

MATERNAL SELF-COMPETENCE AND MOTHER-CHILD INTERACTION

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Abstract: The aim of the present study was to examine the relation between maternal perceptions of self-competence and quality of mother-child interaction as well as the effect of maternal sociodemographic characteristics on the above perceptions. The sample comprised 468 mothers of pre-school aged children. The results indicated a strong relationship between maternal perception of self-competence and satisfaction and mother-child interaction quality. Maternal sociodemographic characteristics (age, level of education, employment status) had no relation with maternal perception of self-competence, satisfaction, or mother-child interaction. However, place of residence, number of children and marital status were important determinants of parenting variables. Mothers from single-parent families reported lower level of self-competence, satisfaction and conflict resolution compared to mothers in two-parent families.

Key words: Maternal self-competence, Mother-child interaction, Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

According to the integrative model of parenting (Čudina-Obradović & Obradović, 2003), which relies on an ecological perspective of development and family, parenting includes three basic elements – parenting experience (self-competence, satisfaction), parenting style, and parenting practices. Parenting experience is related to subjective parental assessment of one's own success in fulfilling the socially set parenting norms and the satisfaction the individual experiences in the parenting role. Parental style is conceptualised as emotional atmosphere within which the parent-child interaction takes place. Parental practices are behaviours that the parent undertakes in order to achieve parental goals and perform the parental role (Čudina Obradović & Obradović, 2003).

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Regardless of whether one starts from the aforementioned model or the Belsky model of parental behaviour determinants (Belsky, 1984), it can be assumed that parenting is a process that follows a developmental course (Lacković Grgin, 2011). During this developmental process numerous influences on parenting exist including the child's and parent's characteristics as well as the characteristics of the wider family and social context, and the interaction of all of the aforementioned characteristics (Belsky, 1984; Čudina-Obradović & Obradović, 2003; Holden, 2010).

In this study the focus was on parenting experience and the quality of mother-child interaction, that is, quality of parental behaviours towards the child. The quality of interaction in the mother-child relationship for the purposes of this study was operationalised in terms of acceptance and conflict resolution. Acceptance is related to parental unconditional acceptance of the child, and the warmth with which the parent approaches the child (Lange, Evers, Jansen, & Dolan, 2002), which is in accordance with Rohner's dimension of acceptance – rejection (Rohner, 2004). Rejection includes hostility, aggression and neglect while acceptance includes physical and verbal expression of love and warmth. The accepting and emotionally warm parents feel love for their child, are friendly towards it, dedicate a lot of attention to it and demonstrate such feelings to it. Rejecting or emotionally cold parents are hostile to their child, neglect it, criticise it, and show to the child few positive emotions (Keresteš, 2001). Conflict resolution is related to the so-called democratic upbringing style (Lange, Blonk, & Wiers, 1998), where the parent resolves conflictive situations mainly through discussion, tries to use the conflictive situation as a learning tool and encourages the child to adopt new and desirable forms of behaviour.

The parenting experience

The importance of parenting experience is emphasized in Belsky's model of determinants of parental behaviour (Belsky, 1984). This model posits that parental self-competence and satisfaction underlie effective parental action and create an emotional climate that has positive influence on children's development (Čudina-Obradović & Obradović, 2003). Parenting experience is conceptualised as a two-facet construct: it includes perceived parental competence in the parental role (perceived parental self-efficacy) and parental satisfaction. A competent parent sees him/herself as the person who has control over one's own parenting and relations with the child, and feels good as a parent (Ljubetić, 2007). Parents who perceive themselves as competent in parenting feel ready and responsible for the parental role and for carrying out parental duties. They also enjoy being parents. Thus, they are ready to ensure an encouraging environment for the child's development (Lacković Grgin, 1994).

