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## Child's attitude towards adult

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### Abstract

The purpose of this was study to reveal positive and negative aspects of child's attitude towards adults. Analysis of literature sources, interview, collision situation and SPSS were used in the method of the study. The research showed that more than one third of the children had experienced offence from adults of one or another kind. The experienced offence reveals itself in a wide range of negative emotions in children's memories. The majority of children tend to rely on adult's authority in situations that are dangerous to life or health but the latter fail to ensure safe environment in all the cases, what would guarantee elimination of experience of harmful habits from child's life. An adult remains the most important person in child's life, who has to show positive examples of own behaviour and interpersonal relations.

Keywords: Contemporary child; attitude; behaviour; adults.

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## 1. Introduction

Psycho-pedagogical aspect of child's attitude to an adult. The role of 'the other'. To be socially adequate means to interact with other people. The interaction will be harmonious, if we know what our social partners think or feel and if we are able forecast their behaviour. However, children's knowledge of other people, i.e., their characterization, implications about feelings, thoughts and actions, become sufficiently precise only at certain age. The question is raised: what information is used by children for constructing their understanding of other people? The work by Ricaud-Droisy and Zoache-Gaudron (2003) about child's social development points to the role of 'the other'. It is argued that the perception of 'the other' is of importance to formation of the child's 'self-image'. The 'self-image', in other words, develops through 'others', when a child places himself or herself in contraposition to 'others'. A child has to accept and to firstly interpret behaviour of 'the other' and simultaneously 'discovering' own behaviour anew. In the process of communication, individuals as if 'put' themselves in the place of others and consider themselves as totally different personalities. Therefore, a child evaluates own actions considering a generalized image of another individual (Juodaityte, 2003; McCartney and Philips, 2006). The personality of an adult is an important parameter of 'the other': a self-confident adult, who approaches others with confidence and is sure of own ability to take control over his/her life is likely to radiate warmth, to demonstrate acceptance and empathy and, thus, will create preconditions for child's positive attitude towards an adult person. And on the contrary, a depressive personality may create conflict, hostile environment, which is saturated with indifference and has a negative influence of child's attitude towards an adult. If surrounded by emotionally mature, well-adapted, responsive to child's needs, attentive and sensitive people, a child will probably adopt a positive attitude towards an adult (Boyd, 2011; Nutbrown, 2010). Another important parameter in cultivation of child's attitude towards an adult includes child's experiences about 'others', which are acquired under prevailing style of behaviour of parents and other adults, who take care of children (Berns, 2009). Authoritarian style of parents' behaviour results in an adverse attitude towards an adult: a child exercises few rights but has to assume heavy responsibility. In such cases, a child faces numerous problems, his/her emotional status is unpleasant and tensed, a child experiences a sense of disappointment followed by aggression. In fact, authoritative style of parents' behaviour creates conditions for development of a friendly attitude but it is a long-lasting process (Alexander and Potter, 2005). The importance of 'others' – adults in the process of child's socialisation is unquestioned; however, family members do not necessarily become 'relevant others'. 'A relevant other' is a personality, whose evaluation the child aims at and whose recommendations s/he appreciates most. Such personalities have a considerable influence on formation of child's 'self-image'. They may be teachers, play partners as well as popular personalities (Juodaityte, 2003; Krogh, 2011). It should be pointed out that under influence of various information technologies, advertising and television, the contemporary society accepts a big number of personalities, whose image frequently fails to meet the standard of behaviour of a pro-social individual. It is acknowledged that in the family adults have the biggest influence on child's attitude towards surrounding people. However, it is not always possible to forecast, who will acquire the status of 'relevant other'. It is obvious that the relations declared between a child and 'others' target at mutual harmony. However, the reality of child's education reveals a big number of facts that optimal conditions for formation of child's positive attitude towards an adult are not established. Therefore, a considerable attention to this sphere should be allotted not only in this research but also in theory and practice of future.

