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## **The attitudes of delinquents to their parents' behavior in the period of early childhood**

### **Abstract**

*The main objective of this research was to determine the factors and their structure that contributed to the emergence of juvenile delinquency. For this purpose delinquents gave their statements on behavior of their parents during early childhood.*

*A total of 115 juvenile delinquents chronologically aged 15 to 18 participated in the inquiry. Parental behavior was assessed on the basis of their children's statements. Juvenile delinquents assessed the behavior of their mothers and fathers through specially conceived questionnaires. Based on the results obtained by factor analysis and orthogonal rotation of factors (Varimax Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin normalization), we can state, infer, and generalize that the father's aggressiveness, emotional neglect by the mother and her inconsistent disciplinary style are the primary factors in the occurrence of juvenile delinquency.*

**Key words:** *juvenile delinquents, dimensions of parental behavior, aggression, adolescence, emotional neglect.*

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## **Introduction**

In addition to many factors that influence the formation of the child's personality, more recently in the social psychological literature the importance of parental behavior towards children is emphasized as a significant factor in the development of the child's personality. It is important to consider the behavior of parents towards children during early childhood and to determine causality with conduct disorder in adolescence. Belsky (1984) first pointed out that the impact of parental behavior on the child's development results from the process which involves multiple interfamilial and extra-familial determinants. Parental behavior itself is complex and there are no simple answers to the question how to deal with children of different ages in different situations. In previous research a correlation of separate dimensions of parental behavior with children's functioning has been confirmed. The author Pettit and colleagues (2001) in a longitudinal study examined the impact of parents' behavioral and psychological control on the occurrence of behavioral problems. They found that psychological control by the mother which is reflected in the austere way of disciplining a child may contribute to the development of externalizing problems (delinquent behavior) especially in girls at an early adolescence, and the development of anxiety, depression and delinquent behavior in later adolescence. The lack of behavioral control by parents was associated with externalized problems such as impulsivity, aggression, delinquency and the use of controlled substances. (Barber and colleagues 1999; Barber 1996). Patterson and colleagues (1992) found that the inconsistent discipline and inadequate control and supervision of the child are the best predictors of delinquency.

One of the first and still the most influential theories that tried to explain the connection between parental behaviors and psychosocial disorders in adolescents is Rohner's theory of parental acceptance and rejection (Parental Acceptance and Rejection Theory - PART). This theory seeks to predict and explain the causes and consequences of parental behavior related to the dimension of emotional warmth, on whose one end is the acceptance and on the other the rejection of the child (Rohner, 1980). According to this theory, parental rejection has strong negative consequences, particularly when observed by the individual, on the behavior and personality of children as well as on the functioning of an adult who says that he/she was a "rejected" child. Acceptance (love) and rejection (lack of love) are the main predictors of psychosocial development of children.

The theory of parental acceptance-rejection predicts that parental rejection has negative effects on the psychological adjustment and behavioral functioning (children's behavior). According to PART, parental acceptance-rejection makes a bipolar dimension of the emotional warmth of parenthood, with parental acceptance on the positive side of the continuum, and parental rejection on the negative side. One side of the continuum is marked by parental acceptance, which refers to warmth, affection, care, comfort, support, care, or just love that children can feel from their parents. The other side of the continuum is marked by parental rejection, which is the lack or avoidance of these feelings and behaviors and the presence of a

wide range of physically and psychologically harmful behaviors and affects. Parental affection can be expressed physically (by hugging, kissing, caressing) and verbally (by praising, complimenting, speaking nice words about the child). (Scheme 1). This behavior and care, support, and attention define the behavioral expressions of parental acceptance. Parental rejection manifests in two ways: aggressive behavior and neglect. Aggressive parents can express their hostility physically (by hitting the child, pushing, pinching, throwing things) and verbally (through sarcasm, profanity, by ridiculing, shouting at, humiliating and insulting the child). Indifferent parents are physically and mentally away from children. They tend to disregard the child's physical and emotional needs. Such parents tend to pay little attention to children and to spend a minimum of time with them. They often forget the promises they made to their children, and do not notice any other needs necessary for the development of their children.

