

## Manipulating a Child in the Family: Exploring Family Empowerment Models for Developing Positive Relationships

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Received 29 November 2019 ▪ Revised 21 December 2019 ▪ Accepted 22 December 2019

### *Abstract*

Children and young people are one of the most vulnerable population to various forms of manipulation. The most common manipulative strategies used by parents are emotional and cognitive manipulation in situations like: marital disagreements, divorces, parental blackmail, economic exploitation of the child, imposition of their own ambitions on the child, etc. The results indicate that a large number of parents who have experienced some form of partner violence estimate that their children demonstrate behavioral changes and risky behaviors. This leads to the conclusion that unstable and conflicting relationships between spouse/partner can be a critical factor for inappropriate relationships with the child, and that unstable families are a very strong predictor of the child's asocial behavior.

*Keywords:* family relationships, child manipulation, violent behavior among partners, children's behavioral changes.

### 1. Introduction

Children and young people are one of the most vulnerable population to various forms of manipulation. The consequences for children make their healthy development and adoption of socially acceptable behaviors difficult and impossible. Considering the variety of forms and sources of manipulation and its consequences, we consider it justified and often inevitable to consider manipulation as a form of violence. Manipulation without regards to the victim's age is considered an immoral behavior that causes harm to another person by force and intimidation, deprives accurate information, denies healthy development and any form of freedom and sound decisions. Unlike physical violence with frequent explicit reactions from the abuser (and victim), psychological or cognitive intimidation is much more successful because it attempts to mislead, deceive, or other, mostly covert strategies, to eliminate its resistance and focus on the behavior by which the manipulator achieves personal benefit. Sometimes someone can consciously consent to the demands of the manipulator, without taking responsibility for their destiny and actions or avoiding facing the problems. Despite inevitably different views on the (un)justification of manipulation, child manipulation is one of the immoral phenomena considered in this paper in the context of domestic violence. The basic goal is to make systematic coercion, control, subordination, and as intense emotional and physical dependence on the other person (parents)

as possible, based on inaccurate information, and as revengeful behavior towards a partner or other person with whom the manipulator is in conflict. To describe the manipulation process would mean to describe the forms of intimidation, which depends on the rich repertoire of the manipulator. Basic manipulation techniques are often cognitive and emotional. For example, appeal to feelings, beautifying reality, psychic compulsions, deceiving, invoking authority, provoking fear, etc.; while cognitive manipulation techniques affect the very content of the message – altering and distorting reality, misinforming, lying about facts, misleading, and forcing the victim to consent.

- Considering the consequences of manipulation, we can consider it as a form of violence.
- Unlike physical violence, hidden forms of manipulation are difficult to detect.
- Basic manipulation techniques are often cognitive and emotional type.
- The results of the conducted research indicate that a large number of parents who have experienced some form of partner violence estimate that their children demonstrate behavioral changes.
- Unstable and conflicting relationships between spouse/partner can be a critical factor for inappropriate relationships with the child.

Some parents, especially when it comes to conflict marriages or divorces, try to portray their behavior entirely as childcare, although there are clear differences and boundaries between upbringing, protection and manipulation, consistency and indecision, freedom and subordination, as well as coercion to accept someone's opinions or behaviors that are not in the best interests of the child. At the same time, there are numerous opportunities to reduce the perceived problems of helping parents and children alike. The educational role of pre-school institutions, schools and social support at various levels plays a central role in the accomplishment of these tasks. Contemporary pedagogy focuses on the everyday problems of children and parents, as well as new functional literacies and competences in fostering the upbringing and development of children. Overcoming manipulative behaviors by parents and promoting the pedagogical culture of parents are prerequisites for the humane relationship of parents in caring for their child.

## 2. Children manipulation in the family – Forms and strategies

Despite proclamations about family as a place of love and safety, there are many paradoxes, including those related to child manipulation. According to the official and court reports, media reports, and many situations in everyday life, the family practice of manipulating children is very rich. Being aware of the complexity of the problem, our analysis contains only some basic forms and procedures of emotional and cognitive manipulation of children, especially in situations of conflict and divorce, material exploitation of the child, emotional blackmail and use of parental authority, manipulation of upbringing and discipline, as well as some situations in which parents promote personal goals and ambitions regardless of desires, interests or abilities, and even regardless of the health of the child (Zloković, 2007a).

