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Original scientific paper

ANALYSING THE STRESS-RELATED FACTORS OF PARENTAL ADAPTATION DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD DAYCARE TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT¹

This study explores the emotional experiences and stress management strategies of parents during their young children's initial transition to daycare. Utilizing a survey-based methodology, the research examined the psychological dynamics of 110 parents (92.7% women, 7.3% men) with children aged 12-36 months across Croatia. The investigation focused on understanding parental stress sources, coping mechanisms, and factors contributing to stress reduction during this critical developmental period. Key findings revealed that 40% of parents reported decreased stress levels over time, with 29.1% experiencing complete stress cessation. Verbal communication emerged as the primary stress management strategy, with 79.1% of participants identifying dialogue as their main coping mechanism. The study highlighted the crucial role of parent- kindergarten teacher communication, with 97.3% of participants rating their interactions as good or excellent. Emotional responses among parents included significant separation anxiety, concerns about child safety, feelings of guilt, and occasional excitement about socialization opportunities. Primary stressors included overcrowded educational groups, potential disease transmission, and concerns about individualized child care. Factors mitigating parental stress encompassed transparent communication, photographic documentation of children's activities, trust in kindergarten teachers' professionalism, and family support. The research contributes to understanding the complex emotional landscape of kindergarten teachers education, emphasizing that parental stress is dynamic and responsive to support interventions. Future research could explore targeted strategies for supporting parents during this critical developmental transition.

Keywords: daycare transition, early childhood education, parental stress, parent-kindergarten teacher, communication

¹ The paper was created in co-authorship with students.

INTRODUCTION

Parental stress during a child's adjustment in kindergarten represents one of the most significant challenges in early parenthood. Within the context of contemporary lifestyle, characterized by professional obligations and pressures, families face particular challenges during transitional periods, especially during a child's entry into daycare.

The initial separation during a child's entry into preschool institutions often represents the first significant separation for parents, resulting in complex emotional reactions, including anxiety, guilt, and discomfort caused by changes in family dynamics. However, alongside these challenges, many parents also experience positive emotions, such as joy, excitement, and a sense of pride as they witness their child's growing independence, socialization, and exploration of new environments (Morris et al., 2007). This transition is characterized by particularly intense emotional experiences for all participants in the process, emphasizing the significance of entrusting childcare to previously unknown individuals. In this context, kindergarten teachers as professional staff play a crucial role in reducing parental stress. Their function manifests through building trust via open and quality communication and providing adequate support during the adjustment period. Despite these challenges, the adjustment process represents an essential element in developing a child's autonomy and social competencies.

Facilitating positive perceptions of adjustment to institutional preschool education can significantly reduce parental stress and optimize the child's adaptation process to the new environment. Accordingly, this paper presents research results whose primary objective is to analyze the dominant stressors faced by parents of nursery-age children during institutional care, and to identify factors that most significantly contribute to stress reduction in these circumstances.

CHILD ADJUSTMENT TO DAYCARE: A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

The process of child adjustment to daycare encompasses multiple aspects of emotional, social, and cognitive development that ultimately contribute to a child's stability and ability to function in novel environments. Upon entering daycare, children encounter numerous new rules, structures, and social norms integral to collective living for the first time. Initial socialization experiences

through interactions with peers and kindergarten teachers help children develop fundamental social skills such as sharing, turn-taking, cooperative play, and communication.

Adaptation within this novel environment enables children to learn, in a secure setting, how to constructively communicate with peers, understand others' emotions, and establish their position within the group—representing a significant step toward forming healthy social relationships later in life (Došen-Dobud, 2004; Kauerz & Schaper, 2021; Vujičić, 2011). Beyond contributing to social skill development, adaptation to daycare helps children develop emotional resilience and the capacity to manage their emotions (Kauerz & Schaper, 2021). Through empathy, attention, and understanding, kindergarten teachers assist children in recognizing and labeling their feelings, such as separation anxiety or joy from new friendships. The opportunity to explore and express these emotions in a controlled environment allows children to develop healthy emotional regulation strategies. Consequently, children become more emotionally competent, which aids them in managing stressful situations not only in daycare but throughout their lives (Mašković et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2024).

