



PERCEIVED DIFFERENCES IN FAMILY FUNCTIONING OF CHILDREN WITH LOW VS. HIGH COPING-POTENTIAL

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BACKGROUND

- According to the Psychological Immune System Theory certain cognitive personality features (called as coping-potential dimensions, e.g. positive thinking, self-efficacy, emotional control, etc) make effective coping possible, and thus contribute to physical and psychological health (Oláh, 2002).
- Despite of their significant role we don't know much about the development of these dimensions in children.
- As family is the most proximal context of development in childhood, and family has been proposed as the most powerful context in which coping socialization occurs (Kliewer, Fearnow, Miller, 1996) family context presumably play a determinant role in formation of coping-potential dimensions, as well.
- Several theories try to describe aspects of family functioning and/or family relationships which are important for healthy development (e.g. Epstein, Baldwin, Bishop, 1983; Parker, Tupling, Brown, 1979; Rathunde, 1989). and so provide a good starting point to explore this topic.
- Aim of the study: to analyse the differences in family functioning of children with low vs. high coping-potential**

METHODS

- Sample:** 63-63 children with low vs. high mean score (from the lower vs. upper quartile) on the shortened version of the Psychological Immune System Inventory (PISI, Oláh, 2002) were randomly selected from a larger sample of school-aged children (N=437; age 11-15 years). Their mother (N= 55 and 56 in the low vs. high coping-potential group) also participated in the study.
- The study was carried out in 2004/2005.
- Method:** anonym, self administered questionnaires for the children and their mothers.
- Topics:** demographic data, coping-potential, family functioning, family atmosphere.
- Scales applied:** 1/ Shortened version of the *Psychological Immune System Inventory* (PISI; Oláh, 2002; Cronbach- α in this study: 0.89); 2/ *Flow Inventory* (Oláh, 2002; Cronbach- α for Flow at home:0.74; Anxiety at home: 0.67; Boredome at home: 0.77); 3/ *Family Assessment Device* (FAD; Epstein, et al. 1983; Cronbach- α for General functioning:0.81; Problem Solving:0.68; Communication:0.70 ; Roles:0.67; Affective Responsiveness:0.82; Behaviour Control:0.64; Affective Involvement:0.45); 4/ Shortened version of the *Parental Bonding Instrument* (PBI; Parker et al, 1979; Cronbach- α for Love and support – mother scale:0.73, for Love and support – father scale: 0.74). The mother and father scale were combined into Parental love scale (For children in two-parent families, we used the higher score for the scales regarding love of mother and love of father).

RESULTS

Bivariate comparisons of demographic characteristics and family functioning in the high vs. low coping-potential (CP) groups

- One significant difference was found in demographic data: in the high CP group a higher proportion of children live in intact families compared to children in the low CP group (Table 1).
- Children in the high CP group have a higher mean score on the *Flow at home*¹ scale, and lower mean score on the *Anxiety and Boredom at home*¹ scales, than children in the low CP group (Fig. 1).
- Mother of children in the high CP group reported higher mean scores on the following subscales of the FAD compared to mothers in the other group: *General functioning*², *Affective responsiveness*² and *Behaviour control*² (Fig. 2). We found no significant differences between the groups on the other subscales: *Problem solving*² (2.28 \pm 0.42 vs 2.37 \pm 0.35; t=-1.2, p>0.05), *Communication*² (2.37 \pm 0.36 vs 2.46 \pm 0.35; t=-1.38; p>0.05), *Roles* (1.84 \pm 0.41 vs 1.95 \pm 0.31; t=-1.62, p>0.05) and *Affective involvement*² (2.26 \pm 0.31 vs 2.30 \pm 0.27; t=-0.66, p>0.05)
- Children with high CP have higher mean score on the *Parental love*¹ scale (PBI) than children in the low CP group (11.43 \pm 1.24 vs 10.49 \pm 1.53; d=-3.77, p<0.001).

