Rozana Petani

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9649-7888
University of Zadar, Croatia

Helena Jurina

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2310-4200
University of Zadar, Croatia

Parents' Opinion on some Myths about Parenting in the Context of their own Upbringing and Social Expectations

Abstract

The aim of this research was to investigate the opinions of parents at different stages of parenthood, about the myths of authoritarian parenting and gender stereotypes in parenting in the context of their own upbringing and social expectations. Considering the influence of one's own parents, the way of growing up and the influence of wider society and social norms, the initial assumption of the research was that the way of growing up, as a family factor and social norms, as a social factor, define parents' opinions on myths about authoritarian parenting and gender stereotypes in parenting. Twelve respondents participated in the research; a qualitative method of semi-structured interview was used. The results of the research showed that family factors, such as the way of growing up and the parenting style, but also social factors such as the social environment and media, influence parents' opinions of myths about authoritarian parenting and gender stereotypes in parenting. Also, it was found that parents differ in their opinions on the myths about authoritarian parenting and gender stereotypes in parenting, depending on the stage of parenthood they are currently in.

Keywords

Gender roles, myths about parenting, parenting, parents, social norms.

1. Introduction

A question which is often discussed is, Why do parents behave in a certain way? Danyliuk and Grusec[1] point out that parents copy the behaviour which their own parents adopted during childhood, but they also tend to behave in according to information about correct parenting that reaches them through the wider community and literature or through the media. Individuals are not born with the knowledge of how to be a good parent but learn it throughout life. But it is not just the context of one's own childhood that determines future parental behaviour. Society also plays a big role in this behaviour. The local community can be very harsh and judgmental, so individuals, motivated by the need for social acceptance, opt for certain socially acceptable parental actions. Although nowadays there is research that proves the falsity of certain myths about parenting, there is still a wide range of misconceptions about parenting among parents that often appear in the form of traditional or modern well-known sayings. Myths are images and/ or projections that allow people to feel accepted in an irrational world, while also deviating from the objective truth.[2] Such misconceptions and distorted truths are very difficult to eradicate. It is understandable that every parent has only the best intentions when it comes to raising their child, but often ignorance leads to the wrong parenting methods, which is equally due to misconceptions and myths that are passed down from older to younger generations. Raising a child is not an easy task, and today, when more than ever various information is more accessible to everyone, it is important to point out to parents that they should think critically about their own style of upbringing and their parental behaviour.

Pernar states that almost all parents in everyday life encounter numerous myths and misconceptions about parenting that can cause them great stress. Stress often occurs due to the pressure and influence of the environment which dictates that good children are the product of good parenting skills, not taking into account external influences on the child that are impossible to control. Although parenting is promoted as something desirable and positive, when it comes to taking on the role of a parent, there is often general disappointment

---

[1] T. Danyliuk, J.E.Grusec, *Parents' Attitudes and Beliefs: Their Impact on Children's Development*, 2014. Retrieved from: http://www.childencyclopedia.com/parenting-skills/according-experts/parents-attitudesand-beliefs-their-impact-childrens-development (4.10.2021).

[2] S. Rusac, A. Štambuk, M. Tomečak, *Promišljanje starenja i starosti – predrasude, mitovi i novi pogledi*, "Hrvatska revija za rehabilitacijska istraživanja" 50 (2014) 1, pp. 36–53.

and "deromanticization" of certain expectations, especially among mothers, because mothers are often criticized for all the problems that occur related to children.[3] For some women, motherhood is more than an identity, it is more important than a career or marriage, while for others, motherhood acts as a disruption to their work role.[4] Motherhood is seen as a deeper and more subjective experience that often comes with the pressures imposed on the mother by traditional society. We find such pressures in well-known myths such as: "A woman's place is in the house with children." Although we live in a time of great social change, freedom and emancipation, for women, freedom is still just an ideal.[5] Stereotypes and prejudices related to the role of the mother can be a great emotional burden and pressure, which can lead to negative consequences and potentially jeopardize a good, psychologically healthy relationship between mother and child.[6] One of the common problems that can affect the disruption of such a healthy mother-child relationship is the problem of breastfeeding in public, which part of society still considers inappropriate, although breastfeeding is an experience that leads to the unification of child and mother and represents a basic biological need for every child.[7]

Parenting is a difficult and demanding job, and caring for young generations includes not only the realization of the child's biological needs, but also the transfer of values and knowledge about life and morals. When it comes to the goals and values that are desirable to convey to children, which also shape the parenting style, it is important to point out that the parenting style depends on the education of parents, their position in society and the influence of the wider community.[8] Parents with a lower educational status are more likely

---

[3] M. Pernar, *Roditeljstvo*, "Medicina Fluminensis: Medicina Fluminensis" 46 (2010) 3, pp. 255–260.

[4] G. Keresteš, M. Sočo, *Roditeljsko ponašanje zaposlenih roditelja: povezanost s objektivnim obilježjima posla i subjektivnim doživljajem odnosa roditeljske i radne uloge*, "Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja" 20 (2011) 3, pp. 647–669.

[5] M. Čudina-Obradović, J. Obradović, *Potpora roditeljstvu: izazovi i mogućnosti*, "Revija za socijalnu politiku" 10 (2003) 1, pp. 45–68.

[6] M. Pernar, *Roditeljstvo*, "Medicina Fluminensis: Medicina Fluminensis" 46 (2010) 3, pp. 255–260.

[7] M. Čudina-Obradović, J. Obradović, *Potpora roditeljstvu: izazovi i mogućnosti*, "Revija za socijalnu politiku" 10 (2003) 1, pp. 45–68.

