

Parental Behaviour and Attitudes as The Source of Adolescents' Perfectionism

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine relationships between adolescents' perfectionism and their parents' parenting. The research method included the Parental Behaviour and Attitudes Questionnaire – ADOR (Matějček, Řičan, 1983), Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale – MPS (Frost et al., 1990) and Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory – PCI (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, Gray, 1998). The research sample consisted of 122 secondary school students aged 16 to 19 (average age 17.37 years), including 44 boys and 78 girls. The main findings of empirical analysis were that there are differences in the relationship between the father's and mother's influence on the development of some perfectionism dimensions in their children. The dimensions Concern over Mistakes and Doubts over Action showed a negative significant relationship with the father's Positive Interest ($r = -0.25^{**}$). The relationship was not confirmed in mothers. Concern over Mistakes and Doubts over Action showed a weak significant relationship with Hostility in the father (0.21^*) as well as mother (0.25^{**}), and also a moderate relationship with the father's as well as mother's Inconsistency ($r = 0.25^{**}$, $r = 0.33^{**}$). The dimension Organization showed no relationship with the father's parenting. In the mother's parenting, a moderate relationship appeared between Organization and Positive Interest (0.35^{**}).

Keywords: *perfectionism, adolescents, parental behaviour and attitudes*

Introduction

Perfectionism as a psychological construct has been considerably studied abroad over the last decade as a phenomenon significantly influencing many areas of human life. Although perfectionism is not a dominant topic of research in our conditions, such a tendency or personality trait is valued in the social life and especially in the work area, in particular if bringing benefits in the form of higher performance or productivity of work. However, many authors note that perfectionism has more maladaptive functions than adaptive ones. Maladaptive perfectionism is often connected with anxiety, depression, obsessive thoughts, but also with eating disorders and often with impaired interpersonal relations. In order to understand this multidimensional personality variable it is necessary to examine its sources. Several foreign research studies point to the fact that it is family that participates in the emergence of perfectionism the most (Flett, Hewitt a Singer, 1995; Frost, Marten, 1990; Flett, Hewitt, 2002; Soenens, Elliot et al. 2005; Besharat, Azizi and Poursharifib, 2011, etc.). In our conditions, the relationship between attitudes of adolescents towards themselves and the perceived parental parenting style has been dealt with by Ďuricová, Hašková (2016). For the above reasons, we decided to study family as the source of perfectionism emergence in adolescents in our cultural conditions.

According to R.O. Frost et al. (1990), perfectionism is defined as a tendency to set excessively high personal standards for oneself. According to G.L. Flett and P.I. Hewitt (2002, p. 5), perfectionism may be characterized as the “striving for flawlessness” and “extreme perfectionists are people who want to be perfect in all aspects of their lives”. Another view on perfectionism is that it is striving very hard to achieve goals and standards. The striving is accompanied by sharp self-criticism when the goals are not achieved. The reason for such striving can be reliance of self-esteem on obtained results (Egan, Shafran, Wade, 2012).

Perfectionism was originally considered to be a one-dimensional construct based on factors of cognitive perfectionism, either on irrational beliefs (Ellis) or dysfunctional attitudes (in: Flett, Hewitt, 2002). Currently, perfectionism is considered to be rather a multidimensional construct. Authors mostly agree that the main feature of perfectionism is setting personal standards for oneself.

Researchers differ in their approach or criteria by which they assess the multidimensionality of perfectionism (Sherry et al., 2009). R.O. Frost et al. (1990) (whose conception of perfectionism was used in our research), a respected author in the field of perfectionism, created a 6-dimensional method for determining perfectionism (The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale), based on four self-oriented

dimensions (**Concern over Mistakes, Personal Standards, Doubts over Actions, Organization**) and two dimensions reflecting the perception of parental requirements on children (**Parental Expectations, Parental Criticism**). **Concern over Mistakes** reflects negative reactions to mistakes, a tendency to interpret mistakes as equivalent to failure. **Personal Standards** mean setting very high standards for oneself and importance of achieving such standards for self-evaluation. **Parental Expectations** are a tendency to believe that parents expect their children to achieve very high goals. **Parental Criticism** is a tendency to perceive that parents are (or were) too critical to children. **Doubts over Actions** is the extent of one's doubts about one's ability to complete tasks. **Organization** means over-emphasizing order and organization.

