

The Effects of Microsocial Factors Through the Family on the Development of Social Competence in Preschool Children

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Abstract

This paper investigates how sociodemographic factors and the family background contribute to the development of children's social competence. Social competence is interpreted within an integrative approach, being analysed according to two indicators: the development level of social skills and interpersonal coping forms of children. The present article focused on negotiation, which has been found to be the most adaptive coping among preschool age children.

Measurements were obtained using questionnaires: a *Social Competence Screening about Preschoolers* filled in by teachers, a *Questionnaire on Coping Strategies* completed both from children and teachers, and a *Family Background Questionnaire* compiled only for parents. Data was collected for a total of 536 preschoolers, of whom 309 parents provided data about home environment. In the linear regression models conducted the most influential demographic factors were the age and gender of the children and the age of the parents. Microsocial factors as the parents', in particular the mother's, employment was determinate in the models, and other sociocultural aspects, as the child's participation in extracurricular activities beside short screentime, the lack of conflicts and disease in family, marital satisfaction are among influencing factors. The study offers various prospects for new research and nuances our views on social competence and child-development.

Keywords: preschooler, social competence, coping skills, microsocial factors, family background.

JEL Classification: I20, I21.

1. Introduction

Social competence counts for a key competence (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2005; Nagy, 2007, 2010). The actual social processes of our society constantly demand from the individual to socialize on different levels and to adapt to various situations constantly, being flexible and creative (Paris & Haynes, 2020; Rényi, Sík & Takács, 2014). The definition of social competence formulated by Semrud-Clikeman (2007, p. 1) resonates with this postmodern situation perfectly, saying that it is “an ability to take another’s perspective concerning a situation and to learn from experience and apply that learning to the ever-changing social landscape. The ability to respond flexibly and appropriately defines a person’s ability to handle social challenges”. The response to social provocations assumes that the person can control his emotions and actions and in situations of interpersonal conflicts can apply adaptive coping strategies (Saarni, 1999). Coping skills are also accepted as belonging to social competence (Goodman & Southam-Gerow, 2010; Lazsádi, 2015; Pang, Frydenberg, Liang, Deans & Su, 2018; Rademacher & Koglin, 2019; Semrud-Clikeman 2007; Zsolnai, Kasik & Lesznyák, 2008).

Based on previous results (Lazsádi, 2015, 2017a; Santhanagopalan, Keysar, & Kinzler, 2022; Zimmer, Lees & Skinner, 2011) negotiation with peers or asking for adults’ assistance in stressful social situations are meant to be adaptive coping mechanisms in preschool years. On the contrary, aggressive reaction, emotional ventilation and avoiding were less effective. Negotiation has proven to have the strongest relation with social skills. The effectiveness of negotiation has been justified by the fact that from all the forms of social coping it has the strongest correlation with the development level of social competence (Lazsádi, 2015, 2017a). Negotiating child formulates responses such as “I would like it back.”, “Please, stop that!”. Based on previous cluster analysis (Lazsádi, 2016), negotiation belongs to the category of confrontational strategies, but within this category, it must be differentiated from offensive coping forms like resistance and aggression. It is a coping mechanism, when the child exercises self-defence by using verbal, assertive communication in an interpersonal conflict.

In the present article social competence is inspected in an integrative way, along two indicators: the development level of social skills and the application of most effective social coping method, the use of negotiation. In recent decades the research community has shown a great interest to socio-emotional development, however, relatively few studies report on the socioeconomic or cultural aspects. The present study investigates how microsocial factors through family affects children's successful social behaviour in kindergarten. Pedagogical thinking often gives priority to the psychological characteristics of the individual and neglects the social background of children. Most of the research analyses only the qualification level of the parents in relation to important skills of socio-emotional competence and academic achievement. This phenomenon can be observed in the literature, but in the selection of research and educational methods as well. The study aims to fill a gap with examining widely the microsocial background of the children in its relation to social skills.

