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## “The child is most important in the world, the parent is responsible for its happiness”. Manifestations of mothers’ guiding by selected upbringing myths

„Dziecko najważniejsze na świecie, rodzic odpowiedzialny za jego szczęście”. Przejawy kierowania się matek wybranymi mitami wychowawczymi

### Abstract

**Introduction.** The article is based on the concept of parenting myths by Janusz Trempała (2010) and concerns two of them – that the child is the most important in the world, so it should be given the best and that the parent is responsible for ensuring a happy childhood for the child.

**Aim.** The aim of the research was to determine the degree of intensity of maternal beliefs and declared behaviours that result from being guided by parenting myths, as well as to identify socio-demographic variables that are important for beliefs and behaviours.

**Materials and methods.** The author’s own Questionnaire of Selected Parental Myths was used. 1217 mothers (aged 18–55;  $M = 33$ ;  $SD = 6$ ) of at least one child aged 1–10 participated in the voluntary, anonymous study.

**Results.** The participating women were moderately guided by educational myths in their beliefs and declared behaviours. Socio-demographic variables had a marginal impact on the results.

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**Conclusion.** The popularity of parental myths was related to the specificity of colloquial thinking. The results of the study are discussed in the context of analogous ways of thinking about children of mothers in China, and also the consequences of the decline in fertility in Poland and the increase in the number of one-child families.

**Keywords:** upbringing myths, parental myths, upbringing, mothers, colloquial thinking, the only child.

### **Abstrakt**

**Wprowadzenie.** Artykuł bazuje na koncepcji mitów wychowawczych autorstwa Janusza Trempały (2010) i dotyczy dwóch z nich – o tym, że dziecko jest najważniejsze na świecie, więc należy mu dać wszystko to, co najlepsze, oraz o tym, że rodzic jest odpowiedzialny za zapewnienie dziecku szczęśliwego dzieciństwa.

**Cel.** Celem badań było określenie stopnia natężenia matczynych przekonań i deklarowanych zachowań, które wynikają z kierowania się mitami wychowawczymi, a także określenie zmiennych socjodemograficznych, mających znaczenie dla przekonań i zachowań.

**Materiały i metody.** Zastosowano autorski Kwestionariusz Wybranych Mitów Rodzicielskich. W dobrowolnych, anonimowych badaniach wzięło udział 1217 matek (18-55 lat;  $M = 33$ ;  $SD = 6$ ) przynajmniej jednego dziecka w wieku 1-10 lat.

**Wyniki.** Badane kobiety w umiarkowanym stopniu kierowały się mitami wychowawczymi w swoich przekonaniach oraz deklarowanych zachowaniach. Zmienne socjodemograficzne miały marginalny wpływ na wyniki.

**Wnioski.** Podstawy popularności mitów rodzicielskich odniesiono do specyfiki myślenia potocznego. Rezultaty badania omówiono w kontekście analogicznych sposobów myślenia o dzieciach matek w Chinach oraz konsekwencji spadku dzietności w Polsce i wzrostu liczby jedynaków w rodzinach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** mity wychowawcze, mity rodzicielskie, wychowanie, matki, myślenie potoczne, jedynacy.

### **Introduction**

“Everyone is an expert on parenting  
until they have their own children.”  
(author unknown)

It probably comes as no surprise to anyone when a modern mother says to her child that it is the most important thing in the world and that she does everything in her power to make it happy. This emotional attitude towards her offspring, which finds its basis in behavioural genetics, the socio-cultural role of the mother and the experience of motherhood, is understandable. It is reflected, among other things, in the prioritisation of the child’s needs over one’s own, which can be seen as logical, as the young child in particular is not able to and satisfy their own needs, often has difficulty in recognising them, and the frustration of needs is particularly distressing

for it (in the case of newborns and infants, even detrimental to further development). However, already the “generalisation” of the child’s most important role and the insistence on the child experiencing happiness represent a certain trap of the cultural schema. Also, a linguistic trap is when we say “the child should always be the most important” or “the child should be carefree and happy” – as if no one else besides the child was ever more important, and that happiness and carefree should be the permanent state that characterises childhood. The research paper presented here addresses just such a generalised way of thinking, characteristic of a time when the child is the centre of attention.

The twenty-first century is characterised by a wealth of knowledge on parenting, which has become easily accessible as a result of the spread of technology and access to the Internet. At the same time, however, one gets the impression that the multitude of tips, methods, recommendations, or ways of upbringing, some of which contradict each other, leads to chaos and the feeling that – colloquially speaking – “you have to manage on your own anyway”. In research conducted by Małgorzata Bereźnicka in 2016, the most popular source of knowledge about parenting and upbringing for Polish parents was the family. In a 2018 study by Anna Szymanik-Kostrzewska and Paulina Michalska, mothers of children aged 1–7 declared that they considered their instincts and feelings to be the most useful source of knowledge about parenting, followed by opinions about their child expressed by medical personnel, on a par with their own childhood experiences. In a 2014 study by Ewa Kopeć, 23.4 % of parents declared that they had no need to expand their knowledge of parenting, and 25 % did not use any scientific knowledge. Because of the above results, it can be assumed that the source of information on parenting in Poland is largely colloquial knowledge – common sense, personal, related to everyday experience, useful in life (Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 2008). Part of this knowledge may be the conviction that a child requires special care from an adult because the child is less independent, less experienced and, when young, not only unable to take care of itself but even to know what it needs. This is where a parent’s desire for their child to be happy comes in, because they may not have experienced enough happiness in their childhood or, on the contrary, it was a time they remember particularly well, if only because of the enjoyment and carefreeness experienced at that stage. From here, it is only a step to believing in specific educational myths, described for the first time in Polish literature by Janusz Trempała (2010) – that “the child is the most important in the world, so he or she deserves everything that is best” and that “the parent is responsible for ensuring that the child has a happy childhood”.

Both myths – according to J. Trempała (2010) – reflect the parent’s investment in the child, with the former referring to material investment and the latter to emo-

tional investment. Both also sound “common sense” and can be considered quite reasonable assumptions until one considers their implications and analyses the consequences of following them (Szymanik-Kostrzevska, Trempała, 2017). The very use of the word myth was meant to suggest that it is some naive assumption, sounding convincing, but resulting (like the Greek myths about the origin or functioning of the world) from a lack of reliable knowledge or discernment; this is also the context in which the word will be further used. Educational myths explain certain ways of doing things, while it is logically impossible to achieve the goals suggested by their content. Moreover, strenuous attempts to meet these goals inherently lead to negative consequences, as the myths of the “ideology of love for the child”, which dominate contemporary pedagogy, “have little to do with the natural need for the necessary care and upbringing of young generations” (Trempała, 2010, p. 171). Myths can be seen as a manifestation of “obsessive love” for the child, while the obsession, in this case, does not have a clinical dimension but stems from a (perhaps not fully realised) fear of not being a good enough parent and constitutes a certain abnormality (Trempała, 2010). At this point, it would be appropriate to address the content of the myths themselves.