Research in the United States confirms that the rejection may get involved in a number of psychiatric disorders and behavioral disorders including: neurosis, schizophrenia, psychosomatic illnesses, allergies, delinquency, school problems, stuttering, a distorted body image, and so on. Extensive intercultural research during 45 years shows that parental rejection can be manifested in four ways: 1. emotional coldness and insensibility; 2. animosity and aggressiveness; 3. indifference and negligence; 4. undefined rejection (Rohner, 1984). Individuals may subjectively experience parental rejection as undefined rejection. Undefined rejection refers to the feeling that their parents do not love or care about them, when there are not necessarily objective indicators that parents are cold and insensitive, rude and aggressive or indifferent.

Scheme 1. Parents' behavior towards children with regard to the dimension of emotional warmth (Rohner)

Acceptance		Rejection		
Love		Agression		Neglect
Physically	Verbally	Physically	Verbally	No contact
Kiss	Praise	Beat	Cursing	Disregarding the child's needs
Hug	Compliment	Slap	Profanity	Physical and mental absence
Cuddle Touch	Speaking nice words to the child and about the child	Pinching Scratching Kicking	Sarcasm humiliation	Indifference
Playing with the child	Song singing	Pushing	Speaking meaningless words about the child	Slight/ignoring
Looking in the child's eyes while talking	Story telling	Plucking/pulling	Ridicule	Avoidance

*The aim of the research* is to examine the latent and overt/manifesting structure of juvenile delinquents' attitudes to the behavior of their parents during their growing up. It is about identifying the latent structures and factors that combine overt parental behavior towards their children, who have been identified by the competent services as delinquents.

*The assumption* is that the physical and verbal abuse of minors by both parents contributes most to the occurrence of the externalized problems in early adolescence. Neglect and rejection of children, lack of love and positive emotions, inconsistency and unfulfilled promises made to children generate and correlate with delinquent behavior of adolescents.

## **Methods**

### *A sample of examinees*

The survey was conducted on a sample of 115 juvenile delinquents. All the examinees of the survey were adolescents aged 15 to 18. A total of 88 male and 27 female examinees participated in the inquiry. The sample consisted of juvenile delinquents who are registered with the Centre for Social Welfare of the Municipality of Podgorica, as follows: juvenile delinquents who were sentenced to the educational/corrective measure<sup>2</sup> of increased supervision by the guardianship authority, as well as juvenile delinquents who were subjected to the institutional educational measure.

### *Measuring instrument*

The main research instrument was a questionnaire, which was designed for the large-scale social research in Montenegro. The primary purpose of the survey is to examine the attitudes of juvenile delinquents, that is, their views and perceptions of acceptance-rejection by parents. As a foundation for the development of the questionnaire the following models were used: Pari (ESSchaefer and RQ Bell, 1958), Gradir (Knezevic, 1994). The scale of perception of parental behavior from the questionnaire was used for the examination of the structure of views of perceived parents' behavior. (Table 1). The scale consists of 20 questions - items arranged in two subscales. The examinee on the Likert type scale of 5 degrees describes how his/her mother or father behaves towards him/her. In the case these modalities were as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> There are three sets of corrective measures that may be imposed on juvenile delinquents including: disciplinary measures, intensified supervision and institutional measures.

Table 1. Scale of perception of parental behavior used in the research

Scale of perception of parental behavior	I agree	I generally agree	I am indecisive	I generally disagree	I do not agree at all
1. Mother's emotional detachment					
2. Child unwanted by the mother					
3. Child as a "burden" to the mother					
4. Mother's indifference					
5. Mother's neglect					
6. Insufficient time dedicated by the father to the child's play					
7. Both parents play with the child					
8. Physical abuse by the father					
9. Father's severity					
10. Physical abuse by both parents					
11. Parents' manipulative behavior towards the child					
12. Father's complaisance					
13. Abandonment of the child by both parents during several days					
14. Mother's severity					
15. Mother's complaisance					
16. Physical abuse by the mother					
17. Both parents' failure to fulfill their promises					
18. Mother's discrepancy					
19. Father's neglect					
20. Insufficient time dedicated by the father to the child's play					

The coefficient of internal reliability Cronbach alpha on the entire sample of examinees was  $\alpha = .80$ . For the subscale of the assessment of the mother's behavior, which includes 10 items, the reliability coefficient is  $\alpha = .89$ . For the subscale of the assessment of the father's behavior, which also includes 10 items, the reliability coefficient is  $\alpha = .88$ .