Parenting satisfaction is related to the satisfaction parents gain from themselves as a parent, that is, satisfaction they experiences from the parental role (Sabatelli & Waldron, 1995). Research dealing with maternal satisfaction has shown that it is significantly correlated to the quality of parenting (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997; Young, Hildebrandt Karraker, & Cottrell, 2006) and to a low-conflict parenting style (Ohan, Leung, & Johnston, 2000). Parental competence and satisfaction are inter-related given that effectiveness in parenting leads to greater satisfaction and parents who assess themselves as being effective in performing the parental role feel strengthened in the parental role (Coleman & Hildebrandt Karraker, 2000).

Research has also shown that mother's perceived self-efficacy is significantly related to her actual competence and behaviour regardless of the child's temperament (Teti & Gelfand, 1991; Sanders & Woolley, 2005) and marital support (Teti & Gelfand, 1991). Furthermore, parental self-efficacy has been shown to predict parenting skills (Coleman & Hildebrandt Karraker, 1997; Jones & Prinz, 2005) and mediate the relationship between child's temperament and maternal depression, social support and poverty on the one hand, and quality of parenting on the other (Coleman & Hildebrandt Karraker, 1997). Parents who perceive themselves as being less efficient and competent in performing the parental role are less effective in their efforts to face difficulties in the child's behaviour (Johnston & Patenaude, 1994; Sevigny & Loutzenhiser, 2010). They are usually not able to use their own parenting knowledge, are very emotionally aroused, and easily give up when confronting difficulties in parenting (Grusec, Hastings, & Mammone, 1994).

Mother's sociodemographic characteristics, parenting experience and quality of interaction with the child

The experience and quality of parenting are influenced by factors that can be grouped into a number of categories. These include parent characteristics, characteristics of the child, family (economic security, family structure, and relationship between parents) and wider social context. Research has well documented the effect of gender and age of parents (Keresteš, 2001; Salonen, Kaunonen, Astedt-Kurki, Jarvenpaa, Isoaho, & Tarkka, 2009); parents' personality traits (Clark, Kochanska, & Ready, 2000; Prinzie, Stams, Deković, Reijntjes, & Belsky, 2009; Smith, Spinrad, Eisenberg, Gaertner, Popp, & Maxon, 2008; Van Bakel & Riksen-Walraven, 2002); characteristics of the child (Kanuth, 2001; Spajić-Vrkaš, 1995) and the influence of family interaction (Ohan et al., 2000; Reić Ercegovac, 2010) on parenting. On the other hand, there is no consistency in the findings of how some sociodemographic characteristics affect parenting. There is data on the negative effects of the poor economic status on

parental skills and behaviour (Čudina-Obradović & Obradović, 1995; McLoyd, 1990). Research by Raboteg Šarić and Pecnik (2006) pointed out the importance of age, education level and marital status on parental behaviour. There is evidence showing a positive relationship between mother's educational level and parenting quality (Alwin, 1984; Coleman & Hildebrandt Karraker, 2000; Zevalkink & Riksen-Walraven, 2001), as well as a positive relationship between mother's employment status and parenting quality (Macuka, 2007; Šimić Šašić, Klarin, & Proroković, 2011). Educational level and socioeconomic status are also significant predictors of parenting style (Bluestone & Tamis-LeMonda, 1999), in the sense that they predict an authoritative parenting style. Meyers (1999) has also shown that mothers of higher educational and socioeconomic level are more inclined towards acceptance and democratic conflict resolution in their interaction with children of pre-school age.

Research examining the relationship between parents' sociodemographic characteristics and parenting has been mainly concerned with the effects of these characteristics on parental behaviour and parenting skills. The effect of sociodemographic characteristics on parental experience (self-competence and satisfaction), however, has rarely been the object of research, and the findings are often contradictory. One factor that seems to affect parental experience is number of children. It has been found that number of children is positively related to parenting experience, so that parents with several children feel and assess themselves as being more competent in the parenting role compared to parents with one child (Coleman & Hildebrandt Karraker, 2000).

