

Minda Mateusz. The perception of parental attitudes and styles to deal with stress among the young attending to athletic championship schools. *Journal of Education, Health and Sport*. 2019;9(9):306-316. eISSN 2391-8306. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3402271> <http://ojs.ukw.edu.pl/index.php/johs/article/view/7400>

The journal has had 5 points in Ministry of Science and Higher Education parametric evaluation. § 8. 2) and § 12. 1. 2) 22.02.2019.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.  
Received: 25.08.2019. Revised: 30.08.2019. Accepted: 07.09.2019.

## The perception of parental attitudes and styles to deal with stress among the young attending to athletic championship schools

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**Abstract**

Introduction and purpose of the work: Parental attitudes perceived by adolescents, and not only parental upbringing impacts, can significantly help young people playing sports developing their careers. In turn, sport itself can strengthen their self-esteem, and also shape their ability to cope with stress. Being an athlete-student exposes young people to experiencing various types of stressors related to training and competitions on the one hand, and the fulfillment of compulsory education on the other. The aim of the study was to check the links between the perception of parental attitudes and students' styles of coping with stress attending the Athletic Championship Schools.

Materials and method: The study involved 51 students aged 16 to 20, including 28 girls (55%) and 23 boys (45%) attending the Athletic Championship School (upper secondary stage). The mean age was 17.8 and the standard deviation was 1.12. To measure the perception of parental attitudes, the Parental Attitude Scale - 2 (SPR-2) by Plopy (2012) was used, which is a shortened version of the Parental Attitude Scale (SPR) for young people. In turn, stress management styles were measured using the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) by Endler and Parker in the polish adaptation of Szczepaniak, Strelau and Wrześniewski.

Results: Obtained results revealed that there is a correlation between perceived negative mother attitudes (excessive demands, inconsistency) and emotion-focused style. Significant links between perceived negative father attitudes (excessive demands, inconsistency) and avoidance-focused style, were also found. It was proved that the intensity of positive attitudes of both father and mother was higher than negative attitudes among the surveyed youth attending AChS.

Conclusions: It is significant to remember, when working with young people playing sports, about family contact, which is associated with coping styles, and that effectively managing stress is a key skill that every player should have. The obtained research results are an important contribution to expanding knowledge about the relationship between parental attitudes and styles of coping with stress, especially among young athletes, although they do not allow to formulate the final conclusions.

Key words: perceived parental attitudes coping with stress; young athletes; the Athletic Sports Championships

## **Introduction**

The climate that prevails in the family, the way the child perceives and feels it, whether they feel safe, secure and free has a positive effect on their development. Additionally, the parents are personal role models for their children, who the children imitate either intentionally or unintentionally [1]. Current research shows that the personality of a young person and his or her behaviour are shaped not so much under the influence of educational interactions resulting from specific parental attitudes, but rather under the influence of their perceptions by the adolescents [2, 3]. The young who are active in sports as part of studying at the athletic championship schools, have to deal with numerous complications. These students, at the level of upper secondary education, are supposed to combine sports activities with the fulfillment of compulsory school attendance and preparation for the *matura* exam. Wilson and Pitchard's research [4] indicate that participation in sport alone may be the cause of additional stressors that people inactive in sports do not experience.

### **Perception of parental attitudes**

In Poland, an attempt to define the concept of parental attitudes was undertaken, among others, by Rembowski. According to him, "parental attitude can be understood as a comprehensive form of the attitude of one's parents (father and mother separately) towards their children, the upbringing issues, and so forth, formed in the course of fulfilling parental functions" [5, p. 55]. Plopa, in turn, made efforts to classify parental attitudes. The researcher, taking into consideration the works of his predecessors dealing with this issue, referring mainly to the typologies of Roe [6], Becker [7] and Rembowski [5], noted that in most of the works demonstrate the dimensions that are some form of love and acceptance, rejection, excessive control, over-protection, and autonomy. Relying on many years of work with family problems as well as drawing from the research he had carried out, Plopa added to the factors mentioned above the dimension of an erratic attitude, encompassed on the high-low continuum indicating the severity of a given approach.

