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## DESIRES, PLEASURES, FEARS AND WORRIES OF THE CURRENT CHILDREN

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article describes selected results of the research on current children which was done in years 2016-2017. The research is focused on exploring the social space of current children - home, leisure time, games and their relation to selected social attributes - desires and pleasures, ambitions, fears and worries. Then we examine concepts of adults about children in these areas. The research sample consists of 96 children aged 5-7 years and 188 adults. The research method is a semi-structured micro-interview for children and questionnaire for adults. In this article the author presents interpretation of research results - the desires, the pleasures, the fears and the worries of the current children in comparison with the concepts of adults.*

**KEY WORDS:** *current 5-7 year old children, research of children, desires, pleasures, fears, worries, concepts of adults about children*

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## **Introduction**

It is important to recognize the dimensions of the social space of current children and not to think that it is identical as adult's concepts of the children's world. At this time, when many adults have misconceptions about current children compared to children in the past, when current children are labelled as overwhelmed by information and communication technologies, materialistic, not spending time in nature, impolite, etc. it is necessary to investigate the reality of the current children.

## **The research**

The research of current children was done in the years 2016-2017. The aim of the research was to examine the concepts and pre-concepts of 5-7-year-old children on selected concepts of social space - home, leisure time, games and toys, the relationship of the children to the given social attributes, their desires and pleasures, fears and worries. Children's ideas and preconceptions were compared with concepts of adults about statements of current children. We used the combined research strategy: qualitative research of children's answers, their analysis, coding and categorization, which has become a structure for quantitative research of adult's concepts about children pre-concepts. Qualitative methods have been used for the purpose of comparisons. Research methods were both flexible micro-interview with children and a questionnaire for adults. Research tools have been designed for the purpose of this research. The clarity of questions was verified on sample of respondents - children during the pre-survey. Based on children's responses and other possible responses, we have created response categories as options in the adult questionnaire. Items in the questionnaire were created analogously with questions given to children. We created responses based on the categories created by analyzing and encoding child's responses.

## **Methodology**

Research of the social space of current children took place in several phases: part Children, part: Adults on children, part: Comparison of both parts, using individual research methods.

**Part: Children**

The research sample:

The research sample consisted of 96 children (61 girls and 35 boys) in age 5-7 years, attending last year at kindergarten and the first year of primary school in Slovakia respectively. (see Table 1).

Tab. 1 Summary of respondents. Part: *Children*

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Age</b>
Children	96	61	35	5,5-6 (52) 6-7 (44)

The research method:

Research method was flexible semi-structured interview with children.

The research tool:

Research tool has been validated in the pre-research as research tool – *Interview to survey on children’s precepts about notions related to social space.*

Partial targets:

Find out what the desires and pleasures of today's children are.

Find out what the fears and worries of today's children are.

**Part: Adults about children**

The research sample:

The research sample consisted of 188 adults - 72 preschool teachers, 51 primary school teachers and 65 parents in Slovakia.

Tab. 2 Summary of respondents. Part: *Adults about children*

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Number</b>
Parents	65
Preschool teachers	72
Primary school teachers	51
Total	188

The research method:

Research method was a questionnaire to explore the knowledge and ideas of the preschool and primary school teachers and the parents of the current children.

The research tool:

Research tool was the questionnaire - Adult view at current children in electronic form and printed form for parents, preschool teachers and primary school teachers.

The research target:

To identify knowledge and concepts of preschool and primary school teachers and the parents of the current children.

Partial target:

To identify knowledge and concepts of preschool and primary school teachers and the parents of selected areas: about children's desires, pleasures, fears and worries.

Partial target:

To compare knowledge and concepts of preschool teachers with partial knowledge and concepts of primary school teachers about the current children.

Partial target:

To compare knowledge and concepts of teachers with the knowledge and concepts of parents about the current children.

**Part: *Comparison of both parts***

Partial target:

To compare knowledge and concepts of adults in part: Adults on children with research results about the current children from the part Children.