2. Literature Review

The family as the first and most influential environment of socialization contributes to the social development of a child on various levels, primarily through nurturance, support, model-setting, and education, but all these factors are in significant relationship to the parents' social and economic status and quality. The report of the WHO (Irwin, Siddiqi & Hertzman, 2007) summarizes the role of the family as ensuring social and economic resources. Among social resources, it mentions education, parental competences and attitudes, cultural habits and values, intra-familial relations, and the health of family members. The economic resources included wealth, living conditions and occupational status making up the SES (Socioeconomic Status) Scale. The literature also categorizes these variables as material and non-material family resources (Márfi, 2007). These two systems of factors are strongly intertwined, but the families do not have all the above-mentioned resources equally, leading to inequality in different family dimensions. The influences of socioeconomic conditions often happen through hidden channels. These can include health related conduct, the parents' coping mechanisms, parental emotional warmth, the parental attitude towards involvement or democratic solutions (Conger, Conger & Martin, 2010; Kao, Tuladhar & Tarullo, 2020; Liu, Zhao, Li, Pan & Cheng, 2022, Kertesi & Kézdi, 2008).

Besides ensuring the environmental stimulus of the child, the family has the role to control the types of environmental factors the child gets in contact with (Richter, 2004). Danis and Kalmár (2011) summarized the findings about the various factors that protect and the factors which endanger children's development. Among risk factors they mention persistent poverty (this is often accompanied by the mother's poor schooling, poor cognitive capacity, the parents' unemployment, or less prestigious job); problems of residence (crowdedness, frequent changes of residence); certain aspects regarding the structure of the family, like single-parent families, spousal distress, more than three siblings; the illness or psychological problems of parents; rigid parental attitudes; neglect or abuse. Reduced responsiveness in their interaction with children, poor stimulation, many stressful events, low social support are other factors worthy to be mentioned. The sooner the child is exposed to risks, the less beneficial their long-term effects will be (Rutter, 2000), and preschool time is a sensitive stage in the development of social competence due to the biological, psychological, and social maturation of children (Berks, 2014; Nagy, Józsa, Vidákovich & Fazakasné Fenyvesi, 2004; Zsolnai, Kasik & Lesznyák, 2007, 2008). It needs to be considered that protective and risk factors also tend to have a cumulative effect (Evans, Li & Whipple, 2013; Sameroff, Seifer, Baldwin & Balwin, 2016). On the other side, protective factors can play the moderator role besides their positive effects, and they help to diminish or avoid the negative consequences.

Parents are the “agents of socialization”, they are the transmitters between the macrosocial system and their children since they act and exist in well-defined social structures. Through them, the social education and growth of the child happen on a “socially differentiated bases” (Mollenhauer, 2003, pp. 130-131.). The current research studies the family in this role of bridging, focusing on those protective aspects and factors of risk, which might have an impact on the development of social competence and the application of adaptive coping in stressful social interactions at the kindergarten.

3. Methodology

To determine which microenvironmental factors have a statistically provable relationship with social competence and which ones play a decisive role in the social development of preschool children, we conducted a quantitative study, based on questionnaire survey. Data was collected

with the consent of the participants. The institutions were included with the permission of the heads and the permission of school inspectors. All children participated with the agreement of their parents, who were informed in detail about the goals and the process of the research both verbally at school parent meetings and on paper in a letter addressed to parents. The participants were informed of their right to refuse to answer any question. The researcher keeps the data provided by the participants confidential.

3.1. Participants

The original complex research studies 536 preschool children, but there are only 309 cases to which all the research methods presented below were applied. All children attend Hungarian groups in a Romanian state kindergarten in an urban area (Târgu-Mureş). It is important to know that in this region almost half of the population is made up of a Hungarian minority. The participants were chosen following a stratification of the criteria based on socioeconomic status of the family (Lazsádi, 2017a). Although the mean values of the sample tend to be close to those of the target population, we cannot affirm with certainty that the sample is representative in terms of socioeconomic indicators, the families in a good economic situation are overrepresented. Gender and age representativeness was achieved for the population of Hungarian preschoolers in the specific region: there are 154 boys and 155 girls in the sample, 49% of the children are 5-7, 28% are 4-5, and 23% are 3-4 years old.