The first myth, “the child is the most important in the world”, implies the assumption that the child should get the best from the parent because the child is the most important (Trempała, 2010). The best should not only be education or medical care but also toys, cosmetics, clothes, snacks, drinks, books, gadgets, technological advances, courses, or extra-curricular activities. The quality of gifts and their level of complexity often exceed the developmental needs of children, who consequently, for example, when receiving a (not necessarily dreamt of) multifunctional educational robot for Christmas, prefer to play with a cardboard box of this robot. J. Trempała (2010) adds that the desire to give the best to the child generates competition between families as to which of them will provide the child with a higher standard of living and who will be the better parent, grandparent, or carer. Moreover, since the child is “the most important in the world”, the parent automatically becomes less important. His or her needs are relegated to the background, considered less urgent, less important and not only from the child’s needs but also from the child’s whims. According to J. Trempała (2010), this leads to an imbalance in the family, to a deterioration of the developmental conditions of all family members. The incessant focus on the child and on having the best of everything, and preferably as much as possible, makes the parents neglect themselves, and their well-being, and frustrate their need for rest. “Obsessive love” of a parent may correspond with “love overload” for children, leading to parental burnout, i.e., a situation where a parent gives their all, continuously and consistently, to the point of extreme exhaustion (Roskam, Raes, & Mikolajczak,

2017; among others). Currently, in Poland, 6.3% of mothers and 2.2% of fathers meet the criteria for the diagnosis of parental burnout (Szczygieł et al., 2020). Previous research has shown a negative correlation between the degree of parental burnout of mothers and the steering of parenting myths (Szymanik-Kostrzewska, 2022); however, due to the cross-sectional measurement and the small percentage of burned-out mothers, this result should be interpreted as the lack of strength of burned-out parents to “invest in their children” rather than the positive impact of “investment”, ensuring a lower degree of burnout.

The second myth – that “a happy childhood should be ensured for the child” – implies not only making the child happy but also protecting him/her from stress, failures, and helping him/her with difficult or disliked tasks (Trempała, 2010). This deprives the child of the developmental stimulus necessary to learn to cope with stress, anxiety, and some difficulties, essential for understanding and respecting the rules of social life. Furthermore, it can ensure that the child does not emerge from his or her role, does not enter adulthood as a young adult, but remains in a prolonged moratorium stage. When it comes to making joy itself, the adult’s idea of what things the child needs to be happy may be at odds with the child’s way of perceiving and enjoying the world. J. Trempała (2010) calls this “an error of adult-centrism”. Finally, “ensuring a happy childhood” imposes responsibility on the parent for the emotions experienced by the child. As Zygmunt Zimny (1984) notes, a sense of responsibility occurs not only when the decision-maker has voluntarily accepted the performance of a task as his or her duty, but also when the decision-maker has allowed himself or herself to be persuaded that it is a duty or obligation. The problem of an excessive sense of parental responsibility is addressed in the Polish literature by Małgorzata Kościelska (2011). She mentions the responsibility of parents when there is no connection between their conscious and intentional action and the situation in which the child found itself (e.g., illness). Such parents may blame themselves, for example, for not foreseeing all the remote possible consequences of leaving their children without their supervision. Such parents, according to M. Kościelska (2011), attribute to themselves, in the broader picture of parenting, full agency concerning everything that happens to their children, regardless of whose care they are under at any given time. As a consequence of an excessive sense of responsibility, the parent reacts with anxiety and increased control towards the child, which in turn inhibits the development of children’s activities. Jenny Barr and her team (2012) suggest that parents are not only recognised in society as being responsible for their child’s health and well-being but are also held co-responsible (as are staff in school institutions) for their child’s school success and even experience and use of cyberbullying. Parental anxiety is therefore also generated by public opinion.

An explanation for the popularity of the aforementioned myths can be found in the specificity of colloquial thinking (see Niznik, 1991). It is particularly susceptible to the emotions that drive communities, leading to stereotypes or prejudices. It is also pseudo-homogeneous, that is, seemingly coherent. The cognitive dissonance resulting from the coexistence of incoherent elements in popular thought (e.g., science and religion) is sometimes eliminated precisely by applying the specific logic of myth. In turn, that which is not in harmony with the totality of man's colloquial knowledge is negated – even if it is true. By combining scientific, objective knowledge about the special role of the parent in the child's life with parents' emotionally close beliefs about how much they love their child, want good for him or her and want the child to be happy, a fertile ground is created for the influence of "ideologues of love for the child" (see Trempała, 2010). They treat child-rearing myths as "categorical imperatives", universal rules that must be strictly adhered to. This phenomenon is fostered by low fertility rates and the accompanying increase in the value of the child – the child is seen as "emotionally priceless" (see Zelizer, 1985). A particularly high psychological-emotional valuing of children has been reported among Polish mothers (Szymanik-Kostrzewska, 2021), which may be manifested by considering their own child to be "the most important in the world" and doing everything to make them happy, even to the point of absurdity, as a way of showing "unconditional love".

According to J. Trempała (2010), this unconditionality is misunderstood. Love without conditions means acceptance of those characteristics of the child that cannot be helped, not unreflective approval of all the child's behaviour, as long as it brings the child joy.

A phenomenon analogous to the myths mentioned above is taking place in China. The introduction of the one-child policy of socio-economically promoting one-child families to reduce overcrowding has led to the emergence of a generation of "little emperors" (Miller, 2014) or "little suns" (Goh, 2011). A 1993 study found no differences between the one-child generation and children with siblings (Falbo, Poston, 1993). However, research conducted 20 years later found significant differences. They showed that the "one-child policy" led to the emergence of less trusting, less trustworthy, more risk-averse, less competitive, more pessimistic, and less conscientious individuals (Cameron et al., 2013). The parents of these children, when raising them, tried to ensure their happiness to fulfil their wishes (Shao, Herbig, 1994). The only children in the families were given special attention, and highly valued, which, according to Esther Goh (2011), made them learn to take benefit of this.

The similarity between the Chinese mothers' behaviour and the following upbringing myths becomes even more pronounced when considering the popularity

of two styles of upbringing in China – authoritarian, focused on control, enforcing obedience and “raising to succeed”, and authoritative, related to giving warmth to the child, rewarding the child, caring for the child’s happiness and enjoying contact with the child (Chen, Luster, 2002). Indeed, an element of the authoritarian style may be an “investment in the child” that is expected to “pay off” in the form of the child’s successes and the pride the child will bring to the family (see Trempała, 2010). Caring for the child’s happiness and material well-being, on the other hand, maybe a manifestation of the authoritative style.

“Obsessive love for children”, as manifested in parenting myths, “can potentially lead to disruptions and even serious behavioural disorders” (Trempała, 2010, p. 170). Excessive focus on the child’s needs diminishes the value of the parent to the child – the child’s psycho-physical needs, time, health, effort, hobbies, and leisure. Since the child is the most important thing in the world, the parent should devote all of his/her resources to him/her, and if the parent is responsible for the child’s happiness, he/she should prevent any situation that takes away the child’s happiness. In Poland, 13.6% of parents regret having children and if they could go back in time and decide once again to have them, they would not have them at all (Piotrowski, 2021). Such a decision was influenced by both economic conditions and the loneliness of parenthood, as well as levels of parental burnout and maladaptive perfectionism. It may also be that a high degree of belief in myths and being guided by them in the long term leads to disillusionment with parenting, a reflection that one will never be a “good enough” parent and, consequently, a sense of discouragement. On the other hand, it is also difficult to speak of benefits for the child. “Chinese” model, in which a very restrictive parent raises the child “to succeed” (so-called “tiger parenthood”), in cultural conditions outside China is less beneficial for the child’s development or life success than a supportive style (see Kim et al., 2013). In addition, the costs associated with overtired and discouraged parents are borne by their children, even in the form of parental violence (see Szczygieł et al., 2020). Finally, excessive focus on the child, so-called “helicopter parenting”, when the parent “hovers like a helicopter” over the offspring, provides excessive support and tries to facilitate the offspring’s coping with life, leads to a lower sense of competence in the child, problems with the development of the child’s autonomy (Schiffrin et al., 2014), lower psychological well-being (LeMoyne, Buchanan, 2011) and, consequently, a decrease in satisfaction with family life (Segrin et al., 2012).

