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## PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN ROMANIA: THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY CULTURE DIMENSIONS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC LIFE

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**Abstract:** The present study investigates the relation between family culture and parental involvement in children's academic life, in a sample of Romanian 15 year olds (N=1596) from the *Health Behavior in School-aged Children* (HBSC) 2005-2006 survey. We aimed at tapping into which components of family culture, as conceptualized in the HBSC framework, account as predictors for school-related parental support, when controlling for students' gender. Results point out that parental support is significantly predicted by mother bonding, followed by parental monitoring (both mother and father), family life and enjoyment of activities. From a research perspective, the findings of the present study bring forward differential parental influences on adolescents' school life in Romania, which need to be further investigated. From a school counseling perspective, they point out relevant directions for the assessment of family factors in the Romanian context and they indicate guidelines for parental education in school and family interventions aimed at increasing parental academic support.

**Keywords:** adolescence, family culture, parental academic support, school counseling.

**Resumo:** O presente estudo investiga a relação entre cultura familiar e envolvimento familiar na vida académica de crianças, junto de uma amostra de adolescentes Romanos com 15 anos de idade (N=1596) com recurso ao inquérito do *Health Behavior in School-aged Children* (HBSC) 2005-2006. Procurámos identificar quais os componentes de cultura familiar, enquadrados no HBSC, que surgem enquanto preditores do apoio parental relacionado com a escola, quando controlada a variável género. Os resultados mostram que o apoio parental é significativamente predito pela relação com a mãe, seguido de monitorização parental (pai e mãe), vida da família e actividades divertidas. Do ponto de vista da investigação, os resultados da presente investigação avançam a

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importância da diferenciação das influências parentais na vida escolar dos adolescentes na Roménia, facto que necessita de futuras investigações. Do ponto de vista do papel da escola, destacam-se importantes orientações para a avaliação dos factores familiares no contexto da Roménia e indicam linhas orientadoras para a educação parental na escola e as intervenções na família visando um aumento do apoio parental escolar.

**Palavras-chave:** Adolescência, Cultura Familiar, Apoio Parental Escolar.

## INTRODUCTION

The involvement of parents in children's academic lives is a largely researched topic of interdependent fields: education, developmental psychology, social psychology, sociology. The study of parental involvement in children's schooling has important implications for teaching, counseling and parenting, which are reflected in children's academic achievement and their mental health (Collins & Laursen, 2004; Granic, Dishion, Hollenstein, 2003; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) define *parent involvement* "as the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain" (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 238). This definition is broad enough to encompass different specific domains of parents' involvement, out of which the focus of the present paper will be on "the allocation of resources to the child's school endeavors" (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 237).

Pomerantz et al. (2007) draw a clear distinction between two types of parent involvement in children's academic lives: *school-based involvement* versus *home-based involvement*, each having specific components, different mechanisms and distinct effects on children. Another taxonomy of parent involvement in children's schooling is made by Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), who propose three categories: (1) *behavioral involvement*, which refers to actual participation in parent-teacher conferences; (2) *personal involvement*, which includes "the child's affective experience that the parent cares about school" (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 239); and (3) *cognitive / intellectual involvement*, which encompasses activities that promote the child's cognitive and intellectual development, like solving puzzles together or going to the zoo.

In order to explain mechanisms underlying the effects of parental involvement on children's academic achievement, two major explanatory models have been postulated: skill development models versus motivational development models (Pomerantz et al., 2007). On the one hand, *skill development models* account for the beneficial effects of parents' involvement on children by means of cognitive and metacognitive skills building. This may occur because of the informational

exchange between parent and child regarding school curricula and level of abilities that youngsters possess. Another reason may be that teachers favor such children with more attention which leads to better skill development (Pomerantz et al., 2007). On the other hand, *motivational development models* argue that benefits of parental involvement on children derive from increasing positive attitudes and motivations regarding school, using resources like “control understanding, perceived competence, and self-regulation” (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 239). Possible mechanisms that account for motivational development are speculated: internalization of positive values about school, modeling strategies for solving tasks and habituation with school-related assignments. Another interesting explanation is represented by the positive effects that motivated children may have on their parents’ involvement (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994).