Perfectionism plays an important role in working life, in the educational process – it considerably influences pupils' motivation, personal standards, affectivity, cognitive processes and, last but not least, pupils' own performance (Flett, Blankstein, Hewitt, 2009). What is significant is also the impact of perfectionism on an individual's social life, it affects an individual's action in social interactions in various small social groups.

Most of the previous research findings indicate that perfectionism is probably a learned personality variable, and that a person's closest environment and life experience have a great influence on its formation. Many perfectionists report unreasonable expectations of parents for their children's performance or critical, punishing parents as the cause of the development of their perfectionism. Parents who are too critical while also perfectionistic develop such a predisposition to a great extent also in their children. They teach their children to be perfectionists mostly in two ways. Firstly, by the way they build social relationships before them, and secondly by their attitude towards life, thus too high expectations whether for themselves or their children (Frost, Marten, 1990). A more complex model of the impact of the family environment on the development of perfectionism was postulated by G.L. Flett and P.L. Hewitt (2002), distinguishing four models of the family influence:

1. **Social Expectations Models** – when children perceive high parental expectations for their performance.
2. **Social Learning Models** – rely on the assumption that children imitate their perfectionistic parents. The imitation is spontaneous. Children observe their parents in various activities and adopt the presented behavioural patterns.
3. **Social Reaction Model** – is based on the premise that children become perfectionists when growing up in a stringent environment sometimes having

even extreme forms such as physical and psychological abuse, upbringing without love, exposure to shame and a chaotic family environment. In such children, perfectionism is a result of coping strategies. Their thinking is adjusted to the idea: "I am perfect; no-one will hurt me".

4. **Anxious Rearing Model** – parents are concerned about not being perfect and they are concerned about their children in the same way, using the over-protecting parenting style in the effort to prevent imperfection. **Over-protective parenting** (over-guidance) is a type of indulgent parenting. It is a type of extremely pedocentric parenting, included in inappropriate types. Over-protective parenting is typical of excessive child care. The child is allowed everything. Parents strive to give their child the most possible stimuli for his/her development from his/her birth. In the effort to protect their child they create an artificial (greenhouse) environment for him/her. They remove obstacles in the child's life and solve his/her problems for him/her. That is the reason why over-protected children lack ordinary social experience of how to deal with conflicts. A research study (in: Kiel, Maack, 2012) of elementary school children found that anxious mothers with high neuroticism had a tendency toward over-protective parenting and their children displayed more shyness and internalizing behaviour than other children.

Based on the theoretical analysis of the issue, our research goal was defined to determine relationships between adolescents' perfectionism and their parents' parenting.

Research Sample

The research sample was obtained by targeted and convenience sampling and comprised 122 secondary school students aged 16 to 19 (average age 17.37), including 44 boys and 78 girls. The research was carried out at the Secondary Vocational School in Banská Bystrica and the Pedagogical and Social Academy in Turčianske Teplice. The sampling of adolescent youth was based on the assumption that the adolescents still lived with their families and were able to assess their parents' behaviour in relation to themselves.

Methods

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS)

The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990) consists of 35 items, responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The MPS consists of six subscales, including:

Concern over Mistakes – CM. This dimension is conceptualized as negative reactions to one's own mistakes and a tendency to perceive such mistakes as total failure.

Personal Standards – PS is a dimension conceptualized as a tendency to set high goals for oneself and evaluate oneself on the basis of their achievement. The dimension *Parental Expectations – PE* is conceptualized as a tendency to believe that parents over-criticize their children. The dimension *Doubts about Actions – DA* is conceptualized as a tendency to feel that the set goals cannot be achieved. The dimension *Organization – O* is conceptualized as an emphasis on order and structure in organizing one's own things.

In our research, the method recommended by Khawaja and Armstrong (2005) was used, where better reliability is achieved when the CM and DA, PE and PC items are combined. Organization and Personal Standards remain independent. In our research, reliability of the MPS and internal consistency of its individual items showed acceptable values of Cronbach's alpha. CMDA (12 items): $\alpha=0.77$; PS (7 items): $\alpha=0.74$; PEPC (9 items): $\alpha=0.76$; O (6 items): $\alpha=0.80$.