## Research aim

The main aim of the study was to determine the intensity of beliefs and behaviours declared by the mothers surveyed that result from following selected parenting myths in their thinking about the child and their perceived behaviour – the myth that the child is the most important in the world, so one should provide the child with everything that is best, and the myth that the parent should guarantee the child a happy childhood. The second aim was to analyse the interrelationship of beliefs and behaviours resulting from being guided by myths and the role of controlled variables: the mother's age, her education, where she lives, as well as the child's age, gender, and number of children in the family.

The following research questions were posed:

1. What is the intensity of mothers' beliefs and stated behaviours as a result of being guided by selected parenting myths – that the child is the most important in the world and the parent is responsible for ensuring the child's happiness?

Based on previous research with the first version of the tool (see Szymanik-Kostrzewska, Trempała, 2017), a hypothesis was put forward that the intensity of both beliefs (H1) and declared behaviours of mothers (H2) would be average.

2. Is the intensity of beliefs and declared behaviours regarding the myth that the child comes first and that the parent should provide a happy childhood comparable among the mothers surveyed?

Again, based on previous research (see Szymanik-Kostrzewska, Trempała, 2017), it was postulated that the intensity of beliefs (H3) and stated behaviours (H4) concerning the assumption that the child is the most important in the world would be higher than the intensity of beliefs and behaviours concerning that the parent should provide a happy childhood.

3. Do the beliefs and declared behaviours of mothers, resulting from their adherence to selected parenting myths, correspond with each other?

Based on previous research (see Szymanik-Kostrzewska, Trempała, 2017), it was hypothesised that there would be a significant positive correlation between beliefs and declared behaviours, related to both the myth that the child is most important (H5) and that the parent should provide a happy childhood (H6).



4. Do the intensity of mothers' beliefs and behaviours as a result of being guided by selected parenting myths differ?

Since beliefs are only one of the factors influencing a person's behaviour and, like attitudes, can only predict part of his or her behaviour (see, among others, Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 1997), it was assumed that there would be differences between the intensity of beliefs and behaviours characteristic of being guided by the educational myth of the special value of the child (H7) and the myth of the necessity of happiness (H8).

5. Do the mother's age, education and place of residence make a difference to the intensity of beliefs and declared behaviours resulting from being guided by selected parenting myths?

It was hypothesised that older (H9), more educated mothers (H10) would be more critical of parenting issues, and therefore their degree of following selected parenting myths would be lower than that of younger, less educated mothers. In the case of the place of residence size, no hypotheses were formulated, as it was not significant in previous research.

6. Do the age of the child, the child's gender and the number of children in the family make a difference in the intensity of beliefs and declared behaviours resulting from the guidance of selected parenting myths?

In this case, there was no basis for formulating preliminary hypotheses; the research question is exploratory.

7. Does the intensity of beliefs and declared behaviours in opposition to beliefs and behaviours associated with selected educational myths matter for the targeting of educational myths?

It was hypothesised that the popularity of beliefs and behaviours that are alternatives to being guided by parenting myths (e.g., the belief that a parent should not devote all of their time and energy to a child or that a child's momentary whims should not be more important than a parent's needs) would co-occur with low acceptance of beliefs and behaviours resulting from being guided by selected parenting myths.

8. What variables and to what extent do they matter for the intensity of the degree of targeting of selected educational myths?

The answer to the last of the research questions would have made it possible to determine the common effect of variables (age, place of residence and education of the mother, age and sex of the child and number of children in the family, as well as the additionally controlled variables of being in a relationship, and perceived material situation) on the extent to which the mothers studied are guided by parenting myths in their thinking and behaviour. In this case, too, no hypotheses were formulated.

## **Materials and methods**

### *The research tools used*

The research used the author's Questionnaire of Selected Child-rearing Myths (KWMW) developed by A. Szymanik-Kostrzewska, based on the Questionnaire of Obsessive Mother-Child Love by Anna Szymanik-Kostrzewska, Michalina Zychal, and Janusz Trempała (see Szymanik-Kostrzewska, Trempała, 2017). The questionnaire consists of four subscales, which are two scales relating in turn to the educational myth that "the child is the most important in the world" (Child Most Important, DN) and the educational myth that "the parent should provide the child with a happy childhood" (Ensure Happiness, ZS). The first subscale, labelled "a", consists of statements representing beliefs about child-rearing. The second subscale, labelled "b", consists of statements that are descriptions of the parent's behaviour towards the child. The "a" statements have counterparts among the "b" statements. Each of the subscales contains 10 diagnostic statements and 5 control statements, representing the opposite of the beliefs/behaviours resulting from following the myth.

The statements of the DN scale represent the following assumptions: the child is the most important in the world and should absolutely get the best from the parent – clothes, food, toys, toiletries, technological advances, home and medical care, and education. The parent's behaviour is governed by the principle of maximum investment in the child's needs while minimising (little/less than the child) and marginalising (less important than the child) their own needs.

The statements of the ZS scale, meanwhile, are based on assumptions: the parent is responsible for the child having a happy childhood and needs to meet the child's expectations of happiness. Frequently, he or she believes that happiness will provide the child with what he or she lacked in childhood. It is also not uncommon for a child to make the mistake of following only or primarily his or her own ideas about what constitutes happiness for the child. He is convinced that a child should be protected from stress and failure and that many responsibilities should not be im-

posed on the child, as this translates into a distorted sense of happiness. He believes that the child should be given tasks that are difficult or disliked, and which do not involve experiencing joy.

Theoretical (content) relevance was assessed by three competent judges (psychologists). Assessments were made for statements from the COMMD at its construction stage and again for new statements and control statements at the construction of the KWMW. The theoretical basis was the concept of manifestations of “obsessive love” by J. Trempala (2010). After the suggested corrections, the judges’ agreement was 100% (in the final post-correction assessment, Kendall’s index of judges’ agreement  $W = 1$ ) on the adequacy of the questionnaire items and the theory. The consistency of the analogous statements from subscales “a” (beliefs) and “b” (behaviours), as assessed by the above judges, was high in all cases (analogous  $W = 1$ ). The KOMMD statements were consulted with a Polish philologist, who independently assessed the content relevance, the consistency of the pairs of statements from the “a” and “b” subscales and the degree of comprehensibility of the terms used (in all three cases his assessment was high).

