

THE STRUCTURE OF PARENTING SENSE OF COMPETENCY IN PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: *The goal of this research was to determine the latent structure of the set of indicators of competencies of parents of preschool children on the sample of 105 respondents from the territory of the municipality of Novi Bečej. The instrument used in the research was the Questionnaire on Parenting Sense of Competency, which is a modification of the scale Parenting Sense of Competency Scale (Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978). The first extracted factor was defined as Parenting demands and parental stress. The second extracted factor points to Parental satisfaction, whereas the third indicates Subjective parenting competency. The extracted factors point to the parents' need for developing their parental competencies, but also to the fact that they have reached socio-emotional maturity needed for this role, and can therefore be "good role models" to future parents.*

Key words: *parenting sense of competency; Parenting demands and parental stress; Parental satisfaction; Subjective parenting competency;*

Introduction

Competencies and their significance for the successfulness of a modern man have become a topic analyzed in all spheres of life. Although the term competencies used to be most important in the area of training and education (Ivanković, n.d.), it is now being used more and more in everyday speech as well. Being competent now means much more than the sum of individual skills and knowledge.

The definition given by the psychologist Franz Weinert, according to whom competencies represent „the cognitive abilities and skills that are

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available to individuals or that can be acquired by them in order to solve certain problems as well as the associated motivational, volitional and social willingness and abilities to successfully and responsibly apply solutions to problems in variable situations“ (Weinert, 2001; as in: Pavkov and Živčić, 2013: 63), was used as the basis for numerous competency models (Pavkov and Živčić, 2013). By the definition of John Erpenbeck and Lutz von Rosenstiel, competence is a self-organizing disposition directed towards action in novel situations and depends on the context (Zürcher, 2010; Pavkov and Živčić, 2013). For Nenad Suzić (2005), competencies represent a continuum. The triad of know, do and be, should be integrated in a single coherent whole so as to enable an individual to combine different knowledge and skills when responding to situations and challenges in accordance with the basic underlying values (Pavlović Breneselović, 2014). According to Boyatzis, competency can be a „motive, trait, skill, aspect of one's self-image or social role, or a body of knowledge“ (Whiddett & Hollyforde, 2007; as in: Ivanković, n.d.) which he or she uses. Differentiating between education and competencies, Erpenbeck emphasizes that whereas education is described as a process and a normative goal, self-development and self-realization of an individual, competencies are understood as the development of potential for independent action in various social areas (Erpenbeck, 2004; as in: Pavkov and Živčić, 2013).

Competencies represent our knowledge, skills and attitudes that create our behaviour and their basic characteristic is precisely their application in real situations (Ivanković, n.d.).

Competencies cannot be measured directly (Pavkov and Živčić, 2013). Observation of a person's behaviour is the key to evaluate whether a person has the motives, traits, knowledge and such (Whiddett & Hollyforde, 2007; as in: Ivanković, n.d.). For collecting information on an individual's competencies, different qualitative and quantitative approaches can be used – observation, interview, survey, discussion, product analysis and such (Pavkov and Živčić, 2013).

Parenting and parenting competencies

Parenting is a very important role in the life of an individual. Partners become parents by the very birth of a child and being a parent is often taken for granted. Thomas Gordon notes that parents are often blamed for all the problems related to children and those created by children and adolescents. Parents are blamed but never assisted (Gordon, 1998). Parenting is a beautiful responsibility, but it is also a very big responsibility.

The term *parenting* comprises several different notions. *Parenting sense* consists of making the decision to have children, assuming and accepting the role of a parent, setting the educational goals (consciously or

intuitively), the sense of one's own worth because of the effort made, emotional relationship and the child's success. *Parental care* includes giving birth to children and taking care of them. *Parental conduct and activities* include all the things a parent does in order to achieve the parenting goals and fulfil their role and the *parenting style* is the emotional climate within which parents raise their children. Most often, parenting was explored in the function of determining both the beneficial and the harmful influences on the child's development and their developmental results (Čudina Obradović and Obradović, 2002). Because of the significance of the parents' influence on the child's development, modern society demands a competent parent.

