

# FAMILY INFLUENCE ON FORMATION OF CHILDREN'S MANIPULATIVE ATTITUDES

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**Abstract.** The article raises the issue of children's manipulation, and examines the conditions contributing to the formation of the manipulative attitudes. As such are analyzed: importance of these attitudes for the child, existence of manipulative attitudes in parents, family microclimate and position to the manipulations in society.

According to the results of an empirical study, the characteristics of the family, provoking the development of manipulative behavior in children, are described. The members of this family hardly cooperate with each other and others, are focused on self-interests, and try to satisfy them without much effort, and by using the people around them. It is accompanied by the insincerity and lack of attention to the child, and most of all to his needs, feelings and emotional stress.

**Keywords:** manipulations, manipulative attitudes, microclimate in the family, formation of disposition to manipulation

## 1. Introduction

Now, no one doubts that the behavior of parents and their parenting style largely predetermine the development of personality traits and behavior patterns in their children. In part, this is a deliberate attempt of the children to behave in the same way as the others, and it is partly an unconscious imitation, which is one of the aspects of identification with the others.

However, in the literature, as a rule, is discussed the influence of democratic, authoritarian or permissive parenting styles on the formation of certain traits of the child, and the impact of the manipulative influences of parents is undeservedly overlooked by the psychologists.

First of all, we shall note that the purpose of manipulation - while hiding one's true intentions, to induce another person to commit certain actions, change

the values, ideas, opinions and the like, at the same time keeping the illusion of independence, autonomy of decisions or actions. Through a variety of tricks and techniques one performs various actions imperceptibly to a person, prompting him to do what he does not want, to turn away from what he aspires, but also create a confidence in him that he is acting on his own will [1, 2, 4, 6 and others].

At first glance it seems that the manipulation of the children by the adults is fully justified by the good intentions (to keep them out of trouble, etc.). But one must not forget that the manipulation in the first place is the use of another person in order to obtain one's own benefit, and the psychological meaning of the manipulation is to control the behavior of people, to manage them, to get power over them or benefits by limiting their freedom. In general, the manipulation of children grows out of a false understanding of the responsibility that is perceived as a constant intrusive control and deprivation of the child's right for independence.

Manipulations can be used circumstantially and unconsciously as well as consciously, purposefully, i.e. becoming a common way to interact with the children. And here is completely unclear whether the manipulative attitudes of the parents influence the formation of such in their children? Social attitudes of the parents may differ but what will happen to the formation of the social attitudes in a child?

All this formed the basis for the empirical study, the *purpose* of which was to determine the effect of the manipulative

attitudes of parents on the formation of such in their children.

## 2. Respondents, study methods and results

*Respondents.* The study involved 15 families with children ranging from 8 to 10 years old. In total, the study involved 30 adults and 30 children.

*Study methods:* Questionnaire "Machiavellianism" - a technique created by American scientists Christie and Geis to determine Machiavellian (manipulative) attitudes of personality. We used a version of this technique for adults (Mach-4) and a children's test for Machiavellianism (Kiddie Mach Test).

*Study results.* The data allowed to divide respondents into three groups: those with a high level of Machiavellianism, middle and low levels of Machiavellianism. Most of the spouses had a middle level of Machiavellian attitudes intensity, but we were interested, first of all, in those respondents with significantly high Machiavellian tendencies. Such were 29% males and 31% females. Moreover, almost 40% of the children also had high level of Machiavellian tendencies, suggesting the influence of the manipulative attitudes of the parents on the formation of such in children. Further analysis confirmed that. Not only in the cases where the manipulative attitudes of the spouses matched, but if the father's level of Machiavellianism was high, the child also had a strong tendency. The high level of Machiavellianism of the mother also influenced the level of the child's Machiavellianism. Thus, the manipulative tendencies of fathers and mothers can equally contribute to the development of such tendencies in their children. In general, in the group of parents with high scores in Machiavellianism scale a positive correlation with the scores of Machiavellianism in children is established, the higher Machiavellianism is

in the parents, the higher it is in the children ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

Thus, the existence of manipulative attitudes in parents provokes the formation of such in their children. Perhaps this is a simple copy of their behavior, as well as the formation of the attitude to manipulations as behavior that benefits the child.

However, it can be assumed that the microclimate in the family will also contribute to the formation of the manipulative attitudes in children. Our previous studies have shown that the existence of the manipulative attitudes lowers the couple's marital satisfaction [4], and this suggests that the socio-psychological climate in the family is unsatisfactory. Therefore, the child will grow up in poor conditions, or in the terminology of some authors, in a dysfunctional family. However, the question remains as to what kind of characteristics of such dysfunctional family will provoke the formation of disposition to manipulation in children. In this regard, we have continued the study.

The *purpose* of it was to determine the characteristics of the family (referred to by the analogy with the literature references as dysfunctional), provoking the development of manipulative tendencies in children.

*Respondents.* The study involved 56 boys and girls, high school students aged 15 to 17 and 5 school teachers.

*Study methods.* To determine the characteristics of family problems in the families of students, the method of expert judges was used. The experts were 5 school employees: head of the teaching department, head of the teaching department for educational work, two teachers working with these children, school psychologist.

From the literature references [3, 7, 8 and others], 15 characteristics of a dysfunctional family have been identified. On their basis a profile has been compiled, which was presented to experts for

evaluation of the intensity of the characteristics of families in which children are brought up. To diagnose the level of intensity of the manipulation disposition of the high school students have also been used the "Mach - 4" technique.

