

Different Reactions of Parents to Displays of Anger in Two- and Three-Year-Old Children

Joanna Szczęsna¹

J. Brudziński Voivodeship Children's Hospital in Bydgoszcz
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6121-1381>

Małgorzata Wójtowicz-Szeffler

Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz
Faculty of Psychology
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4822-2473>

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this article is to present various parental reactions to displays of anger in two- and three-year-old children (reactive parenting methods) and determine which factors (age, gender, education, and place of residence) differentiate parental reactions to a child's behavior. Additionally, the study aimed to ascertain the reactive parenting methods parents use based on the type of situations reflecting behavioral manifestations of young children's autonomy.

Method: A questionnaire-based study conducted with a sample of 120 parents of two- and three-year-old children (60 women and 60 men). An original questionnaire based on Lev Vygotsky's theory of the third year crisis (2002) was utilized. Participants were tasked with describing their reactions to behavioral displays of anger in small children across seven everyday life situations (negativism, stubbornness, defiance, wilfulness, opposition –rebellion, deprecation, and despotism).

Results: Parents declared the use of all reactive parenting methods – both inductive and imperative (punitive and psychological aggression) in response to displays of anger in their two- and three-year-old children. Significant predictors for inductive and punitive methods were found to be the parent's age and education level, while for psychological aggression, predictors were gender and place of residence. The study indicated that only women resort to psychological aggression in their relationship with two- and three-year-olds, with its usage being more frequent when the mother's authority is more threatened and the child's opposition to her will becomes increasingly evident.

¹ Correspondence address: joanna.szczesna.wsd@gmail.com.

Conclusion: Behavioral manifestations of autonomy in two- and three-year-olds are influenced by the natural developmental crisis of the third year. These are expressions of frustration in young children rather than displays of aggressive behavior, which require appropriate parenting methods. Based on the study, it was determined that parents primarily declare simultaneous use of inductive and punitive methods, yet the more a child demonstrates autonomy, the higher the declared tendency of parents to resort to punitive methods increases.

Keywords: reactive parenting methods, displays of anger in two- and three-year-old children

The early childhood period marks the transition from dyadic emotion regulation to self-regulation of the child's nervous system (Czub, 2014). The increasing independence and development of a sense of autonomy during this phase broaden the scope for a two- or three-year-old's free exploration of their environment, while simultaneously presenting the challenge of adapting to new circumstances. On one hand, recognizing their own needs and aspirations separately from adult intentions prompts the child to engage in protest behaviors and test the boundaries between their actions and parental prohibitions, which can be a source of intense frustration. The behavior of a two- or three-year-old, driven by the development of self-awareness, may be impulsive, marked by high levels of arousal, and may transgress social rules and norms (Czub, 2014). On the other hand, the discrepancy between the child's intentions and their inappropriately high sense of competence conflicts with adult expectations (Białecka-Pikul, 2011). This implies that when attempting to restrain a preschooler's intentions, they might intensify their emotional reaction further, and in the absence of mature self-regulation mechanisms, escalate into undesirable behavioral patterns.

In Vygotsky's concept (2002), various behaviors exhibited by young children in interaction with their social environment can be identified. Among these, Vygotsky distinguished: negativism, stubbornness, defiance, wilfulness, opposition – rebellion, deprecation, and despotism, which are elaborated upon below.

- Negativism in a two- or three-year-old child is a symptom of their growing independence. It reflects the child's firm refusal not towards the content of an adult's request but rather towards the fact that the request was made by an adult. It illustrates a shift in the child's motivation. It's associated with the child's social orientation towards another person, often compelling the child to act contrary to their affective tendency. This behavior's motive extends beyond the specific situation; the denial stems from the preschooler's desire to emphasize their autonomy in interacting with adults, despite the absurdity of their behavior and the emotional costs incurred. Vygotsky's understanding of negativism should be distinguished from a simple refusal in response to an adult's request, driven by the child's desire to fulfill their own aims.
- Stubbornness characterizes a child's consistent persistence in their actions, repeating the same demand simply because "they said so." It highlights

- the preschooler's tendency to relate to their evolving sense of self, difficulties in modulating emotions according to context, and again, the lack of connection between the child's behavior and the content of the adult's request.
- Defiance is impersonal behavior. The preschooler rebels against parental rules and societal norms, often expressed in the phrase “yes, but!”, it's an expression of the child's desire to assert themselves.
 - Wilfulness means resisting limitations and acting according to one's own plan of action. Wilful behavior involves the preschooler's tendency to act independently, evident in their refusal of help offered by adults.
 - Opposition – rebellion involves a child expressing protest in various separate circumstances, as if constantly in conflict with their environment.
 - Deprecation of individuals and objects involves using nicknames or phrases that devalue people or things (objectively not leading to harm), describing them as weak and negative.
 - Despotic behaviors, also exhibited by young children, manifest in exerting power over their environment, expecting others to comply with their will, and demanding everything the preschooler desires or signals a need for.