[8] V. Družinec, *Transfer vrijednosti s roditelja na djecu*, "Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu" 65 (2016) 3, pp. 475–488.

to turn to authoritarian style, while more educated parents are more likely to turn to democratic parenting style and exhibit awareness that each child is special and has their own knowledge and skills. Democracy is manifested through the recognition of diversity and the knowledge that it is not useful for the development of each individual to be guided by the myth "All children should be treated the same." Therefore, it is important to know that no one should be compared to anyone, not even children.[9]

Today, a large amount of attention is paid to gender and gender differences. In a study conducted on over three hundred families, authors Endendijk et al.[10] conclude that there are differences in gender beliefs when it comes to the attitudes of mothers and fathers. Pollit[11] states that boys and girls have different social roles imposed by society, and their influence on children is strongest at the earliest age. Thus, both male and female personalities are conditioned by the society in which they live and society sets certain criteria for parents about what behaviours are desirable in children, what toys boys and girls should play with, how they should dress, etc. It is precisely because of such social pressures that it is common today to hear myths like this: "Boys don't play with dolls". In doing so, parents impose on children socially defined influences and thus condition children's behaviour and beliefs. The most common belief is that boys must be strong and masculine, and that girls must be gentle and sensitive, which results in boys learning not to show emotions, and girls learning that showing emotions is an essential part of their gender identity.

In modern times, more and more children are being born out of wedlock. There are also more and more divorces, so the family structure in which children grow up differs greatly from that of a traditional, heterogeneous nuclear family.[12] Increasingly, we also come across families with same-sex parents. However, we cannot argue that this form of parenting is as accepted as the traditional,

---

[9] Ž. Pintar, *Roditeljstvo u otporu*, "Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu" 67 (2018) 2, pp. 287–298.

[10] J. Endendijk, M. Groeneveldb, D.L. van derPolb, R.S. van Berkelb, E.T. Hallers-Haalboomb, J. Mesman, M. Bakermans-Kranenburg, *Boys Don't Play with Dolls: Mothers' and Fathers' Gender Talk during Picture Book Reading*, "Parenting: Science and Practice" 14 (2014), pp. 141–161.

[11] K. Pollit, *Why Boys Don't Play With Dolls*, 1995. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/08/magazine/hers-why-boys-don-t-play-with-dolls.html (4.10.2021).

[12] F. Goldscheider, S. Hofferth, *Family Structure and the Transition to Early Parenthood*, "Demography" 47 (2010) 2, pp. 415–437.

heterogeneous form of parenting. Moreover, for years, same-sex parenting has been the target of discrimination by other groups or heterosexual parents.[13] Koruga[14] points out that there are various misconceptions about same-sex parenting – *old-fashioned homonegativity* is the belief that homosexuals cannot be parents because homosexuality is closely linked to paedophilia and child abuse. In addition, *modern homonegativity* is related to the opinion that children of same-sex parents will be discriminated against as such and rejected by their peers. Today, the situation varies from state to state, but in some of them there is still a prevailing opinion that same-sex parenting is not appropriate and inevitably leads to bad consequences for the children of such families.

Our research may indicate that parenting is actually a relative and socially constructed concept that everyone can understand differently. The modern age is characterized by emancipation and freedom as fundamental values. These values also apply to children. Today, children are protected by numerous laws and parents are required to respect certain norms and social expectations when it comes to the treatment and upbringing of children. Children are considered as a great treasure, and the goal is to protect them and support their healthy development into adulthood. In this sense, it is necessary to educate and inform parents. In order to inform parents about the impact of some misconceptions on the upbringing of children, it is important to first establish the opinions of parents about parenting and misconceptions or myths that may influence their behaviour. Therefore, in this research we wanted to investigate the opinions of parents about the myths related to parenting that are widespread in our area.

2. Method

The aim of this research was to investigate the opinions of parents who are at different stages of parenthood, about the myths related to authoritarian parenting and gender stereotypes in parenting, in the context of their own upbringing and social expectations. Myths are shaped into "sayings" and are divided into two thematic groups: myths about authoritarian parenting and myths about

---

[13] T. Vučković Juroš, *Zašto ovdje možemo, a tamo ne možemo biti obitelj? – Kako socioinstitucionalni okviri oblikuju iskustva LGB roditeljstva*, "Revija za sociologiju" 49 (2019) 2, pp. 205–229.

[14] T. Koruga, *Istospolno roditeljstvo*, Rijeka 2015, Sveučilište u Rijeci.

gender stereotypes in parenting. With regard to the goal, the following research tasks were set:

1. To determine the opinion of parents about the myths related to authoritarian parenting, and gender and stereotypes in parenting, and to investigate the differences in their opinions with regard to the stage of parenthood;

2. To determine the relationship of family factors (the influence of their own parents and their upbringing style, way of growing up, etc.) that influence parenting and opinions about the myths related to authoritarian parenting;

3. To determine the relationship between social factors (the influence of social norms, neighbours, the wider community, the media, etc.) that affect parenting and opinions about myths related to gender stereotypes in parenting.

The myths/sayings discussed in the research are as follows: "The beating came out of heaven"; "A witch will come to take you"; "Without a diploma you are nobody and nothing"; "Little child, little care, big child, great care"; "While you are under my roof, you will listen to me"; "A woman's place is in the house with children"; "Breastfeeding in public is shameful"; "(All) children should be treated the same"; "Boys don't play with dolls"; "It's bad for a child to have two parents of the same sex".

A qualitative method, interviewing, was used in the research. An interview protocol consisting of two parts was developed. The first part covers thirteen questions about the current stage of the family, family factors and social factors that may affect parenting. Furthermore, the second part contains ten questions on participants' opinions on myths about authoritarian parenting and about gender stereotypes in parenting.

Participants in the study were people who are parents of children of different ages and are at different stages of parenthood. For the purposes of this research, the categorization of the parenting stage according to Kestenberg (1970)[15] was used, which distinguishes the following parenting stages: *full parenting* when the oldest child is of kindergarten age, *partial parenting* when the oldest child has not yet left home and *parenting without children* when the oldest child has left the parental home. Of the 12 participants, five were male and seven female,

---

[15] K. Lacković-Grgin, *Doživljaj i praksa roditeljstva u različitim životnim razdobljima*, "Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja" 20 (2011) 4, pp. 1063–1083.

with a range in age from 22 to 54 years. The average age of the participants in the category of full parenthood is 26 years and they have one child on average. The average age of participants in the category of partial parenthood is 39.5 years and they have an average of 2.5 children, and the average age of participants in the category of parenthood without children is 48.5 years and they have an average of 2 children. Each participant is marked with a special code (from S01 to S12).