¹ Reported by the child ² Reported by the mother

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the two groups

| | High CP group | Low CP group | Total sample | Statistics |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Gender of child¹: | | | | |
| Boys | 44.4% | 41.3% | 42.9% | chi ² =0.13 |
| Girls | 55.6% | 58.7% | 57.1% | n.s. |
| Mean age of child¹: | 12.71 (SD=0.91) | 12.62 (SD=1.04) | 12.67 (SD=0.97) | t=-0.55 n.s. |
| Mean age of mother²: | 40.28 (SD=4.87) | 40.53 (SD=5.05) | 40.41 (SD=4.94) | t=0.26 n.s. |
| Education of mother²: | | | | |
| High school or lower | 42.3% | 53.6% | 48.1% | chi ² =1.37 |
| College or higher | 57.7% | 46.4% | 51.9% | n.s. |
| Perceived family wealth²: | | | | |
| Better than average | 41.5% | 36.4% | 38.9% | chi ² =0.30 |
| Average or worse | 58.5% | 63.6% | 61.1% | n.s. |
| Family structure¹: | | | | |
| Intact | 77.8% | 57.1% | 67.5% | chi ² =6.11 |
| Non-Intact | 22.2% | 42.9% | 32.5% | p<0.05 |

¹ Reported by the child ² Reported by the mother

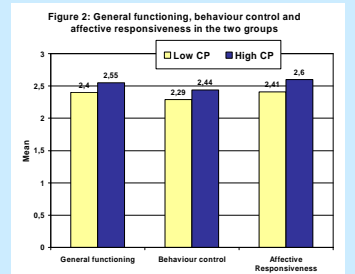
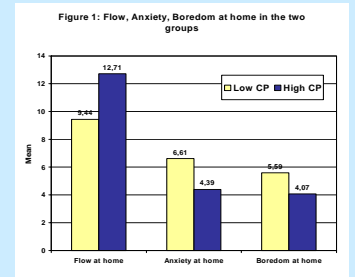


Table 2: Odds ratios of predictor variables for high coping-potential (univariate logistic regressions)

| Variables | OR | 95%CI |
|---|---------|-----------|
| Gender: boys (ref: girls) | 1.14 | 0.56-2.31 |
| Age (continuous) | 1.12 | 0.77-1.59 |
| Family structure: intact family (ref: non-intact family) | 2.63* | 1.21-5.70 |
| Behaviour control (scale) | 2.89* | 1.08-7.74 |
| Affective responsiveness (scale) | 2.25 | 0.99-5.10 |
| Parental love (scale) | 1.73*** | 1.25-2.40 |

* p<0.05; *** p<0.001

BINARY LOGISTIC REGRESSION

- Aim: to identify variables that predict high coping-potential
- Predictors: gender of child, age of child, family structure, Behaviour control, Affective responsiveness, Parental love.

RESULTS

- In univariate logistic regressions (Table 2) the factors associating with high coping-potential were: living in intact family, high behaviour control and high parental love.
- When these significant predictors were entered into a multivariate logistic regression analysis together, only *Parental love* remain a significant predictor (OR=1.77, 95%CI=1.23-2.55; for family structure: OR=2.01; 95%CI=0.81-4.97; for Behaviour control: OR=2.53, 95%CI=0.88-7.31, Modell Chi-Square=43.370, df=1, p<0.000, Cox & Snell R²=0.18). The odds that a child is in the high CP group are multiplied by 1.77 for each one score increase on the Parental love scale.

CONCLUSIONS

- Children with high coping potential perceive their family environment as more favourable: with more flow and fewer anxiety and boredom experiences, with higher parental love and care.
- The mothers of this group perceive the family as having better general functioning, more effective behaviour control, and better affective responsiveness.
- Results of the logistic regression analyses show that parental love is a significant predictor of high coping-potential.
- Family environment, especially the perceived love and care of the parents seems to play a significant role in the development of coping-potential dimensions, although the cross-sectional design limits drawing causal inferences. Further examination is needed for better understanding the underlying mechanism of this relationship.

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