**Interpretation of partial research results**

From the research results we offer interpretation of the selected areas: children's desires, pleasures, fears, worries and visions and knowledge of adults about children.

**Desires and pleasures of current children**

The power of dreams, desires and fantasies can determine positive goals and aspirations of human beings. This power drives some activities and plans. Great imagination helps to develop creativity and inspiration. It creates a great personality. The desire for something can take the form of an activity, which purpose is to meet needs focused on oneself. There is also a desire - dreaming. This desire is bounded with balance between the truth and fantasy, which is quite specific and lively. These desires are also associated with terms like fantasies,

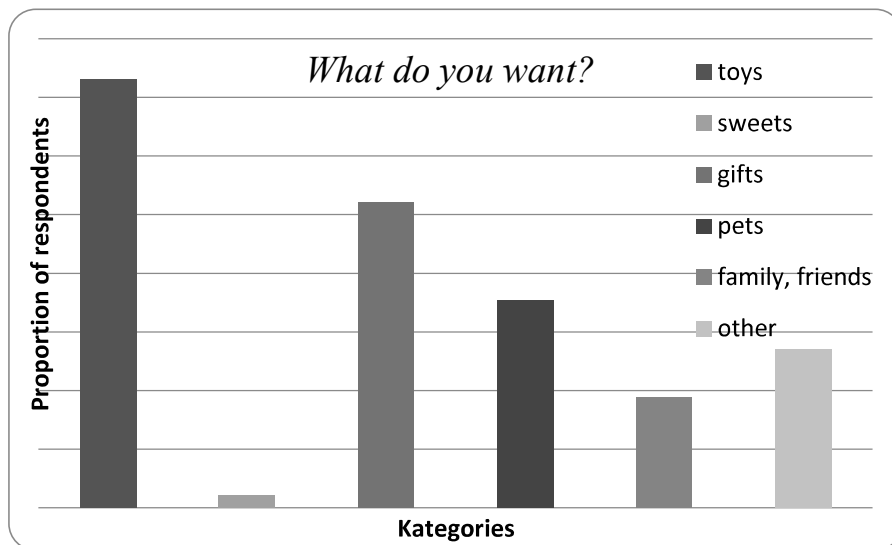
dreams, illusions and goals (Dymara, 2010, p. 20-24). Within this area, we have explored what are current children's desires and what current children are looking forward to. Based on categorized children's answers, we offered parents the categories as choices in the questionnaire. Then we compared whether adults know the desires and pleasures of current children.

### **Children's desires**

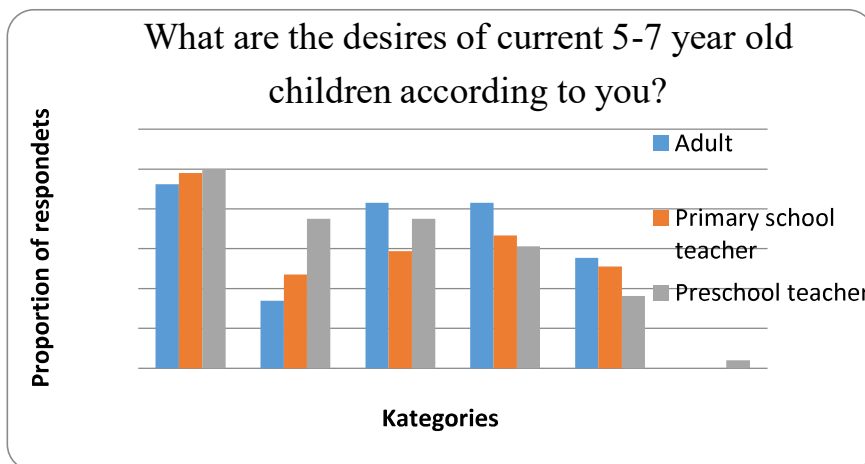
During the interview we first asked the children whether they know what a desire is. Many of the children knew what it is - they described it as something you want very much. This was especially understood by older children. To the children who did not understand the term "desire" we asked a question: *What do you want?*

