

## **SOCIALIZATION VALUES OF MOTHERS AND FATHERS: DOES THE CHILD'S AGE MATTER?**

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**Abstract.** The study compared socialization values held by mothers and fathers of children from two age groups: middle childhood and late adolescence. 410 mothers and 269 fathers of children in middle childhood as well as 603 mothers and 406 fathers of late adolescents were given a list of qualities that children might be encouraged to learn at home, and asked to mark five that they consider the most important. The study found that the child's age is a factor that had a strong impact on parental socialization values. The values held by a mother and father from the same family reveal more similarities than expected by chance. Study findings supported the view that the educational level of parents (with vs. without university degree) is a factor strongly related to the extent to which they attach importance to self-direction versus traditional conformity-related values.

**Keywords:** socialization values, value congruence, fathers, mothers, late adolescence, middle childhood

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### **1. Introduction**

A lot of research has been devoted to socialization values held by parents because these values are known to play a role in shaping the ways in which children are being treated by their parents and how parents organize their children's home environment (see Hirsijärvi and Perälä-Littunen 2001, Hoff et al. 2002, Holden 1995). Socialization values have been found to differ substantially across cultures reflecting different broader cultural ideologies and models of raising children (Greenfield et al. 2003, Kagitçibaşı 2005, Keller et al. 2005, Wang and Tamis-LeMonda 2003). Several socio-cultural factors (e.g. parental educational level, income, neighborhood ecology, ethnicity, the child's gender) have been shown to be responsible for within-cultural differences in socialization values (see Hoff et al. 2002). Among all these factors, parental educational level has been

found to be the factor most strongly related to what qualities parents value in children, especially regarding the extent to which they value self-directive behavior over conformity (Hoff et al. 2002). Despite the popularity of research on socialization values, many questions have remained unanswered regarding issues such as the implications of the parents' gender and the child's age on socialization values.

It is not known whether and to what extent are socialization values held by mothers similar to those of fathers. Parental value congruence is not just a matter of agreement between the parents, the agreement is influenced also by *Zeitgeist* – the prevailing value climate in a given society at a given time (Boehnke et al. 2007).

It is well documented that by now the role of men in families has changed, and fathers are more involved and take more responsibility in child rearing than before (e. g. Marsiglio et al. 2000). Despite the need to include both mothers and fathers in research concerning family influences on child development, developmental psychologists have focused almost exclusively on research on socialization values held by mothers (see Hirsijärvi and Perälä-Littunen 2001, Holden, 1995, for overviews). Value surveys, in turn, have generally not paid special attention to whether the respondents have children at all when reporting results of their findings on socialization values held in certain societies (for instance, Special EUROBAROMETER 225, 2005).

At the same time, some studies show the importance of value agreement between parents. For instance, it has been shown that a mother and father holding more similar values would have an offspring who more strongly desires to share these values (e.g. Cashmore and Goodnow 1985, Okagaki and Bevis 1999, Knafo and Schwartz 2003). Yet little empirical studies have been done on the issue.

A pilot study made by Tulviste and Ahtonen (2007) with relatively small sample size of parents of preschool-age children found that socialization values of fathers were similar to those held by mothers. At the same time, the value similarity was bigger in Finnish than in Estonian families: compared to fathers, Estonian mothers were more likely to emphasize the importance of qualities related to traditional values such as benevolence (e.g. kind, nice, friendly) and conformity (e.g. polite, honoring parents and elders) in children. None of these studies has examined mother-father value congruence as related to the age of the child.

It has been debated in literature whether and to what extent the child's age influences parental socialization values. According to some authors, parents adjust their socialization values as children develop (Chiu 1987). It is likely that parents modify their parenting values especially during their children's adolescent years to be in line with developmental changes (the children's increasing need for autonomy and independence). Researchers have reported contradictory results about the issue (see Barber et al. 2005).

According to other authors, on the contrary, parental socialization values remain relatively stable when children grow older, including adolescent years.

According to this view, values are consolidating in young adulthood and remain relatively stable throughout life (Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

Another characteristic that may affect socialization values is the gender of the child. Although the child's gender has received more researchers' attention than the child's age, there are contradictory views about the issue. Some authors claim that boys are primarily socialized to be independent, achievement-oriented, and self-sufficient while girls are expected to be relationship-oriented, and compliant (for a review see Helgeson 1994, Hill and Lynch 1983). Other studies have found no differences in socialization values on the basis of child gender (see Tulviste and Ahtonen 2007).

