

PARENTAL DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES SEEN THROUGH CHILDREN'S EYES

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Abstract: *Although the word discipline, derived from the word disciplining, means teaching or training, it is associated with the application of punishments aimed at correcting inappropriate/improbable behavior (Knox, 2010, Larzelere & Kuhn 1993 cited in Zoysa, 2011). There is undeniably a special interest in parental disciplinary practices (DPP) (Straus & Stewart 1999) within several disciplines. In a country where the physical punishments are considered efficient and normal, presenting the realities regarding the way children are disciplined is more than necessary, it is almost vital. Starting from the premise that adults tend to become their parents (Zoysa, 2011, Fink, 2014), we are interested in finding out to what extent these milestones in education are still respected and how adolescents perceive DPP. 252 students answered online questionnaires and 48 teenagers participating in group discussions confirmed the cognitive theories according to which the focus in parental discipline must fall on moral internalization and autonomy (Baumrind, 1978, Grusec & Kuczyuski 1997). Internalization, along with the maintenance of the child's self-esteem and the parent-child relationship represents the, goals and finalities in fact of the application of effective disciplinary techniques (Grusec, Goodnow, 1994).*

Key words: *disciplinary parental practices; teenagers; perceptions; positive/negative disciplinary methods*

1. Introduction

The present study represents an interface for a project to sensitize parents regarding the needs of their adolescent children, to the suggestions they make in the direction of improving their communication and relationship. We consider developing some awareness programs for parents to minimize the use of aversive disciplinary methods. What teenagers think about their parents'

disciplinary practices, which of them they evaluate as effective or not, this is the purpose of this research. Various studies have focused on the analysis of the personal history of parents who encountered difficulties in managing their children. Thompson et al. (1999) show that the history of abuse, the feelings of inadequacy as a parent generate a context in which disciplining the child can take abusive forms. Other research shows that the status of a single parent is associated with more violent disciplinary methods (Juby, 2009).

2. Inductive Discipline

Parental practices refer to the mechanisms by which parents teach children rules and norms and describe the way in which the parent supervises the child (Dekovic et al, 2003). The practices can be very varied and put into the category of bad or positive parenting; if we refer to the inductive discipline, this consists of providing explanations and arguments to the child when the parent considers that there is a need to produce a change in the child's behaviour. Strictly speaking, the parent focuses on facilitating the child's understanding of the consequences of his action on others. Hoffman (1994), Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967).

As an authority in the field of studies regarding inductive discipline, it shows that this technique facilitates the internalization of norms and leads to the formation of a higher moral force of the child. According to the author, the child's empathic capacity and the feeling of guilt based on empathy mediates the socialization of their prosocial behavior. The theory is later confirmed by the studies of Krevans and Gibbs (1996) and Kerr, Lopez, Olson, et al (2004). The latter also discovered that the relationship between discipline and externalizing behaviours is mediated by the child's moral regulation. The authors confirm that indeed, the application of discipline in the absence of physical punishment, associated with an increased sensitivity of the parents, strengthens the child's conscience.

Inductive discipline, as a disciplinary approach in managing children's behaviours, is considered the most effective technique in the formation of prosocial behaviour in children (Xiao, 2016; Smetana, 1999; Choe, Olson, Sameroff, 2013). Studies suggest that inductive discipline is associated with fewer externalizing problems of the child, with an increase in empathic level and involvement in prosocial behaviours.

DPP parental discipline techniques can be classified as follows:

- power assertion practices, in which the parent values and manifests his power and authority over the child;
- withdrawal of love, disapproval, rejection, direct expressions of anger induction, expressed through a warm attitude, an environment of acceptance and the parents' focus on the consequences of the child's action on others

3. Rational of the study

The way in which the parental couple understands how to exercise their power is influenced by a multitude of factors: (Belsky, 1984) says that starting from personal background, to the experiences as an individual, as part of a couple or as part of a more general situation, leading to the child's personality elements, all these influences contribute to the design of the type of parenting. Also relevant are the parents' level of education, ideology, religion, type of family, mental health, socio-economic level (Larrance, Twentyman, 1983; Sidebotham, Heron, 2006). The identification of these variables is not the subject of the discussion in this paper; our interest is to understand which are the most disapproved methods of parental discipline, or in other words, which are suitable for teenagers, which are the parental practices that cause them the greatest suffering.

Success in the process of disciplining the child, or otherwise formulated in the management of the child, is determined by the extent to which the child correctly perceives the parental message while still feeling accepted.

