



# Parental attitudes in perception of fathers of deaf children

## Postawy rodzica w percepcji ojców dziecka niesłyszącego<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The paper is of an empirical character. The main objective of the study was to diagnose declared attitudes of fathers towards deaf children. The study made use of the Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) by E. Schaefer and L. Bell. The base group comprised 50 fathers of deaf children (FDC). Additionally, a group of 58 randomly selected fathers having only hearing children were examined (control group – FHC). The analysis of results of this study takes into account first general attitudes of the fathers, i.e. proper emotional contact, the attitude of excessive distance and excessive concentration or protection, as well as attitudes towards family and educational roles; thereafter, the subscale scores were averaged to diagnose the intensity of each particular attitude. As a result of the study, it was established that the presence of a deaf child in the family affects the shaping of specific parental attitudes. The age and education of fathers of deaf children were the variables that also affected the shaping of parental attitudes. In summary, the conclusions for pedagogical practice will be discussed.

**Keywords:** parental attitude, deaf child, father

**Abstract:** Artykuł ma charakter empiryczny. Głównym celem badań było zdiagnozowanie deklarowanych postaw ojców wobec dzieci niesłyszących. W badaniach wykorzystano kwestionariusz PARI (Parental Attitude Research Instrument) E.Schaefera i L.Bella. Grupę zasadniczą stanowiło 50 ojców dzieci niesłyszących (ODN). Dodatkowo przebadano losowo dobranych 58 ojców mających tylko dzieci słyszące (grupa kontrolna- ODS). W analizie wyników niniejszych badań uwzględniono najpierw ogólne postawy ojców, a więc prawidłowy kontakt uczuciowy, postawę nadmiernego dystansu, nadmiernej koncentracji albo ochraniań oraz postawy wobec ról rodzinnych i wychowawczych, a następnie uśredniono wyniki skal cząstkowych w celu zdiagnozowania nasilenia określonych postaw. W wyniku przeprowadzonego badania stwierdzono, że obecność w rodzinie dziecka niesłyszącego ma znaczenie dla kształtowania się specyficznych postaw rodzicielskich. Wiek i wykształcenie ojców dzieci niesłyszących były zmiennymi, które również wpłynęły na kształtowanie się ich postaw rodzicielskich. W części podsumowującej przedstawiono wnioski dla praktyki pedagogicznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** postawa rodzicielska, dziecko niesłyszące, ojciec

## Introduction

The early 1960s set out a new approach to family in social sciences. Of key importance were humanistic orientations (mainly Martin Seligman's positive psychology, Aaron Antonovsky's salutogenesis model, Richard S. Lazarus and Susan Folkman's transactional model of stress) and theories which accentuated the polymorphic and systemic context of approaching the family environment (Heszen, 2016; Kwiatek, Wilczewska, 2015; Lachowska, 2021). This different, more holistic scientific approach was oriented towards family as a social group and not a selected

family member as before. Therefore, family, like every social group, must be treated as an organism comprised of parts each of which has its own input into the work of the entire organism in favour of providing it with optimal adaptation. Each social group is thus a system, i.e. an entirety of mutually dependent parts. Gradual departure took place, from treating family as a certain constant social group towards clearly emphasising the importance of the quality of relationships between the individual members creating subsystems. Family is not only a social group but also a social institution, integrally incorporated into the social structure and into the

<sup>1</sup> Artykuł w języku polskim: <https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2022-1Plutecka.pdf>

particular society's behavioural culture as well as its functioning. Therefore, the 'biological' functions of a family are not 'pure' biological functions, as in the animal world, because they have a close relation with the sphere of highly developed psyche and the social and cultural sphere of functioning of man, marriage and family itself (Świętochowski, 2021).

The following four research perspectives can be observed in the current family-oriented scientific approach: the ecological, competence based, developmental and stability planning orientation. Of crucial importance in the ecological perspective are interactions between man and various social contexts (from the micro- to the macro-system). The dynamics of the diversity and complexity of the impact of these subsystems is also shaped through a specific time context (chronosystem)<sup>2</sup>. The next one, the competence perspective, comes from the traditional model oriented towards exhibiting conflicts, deficits or pathologies occurring in families and highlights the capabilities or the potential of each of the members of the family as a whole. Intra- and interpersonal competencies should be comprised of such skills that enable effective functioning in the immediate and extended social contexts. The developmental perspective is related to understanding family as a system dependent not only on the individual development of each of the family members, their needs and aspirations but also on the phases of family development. Of great importance is maintaining togetherness or consistency of existence in the next stages of the family life. The stability planning orientation stresses the significant importance of family as an educational environment that is a source of support for its members and a sanctuary for family bonds, a place that enables them to regain strength

after experiencing stress in other social environments, e.g. at work or in a peer group (Janicka, Liberska, 2021; Kiereś, Gromek, Hryszan, 2018).

