

## Parent's Attachment and Mentalization as Predictors of Parenting Styles<sup>1\*</sup>

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine whether a tendency towards a certain parenting style can be predicted based on a parent's attachment and mentalization capacity. The study included 122 respondents, 79 female, 43 male, aged from 29 to 54, who were parents of children up to 12 years of age. The data was collected using the following instruments: The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ); The Serbian modified and adapted version of the Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire (SM-ECR-R) and the Mentalization scale (MentS). A regression analysis was applied to test the predictive power of dimensions of attachment and mentalization for each parenting style. The model that explains the variance of authoritative parenting style (23%) contains anxiety and mentalization of others as predictors ( $R^2 = .23$ ,  $F(2, 119) = 17.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .06$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Lower anxiety ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $t = -2.97$ ,  $p = .004$ ) and greater capacity for mentalization of others ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $t = 5.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ) contribute to the tendency towards the authoritative parenting style. The model that explains the variance of authoritarian parenting style (22%) contains anxiety, motivation to mentalize and avoidance as predictors ( $R^2 = .22$ ,  $F(3, 118) = 10.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ,  $p = .029$ ). Higher anxiety ( $\beta = .46$ ,  $t = 5.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ), lower motivation for mentalization ( $\beta = -.26$ ,  $t = -2.98$ ,  $p = .003$ ), and lower avoidance ( $\beta = -.20$ ,  $t = -2.21$ ,  $p = .029$ ) contribute towards the authoritarian parenting style. The conclusion of the study is that, based on a parent's attachment and mentalization, a tendency towards a certain parenting style can be predicted.

*Key words:* attachment, mentalization, parenting style, parents

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## Parent's Attachment and Mentalization as Predictors of Parenting Styles

The importance of parenting is reflected in the effects it has on the psychosocial development and behaviour of children. The individual characteristics of parents are an important factor in determining parenting. The quality of the emotional relationships that people form with significant caregivers while growing up constitutes an adult's *affective style*, an individual characteristic that can shape the relationships people have with others, including their own children (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1973). In this paper, the aspect of parenting, a *parenting style*, is considered from the perspective of *attachment theory*. It is examined whether the dimensions of parents' *attachment* and the development of their *capacity for mentalization* can predict a *parenting style*.

### Parenting Style

A *Parenting style* represents the constellation of attitudes and behaviours of parents in their interaction with children and the emotional climate in which parents' behaviour is manifested which influences the process of socialisation, i.e., the psychosocial development and behaviour of children (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Darling, 1999). In this paper, authors rely on Diana Baumrind's model of *parenting styles*. A *parenting style* encompasses responsiveness, i.e., the emotional warmth and demandingness or control that parents exert over their children (Baumrind, 1966, 1991). Responsiveness refers to the extent to which parents consciously promote children's individuality, self-affirmation and self-regulation through mutual adjustment, acceptance of children and provision of emotional warmth and support. Demandingness or control refers to the demands that parents place on their children in terms of maturity, supervision of children, discipline, and willingness to confront children when they disobey (Baumrind, 1991). A distinction is made between three *parenting styles* depending on the degree of responsiveness and demandingness of parents towards the children: *authoritative*, *authoritarian*, and *permissive parenting styles* (Baumrind, 1966, 1991).

The *authoritative* parenting style is characterised by high responsiveness, emotional warmth, and support as well as high demands adapted to the age of the child (Baumrind, 1991). It involves clear behavioural norms, an assertive approach to children without using coercion and restrictions, while disciplinary measures are more supportive than punitive. It aims to develop children's assertiveness, willingness to co-operate, self-regulation and social responsibility (Baumrind, 1991). Children who grow up in families with an *authoritative* parenting style are self-confident, friendly, achievement-orientated, resilient and can cope well with stress (Baumrind, 1995). An *authoritative* style is associated with better emotion regulation in children and lower levels of behavioural problems, in contrast to an *authoritarian* style

(Haslam et al, 2020; Zubizarreta et al, 2019; Simons & Conger 2007). Adolescents from authoritative families use more adaptive achievement strategies (Aunola et al., 2000), show more engagement in learning and lower levels of depression (Simons & Conger 2007; Zubizarreta, et al., 2019).