The attitudes highlighted by M. Plopa constitute:

1. acceptance/rejection – the high score means acceptance; the low result implies rejection. In the position of acceptance, the freedom in the exchange of thoughts, views and feelings is allowed. The relationship takes on a partnership nature. The child feels that the parent is interested in their affairs and problems, and has a sense of security and warmth. The parent respects the individuality of their child. In the case of rejection, the contact with the parent is not a source of pleasure for the child – unemotional exchanges, the limitation of the relation to securing the material desires, the lack of commitment, and emotional intimacy;
2. autonomy – a child is treated as a partner, has the right to their privacy and to solving their problems on their own. The parent treats the child's opinions with respect, even if they do not entirely approve of them;
3. excessive demands – the attitude towards the child is stiff and ruthless; the parent requires total obedience from their child and does not allow them to have an independent opinion. They require perfection from their child in every sphere of life, imposing their expectations. Such a parent thinks that they know best what is right for their child;

4. inconsistency – the attitude towards the child varies and depends on the current state of the parent. Parental responses are often unpredictable; therefore, they are incomprehensible to the child. Sometimes the parent is sincerely involved and cares for their child; in the next moment they react with a blaze to the slightest offence of the child. In such a home, a child may have a problem with recognizing their own needs and challenges, a frequent mechanism is an emotional distance from their parents;

5. excessive protection – a child surrounded by excessive care. The parent does not accept the changes related to the development of their child, is afraid of their autonomy, does not allow the child to gain independence. In such a situation, the child often distances themselves emotionally or shows rebellious attitudes [based on 2].

It is pointed out that the first two attitudes can be defined as positive ones, while the remaining three as unfavourable, undesirable attitudes. It is worth remembering, however, that the same parental attitude displayed by a mother or father may have a different impact on the development of a daughter or son [8].

### **Coping with stress**

The most comprehensive explanation of the definition of stress in the context of styles of coping with stress has been provided by Lazarus and Folkman in their transactional approach [9]. They describe mental stress as “a specific relationship between a person and the environment, which is assessed by a person as a burden or exceeding their resources and threatening their well-being” [9 p. 140]. The concept of stress theory by Lazarus and Folkman is transactional (not only the interaction process but also its effects are significant), because it takes into account human impact on the environment and vice versa, and takes into account the fact that an individual together with the current situational context constitute an entity that is not merely a sum of parts [10]. Coping with stress is perceived as a process; the styles and strategies of dealing with it. It has a more complex structure that is located at a particular time. Lazarus and Folkman [9] define coping as: continually changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to master specific external and internal requirements assessed by the person as incriminating or exceeding resources. The above statement indicates the importance of styles and strategies for coping with stress in the training process.

This article operationalises the styles of coping with stress according to the classification by Endler and Parker, who, in turn, relied on the previously described Lazarus and Folkman model. Endler and Parker [11] define the style of coping with stress as typical behaviour for a given individual in various stressful situations. They distinguish three basic styles of coping with stress:

- task-oriented coping (TOC);
- emotion-oriented coping (EOC);
- avoidance-oriented coping (AOC).

The task-oriented style characterizes people who under challenging circumstances focus on various types of activities or efforts to solve the problem, both by trying to change the situation and its cognitive transformation. The second style defines people who primarily focus on their own emotional experiences to reduce unpleasant tension. Such people also reveal tendencies for fantasising and wishful thinking. The focus on avoidance concerns people who in stressful situations tend to avoid thinking, facing and experiencing this situation. They are looking for activities that divert their attention and suppress unpleasant emotions. This style can take two forms: engaging in substitute activities such as binge eating, sleeping, shopping (distraction) or seeking social interactions (social diversion). The mode a young athlete copes with a stressful event is primarily determined by their assets, such as personality, mental resilience, gender, self-esteem or age. Therefore, as Gracz and Sankowski [12] believe, there are no two entities that would have the same personality, and therefore, there are no two entities that are equally adapted to operate in a given environment.

