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Adolescent personalities and their self-acceptance within complete families, incomplete families and reconstructed families

Abstract:

At the time of this work I had been concentrating on how the family gave shape to adolescent personalities and how adolescents would, as a consequence, accept themselves.

The purpose of this present study is to determine the differences in personality range and levels of self-acceptance among groups of women and men from complete, incomplete and reconstructed families. The study included a group of 314 adolescents, from the administrative region of Łódź. The following test methods were used: the Survey and standardised Inventory of Personality NEO - FFI by P.T. Costa and R. McCrae as adapted by B. Zawadzki, J. Strelau, P. Szczepaniak and M. Śliwińska; and the Scale of Interpersonal Attitude (SUI) as adapted by J. M. Stanik.

As a result of statistical analyses, it turned out that the dimension of personality the Openness to Experience had indeed diversified the examined adolescent groups. Statistically significant differences were also observed at the self-acceptance level between the study groups.

Keywords:

family structure, adolescence, personality, self-acceptance

Streszczenie:

W niniejszej pracy skoncentrowałam się na przedstawieniu roli struktury rodziny w kształtowaniu się osobowości i samooceny adolescentów. Celem prezentowanych badań było określenie różnic w zakresie wymiarów osobowości i poziomu samooceny między grupami kobiet i mężczyzn z rodzin pełnych, monoparentalnych oraz zrekonstruowanych. Badaniem objęto 314 młodych osób z województwa łódzkiego. Zastosowano następujące metody badawcze: ankietę, Inwentarz Osobowości NEO-FFI P.T. Costy and R. McCrae'a w adaptacji B. Zawadzkiego, J. Strelaua, P. Szczepaniaka i M. Śliwińskiej oraz Skalę Ustosunkowań Interpersonalnych (SUI) w adaptacji J. M. Stanika.

W rezultacie przeprowadzonych analiz statystycznych okazało się, że wymiar osobowości różnicujący badane grupy stanowi cecha otwartości na doświadczenie. Istotnie statystycznie różnice zaobserwowano także w zakresie samooceny badanych grup młodzieży.

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Słowa kluczowe:

struktura rodziny, adolescencja, osobowość, akceptacja siebie

Introduction

Psychological literature widely discusses the multilateral influences of family on emotional and social life development as well as on the whole man's personality (Cartwright, 2003; Plopa, 2005; Liberska, 2011; Rostowska, Rostowski, 2011).

Researchers assume that an individual's correct development including the formation of personality, self image, self acceptance and the relation to oneself as well as to other people results from family experience (Reykowski, 1992).

Family experience can either help develop an individual or, in cases of adverse and very strong influences, impede the process of psychical and social development, not letting an individual form desirable human values.

The above-mentioned experience is extremely important because its impact concentrates mostly in the childhood period, when a child's psyche is the most absorptive, vulnerable, flexible and hardly influenced by the external environment (Dunn, Munn, 1985).

Familiologists point out the importance of the parents' role in family functioning and the children's development. It is because in the initial life period, including the time from infancy to pre-school age, it is the family that plays the main role in the child's personality and self-esteem formation. Its first social contacts are established with the mother, then with the father, brothers and sisters and other housemates (Napora, Schneider, 2010).

Familial influence on the child's development is spontaneous in nature, and is not the effect of any particular educational program. Social stances, determined to a large extent by the socialization process in the first years of life, depend on the family atmosphere in the home, the educational methods applied by the parents, the family structure, and on the social behaviour patterns demonstrated by the parents.

The research done by G. Poraj (1988) shows that parents affect the children's personality and self-acceptance development through applying particular educational methods. Negative influences can be exerted by excessive severity, exaggerated rigorism, and using too much punishment and rules as well as by permissive education, excessive care, and solicitude linked with limited independence.

A number of researchers (Tyszkowa, 2006; Harwas-Napierała, 2006) point out that the relations of a child with adults, mainly concerning their personal qualities, are considered to be one of the most important factors in personal development.

There is also some empirical evidence that there is a close connection between personality and mature parenthood. Mature parenthood can help to reduce the child's self-centeredness, form the child's sense of responsibility and empathy, and trigger its readiness to perform social roles (Rostowska, 2003).