## 2. The present study

The current study addresses socialization values of mothers and fathers with children from two age groups: middle childhood and late adolescence. The big sample sizes and the fact that the participants are mothers and fathers of children of different ages allow to compare socialization values of mothers with those of fathers, as well as find out the possible impact of additional factors such as the child's age and gender, parental education and living place. The study is made in Estonia – a country in transition in regard to the value system. The observed wide diversity and complexity in value systems in countries with rapid cultural, economic and political changes (Lin and Fu 1990, Tulviste et al. 2012, Wang and Tamis-Lemonda 2003) is likely to allow psychologists to better understand the relationships between socialization values and socio-cultural factors. For instance, to find out who – the mother or the father – is more prone to hold traditional values such as respect others, good manners, obedience, and being trustworthy, and who is emphasizing values related to self-direction, such as independence, imagination, self-confidence and healthy lifestyle. It can be also that there are no differences between mothers and fathers in this respect.

It is also possible that socialization values depend on the parents' socio-economic background rather than their gender. The few existing studies made in transitional cultures demonstrate that despite a great variability in value systems in such cultures, most parents are likely to encourage qualities of achievement and self-direction in their children (Lin and Fu 1990, Tudge et al. 1999, Tulviste and Ahtonen 2007, Tulviste et al. 2007, Wang and Tamis-Lemonda 2003). For instance, mothers from Estonia have been found to value some values of self-direction (independence, imagination) for their children as highly as parents in the U.S., Russia, and South Korea (Tudge et al. 1999), parents from Finland (Tulviste and Ahtonen 2007), and mothers from Sweden (Tulviste et al. 2007). At the same time, they emphasize self-confidence less, and upkeep traditional values. Prior studies found that parents in Estonia value traditional values more highly than parents from Finland and Sweden (Tulviste and Ahtonen 2007, Tulviste et al. 2012). Within-cultural differences in Estonia have been observable rather in the

extent of emphasizing the importance of traditional values for children than those regarding self-direction and -expression (Tulviste and Ahtonen 2007).

Thus, the paper aims to examine, first, the similarities and differences between views of mothers and fathers of children from two different age groups – middle childhood and late adolescence – as to what are the most important qualities for children to develop. Based on the prior studies, we expect mothers to uphold traditional values such as obedience, respect of others, and good manners more than fathers.

Secondly, the inclusion of both parents allows a check on the agreement between parents belonging to the same family in respect to these qualities. As socialization values have been shown to depend also on the concrete characteristics of the child (his/her temperament, abilities etc.), we expect fathers and mothers from the same family to be similar in their selection of qualities that are important to develop.

Third, we expect some differences in socialization values of parents having children from different developmental stages: in middle childhood and late adolescence. We expect that parents of late adolescents would stress traditional values less than parents of younger children, in favor of values related to self-direction such as independence, imagination, self-confidence and healthy lifestyle.

Fourth, the effects of other factors (e.g. parental educational level, the child's gender, living in urban vs. rural areas etc) that might have an impact on socialization values will also be addressed. We predicted that parents with university education would emphasize values related to self-direction more, and support those of traditional values less than parents without university degree. We expected that the parents of sons would value qualities related to traditional values less and qualities of self-direction values more by comparison with the parents of daughters. We expected parents from urban areas to stress traditional values more, and self-direction less than parents from rural areas.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1. Respondents*

Two datasets were used in the present study. The first sample (parents with children in middle childhood) was originally formed for a longitudinal study that started when children were first graders (see Tulviste and Kikas 2010). Data used in the current study were collected at the beginning of the third grade (children's age 9–10) from their parents (603 mothers and 406 fathers). Of mothers, 31.5%, and 29.5% of fathers had university education, 62.2% of families were from urban, and 38.2% from rural areas. Among the children, 51.4% were boys and 48.6% were girls.

The second sample was originally formed for the European Youth Heart Study in 1998/1999. The sample was later incorporated into the longitudinal Estonian Children Personality, Behaviour and Health Study (see Harro et al. 2001). The

data for the present study were collected during the follow-up in 2007 when the participating children were in late adolescence – in the age range from 16 to 19 ( $M = 17.78$  years,  $SD = 0.54$ ) from their parents (see Tomson et al. 2011). Respondents to the socialization value questionnaire were 410 mothers and 269 fathers of 171 boys, 239 girls. Of mothers, 45.4%, and of fathers, 39.0% had university-level education. Among the adolescents, 41.7 % were boys, and 58.3 % were girls; 68.0% of them were from urban, 31.5 % from rural areas. At this time, a large percentage of adolescents (76.3%) were high school students, 14.6% were studying at vocational schools, 1.2% at the university, and 7.6% were full-time workers.