When analyzing the effects that parental involvement has on children, Pomerantz et al. (2007) take two types of research into account: studies on natural involvement of parents, on one hand and interventions that promote parental involvement, on the other hand. While *naturally occurring involvement of parents* on the school front seems to be constantly beneficial for children’s achievement, research on involvement on the home front is less clear. On the positive side, when not directly linked to school, parental involvement appears to be associated with better achievement. On the negative side, when directly linked to school, parental involvement appears to have ambiguous effects on children’s performance (Pomerantz et al., 2007). The results of the meta-analysis conducted by Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002) show that there is no substantial evidence sustaining the beneficial effects of *parent involvement interventions*. As the authors point out, these outcomes do not necessarily prove the ineffectiveness of such programs, rather they emphasize the need for better internal validity and attention to the demographics of participants (Mattingly et al., 2002).

The lack of consistency in data concerning parent involvement on the school front versus home front lead to the conclusion that not only the quantity of involvement counts / matters, but also its *quality*. Therefore, a large body of research regarding different categories of parental involvement has been conducted (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Firstly, *autonomy supportive* involvement proves to have positive effects on children’s academic and emotional functioning across cultures, as well as on behavioral adjustment and levels of acting out throughout the transition to junior high. In addition, behavioral control, assessed as needed guidance (Wang, Pomerantz, & Chen, 2007, p. 1606) is beneficial for children’s academic achievement, and it also accounts for decreased delinquent behaviors. In contrast, psychological controlling involvement is emotionally detrimental for children (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000; Wang et al., 2007). Secondly,

it seems that parents' *focus on the process and the pleasure* of learning, rather than on innate abilities and performance is beneficial for the school outcomes of children. Thirdly, *positive affect* expressed by parents during their involvement in children's academic lives is likely to have conducive effects on their achievement, as opposed to negative affect. Fourthly, *parents' beliefs about their children's potential* also seem to influence school outcomes, by means of determining the type of involvement. Positive beliefs of parents seem to be associated with better academic performance of children than negative beliefs (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Another conclusion drawn from different findings of studies on parental involvement is the fact that not every child benefits in the same extent from parents' support. *Children* also play a role in the equation, contributing with their *personal attributes and experiences* to the parent-child interaction. Therefore, it has been suggested that "Children with *negative [competence] experiences* may be particularly sensitive to the quality of parents' involvement because such children have a heightened need for the resources important to skill and motivational development" (Pomerantz et al., 2007, p. 390). On the positive side, these children could benefit more from high quality parent involvement than the ones with *positive competence experiences*. On the negative side, though, they would be more vulnerable to counterproductive types of parental academic involvement than their peers with positive experiences, as they already have the necessary resources (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

In this line of research, other potential moderators are taken into account: socio-economic status, education level of parents and ethnicity, as well as age and gender of children. Hill et al. (2004) point out that demographic factors have different effects on children. That is, *socio-economic background* and *education level of parents* influence educational and career aspirations of their children, but they have no effect on school behavior and academic achievement. Moreover, *ethnicity* seems to play an important role in the relation between parental involvement and academic achievement of children, African Americans being more strongly affected by parental involvement than European Americans (Hill et al., 2004). With respect to *age differences*, children become more independent as they grow older. This may have effects on the form of involvement that they need from their parents (Pomerantz et al., 2007). However, other authors argue that "parent academic involvement matters across middle and high school years, despite previous research that suggests that it declines between elementary and secondary school levels" (Hill et al., 2004, p. 1504). Hence, for more conclusive results, further research is needed with regard to age as a moderator between parents' involvement and children's achievement. As for *differences* found regarding *gender*, it is suggested that girls would benefit less than boys from parental involvement, maybe due to more positive school competence experiences that girls encounter (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

## HBSC research on family factors in adolescent educational development

The conceptual framework of the “*Health Behavior in School-aged Children*” study (HBSC) encompasses integrative perspectives on health behaviors, taking into account not only health-related actions per se, but also variables such as school environment, school adjustment and individual and social resources. That is, it emphasizes the role of: (1) macro-social context (i. e. culture, country, socio-economic, national and local circumstances); (2) social domains like family, peers, and school; and (3) developmental stages which influence cognitive functions, self-perceptions and psychological processes (Currie et al., 2009; Currie et al., 2008; Rasmussen, 2004). HBSC studies have focused on three age groups (11, 13, and 15 years), which represent the onset and the middle years of adolescence, a developmental stage marked by important physical and psychological changes, and increasing independence (Currie et al., 2009).

