

Original Article

Selected Determinants of the Family Environment in the Context of Free Time Activities of Children

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Abstract

The authors discussed in the article the issue of the relationship identification between selected aspects of the family environment and chosen free time activities of children. Quantitative research using the questionnaire of authors was attended by 618 respondents - parents of children attending elementary schools in the town of Ruzomberok. The most important findings from the research include the discovery that the material environment of the family - mainly the monthly household income correlates with the free time activities of the children – while positive correlation was demonstrated during active spending of leisure time, negative correlation (but not at a significant level) was shown in passive spending of free time.

1. Introduction

From the aspect of socialization, the family is one of the most critical environments in which socialization itself takes place. Patterns of behavior (regarding free time not excluded) that a child in the family takes from his closest relatives, affect a person during his lifetime. In the paper, we deal with the family environment, which, among other areas, also has an impact on the free time of children. We understand free time, similar to the author Hofbauer, 2004, p. 13, which defines it as “the time when one does not work under the pressure of his obligations arising from his social roles, particularly from the division of labor and the need to preserve and develop his life.” The author also points out that free time is a time out of work and unpaid duties and is focused on enjoyable experiences and satisfaction, and among its main functions there are recreation, entertainment and personality development. Similar leisure activities are stated by Dumazedier

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(1966): a relaxation component (rest and partly recreation), a component of entertainment and a component of education and self-training (in which one develops his abilities, knowledge and skills.) The free time as we understand it nowadays is connected mostly to modern society. As also Chorvat (2011) points out, industrialization has produced a fixed working time, creating space for universal and individualized free time. Also in the pre-industrial societies, people have devoted themselves to non-work activities, but those activities have been of a different nature than nowadays. Dumazedier agrees (1966) and states: "... the out-of-job time is as old as work itself, but leisure has specific features that characterize the civilization born out of the industrial revolution."

Free time of children and family environment

Free time in childhood is another area that is also tied to contemporary modern societies. If we understand childhood as a period from birth to adulthood, we use the optics of modern societies. As Giddens (2013) states, childhood in pre-industrial societies has often been seen as a transitory stage that has led to a more significant period of adulthood when individuals have been involved in the labor and reproductive process. The French historian Aries (Giddens, 2013) even claims that childhood did not exist in the Middle Ages, and children were involved in the same activities (work and entertainment) as adults and did not have their games and activities that we consider today to be normal. The English sociologist Morgan (Koverova, 2003) also states that the idea of childhood is a modern invention. Modern times, besides other aspects related to childhood, have brought the attempts to universalize the rights embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which also regulates free time for children in Article 31, and refers to the right of the child to rest and free time, to participation in games and recreational activities corresponding to his or her age (UNICEF, 2018). At present, children attending elementary schools have more than five hours of free time (Lenco, & Gallo, 2009).

An essential and irreplaceable environment in which children create attitudes to spending their free time is a family that creates material and non-material conditions for spending leisure time. According to author Hofbauer (2004), not less important is also the realization of free time inside the family unit and what attitude parents and other family members share within spending their free time.

Material conditions in families as possible prerequisite to free time spending

According to the EU SILC (European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions), 12.7% of the Slovak population (approximately 670 thousand people) were at risk of poverty in 2016. A significant factor influencing the poverty risk is the household type. In the household category with dependent children, the most vulnerable household is that with two adults and three and more dependent children, the next risk group is one-parent households with at least one dependent child - incomplete households, a higher number of dependent children and the absence of another adult member threatens household itself and this may endanger the risk of poverty.