The above scientific perspectives have also change the approach orientated towards families with sensorially disabled children. The one-sided view of families with a disabled child, struggling with consecutive stages of emotional experiences, has been gradually rejected. The current scientific approach has enabled parents to perceive the process of care, education or rehabilitation of a child with disability as experiences triggering positive changes. From the point of view of the development of a child with disability, much better results are achieved in collaboration with parents who are focussed on developing educational competences, have self-confidence and are gradually shaping correct educational attitudes (Niedbalski, 2020).

When describing the functioning of families with disabled children, it seems appropriate to show the specific situation of being a hearing parent of a deaf child<sup>3</sup> and of special importance is the perception of parenting by fathers. The role of the father in the family is as important as that of the mother. As a result of the social, economic and cultural transformations taking place, the role of the father is becoming multidimensional. The significance of the father for the beneficial development of the deaf child has been demonstrated by numerous researchers, who stressed the emotional involvement in the process of rehabilitation of the deaf child and the awareness of being responsible for their upbringing. Fathers perceive the child's hearing impairment as an experience which, despite strong emotions,

2 In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the ecological paradigm entered the social sciences, and it was then that scientists began to apply ecological interpretations of the family environment functioning. U. Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) dealt with relationships between a developing child and the environment and created the theory of ecological systems or otherwise the ecological theory of development. According to this theory, man lives in various social environments that are overlapping. The foundation of U. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory are the following four elements: 'process-man-context-time'. Within the environments or contexts of man's development, the author initially distinguished four subsystems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem and in the course of further investigations he added chronosystem chronosystem (Xia, Li, Tudge, 2020).

3 The term 'deaf child' (literally 'non-hearing child') most commonly used in the literature and comprises children with different degrees of hearing impairment. This term is used in compliance with the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education of 28th August 2017 amending the Regulation on conditions for organising training, education and care for children and juveniles, either disabled or socially maladjusted, in preschools and schools, in open and integrated classes (Journal of Laws, item 1652), in the light of which the officially adopted term shall be 'non-hearing'. The terms 'deaf', 'child with impaired hearing' will be used as synonymous terms.

provides encouragement and motivation to cope with this burden in order to prepare the deaf child for independent and normal functioning in life (Davenport, Holt, 2019; Haddad, Steuerwald, Garland, 2019; Kobosko, Ganc, Paluch, Jędrzejczak, Geremek-Samsonowicz, Skarżyński, 2020; Kornas-Biela, 2020; Kornas-Biela, Tupaj, 2020). The father's task-oriented approach aimed at satisfying the deaf child's developmental needs as well as the lower expression of emotion mean that they are definitely better than mothers at coping with stress and searching for substantive solutions to life problems. For this reason, the father's physical and mental presence is so important for the deaf child's regular development.

## 1. Methodological basis for the research

The objective of the study was to obtain an answer to the question, 'How do fathers of deaf children perceive their parental attitudes?' The study was conducted from September to November 2021. In order to diagnose the attitudes of hearing fathers towards deaf children, surveys were carried out among 50 fathers who constituted the base group in the study (FDC). Additionally, the study included 58 randomly selected fathers only having hearing children (control group, FHC). The fathers' age in the study groups was differentiated, the predominant group consisted of fathers aged between 26 and 35 (FDC 38%, FHC 43%). A slightly lower number were fathers aged between 36 and 45 (FDC 31%, FHC 27%) and between 46 and 55 (FDC 20%, FHC 24%). The other fathers were men aged over 55 (FDC 11%, FHC 6%). The analysis of education levels among the two study groups also revealed clear differentiation. In the first group of fathers (FHC), the largest population were fathers with vocational education (49%). Fathers with secondary education made up 31% of the group and only 15% of fathers had higher education. The other fathers, with primary education, were in the minority (5%). In the other group of fathers (FDC) it was secondary education that prevailed (50%). It was then followed

by vocational (25%) and higher education (21%). In the group of fathers of hearing children only 4% of fathers had primary education.

The following variables were taken into account in the overall analysis:

- characteristics of the fathers' attitudes towards deaf and hearing children;
- fathers' age and their attitudes toward the children;
- fathers' education and their attitudes toward the children.