## 2. The research design

While observing a child, a problem is noticed that the conception of a child is most frequently presented from adult's position and may be characterized as single-sided and subjective. Research-based data on child's attitude towards adults' world are hardly available. The purpose of the research: to reveal positive and negative aspects of child's attitude towards adults. The methods of the research: analysis of theoretical literature sources, interview, collision situation, statistical methods, correlation analysis. The methodology of the research. 1000 questionnaire forms were distributed to

parents in Lithuania to find out their opinion about child’s abilities, growing and living conditions; attitude of 402 children towards adults was also researched. Data on each child in the research was submitted by 104 teachers.

### 3. Results and discussion

Analyzing cases of characterization of people, who are important to a child, the results of the research revealed that most frequently children refer to adults, who are close to them (Graph 1 reflects the characterization of mother’s picture, Graph 2 – that of a father and Graph 3 reflects the image of grandparents).

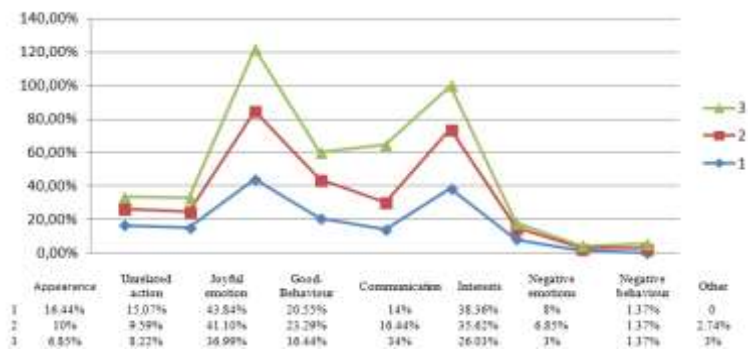


Figure 1. Characterization of people, who are important to a child

The acquired data reveal the following realia: joyful emotions more frequently attached to the mother (43.8 %), a child and a father are more frequently related through common interests (38.36 %), communication with grandparents is more distinctive (34.00 %) compared to contacts with mother (14 %). However, the results that reflect manifestations of negative behaviour towards children are far from joyful: according to the children, the mother, the father and grandparents (1.37 % to each) use violence, harm or disturb children. Negative emotions evoked by adults were also identified: actions of mother (8.00 %), father (6.89 %) and grandparents (3.00 %) may provoke child’s anger, fear and sorrow. It is obvious that adults do not make deliberate efforts to harm a child or to turn him or her into a timid, shy and tactless personality but it can be stated that a child faces difficulties penetrating into manifestations of behaviour of adults surrounding him/her. Making attempts to clarify pre-school children’s attitudes in the making towards surrounding people and the world, the significance of beauty, abilities and power as well as money was distinguished.

Table. 1. Future self-characteristics

Area	No. of children	%
Beauty, good appearance	153	38.06%
Abilities	153	38.06%
Power, money	96	23.88%

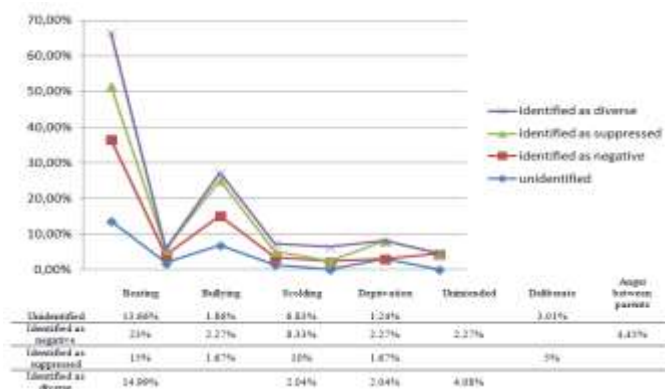
The data of the interviews show that imagining themselves in future, children equally evaluate the importance of striving for beauty and abilities to be acquired (38.06 % each). Children will invest effort in being good-looking, will dye their hair and will be stylish; therefore, they will work hard and a lot, will design cars, will cook and involve in other activities. Pursuit of money and power is also obvious (23.88 %). Possessing a lot of money, children will be able to drive a tank, to shoot and to buy whatever they want. Such results reveal child’s attitudes in the making rather than priorities, which prevail in the world of adults. Depending on child’s experience, these attitudes may develop into positive and negative ones. Communication is an opportunity to acquire knowledge and new