3. Results and interpretation

In the following chapter, the results will be divided into two categories. The first part contains the results related to the myths of authoritarian parenting, and the second contains the results related to the myths about gender stereotypes in parenting.

"The beating came out of heaven" – all participants state that they are familiar with the myth (saying), and the number of participants who express approval is equal to those who express disapproval, regardless of the stage of parenthood. It was heard most often from their own parents, but their opinion is divided. The greatest justification for this saying lies precisely in the responses of male participants (S04, S10 and S11) who state that they had a difficult or traumatic childhood. In the case of S04, a difficult childhood was caused by poverty, hard work and the awareness that his role in the family is primarily instrumental. Rabin[16] states that instrumental motivation is based primarily on the extension of the family line and on the personal benefit of the child which is seen in the response of respondent S04: "What is sometimes said, you have a child to have someone to work for you. It was only important that there was someone who would work, and when you finished school to take you off your parent's back. There was no upbringing, nothing special." (S04)

In the case of S10 and S11, a difficult childhood was described as strict paternal authority and a lack of care and understanding on the part of the father, but also the father's problem with alcohol in respondent S10, and a long and difficult parental separation in respondent S11. Danyliuk i Grusec[17] state that mothers and

---

[16] A.I. Rabin, *Motivation for Parenthood*, "Journal of Projective Techniques and Personality Assessment" 29 (1965) 4, pp. 405–413.

[17] T. Danyliuk, J.E.Grusec, *Parents' Attitudes and Beliefs: Their Impact on Children's Development*, 2014. Retrieved from: http://www.childencyclopedia.com/parenting-skills/

fathers differ greatly when it comes to parenting style. The fathers having a more authoritarian parenting style, which is also stated by Berc et al.[18] who point out that, due to unemployment, poorer economic and material situations and unfavourable family climate, children can often be punished physically by their fathers, which is also evident in participants S11 and S12. Čudina-Obradović and Obradović[19] define authoritarian style of parenting as one in which parents make demands and exercise strict supervision while not providing the child with enough warmth and love. What this parenting style seeks to achieve is self-control and obedience, where parents are a figure of authority that sets demands without the need for explanation, under the excuse that "beatings are remembered". Numerous beliefs and attitudes originate from the personal experience of the parents are applied to their own children, which is evident from the answers of respondents S10: "The beating is from heaven. When you get a little beaten up, then you learn. Otherwise, you can talk to a fool a hundred times, and the fool does the same (laughs)." (S10)

On the other hand, we find three participants who absolutely do not approve and do not justify this saying. Participants S02, S06 and S07 state that beatings are superfluous and that everything can be solved by talking and saying nice words. Specifically, these are respondents who mostly grew up with sisters, unlike the other participants. From this scenario, the influence of the family structure is evident, which is cited by Runco (2014)[20] as well. Namely, S03 grew up with three sisters and one youngest brother, S06 grew up with two sisters, and S07 grew up with a younger sister. If we take into account such a family structure, we can conclude that these participants have adopted a gentler picture of the parental role that comes from growing up mostly with women. Ljubetić i Reić-Ercegovac[21] point out that such intergenerational transmission is present

according-experts/parents-attitudesand-beliefs-their-impact-childrens-development (4.10.2021).

[18] G. Berc, S. Blažeka Kokorić, M. Laklija, *Doživljaj roditeljskog prihvaćanja/odbacivanja u kontekstu različitih socio-ekonomskih uvjeta odrastanja u primarnoj obitelj*, "Hrvatska revija za rehabilitacijska istraživanja" 46 (2010) 2, pp. 1–18.

[19] M. Čudina-Obradović, J. Obradović, *Potpora roditeljstvu: izazovi i mogućnosti*, "Revija za socijalnu politiku" 10 (2003) 1, pp. 45–68.

[20] M. Runco, *Creativity – Theories and Themes: Research, Development, and Practice*, London 2014, Academic Press.

[21] M. Ljubetić, I. Reić Ercegovac, *Svjesnost u roditeljstvu majki i očeva djece različite dobi: Validacija hrvatske inačice upitnika*, "Psihologijske teme" 28 (2019) 2, pp. 397–418.

in both mothers and fathers, especially when it comes to parental warmth and attachment.

"A witch will come to take you" – all participants state that they have heard the saying and the number of participants who express approval is equal to that of those who express disapproval, regardless of the stage of parenthood in which they are. When asked when they heard it, the most common answers are "from parents" and "from grandmother." Given the answers obtained, we can conclude that the influence of the immediate family is pronounced especially on male participants, who justify the saying more than female participants. Namely, the participants' answers show that most of them view the statement as a joke that instils a certain amount of fear in children, in order to control them more easily. Unlike male participants, most female participants state that practicing such a saying is not necessary and that it traumatizes children. "I mean, it traumatizes children when they're little. Then they are afraid of everything and that is not good at all." (S12)

Such trauma is noted by Leus[22] when he describes how children possess magical consciousness and have a fear of all that they cannot explain. The same author describes parents who resort to such intimidation as immature individuals who do not know how to constructively solve problems. So, when it comes to this saying, it is evident that the opinions of the participants differ according to gender. Taking this into account, it is important to state that fathers are less prepared for the role of parents than mothers, and that paternal identity is built only by involvement in the upbringing of the child[23] which may explain the differences obtained.

"Without a diploma you are nobody and nothing" – most participants state that the saying is not justified and that the most important thing is the ability and desire to succeed; not necessarily having a diploma. However, participants S04, S10 and S01 state that a diploma is valuable and opens many doors in life. Such an attitude can be explained if we take into account their upbringing (way of growing up), which can be classified under family factors. Namely, the participants who state that the diploma as something very valuable in life mostly grew up living very modestly and did not have the opportunity to achieve their

---

[22] T. Leus, *Najčešće roditeljske zablude: 49 zamki u odgoju i kako ih izbjeći*, Zagreb 2014, Planet Zoe.