3.2. Instruments

Three research tools were used in the research: a social skills teacher-report questionnaire, a coping strategy self-report and teacher-report questionnaire and a parent-report questionnaire for the home environment assessment.

Social skills were measured with Social Competence Screening for Preschoolers – Teacher and Parent Form (Miclea, Balaj, Porumb, Albu & Cognitrom, 2010). In this study only the questionnaire completed by teachers will be processes. The reliability indicators are good: the Cronbach-alpha of the questionnaire for teachers has a value above 0,9 for each age group. The screening compiled initially in Romanian has been adapted to Hungarian and pretested (Lazsádi, 2017). The questionnaire assesses the following three subscales: conforming to rules,

interpersonal skills, and prosocial behaviour. It evaluates the frequency of a specific behaviour on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=almost never and 5=almost always. The varieties of the questionnaire were compiled for three age groups: 3-4, 4-5, 5-7 years old children.

The Coping Strategies Questionnaire (Zsolnai, Kasik & Lesznyák, 2008) measures the functioning of emotional and social skills in negative social situations of frustration. It is applied to children and teachers as well. The questionnaire is reliable (Cronbach- $\alpha > 0,78$). The questionnaire included stressful interpersonal situations in kindergarten, for example: “What does a child do if a classmate teases him on purpose?” Each answer corresponds to one coping reaction: negotiation; support seeking; resistance; avoidance; physical aggression; emotional response. Support offering was an extra option in situations when the child’s peer gets into trouble. Adults completed the questionnaire individually, indicating only one answer from the enlisted ones. Children were asked by the researcher and their reaction was coded into one of the enlisted behaviours. When reviewing the data, it is important to keep in mind that the interval scales of coping mechanisms express the frequency of using the reported coping and does not denote typologies.

The Background Family Factors Questionnaire studied the demographic and socioeconomic indicators of family conditions, the characteristics of the family structure and some non-material, social-emotional and cultural features, which define the lifestyle of a certain family and creates a specific environment for the socialization of a child. The demographic indicators referred to data related to the age, gender, and nationality of parents. The socioeconomic indicators included educational attainment, occupation and status at work, income, and residential conditions. Within family structures, we have differentiated the nuclear family and the extended family, single-parent, and two-parent families, we took in consideration the number of siblings as well. The social-emotional and cultural resources of the family were examined through the following factors: the children’s daily schedule; the time-management of the parents; the stress factors in the family including conflicts, crises, illnesses; the active presence of supportive relationships; the spiritual and religious resources; the educational values of the parents and the subjective evaluation of their relationships and their life conditions. Data was collected from one parent for each child. In 87% of the cases the child’s mother completed the questionnaire. It was applied

both online and face to face, being sensitive to situations where the parents didn't have access to a PC, internet, were illiterate.

3.3. Statistical analyses

The study examines the correlation between social competence and a broad range of family background variables and aims to identify predictor variables. In the process of analysing data, we used factor analysis to reduce variables of home environment (Lazsádi, 2017a), which are not presented below. To identify the variables that predict the indicators of social competence stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was performed, including all the family background factors as independent variables that were in a linear relationship (correlation) with the outcome variable. To avoid multicollinearity in the explanatory models, only one of the highly correlated independent variables was entered (the one that contributed to the explanatory model the most).

4. Results

As follows, we are going to present the mutual relationship between the variables of home environment and the values of social skills, as well as the connection between the background factors and the most adaptive interpersonal coping, the negotiation. All data regarding correlations are summed up in the **Table 1**. From all possible variables we are going to present only those which are significant to our analysis ($p < .05$). As the linear relation is the prerequisite of regression analysis, correlations represent a selection criterion to set up the variables for the explanatory models.