### 3.2. Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from both parents at the beginning of longitudinal studies. For follow-up studies, parents received the socialization value questionnaire, and returned it to school or to the research lab in a sealed envelope. Mothers and fathers were asked to fill it out independently, and had one week to complete the questionnaire. A reminder was once sent to parents who had not returned the questionnaires. Sixty nine percent of parents with 3rd graders, and 91 percent of parents with late adolescents responded to the questionnaire.

### 3.3. Socialization values questionnaire

Both mothers and fathers were given a list of 17 qualities (see Table 1 for a full list of items) that children might be encouraged to learn at home, and asked to mark five that they considered the most important. We used a modification of the list of eleven value items that was originally used in World Value Survey (WVS) (Inglehart 1994; see Xiao 2000) by adding qualities like *smartness* and *ambitious* frequently mentioned by the Estonian parents, and *self-confidence* frequently mentioned by the Finnish and Swedish parents in our previous research, with a questionnaire that also contained open-ended questions (Tulviste and Ahtonen 2007, Tulviste et al. 2007). In addition, qualities like *healthy lifestyle*, *good looks*, and *sporty* were added as the value questionnaire was also used in the longitudinal health study. Prior research has generally focused on particular parental values or narrow set of values. A reason of adding qualities to the list was that we wanted to draw an overall picture of mother-father value similarities and differences more clearly. The same method as in our study has been used by Tulviste and Kikas (2011) in a study comparing socialization values of different socializers (mothers, fathers and teachers of first grade children). In data analysis, all value items were coded as 1 = *selected* or 0 = *not selected*.

**Table 1. Percentages of mothers and fathers of children in middle childhood and late adolescence choosing each item as being among five most important qualities**

	Middle childhood		Late adolescence	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
Value	M	M	M	M
Trustworthy	72	66	53	49
Independence	68	61	52	51
Good manners	67	58	41	40
Respect others	61	49	50	43
Hard-working	55	58	59	58
Self-confidence	43	40	35	41
Determination	25	42	42	40
Smartness	21	33	22	26
Imagination	19	20	22	0
Ambitious	18	24	27	0
Healthy lifestyle	17	15	53	42
Obedience	19	15	0	0
Unselfishness	7	11	0	0
Sporty	4	7	0	0
Religious	4	5	0	0
Thrift/saving	4	4	15	0
Good looking	1	1	0	0
N	609	319	410	269

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Socialization values of mothers and fathers

Table 1 presents percentages of mothers and fathers with children from two age groups (middle childhood vs. late adolescence) who chose each item as being among five most important qualities that children should be encouraged to learn at home. As Table 1 shows, *obedience*, *religious*, *unselfishness*, *sporty*, and *good looking* were never chosen either by mothers or fathers of late adolescents to be among five most important ones. Some other qualities (e.g. *ambitious*, *imagination*, *thrift/saving*) were chosen only by mothers of late adolescents.

Pearson Chi-squares for the frequency of selecting each item among the five most important socialization values showed that *respect others* was more frequently selected by mothers than by fathers ( $\chi^2 = 10.72$ ,  $p < .01$ ) of younger children. Mothers of late adolescents selected more frequently than their fathers *healthy lifestyle* ( $\chi^2 = 6.90$ ,  $p < .01$ ), *ambitious* ( $\chi^2 = 86.12$ ,  $p < .0001$ ), *imagination* ( $\chi^2 = 68.94$ ,  $p < .0001$ ), and *thrift* ( $\chi^2 = 14.87$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). In the sample of younger children, fathers selected more frequently than mothers *determination* ( $\chi^2 = 27.22$ ,  $p < .00001$ ), *ambitious* ( $\chi^2 = 5.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and *smartness* ( $\chi^2 = 17.85$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).

#### 4.2. Similarity of socialization values between mothers and fathers

Where data from both parents were available, the number of concordant choices (i.e. the number of values chosen by both parents) was computed for each family. In the sample of parents with children in middle childhood ( $N = 302$ ), the mean number of concordant choices was 2.297 (95% bootstrap confidence interval 2.160; 2.428); if parents' values were completely independent, the expected concordance based on marginal frequencies would be 1.858. In the sample of parents with adolescents ( $N = 269$ ), the mean number of concordant choices was 2.825 (95% bootstrap confidence interval 2.695; 2.950); if parents' values were completely independent, the expected concordance based on marginal frequencies would be 2.330. Thus, the obtained concordances were very unlikely to have happened by chance (see Good, 2000).