Conflicts during the marriage or (pre)divorce phase or after the divorce can be short or long term, depending on whether the children have been brought into a network of parental hostility and manipulation. A study conducted by Macuka and Jurkin (2014), which aimed to examine the role of children's perceptions of different dimensions of parental conflict in explaining the prevalence of externalized and internalized problems of young adolescents, found that frequent conflicts between parents who are hostile and not constructively solved represent a risk factor that may adversely affect children's psychosocial functioning. Affected by abandonment by a partner, parents can turn to manipulating the child's feelings, developmental needs, and generally his or her rights. Everyday practice records numerous cases of child manipulation. Some parents often put the child in very unfavorable situations before or after the divorce, such as: the

child acting as a mediator between the parents; a child who is forced to assume the role of the former “partner”; obstruction of equal parental child care; denying the child the right to see and live with the other parent; the denial of the child's right to see his grandparents by the other, “non-caring” parent (Zloković, 2007a).

Parent manipulator use the child for mediation in communication, thus, fighting with the person with whom he/she has recently been in a partnership (“Tell your mother”, “Tell your father”, “Warn your father/mother not to speak to me”, etc.). The child is often expected to act as a mediator or otherwise emotionally and physically participate in the conflict between the parents. In this role, the child is most often confused and intimidated. He begins to perceive his family and the world around him as insecure places, and in his relationships with other people or towards himself he shows distrust and guilt. By manipulating feelings, some parents blame the child for disagreement, abandoning a partner, or trying to make him or her “partner” with whom he or she will share all problems and solve all life situations. The other parent is mostly talked about negatively, and on an emotional level, the child is blackmailed and forced to show evidence of loyalty and love (“If you leave me too, I will die/kill myself”, etc.).

The responsibility of the child sometimes shifts to the level of responsibility of the adult, which, given the consequences, is considered detrimental to the child's further development (Zloković, 2007 a). There are numerous cases of denial of the right to see another, “non-custodial” parent, where the custodial parent invokes the protection and best interests of the child. In fact, manipulating the child often obstructs the child's developmental and other rights (fabricating symptoms of the illness of the child, busy school and extra-curricular responsibilities, insufficient care for the child while staying with the “visitor parent”, etc.). A lot of manipulator parents expect unconditional emotional gratitude and “debt repayment” for caring for child, as opposed to another (not)caring parent who either “dislikes” them or “left” both of them. Putting a child in a situation of having a dual role towards parents is not a rare occurrence, although speaking about manipulation, it does represent a form of violence (Zloković, 2007a).

In the context of marital instability, the breakdown of nuclear families, and the establishment of new – binuclear families or cohabitation relationships, the role of grandparents remains more important in terms of family relationships (Johnson & Barer, 1987). Denying the rights to see grandparents, considering the developmental role of older family members (especially in divorce situations), manipulation of the child becomes even more pronounced and far more reaching. Grandparents provide many often “unrecognized” functions in modern families (Szinovacz, 1998). Often, they provide an economic source to young generations and other family members (Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994); contribute to the solidarity and continuity of the family through time (King, 1994; Silverstein, Giarrusso & Bengtson, 1998); they provide the basis of stability for teenage mothers who are raising new-borns and have been abandoned by their partners. During the first year of divorce, two-fifths of divorced mothers move in with their parents again until they start living independently again (McLanahan, 1983; Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993, according to Bengtson, 2001). Perhaps the most dramatic example is one in which grandparents, as their only loved ones, raise their grandchildren or even great-grandchildren. Obstruction of economic care for the child, considering possible existential and developmental consequences, must also be considered in the context of manipulation. Results of the Single Family Study - Personal Experiences and Environmental Attitudes show that a parent with whom a child does not live is rarely involved in child care (State Institute for the Protection of the Family, Maternity and Youth, 2003, more in: Report of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, 2004: 34).

In the context of material blackmail among parents and the economic exploitation of the child, placing the child (or adult) in an emotional, physical or economic position in which promises, pranks, blackmail, coercion or intimidation are used to satisfy any personal interests

and needs without leading taking care of his feelings, abilities, health, age and negative consequences or harm of any kind is considered to be *exploitative*.