experiences as well as an occasion, which guarantees a positive attitude towards another person. While analyzing and evaluating children’s answers, cases of communication with adults were highlighted as well as experience, which is reflected in child’s relationship with an adult. Adults’ behaviour, which is favourable to a child and reveals child’s positive experience, is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Cases of child’s positive communication with adult**

Area	No. of children	%
Reading of fairy-tales	227	56.47%
Doing sports together	182	45.27%
Implementation of appropriate healthy nutrition skills	68	16.91%
Explanation of rules of computer game	59	14.68%
Explanation of harm of smoking	30	7.46%
Playing together outside	24	5.97%

The research data presented in Table 2 show that favourable behaviour of adults is most vividly manifested during reading of fairy tales: during the interview 56.47 % of the children pointed out that their mother, father, grandparents, a kindergarten teacher, a nurse or other adults read fairy tales to them. Highly significant correlation was observed between adult’s behaviour, which is favourable to a child, and an adult, who reads fairy-tales to a child most frequently ( $r = 0.35189$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This also confirms the statement that adults' favour to children is most frequently expressed through telling fairy-tales. Almost half of the people in the closest environment (45.27 %) go in for sport activities together with a child. Such situation reveals a positive attitude both towards a child and topical issues of health protection. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that only 16.91 % of adults make attempts to implant healthy nutrition skills in children. This means that a big number of adults buy unhealthy food and drinks to a child, when affected by advertisements (e.g., participate in lotteries while buying). Though only 14.68 % of the adults explain the rules of computer games, it is doubted if this case may be perceived as addressing of child’s needs. As it is pointed out in the analysed literature, adults should explain not only positive but also negative sides of life: e.g., harmful effect of computer games and smoking. An attempt was also made to identify the most frequently mentioned form of grievance experienced during interaction with adults by children without negative manifestations of behaviour and with behavioural problem (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2. Child’s behaviour with adults and nature of experienced grievance**

The research data revealed that children, who do not demonstrate any manifestations of bad behaviour according to teachers, less frequently point out that adults do wrong to them by beating

(13.66 %), scolding (6.83%) or depriving them of something (1.24 %). Children with observed manifestations of inappropriate behaviour (manipulation, ignoring, disrespect), more often stated that they experience physical offence (23.00 %), bullying (2.27 %) or deprivation of one or another thing (2.27 %) in the family. The respondents with prevailing submissive obedience compared to other children, more often mention a sense of grievance because of adults' scolding (10 %). 15.00 % of such respondents mentioned physical offence, whereas 5.00 % of the children think that they are offended deliberately. The children, whose communication with adults were characterized as diverse by teachers during the interview, experience grievance when being beaten (14.99 %), scolded (2.04 %) or when an adults takes away something from them (2.04 %). It is important to point out that positive behaviour is not characteristic of a child, who experiences beating, scolding or bullying as well as any other form of punishments from adults. These results confirm a theoretical assumption that children, who are persistently punished by adults, form an attitude towards an adult, which is based on adverse reactions. The research also aimed to identify what feelings a child is able to recognize and indicate after the experienced grievance.