The perception of parental attitudes and styles of coping with stress in young people doing sports

According to Siekańska [13], parents play an essential part in developing a child's sports career. Therefore, attempting to investigate how adolescents perceive parental attitudes can help shape effective mode to manage stress. Due to their close affiliation with performance, the styles of coping with stress are a vital aspect in the functioning of athletes. It is recognized that the task-oriented style is conducive to obtaining the highest sports level [14], because when a person finds themselves in a difficult situation, they do not avoid the problem, but struggle with it and try to find a solution. The literature on the subject lacks research reports analysing the relationship between the perception of parental attitudes and the styles of coping with stress among the students of athletic championship schools (AChS). The issues that have preoccupied the researchers to date have included, e.g. the styles of coping with stress and hope for success [15], who proved that young people attending athletic championship schools most often chose a task-focused style, while the least frequently indicated style was one focusing on emotions. Other studies, in turn, attempt to compare active sports youth with non-sports-active ones in the context of parental attitudes' perception [16]. For example, it was proved that students engaged in sports differed from their peers inactive in sports in terms of perception of the attitude of acceptance, autonomy and inconsistency of the mother and father.

#### **Research goal, research hypotheses**

The study aimed to check the links between the perception of parental attitudes and styles of coping with stress among students attending the athletic championship school. The theoretical considerations presented above and prior research reports have contributed to the formulation of assumptions indicating that the perception of positive parental attitudes progressively correlates with the style of coping with stress oriented towards the task and focused on avoidance, and negatively with the style of coping focused on emotions. The perception of negative parental attitudes, in turn, will positively correlate with the style oriented towards emotions, and negatively with the task-oriented and avoidance-oriented style of coping with stress. It was also assumed that adolescents record higher results in the level of positive parental attitudes (acceptance, autonomy) than in negative attitudes (demanding, inconsistent, protective).

The following research hypotheses (H) were formulated:

H.1. There is a relationship between the perception of parental attitudes and styles of coping with stress among the students of Athletic Championship Schools (*AChS*);

H.1a. There is a positive correlation between the perception of positive parental attitudes and there is a negative correlation with perceived negative attitudes and a style oriented on the task of the *AChS* students;

H.1b. There is a negative correlation between the perception of positive parental attitudes and there is a positive correlation with perceived negative attitudes and a style oriented on the emotions of the *AChS* students.

H.1c. There is a positive correlation between the perception of positive parental attitudes and there is a negative correlation with perceived negative attitudes and a style focused on avoiding the *AChS* students.

H.2. The students of the *AChS* obtain higher results in terms of the level of positive parental attitudes (acceptance, autonomy) compared to the negative attitudes (demanding, inconsistent, protective).

**Method:****Subjects**

The study was conducted on a sample of 51 students aged 16 to 20, including 28 girls (55%) and 23 boys (45%) attending an athletic championship school (upper-secondary level) in one of the cities in the northern part of the country. The average age was 17.8 years, and the standard deviation was 1.12. The respondents practiced both individual ( $n = 24$ ) sports, such as swimming or taekwondo and team ones ( $n = 27$ ), including basketball and volleyball.

**Test procedure**

The study took the form of a paper-and-pencil measurement. The study participants completed the questionnaires during one meeting, which lasted about 45 minutes. The students were presented the purpose of the study and were assured about its anonymity. Furthermore, they were informed about the possibility of resigning from the participation in the study at any point of its duration.