The collaboration between parents and kindergarten teachers has proven fundamental to successful adaptation, as parents can gain insight into their child's daily progress through trust and open communication with kindergarten teachers. This synergy provides parents with opportunities to receive guidance on supporting their child through this new phase. For instance, jointly establishing adaptation routines and separation protocols can minimize stress during morning separations and facilitate the child's transition into daily activities. Even brief daily conversations with kindergarten teachers can help parents better manage their own anxiety, thereby positively influencing their child's behavior. Through this partnership, kindergarten teachers and parents collectively contribute to the child's emotional stability, enabling them to feel supported and secure in both environments (Tatalović Vorkapić et al., 2015).

For children experiencing difficult adaptation, providing additional support mechanisms is crucial to reducing the intensity of emotional reactions such as crying, regression, or withdrawal. Beyond transitional objects like favorite toys or blankets, techniques that help children feel secure and loved in the new environment are recommended. Some daycare centers, for example, allow parents to be present in the space during the initial days, enabling gradual adaptation without complete separation. As adaptation progresses, parents gradually withdraw while kindergarten teachers assume the role of security and support providers. This approach ensures children experience the separation

process with reduced stress and emotional discomfort, contributing to their long-term adaptation (Laura & Bănică, 2017; Stojić et al., 2010).

PARENTAL REACTIONS TO NURSERY ADAPTATION: AN ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES

The process of a child's adaptation to nursery care represents a profound emotional experience for parents, necessitating adjustment to their child's growing independence and confronting feelings of diminished control over their child's daily life. Many parents perceive their child's transition to nursery as a symbolic passage from complete parental care to a new environment where the child begins to form relationships with peers and kindergarten teachers. Primary caregivers frequently experience intensified feelings of sadness, nostalgia, and concern, particularly when children demonstrate resistance to nursery attendance, which may lead to questioning their decisions (Profaca, 2013; Sun et al., 2024).

Parents' interpretation of their children's emotional reactions, such as separation anxiety, often involves perceiving these responses as indicators of child insecurity (Kleinschlömer et al., 2023). Emotional manifestations, including crying, withdrawal, or physical symptoms such as stomach aches, frequently amplify parental concern and generate a need for additional support. During these crucial moments, kindergarten teachers provide valuable assistance to parents through explanations and guidance, emphasizing the temporary and natural nature of these reactions during the adaptation period, which helps parents reduce their anxiety and focus on supporting their child (Kauerz & Schaper, 2021; Mašković et al., 2018; Vujičić, 2011).

Kindergarten teachers recommendations for facilitating transition, including the use of transitional objects such as favourite toys or blankets, contribute to calming the child and providing a sense of security and connection with parents. Parents are often advised to maintain calm and positive communication during separation, further strengthening the child's security in the new environment (Tatalović Vorkapić et al., 2015).

Regular contact between parents and kindergarten teachers enables the creation of an environment of trust and support, reducing parental anxiety. Keeping parents informed about their child's progress through daily communication with kindergarten teachers increases their sense of control and stability. This collaborative relationship assists parents in accepting the

adaptation process as an opportunity for child development and enhanced independence, enabling them to better manage their own emotions during separation (Damjanović et al., 2014; Došen-Dobud, 2004; Monfrance et al., 2024).

The approach incorporating kindergarten teacher support and clear communication allows parents to view their child's adaptation as a positive step toward developing social and emotional skills rather than a stressful change. Beyond emotional aspects, adaptation requires practical reorganization of parental daily routines, introducing new rhythms and obligations related to preparing the child for nursery. For parents experiencing this process for the first time, feelings of overwhelm may arise as adaptation encompasses both their professional and personal dynamics.

Parents' perception of their children's emotional and physical reactions during nursery adaptation can significantly influence their stress levels. Physical symptoms such as vomiting, loss of appetite, and insomnia further intensify parental concern, particularly as parents often interpret these symptoms as signs of severe stress in their child, even when such reactions are temporary (Mašković et al., 2018). Some parents seek medical assistance to exclude more serious issues, especially when children show prolonged signs of nursery environment rejection.

Through regular dialogue and mutual understanding, parents gradually develop trust in kindergarten teachers and the adaptation process, motivating them to embrace changes more optimistically. This support enables parents to progressively view nursery attendance as a positive step toward their child's social and emotional independence rather than a threat to their security and attachment. The partnership between parents and kindergarten teachers, founded on open and continuous communication, contributes to creating an environment where parents feel supported and kindergarten teachers perceive parents as engaged and involved in the process.

THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS ADAPTATION

The relationship between a child and their parents forms the foundation of emotional stability crucial for successful adaptation to nursery care. The trust and intimacy that a child develops with their parents, particularly with the mother, is shaped through a series of interactions in which the parent responds to the child's needs and emotional expressions. The attachment developed in

this relationship directly influences the child's ability to cope with changes and separations, adapting to new environments less stressful and more secure for the child (Mašković et al., 2018).

The sense of security that a child gains through a close relationship with their parent enables them to better handle periods of uncertainty, knowing that the parent is always there to provide support. Attachment theory emphasizes the concept of the "secure base" – a term describing the child's ability to feel emotionally protected and secure even when the parent is not physically present. This secure base provides the child with internal stability and confidence necessary for exploring their environment and forming new relationships, including those with caregivers. When children face new situations, such as adapting to daycare, awareness of this secure base allows them the freedom to separate from parents and gradually integrate into new environments (Mihic et al., 2010; Wang & Zhang, 2021).

The role of parental sensitivity to a child's emotional needs significantly contributes to building this sense of security. When parents consistently recognize their child's emotional signals and respond with attention, the child gradually develops an internal sense of security that enables them to approach new challenges with confidence. For instance, children who feel secure and loved through such attachment more easily develop emotional coping skills for challenges such as separation and adaptation to peer groups in daycare settings (Golombok, 2021). The presence of a secure base further reduces separation anxiety that may emerge during nursery adaptation. When children know that their parents remain present in their lives regardless of temporary physical distance, separation is experienced as less traumatic. Thus, the secure base enables children to experience daycare adaptation as a natural step in socialization, promoting feelings of self-confidence and independence (Tan & Hutagalung, 2020).

Parental stress profoundly impacts a child's emotional security and can negatively affect their relationship, disrupting quality communication and support that provides children with a sense of stability. When parents experience periods of increased stress or emotional challenges, there is often reduced parental sensitivity to the child's needs, potentially resulting in increased tension within the family environment. In such situations, children sense parental anxiety, which may manifest through physical symptoms such as stomach aches, headaches, or loss of appetite. Beyond physical manifestations, emotional reactions such as irritability, withdrawal, and insecurity are often present,

potentially complicating daycare adaptation and hindering the establishment of stable relationships with caregivers (Damjanović et al., 2014).

Parental attitudes toward new situations play a crucial role in the child's adaptation process to nursery care. Parents who view the adaptation process positively and trust in daycare facilities and kindergarten teachers transmit this sense of security to their child. Children who observe their parents facing changes with optimism and support more readily accept new environments and develop trust in kindergarten teachers and peers more quickly. Conversely, parental insecurity or distrust in daycare can provoke additional anxiety in the child, potentially impeding adaptation. Children intuitively recognize their parents' emotional state and often reflect these feelings in their own reactions to daycare, where parental anxiety can increase separation anxiety in the child and slow the socialization process (Vujičić, 2011).

When parental attachment is stable and supportive, children are more likely to build positive relationships with kindergarten teachers and peers. A strong emotional foundation enables children to freely explore and develop social skills in a secure environment. The sense of security derived from supportive parental relationships motivates children to engage in group activities, fostering emotional growth and helping develop communication and social skills. A supportive environment contributes to healthy adaptation and helps children better face new challenges in social interaction (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014).

Poor family relationships and lack of attachment can have the opposite effect, creating feelings of insecurity and emotional instability in children. Insecurity in the family environment can affect a child's adaptation, causing difficulties in forming new relationships and increasing separation anxiety. Children who lack strong emotional support at home often face greater challenges in socialization, where their insecurity complicates the development of trust toward kindergarten teachers and peers. This situation can further delay adaptation and impact the development of social skills crucial for successful integration into the daycare environment.

METHODOLOGY

Research objectives and questions

This study aims to analyze the primary stressors experienced by parents of toddlers during their children's transition to daycare, while also examining the factors that most effectively contribute to stress reduction in these situations.

The research focuses on understanding the extent to which parents perceive this period in their child's life as stressful and identifying the specific circumstances and challenges that trigger feelings of tension.

The following research questions guide this investigation:

1. How do parents of toddlers describe their emotional state and primary sources of stress during their child's transition to daycare?
2. Which factors, according to parents, most significantly contribute to reducing stress associated with their child's adaptation to daycare?