Despite socially construed aggressive connotations, the behaviors of two- and three-year-old children need to be clearly distinguished from intentional aggression – the deliberate aim to harm another person (or oneself) with awareness of causing unfavorable consequences for the target while avoiding personal harm (Aronson et al., 1997; Baron & Richardson, 1994; Frączek, 1980; Krahé, 2005; Skorny, 1989; Surzykiewicz, 2000; Wolińska, 2004; Zimbardo & Gerrig, 2019). This publication adopts the developmental perspective of childhood aggression proposed by Obuchowska (2000), which identifies a phase of *pre-aggressive behaviors* in early childhood. This indicates that a child aims to remove obstacles hindering their goals and reacts with outbursts of anger when their pursuits are blocked. Therefore, the behavioral displays of anger in two- and three-year-olds represent an attempt to regulate their emotional tension rather than an intention to harm those who impose limitations.

Parental parenting methods play a significant role in shaping a young child's independence, allowing them to communicate their needs and readiness to make autonomous decisions. In the context of the aforementioned, the responsiveness and availability of parents, serving as role models, hold immense importance. Based on positive experiences in the parent-child relationship, a child learns adaptive ways to regulate emotions. Positive parenting methods also rely on a democratic approach, striking a balance between respecting the preschooler's autonomy and providing boundaries and support for their emotional, social, and moral development (Appelt, 2021; Obuchowska, 2000). However, other parenting methods might evoke shame, doubt, and helplessness in a child (Erikson, 2004). Literature also suggests that some adults may authoritatively direct a child's behavior, critically evaluating their actions, displaying a tendency to emphasize their superiority through prohibitions or commands, and taking control of the child's activities (Wojciechowska, 2003). In an authoritarian parenting style, there is also shaming, devaluing the child's experienced emotions, and outright rejection of them (Engle & McElwain, 2010; Wojciechowska, 2003). In a bid to

limit emotional outbursts in young children, some parents resort to both physical and verbal punishments (Engle & McElwain, 2010). Heightened parental control may condition a child's compulsive drive to improve their regulatory skills to meet parental expectations, perpetually feeling imperfect. Conversely, this can intensify the child's exhibited emotions and behaviors recognized by Vygotsky (2002) as characteristic of the autonomy manifestations during the developmental crisis of two- and three-year-olds (Keefer, 2005; Wojciechowska, 2003). Furthermore, other parenting methods employed during a two- or three-year-old's anger outburst may manifest extreme permissiveness, lack of disciplinary rules and boundaries, leniency, or submission towards the child (Lasota, 2017; Wojciechowska, 2003). These can also signify limited responsiveness and unavailability of the caregiver, thus denying the child access to a role model (Lasota, 2017; Wojciechowska, 2003). They might also express rigidity in imposing strict rules and expectations, creating a home environment with harsh discipline significantly restricting the child's freedom (Lasota, 2017; Wojciechowska, 2003).

In conclusion, the parental approach, characterized by its repetitive and goal-oriented nature, delineates the disciplinary methods within the family structure (Okoń, 1992). Within the literature, one can find descriptions of other parental responses to a child's inappropriate behavior, denoted as *reactive disciplinary methods* by Dominiak-Kochanek (2017). Among these, the author distinguishes between *inductive* and *imperative methods*. Inductive methods leverage knowledge of psychological mechanisms that aid the child in consciously and enduringly renouncing specific behaviors, facilitating their understanding and internalization of the rules breached by such actions. In the adult-child interaction, dialogue predominates, drawing upon the child's cognitive capacities to foster their moral reasoning. The parent assumes the role of a model, and shifts toward desired behaviors are reinforced in the child through verbal praise and expressions of pride in their accomplishments. Conversely, imperative methods establish a hierarchical, authoritarian dependency in the parent-child relationship. According to Dominiak-Kochanek (2017), these encompass physical punishments, punitive measures, and psychological aggression. Within an imperative disciplinary system, the use of physical aggression, consistent imposition of penalties, temporary isolation, expectations of reparations for the child's inappropriate behavior (punitive methods), as well as the application of psychological aggression, are deemed acceptable. In such instances, the parent induces feelings of guilt, shame, ignores, feigns emotional rejection, or resorts to threats, insults, or humiliation of the child to enforce compliance with the parent's expectations through the child's behavior. Such practices compromise the psychological well-being of the child, rendering their value conditional.