The present study

The aim of this study was, first, to examine the role of mother's educational level, employment and marital status, age, place of residence, and number of children on perception of parental self-competence and satisfaction, as well as on acceptance and conflict resolution regarding children of pre-school age. The hypothesis was that mother's educational level, living in two-parent family and being employed will be positively related to parental perceived self-competence and satisfaction. The assumption was that mothers with better education have better jobs and earn more money; this reduces parental stress. Furthermore, mothers in two-parent families, compared to single mothers, usually have more support in the upbringing of the child, specifically spousal support. This directly affects maternal practices but also in an indirect way mothers' well-being and parenting quality (Belsky & Barends, 2002; Reić Ercegovac, 2010).

A second aim was to examine the relationship between mothering experience

(perceived self-competence and satisfaction) and interaction with the child in terms of acceptance and conflict resolution. The hypothesis was that maternal perceived self-competence and satisfaction will be significant predictors of mother-child interaction quality.

METHOD

Participants

The sample comprised 468 mothers. The sample sociodemographic characteristics are shown in Table 1. The average age of their children was 5.4, ranging from 3 to 6.8 years. A total of 500 participants were contacted and accepted cooperation. Of them, there were 468 completely and validly filled in questionnaires that were included in further analyses.

Table 1. Sample structure according to sociodemographic variables (N = 468)

Sociodemographic variables	Levels	N	%
Age	< 30	122	26
	31-40	131	28
	> 40	215	46
Marital status	Two-parent families	416	89
	Single-parent families	52	11
Employment status	Employed	267	57
	Unemployed	201	43
Educational level	Primary school	33	7
	High school	304	65
	College	70	15
	University	61	13
Place of residence	City	206	44
	Town	136	29
	Village	126	27
Number of children	One	117	25
	Two	206	44
	Three or more	145	31

Questionnaires

Demographics

A questionnaire of general person information was put together for the purposes of this research and consisted of questions on the age, number of children, place of residence, education, marital and employment status of the participants.

Parenting Sense of Competence Scale

To investigate the motherhood experience the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (Johnston & Mash, 1989) was applied. The original version of the scale was formulated by Gibaud-Wallston and Wandersman (1978) in order to measure the perception of parental competence in relation to infants. Johnston and Mash (1989) changed the term infant to child and adapted the questionnaire for parents of primary-school-age children. Similarly to the original version, the two factor structure was confirmed – parental satisfaction and self-competence.

The scale included 17 items and the participants responded by circling the number that best fit how they felt on a Likert-type scale with six response options (1: completely agree to 6: do not agree at all). The Croatian version of the questionnaire was used (Reić Ercegovac, 2010).

The results of the factor analysis on the data of this sample revealed a two-factor solution, similarly to earlier applications of the scale (Delale, 2011; Johnston & Mash, 1989; Ohan et al., 2000; Reić Ercegovac, 2011). In comparison to earlier research, three items significantly loaded a different factor than predicted. These were the items: *My talents and interests are in other areas, not in being a mother*; *If being a mother of a child were only more interesting, I would be more motivated to do a better job as a mother*, and *Being a mother makes me tense and anxious*. In the original version these items were included in the factor of parenting satisfaction, but in this study showed significant loading on the competence factor. One item did not significantly load on any factor and was omitted from further analysis. After transformation by reverse coding, the total score for each subscale was formed by summing the item scores. The higher score signified greater parental competence and satisfaction. Psychometric characteristics of two subscales are shown in Table 2.

Parent - Child Interaction Questionnaire – Revised

To examine the quality of mother - child interaction The *Parent - Child Interaction*

Table 2. Psychometric characteristics of Parenting Sense of Competence Scale and Parent - Child Interaction Questionnaire - Revised

Subscales	Parenting Sense of Competence Scale		Parent - Child Interaction Questionnaire - Revised	
	Competence	Satisfaction	Conflict resolution	Acceptance
Explained variance	21%	15%	15%	14%
M (SD)	47.62 (8.76)	23.78 (6.01)	39.97 (7.78)	24.84 (3.18)
Range of responses	19-60	7-36	18-55	10-28
Cronbach's α	.80	.70	.73	.70
Mean inter-item correlation	.28	.28	.20	.26

Questionnaire – Revised (Lange et al., 1998; Lange et al., 2002) was used. The items tap interpersonal behaviours and feelings when interacting with a child. Conceptually, the questionnaire is based on learning theory and the structural and behavioural family therapy (Lange et al., 2002).

