.68	3.63
«Family cohesion»	5	1-15	0.70	0.82	13.50	1.96
«Family support»	5	1-15	0.65	0.64	12.74	1.88
«Family satisfaction»	11	11-33	0.89	0.85	29.90	3.70
Self-esteem	25	25-125	0.78	0.87	91.39	14.45

Results

- First step was to question whether there are differences between girls and boys regarding the perception of different family variables, general self-esteem and success in school. These results were obtained by analyzing the variances of results of boys and girls on seven different variables which reefer to family, self-esteem and the success in school.

- Results presented in **Table 2.** shaw that girls and boys differ significantly in terms of family relationship, precisely in the perception of the father's control. Comparing to girls boys perceive a greater intensity of father's control.

- Children, especially the boys, in the period of early adolescence are under the strong influence of their peer group. The greater extent of control over their behavior might be the reason of increased perception of the father's domain of control.

Table 2. Results of the ANOVA: Means and F values for the scales used in this study

| Scale	Boys	Girls		
	M	M	F	p
Emocionallity - mather	38.99	39.87	0.850	0.358
Emocionallity - father	38.25	37.98	0.081	0.776
Control – mather	15.55	14.87	1.192	0.277
Control – father	15.35	13.78	**5.78***	**0.0178***
«Family cohesion»	13.70	13.24	1.756	0.1875
«Family support»	12.78	12.68	0.0939	0.759
«Family satisfaction»	30.10	29.64	0.498	0.4817
Self-esteem	91.66	91.03	0.0596	0.8073
School success	3.98	4.15	1.3796	0.2423
	N = 72	N = 55		

- The next aim of this research was to show the relationships between self-esteem and various variables of family relationships and success in school. Correlations were calculated between self-esteem and family variables. The data were processed on the complete sample of boys and girls (N=127).

- The **Figure 1.** shows the correlations between the level of self-esteem and other variables used in this research.

- The obtained correlation's lead to a sequent conclusion: positive relation with self-esteem has the variables of emotional sensibility on both, mother's and father's side, the family cohesion, family support and family happiness. In other words, the greater family support, happiness and cohesion are, the greater is the overall self-esteem of adolescents.

Figure 1. Pearson correlations between the level of self-esteem and family variables and school success
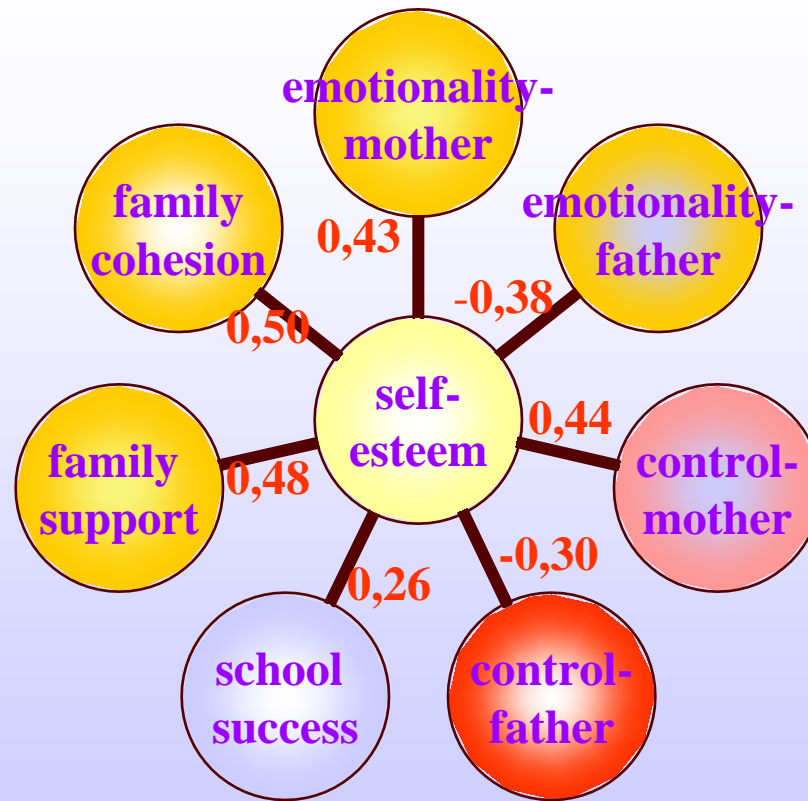
- Further, we were interested in which variables of family relations and in what extent contribute to overall self-esteem of boys and girls. Data were analyzed by the method of regressive analyses (Table 3 and Table 4).

- The results of regression analysis show that for **girls** significant predictors of high self-esteem are father's emotionality and satisfaction with family. It is obvious that girls give great importance to emotional relationship with their fathers, and that global atmosphere in the family and the satisfaction with the way their families work are important to them.

- Predictor variables which make significant impact on the **boys** positive self-image are grades, i.e. school success, father's control and family cohesion. It means that boys self-concept are more determined by school success, low control from fathers and family cohesion which relates with the level of emotional closeness of family members.

Table 3. Summary of multiple regression analysis for self-esteem and family variables (**boys** N=72)

dependent variable	predictors	beta	t	p	
Self-esteem	School success	0.332	3,074	0,003	R=0,518 R²=0,268 F(3,66)=8,075 p<0,0001
	Control - father	-0.225	-2,074	0,042	
	Family cohesion	0.339	3,054	0,003	

Table 4. Summary of multiple regression analysis for self-esteem and family variables (**girls** N=55)

dependent variable	predictors	beta	t	p	
Self-esteem	Emotionality – father	0,361	2,644	0,010	R=0,712 R²=0,507 F(2,49)=25,19 p<0,000
	Family satisfaction	0,416	3,049	0,003	

Conclusions

- The results of this study show that different aspects of family relations make significant (and different) contribution to global self-esteem of adolescents.

- In the male sample the most significant predictors of high self-esteem were school success, family cohesion and low father's control.

- The most important predictors for female self-esteem were emotional relationship with father and family satisfaction.

- Analysis of variance of the results shows differences between boys and girls in the perception of the level of father's control. The boys perceive their fathers to be more controlling over them then girls do.