The exploratory nature of this research aimed to address the ways parents respond to the displays of anger in two- and three-year-old children, as well as determine which reactive disciplinary methods are most commonly chosen by parents. An additional goal was to identify parental reactions to various situations in which a child exhibits behavioral signs of autonomy. Considering the findings indicating the differentiating influence of parental age, gender, education, and place of residence on the disciplinary methods employed (Basiaga, 2020; Dakowicz

et al., 2015; Domański et al., 2022; Kozłowski & Matczak, 2015; Ostafińska-Molik & Wysocka, 2014; Wałęcka-Matyja, 2013; Wąsiński & Górniok-Naglik, 2016), an attempt was made to examine whether these aforementioned demographic variables significantly differentiate the disciplinary methods employed by parents of two- or three-year-old children. Recognizing a research gap in the area of parental reactions to the crisis of the third year of life described by Vygotsky (2002), where a child's undesirable behaviors do not necessarily imply aggression, an effort was made to broaden the scientific perspective with new data. Currently, the assumption is that the gathered information could serve to expand societal knowledge concerning the developmental crisis in young children, allowing for a better understanding of the direction of parental interventions and their consequences for the psychosocial development of growing children.

Method

Participants

The study involved 120 parents from the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship, having children aged 2–3 years – comprising 60 women and 60 men, aged 23 to 55 years ($M = 32.53$; $SD = 5.55$). The selection of participants was conducted using the snowball sampling method. Among the surveyed parents, 68% declared having higher education, 28% secondary education, 3% vocational education, and less than 1% primary education. The majority, 85% of the surveyed parents, were in a marital relationship. Another 8% of parents were in an informal relationship or were raising the child alone. As much as 60% of parents lived in large cities (over 100,000 inhabitants), 23% in small towns (up to 100,000 inhabitants), and 17% came from rural areas. The majority of the respondents (88%) assessed their financial situation as average, while the remaining 22% rated it as either above average or below average.

Measurement Tools

The study employed a Questionnaire of Parental Reactions to Manifestations of Anger in Two- and Three-Year-Old Children, developed for the purpose of this research based on Vygotsky's (2002) concepts. The questionnaire comprises seven items describing behavioral manifestations of autonomy: negativism, obstinacy, recalcitrance, self-will, rebellion –objection, depreciation, and despotism in young children, occurring in everyday life situations. For instance, the item characterizing a child's negativism was described as follows: "Your child, standing by the window, observes other children playing on the playground. Knowing how much joy your child derives from swinging on a swing, sliding down the slide, or playing in the sandbox among other children, you suggest going to the playground at that moment. However, your child refuses, consequently, you propose

staying at home. In response to this message, the child clearly expresses objection.” Another item, obstinacy in a two- or three-year-old, was described as a situation in which: “Your child persistently and visibly annoyed tries to reach for your glass cup on the table containing juice, even though initially, it was pointed to the same juice in their plastic cup for them to drink.” Participants were asked to provide a free-form response to the question: “What will you do in the presented situation and why will you act in this way?”, which was consistently formulated in the same manner and presented under each of the seven descriptions of situations illustrating behavioral manifestations of child autonomy mentioned above. The theoretical consistency of the questionnaire items was verified using the evaluation method by four competent judges. High theoretical accuracy was achieved ($p > .05$; $W = 0.188$), and after incorporating their substantive suggestions, full agreement was reached on all seven items of the research tool.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted using a paper-and-pencil method in February and March 2021 within the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. The participants gave informed, written consent to participate in the study. They received a sheet containing information about the study’s purpose, a demographic questionnaire, and clear instructions on how to respond to the questionnaire items: “Below are descriptions of 7 situations that depict various behaviors of children aged 2–3 years. Please imagine that they refer to the behavior of your child, and then answer the indicated questions. It is important that the response you write down is the first one that comes to your mind.” After completing the questionnaire at their convenience, the participating parents returned it to the institution from which they received the tool.