The questionnaire was adapted for Croatian following of double-blind translation. The revised version of the questionnaire that was used in this study consisted of 21 items. Responses were on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (I do not agree at all) to 4 (I completely agree). In the present sample the original two-factor structure was reproduced. The item *I show my appreciation clearly when my child does something for me*, loaded the acceptance factor, while in the original version it was part of the conflict-resolution factor. On the other hand, the items *My child listens when I explain something* and *I take my time to listen to my child* in the original version are part of the acceptance factor, whereas in this study they loaded on the conflict-resolution factor. Besides this, two items did not load on any of the two factors and were omitted from further analysis. Thus, the final scale comprised 19 items, 12 of which constituted the subscale of conflict resolution and seven the subscale of acceptance. The two factors accounted for 30% of explained variance. Psychometric characteristics of the subscales are shown in Table 2.

Procedure

The study was carried out during 2011 in cooperation with pre-school institutions in the Split-Dalmatian County, Croatia. Twenty two educational groups in four public preschool institutions were randomly selected in the sample, as well as three educational groups in private preschool institutions. The ratio of public and private institutions in the sample corresponded to the ratio of public and private kindergartens in the County. Children whose mothers constituted research sample spend eight hours

on average in preschool, ranging from six to ten hours per day, five days a week.

Participants were invited to participate in the study and were instructed that, while filling in the questionnaires, they should keep in mind only one child and particularly the child attending the preschool institution that had established cooperation with them. It was emphasised they should complete the questionnaire regardless of the relationship with their other children (if they had any). Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The aim of the study was in general terms explained to the participants. Completing the questionnaire took 20 minutes.

RESULTS

In order to investigate the possible effects of mother's sociodemographic characteristics on self-competence, satisfaction and quality of interaction with the child, a series of one-way analyses of variances were implemented. Number of children had a significant main effect on parenting experience, $F(2, 465) = 5.25, p < .01$ for satisfaction, and $F(2, 465) = 6.93, p < .01$ for perceived self-competence. Mothers with two children were more satisfied than mothers of one or three or more children. Mothers with several children perceived themselves as more competent than mothers with one child. Number of children also significantly affected acceptance, $F(2, 465) = 5.29, p < .01$, so that mothers with three or more children were significantly less accepting than those with one or two children, who did not differ between them.

Place of residence was significant only in relation to conflict resolution, $F(2, 465) = 4.31, p < .05$ – mothers who lived in village scored higher in conflict resolution. Thus, there was higher quality of interaction with the child in mothers living in village compared to mothers living in towns or cities.

Marital status, namely, being in a single-parent family as opposed to a two-parent family was important for most of the parenting variables: $F(1, 466) = 3.65, p < .01$ for self-competence, $F(1, 466) = 10.26, p < .01$ for satisfaction, and $F(1, 466) = 3.99, p < .01$ for conflict resolution. Mothers from two-parent families perceived themselves as being significantly more competent and satisfied from their parenting role and considered their interaction with the child as being of a higher quality compared to mothers from single-parent families. However, the latter was true only when it came to conflict resolution, not acceptance.

Table 3 shows the correlations between all variables included in the study. Sociodemographic variables showed significant albeit moderate inter-correlations. As expected, mothers' age was positively related to number of children and negatively with education level, while there was negative correlation between level of education and

Table 3. Correlation matrix of all variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Age	1.00								
2. Place of residence	-.09*	1.00							
3. Employment	-.04	-.21**	1.00						
4. Marital status	.12**	.08	.04	1.00					
5. Education	-.24**	.24**	-.30**	-.03	1.00				
6. Number of children	.42**	-.30**	.02	-.12**	-.23**	1.00			
7. Competence	.05	-.06	-.05	-.09	.04	.09*	1.00		
8. Satisfaction	.02	.01	-.06	-.15**	.04	.01	.37**	1.00	
9. Conflict resolution	-.08	-.13**	-.02	-.12**	.10*	-.03	.36**	.43**	1.00
10. Acceptance	-.11*	.06	.01	-.07	.08	-.08	.40**	.39**	.39**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

number of children. As Table 3 also shows, there were positive correlations between all parenting variables, ranging from $r = .36$ between conflict resolution and perceived self-competence to $r = .43$ between conflict resolution and parenting satisfaction.

