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Parenting style in family and the risk of psychopathology

Styl wychowania w rodzinie a ryzyko rozwoju psychopatologii

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Summary

Parenting style is one of the exogenous factors, participating both in the etiology of psychopathology and in the healthy development of a child. Four main parenting styles, investigated so far, which evoke researchers interest most frequently, are: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive (liberal) loving and permissive uninvolved style. Research conducted in different countries has allowed us to describe connections between applying particular upbringing models and the occurrence of depression, eating disorders, addictions or violence. It has been evidenced that liberal- unloving parenting style, based on little control, and lack of emotional support, is positively associated with aggressive behavior. Parenting models based on excessive control and emotional coldness increase the risk of depression and substance abuse in children and adolescent, whereas authoritative parenting style applied by both parents minimalizes the risk of depression, suicidal tendencies and is also negatively correlated with substance abuse, bulimia and anorexia nervosa. Scientific reports indicate cross-cultural differences in young people's perception of their parent's style. For example, uninvolved parenting style was associated with higher depressiveness in Asian females than in African-American. Our paper presents a review of investigations on parenting styles and their results, conducted in different times and often in different cultures. The presented data allows us to formulate general conclusions and recommendations concerning parenting methods which may minimize the risk of psychopathology in youth. Authoritative style, consisting in high control combined with expression of emotional warmth, seems to be the most advantageous for the child's development.

Keywords: parenting style • adolescents • young adults • psychopathology

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INTRODUCTION

Clinicians working in the field of psychological health indicate an increasing number of varied emotional and psychosocial disorders in adolescents and young adults. What draws attention is the disproportion between growing indicators of good physical health in children and, at the same time, declining indicators of their psychological health [29]. This phenomenon seems to be global. Every year there is a growing number of anxiety, depressive and functional disorders diagnosed among the youth. The frequency of hospitalizations at children and adolescent's psychiatric wards, due to serious emotional, behavioral, eating disorders, borderline personality features and suicidal attempts, is increasing [28]. In Poland, among that group of patients (age 13-19), the prevalence of auto – destructive behaviors in form of self-mutilations is consistently growing, from 27% in 2005 to 47% in 2007 [38]. The morbidity rate of depression among children and adolescent is visibly growing, while the age when first depressive episode appears is decreasing [18]. American investigations have found an increase in the depression rate among adolescents from 8.7% in 2005 to 11.3% in 2014, and in the group of young adults from 8.8% to 9.6% [26]. Italian investigators indicate the escalation of psychological problems among college and academic students [43]. It seems important to analyze the question of young people's worsening condition. The etiology of psychopathological phenomena is multifactorial. Apart from the genetic, biological and situational predispositions, important risk factors also include interactions with the closest family environment, in which the personality develops. "All investigators agree that family is the most important psychosocial factor, equally in the healthy and disordered development of humans" [29].

Family, as a reference group to identify with, influences the child's social and personal development. The case analysis of emotional and behavioral disorders in youth often shows a variety of dysfunctions in the family system, or indicates some specific parental attitudes, impending healthy development and maturing of child's personality. Factors conditioning later problems in young adults may appear at early developmental stages, in different forms and intensity. Professor Namysłowska identifies four groups of factors associated with the family: great social pathology of parental system (criminality, alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, physical violence, sexual abuse, serious illnesses of a parent, especially psychiatric illnesses), factors associated with the family structure (size, presence of one or both parents, sequence of birth, and also boundaries, alliances and coalitions within the family as well as emotional entanglement or separation), separation and loss of one or both parents and the communication style in the family and parenting [29]. In our study we focused on the fourth group of factors. We presented results of several investigations, which had been conducted up to now, concerning the connections between the domi-

inating parental attitudes (described as the "parenting style") and the occurrence of psychopathology in child's later development. Recognizing the influence that a particular parenting style has on a developing personality is crucial for understanding the source of psychopathology, which is important equally in setting the diagnosis and in psychotherapy as well as the psychoeducation offered to parents. Therefore, the present study may be of interest to parents and caretakers, pedagogues, child and adolescent psychiatrists, psychologists as well as to clinicians working with adult patients.