It should be pointed out, however, that this study had an exploratory character, and formulation of a hypothesis with such defined methodological approach may limit the possibility of perceiving the particular phenomenon reducing it to the threads realised by the investigator; it may also neglect a lot of issues that the investigator was not aware of. The study results presented herein do not constitute an attempt at duplicating other studies and therefore cannot be treated as diagnostic, i.e. create a methodological basis for formulating hypotheses for subsequent studies for validation purposes.

The Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) by E. Schaefer and L. Bell, modified by M. Ziemska (2009), which comprises 155 statements forming 23 scales of attitudes, was used as a measure of the fathers' attitudes. The individual scales relate to different matters that are important for the functioning of family as a system. Each scale consists of 5 statements (items) that the subject addresses by selecting one of the answers provided, with related scores: definitely right (4 points), rather right (3 points), rather wrong (2 points), definitely wrong (1 point). When processing the scores, the attitudes scales were divided into the following four groups:

1. Emotional contact with the child: ease of communicating (1), respect for the child's rights (14), developing the child's activity (15), sharing the child's interests (21);
2. Emotional distance: striving at strict parenting (8), irritation (9), avoiding communication with the child (16);

3. Emotional concentration or tendency towards excessive protection: limiting the child's freedom (4), limiting external influences on the child (10), suppressing sexual interests in children (18), accelerating the development (22), raising children in dependency (2), fears of hurting the child (6), suppressing aggression in the child (12), excessive interference with the child's life (20);
4. Attitudes towards the family and parenting roles: giving up social contacts (3), conflicts in the family (7), cult of parents (11), awareness of being dependent on the loved ones (19).

The survey of fathers used a shortened scale which dismissed statements relating to perception of various aspects of family and parenting roles exclusively by women, and more precisely, propensity for self-harm (5), rejecting the role of a housewife (13), neglecting the husband (17) and awareness of dependency (23). The highest score relating to one of the above four scales could be 20 points with 5 points being the lowest. The lowest scores, the more desirable was the father's attitude for the development of the deaf child and the functioning of the family. The above relation does not apply to the first group of attitudes, emotional contact with the child, in which high scores indicate good relationships. The scores given are arithmetical averages for each attitude.

## **2. Results of the analysis of the research material**

The analysis of the study results takes into consideration first the general attitudes of the fathers, i.e. proper emotional contact, the attitude of excessive distance, excessive concentration or protection, as well as the attitudes towards the family and parenting roles, and thereafter the subscale scores that were averaged in order to diagnose the intensity of the particular attitudes. In this study, fathers in both groups, fathers of deaf children (FDC) and fathers of hearing children (FHC) obtained similar scores. In the first group of attitudes concerning the emotional contact with the child, the highest scores were obtained in scale 14, equality of the child's rights (FDC 17 points, FHC

15 points) and in scale 15, developing activity (FDC 16 points, FHC 17 points). The analysis showed that of great importance to fathers is also sharing interests with the child, scale 21 (FDC 14 points, FHC 16 points) and ease of communicating, scale 1 (FDC 15 points, FHC 14 points). The next group of attitudes concerned emotional distance. Fathers of deaf children obtained lower scores (between 6 and 9 points) than fathers of hearing children (between 8 and 11 points). The differences are small but they indicate that fathers keep an emotional distance from their deaf children because they are more irritable, scale 9 (8 points), avoid communication with the child, scale 16 (9 points), but they do not strive at strict parenting, scale 8 (6 points). The above attitudes may result from a situation of being overburdened with responsibilities related to raising a deaf child. Being a father of a deaf child additionally defines and extends the scope of the duties, which affects the shaping of the specific parental attitudes. Being a father of a deaf child may also be a cause of existential anxiety related to the unknown consequences of the parents' actions. On the other hand, fathers' attitudes towards hearing children involve striving at strict parenting (8 points), avoidance of communication with the child (10 points) and irritability (11 points).