**Table 3. Child's feeling after experiencing of grievance**

Child's feelings	No. of children	%
No comments	82	20.40%
Bad emotional state	19	4.73%
Sorrow	15	3.73%
Fear	7	1.74%
Anger, irritation	7	1.74%
No feelings	5	1.24%
Aggression	3	0.75%

The research results presented in Table 3 show that children, who were able to identify the feelings evoked after experience of grievance, pointed out a broad range of them. Bad emotional state was indicated by 4.73 % of the respondents and 3.73 % of the children, who were able to recognise this feeling, mentioned that they felt sorrow. The same numbers of children indicated fear and anger (1.74 %), whereas 1.24 % of the respondents emphasized the absence of any feelings after experience of grievance. The answers of 0.75 % of the children marked aggression in such situations. Statistically highly significant correlation was identified between feelings experienced by children and the identified causes of grievance ( $r = 0.24774$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This shows that child's negative emotions, which remain in his/her memory for long, are often linked to grievance experienced from interaction with an adult. This interview with children confirmed the statements analyzed in the literature sources that emotions play a crucial role in formation of child's attitude to an adult. Therefore, it can be concluded that when a child experiences fear, sense of inferiority, low self-esteem and seeks revenge too frequently, there is a risk of forming a negative attitude towards an adult. In a collision situation, when 'you suddenly feel sick and when there are no adults nearby, one of the friends offers you some medicine, which s/he most often receives from adults , whereas the other says that it is not appropriate to behave like this', children were asked: whom would you listen to? Why?

**Table 4. Child's behaviour in a dangerous situation**

No answer		Refusal to take medicine		Intake of medicine		Doubts	
No. of children	%	No. of children	%	No. of children	%	No. of children	%
9	2.24%	247	61.44%	134	33.33%	12	2.99%
Reliance on an adult							
Reliance only on an adult		Prohibitions		Other factors		No answer	
No. of children	%	No. of children	%	No. of children	%	No. of children	%
94	23.38%	47	11.69%	98	24.38%	15	3.73%

The research results revealed that 33.33 % of the children would behave in a risky way when facing collision situations, which are dangerous for child's health and life. Doubts how to behave in such situations were expressed by 2.99 % of children and 2.24 % of the respondents did not provide any answers. More than half of the children (61.44 %) would refuse to take medicine offered by friends. Further analysis of the research data showed that 23.38 % of children would not drink medicine because they trust only adults. Prohibition to drink medicine without permission of adults was mentioned by 11.69 % of children. About 24.38 % of the respondents would refuse to take in medicine offered by a friend because they think that they may get poisoned or die, because medicine is not tasty or s/he does not know what medicine s/he needs, etc. Statistically significant correlation was identified between child's choice not to drink medicine offered by a friend and their reference to taste of medicine and alcohol ( $r = 0.011929$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This allows to conclude that children tend not to assume risk because the taste may not be pleasant next to perception of the danger itself. 3.73 % of children were not able to explain own choice. The data of the last research disclosed that in situations that are dangerous for their life, children will make appropriate choice. However, reliance on adults is not strong enough to ensure absence of risk while making a choice.

#### 4. Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis of the child's attitude towards adults highlighted negative and positive tendencies. Positive aspects of children's attitude towards an adult were revealed: children provided a positive evaluation of adult's competences and authority. On the other hand, devaluation of values of the contemporary world was also identified: more than one third of children emphasised the authority of an adult as related to pursuit of domination, money and power. The research showed that more than one third of the children in the survey had experienced grievance from adults of one or another kind. Almost one fifth of the children mentioned physical offence. A number of particularly painful facts were identified: children were beaten with a stick; a mother is needed only to protect a child from his father's violence. The experienced grievance reveals itself in a wide range of negative emotions in children's memories such as fear, anger, sorrow, bad emotional state and aggression. The majority of children tend to rely on adult's authority in situations that are dangerous to life or health but the latter fail to ensure safe environment in all the cases, what would guarantee elimination of experience of harmful habits from child's life. Contemporary pedagogy should learn from a child; therefore, each adult working with children has to react to all the signals received from them. Despite processes of modernization, an adult remains the most important person in child's life, who has to show positive examples of own behaviour and interpersonal relations.

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