[23] M. Čudina-Obradović, J. Obradović, *Potpora roditeljstvu: izazovi i mogućnosti*, "Revija za socijalnu politiku" 10 (2003) 1, pp. 45–68.

desired goals and aspirations in life, most often due to a lack of financial support from their parents. According to Leus[24] participants S04, S10 and S01 belong to a group of parents who, due to many life problems, failed to gain higher work qualifications and achieve their own aspirations: "The first thing I wanted to instil in my children is that throughout life they always fight for themselves and that education is something that should be a top priority… to one day afford, like, some kind of a normal life, a better income, meaning an easier job than those of us who work physically much more, so they can have an easier life." (S01)

Leus[25] claims that the second group of parents consists of highly educated individuals, who cannot imagine that their child does not follow in their footsteps and does not complete some form of higher education. We find such an example of fulfilling educational expectations and narcissistic motivation in parents as stated by Rabin,[26] in the responses of respondent S11 who describes his own father's pressure with regard to his education: "My father kept telling me that. I even had to sign on a couple of papers (laughs) that if I didn't finish college or if I didn't enrol or even end up as a canal digger, I wouldn't blame my father. So, he kept imposing on me that without a degree you are nobody and nothing." (S11)

With regard to other factors, no differences were shown among the study participants.

"Little child, little care, big child, great care" – even in this case, nearly all participants stated that they heard the saying, but the opinion about it largely depends on the stage of parenthood as mentioned by Kestenberg,[27] and thus the age of the parent as stated by Ljubešić.[28] Although all the participants stated that the saying was justified, the participants in the stages of full and partial parenthood have some doubts whether the saying is justified. Parents with younger children state that small children are also a big concern for them and that they

---

[24] T. Leus, *Najčešće roditeljske zablude: 49 zamki u odgoju i kako ih izbjeći*, Zagreb 2014, Planet Zoe.

[25] T. Leus, *Najčešće roditeljske zablude: 49 zamki u odgoju i kako ih izbjeći*, Zagreb 2014, Planet Zoe.

[26] A.I. Rabin, *Motivation for Parenthood*, "Journal of Projective Techniques and Personality Assessment" 29 (1965) 4, pp. 405–413.

[27] K. Lacković-Grgin, *Doživljaj i praksa roditeljstva u različitim životnim razdobljima*, "Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja" 20 (2011) 4, pp. 1063–1083.

[28] M. Ljubešić, *Izazovi odrastanja i roditeljstvo*, "Nova prisutnost: časopis za intelektualna i duhovna pitanja" 2 (2004) 2, pp. 325–328.

have not yet experienced the worries that come with older children, which leads to doubts about the justification of this saying: "Well, since my daughter is only a year old now, she's a big concern for me, even if she's a small child, she's really a big concern." (S07)

The opinions of the participants on this saying are generally positive. All participants state that different worries come with older children. Furthermore, older participants belonging to the stage of parenting without children, emphasise the concept of losing control over older children, the importance of maintaining contact, and greater financial worries and fears. These results can be explained by the distinctions between parents in young adulthood and middle adulthood cited by Erickson[29] when he talks about how parenting in young adulthood comes down to giving love and sacrifice that support a child's development. In contrast, parenting in middle adulthood is more about caring for future generations in a social and personal sense. Thus, in relation to the above myth, there are noticeable differences in the opinion of the participants with regard to the stage of parenthood they currently belong to, and thus with regard to participants age.

"While you are under my roof, you will listen to me" – a number of the participants do not consider the saying justified or consider it only partially justified. Among these, male participants (S04, S10 and S11) who were subjected to authoritarian parental behaviour during childhood stand out. However, although the participants are divided in their opinion on this saying, their opinion is not conditioned by the stage of parenthood. Thus, S04, S05, S10 and S11 state that nothing can be achieved with this saying and that it is important to have your own opinion and attitude, which indicates their attitude towards the authority which was created in childhood. Likewise, participants who do not justify or justify the saying to a lesser extent, claim that they think they are better parents or will be better than their own parents. Given that we understand parenting in a broader context, we can see that the term "good parent" does not have the same meaning for all people.[30] Such a strong influence of family factors is also cited by Albritton et al.[31] who point out that men are slightly

---

[29] E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, London 1984, Triad Paladin.

[30] B. Kušević, *Socijalna konstrukcija roditeljstva – implikacije za obiteljsku pedagogiju*, "Pedagogijska istraživanja" 8 (2011) 2, pp. 297–307.

[31] T. Albritton, A. Divney, D. Gordon, T. Kershaw, J. Lewis, U. Magriples, A. Murphy, *Family and Relationship Influences on Parenting Behaviors of Young Parents*, "Journal of Adolescent Health" 54 (2014) 2, pp. 197–203.

more prone to family influences when compared to women, who are slightly more prone to social influences. The opinion of the participants is evident from the following statements: "I don't know, I have no need… to explain, because with such a saying nothing can be gained. You can only end up parting ways or something…" (S05). "Usually you should listen, but maybe you better not listen to some other things, and some, well… You can logically conclude what is harmful and what is not." (S10)

In contrast, the responses of the female participants show that they justify the saying more, and that they also practice it more. Participants S03, S06, S07 and S09 state how important it is to respect the person who provides you with a home and to participate in household chores. In order to understand such an attitude, it is important to state that these participants were brought up with a sentiment that parents must be respected and that work responsibilities and helping parents, most often mothers, are an extremely important part of growing up. As stated by Keresteš and Sočo[32] the mother is given greater responsibility for the child's development and success because mothers are more involved in the upbringing and more prepared for the parental role from childhood. Thus, parents and parenting style leave a strong impression on the opinions of participants, which is evident from the answers stating that they heard the saying most often from their own parents.

The second group of myths about parenting refers to myths about gender stereotypes in parenting. When talking about the relationship between the influence of social factors and opinions about myths related to gender stereotypes in parenting, it is important to consider factors such as the influence of social norms, media influences, and influences of the wider growing community, as well as the role of trends and criticism of society which has a major impact on an individual's worldview and parental role.