In the international report from the HBSC 2005-2006 survey, the following family culture dimensions were assessed: family affluence, family structure, communication with mother, respectively with father, parental monitoring, bonding, disciplinary styles, and family life, enjoyment of family activities and satisfaction with global family atmosphere (Currie et al., 2008; Moreno et al., 2004). Currie et al. (2008) view *parent-child communication* as being essential for the psychological development of the child. According to the 2005-2006 HBSC report, *positive relations with parents* seem to be associated with less disruptive behaviors, less health-risk behaviors, and with better psychological and physical health. *Ease of communication with both mother and father* is significantly associated with *higher family affluence*, regardless of gender or country (Currie et al., 2008).

HBSC research on adolescents’ relations with their parents is various in terms of assessed concepts and variables. Firstly, the influence of *family relations* (i. e. communication with parents) has been compared to the role of *peer relations* in adolescence, in respect to *psychological complaints*, and respectively *psychological adjustment*. Results show that family communication seems to play a larger role in explaining psychological complaints and adjustment, than peer communication. These findings are very similar cross-nationally, but sex and age differences do exist (Moreno et al., 2009).

Secondly, Al Sabbah et al. (2009) investigate the differential effects that *communication with mother versus father* has on *body weight dissatisfaction* among adolescent girls and boys. On the one hand, their findings point out that difficulties in talking to mother are consistently associated only with girls’ body dissatisfaction. On the other hand, difficulties in talking to father are strongly related to both girls’ and boys’ weight dissatisfaction. There are almost no differences across countries regarding the relation between parent communication and body dissatisfaction among adolescents (Al Sabbah et al., 2009).

Thirdly, *adolescent-parent relations* have also been assessed in association with *bullying behavior*, for both aggressors and victims. This has been the purpose of the HBSC study conducted by Nation, Vieno, Perkins, and Santinello (2008). Results show that the influence of parent-child relation on bullying and being bullied outbalances the influences of adolescents' relations with teachers and peers at the age of 15 years. In contrast, at the age of 11 years, teacher-student relations seem to be more influential regarding bullying. Adolescents aged 13 and 15 years who are either aggressors or victims of bullying have a common characteristic: they all do what their parents want and generally they are not consulted in the decision making process by their parents. This may lead to the conclusion that *collaboration between parents and adolescents in making decisions* is a promoter of pro-social behavior. On the opposite, not being consulted in decision making may have negative effects on adolescents' social behaviors in terms of bullying or being constantly bullied by others (Nation et al., 2008).

Fourthly, parent-child communication is also considered and investigated as being part of the broader concept of *family bonding*. The latter is defined as "a feeling of closeness and intimacy towards one's parents and reflected in perceived monitoring, communication, involvement, and joint activities in the family" (Kuendig & Kuntsche, 2006, p. 464). In Kuendig and Kuntsche's (2006) HBSC study, family bonding is operationalized as communication with parents, joint activities, and support. The research focuses on the relation between family bonding and *adolescent alcohol use*. The findings reveal that strong family bonds are associated with less alcohol consumption among adolescents, regardless of parents' drinking habits (i. e., presence versus absence of alcohol use in the family).

Another family factor that has been assessed in HBSC studies is *parental monitoring*, defined as "the parents' knowledge of their child's whereabouts, activities, and friends" (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000, p. 66). It has been shown that higher monitoring levels are associated with better school adjustment, less disruptive behaviors, and less risk behaviors. However, it seems that not all types of monitoring are beneficial for adolescents. Furthermore, one needs to take into account the specific family context and the individual's characteristics when assessing the effects of parental monitoring on children and adolescents (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000; Moreno et al., 2004). In respect to *manifestations of affection*, Moreno et al. (2004) argue that adolescents tend to be less explicit than children. One possible explanation for this fact is the development of autonomy and independence from parents that adolescents need to demonstrate. Despite the decrease of affection expressions, data has pointed out that adolescents benefit a lot from a warm and loving relation with their parents in terms of psychological welfare and self-esteem, academic competence, and hence display less behavioral problems (Moreno et al., 2004).