The completed questionnaire consisted of 60 statements, of which 40 were diagnostic items and 20 were control items. The control statements were placed in random order, every two diagnostic statements. Respondents first referred to the behaviours (subscale “b” for both myths), then were told to respond to the beliefs (subscale “a”) that might explain the stated behaviours to some extent. This order was taken on the assumption that presenting the beliefs first and then the behaviours may induce respondents to present themselves as consistent people and falsify the results to make the thinking consistent with the declared behaviour. In the case of behaviours, situational factors, on the other hand, matter, hence beliefs may explain behaviours to some extent, but not necessarily be fully consistent with them.

The respondents were asked to state how often they observed the behaviour in question in themselves. Answers were placed on a Likert scale of 0–7: never, very rarely, rarely, rather rarely, rather often, often, very often, always. Respondents then indicated whether they agreed with the beliefs constituting the subsequent items of the questionnaire. A linear Likert scale of 0–7 was also used: completely disagree, generally disagree, rather disagree, more disagree than agree, more agree than disagree, rather agree, generally agree, completely agree, more agree than disagree, rather agree, agree, completely agree.

A metric was used to check the remaining variables.

The study sample included 1217 women aged 18 to 55 years ( $M = 33$ ;  $SD = 6$ ). Sociometric data are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Sociometric characteristics of the study sample*

Education			
Primary (%)	Vocational (%)	Secondary (%)	Higher (%)
23 (2)	118 (10)	440 (36)	636 (52)
Place of residence			
Village	Small town (up to 100,000 inhabitants)	Large city (more than 100,000 inhabitants)	No data (%)
403 (33)	388 (32)	417 (34)	9 (1)
Marital status			
Formal relationship (marriage) (%)	Informal relationship (%)	Not in a relationship (%)	No data (5)
948 (78)	191 (16)	70 (5.5)	8 (0.5)
Material situation			
Below average (%)	Average (%)	Above average (%)	No data (%)
20 (1.5)	995 (81.75)	199 (16.5)	3 (0.25)

Source: Author's own study.

The inclusion criterion for the study was that the mother had at least one child (who did not have a diagnosed disability, as this could affect the study results) aged 1–10 years. The women surveyed had between 1 and 10 children ( $M = 2$ ;  $SD = 1$ ), with only nine women having five or more children (less than 1%). The group of children to whom the respondents' answers referred consisted of 630 girls and 587 boys (these were statistically indistinguishable groups in number;  $\chi^2 = 3.04$ ;  $p = 0.08$ ;  $\phi^2 = 0.001$ ), with an average age of 4.5 years ( $SD = 2$ ; gender did not differentiate between children's ages:  $t = 0.58$ ;  $p = 0.56$ ).

### *Research procedure*

The research was conducted as part of three research projects, from October 2018 to June 2022. Recruitment to the study was initially done using the "snowball" method (approximately 10% of respondents), followed by a "door-to-door" method, with willing students from Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz responsible for recruiting and coding some of the results. The respondents resided in Poland.

The research was conducted by ethical standards recommended in Poland (e.g., Brzeziński, 1999; *Kodeks etyczno-zawodowy...*, 2005; Karoński, 2013). The project "The Most Important Child in the World, the Parent Responsible for Its Happiness"

– believed and declared behaviours of mothers of young children as manifestations of being guided by selected parenting myths received a Positive Opinion from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology of UKW (Opinion No. 7/2.03.2021 of 23.03.2021). The research was voluntary and anonymous, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study (to identify selected beliefs and behaviours of mothers related to parenting and child-rearing) and the possibility of opting out until the questionnaire was returned (afterwards, the data were coded and it was not possible to find the data of a specific person). The surveyed mothers gave verbal consent to the study or ticked a box next to the declaration “I consent to the study”. The level of understanding of the research content was controlled (10 participants were excluded due to insufficient understanding of the wording used in the tools), as well as data gaps (it was assumed that gaps of 5% for a participant lead to the exclusion of their data; for all data collected, gaps did not exceed 1%). Participants were allowed to post comments on the surveys, as well as to contact the study leader directly and talk (none of the respondents took up this opportunity).

## **Results**

Statistica ver 13.3 by StatSoft and a free online calculator for estimating the size of differences (effect size) were used to analyse the data obtained (Effect Size Calculator..., September 28, 2023).

First, the psychometric characteristics of the tool used were determined based on the results obtained. For the subscale of beliefs stemming from the myth that the child is the most important in the world (DNa), the measurement reliability, measured by Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient, was obtained at  $\alpha = 0.82$ , for the subscale of behaviour DNb –  $\alpha = 0.85$ , and for the entire DN scale:  $\alpha = 0.9$ . For the subscale of beliefs stemming from the myth of the parent’s responsibility to provide the child with a happy childhood (ZSa),  $\alpha = 0.8$  was obtained, for the subscale of behaviour ZSb:  $\alpha = 0.81$ , and the ZS scale as a whole:  $\alpha = 0.88$ . The reliability of the control statements was  $\alpha = 0.77$ . Due to their high content heterogeneity across subscales, a half reliability index was used for the belief statements – “a” (first half) and behaviour statements – “b” (second half):  $rtt = 0.69$ . An exploratory factor analysis was also conducted – the factors obtained did not overlap with the thematic subscales, and the factor loadings for the KWMW items only exceeded 0.7 four times, moreover, the factors obtained explained a negligible part of the variance. The structure obtained by factor analysis was based on the content convergence of the items from the KWMW belief and behaviour scales for both myths. Confirmatory analysis showed an insufficient fit of the data to the assumed model (for myth one: RMSEA =

0.0949 <0.0895; 0.101>; CFI = 0.894; for myth two: RMSEA = 0.104 <0.0984; 0.11>; CFI = 0.845).

The distributions of the results for the individual statements were close to normal, with skewness and kurtosis in the <-1;1> range (the exception was statement ZS1 from scale “a”: “It is the parent’s responsibility to ensure that the child has a happy childhood” – SKE = 1.02 and K = 1.03), which, with a large sample (N > 100), makes it possible to invoke the Central Limit Theorem and use parametric tests (see Bedyńska, Książek, 2012). In the case of control statements, skewness and kurtosis were exceeded three times and kurtosis alone once (results in the range <2;2>), while SKE = -1.53 and K = 3.05 were obtained once – for the ZS\_k statement from the “a” scale: “If doing something is one of the child’s duties or tasks, the parent can help him/her with it, but should not replace him/her in it, even if the child does not like the activity”. The results for the individual items of the KWMW are included in Appendix 1.

In response to the first research question posed, average scores were determined for the individual scales and subscales (see Table 2). The adopted response scale of 0–7 with a mean of 3.5 allows us to assume that scores within +/- one standard deviation from the mean for a given scale/subscale are average, above – high and below – low. In the medium score range were the scores for both belief subscales (DNa and ZSa), the behaviour subscale ZSb and the overall score of the ZS scale (H1 confirmed). In the high score range were scores for the behaviour subscale DNb and the overall DN score (H2 rejected).

Table 2  
*Averages and standard deviations for KWMW scales and subscales with comparisons*

K	M	W	M	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
subscales							
				DNa – beliefs	4.29	0.99	
				ZSa – beliefs	4.03	0.98	10.56***
				DNb – beliefs	4.94	0.94	
				ZSb – beliefs	4.42	0.96	21.78***
				DN	4.61	0.89	
				ZS	4.22	0.89	19.28***

*Legend:*

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

*Source:* Author’s own study.