The family structure plays a very important role in personal development. It includes the fact that the child has both biological parents, a stepfather or a stepmother, as well as their age, job and social status. A different educational situation is created in a two-generation family as well as in an extended one. Furthermore, when a child has siblings, their age and number appear to be significant for personality and self-acceptance formation. Different personal qualities and self-acceptance levels will be formed in the eldest, the youngest or the only child, or the only boy among a few sisters or the only girl among a number of brothers (Tenikue, Bertrand, 2010). Knowledge of emotional and social experiences which were provided to a child in its family is often the key to understanding the difficulties the child has in social functioning (Kubik, 1999).

At the early school age and during adolescence a child comes into the secondary developmental context, whose range is much wider than the family environment. In this life period an individual's personal development takes place mainly through influences of non-family environments, such as school, friends and people met in various youth organizations, and later in work (Tyszkowa, 2006).

Our article concentrates on the family role in personality shaping and self-acceptance of adolescents (average age 21). An important argument for doing research in this field is to explore the changes which are currently taking place within the Polish family. They are structural, and functional, in nature and are connected with self-consciousness, thus creating a new kind of educational environment.

Modern families have a diversified structure. Increasingly, incomplete families as well as reconstructed ones are becoming visible in Polish society. Both cases have a tendency to increase, therefore it is so important to study how young people function in incomplete families after a divorce and in reconstructed ones since the psychological knowledge on this subject is still insufficient.

This study adopted the personality concept by R.R. McCrae and O.P. John. The authors singled out five main personality dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (John, 1990). These five dimensions were confirmed by numerous sample groups, kinds of data, and for a number of languages (Zimbardo, 2012).

Self-acceptance was determined based on the definition suggested by J. M. Stanik. The author defines it as a rather stable state of personality, resulting from an individual's relatively stable self-estimation, especially when comparing oneself with other people.

High scores obtained on the self-complacency scale for low self-estimation, connect a neurotic, suspicious and hostile personality with a high level of apprehension. On the contrary, low scores point to the lack of these symptoms in the surveyed person's self-description (Stanik, 1998).

It should be emphasized that the level of self-acceptance is connected with how an individual's personality acts, in other words, with its structuralization and organization level. Individuals with stable self-estimation have a better organized personality than individuals with unstable self-estimation. Moreover, worse structuralization results in greater susceptibility of the personality to emotional influences.

Research problems and hypotheses

The purpose of our research was to answer the following questions: Are there any differences in personality qualities between young people from full families, incomplete families and reconstructed ones? Are there any differences in the self-acceptance level between young people from full families, incomplete families and reconstructed ones? Are there any relations and of what kind between young persons' self-acceptance levels and personality qualities from differently structured families?

According to our designated purpose and the above-mentioned questions and based on the content-related literature, a number of research hypotheses have been formulated.

Hypothesis no. 1: There is a difference in personality qualities between groups of women from full families, incomplete families and reconstructed ones.

Hypothesis no. 2: There is a difference in personality qualities between groups of men from full families, incomplete families and reconstructed ones.

Hypothesis no. 3: There is a difference in the self-acceptance level between groups of women from full families, incomplete families and reconstructed ones.

Hypothesis no. 4: There are statistically significant differences in the self-acceptance level between groups of men from families of different structure.

Hypothesis no. 5: There are relations, different as far as strength and direction are concerned, between the self-acceptance level and the examined personality qualities.

Research methods

The following test methods were used to answer our research questions: Survey and Standardised Inventory of Personality NEO - FFI by P.T. Costa and R. McCrae as adapted by B. Zawadzki, J. Strelau, P. Szczepaniak and M. Śliwińska and Interpersonal Relationships Scale (SUI) in J. M. Stanik's adaptation. The survey method allowed us to

gather data on the socio-demographic situation of young persons (age, gender, family structure, domicile, marital status, education). NEO-FFI and SUI are psychometrically acceptable and allow for scientific research (Stanik, 1998; Zawadzki, Strelau, Śliwińska, 1998).

Participants

The study included a group of 600 young persons (average age 21; $\delta=1,181$) from the administrative region of Łódź. The tests were anonymous and done in groups. Participation in the research was voluntary. To create an appropriate sample group, the following exclusion criteria were adopted: young person's attitude toward participation in the survey, demographic structure of the family of origin, and completion of the test sheets².

