



# New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences



Volume 4, Issue 1 (2017) 08-13

ISSN 2421-8030

[www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

Selected Papers of 9th World Conference on Educational Sciences (WCES-2017) 01-04 February 2017 Hotel Aston La Scala Convention Center, Nice, France

## Rights of pre-school children in Lithuania

**Judita Morkveniene<sup>a</sup>\***, Department of Child Research, Faculty of Education, Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, LT-08106 Vilnius, Lithuania.

**Leva Keruliene<sup>b</sup>**, Department of Child Research, Faculty of Education, Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, LT-08106 Vilnius, Lithuania.

**Aldona Mazolevskiene<sup>c</sup>**, Department of Child Research, Faculty of Education, Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, LT-08106 Vilnius, Lithuania.

### Suggested Citation:

Morkveiene, J., Keruliene, L. & Mazolevskiene, A. (2017). Rights of pre-school children in Lithuania. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 4(1), pp 08-13. Available from: [www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Jesus Garcia Laborda, University of Alcala, Spain.

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### Abstract

Currently, the problem of protection of pre-school children's rights in Lithuania has become of utmost importance, a big number of parents are not even aware of children's rights or hardly realise the necessity to consider and respect them. The purpose of this study was to reveal parents' opinion about the rights of pre-school children. The methods used in the study were analysis of literature; parents' opinion survey, interview and SPSS. The research revealed that parents only partially respect and protect children's rights, respect for children's rights to biggest extent depends on parents education, gender, nationality and place of living. To optimise collaboration of family, pre-school education and local governmental institutions, non-governmental organisations 'Save the Children' and UNICEF Lithuania on issues related to children's rights.

Keywords: Pre-school children; family; rights; Lithuania.

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\* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Judita Morkveniene**, Department of Child Research, Faculty of Education, Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, LT-08106 Vilnius, Lithuania.  
E-mail address: [vaikyste@leu.lt](mailto:vaikyste@leu.lt) / Tel.: (85) 279 01 57

## 1. Introduction

The family is the first 'community' of a child where s/he learns most. According to Bajoriunas (2004), the child adopts the first rudiments of humanness only in the family. It teaches children to love a human being as a value making attempts not to violate individual's sense of values. A family is a place, where happiness springs, matures and flourishes but all people have to discover this freedom themselves. Psychologist A. Maslow proved that a child satisfies his or her main needs in the family to be able to pursue higher ones later (Myers, 2000). It is only in the family where a child is able to successfully grow up and develop; therefore, the implemented Government's policy should facilitate development of a child in the economically and socially stable environment of the family (Jones & Walker, 2011). This is the environment, where parents respect and protect children's rights. It should be pointed out that parents are hardly ready to understand that children have their rights, which have to be considered (Vaiko teisių konvencija, 2001). While communicating with children, parents frequently violate their rights (Archard, 2004). The problem of Child's Rights protection is of utmost importance to contemporary researchers in pedagogy, psychology and law. Serious attempts are made to ensure child's rights assurance in the family. The children's rights, peculiarities of their respect and protection in children-parent communication have been extensively analysed all over the world (Alderson, 2008; Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2013). This problem has not been broadly investigated in Lithuania so far (Rights of the Child in Lithuania, 2012).

The protection of child's rights in Lithuania is ensured by the state and its institutions, local self-government bodies, non-governmental organisations, whereof activities are related to protection of child's rights ("Lietuvos Respublikos vaiko teisių", 1996). There are two more active non-governmental organisations, which carry out activities in the sphere of child's rights protection: the **public organization 'Save the Children Lithuania'** and Lithuanian National UNICEF Committee. They work intensively disseminating information on children's rights and their violations to the society ("Rights of the Child in Lithuania", 2012). The Law on Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child was adopted 14 March 1996 and it provides for the main rights, liberties, duties of children and their assurance taking into account the specific position of a child in the family and society. It emphasises the necessity to guarantee child's existential, developmental, protection and participation rights, both in families and in institutions of children's education (Sakalauskas, 2000).

## 2. The research design

The research in children's rights was carried out in a number of nurseries-kindergartens in Vilnius city and Vilnius district and aimed to identify if parents respect and ensure children rights and what competences and personality factors determine this.

The purpose of the research was to reveal parents' opinion about the rights of pre-school children. The objectives of the research were to identify parents' opinion about child's rights and to identify if such factors as parents' age, educational background, gender, nationality, place of residence (town/rural area) and the number of children in the family influence parents' respect for and protection of children's rights.

The methods of the research were analysis of pedagogical, psychological and legal literature; parents' opinion survey, interview; analysis of research results was carried out employing SPSS (SPSS 8.0 and Excel).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was referred to while preparing the methodology for the research. The criteria for manifestations of existential, developmental, protection and participation rights were singled out. On the basis of these criteria, the questionnaire form for parents was prepared.

