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# Perception of Parental Rejection in Children Left Behind by Migrant Parents

Elena ADUMITROAIE<sup>1</sup>, Ion DAFINOIU<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The separation of children from their parents, who have left abroad to work for a long period of time, may generate the feeling of abandonment and parental rejection, with repercussions on their personality. This is the reason for which the goal of this study was to examine the connection between the perception of parental rejection and psychological adjustment of the teenagers whose parents have left abroad to work. 284 high school students registered in the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades in three different schools participated to the study. Self-report data on maternal and paternal perceived rejection and adolescent psychological adjustment were collected. The comparisons between environments have showed that mother's migration has the highest impact on the teenagers left behind. The teenagers whose mothers have left abroad feel rejected by their mother, they are more aggressive, and have a lower self-esteem and a negative vision over the world. Father's migration determines an increase of self-esteem and of the perception of parental acceptance. The most important predictors of teenagers' psychological adjustment have proved to be father's aggressiveness and mother's aggressiveness and warmth/affection.

*Keywords:* migration; psychological adjustment; perceived rejection; children left behind; parental warmth.

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## Introduction

The impact of parental behaviour on children's harmonious development is one of the best documented and researched aspects of the specialized literature (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Rohner, Khaleque and Cournoyer, 2005). In recent years, the unprecedented dimension taken by the migration phenomenon has triggered a series of changes in the family structure with repercussions on children's evolution and socialization. Many researchers have been drawing the attention on the serious consequences on the level of mental health appearing in the children left alone at home (Luca and Gulei, 2007; Toth, Toth, Voicu and ştefănescu, 2007; Fan, Su, Gill and Birmaher, 2010). In a comparative study Iaşi – Kishinev (Irimescu, Stan, Cojocaru and Pitea, 2008), they show that after their parents' leaving, children have depressive-anxiety manifestations, they exhibit an increased emotional instability and a high consumption of alcohol and cigarettes.

The research studies conducted in Romania show that after their parents' leaving, children are confronted with emotional states of nostalgia, sadness and solitude, they feel alone and unprotected (Luca and Gulei, 2007; Toth et al., 2007; Irimescu et al., 2008). As for the younger children, the remembrance of their parents is wiped away very quickly but for older children fear, anger, indignation and the feeling of rejection are the most probable emotions lived which cannot be removed by the presents and money sent by the parents (Luca and Gulei, 2007). The children left behind by migrant parents have to cope, sometimes throughout their life, with the feelings of rejection, abandonment and loss (Irimescu et al., 2008).

The rejection by others causes numerous psychological disorders. As C. Rogers stated ever since 1961, unconditioned acceptance by the others, including by parents, lies at the basis of mental health. At the same time, the attachment theory proposed by Bowlby (1973) underlines that the feeling of rejection by parents makes children become hesitant, aggressive and hostile in relation to others. Ronald Rohner (1986) proposes the most comprehensive theoretical and methodological conceptualization of parental rejection as the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Theory. This is a theory of development and socialization trying to explain and predict the main causes and consequences of parental rejection/acceptance as well as other variables that correlate with parental acceptance and rejection all over the world.

In PARTheory, parental rejection is conceptualized as the absence or withdrawal of parental affection, care and love to which we add the presence of some behaviours and feelings that hurt the child on both physical and psychological levels (Rohner, Khaleque and Cournoyer, 2005). The researches carried out on several cultures for almost half a century show that parental rejection may be

lived as a combination of four main forms of expression: (1) distance and lack of affection as opposed to affection and warmth; (2) aggressiveness and hostility; (3) indifference and neglect (4) undifferentiated rejection (Rohner, 2004). This undifferentiated rejection refers to individuals' beliefs that their parents do not really care about them or love them sincerely, though there may not be clear behavioral indicators for neglect, lack of affection or parental aggressiveness towards them (Rohner, 2004). The opposite of parental rejection is parental acceptance signifying affection, warmth, care, comfort, attention, support or merely love that children receive from their parents or tutors. Parental rejection and acceptance form together the parental affection representing the quality of affective life between children and their parents (Rohner 1986; Rohner et al., 2005).

A great part of parental rejection is symbolic (Kagan, 1978). In PARTheory, parental rejection is seen from two perspectives: as a subjective perception of children and parents or as an unnoticeable objective behaviour. Most often, the two perspectives lead to similar conclusions. If however the two conclusions differ, PARTheory suggests giving priority to the phenomenological perspective (Rohner et al., 2005).