Taking into account the demographic structure of the family of origin, and according to our designated purposes, the distinguished environments included: the full family, the incomplete family as a result of parental divorce, and the reconstructed family. The above-mentioned familial typology was adopted due to methodological considerations connected with facilitating the conduct of research in this area. The appropriate sample group did not include any persons originating from other family types than the above-mentioned.

Ultimately, the test group comprised 314 people (158 women and 156 men). With respect to the family of origin criterion three comparative groups were identified. Comparative group I was made up of 105 people from incomplete families (53 men and 52 women). Comparative Group II consisted of 104 people from stepfamilies (51 men and 53 women). In contrast, comparative group III comprised 105 people from full families (52 men and 53 women).

The empirical material, collected through surveys, was subject to qualitative analysis. For elaborating the data, the test of independence chi - square (χ^2) was used. A number of statistical analyses were carried out using the computer program IBM SPSS Statistics 20. It turned out that the persons forming the appropriate sample group were characterized by domiciled uniformity (large cities, with a population of more than 100 thousand- $\chi^2=4.166, df=4; p=.384$), marital status (single- $\chi^2=1.322; df=2; p=.516$) and education level (secondary education- $\chi^2=1.031; df=2; p=.597$).

² In order to determine the credibility degree of the received results, we used a rate which consisted of the number of question marks in the Interpersonal Relationships Scale by M. Stanik. It points to a protective and distrustful attitude towards the survey. Considering this fact, we excluded from the examination all those persons who had received high and extremely high scores in this scope (119 people) (Stanik, 1998).

Results

The results presented below were intended to answer the question: Did the surveyed groups of women and men from families of diversified structures differ in their personality qualities? For statistical results the F test and Tukey's multiple comparison test were used.

Since women and men react differently to the same stimuli and behave differently in social situations, is the difference being subject to both genetic factors as well as environmental ones the results for all the women and men in the comparable groups from differently structure families were taken into account (Mandal, 2006).

Variations in the personality dimensions of the tested young women from complete families, incomplete families and reconstructed families.

Bi-factor variation analysis taking gender into consideration pointed to a statistically significant difference between the women from the examined types of families. It concerned the quality of Openness ($F=14.487$; $p=.0005$) (Figure 1 and Table 1).

In the Openness dimension, the highest average results (above average) were obtained by women from full families in comparison with those from incomplete families and reconstructed ones. The results appeared statistically significant. A similar degree of Openness also characterized women from incomplete and reconstructed families, who otherwise obtained average results or results below average.

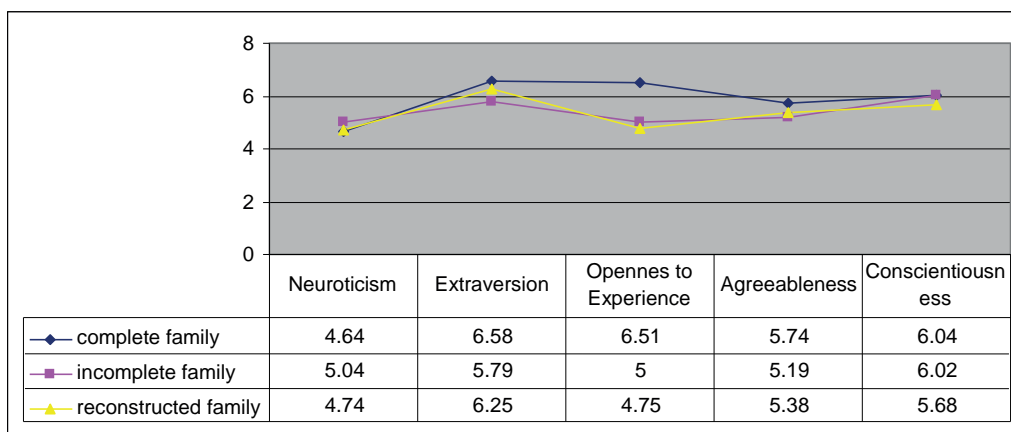


Figure 1. Variations in the personality dimensions of the tested young women from families of diverse structure.

Table 1. The family structure and the dimensions of personality of women in the light of Tukey’s test.

Openness to Experience		
Structure of family:	reconstructed	incomplete
complete	.0005	.0005
incomplete	.768	

In the other personality dimensions surveyed by the NEO-FFI test, namely Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, there were no statistically significant differences between the surveyed groups of women. The results were on the average level. In this way Hypothesis no. 1 was supported.