It is evident an interaction of different forms of economic exploitation of children such as: deprivation of a child's basic means of subsistence; materializing the child's intimacy; material blackmail of partners – as a condition of meeting a child; manipulating the illness and health needs of the child. According to the UNICEF Report on the Analysis of the State of the Rights of the Child in Croatia, the economic exploitation of children refers to the “unauthorized disposal of a child's material resources” (UNICEF, 2014: 121). In 2013, the Ombudsman for Children received 26 inquiries and complaints of this type, some of which related to the exploitation of children by family members (UNICEF, 2014). Some parents satisfy their personal needs by depriving children of their basic material resources – alimony, family pensions, assistance from a social welfare center, etc., while leaving child care to others, often, grandparents and relatives who are emotionally blackmailed into doing something “if they love a child”. In the reports of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children of the Republic of Croatia, for many years, we continuously keep finding examples where some mothers leave children to care for their elderly parents, do not contact their children, contribute to their maintenance, but use the property of their minor children, such as child allowance, family property, etc. The partner's material blackmail is also a possible “source” of income for some mothers who require child's father to regularly see the child and participate in its upbringing with high amounts of money, and after some of them succeed, they continue to blackmail and manipulate the children (Zloković, 2007a).

By appealing to the moral sense and humanity of relatives, friends, or strangers, some manipulative parents also exploit the (poor) health of the child by extorting money, housing, etc. Emotional dependence, excessive control or overprotection is also considered harmful for the development of the child, keeping the child exposed to psychological pressure for a long time in an extremely limited emotional and social environment.

Practices in which parents impose their ambitions as an obligation on their children are very dangerous, as well. Satisfying the wishes and interests of the parents only, and parent's demands that are not in line with the child's gender, age, abilities, health or interests, have many negative consequences for the child. An illustrative example of parental manipulation is found in different areas of life, and it often occurs if the child becomes a “transmitter” of parental ambitions and desires, or, if the parent blackmails and complains about the child's own failures. The consequences of manipulation are not always immediate. Many manipulated persons even manifest their feelings of “satisfaction” due to the fact that, in a certain way, someone cares for them, that they do not have to take responsibility for their own decisions, as well as for a sense of apparent freedom.

Reasons why some parents treat their children inappropriately can only partly be found in repeating their parents' behavior patterns, as well as in a personal specific value system, or in the belief that their children are morally and justifiably used in pursuing all their personal interests – emotional or material.

The strategies that manipulative parents can use are very diverse, and here are just a few that can be conditionally presented as strategies for emotional and cognitive manipulation of children. *Emotional manipulation* is evident in the cases like: false parental empathy and acting unconditional child care; indulging the child and tweaking it only to make it difficult or impossible for the other parent to communicate with the child; continuous appeal to the emotions of the child; playing the role of the parent of the benefactor, i.e. the parent of the martyr; encouraging the child to feel guilty if he or she is in contact with the other parent; creating emotional (co)dependence on one parent; covert child intimidation for any attempt to deny parental love; concealment of actual verbal or physical aggression; extorting the opportunity for new evidence – emotional blackmail. Emotional blackmail directed toward the child in scientific and professional literature is described

as forms of emotional “slavery”, emotional “incest”, abuse of power of authority, or the promotion of the role of the parent of the “sufferer” (Zloković, 2007a). In the pattern of emotional bondage or even emotional incest – also referred to as “Daddy Princesses” and “Little Princes” syndrome – the parent often shows love for the child in the way he or she loves a partner (Soulwork Systematic Coaching). The parent turns to the child as the source of the partner’s love and, infrequently, even very consciously, expects the child to fulfil his or her emotional needs, as a person in a partner relationship would normally do. The real partner is rejected or moved to an imaginary or marginal role. The incestuous upbringing style, erotic comments and exhibitionist behaviors that enter the sexual intimacy of the child and encourage sexual fantasies against the parent are considered manipulation and violence against the child. Demanding emotional support as partner’s one, sharing feelings, responsibilities, making important shared decisions are appropriate for adult relationships, but not for the parent-child relationship. Situations in which parents are divorced, and the child lives with the parent of the opposite sex are particularly delicate (Zloković, 2007a).