PCI – Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory (Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, Gray)

The authors of the Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory are Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, Gray (1998) and it consists of 25 items aimed to determine the frequency of perfectionistic cognitions, increased striving and social comparison in non-clinical population. The PCI is a one-dimensional inventory of perfectionistic cognitions. Items are scored on a 5-point scale, from completely disagree (0 points) to completely agree (4 points). The scale is internally consistent, confirmed by our research, as well, $\alpha = 0.92$. According to the authors, the validity of the PCI is comparable with the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale.

ADOR – Parental Behaviour and Attitudes Questionnaire

The standardized questionnaire of parental behaviour and attitudes for adolescents, ADOR (Matějček and Říčan, 1983), allows for obtaining information about how a child perceives parental attitudes towards parenting and parenting related behaviour towards him/herself. The method is derived from Schaefer's CRPBI

(Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory) of 1965. Using correlation analyses, the Czech modifiers (Matějček and Říčan, 1983) arrived at the following factors determined in parenting styles:

1. Positive Interest vs. Hostility (POZ – HOS)
2. Directiveness vs. Autonomy (DIR – AUT)
3. Inconsistency (NED)

The questionnaire consists of 50 scaled items focused on the mother's influence and 50 identical items focused on the father's influence. Although usual methods of the questionnaire evaluation include combining opposing poles into one factor, in our research we decided to work with the raw score for each factor separately. Reliability of the ADOR scale and internal consistence of its individual items show acceptable values of Cronbach's alpha (from 0.6 to 0.8).

Research results

Based on the results of variables tested for normal distribution, non-parametric statistical procedures were used (Table 1).

Table 1. Testing variables for normal distribution

	Poz M	Dir M	Hos M	Aut M	Ned M	Poz F	Dir F	Hos F	Aut F	Ned F
K-S test	1.91	1.06	1.42	0.77	1.39	1.14	0.69	1.72	0.65	0.91
p-value	0.001	0.204	0.034	0.592	0.04w1	0.148	0.724	0.005	0.793	0.380
	CMDA	PEPC	ORG	PS	HS					
K-S test	0.90	0.88	1.02	0.83	0.72					
p-value	0.393	0.418	0.244	0.482	0.663					

Legend: Poz – Positive Interest, Dir – Directiveness, Hos – Hostility, Aut – Autonomy, Ned – Inconsistency, M – mother; Poz – Positive Interest, Dir – Directiveness, Hos – Hostility, Aut – Autonomy, Ned – Inconsistency, F – father; CMDA – score in the subscale Concern over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions, PEPC – score in the subscale Parental Expectations and Criticism,., ORG – score in the subscale Organization, PS – score in the subscale Personal Standards.

The results in Table 2 allow us to state that parenting of fathers and mothers in our sample does not differ fundamentally.

Table 2. Descriptive indicators of ADOR variables for the whole sample

	M_Poz	M_Dir	M_Hos	M_Aut	M_Ned	F_Poz	F_Dir	F_Hos	F_Aut	F_Ned
Mean	14.68	10.35	5.73	9.96	7.25	12.90	9.39	5.62	10.18	7.68
Median	16.00	11.00	5.00	10.00	7.00	13.00	10.00	4.00	10.00	7.00
Mode	17	11	2	10	8	12	10	1	12	6
Stand. deviation	4.82	3.56	4.02	4.13	4.24	5.19	4.48	4.84	4.77	4.90
Variance	23.29	12.70	16.23	17.13	17.98	27.01	20.12	23.49	22.79	24.03

Table 3. Descriptive indicators of MPS and PCI variables for the whole sample

	CMDA	PEPC	ORG	PS	HS
Mean	32.35	22.52	18.62	18.98	64.37
Median	31.50	22.00	19.00	18.50	66.00
Mode	30	18	21	18	50
Stand. deviation	8.09	6.25	5.24	5.13	14.98
Variance	65.58	39.16	27.52	26.34	224.46