As for the relation between *involvement of parents in children's academic lives* and adolescent development presented in the first section of the present paper, few HBSC studies assessing this dimension have been conducted. One of them is the research conducted by Matos, Dadds, and Barrett (2006), in which the authors appraise *parent encouragement for school*. This can be seen as part of the broader concept of parental involvement in children's academic lives, bearing high similarity to what Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) define as *personal involvement* in their earlier presented taxonomy. Another HBSC study that assesses parental involvement is the one conducted by Volk, Craig, Boyce, and King (2006). In this paper, the relation between *adolescents' perceptions of parental care and involvement* and their *perceptions of school* is examined. Findings emphasize the strong association between perceived parental care, warmth, and involvement, on the one hand, and *school enjoyment* and *achievement*, on the other. It seems that parental support outweighs variables like gender, age, SES, and mental health, when relating them to school enjoyment and self-reported achievement of adolescents.

An interesting finding of Volk et al. (2006) is the fact that *cultural differences* regarding the above mentioned correlation do exist. That is, in northern regions of Canada, there was no significant relation between perceptions of parental care and involvement and perceptions of school performance and enjoyment. The authors offer a possible explanation based on cultural differences, as northern territories are populated with more aboriginal residents. Inuit adolescents seem to have higher levels of autonomy than non-aboriginal adolescents, and aboriginal parents seem to be less involved in their children's lives (Volk et al., 2006). Negru and Băban (2009) have brought forward similar results in a Romanian adolescent HBSC sample. That is, in the sample of 13 and 15 year olds that they analyzed, parental support did not significantly contribute to school adjustment. The possible explanation offered is similar to the one Volk et al. (2006) propose. It seems that Romanian parents' involvement in the academic lives of their children is very limited, an aspect that could explain why parental involvement is not so important for Romanian adolescents' school adjustment (Negru & Băban, 2009).

### *Present study*

The present study is based on data from the "*Health Behavior in School-aged Children*" (HBSC) survey which took place in Romania in 2005/2006 as part of the international HBSC study (Băban, in press). The HBSC, initiated in 1982 by researchers from three countries, is now a World Health Organization collaborative project involving 44 participating countries. The goal of the study is to gain new insight and increase knowledge and understanding of adolescent



health and well-being in social and developmental context, focusing on an ecological perspective that informs health promotion in schools, families and local communities (Currie et al., 2004). The study is conducted every four years on nationally representative samples of 11, 13 and 15 year olds, at same time in all countries, based on a common standardised survey questionnaire.

### *Aims of the study*

The present study investigates family culture predictors of parental involvement in children's academic life, in a sample of Romanian 15 year olds from the HBSC 2005-2006 survey. We aimed at tapping into which components of family culture, as conceptualized in the HBSC framework, account for parental involvement in children's academic life, when controlling for students' gender. Hence, we analyzed the link between parents' role in their children's life in school settings and in family-based interactions and activities. Parental involvement in children's academic life is an element of the school environment in the HBSC framework (Rasmussen, 2004). From the family culture packages included in the 2005-2006 survey we selected parental monitoring, parental bonding, family life and enjoyment of family activities.

As we previously debated, there is a strong relation between family dynamics in terms of parent-child interaction at home and parental involvement in the child's academic life. Though we tapped into family culture by means of student assessments, we believe that they represent a valid indicator of naturally occurring involvement of parents at home. Hence, on the one hand, our study is an exploratory pursuit which investigates how adolescents' perceptions of home-based parent-child interactions and activities explain school-based parental support. On the other hand, the prediction patterns can provide important information for prevention and intervention programs in Romanian school settings. We intend to bring forward elements of the family culture which should be taken into account in individual or family counseling, group or classroom based interventions pointed at increasing parental involvement in their children's academic development.

### *Instruments/Measures*

*Parental academic support.* The parental academic support scale represents a dimension of the perceived school environment in the HBSC survey (Rasmussen, 2004). It was assessed through five items, referring to parental availability in providing help for their child, meeting with teachers when necessary, being

interested in what happens with the child at school, offering encouragement in order to increase academic achievements of the child and proving help with the child's homework. Each item was appraised on a 5-point Likert scales, ranging from total agreement, initially coded with a value of one to total disagreement, initially coded with a value of five.

*Parental monitoring.* The parental monitoring scale consists of two identical questions, separate for mother and father, reflecting *mother monitoring* and *father monitoring*. Each question asks the adolescent to appraise how much his/her mother and respectively father "really knows about" five types of activities (Moreno et al., 2004). Self-assessments are made on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "Don't have or don't see mother/father", initially coded with a value of four, to "She/he knows a lot" initially coded with a value of one.