The sample of the research included 593 parents, whereof children attend pre-school education institutions in Vilnius city and Vilnius district. The respondents were requested to fill in the anonymous questionnaire form of 'Research on Child's Rights'. The parents had to underline the most appropriate answers (the answers were evaluated employing a three-point system: 3 points – respect for children's rights, 2 points – partial respect, 1 point –lack of respect) and to indicate what rights (in

their opinion) children possess (parents' knowledge was evaluated employing a three-point system: 3 points – they are aware of the rights, 2 points – they are partially aware of them and 1 point – they are unaware of child's rights). The characteristic features of the respondents in Vilnius city and Vilnius district are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Distribution of the respondents**

		No.	%
Location	City	488	82%
	Village	105	18%
Age	Under 30 yo	236	40%
	31-40 yo	318	54%
	41-50 yo	35	6%
	Over 51 yo	4	1%
Educational background	Secondary	77	13%
	Special secondary	120	20%
	Advanced vocational education and training	167	28%
	Higher education	229	39%
Number of children in the family	1 child	263	44%
	2 children	287	48%
	3 children	41	7%
	4 and more	2	0%
Gender	Mother	450	76%
	Father	143	24%
Nationality	Lithuanian	427	72%
	Russian	47	8%
	Polish	106	18%
	Other	13	2%

The majority of respondents were surveyed in the city of Vilnius. The biggest proportion the sample consisted of parents under 40 years old. The bigger proportion of parents was holders of the diploma of advanced vocational education and training or even higher education. The indicator of the number of children in the family reflected the demographic situation in Lithuania: most families have one or two children. The biggest number of questionnaire forms was filled out by mothers, which confirms the long-established attitude that children's upbringing is concern of women in Lithuania.

### **3. Results and discussion**

#### **3.1. Evaluation of parents' opinion about respect for children's rights and their protection**

The aim of the research was made to clarify the parents' opinion about children's rights and to identify if they are aware of the general aspects of child's rights and if they respect child's existential, developmental, protection and participation rights (see: Table 2.).

**Table 2. Evaluation of parents' opinion about respect and protection of children's rights**

	General awareness of child's rights		Existential rights		Developmental rights		Protection rights		Participation rights	
Unawareness/disregard (no./%)	11	2%	52	9%	3	1%	43	7%	13	2%
Partial awareness/respect (no./%)	228	38%	343	58%	210	35%	413	70%	328	55%
Awareness/respect (no./%)	354	60%	198	33%	380	64%	137	23%	252	42%
Average point	2.39		2.20		2.46		2.12		2.29	
Standard deviation	0.35		0.46		0.29		0.35		0.35	

The acquired results allow us to conclude that the biggest proportion of parents (60%) are aware of the general aspects of child's rights, 38% of them are partially aware of them and only 2% of the respondents are unaware of child's rights (see: Table 2). The received high average point (2.39) and the average standard deviation reveal that parents have a general understanding of children's rights and know the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are very well aware of what a child needs to feel happy (love for a child) and what the most important things for a child are there in the pre-school education institution.

As it can be seen from the data presented in Table 2, children's developmental rights are mostly respected by parents. The biggest proportion of parents (64%) demonstrates respect for developmental rights, one third of parents (35%) partially respect and only 1% of the parents in the research disregard these rights. The same trend was confirmed by the high average point (2.46) and the minor standard deviation (0.29). It can be concluded that parents provide children with everything they need for their holistic development. Parents support child's right to rest and leisure, involvement in cultural social activities. Children also get the most important things (e.g., a spot for toys, a pet), which ensure successful development of a child. The remaining rights (existential, protection, participation) are only partially considered.

Children's participation rights are mostly respected out of them: 55% of the parents partially respect children's participation rights, 42% of them respect and only 2% of them disrespect such rights (see: Table 2). The same is confirmed by the higher average point 2.29 (compared to average points of existential and protection rights). A considerable standard deviation shows (0.35) that parents expressed more varied attitudes. Parents support child's right to freely express own opinion, to contradict or to inform parents about what is important to his/her life.

Another attempt was made to evaluate parents' respects for children's existential rights. As it can be seen from Table 2, the bigger proportion of parents (58%) partially respect child's existential right, one third of parents (33%) respect their rights and 9% of the parents do not respect them at all. The average point (2.20) shows that the parents partially respect children's existential rights. The marked standard deviation (0.46) points to a big variety of parents' opinions. They partially support the right of children to live and have access to everything what is necessary for their existence. It should be pointed out that parents are perfectly aware of importance of walks in the open air but pay considerable less attention to benefit of afternoon map.