**Research tools**

The perception of parental attitudes. Parental Attitude Scale – 2 (SPR-2) by Plopa [17] was used, which is a shortened version of the Parental Attitude Scale (SPR) for the adolescent. The tool is used to measure five parental attitudes: acceptance-rejection, demands, autonomy, inconsistency, and protection. The respondent's task was to assess separately paternal and maternal attitudes. The questionnaire consists of 45 statements (separately for the mother and the father). A five-grade response scale was used. Within each dimension of the scale, the assessed person could obtain between 9 and 45 points. The higher the score, the more intense a given parental attitude in the respondent's assessment.

The styles of coping in stressful situations. To measure this variable, the Coping Inventory of Stressful Situations, CISS, by Endler and Parker, in the Polish adaptation by Szczepaniak, Strelau and Wrześniewski [18] was employed. It consists of 48 items and is used to study three patterns of coping with stress: the task-oriented (TOC), the emotion-oriented (EOC), and the avoidance-oriented style (AOC), which includes two subscales: distraction and social diversion. The answers provided by the researched person are based on a five-degree frequency scale with which he or she takes action in difficult and stressful situations.

**Result**

The data collected in the study were analysed in the *Statistica* 13 program. The verification of compliance with the regular distribution for all variables was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The analysis revealed that in most cases the distribution of the results could be considered as close to normal (solely variables: paternal/maternal acceptance/rejection and autonomy and paternal acceptance/rejection obtained a result of  $p < 0.05$ ). In addition, it was verified whether the measures of the shape of the distribution of variables, i.e. skewness and kurtosis, significantly differ from the values adopted in the literature on the subject. It is considered that whenever the skewness/kurtosis values are in the range (-2; 2), one can accept that the skewness/kurtosis of a given variable assumes a significance appropriate for the normal distribution [19]. Therefore, parametric tests were used in further analyses. The mean, standard deviation, and skewness and kurtosis values for each variable are presented in Table

1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of measured variables

	Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perception of the mother's attitude	AC	38.12	7.15	-1.06	-0.01
	D	26.06	8.68	0.15	-0.64
	AU	36.96	5.34	-0.69	0.19
	IN	21.29	6.94	0.45	-0.23
	P	33.63	6.20	-0.41	-0.55
Perception of the father's attitude	AC	36.10	8.79	-1.38	1.88
	D	23.76	8.70	0.40	-0.95
	AU	36.45	7.43	-0.87	-0.06
	IN	21.41	8.07	0.16	-1.19
	P	29.84	8.73	-0.78	0.29
Stress coping styles	Task-oriented	56.10	10.43	0.06	-0.13
	Emotion-oriented	47.33	11.74	0.06	-0.13
	Avoidance-oriented	50.94	9.09	-0.15	-0.99
	Engaging in substitute activities	23.43	5.20	-0.03	-1.00
	Seeking social interaction	18.43	4.30	-0.41	-0.11

*M* – mean, *SD* – standard deviation, AC – acceptance; D – demanding; AU – autonomy; IN – inconsistency; P – protective

To verify whether there is a relationship between parental attitudes of the mother and the father in the perception of the adolescents and the style of coping with stress among the *AChS* students, the Pearson r-correlation coefficient was employed (*Hypothesis H1, H1a, H1b, H1c verification*).

The verification of Hypothesis 1a, which assumed a positive correlation between the perception of positive parental attitudes and a negative association with the perceived negative attitudes and the style focused on the task of *AChS* students was not confirmed; all relationships between the variables turned out to be statistically insignificant.

In the case of verification of Hypothesis 1b, it turned out that there is a positive correlation between perceived negative mother attitudes (demanding and inconsistent) and the style oriented towards emotions:  $r = 0.28$  for the demanding attitude (p-value <0.05) and  $r = 0.30$ , respectively for an attitude of inconsistency (p-value <0.05). In other cases, no statistically

significant relationship was revealed between the perceived attitudes of the mother and the father. To verify whether there is a relationship between paternal and maternal attitudes in the perception of adolescents and the style oriented towards avoidance, the r-Pearson ratio was used. There were no statistically significant relationships between the perceived mother attitudes (both positive and negative). The sole significant correlations were noted in terms of father's negative attitudes: demanding ( $r = -0.29$ ) and inconsistent ( $r = -0.29$ ). It also turned out that the correlations between the perceived parental attitude of the father occur within the subscale of the avoidance-oriented style: seeking social contacts. Respectively, for the demanding attitude:  $r = -0.41$ , and for the inconsistent attitude:  $r = -0.40$ .