In an *authoritarian* parenting style, parents are very demanding and directive, but with low responsiveness and show little emotional warmth. They demand obedience from the children and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation (Baumrind, 1991). Children who grow up in authoritarian families show conflict-prone behaviour, are moody, hostile towards others and have a low stress tolerance (Baumrind, 1995).

A *permissive* parenting style means a high responsiveness and little control. Permissive parents avoid confrontation, are indulgent and unconventional, do not demand mature behaviour and allow significant self-regulation (Baumrind, 1991). Children of permissive parents show impulsive-aggressive and rebellious behaviour and low achievement (Baumrind, 1995). *Authoritarian* and *permissive* parenting styles are negatively related to academic achievement, whereas an *authoritative* parenting style is positively related to academic achievement (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Matejevic et al., 2014; Yang & Zhao 2020; Józsa et al., 2019).

## Attachment Theory

*Attachment* theory is a theory of personality functioning, intrapsychic structure, and the development of interpersonal behaviour (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). It emphasises the importance of the quality of the first emotional bonds between a mother and a child and their impact on the relationships that are formed with others throughout life. *Attachment* represents an innate need and a behavioural system that is reflected in the desire for closeness, belonging and security and has its phylogenetic roots in the maintenance of the species (Bowlby, 1969). The quality of *attachment* develops depending on the mother's responsiveness to the infant's signals, i.e., whether the mother is consistently responsive, constantly unavailable, or occasionally available and unpredictable. The affective bond can therefore be secure or insecure. In a *secure attachment*, the child considers himself as worthy of attention and love and attachment figures as available and supportive. In an *insecure relationship*, the child perceives itself as insufficiently valuable and others as unavailable or only temporarily available. These internal representations of self and parents form an internal working models of self and significant others, which are used to interpret the consequences of one's own behaviour and predict behaviour, thoughts, and feelings of others. Initial affective relationships are thought to be relatively stable throughout life through internal working models and their influence on the formation of later relationships with others, including one's own children (Bowlby, 1973). In addition to the behavioural system of attachment, i.e., the desire for closeness and belonging, there is also a system of care. It is assumed that, like the attachment system, it has its phylogenetic roots in the maintenance of the species and consists of providing

protection, care and concern to offspring and creating the conditions for their growth and development (Bowlby, 1969). It is thought to be complementary to the child's attachment system and manifests in adulthood not only towards children but also in other close relationships. However, the synchronicity between the child's attachment system and the parents' caring system is not guaranteed. Increased activation of the parents' attachment system can reduce the activation of their caring system. Therefore, the affective patterns of parental attachment established in childhood and adolescence may influence the overall quality of parental care (Jones et al., 2015).

*Attachment* in adulthood is an individual trait defined by characteristic attachment patterns and/or the dimensions underlying these patterns - the dimension of *anxiety* and the dimension of *avoidance*. *Anxiety* refers to the need for approval from other people and the fear of abandonment in relationships with others. *Avoidance* refers to the avoidance of closeness and dependence on other people (Brennan et al., 1998).

Theory and research suggest that secure *attachment* in adulthood, low *avoidance*, and low *anxiety* (positive model of self and positive model of others) are characterized by openness to closeness and intimacy, self-confidence (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), general trust in other people and their goodwill, support for others, enjoyment in social interactions, and better emotion control (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). *Insecure anxious attachment* (high anxiety, low avoidance; negative model of self, positive model of others) is characterized by preoccupation with one's own attachment needs and the active search for the fulfilment of these needs in close relationships. There is an excessive dependence on others and a search for self-affirmation through the acceptance and approval of others (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), reduced capacity to provide help and care to others, an impaired ability to regulate negative emotions, and a tendency to outbursts of anger (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). *Insecure avoidant attachment* (high avoidance, low anxiety; positive model of self and negative model of others) is characterized by avoidance of closeness in relationships with others and an emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), maintenance of self-esteem by relying only on oneself, avoidance of confronting problems, suppression of expression of emotions, rigidity in thinking, less empathy and less provision of help and care to others, as well as less enjoyment in social interactions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