The data presented in Table 2 reveal that children's protection right are least respected (compare to respect for participation and existential rights). Only one fifth of the parents respect these rights (23%), 70% of the parents show a partial respect for these rights, whereas 7% of the parents disregard these rights. This is also confirmed by the lowest average point (2.12). The parents only partially support child's right to be protected from violence, abuse and various forms of violent behaviour.

They are quite aware of how to behave with a child but fail to perceive what kind of child's behaviour should be really punished. It can be assumed that parents lack pedagogical and psychological knowledge, otherwise they would know what children can be punished for.

Having overviewed the parents' opinion about children's rights and assessed parents' respect for them, it can be concluded that parents are best aware of general aspects of children's rights and they show most respect for developmental rights of children; children's existential, protection and participation rights are partially respected. Parents respect participation rights most, whereas children's protection rights are respected least.

### 3.2. Factors that influence parents' attitude towards children's rights

During the research attempts were made to identify if respect for and protection of children's rights depend on such factors as parents' place of residence, age, educational background, number of children in the family, nationality and gender. The statistical significance of the results was established applying correlation coefficient.

The analysis of the data on factors, which have the most marked influence on parents' attitude towards children's rights, revealed that respect for and protection of child's rights mostly correlate with parents' education, gender, nationality and place of residence. This is reflected in Figure 1.

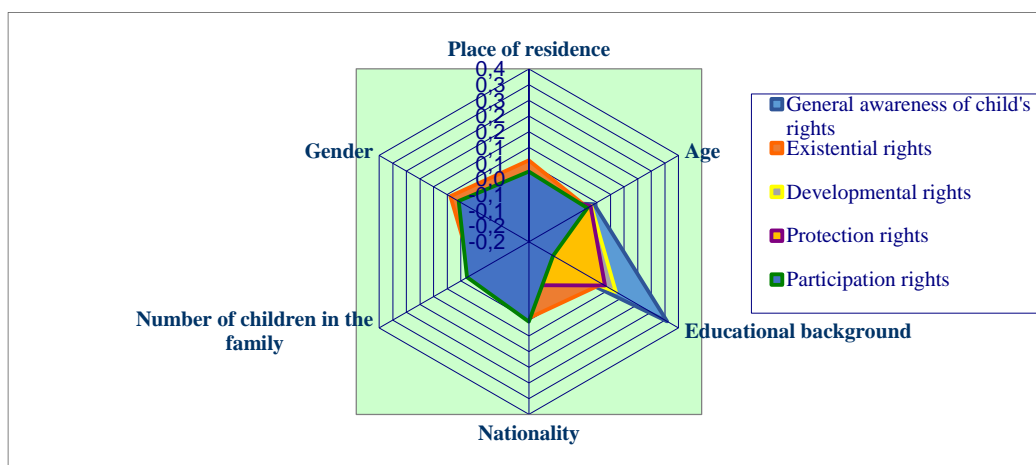


Figure 1. Correlation between parents' opinion and the factors, which have effect on them

The correlation between parents' attitude and factors that influence it reveals that the strongest impact is observed between parents' educational background and general awareness of child's rights ( $r=0.308$  and  $p<0.01$ ), respect for developmental ( $r=0.120$  and  $p<0.01$ ) and participation rights ( $r=0.111$  and  $p<0.01$ ): *the higher the educational background of parents, the more respect for children's rights are observed*; parents' gender mainly influences general awareness of children's rights ( $r=-0.168$  and  $p<0.01$ ), respect for existential ( $r=0.089$  and  $p<0.05$ ) and protection ( $r=-0.140$  and  $p<0.01$ ) rights: *mothers tend to respect children's rights more than fathers*; general awareness of children's rights ( $r=-0.159$  and  $p<0.01$ ) and respect for developmental rights ( $r=-0.148$  and  $p<0.01$ ) correlates most with parents' nationality: *parents of Russian nationality tend to show strongest respect for children's rights*; respect for children's existential rights showed correlation with parents' residence place ( $r=0.059$  and  $p<0.05$ ): *children's rights are slightly stronger respected in cities compared to rural areas*; correlation was not observed between parents' age and the number of children in the family.

#### 4. Conclusions

The analysis of parents' opinion about children's rights and respect of these rights revealed that parents have not sufficiently perceived all the rights of children: parents perceive general issues about children's rights and respect children's developmental rights; children's existential rights, protection and participation rights are partially respected. Parents respect children's participation rights most, whereas children's protection rights are most neglected.

The study of the factors that have the most considerable influence on parents' opinion towards children's rights showed that the respect and protection of children's rights mostly depend on parents' educational background - the higher the parents' education, the more respect is observed; gender - mothers tend to respect children's rights more compared to fathers; nationality - parents of Russian origin respect children's rights more; place of residents - children's rights are more respected in towns than in rural areas.

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