Marija Pavkov and Mile Živčić claim that acquiring competencies and their practical use is a subjective process in which an adult uses their own potential with the intention to reach their goals. Competencies change in time and they depend on the cognitive, physical and psychological potential of an individual, which can also change in time, but they also depend on the experience, genetic predispositions and their cultural environment (Pavkov and Živčić, 2013).

Parenting competencies are a multidimensional construct which includes a behavioural, an emotional and a cognitive component (Coleman and Hildebrandt Karraker; 2000; as in: Delale, 2011). Parenting competency most often includes self-efficiency, the central cognitive element that represents the parent's self-evaluation of their competency in the role of a parent or their ability to positively influence their child's behaviour and development (Coleman and Hildebrandt Karraker, 2000; as in: Delale, 2011).

The subjective sense of parenting represents a significant change in the overall identity of an individual and is most often described by three dimensions: parental satisfaction, parenting demands and parental stress and the sense of competency (Sabatelli and Waldron, 1995; as in: Čudina Obradović and Obradović, 2003). The term parental satisfaction indicates the satisfaction with the support of the spouse or civil partner – the other parent, with the parent-child relationship and one's own success as a parent. Mladen Havelka defines stress as a condition in which the inner – physiological, psychological and social balance of an individual is disrupted and demands an extra effort to be made towards adjustment. The condition of stress occurs when an individual fails to fulfil excessive tasks which are put before them by their environment or themselves (Havelka, 1995). Parenting demands are the external pressures put on an individual who needs to fulfil their parenting role in accordance with the expectations of their environment and the established norms of their society, whereas stress represents an individual's feeling of being unable to fulfil those demands. The demands arise from the child's characteristics as well – their inadaptability, unacceptable behaviour, negative mood, distractedness or hyperactivity. Parental stress also includes

depression of a parent, being overly attached to the child, feeling of parental incompetency, loneliness, disturbed marital interaction and endangered physical health (Čudina Obradović and Obradović, 2003). Parental stress indicates unpleasant feelings related to the demands of the parenting role due to the demands of the environment and the parents themselves.

Subjective parenting competency is a measure of how successful and capable as a parent an individual feels. It is defined as a sense of difficulty in raising a child in the different phases of the child's development, as a self-evaluation of the knowledge, skills, self-efficiency and self-respect or as a sense that a parent is not in control of the process of their child's upbringing (Čudina Obradović and Obradović, 2003).

A competent parent feels good in their role and experiences themselves as a person that is in control of parenting and the child (Milanović and associates, 2000; as in: Jurčević Lozančić and Kunert, 2015). Pedagogical competencies of parents include family interactions, especially the relationship between the parent and the child. Parent's satisfaction and confidence, as well as the child's success, depend primarily upon the quality of the relationship between the parent and the child (Golombok, 2000; Ljubetić, 2007; Pećnik and Starc, 2010; as in: Jurčević Lozančić and Kunert, 2015). However, as Mira Čudina Obradović and Josip Obradović have stressed, parents constantly question where and when they had made mistakes, what they should do to avoid more mistakes, as well as what a good parent is like and what quality parenting actually means (Čudina Obradović and Obradović, 2003).

Anka Jurčević Lozančić and Anabela Kunert claim that possessing basic pedagogical and psychological knowledge and skills well-adjusted to the child's age and abilities is one of the basic competencies seen in a pedagogically competent parent. A pedagogically incompetent parent does not have the knowledge, is uncertain, fails to establish a satisfactory relation with the child, and finds that parenting is a burden (Jurčević Lozančić and Kunert, 2015). European academic community agrees that it is most important to meet the basic developmental needs of the child – to satisfy the child's basic life needs, provide safety and offer emotional warmth, support and motivating conditions for learning and development, give the child guidance and limits and ensure stability (Cleaver, 2006, Pećnik, 2007; as in: Pećnik and Tokić, 2011). We believe that a competent parent knows and acts in order to fulfil these needs. A competent parent never stops learning, constantly acquires new knowledge and develops skills related to children and their upbringing and feels confident and satisfied in the role of a parent.