METHOD

The present article was based on the analysis of available publications and the results of research in the area of parenting styles and their impact on adolescents and young adults. We conducted a wide review of the most popular database in the field of medicine, health and psychology. The process of acquiring information included searching through key words: parenting, parenting style, permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, psychopathology, psychiatric disorders, depression, and addiction, in data bases such as: PubMed, EBSCO, Ovid and Google Scholar. The selection criteria were: accordance with the subject matter of our article, currency of the information, and the methodology of scientific researches accordant with the standards.

PROGRESS OF THE ACADEMIC INVESTIGATIONS ON THE PARENTING STYLES

The meaning of parenting and upbringing became an important focus of attention for researchers long ago, as it seemed to be crucial for the individual and social functioning of a child and the development of personality [46]. The role of "good parenting" is emphasized as the ability to fulfilling a variety of child's needs (bodily and educational as well as emotional and psychological) in a way that provide full physical, emotional and cognitive development. The family accomplishes the upbringing and socialization functions by using diverse measures reflected in preferred parenting style. The meaning of "parenting style" is wider then the parent's methods or reactions to child behavior in specific situations. Parenting style is the dominating attitude towards a child, which is revealed and consequently repeated in various life situations [2, 7]. While parental methods may, in specific situations, influence a child's behavior, the parenting style determines the effectivity of parenting in the socialization process in a more integral way [7, 45]. Parenting style, which includes emotional expression, discipline measures, communication and expression of understanding, may equally support or obstruct the proper development of a child [32, 45]. Since the 1930s, along with psychology and psychoanalytic theory development, investigators started asking questions about the impact of family relations on the individual and social functioning of the child. This prompted much research covering the issue of relations

inside the family. Initially, such investigations encountered difficulties, due to a lack of standardized diagnostic tools. In the 1960s, however, began the development of normalized and standardized diagnostic methods, enabling researchers to investigate the family environment in the relational context, including the dominating parenting style [32, 46]. Such a style was defined as “the constellation of attitudes towards a child, which are communicated and which create the emotional climate of expressed parental behaviors” [7]. In the 1970s and 1980s, Baumrind and Maccoby’s discoveries contributed to determining the typology of parenting styles, based on the gradation of parenting behaviors in two dimensions: sensitive/warm and demanding/controlling. The first dimension includes attitudes associated with the expression of emotional warmth, rewarding, acceptance and involvement; the second includes demanding particular behaviors, strictness, controlling and surveillance. The analysis of possible combinations of those attitudes led to defining the main parenting styles. In next years, several typologies were created, which denominated the particular parenting styles in slightly different ways. The four main parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved, became the most frequent reference point in academic investigations. The authoritative parenting style (also known as “democratic”) is characterized by a high level of control and by the parent providing emotional warmth and sensitiveness to a child’s needs. Parents are equally demanding, even when tender and sensitive; they support and control the child without excessive restrictiveness, using democratic methods. The control is based on clear demands and setting limits but without strict repressive methods. Instead, parents use persuasion and argumentation with regards to their expectations. Using democratic rules in parenting requires time for discussion, conversation, and reasoning of one’s reasoning as well as allowing the child to express his or her point of view [44]. Authoritarian parenting style (also called “autocratic”) means high control combined with low level of emotional warmth and sensitivity. Parents are very demanding and directive, but they express very little feelings or do not show them at all. Parents provide strict control of children’s behaviors by applying stern punishment as the discipline method, with the exclusion of any rewards, including praising the child’s achievements. Parents restrict the child’s autonomy, without any explanation of their demands. Permissive style (described also as “liberal”) is divided into loving and unloving. The first one is characterized by a high level of emotional warmth and sensitivity to a child’s needs, combined with low control. Parents applying that style are very tender and sensitive to a child’s needs, but they do not set any boundaries or demands. They avoid controlling their children; they do not establish any rules, showing absolute acceptance of the children and all their behaviors. In liberal unloving style (also called uninvolved or neglecting –neglecting style), low control of a child’s behavior is combined with a low degree of emotional warmth and sensitivity. Parents give the child complete