The second research question concerned the differences between the intensity of beliefs and behaviours of the DN and ZS scales. The Student's t-test for dependent samples (and Cohen's d for the magnitude of differences) revealed a statistically significant, although small, difference in beliefs and a medium difference in behaviours (see Table 1). In both cases, the extent to which the myth that the child is the most important in the world prevailed (H3 and H4 confirmed).

The third research question concerned the relationship between beliefs and behaviours. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the degree of convergence of beliefs and behaviours within the same myths. The DN<sub>a</sub> and DN<sub>b</sub> subscales correlated with each other at the mean level ( $r = 0.69$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $r^2 = 0.48$ ; H5 confirmed), the ZS<sub>a</sub> and ZS<sub>b</sub> subscales also at the mean level ( $r = 0.69$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $r^2 = 0.48$ ; H6 confirmed). Furthermore, all correlations between the analogue statements of subscales “a” and “b” were statistically significant, mostly at the mean level. For the DN scale, they ranged between 0.21 and 0.54; for the ZS scale, they ranged between 0.22 and 0.63.

Student's t-test and Cohen's d coefficient were used to determine differences between the degree of intensity of beliefs and declared behaviours (the fourth research question). Both myths reported moderately higher scores for behaviours than beliefs (DN:  $t = 29.28$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.67$  and ZS:  $t = 17.56$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.4$ ; H7 and H8 confirmed).

Pearson's correlation for age and Spearman's correlations (due to the ordinal scale of the variables) for education and place of residence (see Table 3) were used to determine the significance of mothers' age, level of education and place of residence (the fifth research question). Mother's age correlated negatively at the low level with both KWMW scales and with all subscales (H9 confirmed) except ZS<sub>a</sub> (H9.ZS<sub>a</sub> rejected). Mother's education level correlated negatively at the low level with all KWMW scales and subscales (H10 confirmed). The size of the place of residence correlated negatively only with the ZS<sub>a</sub> subscale and the ZS scale, and these correlations were low. Correlations were also noted between the controlled variable – mother's marital status – and all scales and subscales, omitting DN<sub>b</sub>. The material situation was not statistically significant.

Table 3

*Correlations between control variables and KWMW results*

Controlled variables	DNa	DNb	DN	ZSa	ZSb	ZS
Age of mother – $r$ ( $r^2$ )	-0.11** (0.01)	-0.11** (0.01)	-0.12** (0.01)	-0.04 (0.002)	-0.09** (0.008)	-0.07* (0.005)
Education – $r$	-0.16***	-0.11***	-0.14***	-0.19***	-0.21***	-0.22***
Place of residence – $r$	0.02	0.01	0.02	-0.09**	-0.04	-0.08**
Marital status**** – $r$	0.06*	0.05	0.06*	0.08** 1>2: $z =$ 2.41*	0.09** 1>2: $z =$ 3.15**	0.1*** 1>2: $z =$ 3.16**
Material situation – $r$	-0.02	0.04	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.03
Age of child – $r$ ( $r^2$ )	-0.09** (0.008)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.04 (0.001)	-0.08** (0.006)	-0.07* (0.005)
Number of children – $r$ ( $r^2$ )	-0.08** (0.006)	-0.08** (0.006)	-0.09** (0.008)	-0.04 (0.002)	-0.09** (0.008)	-0.07* (0.005)
Sex of children – $t$ ( $d$ )	-1.17 (0.07)	0.19 (0.01)	-0.78 (0.05)	-2.52* (0.14)	-1.29 (0.07)	-2.15* (0.12)

Legend:

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

\*\*\*\* Coding method: 1 – formal relationship, 2 – informal relationship, 3 – no relationship

Source: Author's own study.

To determine the significance of the child's gender, age and number of children in the family (the sixth research question), Student's  $t$ -test of differences and Pearson's correlations were used, respectively (see Table 2). The gender of the child differed:

- degree of declared behaviour aimed at providing the child with a happy childhood – higher was observed in mothers declaring behaviour towards boys than towards girls,
- the overall score of the ZS scale – higher in mothers declaring relating to sons in their assessments than in those relating to daughters.

The age of the child correlated negatively with the severity of the DN beliefs and declared behaviours resulting from following the myth that the child comes first, and with the severity of the behaviours and the total score of the ZS scale – the myth that the child should be provided with a happy childhood. The observed correlations were low. The number of children correlated negatively with the



degree of acceptance of the beliefs associated with the myth that the child is the most important in the world and the behaviours resulting from being guided by both myths, also with the overall scores for the DN and ZS scales, in this case, the correlations were also low. An additional comparison was made between mothers of only children (N = 533) and mothers of more children (N = 684) – the second group was significantly more numerous ( $\chi^2 = 37.47$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) but the difference was small ( $\phi^2 = 0.02$ ), so Student’s t-test for independent data was used. For both myths in both the belief subscale and the declared behaviour subscale, significantly higher scores were characterised by mothers of only children, the differences were minor (see Table 4).

Table 4  
*Comparison of the extent to which mothers of only children and mothers of more children are guided by myths*

Subscales	Mothers of only children		Mothers of more than one child		<i>t</i>	<i>g</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
DNa – beliefs	4.41	0.96	4.2	1.01	3.76***	0.21
DNb – beliefs	5.03	0.91	4.86	0.95	3.24**	0.18
ZSa – beliefs	4.12	0.96	3.96	0.99	2.7**	0.16
ZSb – beliefs	4.54	0.92	4.32	0.97	4.12***	0.23

Legend:  
\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Source: Author’s own study.

To answer the seventh research question, the results for the control statements were analysed first (see Table 5). In both cases, there was a higher intensity of beliefs than of declared behaviours, medium for statements alternative to the myth of the need for a happy childhood, high for the myth that the child comes first. The degree of targeting alternative approaches to the myth in beliefs and declared behaviours was higher for alternatives to taking responsibility for the child’s happiness than for alternatives to treating the child as the most important in the world.

Table 5  
*Averages and standard deviations for control statements - alternative to the content of "myths"*

Control subscales	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
DNka – beliefs	4.52	1.004		
DNkb – behaviour	3.62	0.99	-29.41***	0.9
ZSka – beliefs	5.46	0.88		
ZSkb – behaviour	5.13	0.90	-13.78***	0.38
DNk	4.07	0.85		
ZSk	5.30	0.78	45.02***	1.51

Legend:

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Source: Author's own study.