Table 1. *The rate of poverty risk after social transfers by a particular type of households*
 (Kovacova, 2017)

	2010	2011	2013	2013	2014	2015	2016
Childless households	8,1	7,9	9,0	7,5	8,6	7,9	7,2
Households with children	15,0	16,8	16,5	16,3	16,0	15,7	17,2
Incomplete families (min. 1 child)	25,0	26,4	27,5	30,1	30,6	29,9	33,6
2 adults 1 dependent child	12,0	13,2	12,4	10,0	13,2	9,2	10,5
2 adults 2 dependent children	11,0	13,1	14,3	13,2	11,4	14,7	14,8
2 adults 3 dependent children	29,8	32,6	35,1	29,9	28,4	32,9	34,8
Other households with dependent children	14,0	15,5	13,3	14,9	14,9	13,9	15,7

Material deprivation is another indicator of poverty and social exclusion. It is defined as the share of the population in percent, which faces a forced shortage (i.e., not a deficiency based on its own decision) at least in three, respectively in four out of nine items[†] that a household cannot afford. In 2016, in countries participating in the EU SILC research, the level of material deprivation was higher among single-member households and dependent children, households of individuals and households with two adults and three or more children. In 2015, Slovakia faced the highest household deprivation rate with households consist of two adults and one dependent child (3.9%), households with two adults and three and more children (16.3%) and households with two or more adults without dependent children (7.7%) (Eurostat, 2017).

Table 2. *Total rate of material deprivation in the Slovak Republic in period 2012 – 2015*

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rate of material deprivation in at least 4 items	10,5	10,2	9,9	9,0

(EU SILC, 2015)

In a survey comparing 16 countries, it has been shown that leisure activities of children and youth can be to some extent determined or limited by material factors of the family. In most countries where the research has been done, certain socio-economic inequalities have been more or less present, and the results have shown that children from poorer countries are less involved in sports activities and spend more time passively - watching television and spending time with computers (Rees, 2018).

2. Material and methods

The goal of the research is to point out the relationship between selected factors of family environment and chosen free time activities of children attending elementary school.

The main determinants are family income, education of parents and family size. Quantitative research was realized using the author's questionnaire as a research technique; the obtained data were processed on a descriptive level, further analyzes were carried out using several operations of inferential statistics.

Research sample

A research sample consisted of 618 respondents - parents and grandparents of children attending elementary school aged 25-83, average age 39.9 years (median 40, modus 40, standard deviation 6,391). 80.1% (495) respondents were women, 19.9% (123) respondents were men.

The most significant number of respondents - 40.5% (250) had a secondary education with leaving exam, followed by university education - 36.7% (227), secondary education without leaving exam 19.9% (123) and basic education - 2.9% (18). 57.0% (352) of respondents live in the city over 15 thousand inhabitants, 33.3% (206) of respondents live in rural areas and 9.7% (60) of respondents live in the city with less than 15 thousand inhabitants.

Regarding of marital status - 75.4% (466) of the respondents are married, 12.1% (75) are divorced, 6.0% (37) of respondents are single, 1.9 (12) widow / widower and 4.0% (25) lives in a partnership. As of the number of children – the majority are families where there are two children (45.3%, N 280), three children (26.4%, N 163). 17.5% (108) families are one child-family, 6.3% (39) are families with four children and 4.6% (28) are families with five or more children. The family with the highest number of children has 12 siblings.

21 respondents did not answer the question on monthly income for the household. The largest number of respondents ranged between 1001 to 2000 euros, in the category from 601 to 1000 euros we put 33.2% (205) respondents, from 301 to 600 euros 12.6% (78) of respondents, up to 300 euros 2.3 % (14) respondents. 6.1% (38) of respondents said their family income was higher than 2001 euros. 23 respondents (3.7%) receive financial benefits in material need.

3. Results and Discussions

Spending free time

Regarding spending of free time, respondents were able to mark individual free time on a 6-points scale - Table 3. We observe that almost 16% of children read books daily and nearly 22% of children read books every day. More than 50% of children practice sports more times a week. Almost 47% of children watch TV each day.

Table 3. Frequency of spending free time by children of respondents

	Every day	More times a week	Once a week	1-3 times a month	Not at all	Did not respond
Reading books	15,7%	33,8%	20,6%	17,8%	11,8%	0,3%
Sport	21,7%	48,2%	15,2%	6,3%	8,3%	0,3%
Trips into nature	6,6%	24,6%	29,%	28,6%	10,0%	0,3%
Lying in bed	18,9%	10,8%	9,4%	6,5%	52,5%	1,8%
TV watching	46,4%	41,4%	5,8%	1,9%	4,0%	0,3%
Going out with friends	27,0%	47,1%	15,0%	6,5%	3,7%	0,6%
Playing PC	25,4%	38,8%	18,0%	7,8%	9,7%	0,3%
Extracurriculum activity	8,6%	50,3%	20,9%	3,2%	16,5%	0,5%
Housework	22,7%	35,3%	29,3%	5,8%	5,8%	1,1%

Figure 1 shows the average frequency of leisure time spending. As we can see, the kids spend most of their free time watching TV, going out with friends and sports. The least item of the analyzed ones showed that also some of them spend their free time lying in bed – though this number is very low.