Variations in the personality dimensions of the tested young men from complete families, incomplete families and reconstructed families.

Comparative analysis pointed out that the personality dimension significantly different among the men’s groups was Openness ($F=23.677$; $p=.0005$) (Figure 2 and Table 2). Survey results for men from differently structured families were similar to those received by the women in this sphere.

In Openness, the highest average results (above average) were obtained by men from full families in comparison with men from either incomplete or reconstructed families, whose results were below average. The results appeared statistically significant. The quality of Openness characterized the men from incomplete families and those from reconstructed ones to a similar degree.

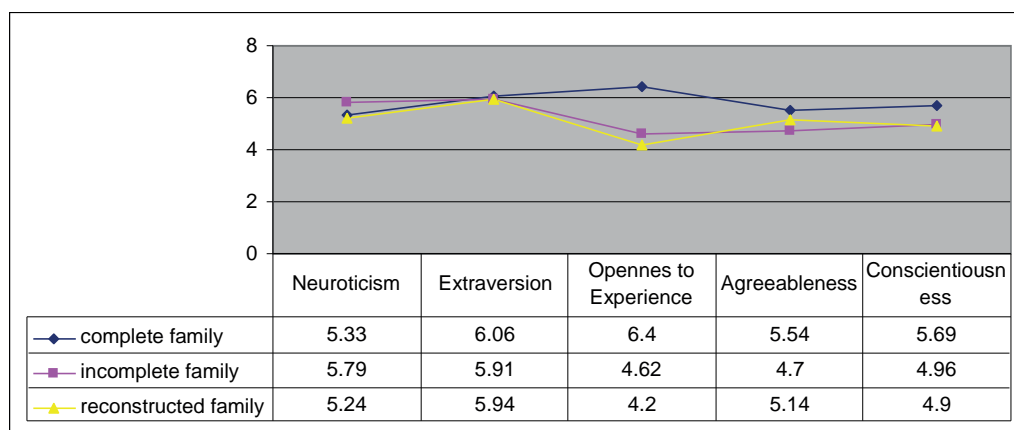


Figure 2. Variations in personalities of the young men from diverse structured families.

Table 2. The family structure and dimensions of the men’s personality in the light of Tukey’s test.

Openness to Experience		
Structure of family:	reconstructed	incomplete
complete	.0005	.0005
incomplete	.423	

In the other personality dimensions surveyed by NEO-FFI, namely Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, there were no statistically significant differences between the men’s groups. The results were on the average level and in this way they supported Hypothesis no. 2.

Variations in self-acceptance of the young women from diversely structured families

The research results presented below (Figure 3 and Table 3) concerning variations in the self-acceptance for the female groups pointed to a statistically significant difference ($F=32.664$; $p=.0005$).



Figure 3. Variations of the average results as regards self-acceptance in the surveyed female groups.

Table 3. The family structure and the women’s self-acceptance level in the light of Tukey’s test.

Self-acceptance		
Structure of family:	reconstructed	incomplete
complete	.0005	.0005
incomplete	.984	

Considering the women’s self-acceptance from the types of families, it was noticed that women from incomplete families were characterized by the highest average results on the self-acceptance scale, which means that they have a low level of self-esteem in comparison with women from full families.

The group from reconstructed families did not differ significantly as regards average results in self-acceptance from those growing up in incomplete families. The self-esteem level was similar in these two groups.

The optimum level of self-acceptance characterized the group from full families, which differed significantly in this scope from the groups of the women coming from other family types.

Variations in self-acceptance of the young men from diversely structured families.

Considering the influence of the family structure on the self-acceptance level in the tested men groups, a statistically significant difference was noticed ($F=45.723;p=.0005$). The results are presented by Figure 4 and Table 4.