freedom, do not restrain a child’s activity, undertaking interventions only in special situations. They do not express spontaneous interest in a child, responding only to his/her expectations and demands. Parents keep a cool and distant attitude towards the child. Permissiveness in liberal unloving style comes from the parent’s excessive self-involvement and their indifference more than from concern over the child’s free expression [7, 12, 16, 32]. In the common language, the permissive parenting style used to be described as the “stress-free parenting”. Introduction of that term after the World War II was associated with a specific revolution in the area of rules and values considered as important in the development of the youth. In “stress-free parenting” the emphasis is put on hedonism, which means the tendency to maximize pleasure and minimize difficulties. In that attitude the basic values and determinants of behavior constitute good mood, comfort and pleasure, while the ability to postpone gratification, persistence in overcoming difficulties, making efforts or altruistic attitude are ignored or even rejected as obstacles in fulfilling one’s own individual needs. Some investigators indicate the association between that particular parenting style and the occurrence of several psychological and emotional problems in youth [30]. The term “stress-free parenting” is not described as a separate parenting style by the authors of the main psychological and pedagogical paradigms; however, it occurs in literature as a synonym of permissive parenting [32, 46]. In many investigations, parental overprotectiveness was indicated as a risk factor for psychopathology. Such an attitude appeared as highly correlated with anxiety, depression, and eating disorders and with juvenile delinquency and addictions [47].

Formulation of theoretical conceptions of family led to creating measurement tools, designed for assessing family functioning. D.H. Olson and coworkers, for instance, described the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems, and created the questionnaire FACES III (Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale) estimating two basic dimensions of a family: cohesion and adaptiveness, and also communication as the elementary features influencing two other variables. The critical estimation of the polarized questionnaire led to the origination of a new version – FACES IV (Flexibility and Cohesion Evaluation Scale) – a tool equally as useful in diagnosis as in therapy [23]. The Polish version of FACES IV, known as “Skala Oceny Rodziny SOR”, was designed for children over 12 years of age and for adults. This version allows us to estimate family relations in eight scales. Six of them are the main scales of the Olson’s Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems, associated with two dimensions of family functioning: cohesion and flexibility (balanced cohesion, unattachment, confusion, balanced flexibility, rigidity). There are also scales estimating communication and family life satisfaction. Apart from the particular scales scores, it is also possible to get three complex indicators: coherence, flexibility and the general indicator of good functioning of the

family [22]. Another example of measurement tool is the “Skala Postaw Rodzicielskich SPR” (The parental Attitudes Scale SPS). Questions contained in this questionnaire allow us to describe parental attitudes in five dimensions, relating to five attitudes: acceptance – rejection, excessively demanding, autonomous, inconsistent, and overprotective [36].

Creating psychometric tools made it possible to estimate family functioning and enabled researchers to investigate the role played by parenting styles in the development of psychological health or psychopathology.

PARENTING STYLE AS A RISK FACTORS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Cultural differences

Previous investigations concerning the association between parenting style and development of psychopathology in young people indicated the importance of cultural differences in the perception of the parenting style dominating in the family of origin and in the assessment of the effects of a particular style. A comparative study of parenting styles in Nordic and Mediterranean countries, for example, showed that the country of origin significantly differentiates the adolescent perception of parenting style in the family. Swedish adolescents perceived their parents as less authoritarian than their Greek and Italian peers and, at the same time, less permissive as Italian peers. Greek parents were perceived as less authoritarian than Italian parents [31]. Research conducted on the Spanish population indicated permissive parenting style as a factor reducing the risk of substance abuse [11], while the American investigations proved that the authoritative style is protective factor for the same problem [42]. Authoritative parenting style in many researches was indicated as the most adaptive and protective against substance abuse problems in young people [33, 35]. Chinese research showed that strict, authoritarian parenting style was perceived by adolescents as more positive than it was among the American youth [8]. Multicenter trials, conducted on groups of adolescents of different races and nationalities, proved the modulating influence of ethnic origins and sex on the correlation between particular parenting style and depression in children. In the group of boys whose parents preferred uninvolved parenting style, African-Americans revealed significantly higher scores in depression scale than Europeans and Asians. In girls, however, uninvolved parenting style led to a higher average level of depression among Asians, while African-American girls showed a lower level of depression than in any other investigated group. Among girls with authoritarian parents, Asians had the higher average scores of depression and African-American girls – the lowest. However, such correlations were not observed in boys [37].