Based on children's answers, we created 5 categories: toys / games, sweets, gifts, pets - as desires associated with social relationships. In 36% of the answers of 5-7 year olds, the desire for **toys** appeared and in 26% the desire for gifts in connection with the coming holiday appeared: *"There are a lot of things I want in toy shop". "To have a lot of Lego bricks."* *"I wanted this doll."* *"Toy cars."* *"I want Lego as Christmas gift."* *"For Christmas I would like one big Lego. But now I've got one Lego for my sixth birthday."* 7% of these toys were different types of media, most often children wanted a mobile phone. *"I'd like a cell phone."* *"To have a cell phone like my daddy."* *"I am looking forward for my birthday. Maybe I'll get a real phone."* The children's desire associated with pets is evident in 17% of children's testimonies: *"To have a living horse."* *"Dog."* *"I would like to have a (living) pet, but I'm living in the apartment block and my parents will not let me to have one."* *"My desire is to have dog."* *"My desire is to have puppy."* 9% of children were able to express higher desires, like peace and love connected with family or friends: *"I wish my mom and dad were living together again."* *"I wish that my mom, father and brother did not have so much work to do."* *"To be with my mother."* *"My desire is to have one more sister."* *"I want my friends Daliborko, Janko and Samko to be here already (who were sick on the day of the interview)."* *"My desire is to have a friend."* At the lowest rate - in 2% of the statements, children said their desires are sweets. In their other statements (4%), the respondents combined their desires with their own fears: *"I want no night to exist."* with dreams and fantasies: *"I want to meet Sidney Crosby (ice hockey player)."* *"I want to fly and to make magic with hands."* *"I'd like to have free time every single day."* *"That week would be opposite*

as it is today – to have five free days and only two days in school.” “To be in the ninth grade already.” “I wish there was no school.” “I wish we were champions in the hockey World Cup.” “I’d like to play on Playstation for the rest of my life.” and with real requirements “I’d like if our neighbourhoods would stop smoking in front of our house.” The category “other” was very diverse.



Graph 1. Representation of children's testimonies about their desires



Graph 2. Representation of adult's knowledge and ideas about children desires

We compared the desires of children with parents' thoughts about what children desires are. In the questionnaire, parents could select up to two options. The question was: *What are the desires of current 5-7 year old children according*

to you? Adult ideas about the desires of today's children are identified with children's confessions.

50% of preschool teachers, 49% of primary school teachers and 46% of parents assumed that children biggest desire will be new toys. Preschool teachers have chosen the following categories of children's desires: gifts (37%), sweets (37%), pets (30%) and desires connected with family and friends (18%). Parents who are in direct contact with their children, probably based on their own experience, have chosen the following categories of children's desires: toys (42%), gifts (41%), pets (41%), time spent with family and friends (27%) and sweets (17%). Preschool teachers (37%) overestimated the desire of 5-7 years old children for sweets, but correctly chosen children's desire for toys, then gifts (37%), less mentioned was time spent with family and friends (18%). Among responses option labelled as "other", the preschool teachers answered that "*children desire is the attention of their parents*".