Parents who emotionally bind a child to themselves try to maintain it even when they are adults. There are various manipulation procedures involved: causing guilt, emotional blackmail, requests to spend time solely together, until you show jealousy or anger at your child’s partner. Emotional “repayment” for birth and parental care, given the ability to manipulate some children, becomes lifelong. The manipulator parent can also use the “power of authority” and incite fear to achieve a personal goal. Parental pseudo-authority allows for a quick and straightforward decision to adopt parental thinking and/or behavior. This type of “argument” is also based on justifiable trust in the authority of the parent, as well as in the name of the principle that the child alone “cannot” check everything that is proposed to him (Breton, 1996).

Even with the imposed and excessive attention to the child, one sometimes tries to replace the other parent, the one who is blamed for neglect, although this is often not true. The parent in the role of “sufferer” (re)emphasizes his sacrifice for the child, assumes the child’s responsibilities, allows the child to make all decisions independently and without consulting the other parent, as in many other ways trying to obtain (“buy”) the love of his own child.

Strategies of *cognitive manipulation* (although difficult to separate from emotional) are often expressed as: creating a precise plan and tactic in separating the child from another parent or relative; insincerity towards the child and lies about the other parent or relative’s parents; misinformation and concealment of one’s goals in separating the child from the family; selective inattention – “accidental” mistakes and omissions; child care overload; transferring blame to others, unknown child, culprits or other parent; strategies for the subsequent remediation of harm if the child manifests the unintended consequences of manipulation as a stressful situation; establishing control over the victim – her needs, interests, movement; coercion to consent to a child’s loyalty and obligations to the child who manipulates the child (Zloković, 2007).

Manipulation is often masked by various messages and phrases that can be read – “I think for you”, “Ask nothing and do only what I order”, “I am your only parent/friend”, “It’s best for you”, “Look for nothing else, no better”, “If you let me down, don’t count on me anymore”, “Your father/mother doesn’t love us anymore”, “Your father/mother doesn’t want to see you anymore”, etc., which may be manipulated by children and young people in different situations and for various reasons.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 *Sample*

Based on the *Family Discourse in the Context of Domestic Violence Survey* conducted in 2017 as part of the project “Pedagogical Aspects of Family Relations” at the University of Rijeka, we used the instrument (more in Zloković & Čekolj, 2018) in which the focus is on adults who are personally experienced or committed violence among or against spouses or extra-marital partners (N=200). Both sexes were equally involved in the study: women (52.5%, N=105) and men (47.5%, N=95), of whom 184 were parents.

Sixty-four respondents had one child (34.8%); seventy-seven respondents had two children (41.8%); fifteen respondents had three children (8.2%); three respondents had four children (1.6%). Five children had a smaller number of respondents (N=2; 1.1%), six and eight children had an equal number of respondents (N=1; 0.2%).

Overall, the interviewed parents had 299 children. There were 48 parents of male children (29.4%); parents of female children 58 (35.6%) and male and female 57 (35.0%) parents.

#### 3.2 *Instrument*

For the purpose of this research, a special instrument has been constructed based on the scientific literature and previous research, as well as direct professional experience in dealing with family relationships. The first part of the questionnaire contained elimination questions that determined the further course of completing the questionnaire. The second part of the questionnaire concerned respondents with children who were asked about the number of children, their age and gender. This section also included questions about the consequences that partner violence experienced or committed on children (e.g. anxiety, psychosomatic problems, aggressive behaviors, fear, academic difficulties, etc.) and possible forms of violence experienced or perpetrated against children (e.g. false reports to institutions for actions and behavior in relation to the child, emotional blackmailing of partners, prevention of seeing the child, etc.).

### 4. Results

Based on questions regarding to parents’ self-assessment of changes in their children’s behavior that they consider to have occurred as a result of conflicting behaviors between them and the partner, the findings indicate a high number of children living in unhealthy family environments. The majority of respondents, almost half, saw the onset of sadness, anxiety and irritability (47.9%) as a change in children’s behavior. Less than 5% of respondents indicated that their children began to show distrust towards their mother (2.2%), fear of stepmother (0.6%), fear of stepfather (4.3%). The second most frequent children’s behavioral change respondents cited an excessive need for attention (39.8%), followed by defiance and disobedience (38.1%). It is also worth mentioning that a large percentage of the answers indicate that children subsequently withdraw into themselves (35%), but also avoid spending time together at home (30.1%) and tend to lie, invent and overdo it (31.9%) and anxiety (36.2%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Parents' self-assessment of perceived changes in children's behavior as a cause of partner violence

Frequency (Percentage %)