### *Procedure*

After getting approval from the competent authority, juvenile delinquents inquiry was conducted on several occasions at the Centre for Social Welfare of the Municipality of Podgorica and the Institute for Upbringing and Education "Ljubović" in Podgorica. The main reason for a relatively long period of data collection lies in the irregular treatment attendance of juveniles who were sentenced to increased supervision. After explaining the purpose of the inquiry, guaranteeing confidentiality and motivating participants to cooperate, the instruments were applied. At the beginning of the hour provided for the survey, the filling in of the questionnaire was explained and clarified in detail, clearly and loudly to examinees. They filled in the questionnaire by themselves, in the conditions of individual examination. The inquiry of one examinee took about an hour. Juvenile delinquents often gave explanations of answers in the questionnaires and requested clarifications of specific questions, which prolonged the time of inquiry.

### **Results**

Obtained statements with regard to 20 items that describe the perceived behavior of parents were subjected to factor analysis. On the basis of factor indicators, perceptual parental behavior can be analyzed generally and structurally. Table 2 shows specific values of  $\lambda$ , the relative amount of specific values, i.e. the percentage of common variance and cumulative variance. Criteria of relevant factors are determined on the basis of the amount of  $\lambda \geq 1$ . Based on 20 manifesting variables (items) five factors are extracted. As we can see, the first two factors are clearly defined by the manifesting variables quantitatively and structurally. According to the results presented in Table 1 the common variance of 5 extracted factors is approximately 71% and the rest, that is, 29% belongs to the factors that are not statistically relevant. Twenty manifesting variables are reduced to 5 latent dimensions or factors, of which the first two or three are the most interpretable.

Table 2. Characteristic roots and the variance percentage

<b>Characteristic values <math>\lambda \geq 1</math></b>	<b>Percentage of common variance</b>	<b>Cumulative variance</b>
<b>4.97</b>	24.87	24,87
<b>4.57</b>	22.83	47,70
<b>2.02</b>	10.12	57,82
<b>1.36</b>	6.82	64,64
<b>1.21</b>	6.09	<b>70.73</b>
Amount	<b>70.73</b>	-

In order to fully comprehend the true meaning of the obtained factors, we also considered communalities<sup>3</sup>. (Table 3) Obtained communalities are high, so we can say that the contribution of each variable to the system of criteria is high. From Table 3 it can be noted that the system of criteria is mostly marked by the variables that indicate the physical abuse of children by both parents and the physical abuse of children by the father. Such high communalities can be explained by a larger number of variables that describe the physical abuse of children. Other variables that describe the perceived maternal behavior in terms of insensibility, lack of affection for children and her indifference. Variable 29 with regard to the participation of parents in the play with children has the lowest communality. The low communality of this variable may be due to some statistical reasons, that is, to the choice of variables that represent these factors.

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<sup>3</sup> Communalities indicate correlations of individual variables and factors

**Table 3 Communalities of variables**

Variables	Initial	Extraction
1. Mother's emotional detachment	1.000	.750
2. Child unwanted by the mother	1.000	.746
3. Child as a "burden" to the mother	1.000	.699
4. Mother's indifference	1.000	.703
5. Mother's neglect	1.000	.637
6. Insufficient time dedicated by the father to the child's play	1.000	.589
7. Both parents play with the child	1.000	.503
8. Physical abuse by the father	1.000	.866
9. Father's severity	1.000	.810
10. Physical abuse by both parents	1.000	.858
11. Parents' manipulative behavior towards the child	1.000	.739
12. Father's complaisance	1.000	.716
13. Abandonment of the child by both parents during several days	1.000	.529
14. Mother's severity	1.000	.786
15. Mother's complaisance	1.000	.732
16. Physical abuse by the mother	1.000	.657
17. Both parents' failure to fulfill their promises	1.000	.728
18. Mother's discrepancy	1.000	.731
19. Father's neglect	1.000	.704
20. Insufficient time dedicated by the father to the child's play	1.000	.671