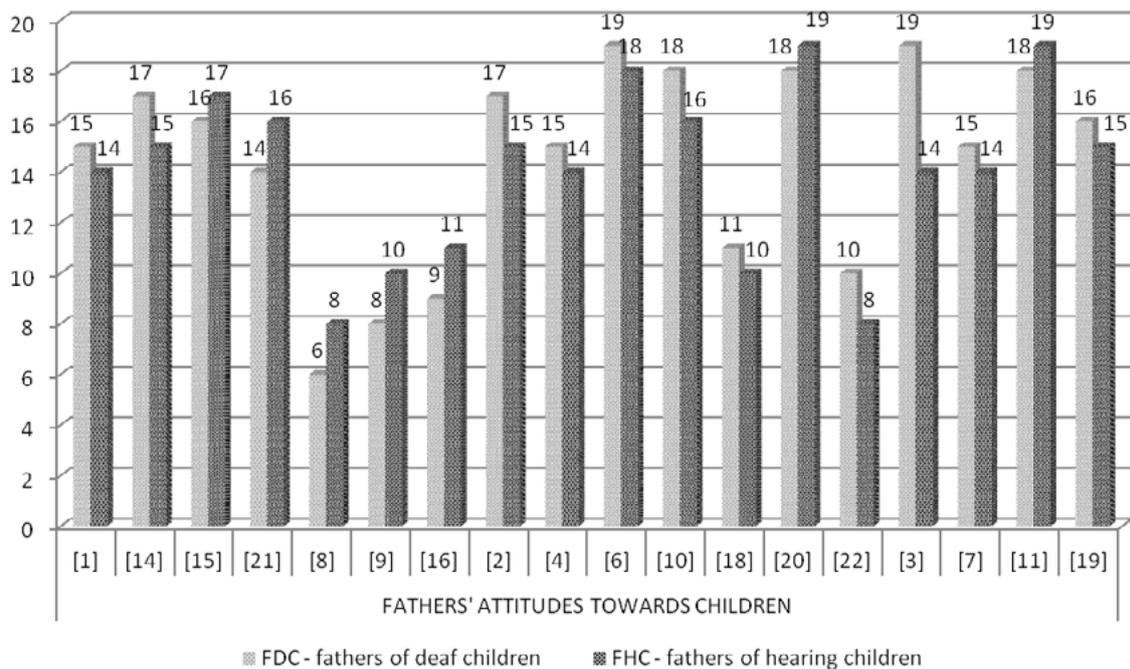
In the third group of attitudes concerning emotional concentration, slight differences can be observed between the scores of the two groups of fathers. High scores in both groups of fathers in the scales concerning the above attitude may indicate on the one hand an excessive interference with the child's life, scale 20 (FDC 18 points, FHC 19 points) and tendencies towards raising the child in dependency, scale 2 (FDC 17 points, FHC 15 points), limiting their freedom, scale 4 (FDC 15 points, FHC 14 points) and external influences, scale 10 (FDC 18 points, FHC 16 points), and on the other hand the fathers' fears of hurting their children, scale 6 (FDC 19 points, FHC 18 points). Fathers do not show high tendencies towards accelerating their children's development, scale 22 (FDC 10 points, FHC 8 points) or suppressing their natural sexual interests, scale 18 (FDC 11 points, FHC 10 points). The scores obtained prove that fathers on the one

hand want to be perceived as autocratic, demanding parents, and on the other hand, they care for building partner relationships with the child.

The fourth group concerned attitudes related to fulfilling the family and parenting roles. Also in this case, slight differences may be observed between fathers in the two study groups. Fathers obtained highest scores in scale 11, regarding the cult of parents (FDC 18 points, FHC 19 points), which is, as a matter of fact, consistent with the traditional system of system of upbringing in Poland. Fathers are more inclined to have recourse to strict discipline in search for new solutions to difficulties in upbringing, instead of permissiveness. Disciplining is still

identified by fathers with maintenance of order and obedience. Therefore, firmness and consistency in father's dealing with the child are so important. In the next scales related to awareness of being dependent on the loved ones, scale 19 (FDC 16 points, FHC 15 points) and to family conflicts, scale 7 (FDC 15 points, FHC 14 points), no significant differences between the groups were found. However, there were differences between the two groups of fathers in the scale concerning giving up social contacts, scale 3 (FDC 19 points, FHC 14 points). Fathers of deaf children protect them from excessive influences of the environment, which are perceived as a threat to their development.

Graph 1. Fathers' attitudes towards children, FDC (n=50), FHC (n=58)



Source: own work based on studies.

The study demonstrated that fathers' age has an impact on their parental attitudes towards children. Fathers in the middle adulthood period, aged between 36 and 45 and those between 46 and 55, as well as fathers over 55 years of age, manifest more desirable parental attitudes than fathers in the early adulthood (between 26 and 35). Fathers in the middle adulthood period, aged between 36 and 45 (FDC 39%, FHC