"A woman's place is in the house with children" – all participants except S10 stated that they do not consider the saying justified, which leads to the conclusion that there are no differences of opinion among participants regarding the stage of parenthood. But the strong influence of social norms on the opinions of the participants is visible. Participants greatly emphasize how they support their wives in their decision to work and not restrain themselves to the role

---

[32] G. Keresteš, M. Sočo, *Roditeljsko ponašanje zaposlenih roditelja: povezanost s objektivnim obilježjima posla i subjektivnim doživljajem odnosa roditeljske i radne uloge*, "Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja" 20 (2011) 3, pp. 647–669.

of "maids", as well as how they appreciate their efforts to reconcile household management with permanent employment. On the other hand, the female participants state that the position of women is better today than it used to be, that no one should prevent them from having their lives outside the home, and that they should not be relegated to "slaves of the house." The opinion of the participants on how they see themselves as women and mothers is evident from the following statements: "It's nonsense! Well, we live in the 21st century, what are we talking about?! If my parents or my husband said that to me, I would get really angry with them. I didn't fight for half of my life, and work to be able to achieve all this in my life just for someone to tell me that my place is in the house." (S12)

The influence of the wider community and various social pressures is visible from the answers of the participants who mostly state that they heard the saying from friends, neighbours and colleagues, but also from children's literature, which S07 cites as reading material through which children learn from an early age that a woman's place is in the house: "I've even heard that, and it's true, that that's all that children's literature comes down to. They have been learning it since they were little, my mother is in the kitchen, my mother is at home, my mother cleans, my mother this, my mother that…" (S07)

Equal parental partnership moves away from stereotypical division of roles and from traditional social expectations and pressures. Equality today comes down to making efficient and fair decisions together, thus avoiding negative energy in the family. Likewise, equal parenting is based on equality in the division of responsibilities and jobs.[33] An increasing number of fathers use paid leave to be with a child which is a great example of the above stated,[34] and one such example is notable in the response of the participant (S11): "A woman's place is where she wants to be. I will not force my wife to be in the kitchen. If, for example, she wants to find a job or she wants to have a permanent job, it is not a problem. Even if she earns more than me, I will stay at home." (S11)

"Breastfeeding in public is shameful" – participants in the category of full parenthood are the least familiar with the saying, participants in the category

---

[33] M. Čudina-Obradović, J. Obradović, *Potpora roditeljstvu: izazovi i mogućnosti*, "Revija za socijalnu politiku" 10 (2003) 1, pp. 45–68.

[34] M. Pernar, *Roditeljstvo*, "Medicina Fluminensis: Medicina Fluminensis" 46 (2010) 3, pp. 255–260.

of partial parenthood are partially familiar with the saying, and participants in the stage of parenting without children are absolutely familiar with the saying. However, when it comes to their opinion on this myth, the participants' responses cannot be related to the parenting stage. Furthermore, it is important to take into account that almost all participants who were familiar with the saying (S01, S02, S03, S04, S08, S09, S12) were also criticized for the way they raised their own child. Differences in opinion about this gender stereotype are also visible with regard to gender. The male participants state that they do not justify the saying and that they consider breastfeeding to be normal and natural in public: "I do not know. I think it's a normal, natural thing, that it's something that I think should be just fine." (S05)

On the other hand, female participants are the ones who partially justify the saying and state that a woman should not expose herself to the gaze of others and create an embarrassing situation, preferring her to take shelter and cover herself. Thus, the answers allude that women are more sensitive to criticism from society and the public, but also that they themselves are more judgmental. Women being more sensitive to the influences of society is also stated by Albritton et al.[35] According to Pernar,[36] in families where both parents are employed, it is the mother who provides the primary care to the child and thus is more criticized when something goes wrong. In this aspect of motherhood, the wider family and the structure of the society in which they find themselves play a major role.[37] If we take the examples of participants S03 and S09, we can confirm this. Participants S03 and S09 cite harsh criticism at the expense of raising their own children. The same participants mostly condemn the public breastfeeding which Čudina-Obradović and Obradović[38] describe as an experience of the union of mother and child. Thus, social pressure creates more stress for mothers than for fathers, for whom being a parent

---

[35] T. Albritton, A. Divney, D. Gordon, T. Kershaw, J. Lewis, U. Magriples, A. Murphy, *Family and Relationship Influences on Parenting Behaviors of Young Parents*, "Journal of Adolescent Health" 54 (2014) 2, pp. 197–203.

[36] M. Pernar, *Roditeljstvo*, "Medicina Fluminensis: Medicina Fluminensis" 46 (2010) 3, pp. 255–260.

[37] M. Čudina-Obradović, J. Obradović, *Potpora roditeljstvu: izazovi i mogućnosti*, "Revija za socijalnu politiku" 10 (2003) 1, pp. 45–68.

[38] M. Čudina-Obradović, J. Obradović, *Potpora roditeljstvu: izazovi i mogućnosti*, "Revija za socijalnu politiku" 10 (2003) 1, pp. 45–68.

is not a necessity, but only a desirable circumstance.[39] Mothers therefore need support, and such support can be provided by a partner or extended family and friends who form an individual's social network.[40]

"(All) children should be treated the same" – the participants' answers show that most of them are familiar with the saying, while the opinion about the saying can be related to the stage of parenthood. Almost all participants in the category of complete parenthood state that they do not consider the saying justified because every child is different and has their own potential. Furthermore, participants with younger children look back at the micro level of this saying: "Every child needs something different. Everyone has their needs, desires, and interests. Someone is interested in, I don't know, cars, someone is interested in drawing, so you can't treat them the same." (S10)

Participants in the category of complete parenting state that they pay more and more attention to the cognitive and emotional development of children, and they achieve this through conversations with children. Thus, with young parents (S07, S10, S11 and S12) we see some modern ways of raising children that are also socially accepted. It is important to note that participants who are in the stage of full parenthood are more educated than participants in other stages of parenthood. Družinec[41] states that the way children are raised largely depends on the education of the parents, their position in society, and the influence of the wider community. Thus, parents of lower educational status are more likely to turn to the authoritarian style, while more educated parents are more likely to turn to the democratic parenting style, which includes the awareness that each child is special and has their own knowledge and skills. In contrast, almost all participants in the category of partial parenting state that they consider the saying justified and that equality is something they should strive for. Thus, participants in the partial parenting stage turn more to the macro level when it comes to this saying. From the participants' answers, it is also evident how their way of raising children has changed over the years. Participants in the categories

---

[39] J.A. Chafel, K.G. Hadley, *Poverty and the Well-Being of Children and Families*, in: C.E, Walker, M.C. Roberts (eds.), *Handbook of Clinical Child Psychology*, New York 2001, Wiley, pp. 3–19.

