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## Rewards and punishments in the education of preschool children

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### Abstract

The authors are focused on measuring the preferences of parents to traditional or alternative forms of rewards and punishments in the education of preschool children. For this purpose the questionnaire for parents was created. Research has shown that parents are aware of the alternative forms of rewards and punishments and try to implement them in their education. Differences in the preference for the traditional and alternative concept of education by gender of the parents, age and the number of children in the family were not found. The only significant influence was found in the parents' level of education.

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### 1. Introduction

As is evident from the historical periods, opinions on the value of children have gradually changed although a manipulative attitude towards children persisted for a very long time and the social value of children increased extremely slowly. The interest of society, particularly from the Catholic Church for children in difficult situations (e.g. illegitimate, abandoned, disabled) appears with the advent of Christianity. With the arrival of the Enlightenment, represented by Voltaire, Rousseau, Pestalozzi and others, the situation of children changed considerably. The needs of children have been recognized and looked after since this period of time.

However, the increasing value of children and the deeper exploration of their life, learning and developmental needs is a feature of a later socialization stage. This period turned the intense attention of many experts towards the

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process of integrating the child into society, while clearly emphasizing the irreplaceable role of the family. The phase of support and help is characterized by encouraging and helping the child overcome immaturity and mastering a variety of burdens. Currently children are becoming an adult partner, especially to parents and those who are involved in their early education. As Kohn (1999) says, the basic strategy for raising children can be summarized in six words: "Do this and you'll get that". We dangle goodies (from candy bars to sales commissions) in front of people in much the same way that we train the family pet. Drawing from hundreds of studies, Kohn (1999) demonstrates that people actually do inferior work when they are enticed with money, grades, or other incentives. Programs that use rewards to change people's behavior are similarly ineffective over the long run. Promising goodies to children for good behavior can never produce anything more than temporary obedience. In fact, the more we use artificial inducements to motivate people, the more they lose interest in what we're bribing them to do. Rewards turn play into work, and work into drudgery. Parents who care about helping children to learn and behave, meanwhile, should be doing everything possible to help them forget that external stimuli exist. Basically, the more educational care relies on incentives, the worse things get.

Rewards and punishments seem at first glance like two completely different concepts, but these are two sides of the same coin. Their similarity is that both are only an external impulse (incentive), which focuses on the external behavior of the child. Both tend to have an immediate effect which most people see as the primary result and never think of their long-term negative impact on personality development. What should be preferred? Rewards or punishments? The research results can be summarized in the clear findings (Čáp & Mareš, 2001): education based on rewards has better results than education based on punishments. The authors further stated that rewards encourage learning, including social learning, which has a large importance in education. Unlike the effect of punishments that one can hardly predict. The same punishment leads one child to correct his behavior, the other to obedience but only outwardly, the third child reacts negatively and more likely continues with the undesirable behavior and the fourth can fall into depression. Unfortunately, the punishment very often leads to the opposite of what should have been achieved.

The rewards are perceived as such actions combined with the behavior and conduct of a child that expresses a positive evaluation and brings the child joy and satisfaction to some of his needs. Conversely, the punishments are such actions which express a negative evaluation and bring the child resentment, frustration or restriction of certain needs. An alternative form of rewards and punishments tends to show the respect and appreciation of the children. Therefore, parents and children are seen as equal partners responsible for their actions. Parents' attention is focused on the ability of the child, his achieved results and the development of confidence and self-esteem. It is a process of encouraging the child that is in contrast to the traditional understanding of rewards and punishments.

The theme of rewards and punishments in the education of children is part of the various disciplines related to child development. Its relevance is also known under diverse specific orientation of the research. Such as identification of associations between children's behaviour and their performance on a task with a steadily increasing ratio of punished to rewarded responses in a group of clinic-referred children with an anxiety disorder (O'Brien & Frick, 1996). Another example is the process of validating the Sensitivity to Punishment and Sensitivity to Reward Questionnaire for Children (SPSR-C) performed by Luman, van Meel, Oosterlaan and Geurts (2012). The results of the comparisons between children 6-13 years old with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and without comorbid oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) showed that children with ADHD have a heightened sensitivity to reward compared to typical controls, while a heightened sensitivity to punishment was displayed particularly by children with ADHD+ASD. The parent-child interaction therapy and triple p-positive parenting program (Thomas & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007) is suggested as a way to strengthen the relationship between the child and the parent.

Rewards and punishments as regulators of children's behavior have been discussed in education in all societies throughout all periods of time. They belong among the most common means of education having many species, functions and risks associated with their use. Therefore, parents should choose appropriate rewards or punishments for the child's personality and age, and ultimately they should apply them consistently. It is therefore very important for the parents to know how to properly use these educational resources. In the presented research we were investigating if the use of traditional or alternative rewards and punishments vary according to parents' gender, age, education and the number of children in the family and what form (traditional or alternative) is preferred among

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