N=163

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often+ Very often
Sadness / anxiety / irritability	18 (11.0%)	26 (16.0%)	37 (22.7%)	78 (47.9%)
Unfounded fears / anxiety	37 (22.7%)	29 (17.8%)	34 (20.9%)	59 (36.2%)
Retreat into yourself	33 (20.2%)	23 (14.1%)	46 (28.2%)	57 (35.0%)
Excessive need for attention	40 (24.5%)	22 (13.5%)	32 (19.6%)	65 (39.8%)
Depression	73 (44.8%)	24 (14.7%)	28 (17.2%)	31 (19.0%)
Spending time alone in the house	58 (35.6%)	19 (11.7%)	34 (20.9%)	49 (30.1%)
Self-injury	123 (75.5%)	8 (4.9%)	16 (9.8%)	12 (7.4%)
Psychosomatic problems (frequent headaches, headaches, skin problems, etc.)	60 (36.8%)	19 (11.7%)	30 (18.4%)	49 (30.0%)
Sleeping difficulties	69 (42.3%)	28 (17.2%)	30 (18.4%)	32 (19.6%)
Eating difficulties	60 (36.8%)	21 (12.9%)	32 (19.6%)	47 (28.8%)
Defiance and disobedience	32 (19.6%)	31 (19.0%)	31 (19.0%)	62 (38.1%)
Aggressive behavior towards others	62 (38.0%)	27 (16.6%)	28 (17.2%)	40 (24.5%)
Aggressive behavior towards animals	124 (76.1%)	14 (8.6%)	7 (4.3%)	15 (9.2%)
Destruction of material goods	99 (60.7%)	19 (11.7%)	16 (9.8%)	24 (15.5%)
Lying, fabricating and / or covering up events, exaggerating	61 (37.4%)	27 (16.6%)	19 (11.7%)	52 (31.9%)
Absence from home	113 (69.3%)	16 (9.8%)	8 (4.9%)	15 (9.2%)
Hostile disposition towards family members	53 (32.5%)	31 (19.0%)	29 (17.8%)	45 (27.6%)
Restraint from other family members	60 (36.8%)	25 (15.3%)	19 (11.7%)	54 (33.2%)
Fear of father	81 (49.7%)	19 (11.7%)	21 (12.9%)	33 (20.2%)
Fear of mother	80 (49.1%)	14 (8.6%)	22 (13.5%)	39 (24.0%)
Fear of stepfather	86 (52.8%)	4 (2.5%)	5 (3.1%)	7 (4.3%)
Fear of stepmother	92 (56.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)
Distrust of father	67 (41.1%)	30 (18.4%)	22 (13.5%)	38 (23.3%)
Distrust of mother	75 (46.0%)	22 (13.5%)	20 (12.3%)	38 (23.4%)
Distrust of stepfather	83 (50.9%)	3 (1.8%)	5 (3.1%)	9 (5.5%)
Distrust of stepmother	90 (55.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.6%)	4 (2.2%)
Distrust of adults in general	65 (39.9%)	27 (16.6%)	34 (20.9%)	28 (17.2%)
Difficulties in relationships with peers	63 (38.7%)	24 (14.7%)	29 (17.8%)	43 (26.3%)
Behavioral difficulties in school / kindergarten	73 (44.8%)	19 (11.7%)	20 (12.3%)	44 (27.0%)
Learning / concentration difficulties	49 (30.1%)	24 (14.7%)	28 (17.2%)	48 (29.4%)
Deterioration of school achievement	63 (38.7%)	23 (14.1%)	19 (11.7%)	36 (22.0%)

Except the observed changes considering to parents, family and various other psychosomatic problems, according to the parent's observation, children also show difficulties in relation to their peers (26.3%), learning difficulties (29.4%) and school achievement (22%). Good school or kindergarten behavior (27%) is also disrupted. It is evident that a large number of children face many life difficulties early on. By cumulating the problem, one can also talk about the potential adoption of some risky lifestyles.