In order to explore the predictive value of maternal sociodemographic characteristics and parental self-competence and satisfaction in explaining variance of mother - child interaction, two hierarchical regression analyses were performed with accepting and conflict resolution as criterion variables (see Table 4). Since categorical variables with more than two levels were included in the model as predictors (education level, place of residence, number of children), dummy variables were created for the respective predictors and included in the regression analyses. The number of dummy variables for each predictor (education level, place of residence, number of children) was equal to the number of levels of the categorical variable minus one. In each dummy variable responses were coded as 0 and 1. For example, for the variable Number of Children (one of the categorical predictors), two new variables were created, one for two children and one for three or more children. Participants with one child were coded as zero; participants with two children were coded as one in the dummy variable “two children”, and as zero in the dummy variable “three or more children”. A similar procedure was applied for education level and place of residence.

Sociodemographic characteristics explained a small but significant part of the conflict resolution variance (6%). Place of residence, marital and educational status were significant predictors for conflict resolution, suggesting that higher education, two-parent family and smaller place of residence predict better mother-child interaction in terms of conflict resolution. By introducing the variables of parenting experience (self-competence and satisfaction) in the second step of the analysis, the

percentage of explained variance was significantly increased. In the final step, from all sociodemographic variables, only the place of residence had significant predictive value for conflict resolution. Mothers who lived in the village and those who perceived themselves as being competent and satisfied in the parental role reported higher quality of interaction with the child in relation to the way conflicts were resolved. The included predictors explained a total of 28% of the variance of conflict resolution.

Table 4. Results of hierarchical regression analyses with conflict resolution and acceptance as criterion variables

Step	Predictors	Conflict resolution		Acceptance		
		β	t	β	t	
1. Sociodemographic variables	Age - 31 to 40	-.06	-.09	-.09	-1.46	
	Age - over 40	-.05	-.07	-.10	-1.53	
	Place of residence - city	-.23	-3.86**	.03	.46	
	Place of residence - town	-.13	-2.41*	.05	.96	
	Employment	.01	0.27	-.04	-.74	
	Marital status (two-parent family)	.10	1.99*	.06	1.19	
	Education -high school	.20	2.15*	.13	1.43	
	Education - college	.20	2.48*	.16	1.99*	
	Education - university	.20	2.48*	.10	1.28	
	Number of children - two	.05	.90	.12	1.98*	
	Number of children - three or more	.03	-.95	.03	-.42	
		<i>R</i>	.25		.22	
		<i>R</i> ²	.06		.05	
	<i>F</i> (11, 456)	2.88*		2.07*		
2. Sociodemographic variables	Age - 31 to 40	-.07	-1.44	-.11	-2.08*	
	Age - over 40	-.07	-1.32	-.12	-2.17*	
	Place of residence - city	-.20	-3.86**	.06	1.09	
	Place of residence - town	-.11	-2.27**	.07	1.45	
	Employment	-0.00	-0.04	-.05	-1.22	
	Marital status (two-parent family)	.03	.63	-.01	-.20	
	Education -high school	.17	2.08*	.12	1.49	
	Education - college	.18	2.50*	.14	2.05*	
	Education - university	.16	2.23*	.07	.99	
	Number of children - two	-.04	-.67	.03	.47	
	Number of children - three or more	-.08	-1.35	-.05	-.89	
	Parenting variables	Self-competence	.24	5.53**	.31	7.07**
		Satisfaction	.33	7.41**	.27	6.08**
Final regression equation indicators	<i>R</i>	.53		.52		
	<i>R</i> ²	.28		.27		
	ΔR^2	.22		.22		
	<i>F</i> (13, 454)	13.33**		12.73**		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Sociodemographic characteristics explained a significant, albeit small, percentage of variance in acceptance (5%) (see Table 4). Mothers with college degree, compared to other levels of education, and mothers of two children perceived themselves as more accepting. Variables of parenting experience, introduced in the second step of the analysis, significantly increased the amount of explained variance in acceptance. The included predictors explained a total of 27% of variance of acceptance.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the effect of mothers' sociodemographic characteristics on their parenting experience and quality of interaction with the pre-school aged child. Also, examine the relationship between parenting experience and parenting quality. Parenting experience was operationalised as perception of parental self-competence and parenting satisfaction. Parenting quality was assessed through a questionnaire on mother-child interaction tapping acceptance and conflict resolution. The sociodemographic characteristics included in the study were age, employment, educational level, marital status, place of residence, and number of children.