Correlation analysis (Pearson correlations) revealed low, negative correlations between the DN scale and its subscales and the mean score for the corresponding control items, and low, positive correlations between the ZS scale and its subscales and the mean score for the corresponding control items (see Table 6). In the case of the ZS subscales, due to the surprising result (negative correlations were expected), correlations between the individual subscale items ZSa and ZSb and the control items were analysed to represent their thematic opposite. Significant positive correlations were obtained for only three items:

1. ZSa beliefs: "A parent should take care of the child's happiness by trying to make sure that the child does not lack what he or she lacked as a child" and the control "A parent, in trying to make the child happy, should rely primarily on the child's opinion and feelings, not on his or her own ideas about the child's happiness" ( $r = 0.19$ ;  $p < 0.001$ );
2. ZSb behaviour: "I try to give my child what I didn't have myself as a child so that he or she doesn't feel the lack of what I lacked and is happy" and the control "In making sure my child is happy, I try to be guided primarily by my child's assessment and feelings, not by my ideas about what gives him or her happiness" ( $r = 0.23$ ;  $p < 0.001$ );
3. ZSb behaviour: "I meet my child's expectations if it makes my child happy" and the control: "I don't try to meet all of my child's expectations in the belief that this will make them happy, I just let them do what makes them happy" ( $r = 0.13$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 6

*Correlations between DN and ZS subscales and scales and controls*

Subscales	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup>
DNa – beliefs and control	-0.11***	0.01
DNb – beliefs and control	-0.21***	0.04
ZSa – beliefs and control	0.13***	0.02
ZSb – beliefs and control	0.24***	0.06
DN and control	-0.21***	0.04
ZS and control	0.2***	0.04

Legend:

\**p* < 0.05; \*\* *p* < 0.01. \*\*\**p* < 0.001

Source: Author’s own study.

The eighth research question was posed to determine the pooled significance of variables relevant to the intensity of targeting selected educational myths. A hierarchical regression analysis (stepwise method) was used. The explanatory variables were the mean score for the DN scale and the ZS scale. The following were included in the group of explanatory variables: mean score for alternative statements for a specific scale: mother’s age, her level of education, place of residence, number of children, material situation, marital status, and the age as well as the sex of the child to whom the statements in the questionnaires referred. For the myth “child is most important” the degree of alternative beliefs and the declaration of alternative behaviours proved to be significant. The mother’s education level, the number of children and the common percentage of explained variance of the results were small (see Table 7). For the myth “a child should be given a happy childhood”, the mother’s level of education was significant. The extent to which alternative beliefs were followed and alternative behaviours were declared, the number of children and material situation with the explained percentage of variance again being small (see Table 8).

Table 7

*Hierarchical regression analysis for the educational myth of the child being the most important in the world*

Response variable	Explanatory variables ( $\beta$ )					$R^2$
	Alternative beliefs and behaviours	Age of mother	Mother's education	Number of children	Age of child	
DN	-0.18*	-0.05	-0.11*	-0.07*	-0.06	0.07

Legend:

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Source: Author's own study.

Table 8

*Hierarchical regression analysis for the parenting myth that a parent should provide a happy childhood for the child*

Response variable	Explanatory variables ( $\beta$ )										$R^2$
	Mother's education	Alternative beliefs and behaviours	Number of children	Sex of the child	Material situation	Place of residence	Age of child	Age of mother	Marital status		
ZS	-0.22*	0.21*	-0.1*	0.05	0.06*	-0.5	-0.5	0.04	0.03	0.1	

Legend:

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Source: Author's own study.

Two additional hierarchical regression analyses were also conducted, in which the dependent variable was declared behaviour. The predictors, meanwhile, were beliefs and sociodemographic variables. For the first myth, a model with a medium fit was obtained ( $R^2 = 0.47$ ) in which the mothers' beliefs ( $\beta = 0.64$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and material situation ( $\beta = 0.11$ ;  $p = 0.04$ ) were statistically significant, and the additional variable included in the model was the mother's age. For the second myth, a model with a medium fit was also obtained ( $R^2 = 0.47$ ) in which the mothers' beliefs ( $\beta = 0.65$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and their education ( $\beta = -0.09$ ;  $p = 0.04$ ) were statistically significant, and the other variables included in the model were the mother's age and the number of her children.

## **Conclusion**

The main aim of the study was to determine the intensity of beliefs and declared behaviours which resulted from mothers' following selected parenting myths. There was an average intensity of beliefs related to the myth that the child is the most important in the world and should get the best as well as beliefs and behaviours based on the assumption that the parent should provide the child with a happy childhood. In contrast, the intensity of declared behaviours reflecting treating the child as the most important in the world was above average. Given the small standard deviation (less than 1 on a scale of 1–7), the variation in results was relatively low. At the same time, there was a higher intensity of behaviours than of beliefs for both myths, higher intensity of both beliefs and behaviours based on the first myth (“the child is the most important”) than on the second myth (“one should ensure the child’s happiness”) and moderate positive correlations between beliefs and behaviours related to the myth in question. Thus, it can be assumed, that the mothers’ beliefs and stated behaviours were moderately consistent, and the frequency of the mothers’ observed behaviours exceeded the degree of agreement with the myth-driven beliefs.

As for the side variables, i.e., the sociodemographic characteristics of the study group, only low correlations and small statistically significant differences were observed. The myths discussed were more likely to be held by younger mothers with lower education. The myth that “the child is the most important thing in the world” was more popular among mothers of younger children and mothers of fewer children. The myth of being responsible for ensuring a child’s happiness was more popular among women in informal relationships than in formal relationships and beliefs derived from it were more often confirmed by mothers, who related it to girls than by mothers who declared beliefs about ensuring happiness to boys.

Taking into account the assumption that following selected educational myths in thought and action represents a certain anomaly (see Trempała, 2010), the moderate popularity of alternative beliefs and behaviours can be considered optimistic, including the high intensity of beliefs regarding that the child is not necessarily the most important and that it is not necessary to provide the child with everything the best. At this point, it is possible to refer once again to J. Niżnik’s (1991) assumptions about the fact that colloquial thinking is characterised by high consistency. Hence, opposing beliefs can coexist without triggering cognitive dissonance, if they are treated not as logical assumptions but as a “common sense” approach.

What was surprising, however, was the positive correlation between statements alternative to the myth of the need for a child’s happiness and statements based on this myth. Only a content analysis of the positively correlating statements makes it possible to explain the result obtained. What the parent considered to be a source

of happiness in his/her childhood and what he/she lacked, may overlap to a certain extent with what the child's opinion and feelings indicate. Meeting the child's expectations, if it makes the child happy, does not in turn preclude not meeting all the child's expectations and allowing the child's activity – doing what makes the child happy. The above inconsistency in the assumptions of the construction of alternative statements is, on the one hand, a weakness of the presented research. On the other – a topic for further exploration of the way mothers think about their behaviour towards their children. Once again, the assumption of the colloquial nature of thinking taking into account the guidance of myths gains confirmation.

The two regression analyses, which were conducted for each myth, revealed a negligible percentage of explained variation – 93% and 90% respectively explained by variables not included in the equation. It can thus be assumed, that the observed moderate popularity of the myths does not depend on sociodemographic variables or alternative beliefs or behaviours. Rather, it is relatively universal nowadays among mothers of children in the post-infancy to late childhood period. In addition, the higher intensity of behaviours than of beliefs may indicate that are not solely derived from beliefs, depend marginally on sociodemographic factors, and more than half of their variability is explained by other variables, including a variety of situational and cultural-social factors.