## **Mentalization**

Theory and research suggest that *secure attachment* to a caregiver in childhood facilitates the development of *mentalizing capacity* (Fonagy & Allison, 2012) and that there is a positive correlation between *secure attachment* and more developed *mentalizing capacity* (Banjac et al., 2013; Fonagy et al., 1991). *Mentalization* is mental activity by which one interprets one's own behaviour and the behaviour of others through their feelings, needs, desires, beliefs, goals, purposes, and reasons. (Fonagy & Allison, 2012). It develops through constant interaction between the child and the

parent, through interpretation and processing of the child's signals and appropriate emotional responses by parents, so the child is not overwhelmed by emotions and feels safe (Fonagy & Allison, 2012). *Mentalization* facilitates the appreciation of different points of view in interpersonal relationships, better resolution of interpersonal problems (Allen, 2006) and enables greater sensitivity to other people's feelings, desires, and attitudes (Recktenvald & Donelli, 2019). It is associated with better self-control, emotion regulation (Fonagy et al., 1991) and attention (Bateman & Fonagy, 2010) as well as more positive relationships with others (Fonagy & Target, 1997). *Mentalization* allows a person to experience emotionally charged situations without simultaneously being overwhelmed by emotions and hyperactivating or deactivating the attachment system, resulting in more sensitive behaviour (Rostad et al., 2016).

### **Parents' Attachment and Mentalization Capacity and Characteristics of Parenting**

The research (Cohn et al., 1992) indicates that parents with *insecure attachment styles* provided less warmth and structure in their interactions with their children, compared to *securely attached* parents. *Secure attachment* of parents is correlated with an *authoritative* parenting style (Doinita & Maria, 2015), while *anxiously attached* mothers are more inclined to an *authoritarian* and *permissive* parenting style (Kittaka, 2014). *Avoidantly attached* mothers showed a greater tendency towards an *authoritarian* parenting style (Kittaka, 2014). Higher *avoidance* is associated with less responsiveness to children when they are under stress (Edelstein et al., 2004). Parents' *insecure attachment* style is associated with less parental acceptance and care, greater intrusiveness, greater psychological control, and less involvement in activities with children that promote positive development (Jones et al., 2015).

Parental *mentalization*, i.e., understanding the child's behaviour through the child's mental states, enables the parent to react sensitively and appropriately to the child's attachment needs, thus providing him with security (Slade, 2005). When parents understand their child's bad behaviour through emotions and needs that underlie that behaviour, i.e., the mental states, they can react more sensitively to the child's behaviour and prevent instinctive responses that can be harsh and insensitive to the child's basic needs (Rostad et al., 2016). Research has shown that a greater capacity for parental *mentalization* is associated with better quality care (Camoirano, 2017: Suchman et al., 2010) and greater sensitivity towards children (Rosenblum et al., 2008).

Our basic research assumption was that understanding the concept of *parenting styles* through the relationship with *attachment* and *mentalization* can be highly informative. This understanding may contribute to recognizing the possible influence of parents' early emotional experiences and the development of their *capacity for mentalization* on the relationship they have with their own children.

The aim of this study is to examine whether, based on parents' *attachment* and *capacity for mentalization*, it is possible to determine the tendency of parents towards a certain *parenting style*.

We expect that *insecurely attached* (high *anxiety* and/or *avoidance*) parents will show a greater tendency towards an *authoritarian* or *permissive parenting style*, while *securely attached* (low *anxiety* and low *avoidance*) parents will show a greater tendency towards an *authoritative parenting style*. Additionally, we expect that parents with more developed *mentalization capacity* will be more orientated towards the *authoritative parenting style* while parents with lower *capacity for mentalization* will be more orientated towards the *authoritarian* or *permissive parenting style*.