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

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Table 4 shows the structure of five factors extracted according to the amount of specific values of  $\lambda \geq 1$ . Towards a more objective and easier interpretation, the orthogonal rotation of the component matrix known as Varimax with Kaiser Normalization was performed. Varimax solution in most cases proved to be an optimal solution of factorization or an optimal solution for the interpretation of factors. The essence of the Varimax method retains the basic principle of orthogonality, i.e. of independence of factors and maximum convergence and correlation of manifesting variables with factors. In other factorization procedures the oblique rotation of factors known as Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization was performed. After considering all the factorizations, orthogonal and oblique rotations, interpretations, discussions, debates, conclusions were drawn based on the results obtained by Varimax rotation (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Manifesting variables	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Mother's emotional detachment	<b>.859</b>	-.028	-.100	.018	-.004
2. Child unwanted by the mother	<b>.820</b>	.001	-.041	-.233	.130
3. Child as a "burden" to the mother	<b>.811</b>	-.083	-.151	-.016	-.108
4. Mother's indifference	<b>.796</b>	.057	-.018	-.254	-.038
5. Mother's neglect	<b>.782</b>	-.103	-.016	-.119	.017
6. Insufficient time dedicated to the child's play by the mother	<b>.698</b>	-.104	.233	.136	-.134
7. Both parents play with the child	<b>-.566</b>	-.290	-.107	.028	-.293
8. Physical abuse by the father	-.106	<b>.916</b>	-.004	.118	.033
9. Father's severity	-.170	<b>.865</b>	-.007	.024	.177
10. Physical abuse by both parents	.048	<b>.832</b>	.361	.178	-.042
11. Parents' manipulative behavior towards the child	.122	<b>.784</b>	.262	.201	.017
12. Father's complaisance	.035	<b>-.662</b>	-.202	.263	-.407
13. Abandonment of the child by both parents during several days	.452	<b>.457</b>	.131	.204	.239
14. Mother's severity	-.024	.164	<b>.801</b>	.337	-.051
15. Mother's complaisance	-.164	-.148	<b>-.789</b>	.194	-.155
16. Physical abuse by the mother	-.201	.220	<b>.713</b>	.226	-.095
17. Both parents' failure to fulfill their promises	-.091	.210	.035	<b>.816</b>	-.092
18. Mother's discrepancy	-.241	.078	.320	<b>.722</b>	.209
19. Father's neglect	.019	.050	-.160	.119	<b>.813</b>
20. Insufficient time dedicated to the child's play by the father	-.012	.174	.139	-.067	<b>.785</b>

Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

By definition, the first specific value i.e. factor exploits the highest total variances. In the case of

$\lambda_1 = 24.87\%$  it is approximately 1/4 of the total variance.

Besides the variable "mother's emotional detachment" which is the carrier of this factor, the correlation between the first factor and the following variables increased significantly: "the unwanted child", "the child as a burden to the mother", "maternal indifference", "neglect by the mother," "not enough time devoted by the mother to the child's play".

The first factor is saturated with the variables related to the mother's negative attitude towards the child. From the above mentioned it follows that the mother's position and attitude towards the child is crucial or primary in personality

formation. The stated results suggest that the mother has the primary role in the formation of the child's personality. Conclusion on the basis of concrete results implies the mother's culpability in the formation of the child as a delinquent. However the conclusion in the sense that the main fault goes with the mother in the formation of a delinquent child is adjusted to include the responsibility of the father as well. There are a number of factors that contribute to the mother's negative attitude towards the child. Those factors in this study were not considered. The first factor can be called "Emotional neglect by the mother." The conclusion that the mother is the sole culprit in the formation of the delinquent's personality is not grounded even statistically. Namely another factor or the specific value is  $\lambda_2 = 22.83\%$ , which is slightly less than  $\lambda_1 = 24.87\%$ .

It is noted that the second factor is saturated with the manifesting variables or delinquents' statements indicating "physical abuse by the father," "father's rigor," "physical abuse by both parents", "parents being manipulative towards their children", "father's complaisance." The first four variables contributed most to the description of the second factor. Physical abuse by the father is the carrier of the second factor. Correlation with the factor is very high; as high as .92. Interestingly, the holder of the first factor is the mother's emotional detachment. It should be noted that the second factor is related to both the variable of physical abuse by both parents and the variable which is the opposite of the father's physical abuse and which refers to the father's complaisance.