Table 2. Summary of Pearson's linear correlation coefficients between perceived father attitudes and a style focused on avoiding

Variable	AC	D	AU	IN	P
The avoidance-oriented style	0.22	-0.29*	0.20	-0.29*	-0.00
Distraction	0.18	-0.15	0.13	-0.14	0.07
Social diversion	0.21	-0.41*	0.23	-0.40*	-0.10

\* $p < 0,05$

The analyses conducted were to indicate whether positive (acceptance and autonomy) and negative (demanding, inconsistent, protective) parental attitudes (mother's and father's) considered separately differ in intensity within the group of girls and boys ( $H_2$  verification). Positive parental attitudes: acceptance and autonomy were compared in each group first. Both in the group of girls (mother's attitude:  $t = 0.22$ ;  $p = 0.83$ ; father's attitude:  $t = 0.38$ ;  $p = 0.7$ ) and boys (mother's attitude:  $t = 1.55$ ;  $p = 0.14$ ; father's attitudes:  $t = 0.45$ ;  $p = 0.66$ ) there were no significant differences in the intensity of these two attitudes for both parents. The next step was to compare negative attitudes (demanding, inconsistent and protective). In the boys' group, all attitudes differed significantly in intensity – the highest intensity was recorded for the protective attitude, and the lowest for the erratic attitude, both in the assessment of the mother and the father. Similarly to the boys' group, the highest intensity was observed for protective attitude, and the lowest for attitude inconsistency in the assessment of father and mother was revealed in the girls' group as well.

Table 3. Pairwise comparisons of only negative parental attitudes among girls ( $n = 28$ ) and boys ( $n = 23$ )

Variables		Girls			Boys		
		M1	M2	t	M1	M2	t
Mother's attitude	Demanding vs. inconsistent	24.93	21.79	3.04*	27.00	20.39	5.09*
	Demanding vs. protective	24.93	33.14	3.80*	27.00	33.48	3.13*
	Protective vs. inconsistent	33.14	21.79	5.39*	33.48	20.39	6.90*
Father's attitude	Demanding vs. inconsistent	20.68	20.96	0.28	23.35	21.13	1.53
	Demanding vs. protective	20.68	29.29	4.96*	23.35	30.30	2.68*
	Protective vs. inconsistent	29.29	20.96	3.47*	30.30	21.13	3.18*

M1 - mean for the first attitude from the pair; M2 - mean for the second attitude from the pair; t - Student's t-test result for dependent samples; \*  $p < 0.05$

The difference in one of the pair of negative attitudes turned out to be insignificant. This situation concerned the demanding and inconsistent attitude of both boys ( $t = 1.53$ ;  $p = 0.14$ ) and girls ( $t = 0.28$ ;  $p = 0.78$ ).

### **Discussion**

Despite the original assumption of a significant link between the perception of parental attitudes, both of the mother and the father, and the styles of coping with stress, the conducted statistical analyses did not allow for the comprehensive adoption of the said assumption. The positive correlation between the perceived negative maternal attitudes (demanding and inconsistent) and the emotion-oriented style turned out to be significant, and there were substantial relationships also in terms of negative paternal attitudes (demanding and inconsistent) and the style of avoidance. Both mothers and fathers who are demanding and inconsistent in the opinion of young people, contribute to the fact that the child may have a problem with recognizing their own needs, thus gaining emotional distance to their parents in response to their erratic actions. What is more, parents imposing their expectations want their child to be perfect in every sphere of life. Young people playing sports are particularly susceptible to formulating the requirements within which they must be the best, the most accomplished, with no sign of weaknesses. Experiencing uncertainty and faced with excessive demands and without support, a young person creates response patterns by finding them in the behaviour of their parents. Research reports have shown that young people learn coping strategies related to emotions or avoidance through observation and imitation from their immediate environment [20, 21]. There is no doubt that the parents constitute the environment that generates such conditions; they are the child's first models of particular coping strategies [22].