#### **Conclusions on the desires of children**

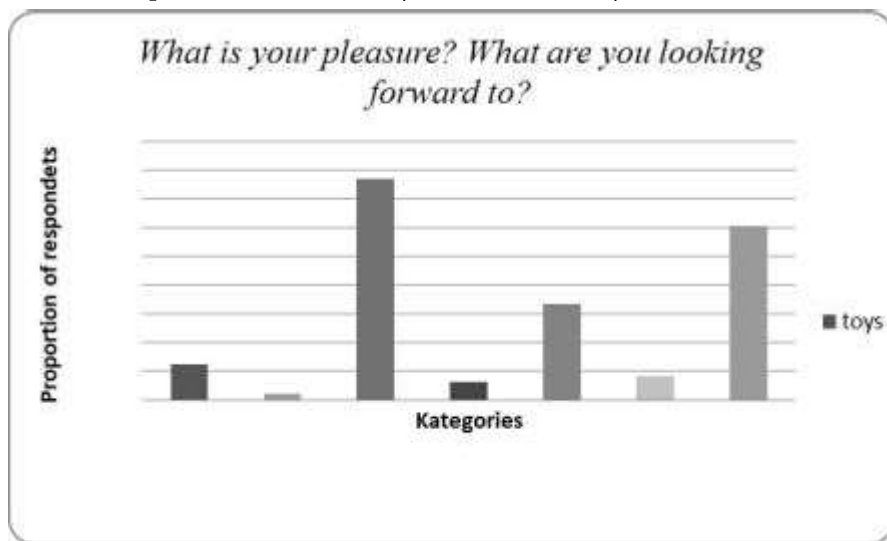
Concerning the desires of 5-7 year old children, the following points are about to be presented. Children's of this age biggest desires are new toys and gifts. The ideas of adults were the same as the answers of children.

Desires represent what the child does not have, since he or she is not old enough. Among the toys that children want and gifts that children are looking forward to getting are also different types of media - most often a cell phone. Children's desires also reflect the times the child is living in and this desires are an indicator of a phenomenon that is modern and which every child desires to have (Pokémon cards, etc.). Today's kids don't have a pet – especially children who live in blocks of flats. This "missing part of childhood" is perceived by children themselves and in their desires for toys and gifts. After that they wish for a pet.

#### **Children's pleasures**

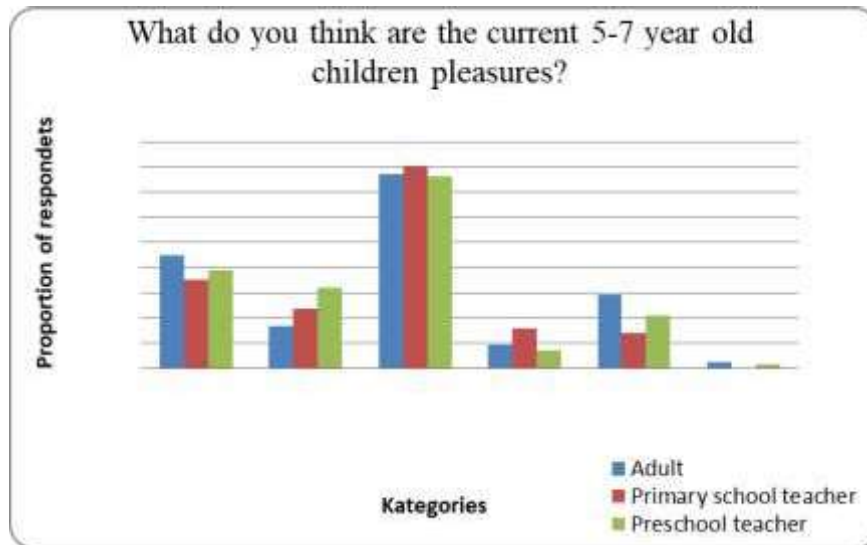
The pleasures of children are closely related to the desires. Semantics of questions: *What is your desire?* and *What are you looking forward to?* was aimed on delicate semantic sensitivity of children to distinguish the difference between these two questions. This was confirmed in our research, when we found out the difference in the composition of children's answers where the children distinguished: they desired for toys and gifts, in connection with the coming holiday they are looking forward to, as is obvious from 38% of the answers: "*I'm looking forward to the winter when there is a lot of snow and Christmas presents*"

