

ABSTRACT

The doctoral dissertation comprises a series of seven thematically related scientific publications (five articles published in highly rated scientific journals in English, one article published in both Polish and English, and a chapter in a collective work in Polish). The main goal of the presented original research, which is the subject of doctoral dissertation, was to analyze personal, relational, and situational factors associated with parental responsiveness measured through the assessment of exhibited behaviors and self-reported. In Publication 1, we (Kaźmierczak et al., 2020) introduced the Polish adaptation of the Ainsworth Sensitivity Scale (1974) – an observational tool for assessing the quality of interactions between parents and children, as well as its innovative application in the context of studying couples. The study involved 220 couples. Half of the study group consisted of couples expecting their first child (third trimester of pregnancy), while the other half consisted of couples without children and not expecting any at the time. The study results showed that the activation of the parental role fosters higher responsiveness, and also confirmed that when it comes to responsiveness, both individual differences and the relational context should be considered. Therefore, the aim of the research presented in Publication 2 (Kaźmierczak et al., 2022) was to discuss individual differences in terms of negative emotionality and temperament among parents and their young children, and their connection to reactions to the strongest stimulus coming from the child, namely their cry. The results indicated that difficulties in emotional regulation in adults and the negative emotionality of the child were associated with parent-oriented reactions to the child's cry. In further stages of the doctoral thesis, I presented the development, pilot study, and main study on the self-reported tool for assessing parental responsiveness – the Parental Responsiveness Scale (Anikiej, Kaźmierczak, 2019; Anikiej-Wiczenbach, Kaźmierczak, 2021; Publications 3 and 4). The analyses proved that parental responsiveness, when measured self-descriptively, is associated with both empathy and attachment in close relationships. It was also showed that women rate their responsiveness higher than men. The Parental Responsiveness Scale proved to be a reliable and valid tool for the self-descriptive measurement of parental responsiveness. Publication 5 characterized the importance of interactions between parents and the situational context for parental responsiveness. The research was conducted during 6 the Covid-19 pandemic, and the results highlighted the significance of perceived stress, emotional burden, and fear of infection on responsive parental behaviors and reactions to the child's cry. Publications 6 and 7 (Anikiej-Wiczenbach i in., 2024; Anikiej-Wiczenbach, Kaźmierczak, 2023) presented a study designed to deepen the analysis of the examined construct of parental responsiveness, measured both observationally and self-descriptively. Many predictors were analyzed, such as empathy, attachment styles, parenting styles experienced in the family of origin and satisfaction with the relationship between parents. Mutual effects of mothers and fathers, as well as gender differences (including parents and children), were also considered. The results showed that empathy is an universal predictor of parental responsiveness, measured both self-descriptively and observationally. Attachment was an important predictor of responsiveness measured self-descriptively. Satisfaction with the relationship with the partner was a significant predictor only for men. Experiences in the family of origin turned out to be an important predictor of parental responsiveness. Interestingly, more dependencies between the parenting patterns of parents and their reactions towards the child were observed in the case of parents raising daughters. In summary, the research presented in the series of publications involved over 1600 participants. The study groups (aside from the results presented in Publication 1) consisted of parents of young children. Examining such a number of participants, using different qualitative methods, and considering so many predictors, gender differences, and interactions between parents allowed for a detailed and in-depth analysis of the construct of parental responsiveness.