*Parental bonding.* The parental bonding scale is a self-assessment measure of the level of emotional parent-child attachment. It is replicated separately for *mother bonding* and *father bonding*, each subscale consisting of eight identical items. Appraisals are made on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "Don't have or don't see mother/father", initially coded with a value of four, to "Almost always" initially coded with a value of one. Items one to five and eight reflect positive aspects of parental bonding, while items six and seven refer to negative dimensions (Moreno et al., 2004).

*Family life and enjoyment of activities.* These two scales are made of the same eight items which reflect activities children can do with their parents, like playing indoor games, visiting friends or relatives, or going for a walk together. The *family life scale* asks adolescents to appraise "How often do you and your family usually do each of these things all together?" on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Every day" (initially coded with 1) to "Never" (initially coded with 5). The *enjoyment of activities scale* focuses adolescents on "Do you like to do these things with your family?" with self-assessment on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "I like it a lot" (initially coded with 1) to "I do not do this activity with my family" (initially coded with 5).

*Gender.* The gender of participants was coded with 1 for boys and 2 for girls.

### *Participants*

In the present study we used the 2005/2006 HBSC survey data from a representative sample of fifteen year old adolescents attending Romanian schools, in the ninth grade ( $N = 1596$ ). From the total number of participants, 603 (37.8 %) were boys and 993 (62.2 %) were girls. The questionnaires were filled in by participants in their schools, after providing individual consent for questionnaire completion and being informed of data confidentiality. The HBSC instrument

was administered by a team of trained research assistants and all filled-in questionnaires were put in sealed envelopes in order to protect the anonymity of participants.

### *Results*

All data was processed using SPSS 16 for Windows.

#### Data recoding

*Parental academic support.* Responses on this scale were recoded so that low scores indicate reduced levels for each component item and high scores reflect increased levels.

*Parental monitoring.* Participants' answers on this scale were recoded from zero (Don't have or don't see mother/father) to three (She/he knows a lot).

*Parental bonding.* Responses on this scale were recoded from zero (Don't have or don't see mother/father) to three (Almost always) for the positive bonding items. For the two negative bonding items we used the following recoding principle: zero for the response alternative "Don't have or don't see mother/father" and a coding of one for "Almost always" to three for "Never". Hence, reduced levels of negative bonding were reflected in high scores.

*Family life and enjoyment of activities.* For the family life scale we employed a recoding from zero for "Never" to a value of four assigned to "Every day". Similarly, in the enjoyment of activities scale "I do not do this activity with my family" was given a value of zero, and "I like it a lot" a value of four. Therefore, low scores reflected reduced involvement in joint family activities and enjoyment of these activities and high score high involvement and enjoyment.

#### Descriptive and inferential results

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for the primary variables are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

In Table 1 we detail the descriptive statistics for the total sample ( $N = 1596$ ) of fifteen year olds in the ninth grade. Students perceive a higher degree of monitoring provided by mothers ( $M = 11.67$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ), rather than fathers ( $M = 10.81$ ,  $SD = 4.12$ ). Interestingly, the standard deviation for father monitoring is much higher than that for mother monitoring. This can be an indicator of high variability among adolescents' perceptions of their fathers' knowledge about the types of activities they are involved in. For parental bonding the difference

between bonding with one's mother ( $M = 19.70$ ,  $SD = 3.27$ ) compared to one's father ( $M = 17.79$ ,  $SD = 5.88$ ) is even more visible. Again, standard deviations for father bonding are much higher than those for mother bonding, pointing out a higher level of variability among participants in the emotional attachment to their fathers.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the primary variables (N = 1596)**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Observe drange	Possible range
Parental academic support	21.31	3.03	7-25	5-25
Mother monitoring	11.67	1.81	3-15	0-15
Father monitoring	10.81	4.12	0-15	0-15
Mother bonding	19.70	3.27	0-24	0-24
Father bonding	17.79	5.88	0-24	0-24
Family life	16.10	5.91	0-32	0-32
Enjoyment of family activities	23.68	6.74	0-32	0-32