## Method

### Sample and Procedure

The sample of the survey consists of parents of children younger than 12 years old. The sample is convenient, formed by the snowball technique and includes a total of 122 parents, 79 female and 43 males, aged from 29 to 54 ( $M = 41.18$ ;  $SD = 5.160$ ). When it comes to the level of education it has been shown that 11.5% of respondents have a high school degree, 24.6% bachelor's, 40.2% master's and 23.8% PhD or specialization. The respondents filled out survey questionnaires in electronic form. The questionnaire was e-mailed to a certain number of people in the author's environment, who were then asked to send out the questionnaire to other people from their own environment who fit into the afore-mentioned profile. The respondents were informed that the study was anonymous, voluntary, and that the results would be processed in a group form and used for purposes of science and research, and that they can withdraw from the research at any time.

### Measures

**The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson et al., 2001).** The questionnaire measures the *authoritarian*, *authoritative* and *permissive style* and is based on Baumrind's model of *parenting styles*. The *authoritarian style* contains three dimensions: coercion (e.g., "I physically punish the child, as a way of discipline"), verbal hostility (e.g., "I yelled at my child when he misbehaved") and non-explanation (e.g., "I punished/ I left my child by taking away his privileges, with little or no explanation"). The *authoritative style* includes the dimensions: connection (e.g., "I talk to my child about his problems"), regulation ("I explained to my child why the rules must be followed") and autonomy (e.g., "I allowed my child to influence the rules in the family"), while the *permissive style* is determined by one dimension (e.g., "It was difficult for me to discipline my child"). In this paper, the total scores of authoritarian and authoritative styles were used, not the subdimensions underlying these styles. The questionnaire consists of 32 items, 12 of which refer to the dimension of the *authoritarian style*, 15 to the

dimension of the *authoritative style*, and 5 to the dimension of the *permissive style*. Respondents answer the questionnaire by assessing their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert-type scale. The degree of agreement ranges from 1 – *never*; 2 – *rarely*; 3 – *occasionally*; 4 – *often*; 5 – *always*. Reliability of subscales in this study was:  $\alpha = .81$  for *authoritarian style*,  $\alpha = .84$  for *authoritative style* and  $\alpha = .44$  for *permissive style*. The subscale of the *permissive style* was excluded from further analyses because of poor reliability.

**The Mentalization Scale (MentS; Dimitrijević et al., 2018)** examines three dimensions of the *capacity for mentalization: mentalization of one's own states* (e.g., “When I get upset, I’m not sure if I’m sad, afraid, or angry”), *mentalization of others* (e.g., “When I make conclusions about other people’s personality traits I carefully observe what they say and do”), *motivation to mentalize* (e.g., “I find it important to understand reasons for my behavior”), as well as the overall capacity for mentalizing. In this paper, the overall capacity for mentalizing was not used, but only three dimensions underlying the global score. The questionnaire consists of 28 items with which respondents evaluate the degree of agreement using a five-point scale ranging from “1 - *completely false*” to “5 - *completely true*”. The subscale related to the *mentalization of one's own states* consists of 8 items, while the subscales related to the *mentalization of others* and the *motivation for mentalizing* consist of 10 items. Scores are obtained by summing all items in each of the subscales. In this study, the reliability of subscales was:  $\alpha = .67$  for *mentalization of self*,  $\alpha = .79$  for *mentalization of others* and  $\alpha = .74$  for *motivation to mentalize*.

**The Serbian Modified and Adapted Version of the Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (SM-ECR-R; Hanak & Dimitrijević, 2013).** The questionnaire examines *attachment* and consists of 36 items, half of which refer to the dimension of *avoidance* (e.g., “I prefer not to show how I feel deep down”) and half to the dimension of *anxiety* (e.g., “I’m afraid that I will lose the love of persons with whom I feel close”). Respondents respond by assessing on a seven-point scale the extent to which they agree with each item. The degree of agreement ranges from “1 - *I do not agree at all*; 2 - *I do not agree*; 3 - *I partially disagree*; 4 - *I neither agree nor disagree*; 5 - *I partially agree*; 6 - *I agree*” to “7 - *I completely agree*.” The measures are expressed by the mean value of the answers on each scale and indicate the level of expression of *avoidance* and *anxiety* in relationships with others. Reliability of subscales in this study was:  $\alpha = .84$  for *avoidance* and  $\alpha = .87$  for *anxiety*.