PARENTING STYLE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PARTICULAR DISORDERS

Depression

The transition to adulthood itself increases the risk of depressive symptoms in adolescents. Parenting style might be a critical factor to modulating such risk [13]. A number of studies were conducted in the search for connections between dominating parenting attitude and the occurrence of diverse pathologies in children, adolescents and young adults. Inquiring the etiology of depressive disorders showed their association with particular experiences in relationship with parents. Among risk the factors predisposing the child to depression are the following: negative parental attitudes such as emotional coldness, rejection, distance and lack of parental support as well as excessive criticism, over controlling and uninvolved parental style. In the population of American youth, aged between 12–17 years, the experience of authoritarian parenting style was significantly more often associated with the occurrence of depressive symptoms than was the case with the authoritative parenting style [17]. In 2010, a Hungarian study conducted on grammar scholars and academic students showed a significant connection between maternal authoritarian styles and depressive symptoms in girls [35]. Investigations regarding ethnic origins and sex revealed a few risk factors for depression in adolescents, such as: uninvolved parenting in African-American boys, uninvolved and authoritarian style in girls of Asian origin. It was also discovered that in African-American girls, depressive symptoms were not associated with a parenting style [37]. An Egyptian study conducted on adolescents with suicidal attempts showed their tendency to perceive parents as less caring and more controlling, in comparison to their non-suicidal peers. Stronger suicidal tendencies were proved to occur in adolescents experiencing parental emotional neglect. Interestingly, separate research on the influence of a mother’s and father’s parental style did not show an important correlation between suicidal tendencies in children, while the mutual effect of both parent’s authoritarian style showed a positive correlation with their children suicidal attempts [41]. Longitudinal investigations conducted in the Philippines showed the associations between parenting styles reported by offspring at the age of 18 and the occurrence of depressive symptoms at the age of 21. The analysis showed a positive association between authoritarian and neglectful mothering styles and depressive symptoms in daughters, while the association between authoritarian mothering and sons’ depressive symptoms was negative [13].

Eating disorders

For many years, researchers have been strongly interested in behavioral disorders in children and adolescents, associated with eating, such as: binge eating, extreme weight control, bulimia or anorexia nervosa. Among

the many analyzed factors, the role of parents' eating behaviors as well as more general parental attitudes and parenting styles became the focal points of our study. American multicenter analysis indicated an association between the parental practice of using food to calm children's emotional state and the development in children of the tendency to use that particular coping strategy, which becomes a risk factor for binge eating [5]. Previous research proved that there is an association between perfectionist and authoritarian mothers (low level of emotional warmth combined with high level of control) and the occurrence of binge eating in daughters, as an avoidance mechanism from difficult emotions in relations with mothers [15, 27, 39]. In a 30-year long longitudinal study, conducted on Australian adolescents and their parents, investigators searched for the connection between low level of expressed warmth and parental control and the occurrence of eating disorders. Such an association has not been observed in boys; however, the connection between low level of emotional warmth in parents and bulimic behaviors has been found in girls. Also, the low control combined with low level of warmth (the rejecting – abandoning style) was associated with a higher risk of appearance dissatisfaction, pursuit of slimness and bulimia [19], which was accordant to previous investigations [15]. Different results came from a 5-year long investigations on the association of specific parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and rejecting) with the eating disorders in adolescents, conducted at schools in Minnesota. Researches did not find unequivocal evidence for the connection between the parenting style and disordered eating behaviors among adolescents; however, they indicated that the authoritarian parenting style is a potential risk factor for such disorders. In the described study, the mother's authoritarian style correlated with the daughter higher probability of extreme weight controlling behaviors after five years, in comparison with the adolescents, whose mothers preferred the authoritative, permissive or rejecting parenting style. Daughters of authoritarian mothers, in comparison to daughters of authoritative mothers, after five years revealed the tendency to overeat [48]. Enten and coworkers investigated the role of the father in the development of psychopathology associated with eating. They proved a negative correlation of authoritative paternity style with the pursuit of slimness and body dissatisfaction in a child. An opposite correlation occurred with reference to fathers preferring an authoritarian parenting style [9].