At this point, it is worth analysing once again the socio-cultural basis of the popularity of the myths mentioned. J. Trempała (2010) points to the important role of the increasing value of the child in the popularity of educational myths. Çigdem Kagıtcıbası (1996, 2007) notes, that in Western countries with good economic conditions and individualistic orientations, socially secure seniors are characterised by a high emotional valuation of children, at the same time, utilitarian reasons for having them (e.g., the need for children to work for their parents or family) are irrelevant. The blending of Eastern and Western cultures as a result of modernising societies and globalisation in turn leads to a decline in the utilitarian value of the child, while its emotional value remains unchanged. Polish culture is influenced in numerous ways by both Eastern and Western influences. Given the low fertility rate and fertility problems, the particularly high emotional and psychological value of the child (Szymanik-Kostrzewska, 2021) is not surprising. Its manifestation is, for example, the attaching of particular importance to caring for the child supporting its development and “being in its life”, which finds expression, for example, in involved parenting (see Bakiera, 2013, 2014). From here, however, it is a step to “over-involvement” and its various manifestations. One can mention here, for example, the specificity of the functioning of the “madkas [muddas]”. The beginning of the activity of mothers called by this stereotypical term coincides with the announcement of the government subsidy programme for parents of children

“500+” and the increase in popularity of internet portals on which people offer to give away their belongings for free (Naruszewicz-Duchlińska. 2020). “Madkas” are considered to be demanding, uncultured, argumentative, often even aggressive, and stupid. Considering themselves better than others by having a child and using the child to receive certain goods or services for free (Szymanik-Kostrzevska, *in preparation*). According to Emilia Bańczyk (2021), “madkas” are also overprotective, overly focused on the child, unable to say no to a child and are very permissive of a child’s behaviour. These assumptions correspond with the content of the myths about “the child being the most important in the world” – “give because it is for the child” (entitlement approach, demanding things for free for the child) – and “the child should be provided with a happy childhood” – “you can pity me but you refuse the child...!?” (emotional blackmail in a refusal situation, verbal aggression). “Madkas” are currently criticised and ridiculed (Ozga, 2018; Wileczek, Raczynski, 2021), which further negatively affects the social image of mothers, who do not present a demanding attitude (Bańczyk, 2021).

Finally, it is possible to reflect on the far-reaching consequences of the popularity of upbringing myths about “the child being the most important in the world” and “the parent should provide a happy childhood”. If one treats parenting myths as stereotypes (see Chlewiński, 1992), which are followed by modern mothers, it can be assumed, that the behavioural component of the stereotype (behaviour in line with it) has emerged more clearly than the cognitive component in the form of beliefs. This is logical because behaviour is largely influenced by situational factors, not only the norms by which a person is guided or his/her beliefs. If we define parenting as a conscious and intentional activity, having a purpose (Bakiera, 2019), mothers’ beliefs – according to the Theory of reasoned action (see Ajzen, Fishbein, 1980) – will to some extent (see Armitage, Conner, 2001) predict their behaviour towards their children, undertaken in the course of parenting. However, let us still take into account the specific socio-cultural conditions. Well, one can notice a certain analogy between the social situation in Poland and China. Although the reasons for this are different in Poland, too, we are currently observing a decline in the fertility rate. According to a report by the Central Statistical Office (see Lisiak, Morytz-Balska, 2023), in 2022, the fertility rate of Poles was 1,261 (on average one child for every woman of childbearing age, twelve children for every ten women). In contrast, in 1990 it was 1,991 (by analogy, an average of two children, nineteen out of ten women). Thirty-six percent of women under the age of 35, who have one child, declare no intention of expanding their family with mothers of only children accounting for one-third of the respondents. It can be expected, that the percentage of only children in families will increase. In the presented research, as many as 44% of mothers had only one child and this group had higher results in terms of following both parenting

myths than the group of mothers of more children. Perhaps shortly also in Poland, we will experience the effects of raising “little suns”.

The construct of parenting myths or parenting myths is not popular in the scientific literature. Meanwhile, modern parents’ misunderstanding of the assumptions underlying the ways of raising children promoted today (e.g., closeness, attentiveness, involvement, upbringing for responsibility, not obedience, abandoning punishment and rewards in favour of building an emotional relationship, and unconditional love) can lead to being guided by the very myths of upbringing in the course of colloquial thinking and as a consequence – to behaviour that is educationally and developmentally harmful. Consider, for example, “stress-free upbringing” originally intended to dispense with punishments and rewards in difficult situations (such as conflicts between parent and child or a child making a mistake) – to support the child, instead of adding additional stress. It has been misrepresented as a lack of setting limits, orders, prohibitions, or saying “no” because it “stresses the child”. Finally, it has become synonymous with the absence of educational interactions (see Szymanik-Kostrzevska, 2016). Older generations equate with “stress-free upbringing” the absence of spanking or hitting children to which some adults even refer contemptuously. As many as 27% of Poles from a sample of more than a thousand people agreed, that “a spanking hasn’t particularly hurt anyone yet” (Jarosz, 2018, p. 10), and 43%, that “there are situations when it is necessary to spank a child” (Jarosz, 2018, p. 9). Hence, arguments like “I got spanked a few times and grew up to be a good person”. “Engaged parenting” (Bakiera, 2013, 2014), in which the parent is fulfilled and does not experience conflict between being a parent and other roles has, therefore, also the unreflective assumption that the child is (or should be) the most important and the role of the parent is to give the child happiness, constitutes a distortion. Meanwhile, in a sample of more than a thousand Polish mothers, declarations about beliefs and behaviours showed, that they moderately agree with the content of both myths. Of course, it should be taken into account, that the volunteers themselves were examined, the selection did not meet the criteria of randomness and the data obtained are based on what mothers admitted to. However, the results of the study made it possible to capture and describe a certain part of the image of motherhood – mothers, who “believe a little and a little do not believe” in these myths, are relatively consistent in this.



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## **Annex 1. Results for individual KWMW statements**

<b>KWMW positions</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SKE</b>	<b>Kurt</b>
DNK1a. A parent should not devote all their time and energy to their child and neglect themselves.	4.79	1.70	-0.80	0.34
DNK1b. I try to take care of both my child and myself, so I do not devote all my time and all my energies only to my child.	4.26	1.55	-0.15	-0.49
DN1a. A parent should take care to buy or provide the best for their child (products, services, and entertainment).	4.44	1.61	-0.39	-0.20
DN1b. I take care to buy and provide the best for my child (products, services, and entertainment).	5.21	1.37	-0.53	-0.17
DN2a. It is the parent’s responsibility to provide the best possible learning opportunities for the child, including by choosing a good kindergarten, school, and ensuring access to a variety of learning aids.	5.69	1.24	-0.82	0.38
DN2b. I do my best to provide my child with the best possible education and wide access to educational toys, educational programmes, the Internet, and technology.	5.40	1.34	-0.65	0.06
DNK2a. A child’s momentary whims should not be more important to a parent than taking care of what they need.	4.54	1.65	-0.52	-0.03
DNK2b. I try to take care of what I need first, only then do I respond to my child’s momentary whims.	1.99	1.64	0.79	0.39
DN3a. Parents’ needs should not override those of their children.	4.54	1.69	-0.43	-0.34
DN3b. In my life, I take care of my child’s needs first, only then my own.	5.46	1.38	-0.75	0.15
DN4a. Parents should always find time for their children – even when they are tired or ill.	4.59	1.59	-0.38	-0.30
DN4b. If my child wants something from me, I find time for him/her even if I am tired or ill.	5.39	1.29	-0.63	0.22
DNK3a. Parents should have time just for themselves, for their pastimes – when looking after their child would not be most important to them.	3.09	2.08	0.07	-1.03
DNK3b. If I carve out time just for myself, I allocate it to my pastimes, assuming that then taking care of my child is not most important to me.	2.84	1.91	0.31	-0.62
DN5a. A parent should make sure that toys and products for the child are of the best quality.	4.63	1.73	-0.59	-0.12