Methods of Data Analysis

The data obtained from the research material underwent qualitative analysis of each response provided by the participating parents. The aim was to classify the respondents’ statements into appropriate categories of reactive parenting methods, as outlined by Dominiak-Kochanek (2017). However, the indicators proposed by the author for inductive and imperative parenting methods appeared too narrow, leading to their expansion with additional descriptions of parental behaviors. These descriptions remained consistent with the main assumptions of the presented typology (see Table 1, p. 139). Additionally, due to the lack of reported use of physical punishment by the participating parents, this category was removed from the classification of imperative parenting methods as described by Dominiak-Kochanek (2017) (see Table 1, p. 139). Consequently, three categories of reactive parenting methods were finally distinguished: inductive methods, punitive methods, and psychological aggression, which were subjected to quantitative analysis. Given that the quantitative data had a normal

distribution, statistical analyses to determine the relationship between the anger of two- and three-year-old children and the parental response methods employed such as analysis of variance and multiple regression analysis.

Table 1

Division of Reactive Parenting Methods

Inductive Methods	Imperative Methods	
	Punitive Methods	Psychological Aggression
→ discussing consequences and providing rational justification for disciplinary actions according to the child's cognitive abilities	→ reducing privileges	→ ignoring
→ pointing out alternative adaptive ways to handle a similar situation	→ isolating from others, placing in a different location	→ threatening.
→ modeling desired behaviors	→ expecting compensation	→ imposing decisions under extreme conditions "either... or"
→ using positive reinforcements (verbal praise, expressing pride in the child's behavioral changes)	→ enforcing obedience through commands and prohibitions	→ inducing fear
→ providing opportunities for making choices or independent decision-making (creating conditions for reflection, allowing time for consideration)	→ imposing limitations on the child's activities	→ pretending to experience unpleasant emotions due to the child's unwanted behavior
→ allowing exploration and learning through experience	→ inhibiting the child's independence	→ displaying emotional indifference
→ dialogue concerning the circumstances leading to the specific outcome or the child's behavior (with a determination to understand the child's perspective)	→ disregarding or neglecting the child's needs	→ sulking
→ following the child's needs	→ diverting the child's attention	→ pretending to be offended
→ ignoring unwanted child behavior while ensuring their safety	→ dictating one's will and expecting absolute compliance	→ evoking a sense of guilt in the child
→ reframing a challenging situation into one that's appealing to the child		→ provoking feelings of shame in the child
→ making an agreement with the child based on mutually established conditions		

Source: Own elaboration based on Dominiak-Kochanek (2017) and empirical data analysis (Szczęsna, 2021).

The Results

Reactive Parenting Methods Declared by the Surveyed Parents in Response to the Tantrums of Two- and Three-Year-Old Children

The statistical analysis commenced by determining the percentage frequency index of the use of various reactive parenting methods among the surveyed parents. To accomplish this, three variables were established: inductive methods,

punitive methods, and psychological aggression. These variables were populated with the frequency (expressed as a percentage) with which each parent employed these reactive parenting methods in comparison to the other declared methods.

Subsequently, an examination was conducted to identify the most frequently used reactive parenting methods among the surveyed parents in response to the tantrums of two- and three-year-olds (refer to Table 2).

Table 2

The distribution of the most commonly used reactive disciplinary methods by surveyed parents (N=120)

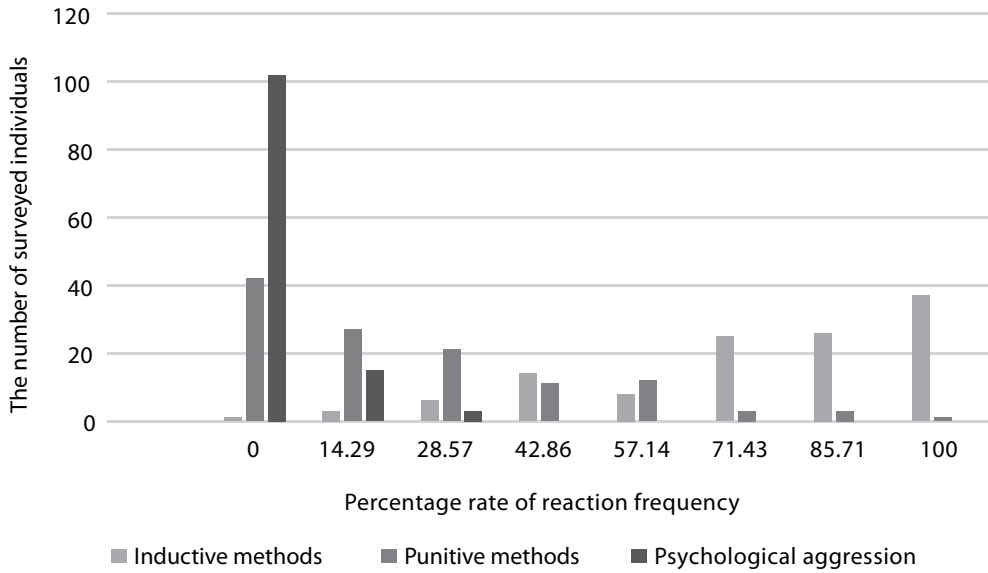
The percentage rate of reaction frequency	Inductive Methods		Imperative Methods			
			Punitive Methods		Psychological Aggression	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
0	1	0.83	42	35.00	102	85
14.29	3	2.50	27	22.50	15	12.50
28.57	6	5.00	21	17.50	3	2.50
42.86	14	11.67	11	9.17	–	–
57.14	8	6.67	12	10.00	–	–
71.43	25	20.83	3	2.50	–	–
85.71	26	21.67	3	2.50	–	–
100	37	30.83	1	83	–	–
Total	120	100	120	100	120	100