#### 4.3. Relationships between socialization values and sociocultural variables

To examine the impact of the child's age (being in middle childhood vs. late adolescence), gender (boys vs. girls), the parents' educational level (without vs. with university degree), and living place (urban vs. rural) on socialization values held by mothers and fathers, logistic regression analyses were carried out separately for mothers and fathers. An odds ratio greater than 1 implies that the selection of this quality is more likely in the second group than in the first group. An odds ratio less than 1 implies that the selection of this quality is less likely in the second group.

*Effect of the child's age on parents' socialization values.* The probability of selecting *healthy lifestyle*, and *thrift*, was for mothers with adolescents more than two times bigger the probability for mother of younger children (respectively,  $OR = 2.289, p < .0001$ ;  $OR = 2.100, p < 0.0001$ ). The probability to select *ambitious* and *determination* was also higher for mothers of adolescents (respectively,  $OR = 1.338, p = .001$ ;  $OR = 1.461, p < .0001$ ). At the same time, they were less likely to select *good manners* ( $OR = 0.599, p < .0001$ ), *independence* ( $OR = 0.716, p < .0001$ ), *trustworthy* ( $OR = 0.684, p < .0001$ ), *respect others* ( $OR = 0.790, p < .001$ ), and *self-confidence* ( $OR = 0.844, p = .05$ ) than were mothers with younger children.

Among fathers, the probability to select *healthy lifestyle* ( $OR = 1.996, p = .0001$ ) was higher for fathers with adolescents than for fathers with younger children, whereas the probability for selecting *good manners* ( $OR = 0.730, p < .001$ ), *independence* ( $OR = 0.810, p < .05$ ), and *trustworthy* ( $OR = 0.721, p < .001$ ) was higher for fathers with younger children.

*Effect of parents' educational level on their socialization values.* Mothers with university education were more likely to select *healthy lifestyle* ( $OR = 1.336, p < .001$ ), *imagination* ( $OR = 1.659, p < .001$ ), *determination* ( $OR = 1.181, p < .0001$ ), *smartness* ( $OR = 1.175, p < .05$ ), and *self-confidence* ( $OR = 1.183, p < .05$ ) than were mothers with lower educational level. They were less likely to choose *obedience* ( $OR = 0.565, p < .0001$ ), *good manners* ( $OR = 0.691, p < .001$ ),

*respect others* (OR = 0.790,  $p < .001$ ), *trustworthy* (OR = 0.777,  $p < .001$ ), *hard-working* (OR = 0.863,  $p < .05$ ), and *thrift* (OR = 0.678,  $p < .01$ ).

Fathers' university education compared with lower education increased the probability to select *imagination* (OR = 1.624,  $p < .001$ ), and *healthy lifestyle* (OR = 1.293,  $p < .05$ ), and decreased the probability to select *hard work* (0.817,  $p < .05$ ), and *good manners* (OR = 0.775,  $p < .001$ ) among five most important qualities.

*Effect of living place on parents' socialization values.* Mothers living in rural areas were more likely to select *thrift* than mothers in urban areas (OR = 1.268,  $p < .05$ ). Fathers living in rural areas were less likely than fathers in urban areas to select *smartness* (OR = 0.798,  $p < .05$ ), and *unselfishness* (OR = 0.537,  $p < .01$ ).

*Effect of the child's gender on parents' socialization values.* Mothers and fathers of daughters were more likely to select *independence* (respectively, OR = 1.190,  $p < .01$ ; OR = 1.307,  $p < .01$ ) than fathers of sons. Fathers who had daughters were also less likely than other parents to select *unselfishness* (OR = 0.647,  $p < .05$ ) among most important qualities to develop.

## 5. Discussion

One of the goals of the present study was to learn about the similarities and differences between mothers' and fathers' views about the important qualities for their children to develop. It appears that mothers and fathers share predominant socialization values. They were most likely to choose, first of all, *trustworthy*, *respect others*, *hard-working*, and *independent* as the most important qualities children should be encouraged to learn at home. Although mothers of adolescents selected some qualities (e.g. *ambitious*, *imagination*, *thrift/saving*) never chosen by fathers of same age children, there was overlap in items (*obedience*, *religious faith*, *unselfishness*, *sporty*, and *good looking*) never chosen by them. Both mothers and fathers had no clear favorites.