[40] D. Nenadić-Bilan, *Društvena potpora roditeljima djece predškolske dobi*, "Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu" 64 (2015) 1, pp. 45–63.

[41] V. Družinec, *Transfer vrijednosti s roditelja na djecu*, "Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu" 65 (2016) 3, pp. 475–488.

of partial parenting and parenting without children state that they were more lenient towards younger children than older ones (S01, S08, S09), which makes their opinion contradictory. However, in order to ensure the same rights and the same conditions for all children, the participants in the partial parenting stage state that children should not be treated differently, and this is evident from the statement: "I think that's fine, yes, all children should be treated the same and all children should have the same rights, more so, maybe we should be more concerned with making ourselves more approachable and helping individual children." (S05)

Such responses from participants point to what Erickson[42] points out when he talks about how parenting practices in young adults are reduced to providing love and encouraging the child's individual development, while parenting in middle adulthood is more reduced to caring for the next generation as a whole, and that children are seen as part of society who need help. Thus, participants with school-age children look at the macro level when it comes to this saying, and participants in the stage of parenting without children look equally at the micro and macro level. Although parenting is largely conditioned by cultural understandings, beliefs about the role of parents are not constant, but change with age and needs, because parents are not born ready for their role, rather they learn it and adapt to new situations.[43] Thus, participants who state that they are familiar with the saying also state that they believe that social norms shape them as parents. Female participants who are familiar with the saying (S01, S03, S09, S12) mention problems with the behaviour and punishment of children in public, and problems with following trends and social networks: "I may have said before that there is no chance that I will give them a mobile phone, and now it is normal for me that they have a mobile phone. Of course, they don't have Facebook, but they have Tik Tok because it's simply something their friends have and why wouldn't they have it." (S08)

Participants who are not familiar with the saying also state that social norms do not shape them as parents at all (S02, S05 and S10). Participants who consider the saying justified also state that all children should be treated the same, that the times have changed, as well as noting that the upbringing is different

---

[42] E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, London 1984, Triad Paladin.

[43] E. Sunko, E. (2008), *Utjecaj provedbe programa za roditelje na njihove stavove o odgoju*, "Odgojne znanosti" 10 (2008) 2, pp. 383–401.

today than in the past, therefore parents should adapt to new situations and upcoming trends.

"Boys do not play with dolls" – all participants state that they do not consider the saying justified, which leads to the conclusion that the opinion of the participants about this saying is not conditioned by the stage of parenthood. Although almost all participants stated that they have heard the saying, most of them stated that they heard the saying from neighbours, friends and the elderly. Thus, the formation of parental roles is influenced by some external factors and social expectations that can either support parents or create stress, which in turn has an effect on the child. The environment creating stress for parents in performing their parental role is evident from the following statement: "Yes, that's what my father always told me. As I am the only male between my siblings, I have two sisters, I always liked to play with them. They also played with dolls and I think it was never a problem for me, but I don't know, it was problem for him…" (S11)

Moreover, although all participants point out that the saying is not justified, participant S03 points out that such behaviour would not be encouraged, unlike participant S01, who points out how important it is for a child to play with dolls in order to acquire parenting skills from the earliest childhood. Such answers can be explained if we take into account that the child's value is derived from the need of parents to meet certain expectations or norms imposed on them by society, and from the desire to fulfil gender identity stated by Čudina-Obradović and Obradović.[44] Pollit[45] states that boys and girls have different social roles imposed on them by society, the most common belief being that boys must be strong and masculine, while girls must be gentle and sensitive. Thus, when it comes to this myth, the participants' answers show that they are not inclined to justify such socially constructed roles, but rather look to meet the child's needs and interests, which leads to the conclusion that society's influence weakens when it comes to gender differences concerning children.

"It's bad for a child to have two parents of the same sex" – participants in the stage of full parenthood and parenting without children point out, to a greater extent, that the saying is unjustified as opposed to participants

---

[44] M. Čudina-Obradović, J. Obradović, *Potpora roditeljstvu: izazovi i mogućnosti*, "Revija za socijalnu politiku" 10 (2003) 1, pp. 45–68.

[45] K. Pollit, *Why Boys Don't Play With Dolls*, 1995. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/08/magazine/hers-why-boys-don-t-play-with-dolls.html (4.10.2021).

in the stage of partial parenting who point out, to a greater extent, that the saying is justified. It is evident that the influence of the wider community and the influence of the public has a significant impact on the opinions of the participants. Pećnik et al.[46] state that certain indirect influences shape the view of the parental role due to various information coming from the family or from the media. Participants who point out that they do not justify, or only partially justify the saying are also those who stated that they have been criticized, and that social norms limit them as parents. Kušević[47] also cites some of such restrictions when she talks about how it is generally accepted that parents should have children in their twenties, and that it is only natural that a child has both a mother and a father. It is noteworthy that participants who, to a greater extent, do not justify the saying are also the most educated. Therefore, we can conclude that the level of education and social status of parents determine the values that parents want to pass on to their children,[48] but also their views on the parental role. From such answers, it can be concluded that the participants who do not justify or partially do not justify this saying (S02, S03, S04, S07, S09, S11 and S12) understand what it is like to be under public pressure and magnifying glass of the wider community which implies following parenting trends, but also under the social constraints that the mentioned trends carry. Thus, participants who state that they do not justify the saying (S03, S04, S07, S11, S12) point out that the most important thing for a child is to have parents, regardless of their sexual orientation.