Grusec and Ungerer stress that a number of parents, due to being self-absorbed and having unpleasant emotions, develop an unrealistic image of

their own efficiency as parents (Grusec and Ungerer, 2002; as in: Delale, 2011).

Competent parents get involved in different behaviours of their child and expect their influence to have positive outcomes despite the fact that this is a slow process or that their actions are based on trial and error method (Delale, 2011).

Previous researches

Linda Gilmore and Monica Cuskelly used *Parenting Sense of Competence Scale* in their research. Factor analysis produced three acceptable factors – Satisfaction, Efficiency and Expression of Interest which was 47, 3% and 50,1% of variance for mothers and fathers. Mothers showed higher efficiency than fathers, whereas fathers showed greater satisfaction with the parenting role (Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2008). Jones and Printz identified this scale as the most often applied scale for evaluating parental self-confidence (Johnston & Mash 1989; as in: Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2008).

Research methodology

The main problem of this research is given in the form of the research question: Which factors influence the parenting sense in parents of preschool children? Accordingly, the goal of the research is to determine the latent structure of the set of indicators of competencies of parents of preschool children.

After the research, we expect to get a precise structure of competencies of parents of preschool children.

The sample

Research sample consisted of 105 respondents – parents of preschool children from the territory of the municipality of Novi Bečej, 75 (71,43 %) female and 30 (28,57 %) male. The observed Chi-Square statistic $\chi^2 = 19,286$ with significance level of $p = 0,001$ shows that the sample is not gender balanced. Within the sample, there were 33 (31,40 %) parents from villages and 72 (68,60 %) from the city. The observed Chi-Square statistic $\chi^2 = 14,486$ with significance level of $p = 0,001$ shows that the sample is not place of residence balanced. Of the total number of respondents, 72 (68,60 %) are employed, and 33 (31,40 %) are unemployed. The observed Chi-Square statistic $\chi^2 = 14,486$ with significance level of $p = 0,001$ shows that the sample is not balanced in relation to the category of employment. Also, 9 (8,6 %) respondents have finished elementary school, 59 (56,2 %) high school, 14 (13,3 %) have graduated from college, i.e. have bachelor's degree (first level vocational or academic studies) and 23 (21,9 %) have completed second level of studies. The calculated Chi-Square statistic $\chi^2 = 58,314$ with significance level of $p = 0,001$ shows that the sample is not balanced in relation to the level of education. The sample consisted of 26 (24,76 %) parents of one child and 79 (75,24 %) parents of two or more children. Chi-

Square statistic $\chi^2 = 26,752$ with significance level of $p = 0,001$ shows that the sample was not balanced in relation to the number of children in the family. Twenty one (20 %) single parents participated in the research, and 84 (80 %) parents who live in matrimony. Chi-Square statistic $\chi^2 = 37,800$ with significance level of $p = 0,001$ shows that the sample was not balanced in relation to this indicator.

The Instrument

For the research, the author used the instrument *Questionnaire on Parenting Sense of Competency*. In the introductory part of the instrument, information on the research is given, together with the anonymity guarantee and the explanation of what is expected from the respondents. The first part of the questionnaire is design to obtain basic socio-demographic information – place of residence (village/city), gender, education, parent's employment status, the number of children in the family and whether the respondent is a single parent. The second part of the questionnaire is the scalar consisting of 17 items related to the parenting sense (*Parenting Sense of Competence Scale* (Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978)). The respondents graded the items using the following scale: I strongly disagree, I disagree, I am indecisive, I agree and I strongly agree. The scalar has 9 items which needed to be recoded.

The instrument's reliability was determined by Cronbach alpha test, which on the sample from this research resulted in $\alpha = 0,831$.

Research process and statistical data analysis

The research involved parents of preschoolers from the territory of the municipality of Novi Bečej. The survey was administered voluntarily and anonymously, and was closed-ended. The statistical analysis was performed using *SPSS 23.0 for Windows*.