## Results

The results of descriptive statistics are represented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive analysis*

Variables	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Sk	Ku
Anxiety	1.00	5.56	2.27	0.86	1.10	1.65
Avoidance	1.72	5.83	3.28	0.81	.53	.24
Mentalization	70.00	126.00	104.13	12.01	-.25	-.47
MentS	14.00	40.00	30.24	5.12	-.39	.13
MentO	26.00	50.00	39.70	5.15	.09	-.70
MentM	21.00	49.00	37.90	5.96	-.33	-.38
Authoritative	2.87	5.00	4.40	0.41	-1.23	2.14
Authoritarian	1.33	4.92	2.27	0.51	1.29	4.84

Note: MentS – mentalization of self; MentO – mentalization of others; MentM – motivation to mentalize

Table 2 shows results of Spearman's correlation coefficient test between variables. The correlation of *authoritative* parenting style with dimensions of attachment, *anxiety* and *avoidance* is negative and weak. The correlations of this parenting style with dimensions of mentalization of self and mentalization of others are positive and medium-intensity, while correlation with motivation for mentalization is positive and weak. The *authoritarian* parenting style is positively, medium-intensity, correlated with *anxiety* and has a negative weak correlation with *mentalization of self*. There is a negative medium-intensity correlation between anxiety and mentalization of self. Avoidance is weakly and negatively correlated with mentalization of self, and negatively and medium-intensity with mentalization of others and motivation to mentalize.

**Table 2**

*Correlations between variables*

	Anx	Avoid	MentS	MentO	MentM	Authori tative	Authori tarian
Anx		.318**	-.535**	-.054	.089	-.286**	.361**
Avoid			-.295**	-.424**	-.326**	-.278**	.030
MentS				.365**	.160	.344**	-.268**
MentO					.643**	.400**	-.073
MentM						.257**	-.189*
Authoritative							-.071
Authoritarian							

Note: Anx – anxiety; Avoid – avoidance; MentS – mentalization of self; MentO – mentalization of others; MentM – motivation to mentalize; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$



The Forward method of regression analysis was conducted to test the predictive power of *attachment* and *mentalization* for each parenting style. The criterion for including variables in a predictive model was if probability of F change is  $\leq .050$

**Table 3**
*Prediction model of the authoritative style*

	Predictors	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	Model summary
1.	MentO	.41	4.98	.000	$R = .41, R^2 = .17,$ $F(1, 120) = 24.80$ $p < .001$
2.	Anxiety	-.24	-2.97	.004	$R = .48, R^2 = .23,$
	MentO	.41	5.08	.000	$F(2, 119) = 17.63$ $p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .06,$ $p = .004$

Note: MentO – mentalization of others

Table 3 presents the predictive models of the *authoritative* parenting style. In the first step, the model that contains only mentalization of others as a predictor was established and it explains 17% variance of *authoritative* parenting style. In the second step, the anxiety was included as a predictor establishing the model that gives the best results in this study, and explains 23 % variance of the *authoritative* parenting style. Lower *anxiety* and higher capacity for *mentalization of others* contribute to a greater tendency towards the *authoritative* parenting style, while *mentalization of others* is a more significant predictor.

**Table 4**
*Prediction model of the authoritarian style*

	Predictors	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	Model summary
1.	Anxiety	.38	4.56	.000	$R = .38, R^2 = .15,$ $F(1, 120) = 20.82$ $p < .001$
2.	Anxiety	.41	4.87	.000	$R = .43, R^2 = .18,$
	MentM	-.19	-2.28	.024	$F(2, 119) = 13.38$ $p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .04,$ $p = .024$
3.	Anxiety	.46	5.36	.000	$R = .46, R^2 = .22,$
	MentM	-.26	-2.98	.003	$F(3, 118) = 10.84$
	Avoidance	-.20	-2.21	.029	$p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .04,$ $p = .029$