When we talk about the occurrence and frequency of forms of manipulation among partners, a large number of findings were noted suggesting that there were inadequate relationships in families attended by children. The largest number of respondents stated that they

often or very often experienced verbal conflict with their partner in front of the child (55.8%). Slightly less than half of the respondents stated that they experienced obstruction of active participation in the child’s upbringing and life (45.4%) or intimidation of the child by the other parent (43.5%). Certainly, we can’t neglect the results that show that 40.5% experienced withholding information about a child; spousal violence against the child (38.7%), emotional blackmail (35.6%), material exploitation and misappropriation of money intended for the child (35.6%), prevention of seeing and meeting the child (35%). The smallest number of respondents stated that they had reported to institutions for violent treatment of a child (11%) or deliberately falsely reported members of the wider family to institutions and/or civil society organizations for actions and behavior in relation to a child (9.8%) (Table 2.).

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of answers to the question “Have you ever experienced any of the following by your husband/wife?”

Have you ever experienced from your husband/ wife any of the following practices?	Frequency (Percentage %) N=163			
	Never	Once	Several times	Often + Very often
Report to institutions and/or civil associations for inappropriate and/or abusive acts and behavior against a child	111 (68.1%)	9 (5.5%)	25 (15.3%)	18 (11.0%)
Deliberate false reporting to institutions and/or civic associations for actions and behavior in relation to a child	95 (58.3%)	21 (12.9%)	17 (10.4%)	30 (18.4%)
Deliberately deceiving and spreading falsehood to family members and close friends about inappropriate and/or aggressive behavior towards a child	71 (43.6%)	9 (5.5%)	32 (19.6%)	51 (31.3%)
Requests to officially prohibit contacting and/or socializing with other members of your family	108 (66.3%)	13 (8.0%)	18 (11.0%)	24 (14.7%)
Intentional false reporting of members of the wider family to civil society institutions and/or associations for actions and behavior in relation to the child	115 (70.6%)	19 (11.7%)	13 (8.0%)	16 (9.8%)
Emotional blackmail, threats and / or intimidation by taking away child care	50 (30.7%)	14 (8.6%)	41 (25.2%)	58 (35.5%)
Denial of alimony or other available child allowance	114 (69.9%)	9 (5.5%)	12 (7.4%)	28 (17.2%)
Material exploitation and unintended spending of money intended for a child	69 (42.3%)	10 (6.1%)	26 (16.0%)	58 (35.6%)
Preventing seeing and meeting the child even though they are determined by decision and judgment	89 (54.6%)	5 (3.1%)	16 (9.8%)	53 (32.5%)
Preventing seeing and meeting a child	79 (48.5%)	5 (3.1%)	22 (13.5%)	57 (35.0%)
Preventing active participation in the child’s upbringing and life	68 (41.7%)	2 (1.2%)	19 (11.7%)	74 (45.4%)
Withholding information about the child (e.g. health, interests, activities, ...)	70 (42.9%)	1 (0.6%)	26 (16.0%)	66 (40.5%)
Alienating a child from you (intimidating, deceiving a child)	60 (36.8%)	6 (3.7%)	26 (16.0%)	71 (43.5%)
Verbal conflicts in front of the child	19 (11.7%)	12 (7.4%)	41 (25.2%)	91 (55.8%)
Partner's violent behavior towards you in front of your child	48 (29.4%)	10 (6.1%)	42 (25.8%)	63 (38.7%)

## 5. Discussion

The aim of the research was to examine the existence and frequency of perceived forms of violence by spouses/partners, as well as to assess parents’ perceived changes in children as a cause of conflicting and violent behavior among parents. The result that shows that the most observed behavior change relates to the onset of sadness, anxiety and irritability of the child (47.9%) is the study by Macuka and Jurin (2014) according to which children who report higher levels of frequent, intense and weak resolved conflicts between their parents have higher scores on depression. Similarly, Campbell and Lewandowski (1997) point out several signs that

characterize children's reactions to traumatic family events, such as: sleep problems, excessive fear responses, developmental regressions, deliberate avoidance, panic, irritability, psychophysiological disorders, etc.

Other researches note examples of behaviors of children of different ages, who have witnessed some form of parent conflict. The behavior of children between the ages of 6 and 18 includes: frequent participation in fights, vagrancy, unjustified absences from school. Children between the ages of 18 months and 5 years are cruel to animals, physically assaulting other people and unwilling to sleep alone (McFarlane, Groff, O'Brien & Watson, 2003).

Authors Hegarty, Taft and Feder (2008) highlight the connection of partner violence with child abuse and highlight the poor consequences for children who have witnessed conflict between parents. Children exposed to intimate partner violence are at greater risk for physical, emotional, behavioral and educational problems that can persist into adulthood (Hegarty, Taft & Feder, 2008).