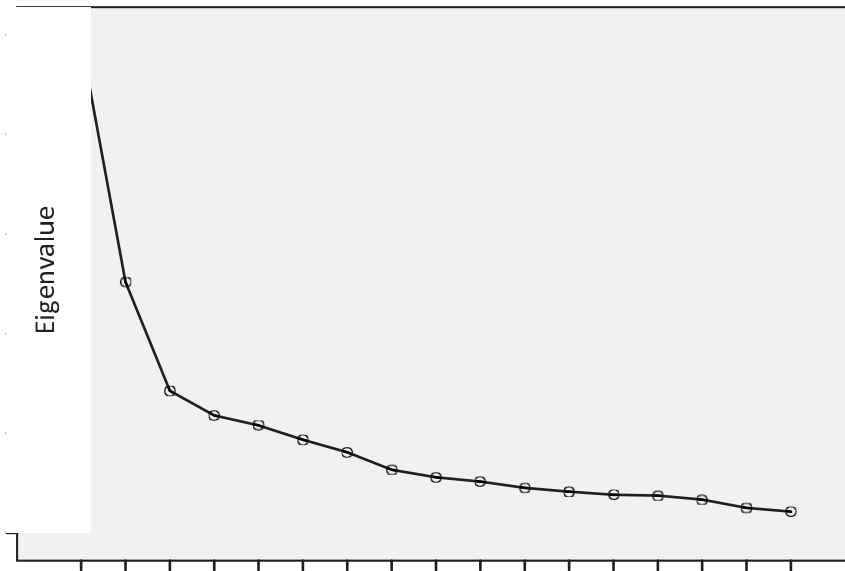
Research results with discussion

The answer to the question of what the structure of parenting sense is was sought through the factorization of the instrument. The goal was to use the larger number of interconnected variables to determine a smaller number of basic, i.e. latent variables that explain the interconnectedness.

The principal components retained were rotated by oblimin rotation. These results are shown in Table 1. Using factor analysis, we tried to determine the interdependence between our variables and explain them by a smaller number of shared factors. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic – (KMO measure of sampling adequacy) shows the adequacy of the correlation matrix for factorization and amounts to $KMO = 0,782$, and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is also significant ($p = 0,000$) which confirms that the application of factor analysis is justified.

Cattell's Scree plot shows a "break" between the third and the fourth component, which is why we have excluded three components (Graph 1).

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Components – factors

Graph 1: Number of factors - Cattell's scree plot

The extracted factors of parenting sense were defined as: Parental satisfaction; Parenting demands and parental stress; and Sense of competency (Sabatelli and Waldron, 1995; as in: Čudina Obradović and Obradović, 2003).

The latent structure of the first factor consists of 9 items (Table 1). The structure of the first factor *Parenting demands and parental stress* consists of the following items: *My parents were better prepared to be parents than I am (R)*; *Being a parent makes me tense and anxious (R)*; *I go to bed the same way I wake up in the morning, feeling I have not accomplished a whole lot (R)*; *If being a parent were only more interesting, I would be motivated to do a better job as a parent (R)*; *Even though being a parent could be rewarding, I am frustrated now while my child is at his / her present age (R)*; *My talents and interests are in other areas, not being a parent (R)*; *Sometimes I feel like I'm not getting anything done (R)*; *I do not know why it is, but sometimes when I'm supposed to be in control, I feel more like the one being manipulated (R)* and *A difficult problem in being a parent is not knowing whether you're doing a good job or a bad one (R)*. Parenting stress is an aversive psychological reaction to the demands of parenting which connects the demands of parenting, parents' behavior and

psychological state, the quality of the parent-child relationship and the parent's psycho-social adjustment (Profaca, 2002; Profaca and Arambašić, 2004; as in: Delale, 2011). Kirby Deater-Deckard stresses that the individual differences in parenting stress have proven to be an important aspect of the functioning of the parent, the child and the family (Deater-Deckard, 1998). Parents tend to replicate the upbringing methods of their parents, as well as the method of "dealing" with family issues. Through different forms of training, parents can get familiar with the pedagogical, psychological and other scientific findings – on children and their development and behaviour, on parents, interpersonal communication and constructive problem solving and in this way develop their parenting competencies. Modern society asks for a modern, competent parent who will meet the demands put before them by parenting, and as such, they would not be exposed to parenting stress.