Parental acceptance and rejection as perceived by teenagers have consistent effects on the psychological adaptation of children and teenagers (Rohner, 1991). The perception of parental rejection especially tends to be accompanied by a weak psychological adaptation which includes: (a) anger, hostility, aggression, (b) negative self-esteem; (c) negative self-adequacy; (d) emotional instability; (e) emotional unresponsiveness; (f) negative worldview (g) dependence or defensive independence depending on the form, frequency, timing, and intensity of perceived rejection (Rohner et al., 2005).

An analysis of the 43 surveys shows that parental rejection has numerous negative effects on psychological and behavioral adaptation of children, teenagers and adults from the whole world, regardless of race, ethnic group, age or gender (Khaleque and Rohner, 2002). Rohner et al. (2005) show that about 26% from the variance of psychological adaptation of children and teenagers may be explained by the perception of parental rejection from the part of the main attachment figures. Kim, Cain, and McCubbin (2006) demonstrate that a high level of perception of parental rejection may explain between 27 and 46 % from the variance of teenagers' psychological adaptation.

Other research studies have showed that when they feel rejected by parents, teenagers manifest internalizing and externalizing problem behavior, such as depression and aggression to a larger extent (Buehler and Gerard 2002; Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, and McBride-Chang, 2003; Chen, Liu, and Li, 2000; Rothbaum and Weisz, 1994). Parental rejection may determine teenagers to negatively self-evaluate themselves and to have a negative image of the future; but these assessments may make them vulnerable to depression (Kim et al.2003; Nolan, Flynn,

and Garber, 2003). Surveys have also shown that parental rejection increases the risk for teenagers to learn socially unacceptable behaviours such as externalized behaviours (Ge et al. 1996; Rothbaum and Weisz, 1994).

This survey aims at analyzing the perception of parental rejection and psychological adjustment of teenagers whose parents have left abroad to work. The investigational approach tries to answer three questions: (1) How does the perception of parental acceptance and rejection change in the teenagers left behind after their parents' emigration?; (2) What psychological adjustment issues do teenagers whose parents emigrated encounter? and (3) Which is the predictive value of parental rejection in the prediction of teenagers' psychological adjustment? According to the theory, it can be hypothesised that teenagers whose parents have emigrated perceive a higher level of parental rejection and have a lower psychological adaptation as compared to the teenagers living together with both parents.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

284 teenagers and youngsters, high school students registered in the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades in three schools participated to the survey. 177 of the entire number of participants analysed have one or both parents left abroad to work; the rest of 107 are the control group. The age of participants ranges between 14 and 19 ( $M=16.82$ ;  $SD=1.05$ ); 199 of participants are girls and 85 are boys. Students come from both the urban environment ( $n = 127$ ) and the rural environment ( $n = 157$ ). Of the participants who have parents who left abroad, 68 declared that only their mother is left, 51 said that only their father is left and 58 declared that both parents are left. At present, 135 of students live with both parents, 51 live only with their mother, 43 live only with their father, 34 live with their grandparents and 21 live with someone else such an aunt, an elder brother or a friend.

### ***Instruments***

Parental rejection was assessed using the Child Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (PARQ; Rohner, 2005). The PARQ is a self-reporting instrument existing in two identical forms: the form for Mother and forms for Father. The questionnaire is made up of 60 items distributed into four subscales: Warmth/parental affection (20 items), Aggressiveness / Hostility (15 items), Indifference / Neglect (15 items) and Undifferentiated reject (10 items). Answers are registered on Likert scale in four stages starting from 1, "always true", up to 4, "always false". A total score obtained by the summation of the four subscales after item

reversing represents a general indicator of parental rejection. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients calculated for the entire instrument and for each subscale separately have values between 0.82 and 0.93.

Psychological adaptation was assessed using The Adult Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ; Rohner & Khaleque, 2005). We preferred the form for adults for two reasons. First, the form for children is for the children aged between 7 and 12 whereas the form for adults may be applied to teenagers and adults. Second, the two forms are similar, except the fact that the version for adults uses a somehow more complex language and presents three more items for each subscale. The Adult PAQ is a self-reporting instrument made up of 63 items grouped into seven subscales (9 items each): Aggressiveness / Hostility, Dependence, Negative self-esteem, Negative Self-Adequacy, Emotional Unresponsiveness, Emotional Instability and Negative Worldview. Answers are registered on Likert scale in four stages starting from 1, "always true", up to 4, "always false". The questionnaire items are conceived to illustrate psychological unbalances (i.e., I think I am a failure). Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients calculated for the entire instrument and for each subscale separately have values between 0.66 and 0.82. For this questionnaire, we may calculate a total score (by summing all items of the seven subscales) giving information about the general level of teenager's psychological adjustment.