The very high percentage of teenagers who perceive slaps as a disciplinary method as no abusive is worrying. If we consider the theory of learning and the effects of corporal punishment, we can express our concern about the risk of involving these teenagers in codependent relationships. Research has clearly demonstrated associations between corporal punishment of children and maladaptive behavior patterns such as aggression and delinquency. Knox, M. (2010) shows that the progress made towards the elimination of corporal punishment is wasted/limited by the strong beliefs of parents, in their capacity as "owners" of children.

4. Participants

The study consists of 252 students from three schools and high schools in Arad County (Mihai Viteazul High School in Ineu, Vasile Goldiș National College and Iustin Marșieu Socodor High School). The largest share of respondents (46.8%) is made up of 16-year-old students (117 students), followed by 15-year-old respondents (32%), respectively 80 students. 10% of children are part of single-parent families, of these, 7% live in rural areas.

5. Purpose

In carrying out this study, we started from the premise that the impact of discipline on the child is determined by the cognitive and emotional perception that he has as a parenting practitioner (Patrick, 2009). We evaluate the perceptions of adolescents regarding the disciplinary methods applied by their parents. We do not intend to carry out a complicated statistical processing; in this work, we consider the quick scan of parental disciplinary practices that

adolescents consider the most harmful or harmful (which cause them suffering)/and the most effective disciplinary methods.

6. Methods

A semi-structured questionnaire was applied in google forms format completed by 252 students and 6 focus groups were organized with 48 participants, students aged between 13-18 years. The questionnaire included the items that resulted from the discussions in the focus groups. The mixed research took place between April and July 2022.

7. Findings

7.1. The making of the focus group: Exposing the main ideas, synthesis and data analysis

The FG realization methodology was respected. The participants were students aged between 13-18 years, organized within 6 FG, selected according to their rural/urban background. Three focus groups included 24 7th-8th grade students, and three other FG included participants aged 15-18. The topic of discussion was exposed, namely, parental disciplinary practices.

- The main topics addressed in the focus group discussion were the following
- Disciplinary methods
- The disciplinary methods that he considers the most painful/unfair
- Disciplinary methods that he considers to be the most effective

Group interviews highlighted several methods of discipline. We list the following: dispossession of the phone, bans on going out or seeing friends, withdrawal of rights or privileges, less pocket money, fighting, loud arguments, accusations, threats, Guilt trapping, emotional invalidation, revenge for failures, overloading with household tasks, silence treatment, withdrawal of affection, emotional blackmail.

Group discussions really indicate the need for teenagers to make themselves heard. The differences in perception regarding the preferences or disagreement for certain disciplinary methods according to the age category were highlighted quite strikingly. The 13-15-year-old segment is more sensitive to the dispossession of the phone or the ban on seeing friends than the 16-18-year-old segment.

The obtained results speak of a generation of mature children who know how to express their emotional and psychological needs, analytical and very fine observers.

" How could I not cry if my mother yells at me all day long and my father is the angriest man?" (Elena, 18 years old)

"He punishes me by taking my phone, but my father is always active and posts quite frequently" (Leon, 13 years old)

Two main discussion directions were highlighted, namely: the attitude towards the mistake and calm attitude with respect. The children claim a new form of discipline, namely intelligent, calm and comprehensive "punishment". Actually, the group discussions painted a picture of the parents described by the participants as follows: stressed parents, in a hurry, "with their mind always on tasks", superficial listening to the child's needs, anger. The parent, busy and engaged in countless work tasks, aware of the responsibility he has, spends time with the child depending on his emotional availability to the extent that he is calm or de-stressed enough to do so.

On the other hand, the participants in the group discussions feel that they are a priority for the parents, "the only problem is that they are busy and have a lot on their minds". Although most of them appreciate the relationship between the parents as good and very good, they have some suggestions for parents. The most common disciplinary measure of parents consists of criticism, attention, warning, argument associated with the creation of a stressful, tense environment, in which anger rules for several days.

"...I don't know why it is necessary for them to be angry with me for 5 days, not to speak to me or to answer monosyllabically, if I understood the mistake I made"

Participants from single-parent families are more frequently accused of using more aggressive disciplinary methods such as anger, withdrawal of affection, withdrawal of privileges, emotional blackmail. Not listening carefully to the needs, preferences or wishes, inattention and not taking into account the child's personality was identified as the "most painful" parental practice and frequently encountered in adolescents. According to the teenagers, the reasons for this disobedience are either the parents' lack of confidence in the child's maturity, or the preference for directive parenting with precise tasks that reduce risks (failure, compromises, losses). They feel their parents' concern and care, control and supervision, but in some aspects of life, such as intimate relationships, choosing a profession, going out with friends, various choices, parents are insensitive.