In contrast, participants justifying the saying (S01, S05, S06, S08, S10) point out that a child must have both a mother and a father, and participants S05 and S10 state that they believe that a child raised by same-sex parents will become homosexual. It is evident that there are different attitudes about same-sex parenting among heterosexual parents.[49] Their responses show that same-sex families are

[46] N. Pećnik, T. Radočaj, A. Tokić, *Uvjerenja javnosti o ispravnim roditeljskim postupcima prema djeci najmlađe dobi*, "Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja" 20 (2011) 3, pp. 625–646.

[47] B. Kušević, *Socijalna konstrukcija roditeljstva – implikacije za obiteljsku pedagogiju*, "Pedagogijska istraživanja" 8 (2011) 2, pp. 297–307.

[48] Ž. Pintar, *Roditeljstvo u otporu*, "Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu" 67 (2018) 2, pp. 287–298.

[49] T. Vučković Juroš, *Zašto ovdje možemo, a tamo ne možemo biti obitelj? – Kako socioinstitucionalni okviri oblikuju iskustva LGB roditeljstva*, "Revija za sociologiju" 49 (2019) 2, pp. 205–229.

not as accepted as traditional, heterogeneous families. Koruga found something similar in his research.[50] Almost all the arguments leading to the justification of this saying are visible in the following statements: "I can't say what that child would be like… Would they think the same as this child who grew up with a mother and father?" Or again, if they had two mothers or two fathers, would they turn out the same, and is that normal? I can't judge that right now." (S01). "Yes, a child must have a mother and a father, and I think I might tolerate two women to have a child, but two men to have a child, a male child, for me it is, I don't know, inadmissible." (S05)

4. Conclusion

This research provided insight into the opinions of parents who are at different stages of parenting about myths related to authoritarian parenting and gender stereotypes in parenting. Research has found that parental familiarity with myths is generally no different when it comes to the parenting stage. However, when it comes to the participants' opinion on the myths about authoritarian parenting, the results suggest that parents in the stage of parenting without children are more traditional in their opinion on upbringing and to a greater extent justify these myths. In contrast, parents who are in the stage of partial parenthood justify myths about authoritarian parenting to a lesser extent and are more prone to adhering to social norms than to the influence of the family. Thus, based on the results, it can be explained that parental opinion on the myths of authoritarian parenting changes with respect to the stage of parenthood. Furthermore, when it comes to parental opinions about myths related to gender stereotypes in parenting, the influence of parenting stage and age is somewhat more pronounced compared to myths about authoritarian parenting. With myths about gender stereotypes in parenting, it can be concluded that the influence of the parenting stage is closely related to whether parents are familiar with the myths or not. Parents in the stage of full parenthood are the least familiar with the myths about gender stereotypes in parenting, while parents in the stage of parenthood without children are far more familiar with these myths. However, when it comes to the participants' opinion on the myths about gender stereotypes in parenting, the results suggest that parents in the

---

[50] T. Koruga, *Istospolno roditeljstvo*, Rijeka 2015, Sveučilište u Rijeci.

stage of partial parenthood are less liberal and to a greater extent justify these myths. Such findings may be the result of the influence of social factors that most strongly affect parents who have children of predominantly school age, and are more prone to influences and opinions of their friends or neighbours, but also of society in general.

Considering the relationship between opinions on myths about authoritarian parenting and the influence of family factors, the results suggest that family factors in their various forms have a strong influence on parents' opinions about these myths. Thus, when speaking of corporal punishment, family factors such as growing up under an authoritarian parental regime, corporal punishment in childhood, and lack of parental love, exert a strong influence that is visible in participants who themselves justify corporal punishment of children. The influence of the way of growing up has also been determined when it comes to the pressure on education. Although almost every parent wants their child to live well and be successful regardless of whether the child has the abilities and interests for education or not, parents are still inclined to impose such an ideal on their children, especially if they themselves were prevented from obtaining a degree due to the way they grew up and the influence of their own parents, or if they themselves are highly educated. Likewise, the results suggest how the structure of the family in which one grows up, influences differences in opinions among participants.

Furthermore, the myth of child intimidation shows a strong influence of parents and immediate family, and a generational transmission of behaviour towards children. The results also suggest that parenting styles shape participants' opinions when it comes to attitudes toward authority. Authoritarian control imposes certain rules on children and tries to achieve obedience, but although the goal may be well-intentioned, the means to achieve this goal are not entirely justified and lead to negative consequences and problems with authority later on in life.[51]

When it comes to the relationship between opinions on myths about gender stereotypes in parenting and the influence of social factors, the results suggest that social factors have a very strong influence on parents' opinions about these myths. When it comes to the position of women and breastfeeding in public, the results indicate that men are aware of the position of women in society, and

---

[51] T. Leus, *Najčešće roditeljske zablude: 49 zamki u odgoju i kako ih izbjeći*, Zagreb 2014, Planet Zoe.

that emancipation should be pursued. On the other hand, the results show that women are the ones who are more critical of their own position and still do not feel completely free and emancipated in this regard.

In the case of myths about the treatment of children, the results also indicate a strong influence of social factors, such as public influence. The influence of social factors is also seen in the trends that change parental opinion about myths related to gender stereotypes in parenting. Although parenting is largely conditioned by cultural perceptions, beliefs about the role of parents themselves are not constant but change with age and needs as parents learn and adapt to new situations on the go.[52] Moreover, there is the influence of social criticism that acts as a stressor, especially for mothers, who are more exposed to these criticisms. However, when it comes to gender differences between children, the results show that traditional social influences are weakening and that parents are looking at what is best for the child, and not what society dictates. When it comes to same-sex parenting, the influences of tradition and of the social environment are still visible, forming a parental opinion based on the sentiment that the child must have a mother and father, but also the belief that a child of same-sex parents cannot have a normal life like other children. Thus, there are different views on same-sex parenting such as old-fashioned homonegativity and modern homonegativity that serve as arguments for parents who have more traditional opinions about gender stereotypes in parenting.[53]

Our research may indicate that the influences of the primary family, ways of growing up, family structure and society, media, neighbours and traditional beliefs are extremely strong and shape parental opinions. The research also left some open questions that can serve as a starting point for future research. Future research may focus on exploring a variety of other influences on individuals who become parents, and shape their opinion of the parental role. Also, it would be interesting to conduct research on a larger number of respondents in various different parts of Croatia.