The analyses showed that the sociodemographic characteristics of the mother were not as relevant to the parenting experience or the quality of interaction with the child as was expected. Starting with Belsky's model, the personal characteristics of the parent should be dominant parental determinants (Belsky, 1984) given that they have an indirect and direct effect on parenting through a wider context in which interaction is achieved in the parent-child relationship. The results of this research showed that mother's age was not important for mothering experience or mother-child interaction. Similar results were obtained by Coleman and Hildebrandt Karraker (2000) who also did not find any effect of mother's age on competence indicators and mother's self-efficacy.

Earlier research on the relation of mother's educational level with quality parenting showed that there is a positive link between them (Alwin, 1984; Zevalkink & Riksen – Walraven, 2001). These results were attributed to mothers' wider general knowledge as well as knowledge about children's needs and developmental changes, that is, mothers' easier access to educational data on parenting. The results of this study did not confirm the role of educational level on quality of parenting or motherhood experience. Similar findings were reported by both Coleman and Hildebrandt Karraker (2000) on mothers of school-aged children and by Reić Ercegovac (2010) on mothers of infants.

As regards employment status, the present study did not find any effect on the parenting experience and quality of parenting, contrary to earlier research showing that working mothers achieve higher quality of mother-child interaction (Macuka, 2007). Similarly to the results of Macuka (2007), other studies have shown that mother's employment was predictive of the quality of interaction within the family. Specifically, Šimić Šasić et al. (2011) showed that both parents being employed was positively associated to higher quality of family interaction. Moreover, unemployed mothers showed greater rejection in interaction with their adolescent child compared to working mothers. Of course, it should be taken into consideration that differences in children's age between studies can contribute to different findings on the effectiveness of employed mothers to maintain quality interaction with the child. Nevertheless, the results of the present study were in accordance with the results obtained by Coleman and Hildebrandt Karraker (2000).

Place of residence, on the other hand, did have an effect on conflict resolution. Conflicts with the child were better resolved by mothers living in village compared to those living in towns or cities, and this led to higher interaction quality with the child. The results of earlier research showed a similar situation (Šimić Šasić et al., 2011). It was found that children living in village were more satisfied with their families and perceived their mothers as more accepting than did their peers living in the city. A possible explanation of these findings is a more relaxed lifestyle in the village and smaller towns both for children and adults, more bonds among members of the local community who supervise children when their parents are absent and in this way prevent potential sources of conflict, and in the freedom children in villages and smaller towns have compared to children from larger cities where everyday life is more stressful, especially for working mothers.