Data collection methodology

This study employed a questionnaire survey designed specifically for thesis research purposes. The primary objective was to examine parental assessments of how their toddlers' attendance at kindergarten teacher education institutions affects their daily functioning. The survey was administered through Google Forms.

In this study, descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize and present the data. These included frequencies and percentages to provide an overview of demographic characteristics, as well as to analyze parents' responses regarding their stress levels, emotional reactions, coping strategies, and communication experiences with kindergarten teachers. Descriptive statistics were chosen as they are well-suited for summarizing and interpreting survey data, especially in studies that aim to explore trends and patterns rather than test causal relationships. Moreover, this research serves as a foundation for further studies and analyses.

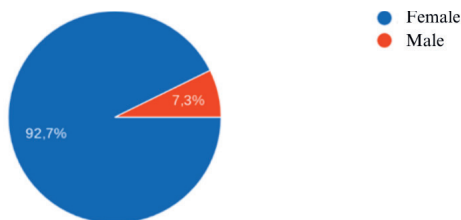
The questionnaire began with demographic data collection, including participants' gender, age, child's age, place of residence, employment status, and education level. This was followed by seventeen closed-ended questions designed to assess parent-child relationships, parent-close relations, parent-kindergarten teacher interactions, and parental stress levels. Furthermore, the survey included 14 statements rated on Likert scales, with response options ranging from four to six choices depending on the statement. The questionnaire concluded with three open-ended questions allowing descriptive responses regarding emotional states during daycare drop-offs, separation experiences, most stressful situations, and key stress-reduction factors. Additionally, four hybrid questions addressed participants' leisure time, stress coping mechanisms, and stress reduction methods. The survey used in this study was specifically developed for the

purposes of thesis to collect descriptive data on parental experiences during their child's transition to daycare. The questionnaire included demographic questions, closed-ended questions, Likert-scale statements, open-ended questions, and hybrid questions, as described. To ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions, the survey was pre-tested with a small group of individuals (parents) prior to data collection. Feedback from this pilot group was used to refine the wording of questions and statements, ensuring they were easily understood by the target audience. Given the exploratory and descriptive nature of the study, formal psychometric testing for validity and reliability was not conducted. The primary focus was to identify general trends and patterns. We acknowledge that future research could expand on this work by developing standardized measures and conducting thorough psychometric evaluations.

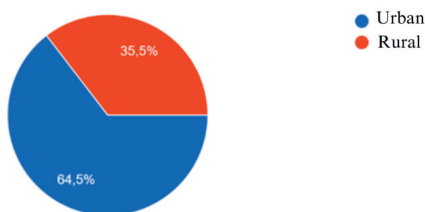
The questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms, enabling efficient and economical data collection. It was specifically shared in parenting groups and forums related to early childhood education to reach parents of toddlers attending daycare. This distribution method offered flexibility, allowing participants to complete the survey at their convenience. Anonymity was maintained throughout, and the collected data were used exclusively for thesis research purposes.

Sample characteristics

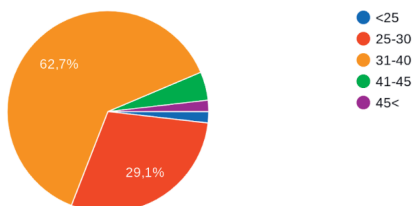
The research was conducted in January 2024, sampling parents of toddlers from various daycare centers across Croatia to ensure result reliability. Graph 1., Graph 2. and Graph 3. show the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The sample comprised 110 parents, with 92.7% female and 7.3% male participants (Graph 1.). The majority (64.5%) resided in urban areas, while 35.5% came from rural regions (Graph 2.). The predominant age group was 31-40 years of age (62.7%), followed by 25-30 years of age (29.1%) (Graph 3.). Regarding education, most participants (51.8%) held university degrees, 35.5% had completed secondary education, and 10.9% possessed college degrees, with two participants having only primary education. The majority (78.2%) worked full-time, while 10% worked part-time. Most participants were married (88.2%), 10.9% were in domestic partnerships, and 1% were divorced. Regarding children's ages, 55.5% had children aged 25-36 months, and 44.5% had children aged 12-24 months. Most participants (50.9%) had one child, 36.4% had two children, and 12.7% had three or more children.