43%), aged between 46 and 55 (FDC 21%, FHC 15%) and over 55 years of age (FDC- 12%, FHC- 25%) more often demonstrate the desirable attitudes of a parent's emotional contact with the child than fathers in the early adulthood, aged between 26 and 35 (FDC 18%, FHC 25%). With age, fathers display an emotional distance from the problems encountered (aged between 36 and 45, FDC 41%, FHC 39%; aged

between 46 and 55, FDC 22%, FHC-27%; over 55 years of age, FDC 19%, FHC 24%; aged between 26 and 35, FDC 18%, FHC-10%). Fathers in the adulthood period (aged between 36 and 45, FDC 29%, FHC 43%; aged between 46 and 55, FDC 28%, FHC 21%, over 55 years of age, FDC 29%, FHC 18%) to a larger extent prefer emotional concentration towards the child than fathers aged between 26 and 35 (FDC 14%, FHC 18%). For both groups of fathers, greater impatience with the problems related to fulfilling the family and parenting roles can be seen with age (for those aged between 36 and 45, FDC 31%, FHC 39%; for those aged between 46 and 55, FDC 25%, FHC 31%; over the age of 55, FDC 28%, FHC 25%). On the other hand, fathers at younger age (between 26 and 35, FDC 26%, FHC 15%) do not feel the need for maintaining the cult of parents or the awareness of dependency.

The level of education affected the shaping of the desired parental attitudes. Closer emotional contact was revealed by fathers with higher education (FDC 47%, FHC 39%) and secondary education (FDC 25%, FHC 28%) than fathers with vocational education (FDC 22%, FHC 25%) and primary education (FDC 6%, FHC 8%). Fathers with vocational education (FDC 36%, FHC 38%) and secondary education (FDC 31%, FHC 35%) displayed a greater emotional distance towards the problems encountered than fathers with higher education (FDC 21%, FHC 20%) and primary education (FDC 12%, FHC 7%). A further empirical analysis showed that fathers with higher education (FDC 45%, FHC 39%) and secondary education (FDC 27%, FHC 31%) revealed greater emotional concentration towards the child's developmental needs than fathers with vocational education (FDC 24%, FHC 24%) and primary education (FDC 4%, FHC 6%). Fathers' competencies in undertaking family roles, especially related to parenting, increase together with the level of education. In the group of attitudes related to fulfilling family and parenting roles, in the individual scales, fathers with higher education (FDC 39%, FHC 42%) and secondary education (FDC 29%, FHC 38%) obtained higher

scores than fathers with vocational education (FDC 26%, FHC 18%) and primary education (FDC 6%, FHC 2%).

## **Conclusion**

As a result of the study carried out, it has been established that the presence of a deaf child in the family has an impact on the shaping of the specific parental attitudes. Fathers of deaf children manifest attitudes of proper emotional contact towards their children. A deaf child's specific needs translate into increased parental concern and emotional concentration. The study has also revealed fathers' difficulties related to performing parental roles. Among the most common difficulties, fathers of deaf children listed expansion of positive emotions towards the child, exaggerated control and fear of their health as well as irritation resulting from the situation of being overburdened with responsibilities. Parenting problems are inevitable and most parents experience them to a greater or lesser extent. It would be more worrying if fathers attempted to conceal them or failed to notice them. The study has shown that in the case of fathers of deaf children, age and education were those variables that affected the shaping of specific parental attitudes. With age, fathers exhibit more desirable parental attitudes. In turn, the higher the level of education, the greater emotional contact and emotional concentration.

The results obtained in the study require further deepened qualitative and quantitative analysis and taking into account the inferentiality of many of the phenomena that take place in the family environment. Issues concerning paternal attitudes towards deaf children should be investigated based on a systemic epistemology and appreciation of the fact that human interactions take place in different contexts. Therefore, it is not sufficient to understand the individual members of a family and meet the father because what is important is the dynamics of the family functioning as a system in the entire life cycle. Psychological and educational aid should be focussed on family as a system and separately on each member.

This outline of fathers' attitudes towards deaf children points out to the need for supporting measures. What is desirable is a broadly understood support that will contribute to father's greater involvement in the development of deaf children at the various life stages. All offers of psychological help addressed to the father should take account of the following professional and non-professional forms:

- providing information on deaf children's special developmental and educational needs, with special consideration of assistance in acquiring communication competencies that are necessary in relationships with deaf children;
- building local networks of counselling and consultation;
- offering psychological assistance to fathers, taking advantage of methods that make reference to the interactive activities, e.g. the Video Home Training model;
- ongoing provision of information on institutional offers of external assistance;
- provision of specialist help, e.g. by an educationalist, psychologist, speech and language therapist for the hearing impaired or a sign language interpreter;
- collaboration with parents of deaf children within the framework of meetings organised by associations or foundations;
- Inclusion of other hearing members of the family, e.g. siblings, grandparents, in the supporting actions;
- building support groups for parents with an early intervention programme;
- mediation in solving particular difficult parenting issues or a family crisis;
- sharing experience of being a deaf child's father during meetings with other families raising a deaf child;
- building a community of deaf children's fathers in order to organise regular meetings during which there will be enough time for understanding, support and sincere conversations concerning better fulfilment of the role of father.

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