	Variables of family background	Social competence Teacher-report	Negotiation Self-report	Negotiation Teacher-report
Demographics	Age of child	n.s.	.129*	.162**
	Age of parents	n.s.	.172*	.177**
	Gender of child: woman	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
SES indicators	Educational attainment of mother	.124*	n.s.	n.s.
	Educational attainment of father	.115*	.182*	n.s.
	Economic conditions	.179**	n.s.	.124*
	Leading position of the mother at the workplace	n.s.	n.s.	.122*
	Unemployment of one or more family members	n.s.	-.173**	-.135*
Household structure	Unemployment of mother	-.160**	n.s.	-.164**
	Single mother	-.116*	n.s.	n.s.
Time-management	Extracurricular activities vs. watching TV	.177**	n.s.	n.s.
	Healthy leisure activities of the parent	.127*	n.s.	n.s.
	Time spent together with father	.140*	n.s.	n.s.
	Time of parent spent on multimedia	n.s.	-.140*	n.s.
	Child/parent quality-time	n.s.	n.s.	.131*
Social factors	Social support	n.s.	.162*	n.s.
	Long-lasting illnesses	-.153*	n.s.	-.128*(mother)
	Marital conflicts	-.154*	n.s.	n.s.
	Spousal satisfaction	n.s.	.126*	n.s.

Note: n.s=not significant, * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

Table 1. Correlations between Family Background Factors and the Indicators of Social Competence

Description of the relationships and the conducted regression analysis are presented below.

4.1. The child's social competence level and its relation to the family factors

As we have already proven in our previous research, girls were estimated to have higher social competence (Lazsádi, 2016, 2017b). Social competence level correlates positively with the objective indicators of social and economic well-being: schooling of the parents, the financial situation of the family, household conditions, and the active status of the mother in the work field. There is a valuable connection between social competence and factors indicating the time management of the family. As expected, the child-parent quality time correlates with social competence. The amount of time spent with the father (not necessarily based on joint activity, but the pure physical presence of the father) proves to gain even more significance, supported by the negative correlation with the absence of the father (“mother raises the child alone”). The factor referring to the child's schedule, which includes less time for screen watching, but more time on extracurricular activities strongly correlates with a high level of social competence. In addition, the amount of time that the parents spend on healthy leisure activities (factor including relationships with friends and physical exercise) correlates positively with a high level of social competence of their child. It's essential to note that both factors referring to ways of spending free time are closely linked to the SES indicators: parents with better social status invest more time in physical and mental hygiene both for themselves and for their children (factor including more extracurricular activities for children and less time watching television and factor including parents' time for meeting friends and exercising) (Lazsádi, 2017a).

Factors of stress in the family, such as chronic illness, marital conflicts or the lack of spousal satisfaction also have a negative impact on social competences. Looking at stress, the mother's unemployment or the burden of raising children alone could also cause a great deal of stress. Among educational values, the emotional-creative dimension correlates with social competence the most. Note that, the factor analysis (Lazsádi, 2017a) separated the emotional-creative educational path (the importance of the expression of emotions and of imagination) from education for responsibility (diligence responsibility, thriftiness) and from education for traditional social values (religion, national values). It is important to mention that there is a strong correlation between SES variables and educational values: educational level of the parents

correlates with an increased attention to emotional-creative values in education ($r=.163$), while parents with lower education prefer education for responsibility ($r=.155$) (Lazsádi, 2017a).

The most suitable model for multiple regression analysis explains quasi 20% of the variance of social competence with five variables (**Table 2**). This model contains the following variables: the gender of the child, the quantity of marital conflicts, the activity of the mother in the work force, the extracurricular activities of the child versus time on watching screen, and the ratio of illnesses occurring in the family. If the gender of the child is excluded from the explanatory variables, the model will still be valid, but the impact will decrease to 15.8%. In this model, the female gender increases the explanatory power with $\frac{1}{4}$.