(looking forward for snow and gifts). "I'm looking forward to the Christmas." "I am leased when we have lot of Christmas presents." "I'm looking forward to the gifts" "I look forward to my birthday." "I'm looking forward to my birthday party because I celebrated my name-day on Monday. "My desire is to get toy doll for my birthday." 17% of children are looking forward to spend time with family and friends: "I'm looking forward to seeing my friends and my grandpa tonight. "I'm looking forward to being at home with my mommy." 30% of children like spending time going on trips with family: "I'm looking forward to going to Hungary for a holiday." "I'm looking forward to swimming in the pool. "I'm looking forward to swimming in the summer." "I'm looking forward to the holidays." Social and family experiences together make up 47% of children's answers. Children mentioned toys prominently in connection with their desires, as pleasures - the toys were mentioned in 6% of children's responses. Pets were mentioned by 3%, school (in preschool children) by 4% and sweets by 1% of children.



Graph 3. Representation of children's testimonies about their pleasures





Graph 4. Representation of adult's knowledge and ideas about children pleasures

The adults' views on the current children pleasures were identified by questions in the questionnaire with a maximum of two choices: *What do you think are the current 5-7 year old children pleasures?* In the context of what are children looking forward to, the ideas of adults identify with children's confessions. Primary school teachers (80%), parents (77%), and preschool teachers (76%) assumed that children are mostly looking forward to the upcoming holidays. Subsequently, 45% of parents, 38% of preschool teachers and 35% of primary school teachers chose toys. Preschool teachers (32%) and primary school teachers (23%) selected sweets and after that they chosen spending time with family and friends as children pleasures. Parents selected time spending with family and friends (29%) and after that - sweets (17%). Pets were assumed by 7% of preschool teachers, 9% of parents and 15% of primary school teachers. Only 1% of preschool teachers added that *“current children aren't looking forward for anything”* and 1% of parents said that children in pre-school age stated that they are looking forward to going to school.

#### **Conclusions on the pleasures of children**

In regard to the children's desires, we have explored the pleasures of the children. Children of this age are looking forward to the upcoming holidays, whether it is Christmas, birthday or name day and after that trips with family and friends. Children preferred trips, experiences and time spent with family over toys and sweets. The ideas of adults about children desires were

the same as the responses of children. However, in other categories teachers underestimated children. Teachers assumed that children biggest desire will be sweets and not time spending with their parents and friends.

The child is greatly affected by its surroundings - parents, family, teachers, who keeps reminding him which holidays are coming, or that child can be looking forward to own birthday or name day.

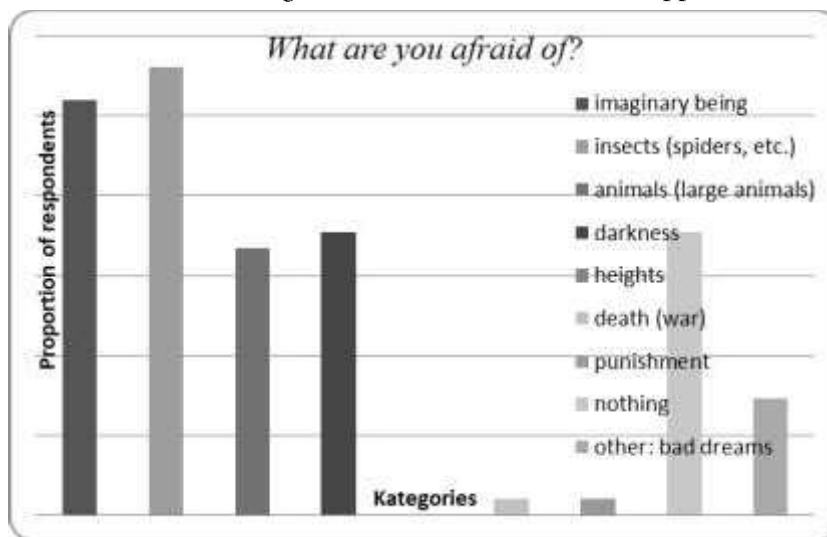
### **Fears and worries of current children**

The social space as the space the child seizes, brings with it both positive and negative aspects. The child is looking forward to many things, has a lot of desires, but is also worried of certain situations, or is afraid of something real or irrational. For adults, it is very important to pay attention to this aspect of children's perception of the world. For today's pedagogy, it is also an impulse to face new challenges.