Note: MentM – motivation to mentalize

Table 4 presents the predictive models of the *authoritarian* parenting style. The first model of prediction of the authoritarian style contains anxiety as a predictor. In

the second step, motivation to mentalize was included and finally, in the third step, the avoidance was included and by that, the best model to predict the authoritarian style, on this sample, was established. This model explains 22% variance of the authoritarian style. Higher *anxiety*, lower *motivation to mentalize* and lower *avoidance* contribute to a greater tendency towards the *authoritarian* parenting style, while *anxiety* is the most significant predictor.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine whether a tendency towards a certain *parenting style* can be predicted based on parents' *attachment* and *mentalization*.

The stated research findings, in the light of *Attachment theory*, *Mentalization theory* and *Theory of parenting styles* can be understood as follows. The results show that the attachment dimension, *anxiety* and the *mentalization of others* are significant predictors of an *authoritative* parenting style. Lower *anxiety* and higher *mentalization of others* indicate a greater tendency towards an *authoritative* parenting style and *mentalization of others* has a greater contribution than *anxiety*. Lower *anxiety*, i.e., a lower need for approval and a lower fear of abandonment in relationships with others, as well as a greater capacity of parents to mentalize others' internal states and behaviours, indicate a greater tendency towards an *authoritative* parenting style. On the other hand, the results show that greater *anxiety*, lower *motivation to mentalize* and lower *avoidance* contribute to an *authoritarian* parenting style. These findings are consistent with other studies (Cohn et al., 1992; Doinita & Maria, 2015; Jones et al., 2015) that have found that parents who have a *secure attachment* (low *anxiety* and low *avoidance*) provide more emotional warmth and structure to their children and tend to have an *authoritative* parenting style while *insecure attachment* (high *anxiety* and/or *avoidance*) is associated with *authoritarian* and *permissive* parenting style, less parental acceptance and care, greater intrusiveness, and greater psychological control.

The initial affective relationships we form with our parents in childhood contribute to our relationships with our children in adulthood (Bowlby, 1973). Parents who have low *anxiety* and thus who do not hyperactivate their affective system are able to give their children more responsiveness, warmth and support and make more demands that are appropriate to the children's age, i.e., an *authoritative* parenting style. As their attachment system is not hyperactivated, their caregiving system is not impaired (Jones et al., 2015). A more developed *capacity for mentalization* of others also enables parents to be aware of the nature of mental states and to make efforts to identify the mental states that underlie certain child behaviours. Additionally, a more developed *capacity for mentalization* of others enables parents to experience emotionally charged situations without being overwhelmed by emotions and thus without hyperactivating their attachment system, allowing them to react more sensitively to the child's behaviour (Rostad et al., 2016), which is characteristic of

the *authoritative* parenting style. These findings are consistent with the findings of other research that suggest that mentalizing the child's internal states, understanding the child's behaviour regarding the emotions and needs underlying that behaviour, result in better quality care and greater sensitivity towards the children (Camoirano, 2017; Suchman et al., 2010; Rosenblum et al., 2008), which is a characteristic of the *authoritative* parenting style.

Greater parents' *anxiety*, less *avoidance* and less *motivation to mentalize* contribute to an *authoritarian* parenting style characterised by less emotional warmth, responsiveness, and support. Higher *anxiety* and thus hyperactivation of a parent's attachment system, preoccupation with one's own attachment needs reduces the capacity to provide help and care to children (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Parents' reduced *motivation to mentalize* their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviours and those of the child can also lead them to view the child as an object and thus display controlling and coercive behaviour towards the child (Allen, 2006), which is characteristic of the *authoritarian* parenting style. Without mentalizing the child's inner states, parents may react instinctively and be harsh and insensitive to the child's basic needs (Rostad et al., 2016). Parents' lower *motivation to mentalize* prevents them from taking the child's point of view (Allen, 2006), making them less sensitive to the child's feelings, desires, and attitudes (Recktenvald & Donelli, 2019).