As depicted in Table 2, parental academic support is significantly related to all family culture components. The support parents offer in their children's academic lives is positively correlated with both mother ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and father ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) monitoring, with both mother ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and father ( $r = .16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) bonding and also with both family life ( $r = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and enjoyment of family activities ( $r = .28$ ,  $p < .01$ ). We did not depict significant gender differences for the perceived academic support provided by parents ( $r = .008$ , *ns*). We did find though that boys report higher levels of father monitoring ( $r = -.056$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and bonding ( $r = -.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and also more activities conducted with the family in the family life scale ( $r = -.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Girls do report less joint family activities, but they enjoy them more than boys do ( $r = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 2. Intercorrelations between the primary variables (N = 1596)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Parental academic support	–							
2. Mother monitoring	.24**	–						
3. Father monitoring	.22**	.36**	–					
4. Mother bonding	.22**	.26**	.11**	–				
5. Father bonding	.16**	.10**	.74**	.17**	–			
6. Family life	.26**	.18**	.19**	.21**	.14**	–		
7. Enjoyment of family activities	.28**	.26**	.23**	.23**	.16**	.55**	–	
8. Gender	.008	.19**	-.05*	-.004	-.11**	-.11**	.05*	–

Note.\* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

For the investigation of family culture predictors of parental involvement in children's academic life we employed a hierarchical linear regression procedure, with parental academic support as criterion and parental monitoring (for mother and respectively father), parental bonding (for mother and respectively father), family life and enjoyment of family activities as predictors. In order to control for gender differences, we also introduced this variable as predictor. As depicted in Table 3, four hierarchical regression models were tested. This was done in order to account for influences on parental academic support of students' gender, parental monitoring, parental bonding, family life and enjoyment of family activities.

**Table 3. Summary of hierarchical linear regression for estimating parental academic support from participants' gender and family culture predictors (N = 1596)**

Variable	Outcome variable				
	Parental academic support				
	R2	$\Delta R2$	B	SE B	B
STEP 1	.00	.00			
Gender			-.07	.17	-.01
STEP 2	.08**	.08**			
Gender			-.24	.16	-.03
Mother monitoring			.33	.04	.19**
Father monitoring			.10	.02	.14**
STEP 3	.11**	.03**			
Gender			-.19	.16	-.03
Mother monitoring			.24	.05	.14**
Father monitoring			.10	.03	.14**
Mother bonding			.21	.03	.19**
Father bonding			-.005	.02	-.01
STEP 4	.15**	.03**			
Gender			-.15	.16	-.02
Mother monitoring			.19	.05	.11**
Father monitoring			.08	.03	.11**
Mother bonding			.16	.03	.15**
Father bonding			-.007	.02	-.01
Family life			.05	.01	.11**
Enjoyment of family activities			.05	.01	.12**

Note:\*\*  $p < .01$

The influence of students' gender did not account for a significant proportion of the variance in perceived parental academic support at Step 1 ( $\hat{a} = -.01, ns$ ). When controlling for this variable in Step 2, while entering mother and father monitoring, gender influences remained statistically non-significant. As Step 2, the introduction of mother ( $\hat{a} = .19, p < .01$ ) and father monitoring ( $\hat{a} = .14, p < .01$ ) in the regression model led to a significant increase of 8% in the prediction of parental academic support. In Step 3 of the hierarchical linear regression, the addition of mother and father bonding contributed to a significant 3% increase for the variance of parental academic support. Father bonding was not a statistically significant predictor for parental academic support ( $\hat{a} = -.01, ns$ ). Finally, in Step 4, when we introduced family life ( $\hat{a} = .11, p < .01$ ) and enjoyment of family activities ( $\hat{a} = .12, p < .01$ ) as additional predictors, the regression model added a significant 3% to the variance of parental academic support.

### *Discussion*

Parental academic support represents a key element in children's academic achievement and their mental health, as previously discussed (Pomerantz et al., 2007). The HBSC studies on this topic emphasize relations between school-related parental support, on the one hand, and adolescent health, adjustment, conduct problems, anxiety, depression, school enjoyment, and academic achievement, on the other (Matos et al., 2006; Volk et al., 2006). Therefore, the in-depth understanding of the components that influence parental support is extremely important for adolescents' positive development. When interventions target the core elements that contribute to parental support, the developmental benefits that adolescents gain from their parents' involvement is substantially enhanced. In the present study, parental support has been best predicted by mother bonding, followed by parental monitoring (mother and father) and family life and enjoyment of activities.