The situation of parents' leaving abroad to work was investigated by means of a demographic questionnaire. Thus, teenagers were asked to give information related to their age, gender, origin and the leaving abroad of one or both parents – the moment of leaving, the parent left, the teenager's age at parent's first leaving, with whom they live at present.

### ***Procedure***

The administration of instruments was carried out collectively in the school where the students were learning during the homeroom class. Initially, the students were explained that they must (a) belong to a biparental family (mother and father), so that they might answer both forms of the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire; (b) have at least one parent left abroad to work; (c) receive parents' consent to participate in the survey and (d) express their consent to participate in the research in order to be accepted in the research. We additionally selected a control group made up of teenagers whose parents have never emigrated. The students were given unlimited time, but 50 minutes were enough for the completing of all questionnaires. Materials were collected immediately after the assignment has been finished.

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, the standard deviations and results of variance analysis (ANOVA) for all the variables under study differentiated depending on the parent left abroad to work (mother, father, both parents, nobody).

Table 1. Results of the One-Way ANOVA Tests with means and standard deviation scores for all the variables

| Scale                          | Mother |       | Father |       | Both parents |       | Nobody |       | F value | p      |
|--------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------------|-------|--------|-------|---------|--------|
|                                | M      | SD    | M      | SD    | M            | SD    | M      | SD    |         |        |
| Warmth and affection – M       | 36.09  | 15.84 | 30.74  | 7.39  | 29.68        | 8.77  | 32.13  | 9.89  | 4.03    | 0.00** |
| Hostility and aggression – M   | 45.22  | 10.91 | 47.25  | 7.99  | 50.05        | 6.35  | 48.34  | 7.90  | 3.68    | 0.01*  |
| Indifference and neglect – M   | 46.48  | 10.10 | 51.15  | 7.78  | 52.63        | 5.44  | 49.97  | 7.08  | 7.23    | 0.00** |
| Undifferentiated rejection – M | 29.18  | 7.84  | 32.06  | 5.22  | 33.31        | 3.94  | 31.89  | 6.40  | 5.12    | 0.00** |
| Maternal Rejection             | 164.03 | 38.60 | 179.72 | 24.29 | 186.31       | 20.07 | 178.02 | 27.86 | 6.64    | 0.00** |
| Warmth and affection – F       | 35.76  | 14.23 | 31.31  | 7.94  | 42.42        | 18.71 | 38.78  | 14.34 | 5.37    | 0.00** |
| Hostility and aggression – F   | 44.68  | 11.00 | 49.97  | 8.84  | 47.01        | 11.38 | 47.96  | 10.40 | 2.12    | 0.09   |
| Indifference and neglect – F   | 47.13  | 9.18  | 50.92  | 6.34  | 44.33        | 11.68 | 46.05  | 10.27 | 4.39    | 0.00** |
| Undifferentiated rejection – F | 29.45  | 7.68  | 33.05  | 5.15  | 31.07        | 7.50  | 30.93  | 6.62  | 2.37    | 0.07   |
| Paternal Rejection             | 165.97 | 39.66 | 181.61 | 24.85 | 160.00       | 43.49 | 166.42 | 37.08 | 3.12    | 0.02*  |
| Hostility / Aggression         | 22.78  | 5.75  | 23.43  | 5.66  | 23.69        | 4.76  | 25.49  | 4.73  | 4.46    | 0.00** |
| Dependency                     | 18.85  | 4.33  | 19.52  | 4.15  | 19.20        | 5.04  | 19.42  | 5.44  | 0.25    | 0.86   |
| Negative Self-Esteem           | 27.73  | 4.09  | 27.75  | 4.27  | 29.68        | 6.79  | 27.16  | 4.63  | 3.41    | 0.01*  |
| Emotional Unresponsiveness     | 24.85  | 4.47  | 26.08  | 3.06  | 25.86        | 3.61  | 25.76  | 4.39  | 1.16    | 0.32   |
| Emotional Instability          | 21.41  | 3.68  | 22.11  | 4.51  | 22.50        | 4.14  | 21.98  | 4.11  | 0.76    | 0.51   |
| Negative Self-Adequacy         | 25.14  | 4.04  | 26.74  | 4.04  | 27.34        | 4.39  | 26.97  | 4.65  | 3.36    | 0.01*  |
| Negative Worldview             | 21.85  | 5.63  | 23.83  | 6.66  | 23.93        | 4.25  | 24.11  | 5.24  | 2.76    | 0.04*  |
| Psychological adjustment       | 160.71 | 21.31 | 169.64 | 20.61 | 171.20       | 21.21 | 170.70 | 20.66 | 3.91    | 0.00** |