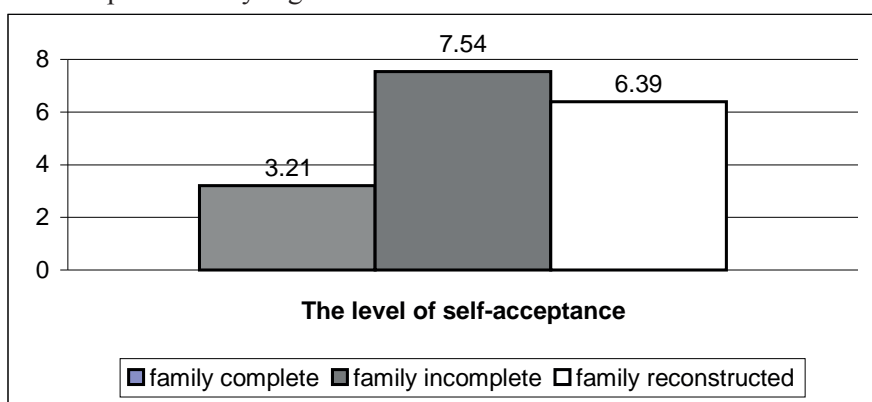


Figure 4. Variations of the average results as regards self-acceptance in the male groups.

Table 4. The family structure and the men’s self-acceptance level in the light of Tukey’s test.

Self-acceptance		
Structure of family:	reconstructed	Incomplete
complete	.044	.0005
incomplete	.0005	

The statistical analysis shows that, as far as self-acceptance is concerned, men from incomplete families received the highest average results in comparison with men from reconstructed families (above average) and from full ones (low results). It means that they are characterized by a low level of self-esteem; they are tense and neurotic. The results appeared statistically significant.

Between the male groups from full families and reconstructed ones there was seen a tendency ($p=.044$) toward showing better socially adapted men from full families. As it appeared, men from full families received the lowest average results on the self-acceptance scale, which means the their self-esteem was optimal.

Correlation of self-acceptance with the personality dimensions in the young people from the examined families types.

The next research stage analysed the relations between self-acceptance and the young persons' personality dimensions from differently structured families. In order to do that, we used the r-Pearson correlation coefficient.

Taking into consideration that the correlation coefficients are not additive, we carried out a statistical analysis separately for each compared group.

In the situation when the same two psychological variations correlated with each other in two or/and three types of the surveyed families, the obtained correlation coefficients were compared with respect to their value compatibility.

Analysing the results with respect to correlations between self-acceptance and selected personality dimensions, we used a breakdown of these variations and received the results which are in Table 5.

Table 5. The relation between self-acceptance and some personal qualities of the young people from differently structure families.

Dimensions of personality	Self-acceptation		
	Structure of family		
	Family complete	Family incomplete	Family reconstructed
Neuroticism	.200 p=.041	.575 p=.0005	.339 p=.0005
Extraversion	-	-.255 p=.009	-
Openness to Experience	-	-	-
Agreeableness	-.200 p=.041	-	-
Conscientiousness	-	-	-.225 p=.022

The research results with respect to correlation between self-acceptance and some personal qualities showed that there are relations between the variations and that their strength and directions are different. In this way, Hypothesis five was confirmed.

Considering the relation between self-acceptance and neuroticism, we discovered that it occurs in all the surveyed groups from full families, incomplete families and reconstructed ones (p=.200;p=.575;p=.339). Correlation coefficient values were not significantly different (p=.029).

High levels of apprehension, emotional tension, frequently experienced feelings of hostility and anger, shyness, and minimal ability to cope with stress result in receiving

high scores in the self-acceptance scale, which can be interpreted as pointing to low self-esteem.

There was negative correlation between the extraversion and self-acceptance in the persons from incomplete families. This low level of self-acceptance appears to be related to behaviours aimed at seeking stimulation, willingness to dominate in company, and life activities. The mechanism of compensation might have taken place here. A young man from an incomplete family, having low self-esteem, wants above all to show psychic strength and vigour – and not to be perceived as weak and hesitant.

Agreeableness, or one's attitude about other people, correlated negatively with self-acceptance in persons from full families. It appears that a higher level of self-esteem characterizes persons who are less agreeable, more egocentric, and in relations with others oriented towards competition rather than cooperation. The last relation analysed concerned conscientiousness, which correlated positively with self-acceptance for young persons from reconstructed families. We found that strong-willed, highly motivated and persistent persons are characterized by an optimum level of self-acceptance.