Graph 1. Sex of respondents



Graph 2. Distribution of respondents by area of residence



Graph 3. Age of respondents

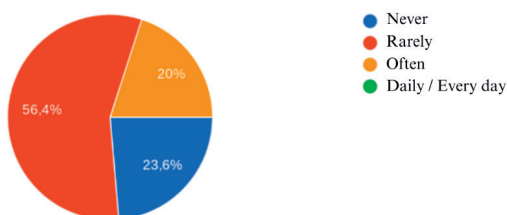
Ethical considerations

The survey was conducted by research ethical standards, ensuring anonymity, voluntary participation, and the option to withdraw at any point. Data confidentiality was maintained through secure storage protocols. Results were presented at the group level, without individual identification. Before completing the online questionnaire, parents received comprehensive information about the research, including its topic, objectives, and implementation plan, and indicated their consent by clicking “Continue.” The process was guided by principles of autonomous decision-making, with complete protection of parental privacy. Data usage was strictly limited to thesis research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How do parents of toddlers describe their emotional state and primary sources of stress during their child's transition to daycare?

Parental presence plays a fundamental role in a child's emotional and social development, shaping their sense of security and attachment patterns. However, the extent to which parents separate from their children varies considerably, influenced by cultural norms, parental beliefs and practical circumstances. While constant parental presence provides stability, occasional separation can foster children's independence, resilience and social adaptability (Saganić, Smojver-Ažić & Večerin, 2024). To better understand patterns of parental separation and their implications, the following findings examine the frequency of parent-child separation and its potential impact on children's development. The findings indicate that 23.6% of parents have never separated from their child, while the majority (56.4%) practice separation rarely, and 20% of parents frequently implement separation, with no instances of daily separation reported (Graph 4.). These results suggest recognition of the importance of parental presence in a child's life, while acknowledging that occasional separation can positively influence a child's socialization and emotional adjustment.



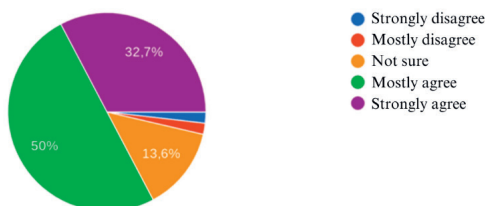
Graph 4. Distribution of separation of children from their parents before starting kindergarten (nursery)

Periodic separation, as reported by parents, is recognized as a part of the adjustment process, aligning with Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), which emphasizes the importance of gradual independence in child development. The findings from this study primarily reflect the perspectives of parents, providing valuable insights into their emotional responses and perceived challenges during their child's transition to daycare.

While these findings highlight important themes related to parental experiences, this study does not seek to make radical conclusions about broader

developmental outcomes. Instead, it opens the door to further research that could explore the complex interplay between parental emotions, their coping mechanisms, and the long-term impact on children's emotional and social development. Future studies could build upon these initial insights by employing longitudinal designs or incorporating diverse methodological approaches to deepen our understanding of this multifaceted process.

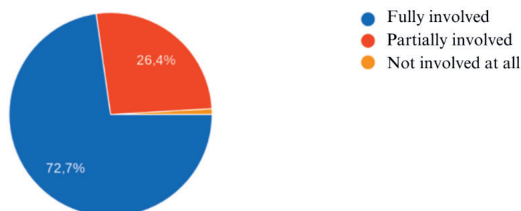
Furthermore, our results demonstrate parental attitudes regarding the transmission of anxiety and fears to their children, with the majority of participants (82.7%) partially or fully agreeing that their fears and anxieties can influence their child's emotional state (Graph 5.). This high level of awareness regarding such influence underscores the significance of positive parental roles in children's emotional development. Children intuitively recognize their parents' emotional states and frequently mirror these emotions through their own reactions. Research by Havighurst et al. (2021) highlights the neurobiological mechanisms underlying parent-child emotional synchronization. Their findings corroborate our study's observations that parental emotional states significantly impact children's psychological well-being, with particular emphasis on the role of parental emotional intelligence.