*Study results.* On the basis of expert evaluations, two groups of students were identified: the first group consisted of young men and women who live in dysfunctional families (25 people) and the second group was formed by the young men and women living in problem-free families (31 people).

The results of the study of Machiavellian tendencies of teenagers from problem-free and dysfunctional families are shown in Fig. 1.

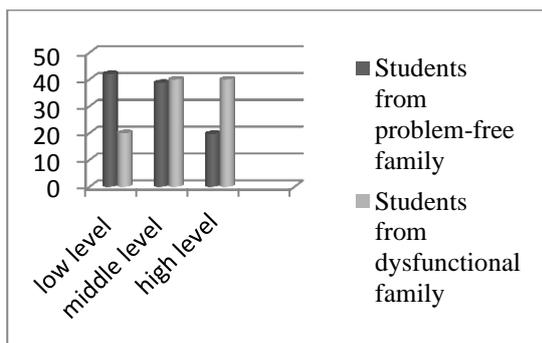


Fig. 1. Intensity of Machiavellian tendencies in students from problem-free and dysfunctional families (in %)

As can be seen from Figure 1, among the teenagers from dysfunctional families there are two times more those with the high level of Machiavellianism intensity, and more than two times less persons with the low level of intensity of manipulative attitudes. The significant differences between them ( $\chi^2 = 4,125$  with  $p \leq 0,05$ ) suggests that the students from the problem-free families are less predisposed to the manipulative behavior.

Of the variety offered by the characteristics of a dysfunctional family, the experts selected the following parameters: orientation of the family on their own selfish interests and lack of disposition to the cooperation, low level of

group cohesion, attraction to momentary pleasures that do not require any effort, insincerity, desire to use others for one's own purposes, lack of attention to the child and lack of concern about him, ignoring the inner world and experiences of the child (Fig. 2).

The use of U - Mann-Whitney test showed the presence of significant differences between the two groups of students according to this parameters ( $U_{Emp} = 0$  with  $p \leq 0.05$ ).

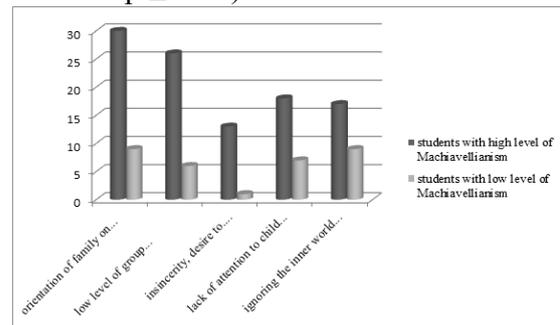


Fig. 2. Intensity of dysfunctional family parameters in a group of students with high and low levels of Machiavellianism

It is easy to see that each of the selected characteristics of a dysfunctional family can contribute to the formation of a predisposition in children to manipulative behavior, but it turned out that the characteristics are closely linked. We have found a positive correlation between the orientation of the family on their own selfish interests and the lack of attention to the child and the lack of concern about him ( $p \leq 0.01$ ); between the priority of reaching success with minimum labor and insincerity, the desire to use others for one's own purposes, and the suppression of feelings and needs of the child ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). This allows us to describe the family, provoking the development of the manipulative attitudes in children as follows. Family members hardly cooperate with each other and others, are focused on self-interest, and try to satisfy them without much effort, and by using the people around them. It is accompanied by the insincerity and lack of attention to the

child, and most of all to his needs, feelings and emotional stress.

### 3. Discussion of results

So, as fairly pointed out by E. Shostrom, people are not born manipulators, they become such. They are created out of small children by leading them into the manipulative world of modern man. The first lesson they get from their parents, who, in turn, represent a finished product of the modern manipulative society [6]. Up to a certain time, the parents quite successfully manage to manipulate their children. It even brings visible results, but many years later, when the children start to manipulate their parents, the last begin to reap the fruits of their upbringing.

In addition to the targeted education of parents, the microclimate in the family affects the child. Watching how parents manipulate each other, the child also learns the manipulative behavior attitudes.

However, in order to make this method of interaction to be reinforced, and then to appear in the child's relationships with other people, this is not enough. It is necessary for the child to realize his own gain from the manipulations and strive to them for the benefit.

Manipulation, despite a number of advantages (quick results with minimum waste of time and labor, etc.), is non-constructive communication, as evidenced by the obtained data. Then how can one change the manipulative attitudes?

As known, attitude change occurs when there is a mismatch in a cognitive structure. For example, the customary manipulative attitude to use others for one's own purposes confronts a positive attitude to the person in relation to whom the manipulation is supposed to be carried out. Since the impetus for the attitude change is the need of the individual for restoring cognitive conformity [5], it can be assumed that the more loving people in

a child's life, the more likely the refusal of the child from the manipulative behavior.

Thus, the change of the manipulative attitudes can be analyzed in terms of changes in the active position of the child, caused by the development of his personality. But it can also be analyzed from the point of view of the content of the objective social changes affecting the given level of dispositions, such as change of microclimate in the family. Finally, there is one more important factor - social situation, if society itself will not be encouraging the manipulative behavior of its citizens.

So, whether the children become manipulators or not, depends on many factors: on the significance of these attitudes for the child, the existence of manipulative attitudes in the parents, microclimate in the family and society in general. In this case, one can agree with a number of scientists that if there is the social resistance to this kind of behavior, the manipulative attitudes of both parents and their children will become unprofitable, and thus, the manipulations will lose their attractiveness as failing to meet the main condition - obtaining benefits for oneself at the expense of the other.

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