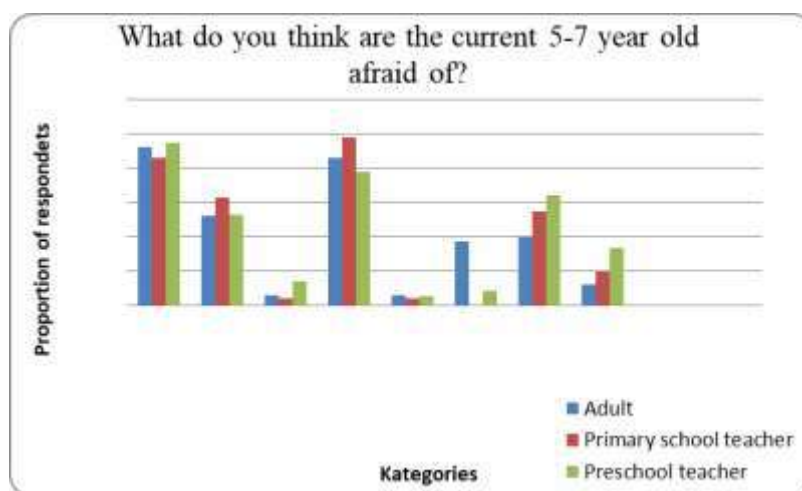
#### **Children's fears**

Although the diagnosis of such sensitive topics may be problematic for the teacher in the context of normal school practice, in a flexible interview which follows the previous questions, this issue naturally became part of this interview. From 5-7 year old children's answers to the question: *What are you afraid of?* the most frequent answer was fear of insects (spiders, etc.), which was mentioned in 28% of children's testimonies: *"I am most afraid of spiders."* *"I'm afraid of bees."* 26% of children mentioned the fear of an imaginary being (spooks, ghosts, zombies): *"Ghost."* *"I'm afraid of zombies."* *"I'm afraid of spooks."* *"That somebody scares me."* *"Skeleton and ghosts."* *"I am also afraid of such a black dwarf in the story of "Seven ravens" (fairy tale)."* Other fear mentioned in the testimonies by 17% of the children was fear of darkness: *"I'm afraid of the darkness"* *"Um, the darkness. I'm a bit afraid of the darkness."* and fear of animals, respectively large animals: *"I'm afraid of, uh, bear."* *"I'm afraid of, for example, dogs (big dogs)."* 17% - especially older children, who are already aware that imaginary beings do not exist, have replied that they are not afraid of anything: *"Nothing"* *"Because I know it's Ferko (dressed as spook)."* As it was about some children's associations about fear, the question: *What are you afraid of?*, the children automatically responded with the above-mentioned answers. 7% of children mentioned fear of bad dreams. Option - fear of death (war) and punishment was

mentioned only by 1% of children and fear of heights was not mentioned at all. Probably because they didn't think about it as one of the fears. Children were unable to think abstractly and to perceive higher forms of fear. The war or death was understood as something that children didn't want to happen.



Graph 5. Representation of children's testimonies about their fears



Graph 6. Representation of adult's knowledge and ideas about children fears

To the question in the questionnaire with a choice of maximum two options: What do you think are the current 5-7 year old afraid of? adults have chosen the following options. Less than half of parents and preschool teachers chose the fear of an imaginary being for the most common fear of 5-7 year olds. 40% of parents and preschool teachers selected fear of the darkness. 50%

of primary school teachers believe that the greatest fear of current children is the fear of the darkness and 40% of them tend to think that biggest fear of 5-7 year old children is fear of imaginary being. Primary school teachers (31%) and parents (26%) expected on the third place children's fear of insects, preschool teachers (32%) chose fear of punishment. The possibility that children are not afraid of anything was chosen by 17% of preschool teachers, 10% of primary school teachers and 6% of parents. Fear of heights was represented by just over 2% in all respondents, fear of animals ranged from 1% to 7%.