Number of children was also proven significant for mothers' satisfaction, self-competence and acceptance. Mothers with one or two children perceived themselves as more accepting than mothers with three or more children. This is in line with finding from earlier research (Štironja Borić, Roščić, Sedmak, Šepčević, & Keresteš, 2011) showing that mothers with more children reported greater tendency towards negative parenting behaviour, probably due to lack of time and energy for each child separately. Apart from this, mothers with several children perceived themselves as significantly more competent compared to mothers with one child. Mothers of two children, compared to those with one, three or more children, were the most satisfied with parenting. In contrast to the present results, research by Coleman and Hildebrandt Karraker (2000) showed that number of children was not related to any of the measures of parental self-efficacy. However, experience with children, other than one's own, was positively correlated to the perception of parental self-

competence. The authors explained this finding in that experience with someone else's children gives people normative information on children's needs, behaviours and development, and this influences the upbringing of one's own children. Parents with experience are less inclined to attribute all difficulties to their own incompetence and more successfully develop the belief about their own efficacy in the parental role.

Of all included characteristics of the mother in this study the most significant variable was shown to be mother's marital status. Our results showed that mothers from single-parent families report lower sense of competence, lower level of satisfaction and lower quality of interaction with their pre-school aged child as regards conflict resolution. However, in the case of acceptance there was no significant difference between mothers in single-parent and two-parent families. Earlier research has shown that single mothers were generally more hostile in their interaction with their children and more inclined to punish them than mothers from two-parent families (Simons, 1996).

An explanation for these findings could be that mothers who live with the child in single-parent families experience lower subjective well-being. Extant research has shown that marital status is a significant predictor of subjective well-being, that is, persons in a marital or extramarital relationship have a much higher level of subjective well-being than unmarried, divorced or separated persons (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Given that subjective well-being is a significant predictor of parenting quality (Belsky & Barends, 2002; Reić Ercegovac, 2010), it is possible that the results of this study reveal lower quality of parenting and lower perception of self-competence and maternal satisfaction in single-parent families due to the lower subjective well-being of single mothers. Since this research did not examine mothers' subjective well-being, it would be interesting future research to examine whether it mediates mother's marital status and mothering experience, including interaction with the child.

It is also possible that lower parental competence and satisfaction, as well as lower quality of mother – child interaction in mothers from single-parent families is due to lack of support from the marital partner. Partner's support is a protective factor of the quality of parenting (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994). Earlier research suggested that mothers who have satisfactory support from others are also more efficient in their interaction with the child (Belenky et al., 1997). Support from one's partner and other members of one's social network enables parents to experience more satisfaction in the interaction with their child and make them willing and competent to satisfy the child's needs (Reić Ercegovac, 2011). Besides this, for parents who receive greater social support, it is likely that this support is more accessible to them so that they can seek help or advice related to childcare. This makes parents more

secure and probably more competent in the parental role. Similarly to the results reported in this paper, Hakvoort, Bos, van Balen, and Hermanns (2011) showed that mothers from single-parent families have lower perception of self-competence with pre-school aged children compared to mothers from two-parent families. Applying the same measure of parental self-competence used in this research, Copeland and Harbaugh (2004) showed that mothers from single-parent families expressed lower level of competence compared to mothers from two-parent families.

Finally, as expected, the results of this study showed significant correlations between mothering experience and quality of mother-child interaction. Self-competence and satisfaction in maternal role were significant predictors of both aspects of mother-child interaction (i.e., acceptance and conflict resolution), suggesting that mothers who perceive themselves as competent and feel satisfied with their parental role perceive interaction with their child in a positive way.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that the results of this study confirmed the role of the “wholeness” of the family in parenting quality and motherhood experience. However, the ability of other sociodemographic characteristics of the mother to explain her interaction with the child was limited, likely because the measures used were self-reports of one’s parenting experiences. Furthermore, the results of this research pointed out the importance of parenting experience for quality interaction with pre-school aged children and also the importance of parenting experience measures as indicators of the quality of the interaction in the parent-child relationship. Given that the quality of mother-child interaction, as captured in acceptance and conflict resolution, is a significant predictor of positive developmental attainments for the child (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, & Ritter, 1997) it is clear that parenting assessment, and particularly, how competent and satisfied with their parenting parents are, is important for child adjustment. Subjective parental competence and satisfaction with parenting have a significant influence on parental styles and parenting quality given that they directly affect parental behaviour, and besides that, represent the easiest and the most effective way to change inappropriate parental behaviour (Holden, 2010).

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