Graph 5. Parents' opinion on whether the parents' concerns and fears are transmitted to the child

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a crucial factor in a child's development, yet various obstacles often prevent parents from engaging at their desired level. Challenges such as work-life balance, time constraints, and shifting societal demands can create discrepancies between the ideal and actual extent of parental participation (Wildmon et al., 2024). Understanding these dynamics is essential for identifying support strategies that facilitate more inclusive and accessible parental engagement. The nuanced analysis of parental involvement merits particular attention. While 72.7% of parents report full engagement, 26.4% indicate partial involvement, potentially reflecting contemporary challenges such as work-life balance and time constraints. A minimal 0.9% declare non-involvement, suggesting the need for targeted support strategies (Graph 6.). This

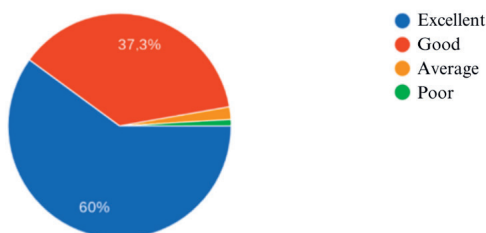
aligns with Kim and Hill's (2018) research, which emphasizes the importance of developing inclusive support mechanisms for parents facing engagement barriers.



Graph 6. Involvement of parents in the child's educational process

Which factors, according to parents, most significantly contribute to reducing stress associated with their child's adaptation to daycare?

Effective communication between educators and parents is essential for child development (Aleksić et al., 2024). The communication data are equally compelling, with 60% of parents rating their interaction with kindergarten teachers as excellent and 37.3% as good (Graph 7.). This high satisfaction rate underscores the significance of collaborative partnerships between parents and kindergarten teachers. Christenson and Reschly's (2010) research indicates that high-quality communication is crucial for creating a nurturing developmental environment for children. The minimal percentage of parents reporting moderate (1.8%) or poor (0.9%) communication experiences suggests a robust educational ecosystem. This finding corresponds with contemporary research by Henderson and Mapp (2016), who argue that effective parent-kindergarten teacher partnerships are crucial for optimal child development. Particularly relevant is the work of Gluščić and Pustaj (2008), who highlight the importance of collaborative relationships in supporting children's holistic growth. The scholarly literature, such as Siraj-Blatchford and Mann's (2007) research, further corroborates these findings by demonstrating how high-quality parent-kindergarten teacher interactions contribute to creating stimulating learning environments. The presented data reflect a positive trend in early childhood education, emphasizing the pivotal role of parental involvement and effective communication in supporting children's developmental trajectories.



Graph 7. Communication of respondents with educators

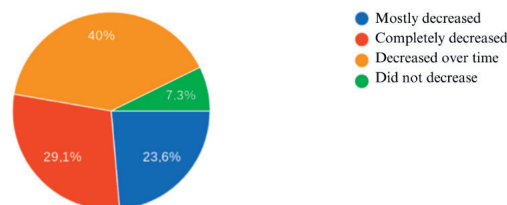
Our findings demonstrate a notably positive initial interaction between parents and kindergarten teachers, with 86.4% of participants describing their first encounter as positive and pleasant. This aligns with contemporary research on relationship dynamics in kindergarten teacher education. Malaguzzi's (1998) concept of the "image of the child" provides a theoretical framework for understanding these interactions. In his pioneering work on the Reggio Emilia approach, Malaguzzi emphasized that kindergarten teachers' internal perceptions fundamentally shape the pedagogical environment and interactions. The findings suggest that teachers successfully create a welcoming atmosphere that immediately establishes trust and comfort.

Research on parental stress and coping strategies reveals diverse approaches to managing challenges associated with raising children (Andrioni et al., 2022; Amnie, 2018; Arif et al., 2020). The obtained data indicate that the majority of respondents (66.4%) actively seek solutions in stressful situations, demonstrating a proactive approach to problem-solving. Reaching out to friends or family members for support was chosen by 14.5% of respondents, while only 1.8% prefer relaxation techniques such as meditation or breathing exercises, suggesting a lower inclination toward these methods. Withdrawal and reflection as a strategy is present in 16.4% of parents, and only 0.9% of respondents reported becoming anxious in stressful situations (Graph 8.). These diverse approaches testify to the various ways parents respond to stress, and understanding these reactions enables the development of tailored support strategies that can assist parents in better stress management. Comparative studies by Thompson and Gustafson (2020) similarly highlighted diverse parental stress management strategies, emphasizing the importance of individualized support frameworks. The low preference for meditative techniques (1.8%) might indicate cultural or personal barriers to mindfulness practices.