<b>KWMW positions</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SKE</b>	<b>Kurt</b>
DN5b. I take care to give my child toys and products of the best quality.	4.95	1.45	-0.44	-0.19
DN6a. A parent should provide their child with as many different toys and books as possible.	4.40	1.67	-0.38	-0.30
DN6b. I make sure my child has as many different toys and books as possible.	5.01	1.45	-0.47	-0.06
DNK4a. Parents do not have to provide the best quality toys for their child, it is more important that they are safe and age-appropriate.	5.39	1.54	-1.12	1.34
DNK4b. When I buy toys for my child, I mainly look at whether they are safe and age-appropriate for the child, they do not have to be the best quality.	5.07	1.57	-0.70	0.11
DN7a. Parents should first and foremost make sure that it is the child who can indulge in their favourite activities, only then can they think about their hobbies.	4.27	1.54	-0.17	-0.32
DN7b. I make sure that my child can develop his/her interests, it is less important for me to develop my interests.	4.91	1.42	-0.36	-0.02
DN8a. Expenditure on a child's pleasures should take precedence over expenditure on a parent's pleasures.	3.69	1.64	-0.03	-0.25
DN8b. If I have extra money to spend, I spend it on pleasures for my child, not on pleasures for myself.	4.57	1.49	-0.30	-0.03
DNK5a. The child's needs should be essential to the parents, but they should not be met at the expense of their own needs.	4.77	1.55	-0.41	-0.25
DNK5b. I try to meet my child's needs, but not at the expense of meeting my own needs.	3.95	1.70	-0.16	-0.42
DN9a. Parents' "time for themselves" should be spent primarily with their children, e.g., playing with them, and organising entertainment for them.	2.92	1.70	0.33	-0.23
DN9b. I allocate my "time for myself" primarily to my child, either playing with him/her or planning entertainment for my child.	3.90	1.65	-0.16	-0.25
DN10a. Parents should invest money in their child's development rather than their own.	3.76	1.56	-0.03	-0.16
DN10b. If I can afford to spend money, I spend it on something, that will benefit my child's development rather than myself.	4.57	1.38	-0.17	-0.21
ZS1a. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure that the child has a happy childhood.	5.84	1.19	-1.02	1.03

<b>KWMW positions</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SKE</b>	<b>Kurt</b>
ZS1b. I give my child pleasure because I take responsibility for my child to have a happy childhood.	5.43	1.22	-0.50	-0.22
ZS2a. Parents should never put their happiness before that of their children.	4.64	1.67	-0.42	-0.30
ZS2b. I care about my child’s happiness more than my own.	5.42	1.40	-0.76	0.35
ZSK1a. A parent should not meet all the expectations of children to make them happy – a child’s happiness depends largely on what a child does for pleasure.	4.98	1.44	-0.70	0.54
ZSK1b. I don’t try to meet all my child’s expectations in the belief that this will make them happy, I just let them do what makes them happy.	5.08	1.28	-0.58	0.63
ZS3a. A parent should not impose a lot of responsibilities on a child.	3.71	1.56	-0.15	-0.22
ZS3b. I impose a few responsibilities on my child.	4.07	1.55	-0.16	-0.20
ZS4a. It is wrong for a parent to force a child to do something the child does not want to do (except for things that are absolutely necessary to keep the child healthy and safe).	4.15	1.73	-0.23	-0.53
ZS4b. I do not force my children to do activities they do not want to do unless it is something necessary for their health or safety.	4.58	1.64	-0.38	-0.50
ZSK2a. A parent, when trying to make a child happy, should rely primarily on the child’s opinion and feelings and not on his/her own ideas about the child’s happiness.	4.97	1.60	-0.67	0.06
ZSK2b. In trying to keep my child happy, I try to rely primarily on my child’s opinion and feelings, rather than my ideas about what makes my child happy.	5.05	1.38	-0.55	0.14
ZS5a. It is a parent’s responsibility to protect the child from failure and the associated disappointment and sadness.	3.64	1.86	-0.02	-0.72
ZS5b. I protect my child from failures, and unpleasant emotions such as sadness or embitterment.	4.02	1.76	-0.16	-0.54
ZS6a. A parent should not deny a child what he/she really wants if he/she can give or provide it (except for things that are dangerous for the child, e.g., a sharp knife).	3.56	1.75	0.02	-0.59
ZS6b. I do not deny my child what he/she wants very much if I can give or provide it to him/her – unless it is dangerous for the child (e.g., a sharp knife).	4.63	1.56	-0.45	-0.06
ZSK3a. Rather than protecting the child from failure, the parent should teach the child to cope with failure.	5.86	1.18	-1.04	1.06

<b>KWMW positions</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SKE</b>	<b>Kurt</b>
ZSK3b. Instead of protecting my child from possible failure, I try to teach him how to deal with such situations.	5.22	1.31	-0.61	0.34
ZS7a. A parent should take care of their child's happiness by trying to make sure that their child doesn't lack what they lacked as a child.	4.50	1.64	-0.48	-0.06
ZS7b. I try to give my child what I didn't have myself as a child so that he/she doesn't feel the lack of what I lacked and is happy.	4.88	1.59	-0.60	0.04
ZS8a. A parent should not force a child to do a task that he or she strongly dislikes, just substitute it.	3.14	1.85	0.14	-0.73
ZS8b. If my child definitely doesn't like doing something, I don't force him/her to do it, I just substitute it.	3.18	1.63	0.29	-0.12
ZSK4a. When assigning chores to a child, the parent should be guided by whether the child at a given age can manage to do them and whether they are too difficult for him/her to perform, rather than looking at how few they are.	5.81	1.17	-1.04	1.16
ZSK4b. I try to adapt my child's responsibilities to his/her age and ability, I am not guided by the fact that there should be little.	5.15	1.37	-0.55	0.16
ZS9a. If doing something is difficult for the child and can lead to failure and sadness, the parent should help the child.	2.78	1.72	0.28	-0.42
ZS9b. I guide my children in activities that are difficult for them and failure in them makes them sad.	3.45	1.69	0.13	-0.43
ZS10a. A parent should meet their child's expectations that involve their happiness.	4.33	1.40	-0.32	0.46
ZS10b. I meet my child's expectations if it makes my child happy.	4.50	1.39	-0.27	0.35
ZSK5a. If doing something is one of the child's duties or tasks, the parent can help but should not replace it, even if the child dislikes the activity.	5.71	1.34	-1.53	3.05
ZSK5b. Rather than replacing my child in his/her duties or tasks, I help the child but make sure he/she does them, even if the child doesn't like doing something.	5.15	1.38	-0.66	0.27

Legend:

DN – The Most Important Child scale (myth one)

ZS – Ensure Happiness scale (myth two)

a – belief subscale

b – subscale of declared behaviour

K – control item for given subscale

Source: Author's own study.



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