Independent variables of family background	Beta	t	Sign.	R ²
Gender of child: woman	.212	3.102	.002	
Marital conflicts	-.224	-3.310	.001	
Unemployment of the mother	-.197	2.901	.004	.201
Child's time spent on extracurricular activities vs. watching TV	.150	2.219	.028	
Long-lasting illnesses of family members	-.145	-2.175	.031	

F (4.297) = 11.980; $p \leq .01$

Table 2. Multivariate Linear Regression Analysis on Social Competence Level of Children

At each step of the modelling process other socioeconomic factors were included as well, but for a better affirmation of the life-quality indicators only the factor of the mothers' active status in the work force was left inside, because due to this indicator the immediate correlations between other SES indicators (qualifications, financial situation) can also be identified. If the economic factor of the mother having a job is enough to sustain the explanatory model, it means that it is not necessarily the highly developed financial well-being, but the financial stability, and the emotional and social benefits of the socially active mother have a lot more to contribute to this matter. According to the multiple regression model, it can be affirmed that the development of social competence in preschool children is collectively influenced by suitable socioeconomic conditions, the balance in the relationship of spouses, the participation of the child in extracurricular activities while watching less screen and the health of parents as well.

4.2. The child’s coping in situations of interpersonal conflict and it’s relation to the family factors

As the intercorrelation between the evaluators (teacher and child) regarding coping was not significant, statistical analyses were run on both assessments. Some aspects are common along both evaluators: negotiation becomes more frequent as the child grows (Lazsádi, 2017b), what is more, it occurs more often with children of older parents. Among the other factors it can be highlighted that the SES indicators correlate with negotiation (**Table 1**): higher education, good financial situation, being active on the labour market, or even a leading position at the workplace prove a positive relation with this coping mechanism.

According to teacher-report, negotiation correlates positively with the leading position of the mother at work and with a good financial situation of the family, whereas it correlates negatively with the presence of unemployment in family. In the case of the mother being unemployed, the correlation is utterly significant. Socio-emotional indicators show that the parent’s time spent together with their children and the mother’s health correlated with negotiation.

According to the multiple regression analysis (**Table 3**), the age of the child and the parent, the mother’s health and her economic activity show an 8% explanatory power. The maturity of the parents and the children deriving from their age has a similar degree of impact on the frequency of negotiation. This is followed by the negative influence of illness and unemployment of the mother with very close coefficients.

Independent variables of family background	Beta	t	Sign.	R ²
Age of parents	.141	2.475	.014	.84
Age of child	.146	2.621	.009	
Long-lasting illness of mother	-.130	-2.343	.020	
Unemployment of the mother	-.124	-2.193	.,029	

$F(4.301) = 6.776; p \leq .01$

Table 3. Multivariate Linear Regression Analysis on the Coping Mechanism of Negotiation (*Teacher-report*)

According to the model, the use of negotiation as a coping in social conflicts is significantly enhanced by the maturity of the children and the parents, by the health and the economic contribution of the mother. *Based on the children’s evaluation of coping*, the father’s educational

level shows a positive relationship with the negotiating coping of the child. From social factors the supportive relations of the family, the satisfaction with the spouse (the factor is referring both to marital and to parental partnership satisfaction) are the ones which correlate positively, while the time that a parent spends on multimedia gadgets correlates negatively with the child's negotiation.

The multiple regression analysis model (**Table 4**) explains 8% of the total variance of negotiation according to the responses given by children. This model contains three independent variables: the age of the parent has the most significant explanatory power, followed by the occurrence of unemployment in the family, and lastly the satisfaction with spouse expressed in negative numbers. Qualification of parents occurred in many models, but it does not have a predictive character in our strongest model.