Apparently, the teenagers seem to describe an Authoritarian parenting style, but they admit that there is also warmth and support. Asked how they explain this contradiction in parenting practice, they answered that "they were not listened to either", or they don't realize, or they think it's good. Other respondents' express disinterest for these reasons and they declare themselves to be outdone." They will ignore their advice and make their own choices". On the other hand, the respondents admit that they can rely on their parents, that

they are responsive and that in general they can say that they have a good to very good relationship.

"I feel pressured to always be strong, to be happy all the time because they provide me with all the conditions... sometimes I feel defective because I prefer to spend my time in peace by myself..." (Lucian, 16 years old, single parent family)

"I don't care if he does it out of the need to protect me... not because he thinks I'm inexperienced and could make mistakes... I have the right to make mistakes and I need to take responsibility. even if I'm constantly worried about not causing and more problems than we already have in the family." (Alin, 18 years old, single-parent family)

"I'm tempted to please them...to be who my parents want...but I can't find myself in the image I'm working so hard to build..." (Laura, 17 years old, two-parent family)

Withdrawal of affection and silent treatment were found as topics of discussion in all focus groups; this practice was considered the most painful punishment, being identified by the participants in the "top" of the most disapproved disciplinary measures. As a whole specialized literature indicates, children/adolescents appreciate, expect from their parents and respond positively to empathic attitude, respect, understanding.

7.2. About nonverbal language of participants

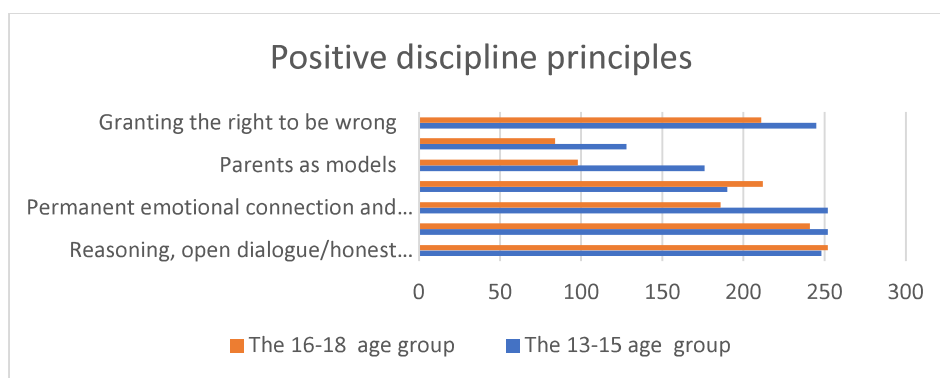
Approaching this subject was quite difficult, the subject of discipline as a parenting practice being quite delicate. The dynamics of the discussions were initially accentuated by the contradictory opinions, after which the atmosphere eased when the participants understood the neutral attitude of the moderator. There were 3 cases that authentically related the experience of abuse perceived as a disciplinary practice (hair pulling, occasional slap). In two of the cases, the facial expression reflects indignation, acceptance of the experience they live and recognize in a group of equals unknown to them; fixed, stable body posture, visual contact with the mediator and participants, weakly differentiated gestures, firm voice, aspects that confirmed and emphasized the verbal message.

In the case of the third participant, the non-verbal language suggested a contradiction of the verbal message; more precisely, the participants who experienced physical discipline appealed to humour and minimization to display a less affected attitude. They avoided visual contact, showed psychomotor agitation, anxiety, noisy behaviour, impatience, sudden movements, distracted.

7.3.The quantitative results

Participants ranked the PPDs listed below according to effectiveness/preference, importance. For the 16-18 age segment, among the psychological needs, respectful treatment, trust and empowerment is the priority, and equally the need for emotional connection, followed by open dialogue, honest and calm discussions. The application of natural consequences as DPP is appreciated by 190 respondents, and 176 emphasize the importance of the parental model. There are small differences in the ordering of DPP for the 13-15 age group: they want to be treated calmly and without anger, the method followed by the one that implies respect and empowerment. It seems that they would rather treat the problems naturally and apply the natural consequences instead of reflecting on the mistake made. The figure below represents the assessments made by the respondents regarding positive disciplinary practices.