\*  $p < 0,05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0,01$

The results show that maternal and paternal rejection is differently perceived by teenagers depending on the parent who has emigrated. Mother's leaving modifies the perception of maternal rejection and father's leaving modifies the perception of paternal rejection. More precisely, post-hoc analyses (Bonferroni) show that the teenagers whose mothers have left abroad to work perceive the highest level of maternal rejection of all groups of participants. The group of teenagers whose mothers left abroad perceives less warmth and maternal affection as compared to the group of teenagers with both parents left abroad ( $MD = 6.40$ ;  $p < 0.00**$ ), more aggressiveness and maternal hostility ( $MD = -4.83$ ;  $p = 0.01*$ ) and a higher level of undifferentiated rejection ( $MD = -4.13$ ;  $p < 0.00**$ ). At the same time, the teenagers whose mothers emigrated feel much more neglected by

their mother, as compared to the teenagers whose father has left abroad (MD = -4.67;  $p < 0.00^{**}$ ), with both parents left (MD = -6.15;  $p < 0.00^{**}$ ) or with the teenagers who live with their parents (MD = -3.48;  $p < 0.02^{*}$ ).

Collectively, the perception of paternal rejection is lower in the teenagers whose father is left as compared to the teenagers whose parents are both left (MD = 21.61;  $p = 0.02^{*}$ ). Though father's emigration is accompanied by a decrease of paternal rejection, teenagers perceive less warmth/affection and more paternal neglect when their father is left.

Comparisons between environments in terms of teenagers' psychological adjustment highlight the impact of mother's migration. Thus, the teenagers whose mother has left abroad have the lowest level of psychological adjustment of all participants. Significant differences appear in terms of aggressiveness, self-esteem, self-adequacy and worldview. The aggressiveness of the teenagers whose mother has left abroad is higher than that of teenagers who live with their parents (MD = -2.71;  $p < 0.01^{**}$ ). Self-esteem is higher in teenagers with both parents left abroad as compared to the teenagers whose parents are in the country (MD = 2.52;  $p = 0.01^{*}$ ). The teenagers whose mother has left abroad have the lowest level of self-adequacy of all participants in the study. In the end, the teenagers whose mother has left abroad to work report a more pessimistic worldview as compared to the children whose parents work in the country (MD = -2.25;  $p = 0.04^{*}$ ).

To notice how mother's behaviour differs from father's behaviour in the perception of teenagers whose parents have emigrated, we used the paired t-test. We compared the results reported by the teenagers for mother and father for total rejection and the four subscales that constitute it. The analysis shows that mothers are perceived as being warmer and more affectionate than fathers ( $t(1.176) = -2.99$ ;  $p < 0.01^{**}$ ) and less neglectful than fathers ( $t(1.176) = 2.60$ ;  $p = 0.01^{*}$ ). There are no differences between mothers and fathers in terms of aggressiveness perceived, undifferentiated rejection and total rejection.

To examine which of maternal and paternal behaviours are predictors of teenagers' psychological adjustment, we conducted a series of stepwise regression analyses. The criterion variables were teenagers' psychological adjustment together with the seven subjacent psychological dimensions and predictors were represented by the four variables describing both maternal and paternal behaviour.

As one may see in *Table 2*, for the group of teenagers whose parents have emigrated psychological adaptation is generally predicted by only three of the eight predictors, as follows in the order of their importance: father's aggressiveness, mother's neglect and indifference and mother's aggressiveness. Teenagers' hostility and aggressiveness are predicted by father's aggressiveness, mother's aggressiveness and the warmth and affection received from the mother. The dependence on the others or immature independence is predicted only by mother's

behaviour; the most important predictor is mother's affection followed by her neglect and indifference and mother's aggressiveness. Self-esteem and self-adequacy of the teenagers from this survey are predicted by mother's indifference and neglect and father's aggressiveness. Emotional unresponsiveness is predicted by mother's aggressiveness, father's undifferentiated rejection and maternal warmth. Emotional instability is predicted only by father's and mother's aggressiveness; and the worldview is predicted by mother's aggressiveness, father's warmth and mother's indifference.