The structure of the second factor suggests that juvenile delinquents perceive a frequent physical abuse by both parents, especially by the father. This factor can be called "**Physical abuse by the father**". Abandonment of children by both parents during several days equally correlates with the first and second factors, which is natural; therefore a special interpretation of this correlation is not required.

Varimax rotation showed no significant change in the structure and amount of the coefficients on the third factor. The structure of the third factor consists of variables "the mother's rigor", "the mother's complaisance," and "physical abuse by the mother." The third factor is structurally similar to the second factor. Namely it relates to physical abuse by the mother. The variable of the mother's complaisance is the case as well as the father's complaisance on the second factor. It is delinquents' ambivalent attitudes towards their mothers who, like delinquents' fathers do in the case when physical abuse is not working, seek a solution in complaisance or indulgence. Delinquents perceive their parents at the same time as aggressive and pliable. This factor can be called "the mother's inconsistent disciplinary style".

The fourth factor describes inappropriate child-rearing practices of parents. This factor can be called "uncontrolled socialization." The fourth factor has the largest number of claims related to the mother's inconsistency in applying corrective actions and to parents' failure to fulfill promises. It is assumed that both parents' failure to fulfill promises is typical with parents who abuse their children. Such parents often forget the promises they made to their children and do not recognize the needs that are important for children's development.

After Varimax rotation the correlation between the fifth factor and the variables "the father's neglect" and "not enough time devoted by the father to his child's play" significantly increased. With regard to this factor two claims were particularly significant. The first statement reads: "My father was not involved in my upbringing and was often absent from home" and the other "I think my father played with me a lot less than he could." It is obvious that these two aspects are closely linked to the perceived father's behavior marked by his neglect. It is noted that this factor is defined by the father's behavior such as inadequate supervision, uncontrolled socialization, and emotional neglect. Based on the content of claims, this factor can be called "The father's social neglect of the child".

Sublimating the obtained results it can be concluded that the quantitative indicators in Table 4 are the optimal support for the interpretation, discussion and conclusions. Respecting the amount of specific values  $\lambda$ , 5 factors (latent dimensions) were extracted and they determine the patterns of behavior of juvenile delinquents' parents. In the case it is the "emotional neglect by the mother", "physical abuse by the father", "inconsistent disciplinary style of the mother", "uncontrolled socialization of both parents" and "the father's social neglect of his child". The saturation of the first, i.e. the main component with 20 manifesting variables is very high. In the case, coefficients range from 50 to 87. Conclusion on the basis of the coefficients would be that there is a general factor of abuse and neglect of juvenile delinquents by both parents.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The main objective of this research was to examine the structure of attitudes of juvenile delinquents to the perceived behavior of parents during early childhood. Juvenile delinquents assessed the behavior of their parents on the scale of perception of parental behavior, for which we compiled 20 questions (items). In view of the above mentioned problem, the results will be discussed in the following text.

According to the results, we can say that the dimension of aggressiveness of both parents has the greatest significance in the prediction of occurrence of delinquent behavior. Implemented analyses indicate that the aggression that occurs in parents of juvenile delinquents is a common form of directing children's behavior. In support of the results obtained from this research, the research results of Patterson and colleagues (1992) are relevant where it is also stated that juvenile delinquents are often physically punished during their childhood.

One possible explanation for the results is that the connection between physical aggression by parents and subsequent delinquent behavior may be mediated by a number of risk factors operating within families. The connection may be mediated by contextual variables, such as parental psychopathological problems, disorders of marital-family relationships, poor quality of interaction between parents and the child. Marital and family conflicts lead to the point when parents transfer their anxiety on children. Aggressive parental behavior creates in children

hostility, aggression. Restraining the expression of anger and pain towards parents leads to the expression of aggressive behavior towards the outside, often towards the peers. In fact, previous studies have shown that it is an important predictor of attachment to parents, the relationship between the parents that is a conflict between them. (Capaldi and Patterson, 1991; Crockett and colleagues, 1993).