## Limitations

There are some limitations of this study. The sample was non-random and unequal by gender. Moreover, the education of the participants is not representative for the population since a large percentage of the participants have a PhD or specialization. The permissive style subscale had poor reliability and was excluded from the analyses, so we only examined two parenting styles. More comprehensive data could be obtained with instruments that distinguish a larger number of parenting styles. Furthermore, we did not analyse dimensions underlying *authoritative* and *authoritarian* parenting style.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

We can conclude that *mentalization of others* and *anxiety* are significant predictors of the *authoritative* parenting style while *anxiety*, *motivation to mentalize* and *avoidance* are significant predictors of the *authoritarian* parenting style. Lower *anxiety*, lower preoccupation with one's own attachment needs and sense of security, and a greater *ability to mentalize* the child's internal states and behaviour contribute to a greater tendency for parents to adopt the *authoritative* parenting style, which is characterized with greater responsiveness, emotional warmth, support and demands

appropriate to the child's age. Higher *anxiety*, preoccupation with one's own attachment needs, lower *avoidance* and lower *motivation to mentalize* the child's internal states and behaviour contribute to a greater tendency of parents towards the *authoritarian* parenting style which implies less responsiveness, emotional support, and higher control, directiveness and demands from the child without explanation.

Based on the results of this study, it is possible to develop interventions to help parents explore their inner reasons for a preference for a particular parenting style. It is also possible to develop interventions that would strengthen parents' *ability to mentalize*, especially to *mentalize others*, and help them to adopt the *authoritative* parenting style.

The obtained findings provide a good basis for further research. It is recommended to explore dimensions underlying *authoritative* and *authoritarian* parenting styles. In addition, more comprehensive data could be obtained by analysing children's *attachment* as well as *parenting styles*, not only from the parents' perspective but also from their children's perspective.

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## Afektivna vezanost i mentalizacija roditelja kao prediktor vaspitnih stilova

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### Apstrakt

Cilj ove studije je da ispita da li se na osnovu afektivne vezanosti i kapaciteta za mentalizaciju roditelja može predvideti sklonost roditelja ka određenom vaspitnom stilu. Istraživanjem su obuhvaćena 122 ispitanika, 79 žena, 43 muškarca, starosti od 29 do 54 godina, koji su roditelji dece do 12 godina starosti. Podaci su prikupljeni korišćenjem sledećih instrumenata: Upitnik stilova i dimenzija roditeljstva (PSDQ); upitnik Iskustvo u bliskim odnosima, modifikovana i prilagođena verzija na srpskom jeziku (SM-ECR-R) i Upitnik za ispitivanje mentalizacije (MentS). Regresiona analiza je primenjena da bi se testirala prediktivna moć dimenzija afektivne vezanosti i mentalizacije za svaki vaspitni stil. Model koji objašnjava varijansu autoritativnog vaspitnog stila (23%) sadrži anksioznost i mentalizaciju drugih kao prediktore ( $R^2 = .23$ ,  $F(2, 119) = 17.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .06$ ,  $p = .004$ ). Manja anksioznost ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $t = -2.97$ ,  $p = .004$ ) i veći kapacitet za mentalizaciju drugih ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $t = 5.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ) doprinosi sklonosti ka autoritativnom vaspitnom stilu. Model koji objašnjava varijansu autoritarnog vaspitnog stila (22%) sadrži anksioznost, motivaciju za mentalizaciju i izbegavanje kao prediktore ( $R^2 = .22$ ,  $F(3, 118) = 10.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ,  $p = .029$ ). Veća anksioznost ( $\beta = .46$ ,  $t = 5.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ), niža motivacija za mentalizaciju ( $\beta = -.26$ ,  $t = -2.98$ ,  $p = .003$ ), i niže izbegavanje ( $\beta = -.20$ ,  $t = -2.21$ ,  $p = .029$ ) doprinose autoritarnom vaspitnom stilu. Zaključak studije je da se na osnovu afektivne vezanosti i mentalizacije roditelja može predvideti sklonost ka određenom vaspitnom stilu.

*Cljučne reči:* afektivna vezanost, mentalizacija, vaspitni stil, roditelji

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