---

[52] E. Sunko, *Utjecaj provedbe programa za roditelje na njihove stavove o odgoju*, "Odgojne znanosti" 10 (2008) 2, pp. 383–401.

[53] T. Koruga, *Istospolno roditeljstvo*, Rijeka 2015, Sveučilište u Rijeci.

Bibliography

Albritton T., Divney A., Gordon D., Kershaw T., Lewis J., Magriples U., Murphy A., *Family and Relationship Influences on Parenting Behaviors of Young Parents*, "Journal of Adolescent Health" 54 (2014) 2, pp. 197–203.

Berc G., Blažeka Kokorić S., Laklija M., *Doživljaj roditeljskog prihvaćanja/odbacivanja u kontekstu različitih socio-ekonomskih uvjeta odrastanja u primarnoj obitelj*, "Hrvatska revija za rehabilitacijska istraživanja" 46 (2010) 2, pp. 1–18.

Chafel J.A., Hadley K.G., *Poverty and the Well-Being of Children and Families*, in: C.E. Walker, M.C. Roberts (eds.), *Handbook of Clinical Child Psychology*, New York 2001, Wiley, pp. 3–19.

Čudina-Obradović M., Obradović J., *Potpora roditeljstvu: izazovi i mogućnosti*, "Revija za socijalnu politiku" 10 (2003) 1, pp. 45–68.

Danyliuk T., Grusec J.E., *Parents' Attitudes and Beliefs: Their Impact on Children's Development*, 2014. Retrieved from: http://www.childencyclopedia.com/parenting-skills/according-experts/parents-attitudesand-beliefs-their-impact-childrens-development (4.10.2021).

Družinec V., *Transfer vrijednosti s roditelja na djecu*, "Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu" 65 (2016) 3, pp. 475–488.

Endendijk J., Groeneveldb M., van der Polb D.L., van Berkelb R.S., Hallers-Haalboomb E.T., Mesman J., Bakermans-Kranenburg M., *Boys Don't Play with Dolls: Mothers' and Fathers' Gender Talk during Picture Book Reading*, "Parenting: Science and Practice" 14 (2014), pp. 141–161.

Erikson E., *Childhood and Society*, London 1984, Triad Paladin.

Goldscheider F., Hofferth S., *Family Structure and the Transition to Early Parenthood*, "Demography" 47 (2010) 2, pp. 415–437.

Keresteš G., Sočo M., *Roditeljsko ponašanje zaposlenih roditelja: povezanost s objektivnim obilježjima posla i subjektivnim doživljajem odnosa roditeljske i radne uloge*, "Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja" 20 (2011) 3, pp. 647–669.

Koruga T., *Istospolno roditeljstvo*, Rijeka 2015, Sveučilište u Rijeci.

Kušević B., *Socijalna konstrukcija roditeljstva – implikacije za obiteljsku pedagogiju*, "Pedagogijska istraživanja" 8 (2011) 2, pp. 297–307.

Lacković-Grgin K., *Doživljaj i praksa roditeljstva u različitim životnim razdobljima*, "Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja" 20 (2011) 4, pp. 1063–1083.

Leus T., *Najčešće roditeljske zablude: 49 zamki u odgoju i kako ih izbjeći*, Zagreb 2014, Planet Zoe.

Ljubešić M., *Izazovi odrastanja i roditeljstvo*. "Nova prisutnost: časopis za intelektualna i duhovna pitanja" 2 (2004) 2, pp. 325–328.

Ljubetić M., Reić Ercegovac I., *Svjesnost u roditeljstvu majki i očeva djece različite dobi: Validacija hrvatske inačice upitnika*, "Psihologijske teme" 28 (2019) 2, pp. 397–418.

Nenadić-Bilan D., *Društvena potpora roditeljima djece predškolske dobi*, "Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu" 64 (2015) 1, pp. 45–63.

Pećnik N., Radočaj T., Tokić A., *Uvjerenja javnosti o ispravnim roditeljskim postupcima prema djeci najmlađe dobi*, "Društvena istraživanja: časopis za opća društvena pitanja" 20 (2011) 3, pp. 625–646.

Pernar M., *Roditeljstvo*, "Medicina Fluminensis: Medicina Fluminensis" 46 (2010) 3, pp. 255–260.

Pintar Ž., *Roditeljstvo u otporu*, "Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu" 67 (2018) 2, pp. 287–298.

Pollit, K., *Why Boys Don't Play With Dolls*, 1995. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/08/magazine/hers-why-boys-don-t-play-with-dolls.html (4.10.2021).

Rabin A.I., *Motivation for Parenthood*, "Journal of Projective Techniques and Personality Assessment" 29 (1965) 4, pp. 405–413.

Runco M., *Creativity – Theories and Themes: Research, Development, and Practice*, London 2014, Academic Press.

Rusac S., Štambuk A., Tomečak M., *Promišljanje starenja i starosti – predrasude, mitovi i novi pogledi*, "Hrvatska revija za rehabilitacijska istraživanja" 50 (2014) 1, pp. 36–53.

Sunko E., *Utjecaj provedbe programa za roditelje na njihove stavove o odgoju*, "Odgojne znanosti" 10 (2008) 2, pp. 383–401.

Vučković Juroš T., *Zašto ovdje možemo, a tamo ne možemo biti obitelj? – Kako socioinstitucionalni okviri oblikuju iskustva LGB roditeljstva*, "Revija za sociologiju" 49 (2019) 2, pp. 205–229.