Based on the results presented in Table 4, there is a weak, statistically significant relationship between Poz (Positive Interest) and CMDA (Concern over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions). There is an equally weak, statistically significant

Table 4. Correlation coefficients (Spearman's test) of perfectionism dimensions and parental behaviour and attitudes factors for fathers (N = 122)

	F_Poz		F_Dir		F_Hos		F_Aut		F_Ned	
	P	p-val	ρ	p-val	ρ	p-val	ρ	p-val	ρ	p-val
CMDA	-0.25**	0.005	0.095	0.297	0.21*	0.017	-0.09	0.323	0.25**	0.004
PEPC	-0.29**	0.001	0.28**	0.002	0.43**	0.000	-0.24**	0.006	-0.45**	0.000
ORG	0.08	0.347	-0.19*	0.030	-0.13	0.144	-0.007	0.935	-0.04	0.657
PS	0.04	0.618	-0.10	0.263	-0.07	0.417	0.007	0.935	0.034	0.706
HS	-0.04	0.600	-0.01	0.863	0.13	0.127	-0.04	0.653	0.08	0.364

Legend: CMDA – score in the subscale Concern over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions, PEPC – score in the subscale Parental Expectations and Parental Criticism, ORG – score in the subscale Organization, PS – score in the subscale Personal Standards, Poz – Positive Interest, Dir – Directiveness, Hos – Hostility, Aut – Autonomy, Ned – Inconsistency

relationship between Dir (Directiveness) and PEPC (Parental Expectations and Parental Criticism). Another, moderate relationship appears between Hos (Hostility) and PEPC. Aut (Autonomy) and PEPC show a weak negative correlation. There is a weak, statistically significant relationship between the father's Inconsistency NED and CMDA (Concern over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions). The father's Inconsistency NED and PEPC (Parental Expectations and Parental Criticism) show a strong and negative relationship. However, the results allows for stating that the variability of the perfectionism dimensions can be explained by the variability of the above father parenting factors only in 6% (CMDA and Positivity, CMDA and Inconsistency) and no more than 20% (father's PEPC and Hostility).

Based on Table 5, there is a weak, statistically significant relationship between the mother's Poz (Positive Interest) and PS (Personal Standards). A moderate, statistically significant relationship appears between the mother's Positivity and ORG (Organization). There is a moderate, statistically significant relationship between the mother's Dir (Directiveness) and PEPC (Parental Expectations and Parental Criticism). A moderate relationship appears between Hos (Hostility) and PEPC. There is a moderate, statistically significant relationship between the mother's Inconsistency and CMDA (Concern over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions). The mother's Inconsistency NED and PEPC (Parental Expectations and Parental Criticism) show a moderate and negative relationship. However, the results allow for stating that the variability of the perfectionism dimensions can be explained by the variability of the mother's parenting factors only in 4% (mother's Positivity and Personal Standards) and no more than 20% (mother's PEPC and Hostility).

Table 5. Correlation coefficients (Spearman's test) of perfectionism dimensions and parental behaviour and attitudes factors for mothers (N = 122)

	M_Poz		M_Dir		M_Hos		M_Aut		M_Ned	
	P	p-val	ρ	p-val	ρ	p-val	ρ	p-val	ρ	p-val
CMDA	-0.12	0.167	-0.03	0.707	0.25**	0.004	0.06	0.497	0.33**	0.000
PEPC	-0.18*	0.046	0.32**	0.000	0.43**	0.000	-0.13	0.128	0.39**	0.000
ORG	0.35**	0.000	-0.16	0.066	-0.13	0.146	0.02	0.764	-0.08	0.340
PS	0.22*	0.011	-0.07	0.424	-0.08	0.356	0.06	0.456	0.11	0.220
HS	0.11	0.223	0.08	0.362	0.13	0.143	-0.01	0.883	0.19*	0.029

Legend: CMDA – score in the subscale Concern over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions, PEPC – score in the subscale Parental Expectations and Parental Criticism, ORG – score in the subscale Organization, PS – score in the subscale Personal Standards, Poz – Positive Interest, Dir – Directiveness, Hos – Hostility, Aut – Autonomy, Ned – Inconsistency