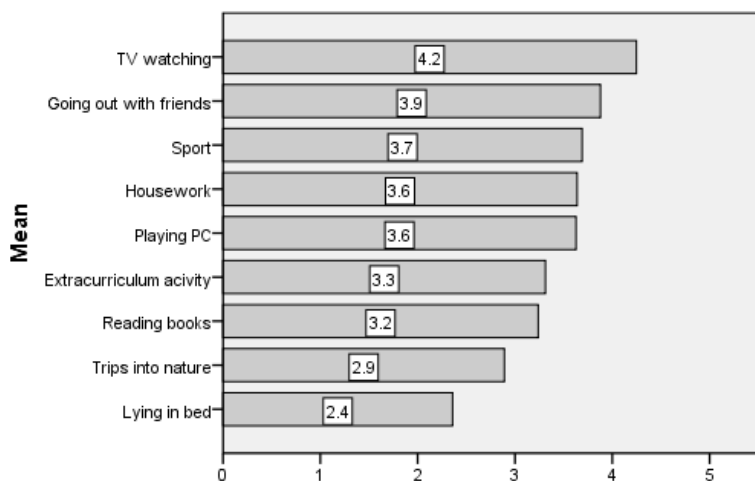


Figure 1. Average values of rate of spending free time

Items related to leisure time were subjected to a factor analysis that identified two factors that we called Active Spending of Free Time (Factor 1) and Passive Spending of Free Time (Factor 2).

Table 4 shows a rotated factor matrix that consists of individual free time items. The result of the KMO test was 0.556 and the result of the Barlett's Sphericity test was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 357,300$, $p \leq 0,000$). Varimax rotation was used for factor analysis.

Table 4. *Rotated matrix of factor analysis for variation of spending free time*

	Factor 1	Factor 2
spending free time - sport	0,690	0,006
spending free time - nature	0,667	0,151
spending free time – hobbies, after school clubs	0,530	-0,192
spending free time – reading books and magazines	0,444	-0,253
spending free time - housework	0,421	0,195
spending free time – TV watching	-0,002	0,709
spending free time - PC	-0,165	0,612
spending free time – goes out with friends	0,230	0,535
spending free time – lies in bed	-0,023	0,534

Factor 1 – active free time spending

Factor 1: min. – 1,00, max. – 5,00, AM – 3,35, SD – 0,654

This factor groups items related to active spending of free time, in details, reading books and magazines; sport; visit in nature, after-school clubs and activities and housework. The variable is not normally distributed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test: Statistical = 0.108, df = 617, p = 0.000).

Factor 2 – passive free time spending

Factor 1: min. – 1,00, max. – 5,00, AM – 3,53, SD – 0,742

This factor groups items relating to passive spending of leisure time, in details reading books and magazines; sport; walking in nature, after-school clubs and housework. The variable is not normally distributed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test: Statistical = 0.080, df = 617, p = 0.000).

Correlations between spending free time and selected aspects of the family environment

- Monthly income for the household of respondent: table 5 shows that a statistically significant correlation (as per Cohen's interpretation it is a weak correlation) has only been demonstrated for Factor 1. We can say that the higher the monthly income of the household, the more children spend their free time actively.

Table 5. *Correlation coefficient of active and passive spending of free time and monthly income of household*

Factor 1	correlation coefficient	0,232*
Active spending of free time	p – value	0,000
	N	596
Factor 2	correlation coefficient	-0,012
Passive spending of free time	p – value	0,769
	N	596

*Correlation is significant for $\alpha=0,01$

- Education of respondent (father/mother/grandparent): Table 6 shows that a statistically significant correlation has been demonstrated for both factors, Factor 1 is positive and Factor 2 shows a negative correlation (both correlation factors according to Cohen's interpretation refer to a weak correlation). We can state that the higher the education of the respondent, the more children spend more free time actively, and the higher the education of the respondent, the fewer children spend the free time passively.