Graph 8. Reactions in stressful situations

Parental stress levels can fluctuate over time due to various factors, including changes in family dynamics, support systems, and individual coping mechanisms. A study by Azzahra and Suprayogi (2021) examined the stress levels of parents with kindergarten students during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the unique challenges faced during this period. While such stressors can be significant, parental stress does not remain static; rather, it tends to evolve as parents adapt to their circumstances and develop coping strategies. This adaptive process is reflected in the present findings, which indicate a notable trend in the reduction of parental stress levels over time. Approximately 40% of parents report decreased stress levels, while 29.1% indicate a complete cessation of stress symptoms. Furthermore, 23.6% of respondents observe significant stress reduction, with only 7.3% reporting persistent stress. These findings align with contemporary understanding of parental stress dynamics.



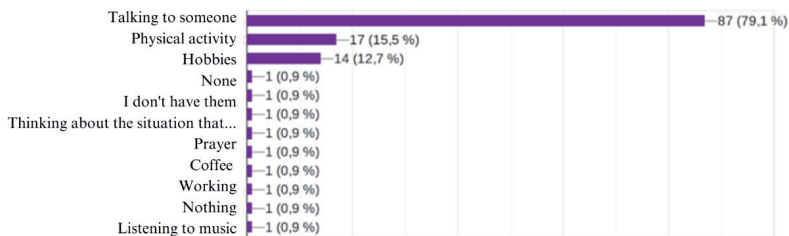
Graph 9. Comparison of the current level of stress with that on the first day of the child's departure to kindergarten

A longitudinal study conducted by Umberson et al. (2010) supports the observation of stress reduction over time, demonstrating that parents develop more effective coping mechanisms as they gain parenting experience. The theoretical frameworks of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) coping strategies and Cohen and Wills's (1985) social support theory maintain their academic relevance in this context. The meta-analysis conducted by Phelps and Anderson (2013) reinforces their foundational work, emphasizing how social support and

cognitive reappraisal mechanisms significantly mitigate parental stress. More recent research by Rodríguez-González et al. (2016) further corroborates these findings, indicating that parental stress levels typically decrease as individuals develop more sophisticated emotional regulation strategies and expand their support networks.

Research findings provide insights into stress management strategies employed by parents. The study reveals that verbal communication emerges as the predominant coping mechanism, with 79.1% of participants identifying conversation as their primary method for stress mitigation. This significant preference underscores the crucial role of social support and interpersonal communication in regulating parental stress (Graph 10.).

Physical activity represents a secondary stress reduction strategy, utilized by 15.5% of respondents (Graph 8.). This aligns with contemporary psychological research demonstrating the neurobiological benefits of exercise in stress modulation, including cortisol reduction and endorphin release (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Salmon, 2000). Furthermore, 12.7% of parents reported finding emotional relief through engagement in personal hobbies (Graph 8.), indicating the therapeutic potential of diversionary activities and individual interests in psychological resilience (Fredrickson, 2001). The diversity in stress management approaches emphasizes the individualized nature of coping mechanisms and the importance of personalized stress intervention strategies.



Graph 10. Strategies for reducing stress

This study sheds light on the importance of parental awareness regarding their emotional influence on children, the significance of effective communication with educators, and the value of proactive coping strategies in managing stress during the transition to daycare. While the findings highlight key themes, the study remains exploratory, focusing on describing parental perspectives rather than drawing broad generalizations. These results serve as a foundation for future research to delve deeper into the intricate relationships between parental

emotions, coping mechanisms, and child adjustment processes, emphasizing the need for longitudinal and multidimensional approaches to expand our understanding of this complex dynamic.

Recent research conducted by Radesky et al. (2023) highlights the potential of digital platforms in supporting transition processes. Their findings suggest that multimedia communication reduces separation anxiety, technology can facilitate more transparent institution-parent interactions, and digital platforms provide additional mechanisms for emotional support.