Conclusions

From the dawn of time, humanistic thought has been interested in the family as an institution, its problems having always been the centre of attention of all religious, philosophical, ethical and legal systems, since the family constitutes man's most fundamental reality. Although the family still occupies a high position in the hierarchy of values declared by man, it is affected by a host of undesirable changes and threats, such as: consumptionism, unemployment, poverty, and social pathologies. More and more families are unable to perform all their roles correctly and because of this they cannot provide their children with optimal conditions for development. Phenomena of the kind mentioned concern both full, incomplete, and reconstructed families, which can also be affected by permanent conflicts or commonly existing social diseases such as alcoholism.

Content related literature concerning diversified family structures, shows a wide range of occurring problems. It is emphasized that they affect not only adults but also the younger generation, who are doomed to existence in atypical environments not always satisfying their needs. There is no doubt that any abnormalities in a family influence a young individual's personal development and self-acceptance.

Our research has shown that the functioning specificity of full families, incomplete families and reconstructed ones strongly determine young persons personalities and their self-acceptance levels.

Comparisons between the groups of women and men from differently structured families pointed to one differentiating personality dimension. It appeared that the women and the men from full families most frequently displayed cognitive curiosity, a tendency toward positive valuations of life experiences. Young people from incomplete and reconstructed families received Openness scores below average, which can point to conventionalism and conservatism demonstrated both in views and behaviour.

Openness characterizing the young people from full families could have resulted from the attitudes presented by the parents, expressing acceptance, respect and the right to gain experience. Being able to act independently and at the same time feeling secure, the young generation could fully concentrate on their cognitive activity development.

Openness is very important for young, contemporary men since the environment where people live is characterized by an unheard of confrontation of cultures, a variety of which can be defined both globally and in micro-sociological terms. It is the consequence of such phenomena as: availability of modern transport, communication, and information transmission as well as social mobility and environmental openness. People meeting each other, almost at every step, reveal their distinctness to each other. In such circumstances, even peaceful co-existence, not to mention agreement or cooperation, is impossible without openness or tolerance toward others.

It should be emphasized that nowadays a preferable personality structure is an "open" one as it is open to innovativeness and a high level of life aspirations. The occurring cultural changes intertwine with social culture differentiation, its mobility, tendency to be open to act according to new social rules, with its emergence of new social groups, institutions, jobs, development, and deepening individual autonomy (Doniec, 2005).

Therefore, people characterized by openness have more opportunities to find their place and succeed in the contemporary world than those people who do not have this quality.

There is no doubt that besides personal qualities, self-awareness and self-acceptance are crucial for social behaviours displayed by an individual.

Self-acceptance is an important element of self-awareness as it enables self-determination as well as enabling individuals to distinguish themselves from the environment. It allows a person to assume a critical attitude towards their abilities as well as towards new requirements set by the environment. It plays an important role not only in getting to know oneself but also in steering one's behaviour and realizing his/her life plans.

If a person knows what place they occupy in society and what they can achieve, that means that their self-awareness functions correctly and there are no intrapersonal conflicts.

If, on the other hand, there is a big discrepancy between a person's view of their abilities and their real achievements, we speak about a self-awareness disorder. This disorder, according to psychoanalysis, can result from a conflict between aspirations for significance and feelings of low self-esteem.

The results of our research with respect to self-acceptance in young people from differently structured families showed statistically significant differences between women's and men's groups.

Both women and men from full families received scores pointing to a high level of self-esteem. On the other hand, women and men from incomplete and reconstructed families received scores reflecting low levels of self-esteem, which were connected with neurotic and hostile attitudes.

Our results strongly indicate that the family which satisfies the needs of its members and provides them with support and unconditional love, constitutes the optimal educational environment for stimulating one's positive self-image.

Our results can be confirmed by the research results done by H. Szczęsna (2005). The author demonstrated empirically that young people from divorced families were characterized by an average self-acceptance level in comparison with young people from full, well-functioning families, who had a high level of self-acceptance.

Also, J. Conway (1997) in his research, demonstrated empirically that young people from incomplete families were more often characterized by low levels of self-acceptance and self-esteem.

Furthermore, research by K. Pospiszyl showed that the more the father is involved in the educational process and the stronger his emotional bonds with the child are, the higher the child's self-acceptance and self-confidence are in relations with other people (Pospiszyl, 1980).

As a result of our research, a few important observations were made, which are not only consistent with contemporary thought but also bring in some valuable elements modifying the general knowledge on the subject. The research results are significant psychologically because they show that the family structure and parental relationship influence, to a large extent, the personal development and the self-acceptance level of young people.

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