In line with the assumption that mothers put more emphasize on traditional values than fathers, *respect others* was more likely, and *determination*, *ambitious*, and *smartness* less likely chosen by the mothers of younger children than their fathers. As to mothers of adolescents, they chose *thrift*, but also qualities of self-direction, such as *imagination*, and *ambitious* more frequently than fathers did. Thus, the mothers' and fathers' views on what quality they think to be important to develop in children appears to depend rather on the age of the child, and on the quality under question than on different value types (traditional vs. self-direction values).

The second goal of the study was to address the father-mother value agreement. As expected, the qualities selected independently by the mothers and fathers who belong to the same family revealed more similarity than expected by chance. The results are consistent with previous research showing a high similarity between socialization values held by preschoolers' mothers and fathers from same family



(Tulviste and Ahtonen 2007). It is likely that the child's characteristics like his/her age, temperament, abilities, etc. have an impact on his/her parents' selection of desirable qualities. Moreover, one reason of full agreement between parents' values could lie in the fact that parents frequently discuss the issues of childrearing with each other. Congruent with this, Okagaki and Bevis (1999) found that the more frequently parents discuss their values with children, the more accurately daughters perceive their parents' values. A reason why parental inter-correlation differs between certain values but not in the others may be in *Zeitgeist*: values are cherished to a different degree in different societies at different times (Boehnke et al. 2007).

In line with the third hypothesis, significant differences emerged in socialization values of parents of children in middle childhood and those with late adolescents. The finding that the child's age has a strong impact on his/her parents' socialization values is the most important result of our study, because the age of the child has received little attention in prior studies (see above). The hypothesis that self-direction values would be more important in parents of late adolescents than in parents of younger children found no clear support. Mothers with adolescents selected *healthy lifestyle*, *ambitious determination*, and *thrift* more frequently, and *good manners*, *trustworthy*, *respect others*, *independence* and *self-confidence* less frequently than mother of younger children. Fathers with adolescents selected *healthy lifestyle* more frequently, and *good manners*, *independence*, and *trustworthy* less frequently than fathers with younger children. Thus, mothers seem to be more influenced by children's age than fathers when selecting the most important qualities to be developed. A comparison of parents of younger children and adolescents found that the parents of adolescents stressed the importance of *healthy lifestyle*. An explanation for this could be that adolescence is a period of increased vulnerability to depressive symptoms, and for many youth of starting to exhibit risk-taking behaviors like alcohol drinking (Roche et al. 2008).

Fourth, the study focused on the impact of socio-cultural factors (e.g. parental educational level, living in urban vs. rural areas, the child's gender, etc.) on socialization values. As expected, parental educational level appeared to be associated with the extent to which the parents value self-directive behavior over conformity and traditional values. University-educated mothers were less likely to choose qualities related to traditional values (e.g. *trustworthy*, *polite*, *good manners*, and *obedient*), and more likely to choose those related to self-direction (e.g. *imagination*, *self-confidence*, *healthy lifestyle*, *determination*, and *smartness*) among the five most important qualities to develop in children than less-educated mothers. The fathers with university education valued *imagination*, and *healthy lifestyle* more highly, and *good manners*, and *hard work* less highly than those fathers whose educational level was lower. Thus, the findings were congruent with those of prior studies (see Hoff et al. 2002).

The expectation that parents of sons would be more likely to stress the qualities related to self-direction, whereas those of traditional values would be emphasized

by parents of daughters, did not find any support. Both parents of daughters were more likely than parents of sons to select *independence*, and fathers of daughters were less likely to select *unselfishness* than fathers of sons. The place of living had a weaker impact on socialization values held by parents than was expected. Mothers from rural areas differed from mothers from urban areas only in their tendency to value *thrift* more highly than mothers from urban areas did. Fathers from rural areas, in turn, were more likely to value *unselfishness* and *smartness* more highly than fathers in urban areas.

In sum, despite some differences between mothers and fathers of different socio-cultural backgrounds regarding relative importance put on some qualities in children, they tend to share predominant socialization values. As in previous studies, parental educational level turned out to be a strong factor shaping parental socialization values. The present study added the knowledge that child's age is another important source of variance in parental socialization values. The child's gender and family's place of living emerged to be less related to socialization values.

It is important to note that the present investigation is limited in that the study was carried out only in a single transitional country – in Estonia, as socialization values are certainly known to vary across cultures (see above). Another limitation is that socialization values of parents with children from two age groups – middle childhood and late adolescence – were compared. In order to be certain how socialization values of parents with children of a different age vary, as well as how the values change as children become older, a longitudinal design would be ideal. The present investigation, however, does provide new information indicating a need to have a developmental perspective in the research on socialization values as well as to pay more attention to paternal socialization values.

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