It is interesting to notice that father's indifference and neglect do not represent a significant predictor for any of the variables of psychological adjustment. At the same time, father's warmth and affection represent a weak predictor of teenagers' psychological adjustment.

*Table 2. Predicting psychological adjustment from perceived parental behaviour (Standardized  $\beta$  coefficients)*

| Predictors                     | Criterion Variables |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                | H/A                 | D       | NSE     | EU      | EI      | NSA     | NWV     | PA      |
| Warmth and affection – M       | 0.18*               | 0.64**  | 0.06    | -0.27** | 0.05    | -0.15   | 0.03    | 0.14    |
| Hostility and aggression – M   | 0.29**              | 0.19*   | -0.01   | 0.12    | 0.20**  | 0.08    | 0.18*   | 0.17*   |
| Indifference and neglect – M   | -0.08               | 0.41**  | 0.36**  | 0.13    | 0.05    | 0.35**  | 0.16*   | 0.21**  |
| Undifferentiated rejection – M | 0.17                | 0.01    | 0.05    | 0.09    | -0.02   | 0.15    | -0.11   | 0.05    |
| Warmth and affection – F       | -0.05               | 0.01    | 0.01    | 0.05    | -0.09   | -0.10   | -0.26** | -0.05   |
| Hostility and aggression – F   | 0.26**              | 0.07    | 0.22**  | 0.18    | 0.21**  | 0.24**  | 0.13    | 0.35**  |
| Indifference and neglect – F   | 0.03                | -0.02   | -0.05   | -0.05   | 0.03    | 0.03    | -0.03   | -0.01   |
| Undifferentiated rejection – F | 0.01                | -0.01   | 0.12    | 0.27**  | -0.21   | 0.06    | 0.05    | -0.02   |
| R <sup>2</sup>                 | 0.17                | 0.14    | 0.19    | 0.15    | 0.11    | 0.19    | 0.18    | 0.29    |
| F                              | 15.32**             | 12.41** | 25.32** | 18.37** | 13.92** | 25.75** | 16.08** | 29.48** |
| df                             | 173                 | 173     | 173     | 173     | 172     | 173     | 173     | 173     |

\*  $p < 0,05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0,01$

## Discussions

Parents' migration is a major event in the life of children and teenagers left behind whose consequences have not been fully elucidated yet. The results of this survey show that only mother's leaving has a negative impact on teenagers' psychological adjustment and the child-parent relationship. The teenagers whose mothers work in another country perceive less warmth and maternal affection, they see their mother as being more aggressive and hostile in relation to them and they feel neglected by her. In teenagers' perception, the mothers who reject their

children the most are the ones that emigrate. R.S. Parreñas (2006) has also come to similar conclusions suggesting that children still consider mother's migration as a form of abandonment, regardless of the material advantages received and the potential care provided from distance. Children have higher expectations from their mothers in terms of the care needed by the family, even if they have left abroad. Though acknowledging the material advantages obtained by their mothers, children do not consider these as a form of care. This is the reason for which the children whose mothers have emigrated perceive more feelings of abandonment than the children whose fathers have left abroad. All these result in the idea that these children do not valorize mother's economic contribution unless she continues to take care of her family.

Similar results were obtained by Battistella and Gastardo-Conaco (1998) who show that parents' absence is perceived by the children as a form of abandonment and solitude. Parrenas (2006) also highlights that, in the case of mother's migration, fathers do not necessarily assume the role and duties held by her. This role is rather assumed by other girls or women in the family; this burden falls on the shoulders of the elder daughter who takes over the attributions of the absent mother. The feelings of solitude and abandonment have also been identified by Jimenez-David (2002) in the children whose parents left abroad. Moreover, the author mentions that the feeling of abandonment is different from the situation of parents' death or divorce.

Father's migration determines a decrease of the perception of paternal rejection. Though the teenagers whose father has left abroad to work perceive less warmth and affection from the father and more indifference and neglect, in general they feel the least rejected by the father. These results may have a partial explanation in the structure of marital gender roles. Although men seem to get more and more involved in the household duties and children's care, they are still perceived as the main economic supporters of the family (Slocum & Nye, 1976; Pleck, 1983; 1985; apud. Turliuc, 2004). Consequently, fathers who have left abroad to find a better paid job may be considered as parents who care about their children.

