

## PERCEIVED PARENTING STYLE AND PERFECTIONISM IN EARLY AND MIDDLE ADULTHOOD

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### Abstract

The family lays the foundations of the personality and shapes the children from a biological to a social being, and accordingly, the children form their personality. The aim of this study was to test the association of perceived parenting styles with perfectionism in individuals in early and middle adulthood, as well as the association between individual perceived parenting styles and perfectionism subscales and differences between them. The study was conducted on 100 respondents, and a positive relationship was determined between the perceived authoritarian and permissive parenting style and perfectionism, as well as a negative relationship between the authoritative parenting style and perfectionism.

**Keywords:** parenting style, perfectionism, early and middle adulthood

### Introduction

Starting from childhood, the family influences the development of the children's personality by creating an environment in which certain expectations and goals are set for their development and life<sup>[1]</sup>. The family lays the foundations of the personality and shapes the children from a biological to a social being, and accordingly, the children form their personality. One of the most famous classifications of parenting styles is Baumrind's, which lists three different parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive<sup>[2,3]</sup>. Parents with an authoritarian parenting style aim to shape, control and evaluate children's behavior, as well as their beliefs and attitudes, in accordance with a certain standard of behavior, which is usually motivated by the parents' religious commitment and beliefs, or by some higher, "totalitarian" authority<sup>[2,4]</sup>. Parents with an authoritative parenting style try to guide their children towards developing an independent, rational attitude. This style is also known as a democratic parenting style because parents often encourage children to behave freely and to express their opinion, and in case of setting some restrictions, they share with the children the reasons behind that restriction and discuss with them, taking into account their objections before making a final decision<sup>[2,4]</sup>. Parents with a permissive parenting style accept their children as they are, provide information and help them realize their urges, desires and actions, and do not punish mistakes, avoid putting themselves in a position of control and do not encourage them to be led by external standards<sup>[2,4]</sup>.

According to the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud<sup>[5]</sup>, childhood is particularly important for the psychological development of a person. During the first six years, the child faces a very turbulent psychosexual development. Freud distinguished five stages in psychosexual development: oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, latent stage and genital stage. The anal phase occurs at the age of 18 months and lasts until the third year. This is the period when the

child explores his independence, accepting his own power, learning and expressing unpleasant feelings, such as aggression and anger<sup>[6,7]</sup>. Parents' demands are conflicting for children at this age, as are their wishes and physical capabilities, and in order to face this conflict, children behave in one of the two possible ways: a) oppose the demands of the parents, or b) refuse to go to the toilet. A child who likes to resist to the parents' demands gets satisfaction from "malicious" toileting, before or after being placed on the toilet. If the parents are too permissive and the child is successful in his intentions, then he develops an anal-expulsive personality, which is characterized by disorder, carelessness, disorganization and is prone to emotional outbursts. In contrast, the child may refuse to comply with the parents' demands and gain satisfaction by accumulating feces in the colon. If this tactic proves to be successful, the child will develop an anal-retentive personality, which is characterized by stinginess and stubbornness, has a compulsive need for order and neatness, and can be considered a perfectionist<sup>[8]</sup>. This stage often leads to conflicts between the child's and the parents' will, and the traumas associated with this activity can contribute to phallus fixation or to the development of an anal personality<sup>[7]</sup>. Freud<sup>[9]</sup> believes that experiences during this period can leave lasting consequences on persons' development, influencing their attitudes towards control, order and social expectations. The influence of the anal stage is of particular interest on the development of perfectionism - Freud believed that children who do not successfully resolve conflicts during the anal stage tend to develop a tendency towards perfectionism later in life.

One of the main themes in theorizing about the development of perfectionism is that perfectionism is the result of a strict style of parenting. Authoritative parenting, characterized by a large number of demands and expectations, but also parenteral responsiveness is associated with positive outcomes in children <sup>[2,10-16]</sup>.

### **Material and methods**

*Aim of the study* - Testing the association of perceived parenting styles with perfectionism in persons in early and middle adulthood, as well as the association between individual perceived parenting styles and the subscales of perfectionism and the differences between them.

Respondents - 100 respondents, of which 53 female (53%), and 47 male (43%), with completed secondary education.

#### *Measuring instruments*

The Perceived Parenting Style Scale (Perceived Parenting Style Scale, 2013) is a self-evaluation test; it consists of 30 questions that measure the perception of individuals about the behavior of their parents, that is, it determines their parenting style in relation to three dimensions, such as authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles. The test was created by Divya and Manikandan<sup>[17]</sup>. Cronbach-Alpha coefficient for each style reveals that the authoritative style has a coefficient of  $\alpha=0.79$ , for the authoritarian style  $\alpha=0.81$  and for the permissive style  $\alpha=0.86$ . The assessment is made with a five-point Likert scale, with 1 - "I do not agree at all", and 5 - "I completely agree".

Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS, 1998) is a self-evaluation test; it consists of 35 questions and despite overall perfectionism, it also measures four subscales: worry about mistakes and uncertainty in actions; excessive concern for parents' expectations; excessively high personal standards; concern for accuracy, order and organization. The validity of the scale has further been established through convergence with other clinically relevant problems, such as anxiety in students<sup>[18]</sup>, insomnia<sup>[19]</sup>, social phobia <sup>[20]</sup>, obsessive-compulsive symptoms<sup>[21]</sup>

and anorexia nervosa [22]. The assessment is made with a five-point Likert scale, with 1 - “I do not agree at all”, and 5 - “I completely agree”.

## Results

**Table 1.** Perceived parenting styles

Parenting style	M	SD
Authoritative	37.96	5.86
Authoritarian	26.48	8.49
Permissive	21.20	7.35

**Table 2.** Perfectionism

	M	SD
Perfectionism	85.82	21.75
Worry about mistakes and uncertainty in actions	37.93	12.47
Excessive concern for parents' expectations	22.65	9.55
Excessively high personal standards	25.23	5.27
Concern for accuracy, order and organization	24.38	5.09

**Table 3.** Correlation between parenting style and perfectionism

Parenting style	Perfectionism
Authoritative	-0.482**
Authoritarian	0.607**
Permissive	0.532**

The analyses of the results obtained in this study showed a statistically significant, positive correlation between the perceived authoritarian parenting style and overall perfectionism ( $r=0.607$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), as well as between the perceived permissive parenting style and overall perfectionism, ( $r=0.532$ ;  $p<0.01$ ). There was a statistically significant, negative correlation between the perceived authoritative parenting style and overall perfectionism ( $r=-0.482$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

**Table 4.** Correlation between parenting style and individual scales of perfectionism

Parenting style	Excessive concern for parental expectations	Excessively high personal standards	Concern for mistakes and uncertainty in procedures	Concern for precision, order and organization
Authoritative	-0.445**	-0.146	-0.439**	0.274**
Authoritarian	0.738**	0.201*	0.409**	-0.271**
Permissive	0.546**	0.263**	0.399**	-0.213*

A negative statistically significant association between the authoritative parenting style and the individual scales of perfectionism, with the exception of the excessively high personal standards subscale, and a positive statistically significant association between the authoritarian and permissive parenting style and all the individual scales of perfectionism were observed.

## Discussion

According to the findings of this study, there was a statistically significant, positive association between perceived authoritarian parenting style and overall perfectionism. Namely, many people in early adulthood perceived their parents' parenting style as authoritarian, they ranked it higher on the perfectionism scale. Contrary to this, among persons in early adulthood who perceived their parents' style as authoritative, a negative

association with perfectionism was observed, that is, many respondents perceived their parents' parenting style as authoritative, and they ranked it lower on the perfectionism scale. Such findings are in accordance with the findings of other studies which, among other things, showed that there was a statistically significant connection between authoritarian parenting and socially-prescribed perfectionism, that is, that higher levels of authoritarian parenting can be the reason for developing perfectionism [16,23,24].

The results showed the strongest, statistically significant, positive association between perceived authoritarian parenting style and overconcern with parental expectations, meaning that as more early adulthood individuals perceived their parents' parenting style as authoritarian, the higher they ranked it on the scale of overconcern with parental expectations. This means that exposure to parental perfectionism, as well as authoritarian parenting style, lead to the perception of strict expectations, self-esteem tied to success and fear of disappointing others, prescribing too strict order, precision and organization, which overall affects the development of socially prescribed perfectionism. These results are consistent with relevant research [25,26].

### Conclusion

From the results obtained in this study, it can be concluded that it is important to raise social awareness about parenting styles and how they affect personality development, especially when it comes to individuals in early adulthood. The influence of the authoritarian parenting should be especially observed and parents should gradually be directed towards developing ways of behavior and upbringing that would strive for the authoritative style of parenting. It would also help if people educated themselves more about perfectionism and its effects in everyday life. Although this can be considered a global problem, it has to be especially discussed in collectivist societies. In the case of our country, which in the last few decades has been shifting from a collectivist to an individualist society, the awareness of the connection between authoritarian styles of parenting and perfectionism should be at a higher level in order to reduce the damage that can be caused to a person with perfectionist characteristics, and to develop a society with healthy work habits and clearly set goals.

*Conflict of interest statement.* None declared.

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