Independent variables of family background	Beta	t	Szign.	R ²
Age of parents	.179	2.756	.006	
Unemployment of one or more family member	-.177	-2.728	.007	.82
Spousal satisfaction	.134	2.066	.040	

$F(3,223) = 6.534, p \leq .01$

Table 1. Multivariate Linear Regression Analysis on the Coping Mechanism of Negotiation (Self-report)

The regression model according to the children's responses on coping scale underlines the role of parents' maturity and the parents' active status on the labour market, moreover, it shows the importance of marital satisfaction within family relationships. It is important to mention that the explanatory models on negotiations are very low, but it draws our attention to the variables that are worth analysing in more depth.

5. Discussions

The results have shown the impact of family background factors on the early development of social competence. The regression model on the social skills revealed that the economic inactivity of the mother, the lack of extracurricular activities in the child's schedule, while too much screen time, stressful situations like too many conflicts and chronic illnesses in the

family all contribute to the growth of the risk that the preschooler will have difficulties in social integration. This is more prevalent in the case of boys.

In the case of negotiation coping the model created according to the teacher-report showed that the most effective responses in conflict situations are defined by the maturity of the child and parent due to their age, as well as by the mother's health and her social and economic activity. The regression model that was based on children's self-report on coping mechanisms similarly proves that the parents' age and working activities are closely linked to the acquisition of negotiation as a coping skill and their effects become emphasized if there it is a high level of co-parenting and marital satisfaction.

Our earlier findings have predicted the significance of the child's age (Lazsádi, 2017b) which proved to have a defining role in the models referring to negotiation as well: negotiation as a verbal coping is developing until the final year in kindergarten, when the child can use verbal response in self-defence, is capable of self-discipline and to take into consideration the other's opinion. Interestingly, not only the child's age but also the parents' age is defining in the development of negotiation. This can be explained by the placidity and judiciousness the people acquire as they get older and the higher education of older parents with preschool children. Education was evident in correlations, but its explanatory power has not been confirmed. It is unexpected, however, that age takes precedence over education.

Related to gender, the result corresponds with other research findings that girls generally have better social skills in childhood (Hukkelberg, Keles, Ogden & Hammerstrøm, 2019). The disadvantageous situation of boys is in relation to the maladaptive coping techniques they tend to use, like aggression and avoidance (Lazsádi, 2016). Moreover, the lower values can be explained by the fact that educators and educational institutions favour those attitudes which are mainly girls' characteristics. This could be the reason the girls also get more positive feedback than boys in kindergarten already, which serve as a significant long-term advantage in their emergence at school – though, here we did not focus on differences according to gender.

Variables related to social and emotional well-being are prominently represented. These are the health of family members, the relationship between spouses, meaningful activities for children. To a certain extent the activity of parents in the work field can be considered a socio-emotional well-being factor as well. Although it was considered among the variables as an economic factor

and it is undoubtedly an expression of economic safety, parents having a job does not only mean an economic benefit. From the perspective of social capital theory parents' work is the condition of cultural benefits too (Bourdieu, 2010) – the acquisition of knowledge, skills, experience – and they materialize in social relations. Having a job means much more than ensuring an income for the family. It is such a cultural and social resource, which provides the child with stimuli and possibilities for development, while its absence could lead to social isolation (Morrish & Medina-Lara, 2021). It is to be highlighted the benefit of working as a linking possibility between the microsocial environment of the family and other systems outside the family (Székely, 2013). Moreover, the loss of a job or its continuous absence is a permanent and strong source of stress, accompanied by other stress factors in the explanatory models: illnesses and conflicts in the family or distress caused by dissatisfaction between spouses. The cumulative presence of all these hinders the balanced development of social competence.