Aggression

Recently, much attention has been paid to the factors responsible for aggressive behaviors in children, adolescents and young adults [16]. The complexity of such factors is significant. Among the biological, genetic, temperamental and situational agents, an important role is played by inner-family factors, since in the family children learn emotional contact, they establish their first social relationships and gain the experience of social

coexistence [44]. Researchers indicate that, in the case of aggression, we cannot look only at the most simple relationship between parenting style and the development of aggressive behaviors in child. Such a connection may be understood twofold: aggression in a child is the reaction caused and fixed by a particular parenting style or, conversely, genetically conditioned high level of aggressiveness in a child prompts particular strategies in parents. Adoption studies have supported the second option by proving that, to some degree, a child's behavior might influence the choice of a particular parenting style by the parent. [16]. Jaffie's and co-workers researches show that children's antisocial behaviors, to a certain extent, might provoke caretakers to apply corporal punishment (the author clearly distinguishes corporal punishment from maltreatment) [14]. This bidirectional reaction conditioning process may be possibly applied also to other symptoms revealed by children. In the previous part of this paper, we analyzed the connections between the parenting style and depression in children. And here also appears the question of how an adolescent's depression, associated with the lack of initiative, psychomotor sluggishness or lowered task performance, might provoke authoritarian behaviors in some types of parents. In our study, we present chosen correlations between the parenting style and symptoms in children. However, searching for the origin of such correlations seems to be an interesting issue for future investigations.

Polish research, conducted between 2010–2012, on a group of adolescents and young adults (average age: 23) concerned the correlation between aggression revealed during adolescence and the perception of parenting style in the family. It concluded with an interesting observation that 68% participants described the parenting style of mothers as democratic, while 90.9% participants defined the parenting style of fathers as liberal – unloving. Authors of the research drew the conclusion that mothers were giving a child more attention than fathers. The results of the research showed that hostile – submissive and rebellious – distrustful behaviors occurred more often in boys whose mothers applied a democratic style than in girls. In the case of mothers preferring a liberal – unloving style, boys, more often than girls, revealed hostile and dominant behaviors. Also, sons of fathers preferring a liberal – unloving parenting style, more often than daughters of such fathers, revealed hostility and domination in their behaviors. Researchers assume that the correlation between liberal – rejecting parenting style presented by fathers and the aggressive behaviors in boys might be associated with the tendency to strongly identify with fathers and to emulate their behaviors. It might be also the result of boys assuming the position of a leader of the family in the situation, when the father is physically or emotionally absent [44].

Chinese investigators who analyzed connections between the parenting style and active and reactive aggression in children and adolescents discovered that

a strongly restrictive parenting style, integrating domination and a rejecting attitude, correlated with reactive aggression in boys and girls and with a high level of aggression in boys [10].

Israeli researches proved that feeling parental rejection has strong connections with the development of psychopathology. Rejection has wide meaning: from lack of expressed warmth and tenderness, through negligence and lack of attention, to open expression of hostility and parental aggression. In comparison to children who perceive their parents as approving, children who experience parenting attitudes described above revealed both higher level of hostility or aggression and also a tendency to be submissive, emotional unstable and with a lower self-esteem. Results of the presented study indicated the probability of incorporated symptomatology development (such as anxiety or low self-esteem) only in the case when the negative perception of parental practice was at the medium level. When the level of emotional rejection was high, the probability of externalization in the form of aggressive behaviors grew [47].

Some authors indicate that dysfunctional family relations, lacking in security, trust and love, may create the potential background for auto-aggressive behaviors in children and adolescents [38].