This study also determined the importance of considering emotional neglect by the mother in the prediction of delinquent behavior in adolescence. We found that the child who experiences acceptance less than rejection by the mother have more externalized problems. Emotionality is a dimension of parental behavior that involves acceptance, support, emotional warmth. A mother who sees her child as a burden views the caring for him/her as an imposed obligation. Regarding a connection between the lack of acceptance and support and distorted developmental outcomes in children, such as withdrawal, aggression, there is empirical evidence (according to Cummings and colleagues, 2000). In addition to the results obtained in this study there are the research results obtained by G.Keresztes (1999), where it is also stated that the child's aggressive behavior is significantly connected with the mother's rejection.

Furthermore, the results of this study show that the ineffective disciplinary style as a dimension of parental behavior is also important to consider in the prediction of delinquent behavior. Parents with poor disciplining skills contribute negatively to the coercive behavior of the child. Namely, when making requests for the child which he/she refuses to obey, those parents do not persevere to the end of the request fulfillment. Interactions between parents and the child accompanied by parents' inconsistency, frequent conflicts and intense negative emotions lead to the point when the child uses aggression as a social strategy for negotiation in interpersonal relationships. In addition to the obtained results from this research there are the research results by Capaldi and Patterson (1994), showing that harsh and inconsistent parental discipline skills explain 30% to 52% of the variance in the development of violent behavior.

Insufficient time devoted to the child by the father is one of the dimensions of parental behavior that is predictive for the development of delinquent behavior, but not specific. Given that the father's role is particularly important in the identification of a male child with a person of the same sex, an inadequate supervision by the father and his frequent abandonment of the child and family aggravates or complicates the process of socialization. Such father's behavior towards the child leads to a cold emotional relationship with the child. The child feels anger, rage, and isolation. The child's not expressing emotional pain and anger towards his father during childhood leads to his/her expression of aggressive behavior towards the environment in adolescence. The results of this study are not confirmed by the international research. In most overseas research it is increasingly emphasized that the father's physical aggression significantly contributes to the development of behavioral disorders in the child. (Patterson and coll.1992; Kashani and coll.1998)

Failure to comply with parental promises is a dimension of parental behavior predictive for the development of delinquent behavior, but not specific. Failure to

comply with parental promises implies a lack of parents sensitivity. Parents do not have the ability to recognize the needs of the child and to respond to them. Insufficient sensitivity of the parents has for the consequence the child's inability to adequately master himself/herself or his/her surroundings.

Research shows a link between the lack of sensitivity of parents and subsequent antisocial behavior of young people. (Haapasalo, Tremly, 1994; Lyons-Ruth, 1996; Allen and coll, 1998). However, the poor sensitivity of parents during childhood is not a factor specifically related to anti-social behavior unless it interacts with other negative characteristics (parents' rejection, parents' erratic behavior). Children who assess their parents as non-sensitive are prone to experience intense anger and negative expectations of others. Insensitive parents cannot direct them. Their inability is greater if social change is greater, and the learned behavioral patterns can less be applied to the upbringing of the child. A delinquent outcome in adolescence is possible, but there are also other possible outcomes.

Overall, the results of this study show that parental behavior towards children during early childhood may significantly contribute to the development of delinquent behavior in adolescence. These results provide a basis to conclude that there is a link between the acceptance of children in the family and behavioral disorders in adolescence. The results point to the need to create specific approaches to prevention and treatment of these problems. Finally, it should be noted that the results may be reconsidered in the context of some severe conclusions. It should be noted that this has to do with young delinquents' attitudes to and their perceptions of their parents' behavior of. These perceptions cannot be taken as accurate assessments of parental behavior, but they are certainly very relevant, because children estimate best how they feel and how they see their relationship with their parents. When assessing parents' impact on the child, it is appropriate to use information from different sources to get more objective data with regard to parenting practices. Estimates of both parents and children can be taken into account, or a systematic observation of families in actual conditions can be carried out. Children's problems can be seen as a consequence and a cause of parental behavior, which further complicates the operationalization of parent-child relationship and includes a deeper methodological issue of such research.

The results of this research can be useful guidelines for future study in this area. The survey was conducted on a sample of juvenile delinquents. Therefore it would be interesting to conduct a comparative analysis of the family functioning of juvenile delinquents and adolescents who sought help at mental health institutions, both in relation to one another and in relation to the normal population. It would be interesting to examine whether adolescents with problems are characterized by the family functioning features that separate them from the normal population, and differentiate them mutually.

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