Figure no.1. *Positive discipline principles*



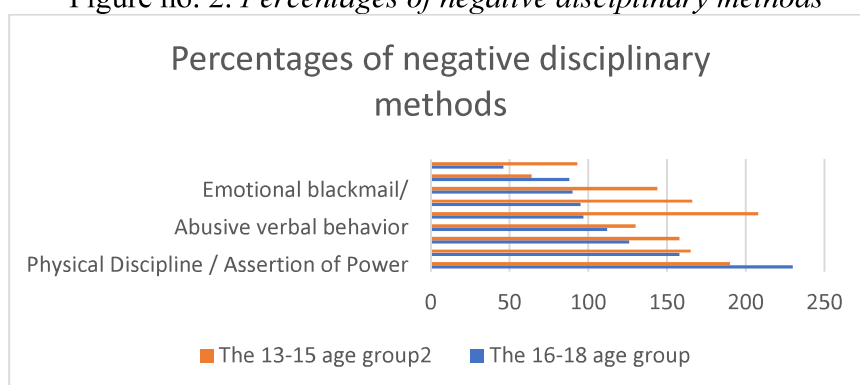
Group discussions reveal common and troubling disciplinary practices. Adolescents have vocally expressed their disapproval for some of them, differentiated according to the age segment: on top of the disciplinary practices negatively evaluated by adolescents, physical discipline is by far considered the worst one for 16–18-year-olds, followed by emotional deprivation and silence treatment, while for the 13-15 age group, the least accepted punishment is phone deprivation followed by emotional deprivation and the silence treatment.

56.2% of teenagers do not consider a slap as a disciplinary method, a form of abuse. A high percentage of them are respondents who belong in the rural environment, and 8.2% belong to single-parent families. Being part of a single-parent family can be, as mentioned above, an indicator for a traditional type of discipline (Solomon, Warin, Lewis, Langford, 2002; Juby, 2009) It is also possible that the overload of parental tasks and roles of the single parent

can lead to frustration and severe attitude towards the child, as shown in the specialized literature.

This perception may be due to the changes that have occurred in recent years regarding the democratization of the parent-child relationship and the change in mentality regarding the child's upbringing and education, instilled by the Charter of the Rights of the Child, whose principals have been instilled in schools. Mass media, school and school programs and with parents may have had an effect on this perception of corporal punishment.

Figure no. 2. *Percentages of negative disciplinary methods*



In an overwhelming percentage of respondents, they disapproved of the assertion of power and the withdrawal of love as DPP. This fact confirms the results of Patrick's study (2009) which finds that inductive discipline is perceived as favourable by adolescents; he claims that this parental practice is positively related to the sense of morality towards oneself. Indeed, the adolescent's sense of adequacy stimulated by the parent's correct approach to a mistake and by acceptance is emphasized both in the group discussions and in the answers to the questionnaires. Bannon (2011) emphasizes the effect of this technique in the internalization of standards by children and high moral reasoning.

8. Reflecting at the future

This study reveals that adolescents tend to critic DPP, they disagree with many of these practices that do not have the intended effect, but on the contrary, they produce indolence, self-doubt, frustration, suffering (Trickett, Kuczynski, 1986; Taylor, Moeller, Hamvas, Rice, 2013). A small number reported mild abusive practices, and others made comments related to this topic, but without admitting that they live this experience. The predictive family context for the use of harsher disciplinary practices could be single parenthood, the parents' professional overwork.

Respondents reported that if they admit their mistake, DPPs are less severe, a theory also confirmed in the study by Rodriguez and Sutherland (1999). Although the findings support the theory of DPP effectiveness through moral internalization and autonomy (Grusec & Kuczyuski 1997), more complex potential directions towards positive parenting are proposed.

In light of the results obtained and looking to the future, we can express our concern on the one hand and on the other hand the confidence that the young generation claims respect and appreciation by having a healthy vision of the parent-child relationship. The group discussions indicate that indeed, the term of disciplinary practices is associated with punishment, and punishment seems to mean conflictual attitude, deprivation, dispossession, and ultimately discomfort.

The group discussions show that the respondents classify ignorance as a weakness and lack of knowledge; they expect their parent's rules to also apply to themselves.

Conclusions

The results indicate the need to carry out information programs addressed to parents regarding positive parenting and inductive disciplinary practices. It is necessary to operationalize the terms of abuse, limits, positive discipline, psychological and emotional needs. Parents must get in touch with specialists who will inform them about the basic principles in educating a child; joint parent-child programs held constantly in the school or community. We believe that the children's voice can be used as proposed by Aubrey and Dahl (2005) in the development of policies for the family and the child.

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