The strongest predictors of parental support in the models we generated are mother monitoring and bonding. Father monitoring, family life and enjoyment of activities have also been strong predictors for parental support. Firstly, this reveals the fact that for Romanian adolescents the perceptions of parents' knowledge about their activities and relations contribute to a significant degree to the perceived academic parental support. Secondly, Romanian adolescents' perceptions of school-related parental support seem to be considerably explained by perceptions of family life and enjoyment of family activities. That is, adolescents who think they have a happy, fun family life, they also benefit from high academic parental support. The fact that gender is not a significant predictor for parental academic support in this adolescent Romanian sample can indicate

that girls and boys perceive school-related support in similar manners. To some degree, the negative relation between gender and parental support points out that Romanian boys perceive higher levels of academic parental support than girls.

As previously discussed, the *parental monitoring and bonding dimensions* were separately assessed for each parent. In the regression models we generated, both mother and father monitoring represent valid positive predictors of parental academic support, while for bonding only appraisals referring to mothers are valid positive predictors. While monitoring reflects parental knowledge about activities that children are involved in, the bonding items appeal to emotional attachment (Moreno et al., 2004). Hence, higher monitoring from both mother and father is clearly a positive indicator of their interest and involvement in their child's school activities, not only in their out-of-school ones. For bonding though, the trend we revealed from the regression models indicates that father bonding is a negative predictor for parental academic support. This would suggest that low father bonding tends to predict high family involvement in their children's academic development. Though the finding was not statistically significant, it represents an interesting starting point for future research on differential parental influences on adolescents' school life in Romania. Mother bonding remained a strong positive predictor of parental academic support in the two regression models. This finding is very important for interventions aiming at academic parental support, by indicating that a key target should be mother bonding, in terms of emotional support and autonomy promotion offered by mothers. It also has important implications for research, indicating that emotional support and autonomy promotion of mothers should be taken into account when assessing school-related parental support. Hence, it does appear that at least in the Romanian adolescent sample we used, influences of parent-child bonding are of different intensity and direction (positive versus negative) for each parent.

Pomerantz et al. (2007) draw some directions for further research and interventions on the involvement of parents in children's academic lives. In respect to *research*, several improvements of methods are suggested: extending qualitative studies to quantitative ones, using observational methods to assess parent-child interactions and designing experiments to establish the causal role of parental involvement. The authors also point out the importance of children's characteristics that need to be taken into account when analyzing the effects of parent involvement. As for *designing effective interventions*, the most important practical implication is the need for promoting autonomy support, focus on process, positive affect, and positive beliefs accompanying parents' involvement in their children's schooling (Pomerantz et al., 2007). In the spirit of these research directions, we view our findings as a preliminary attempt to analyze the role of parents in family-based and school-focused interactions with their



children. A limitation of the current study resides in the fact that data is based only on appraisals made by adolescents. Hence, in order to have an accurate picture of family dynamics, it is important that future studies also focus on appraisals made by parents and also on behavioral measures of parental involvement and parent-child interactions.

From an *applied developmental intervention* perspective, an important aspect of parental involvement in children's academic life is represented by the *multidimensional effects* it brings forth in children. Namely, it has beneficial influences on children's motivation, engagement, school behavior, academic achievement, educational and career aspirations, and adjustment to transition. Moreover, research points out that parental academic involvement is also associated with better mental health in terms of higher emotional and social functioning of children (Grolnick et al., 2000; Hill et al., 2004; Pomerantz et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2007). From this integrative perspective, a better understanding of family culture predictors for parental school involvement can guide practitioners who develop family-focused interventions. The level of parental involvement in the academic development of adolescent children represents an underexplored aspect in Romanian school and home-based interventions. School psychologists in Romania can benefit from our findings, as they point out relevant directions for the assessment of family factors in the Romanian context and parental education directions for school and family interventions.

Adolescence brings forward a refinement of parent-child relations and active negotiations of these roles in families. The perceived similarities and differences in the monitoring and bonding given by each parent, can contribute to the elaboration of assessment and intervention procedures in Romanian schools, aimed at increasing parental academic support. Also, school and community interventions and media campaigns must bring forward the role frequent and enjoyable joint-family activities have in strengthening parental academic support. From the Romanian parents' perspective, the conceptualization of parental academic support through factors referring to naturally occurring, home-based parental involvement can be very useful. This is because it will help them view their role in their children's development not so much as a burden and "hard work", but as something they can do and improve in every-day activities and interactions.

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