### **Conclusions on the fears of children**

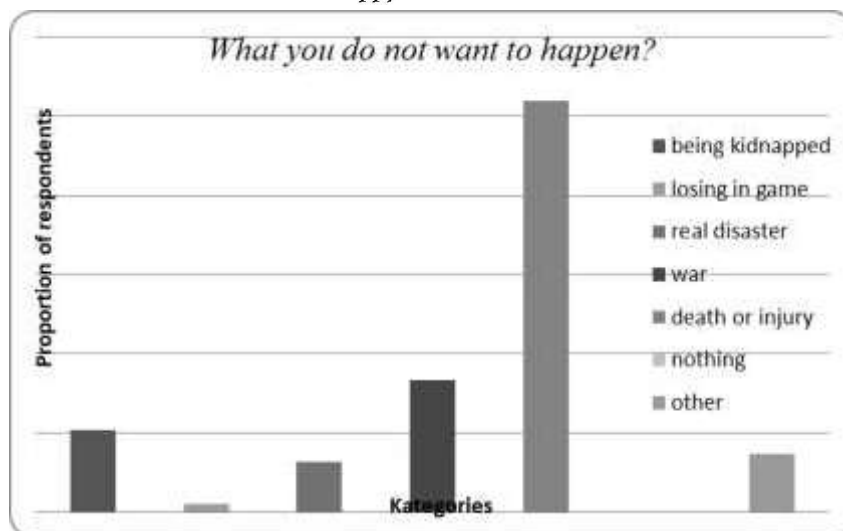
Children aged 5-7 years are most afraid of insects, then they are afraid of imaginary beings, even if they no longer believe that they exist, darkness and animals. Adult concepts of the most common children's fear only partially agree with children's responses. Adults assume that the biggest fears of children are imaginary beings, darkness and punishment. Adults do not expect that children are afraid of animals. The children almost did not talk about punishment as something they are afraid of, though adults, both parents and teachers expected that children are afraid of it.

In connection with fear, the children did not mention fear of war or death, because they perceived them more like concerns or worries. This was reflected in the examination of children's worries. It is important for parents and teachers to understand children worries – so they can help children to overcome them.