Table 6. *Correlation coefficient of active and passive spending of free time and education of the respondent*

Factor 1	correlation coefficient	0,240*
Active spending of free time	p – value	0,000
	N	617
Factor 2	correlation coefficient	-0,182*
Passive spending of free time	p – value	0,000
	N	617

* Correlation is significant for $\alpha=0,01$

- A number of children in the family: in table 7, we can see that a statistically significant relationship has been demonstrated between the number of children in the family and active spending of free time; in the case of passive leisure time, this relationship has not been demonstrated. We can say that the higher the number of children in the family, the more they spend their free time actively.

Table 7. *Correlation coefficient of active and passive spending of free time and the number of children in the family*

Factor 1	correlation coefficient	0,144*
Active spending of free time	p – value	0,000
	N	618
Factor 2	correlation coefficient	0,038
Passive spending of free time	p – value	0,351
	N	617

* Correlation is significant for $\alpha=0,01$

Limitations of chosen free time activities due to the lack of finance.

Table 8 shows three possible ways of spending free time and their possible limitation due to lack of finances. Most respondents limit their children in cultural events, less in sports activities and at least in hobby clubs and after-school clubs.

Table 8. *Limitations in free time spending due to lack of finance*

	We cannot afford it at all		We afford it sometimes		We do not limit ourselves		Did not respond	
Hobby clubs of children	24	3,9%	128	20,7%	448	72,5%	18	2,9%
Sport activities of children	28	4,5%	141	22,8	429	69,4%	20	3,2%
Cultural events with children	41	6,6%	240	38,8%	318	51,5%	19	3,1%

A more detailed analysis showed that the higher the income of the family in the household, the fewer respondents being limited to the individual types of free time activities (Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to identify the relationship between household income and the rate of limitations in free time activities), which showed a moderate positive relation to level of significance $\alpha = 0.01$).

Table 9. *Correlation coefficient in limitations in free time activities and monthly income of households*

limitation – hobby clubs of children	correlation coefficient	0,422*
	p – value	0,000
	N	583
limitation – hobby clubs of children	correlation coefficient	0,368*
	p – value	0,000
	N	583
limitation – sport activities of children	correlation coefficient	0,363*
	p – value	0,000
	N	583

* Correlation is significant for $\alpha=0,01$

Discussions

Leisure time research for different target groups nowadays takes a lot of space on different levels. Regarding international comparisons, Slovakia belongs to relatively higher income countries where children and young people spend their free time mostly by using the Internet, computers, watching TV and sports practice. States, where material deprivation is higher, are characterized by a lower level of participation of children and youth in sporting activities. (Rees, 2017). In our research, we have attempted to outline possible relationships between selected aspects of the family environment and chosen free time activities. Authors Bianchi, Robinson (Hofferth, & Sandberg, 2001) found out that household income can predict free time spending - children coming from families with higher income spent more time reading their books and spending free time in their homes with parents as children coming from families with lower income; another important

finding is that there is an inversion relationship between watching TV and education of parents. The authors Hofferth, & Sandberg (2001) on the contrary find out that income is not as important determinant of free time as it would be – in their research it negatively correlated only with TV watching. The most interesting results of the research include the finding that material conditions - namely, the level of monthly income in families, positively correlates with active and negatively with passive spending of the free time (the higher the income in the family, the more active and less passive options), also in this respect, it is important to factor the education of parents (father/ mother/grandparent), which also correlates with spending the free time (the higher the education, the more active and the less passive spending of free time). In the case of the number of children in the family, the correlation has only been demonstrated in the case of active free time spending. The income level has been shown to be a significant factor in the correlation with variable restriction in free time activities.

4. Conclusions

By our paper, we have tried to point out to selected aspects of the family environment in the context of leisure time activities for children and young people. We can conclude that income of parents, education of parents, or family size play an important role in the engagement of children into free time activities and their choice.

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