Various research reports the effects of chronic illnesses of parents on the social-emotional development of children (Burt, Obradović, Long & Masten, 2008; Kaasbøll, Skokauskas, Lydersen & Sund, 2021; Spencer, 2018). Often the explanations are related to the emotional state, isolation, and the problem-solving strategy of the parent. Science is paying attention to the connection of maladaptive coping strategies, the lack of supportive relations and illnesses (Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015; Knowles, Apputhurai, O'Brien, Ski, Thompson, & Castle; 2020; Kristofferzon, Engström & Nilsson, 2018). It is likely that not only the stress caused by the illness itself, but also the consequent coping models have a lot to say in the matter of the child's attitude towards problems. Impacts of health, work and spousal relationships, and the fact that they enhance each other has been unfolded by the sociologist, Coleman (1998), in the social capital theory. In his interpretation the relationships between people highly influence their health but is possible interpretation the other way around: the way people assess their health does not depend only on their physical state, but also on the level of stress they are exposed to along with their social relations and economic situation (Kopp & Martos, 2011).

The most important human relations are those that are formed in the intimacy and safety of the family (Coleman, 1990). The emotional well-being of the parent, the satisfaction with the spousal and parental partnership is beneficial for the child's social development as well (Camisasca, Miragoli, Di Blasio & Feinberg, 2019; Irving & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2002; Peltz,

Rogge & Sturge-Apple, 2018). Consequently, a relaxed atmosphere can provide good conditions for the achievement of individual goals and the development of proactive and initiative-taking. Good spousal relations provide the parents' effective interpersonal coping and good conflict-solving mechanisms, which can all serve as adaptive coping models for the child.

When speaking about family relationships, it is important to mention that the father's presence is a correlating factor with social skills. The latent or manifested impacts of the father's presence in the family can be seen in many aspects of life: emotional and economic safety, the fulfilment of family roles can all justify his relationship with social competence. As divorce is usually preceded by a series of conflicts, it is inevitable to ask the question of whether the conflicting family atmosphere or the lack of the father's presence is the defining factor. The concomitance between the frequency of parental conflicts on different issues (Lazsádi, 2017a), may express that, independently from causes, conflicts between parents can be rooted in their models of interpersonal coping.

All the examined social skills have shown correlations with the factor of leisure activities: the parent-child time-together, the time parents dedicate to a healthy lifestyle and child's extracurricular activities in the detriment of watching television. Only the latter had explanatory power besides other economic and psychosocial factors. The participation of children in extracurricular activities can contribute to the development of social competence in many ways. According to Dyson (2010), extracurricular activities outside kindergarten and school can help learners in making up for deficiencies. As far as development is concerned, these activities provide the child with a proper environment for interaction where he can exercise his social skills in new relationships. This environment contains the same "loose bonds", namely loose relationships, which the social capital theories find so important in their views on the social mobility of adult population (Granovetter, 1991) – and it also appears among the correlating variables under the name of supportive relations of the parents. Besides extracurricular activities, this factor contains the time the child spends in front of the screen too, expressed in negative numbers. The effects of watching too much screen depend on various factors, but its negative impact on social development is most certainly the passivity of the child and the lack of social interaction (Oswald, Rumbold, Kedzior & Moore, 2020; Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Kósa, 2004).

Summing up the correlations between negotiation as a coping mechanism and family background factors, the image becomes coherent: together with the growth of the child, the socioeconomic and psychosocial influence of the family grows as well. The material aspects of living conditions and social stratification are expressed by variables referring to unemployment and indirectly, by poor schooling. According to our models the experience of parents due to their age, in addition a balanced professional, personal life correlates positively with their children use of adaptive coping, namely negotiation. The enlisted factors are the elements of health in a general sense. The common root of adaptive coping and a general state of balance is appositely reflected in the explanation offered by Albert-Lőrincz (2011, p. 34) about the modern interpretation of health, saying “health is the capacity to adapt to the constantly changing expectations and conditions of life.”.

6. Conclusions

Competencies in early childhood are rarely examined in a complex manner, by a multilateral mapping of background factors. The purpose of the paper was to reveal patterns which describe the interplay of microsocial factors on social skills in the preschool years. Alongside those factors which enhance positive outcomes, the findings draw attention to a few microsocial factors which may represent a risk. The models didn't have a strong explanatory power, it is necessary to continue the data processing by keeping certain background variables under control during the regression analysis.