Cikov's (2019) research confirmed that parents' primary concerns center on child safety, separation anxiety, and the quality of caregiver interactions. These emotional responses reflect parents' deep psychological investment in their children's early social transitions. Our research identified primary stressors including overcrowded educational groups, potential disease transmission, insufficient child-to-caregiver ratios, and concerns about individualized child treatment. Parents emphasize that stress reduction requires quality communication with kindergarten teachers, regular updates about children's daily activities, and confidence in kindergarten teachers competence.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive examination of parental stress during the transition of toddlers to preschool settings, revealing complex emotional dynamics and adaptive mechanisms. The research illuminates the multifaceted nature of parental experiences, highlighting significant psychological processes associated with kindergarten teacher socialization. The findings demonstrate that while initial separation induces considerable anxiety, parents predominantly exhibit proactive coping strategies. Notably, 40% of parents reported a reduction in stress levels over time, with 29.1% experiencing complete stress cessation. Verbal communication emerged as the primary stress management mechanism, with 79.1% of participants identifying dialogue as their principal coping strategy. Key insights include the critical role of communication between parents and kindergarten teachers, with 97.3% of participants rating their interactions as good or excellent. The study underscores the importance of establishing trust, transparency, and collaborative partnerships in mitigating parental stress during this significant developmental transition.

The research contributes to understanding the intricate emotional landscape of kindergarten teacher education, emphasizing that parental stress is not static but dynamically responsive to supportive interventions and increased familiarity

with institutional environments. Future research could explore targeted strategies for supporting parents during this critical developmental phase, potentially leveraging digital platforms and personalized communication approaches. By providing empirical evidence of parental experiences and stress management mechanisms, this study offers valuable insights for kindergarten teachers, psychologists, and policymakers involved in kindergarten teacher education and family support systems. This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample was obtained through convenience sampling via social media platforms, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Second, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, as participants may have responded in ways they perceived as favorable. Third, the study employs a descriptive design, focusing on trends and patterns without exploring causal relationships or deeper inferential analyses. Finally, the scope of the study was restricted to the perspectives of parents, without direct observation of child outcomes or additional contextual factors, leaving room for future research to explore the interplay between parental perceptions, educator practices, and children's developmental outcomes. Future studies could address these limitations by using randomized sampling methods, incorporating direct observations or mixed-method approaches, and employing longitudinal designs to capture the long-term effects of parental strategies and daycare transitions. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable initial insights into parental experiences and highlights important areas for further investigation.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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ANALIZA ČIMBENIKA RODITELJSKE PRILAGODBE POVEZANIH SA STRESOM TIJEKOM PRIJELAZA U VRTIĆ U RANOM DJETINJSTVU

U radu se istražuju emocionalna iskustva i strategije upravljanja stresom roditelja tijekom početnog prijelaza njihove djece u vrtić. Koristeći anketnu metodologiju, istraživanjem je ispitana psihološka dinamika 110 roditelja (92,7 % žena, 7,3 % muškaraca) s djecom u dobi od 12 do 36 mjeseci diljem Republike Hrvatske. Istraživanje je bilo usmjereno na razumijevanje izvora roditeljskog stresa, mehanizama suočavanja i čimbenika koji pridonose smanjenju stresa tijekom ovog kritičnog razvojnog razdoblja. Ključni rezultati otkrili su da je 40 % roditelja prijavilo smanjenje razine stresa tijekom vremena, a 29,1 % doživjelo je potpuni prestanak stresa. Verbalna komunikacija pojavila se kao primarna strategija upravljanja stresom, pri čemu je 79,1 % sudionika identificiralo dijalog kao svoj glavni mehanizam suočavanja. Studija je istaknula ključnu ulogu komunikacije roditelja i odgojitelja, pri čemu je 97,3 % sudionika ocijenilo njihovu interakciju dobrom ili izvrsnom. Emocionalne reakcije među roditeljima uključivale su značajnu tjeskobu zbog odvajanja, zabrinutost za sigurnost djeteta, osjećaje krivnje i povremeno uzbuđenje zbog mogućnosti socijalizacije. Primarni uzroci stresa uključivali su prenapučene obrazovne grupe, mogućí prijenos bolesti i zabrinutost oko individualizirane skrbi za djecu. Čimbenici ublažavanja roditeljskog stresa bili su transparentna komunikacija, fotografsko dokumentiranje aktivnosti djece, povjerenje u profesionalnost odgojitelja i podrška obitelji. Istraživanje pridonosi razumijevanju složenog emocionalnog krajolika obrazovanja u ranom djetinjstvu, naglašavajući da je roditeljski stres dinamičan i osjetljiv na intervencije podrške. Buduća bi istraživanja mogla istražiti ciljane strategije za podršku roditeljima tijekom ove kritične razvojne tranzicije.

Ključne riječi: komunikacija roditelj - odgojitelj, obrazovanje u ranom djetinjstvu, prijelaz u vrtić, roditeljski stres, upravljanje stresom