Table 1: The structure of parenting sense of competency

Factors	Components after rotation		
	1	2	3
Parenting demands and parental stress	0,793		
	0,768		
	0,757		
	0,712		
	0,712		
	0,686		
	0,660		
	0,625		
	0,488		
Parental satisfaction		0,664	
		0,654	
		0,590	
		0,570	
		0,443	
Subjective parenting competency			0,783
			0,740
			0,652

Extraction method: Analysis of principal components

Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization

The second-ranked factor consists of 5 items and is related to *Parental satisfaction* (Table 1). The structure of this item consists of the following items: *If anyone can find the answer to what is troubling my child, I am the one; Considering how long I've been a parent, I feel thoroughly familiar with this role; The problems of taking care of a child are easy to*

solve once you know how your actions affect your child, an understanding I have acquired; Being a parent is manageable, and any problems are easily solved and Being a parent is a reward in itself. Expectations from the parenting role related to one's own expertise in raising a child are very important for parental satisfaction. Parenting competency and the subjective sense of parenting are considerably dependant on the preparedness of the marital partners, their anxiety or indifference to the birth of a child (Delmore-Ko et.al.,2000; as in: Čudina Obradović and Obradović, 2003). Self-satisfaction with fulfilling one's own expectations, belief in one's own strengths and skills for "good parenting" and "being immersed" into the role of a parent are all related to the positive sense of parenting.

The third factor is Subjective parenting competency which consists of 3 items (Table 1): *I meet my own personal expectations for expertise in caring for my child; I honestly believe I have all the skills necessary to be a good parent to my child and I would make a fine model for a new parent to follow in order to learn what he or she would need to know in order to be a good parent.* Self-efficacy is a parent's belief in their own abilities to efficiently realize different tasks and meet the demands of parenting (Sanders and Woolley, 2005; as in: Delale, 2011). Parental sense of competency (Gibaud-Walston and Wandersman, 1978; Sanders and Woolley, 2005; as in: Delale, 2011) comprises parent's assessment of their efficacy (self-efficacy) in the role of a parent and their assessment of satisfaction with fulfilling their parenting roles. Being satisfied with fulfilling the parenting role is in a way a consequence of the sense of efficacy which encourages handling multiple simultaneous tasks but also the enjoyment in the parenting process (Delale, 2011). (Self)efficacy in a parent means that the parent is empowered in their parenting role.

Conclusion

This research was done with the aim to determine the latent structure of the set of indicators of competencies of preschoolers' parents. The first extracted factor *Parenting demands and parental stress* indicates that parents need counselling and pedagogical training to empower them in their parenting roles and help them develop their parenting competencies. The second extracted factor *Parental satisfaction* proves the parents' psychosocial wellbeing and that parenting, with all its responsibilities, proves their social-emotional maturity needed for this role. In the order of priority, the third factor was *Subjective parenting competency*. The subjective sense of competent parenting, based on positive self-assessments of parents, creates a positive emotional climate and affects the efficacy of parent's actions (Čudina Obradović and Obradović, 2003). Cooperation of the preschool institution and parents has the tendency to engage parents in all the aspects of kindergarten activities. This trend enables the parents to be involved in

counselling teams and parenting trainings organized by the preschool institutions. Often a parent can understand another parent better and help them overcome difficulties by offering advice.

It is the society's responsibility to offer support and strengthen parenting and parental competencies and recognize the parents' key role in raising responsible children (Spasojević, 2011). Parenting competencies need to be developed and this process involves acquiring knowledge and skills needed to face the challenges of parenting, but also to deal with the stress this role brings (Mandarić Vukušić, 2016). Today's parents should keep up with the trends and educate themselves through all the channels available – workshops for parents, parenting schools, round tables, with the help of research literature and electronic media, because this is one of the conditions of being competent to be a parent. The society should offer support in developing and strengthening parenting competencies through different courses, trainings and parenting schools, but it should provide economic support as well. One of the most common feelings of competence is the satisfaction with the job done – and a competent parent is satisfied by themselves and their role as a parent.

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