From the examined demographic variables, the gender of the child and the age of both the child and the parent proved to be important. The primordial importance of the SES indicators in the development of social competence wasn't confirmed in our sample, but the impact of non-material/sociocultural indicators appeared to be more obvious: factors of social and economic activity of parents (outstandingly the mothers' activity in the work force), health and healthy lifestyle, a mostly tension-free family atmosphere, the child's participation in extracurricular activities while having less screentime, all took important role in the development of social competence. Although the SES variables were not present directly in the explanatory models with a large influence, it is to note that most of the significantly effective factors were correlated with a good social status of the family. This explains that not necessarily a very high social

position promotes the development of social competence, but a stable climate is important. The revealed factors are more like the threshold between deprived, very bad socioeconomic conditions and an economically, socially, and emotionally balanced environment. It is important to keep in mind that our findings refer to the average urban population; what is more, families with good SES indicators are a little bit overrepresented in the sample. This is precisely one of the limitations of the research. In the case of extremities along SES factors, stronger explanatory models are expected.

Analysing the groups with extreme social conditions could be one way to continue research. The most decisive variables should be investigated in specific, vulnerable groups both with quantitative and qualitative methods. We are already conducting participatory observations in several kindergarten groups, but the data has not been processed yet. Besides, a longitudinal continuation of the research promises the greatest results, for which our database has all the capabilities.

At the level of educational practice, the results of the present research have revealed the necessity of such prevention programs which counts with the child's social context and interfere on different levels. We consider the pillars recommended by Albert-Lőrincz (2012) very important: to strengthen the problem-solving skills of the individual, enhance changes in the environment and provide the long-term sustainability of resources. For an effective realization of activities that enhance the development of social skills, our findings have come up with important differentiating criteria, such as the age and gender of the child, socioeconomic status and its' relationship with health, lifestyle, behavioural models.

Findings confirmed the necessity of the inclusion of certain sociological aspects in teacher training. Proper knowledge of the children's microenvironment and its broader social definition would help pedagogues to make much more prudent decisions as far as prevention or intervention techniques are concerned. Moreover, knowledge about the children's problems would help teachers in their choice of the most suitable method of teaching and discipline. Kindergartens and schools eminently need those pedagogues who have a vast knowledge of children and sociology, good pedagogical practice and such an educational belief, which does not hinder children belonging to one socialization type to benefit the other.

At the same time, the results suggest solutions that are not necessarily confined to the boundaries of educational activities within kindergarten and school, but rather in organizing extracurricular activities, developmental activities based on socio-emotional learning both for children and parents. Although there is a wide range of extracurricular activities, especially in the urban environment, in the absence of basic economic background and in the lack of information these are unavailable for those children who need them most.

On a macro level, besides the reduction of financial gaps, it would be extremely beneficial if such socio-political or civil measures were initiated which would involve at least the part-time employment of unemployed mothers, meaning the activation of mothers outside the family and the enhancement of social roles for isolated mothers. The correlations between the mother's social inactivity and health problems with social competence urge us to believe that the organization of mental hygiene programs and training for mothers is an absolute necessity. Furthermore, as soon as the presence of father was shown to be important, father supporting programs could be a great opportunity to enhance to success of social development. Parent engagement programs are becoming popular in early childhood education, and that is a possibility to equalize educational differences arising from SES inequalities. The study demonstrates the importance of targeting the entire family in social-emotional development.

The strength of the research is also its limitation: seeking for relationship between many variables and the coordination of the points of view of several evaluators was adequate for a versatile mapping of the influencing background factors, but it is difficult to navigate through the data and results are not enough yet to explain deeper connections. That is open for further research. The results give possibilities for interdisciplinary interpretations, but due to space limitations nor the theoretical framework nor the explanations did not strive for it. Even so, findings can be useful for educational, psychological, sociological further research.

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