Psychoactive substance abuse

Researches underline the fact that parental influence does not occur in a vacuum; especially substance abuse and addiction problems in children are determined by many psychosocial risk factors, such as interactions with peers, pressure of the group, influence of the media and advertisements, boredom and environmental deprivation [24]. The role of parents with regards to children with substance abuse problems used to be considered in two aspects: first, as the issue of parental practices and parenting styles and, secondly, as the modeling process [4, 21, 40]. Substance abuse in parents is indicated as a risk factor for substance abuse in adolescents. Also, the correlation was observed between rejecting – neglecting parenting style in fathers and the tendency in sons to experiment with substances [3, 12]. Some researchers underline the role of parental practices as more significant than the modeling of substances associated behaviors alone. In scientific investigations, the protective role of parenting style in addiction prevention is pointed out even more often than the parenting style as an addiction risk factor. Parents and caretakers, by their attitudes, may form a child's psychological resistance, emotional well-being and the ability to choose healthy behaviors, which minimize the risk of substance abuse [6, 40]. The role of parenting style in addiction development in youth is disputable. Some investigations indicate a negative correlation of authoritative parenting style with the tendency to abuse substances in children and adolescents [3, 12, 24, 34, 40]. Shakya and co-workers demonstrated that not only authoritative style of a parent, but also authori-

ritative style of child's best friend's parent, may prevent him or her from using substances. "Authoritative parent minimalizes probability of adolescent getting drunk to 57% and probability of smoking nicotine to 43%. (...) If a teenager has a friend, whose mother is authoritative, the probability of getting drunk is minimalized to 40%, smoking nicotine to 39%, using marihuana to 43%" [40]. In research conducted on young Swedish population, rejecting – neglecting style was associated with higher scores in substance use; however, a metaanalysis of all potential risk factors showed that contact with peers abusing substances had a more important meaning. Authoritative style, similarly as in other studies, positively correlated with less frequent alcohol use [3].

PARENTING STYLE AS A SUPPORTING FACTOR FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Many authors indicate the role of parenting style in young people's development. Álvarez-García and coworkers demonstrated the negative correlation between parental practices, such as expression of feelings, communication and support, and antisocial behaviors in children and adolescents. Adding numerous studies, they indicated that parental attitudes mentioned above minimize the risk of such behaviors as: substance abuse, disrespectful relating to parents, active violence towards peers and juvenile delinquency [1]. Milewsky's investigation proved the significance of parenting style in providing child's well-being. The author demonstrated that authoritative parenting is associated with higher self-esteem, higher life satisfaction and a lower level of depression in adolescents [25]. Also, a negative association has been observed between authoritative parenting style and the occurrence of affective disorders, especially among girls [35]. A mother's authoritative style turned out to be a critical protective factor for substance abuse in female and male adolescents [34]. With reference to substance abuse prevention, particularly underlined is the role of authoritative parenting, combined with parenting control and good communication [24]. Already the first researchers investigating parenting styles, made an observation, that children brought up by parents applying authoritative style, show higher self – confidence, are more socially responsible, able to perform good cooperation and self - discipline, and they also, more often and more eagerly take the initiative in undertaking a new task [20].

CONCLUSIONS

Numerous scientific data indicate the association between parenting style and forming both positive and negative patterns of behavior in children, adolescents and young adults. Considering the present development of society, the most beneficial parenting practices are those, which let the child to sense love and acceptance from parents [47], as well as to understand and recognize the necessity of adjusting one's behavior to important limits and social demands. The analysis of available reports allows to state that:

- the most advantageous is the authoritative parenting style, consisting in balanced control combined with expression of emotional warmth and understanding, which appears to be most supportive for a child,
- authoritative (democratic) parenting is indicated as the protective factor for substance abuse, depression, aggressive and antisocial behaviors, it also helps to develop higher self-esteem and life – satisfaction in children and adolescents.

Other styles of parenting create a greater risk of psychopathology and adaptive difficulties. Scientific data reveals that:

- authoritarian parenting style shows a correlation with eating disorders, aggression and uninvolved parenting style, and is indicated as predisposing to depression (the level of depressive reaction is only slightly modulated by culture, ethnic background and sex),
- liberal – unloving parenting style in fathers was associated with aggressive behaviors in boys.

Psychopathology prevention should, therefore, include education and psychological help for parents, so that they could work out some more constructive parental practices, forming optimal parenting style.

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