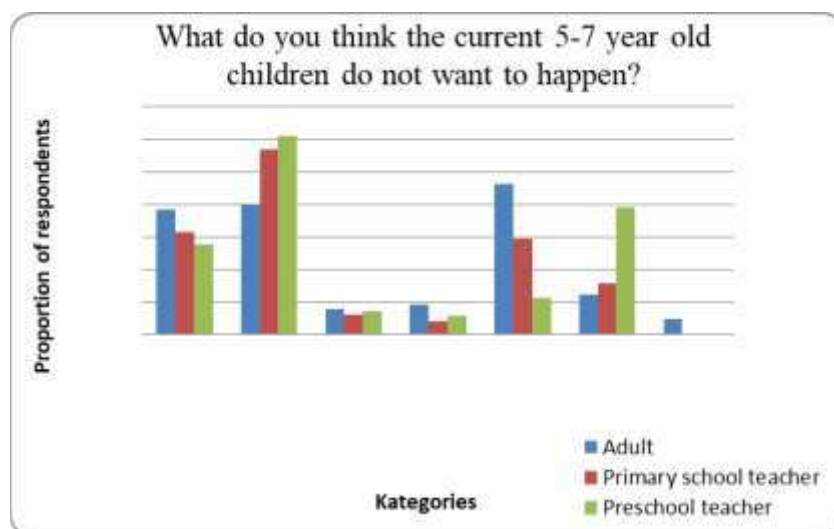
### **Children's worries**

Children understand the term "fear" a little different than terms "worry" or "concern". We chose a question that it more understandable to children - so we asked, "*What you do not want to happen?*" Fears and worries go hand in hand. What children did not mention as fear, in 52% of the statements, they expressed themselves in answer to the question: "What you didn't want to happen? as their worry of themselves and their close relatives within the category of fear of death or injury: "*I do not want my cousin to die.*" "*I do not want my mum and my dad to die.*" "*I don't want something bad happen to my little sister.*" "*I do not want my family to be sick.*" In this question, 16% of children were worried about wars: "*I do not want a war in Slovakia.*" 10%, mostly younger children, were worried about their own person – they were worried about being kidnapped: "*I do not want them to kidnap me.*" "*That some monster will take me to the hell.*" "*I do not want to be lost.*" 6% of children were worried about a real disaster, fire, theft. They were

mostly children, who had similar experience that something like that could happen because they heard about it, or it happened in their family or to somebody around them: *“I do not want our house to be burned.” “I do not want our cottage to be robbed. Because they already robbed our cottage in the past.” “I don’t want our Earth to be destroyed.” “I do not want to fall into lava.”* 1% of children mentioned worry of losing in game or competition: *“I do not want anyone to beat me in the football game.”* 7% of children were worried about interpersonal relationships or conflicts: *“I’d like to have my friends again.” “I do not want anyone to shout at us. I would like to be happy.”*



Graph 7. Representation of children's testimonies about their worries



Graph 8. Representation of adult's knowledge and ideas about children worries

Question in the questionnaire for adults: *What do you think the current 5-7 year old children do not want to happen?* examining adults' ideas about children's worries, was a question with a choice of maximum two options for children. Parents' responses about children were closer than teachers'. 46% of parents identified the death of a close relative of children as the child's greatest worry, 40% losing in game or competition, 38% voted for the child's worry of being kidnapped, 9% chosen war as one of children worries, 7% of the real disaster, and 5% of parents are aware of children's worry about family relationships as a other option. Teachers of both categories believe that children would be more worried of losing in the game than losing close relatives. Preschool teachers were expecting the following child worries: 60% of them voted for children worry about losing the game or competition, 38% thought that children are not afraid of anything, 27% voted for children worry about their own person, 11% voted for children worry of death (their own or theirs close relative), 7% voted for children worry of real disaster and only 5% voted for worries of war conflict. Primary school teachers (56%) voted for worry of losing in the game or competition, 31% for worries about their own person – like being kidnapped, 15% voted for not afraid of anything, 5% of real disaster and 4% of war.

### **Conclusions on the children worries**

What children mostly do not want to happen is the death of a close relative, usually mentioned very specifically by the child which has a near experience or threat in the vicinity. Interestingly, the children can better express themselves when they answer the question: *What you don't want to happen? / What are your worries?* and not the question: *What are you afraid of?* Five to seven year old children can perceive worries about life situations such as death or war. Children of this age are worried about themselves and their close family, parents, siblings and friends – children do not want something bad happen to them. Parent's ideas about children worries were closer to the ones of children. Teachers have underestimated the potential worries of children. Teachers thought that children biggest worry is losing the game or competition.

It can be concluded from children's answers, that 5 to 7 years olds are able to think of abstract matters such as war or death in connection with their worries, or concerns. Certainly, children of this age cannot imagine what it is like if they did not have this sensitive family experience. However, they register the issue because they hear about it from adults' conversations. So children often imitate

adults. Parents have identified the biggest worries of children as concern about the death of a close relative.

We have picked out selected research findings from current children's research. We found out that parent's ideas were often different than children's ideas. We placed the emphasis on recognizing the children's perception of the social space and their emotional experiences of these phenomena, including the desires, pleasures, fears and worries of children. Whether they are parents, preschool and primary school teachers, everyone should work on better knowledge of children and their survival in the current world.

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