Discussion

The aim of our research was to determine correlations between adolescents' perfectionism and their parents' parenting. Our findings confirmed that some dimensions of perfectionism according to Frost's conception correlate with parenting styles, and it was also found that there are some differences in the mother's and father's parenting and its relationship to the perfectionism dimensions measured. The method itself includes the Parental Expectations and Parental Criticism dimension, which shows significant moderate relationships with all the factors of parental behaviour and attitudes in fathers and three dimensions (Directiveness, Hostility and Inconsistency) in mothers. The perfectionism dimensions Concern over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions showed a negative significant relationship with the father's Positivity. The findings suggest that a lack of the father's positive interest in his child influences to some extent his/her increased Concern over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions. Such a correlation was not confirmed in mothers. Concern over Mistakes and Doubts about Actions showed a weak significant relationship with Hostility in both fathers and mothers and also a moderate significant relationship with the father's and mother's Inconsistency. Our research findings point to the fact that hostile parents with an inconsistent parenting style increase Doubts about Actions in their children and also increase their Concern over Mistakes. The findings indicate possible validity of the social reaction model (Flett, Hewitt, 2002).

Our findings also confirm the findings by B. Soenens and A.J. Elliot et al. (2005), whose research study investigated whether parental perfectionism is a predictor of parental psychological control in girls. The study confirmed that parental perfectionism significantly predicted parental psychological control more in fathers than in mothers. In another study, involving a hundred undergraduates, G.L. Flett, P.L. Hewitt and A. Singer (1995) examined the association between dimensions of perfectionism and parenting styles. Their results showed that parental authority styles may contribute to the development of perfectionism. Based on the research, G.L. Flett asserts that perfectionism is a feature parents can pass down to their children. Similarly, K.Y. Kawamura, R.O. Frost and M.G. Hartz (2002) confirm that an excessively authoritarian parenting style influences mainly the development of maladaptive perfectionism in children of such parents.

The Organization dimension showed no relationship with the father's parenting style. In the mother's parenting, a moderate relationship appeared between Organization and Positive Interest. Organization reflects an emphasis on order and structure in organizing one's own things, which is mostly a parenting domain of mothers, who require their children to maintain order and schedule. A difference

in parental styles in relation to the dimensions of perfectionism appeared also in the relationship between the mother's Positive Interest and Personal Standards, where a significant, weak relationship was confirmed between the variables. There was no such correlation in fathers at all. It follows from our research that the mother's Positive Interest in her child influences his/her setting of Personal Standards. It is possible that our finding points to the social expectations model, thus the mother's interest in her child acts upon the child as a motive to set higher standards for him/herself, since the child can perceive parental expectations regarding his/her performance.

Our research examined also the extent of perfectionistic cognitions presenting the cognitive aspect of perfectionism. However, this did not appear as relevant in relation to the variables of parents' parenting attitudes and behaviour (except Inconsistency, but there was only a weak significant relationship). This finding may lead to the assumption that parental parenting influences more substantially the emotional and conative aspects of perfectionism, while not affecting the cognitive aspect so much. This assumption should be further verified.

Our research study focused on perceived parenting from the perspective of adolescents. We have no information whether parents of perfectionistic children are perfectionists themselves. Some research studies, such as, e.g., the research by M.A. Besharad, K. Azzizi and H. Poursharifib (2011), confirm that the existence of perfectionism in parents has a significant influence on the parenting style used by them.

Conclusion

Perfectionism, mainly its maladaptive form, has a serious impact on an individual's life, whether at school, work or in private. Perfectionism of youth need not always manifest itself precisely in school performance. Maladaptive perfectionism may manifest itself in adolescents also in other areas, such as, e.g., excessive focus on looks, presentation on social networks, etc. A frequent and significant source of perfectionism includes mainly family, especially perfectionistic parents as social learning models, but also their parenting style. Our research pointed also to differences in connections between the mother's and father's influence in the development of perfectionism in children. Hostile and inconsistent parenting turns out to be harmful. On the other hand, parents' positive interest is rather connected with adaptive aspects of perfectionism. However, our research findings cannot be generalized, they are limited by the size and sampling.

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