In accordance with the high percentages of violent behavior experienced by partners, we find similar results in the work of other researchers. For example, Thompson, Bonomi, Anderson, Reid, Dimer, Carrell and Rivara (2006) point out that, of the total number of intimate relationships, 14.7% reported violence of any kind and 45.1% abused women has experienced multiple types of violence. Depending on the type of partner violence, 10.7% to 21.0% of victims experienced violence by multiple partners over a period of 1 year to 5 years. Rates of violence were higher for younger women, women with lower incomes and lower levels of education, single mothers and those who had been abused in has particular importance for his or her development, emotional security, social competence, intellectual achievement, as well as the very relationship that, when he or she becomes a parent, he will have with his own children. Conceptual approaches to defining parenting start from a range of individual abilities, environmental influences, and the characteristics of the child itself. We approach the understanding of the parental role as a multidimensional interactive process (Klaus & Kennell, 1976). Research by Burgessa and Congera (1978) show the importance of positive interaction between both parents as well as both parents with their child.

Children whose mothers did not have a positive relationship showed deficits in social skills, had poor self-esteem, and their mothers had broken relationships with their partner, which all together led to a weakening of the mother-child relationship. Studies on fathers who have not had a positive relationship with children refers to emotional problems, a lack of social contacts, as well as reduced working capacity of children (Egeland, 1990). Unstable relationships with a partner have been shown to be a critical factor in poor relationships, as well as inappropriate relationships with the child. Parents who care about children inappropriately provide very little positive and stimulating interaction. For this reason, children most often show lack of positive social contacts, inappropriate activities and sometimes high levels of depression. Unstable families are a very strong predictor of the child's asocial behavior (Rosić & Zloković, 2002).

The roles of women and men culturally and over time define influence on both women's and men's point of view on their duties in the care and child upbringing. Growing up in a family with both parents increases the assumption of mutual agreement about decision making, economic security, better child care, emotional support, better motivation and better success. But sometimes overworked and often nervous parents may show little care and unexpected little encouragement to their children. The ability of a single parent such as a mother to take care of her child depends not only on financial security but also on other relationships such as age, education, parenting style, individual personality traits, value system, etc. Although many families have many problems, this does not automatically make them the category of parents who care less about their child. The situations are different, and the incomplete family cannot be considered outside the context of other factors.

The distinction of the functional “role of the mother” and “the role of the father” is nowadays mainly found in some traditional middles, particular cultures and religions. Undoubtedly, although in traditional cultures the roles of women and men were “clearly” defined, in most cases these divisions were functional and given by the geographical and political context in which people live. Despite some possible differences that arise with respect to the role of parents in the lives of children, there are no relevant differences between a man and a woman when it comes to their ability to care for a child.

## 6. Conclusion

Children are exposed to various forms of influence that are often not easy to notice. The problem of manipulating children is often ignored as a family problem, and due to forms and consequences it can also be considered in the context of domestic violence. Considering the consequences, in 1958, Vance Packard drew attention to the remarkable possibilities of manipulation, which led to the development of whole strategies especially adapted to even the early age of children. The basic goals of contemporary definitions of the child upbringing are self-realization and full child development, free personality, liberation from any kind of inequality, development of personality as well as equal participation at all social levels. On the other hand, the primary aim of manipulation is to pursue, for the most part, purely personal interests, mainly through fraud and coercion, and regardless of the consequences for the victim. In order to achieve this goal, man is governed as an object that becomes a manipulative object, a “living toy”.

In order to deepen their understanding of the problem and to enrich scientific knowledge, for further research, the authors recommend conducting research that would involve the children of abusive parents, that is, examining their own assessment of relationships in the family witnessing mutual parent violence. Certainly, such a holistic and human-developmental approach would be a solid basis for further developing family empowerment strategies for developing positive relationships and family togetherness, and thus contributing to reducing the global problem of domestic violence and manipulating children by parents.

## Acknowledgements

This paper is result of scientific research work on the project “Empowering Families for the Development of Positive Relationships and Family Communion” (lead by Jasminka Zloković, code: uniri-societies - 18-6, 1132), which started in March 2019 with the support of co-financing the project by the University of Rijeka.

The authors declare no competing interests.

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