In breakthrough moments of their adolescence, a young man needs authority, which will be their point of reference while making decisions. The parent's failure to respond to the child's needs may cause negative consequences in many realms of their functioning [23]. Parental attitudes of requirement and inconsistency may result in the formation of defensive forms of responding to stressful situations, e.g. the withdrawal and avoidance of difficult situations or the habit of aggressive behaviour [see 24, 25]. It should be emphasized that the system of attitudes displayed by parents as demanding and inconsistent has a significant impact on the risk of depression in adolescents [26]. It also turned out that excessive demand combined with the parents' inconsistency can contribute to internet addiction among young people [27].

The work also verified whether individual attitudes differ in the range of obtained average values. It turned out that the positive attitudes do not differ significantly from each other, while among the adverse reactions the highest average was recorded for the protective attitude and the lowest for the inconsistent attitude (for both the mother and father). The atmosphere of a family home is one of the most important non-specific components in shaping the development path of a young athlete, which may result from the fact that regardless of whether parents are more accepting or giving greater autonomy in their attitudes, the child experiences positive emotions and support from them. Bettelheim [28] emphasises that to be treated by a supportive and trustworthy, the parent does not have to meet all the child's needs. Additional analysis showed that positive attitudes were higher than the negative ones. This may be related to parents' participation in the adolescent's sports life, which is perceived as support [13], and potentially translates into perceived positive attitude of the parent. Assuming further that for the proper functioning of the child, the parent as an essential person should appear positively, the result obtained confirms this.

## Summary

The study was aimed at checking the relationship between the perceived parental attitudes and the styles of coping with stress among young people attending athletic championship schools. The process of growing up of a child is more influenced by the parent's perceived behaviour than the actual behaviour of the father and the mother [8, 29, 30]. The attitudes of parents towards their children affect the development of the cognitive, emotional and social functioning of the latter. Positive parenting attitudes perceived by parents are associated with favourable health behaviours of young people, while negative attitudes are associated with adverse health behaviours of the adolescents [31]. Effective coping with stress is a critical ability that every contestant should display because stress is an integral part of competitive sport. Owczarek's research [14] confirms that the task-oriented style of coping with stress is the one that helps in gaining the highest achievements in sport most.

Analyzing the relationship between coping with stress and hope for success, Minda and Piasecka [15] stated that a higher level of hope is associated with employing the task-oriented style and avoidance oriented style among the AChS students. It should be noted that for the students with unique sports talents, desire for success may be one of the most essential personal resources [32], which may be shaped not so much under the influence of educational interventions resulting from specific parental attitudes, but rather under the influence of their perception by the adolescents [3]. This is important because the level of hope for success is related to the perception of parental attitudes, so it is worth remembering that when working with young people playing sports, it is important to consider the family contact [16].

The obtained research results do not give ground to draw the ultimate conclusions but are another critical contribution to expanding knowledge about the relationship between parental attitudes and the styles of coping with stress, especially among young athletes.

## Conclusions:

1. There is a relationship between perceived negative maternal attitudes (excessive demands, inconsistency) and the emotion-oriented style.
2. There are links between perceived negative paternal attitudes (excessive demands, inconsistency) and the style focused on avoidance.
3. The intensity of positive attitudes, both of the father and mother, was higher than the negative attitudes among the surveyed youth attending the AChS.

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