As for psychological adaptation, teenagers whose mothers have left abroad register the weakest psychological adjustment of all participants to the survey. These teenagers are more aggressive, have a lower self-adequacy and a negative vision of the world and future. The results support the conclusions of some surveys conducted on the Romanian population that show an increase of physical and verbal aggressiveness in the children whose parents are left (Luca et al., 2007; Irimescu et al., 2008). Researches in Jamaica have come to the conclusion that mother's absence is a determining factor in children's involvement in violent acts. Thus, it has been shown that in 80% of the cases of children who fall foul of the law mother is absent, migration being the second cause of mother's absence (D'Emilio *et al.*, 2007).

Mother's leaving also influences children's perception of the world and future. The children whose mother has left consider that life is more difficult and the world is a more dangerous and threatening place. In the same direction, the research conducted in the Republic of Moldova on children whose parents have emigrated shows that they have less positive expectations of the future, they do not think that they would be able to valorize their studies or find a job in their country (Irimescu et al., 2008).

In this survey, the self-esteem of teenagers whose both parents have left abroad is significantly higher as compared to the children whose parents work in the country. Surveys conducted in the country show that there is an increase of self-esteem in the children left behind since they frequently receive significant sums of money and presents from their parents (Luca et al., 2007). As compared to the children of the same age, they have more money to spend, they can afford various clothing items, accessories in fashion or make trips abroad together with their parents.

The research aimed at highlighting the predictive power of maternal and paternal behaviour on teenagers' psychological adjustment. Data suggest that parental rejection accounts for about 29% of the variance of psychological adaptation in the teenagers whose parents have left abroad. The results concord with the previous surveys conducted by Rohner et al. (2005) and Kim et al. (2006) showing that both the perception of maternal and paternal rejection and the paternal rejection are important predictors of psychological adaptation. To these we may add the survey conducted by Lila, Garcia and Garcia (2007) indicating that 36% of the variance of children's psychological adaptation may be explained by the perception of maternal and paternal warmth if one checks the effect of biological gender, age and social class.

In this research, the most important predictors of psychological adjustment are father's aggressiveness and mother's indifference and aggressiveness. Thus, the more aggressive the parents, the more hostile and aggressive teenagers, the lower the self-esteem, the higher the emotional instability and the more pessimistic the vision of the world and future is. Collectively, mother's behaviour has the highest predictive power on teenagers' behaviour. As for the father, his aggressiveness and hostility hallmark the children's psychological functioning. At the same time, father's neglect and indifference do not seem to be significant predictors for any of the dimensions of the personality under analysis.

## Conclusions

The research lays stress on the fact that parental behaviour plays an important role in teenagers' psychological adaptation. Although this is the age when teenagers start asserting their independence from parents, their separation due to migration may lead to adaptation problems for the children left behind. The separation from mother is especially accompanied by numerous negative consequences that may not be fought against by the care the teenagers receive from the father, grandparents or other relatives under whose protection they have left.

In case of the children left behind, maternal rejection is a stronger predictor of psychological unsuitableness as compared to paternal rejection. Most studies analyzing the relationship between children and parents suggest that maternal and paternal behaviour have different effects on children's psychological adaptation (Lila, Garcia & Garcia, 2007; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). These results may be explained by the cultural construction of motherhood and fatherhood. The influence of the maternal and paternal behaviour varies from one cultural group to another depending on individuals' level of adaptation to certain historical, cultural and social-economic conditions (Veneziano, 2000).

Results may be useful to specialists who manage the cases of children left behind without parental care – social workers, psychologists or teachers. They may pay an increased attention to the cases in which mother has emigrated even if the children are taken care of by the father. They may also develop parental education programmes that might render parents, especially mothers, aware of the importance of the warmth and affection offered to children and might advise them for the diminution of hostile and aggressive behaviours. Parents may be taught how to manifest their love and care for the children being at a distance.

This research offers a series of preliminary data to understand the child-parent relationship in the context of economic migration. However, the study makes a cross-sectional analysis of the phenomenon and evaluates statistical associations and not the causation. For a higher degree of generalization of data and in order to notice whether the associations between variables are stable or they modify over the time, a longitudinal research design that may study a large group of teenagers before and after parents' emigration is necessary. Future studies may take into account other factors influencing the psychological adaptation of teenagers such as the relationships and family climate before parents' migration and parents' attachment or psychopathology.

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