A detailed analysis of Table 2 reveals that 37 surveyed parents (30.8%) declared a tendency to exclusively employ inductive methods in response to the tantrums of their two- and three-year-old children, with only 1 parent showing no inclination toward this method. Regarding punitive methods, the observation was the inverse – only 1 parent declared the exclusive use of these disciplinary methods with their children, and 42 parents (35%) did not declare the use of punitive methods at all. Similarly, a small number of parents (18 individuals) confirmed employing psychological aggression – among them, for 15 respondents, this method comprised 14% of all their employed parenting methods, while for 3 individuals, it constituted 29% of their reactions. The study indicates that 102 parents declared that they do not consider psychological aggression as a means of disciplining their child.

Furthermore, the study established that parents declare the simultaneous use of multiple parenting methods as well as the use of only one method (refer to Figure 1, p. 141).

Figure 1

Trend in the most frequently used reactive parenting methods reported by surveyed parents (N=120)



From the data presented in Figure 1, it is evident that parents most frequently declare the simultaneous use of two parenting methods (inductive and punitive methods).

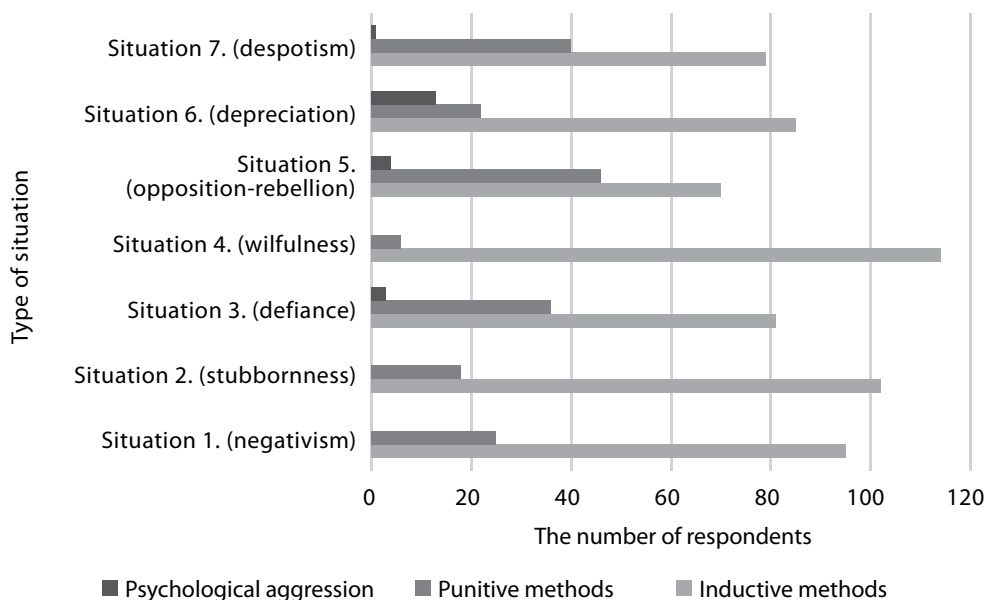
Reactive Parenting Methods Declared by Surveyed Parents in Response to the Manifestations of Anger in Two- and Three-Year-Old Children Based on the Type of Situation

In the next section of the analysis, the declared frequency of use of reactive parenting methods by surveyed parents was examined concerning the type of situation that reflects the behavioral manifestations of autonomy in young children (negativism, stubbornness, obstinacy, wilfulness, opposition – defiance, depreciation, despotism).

The information presented in Figure 2 (p. 142) indicates that surveyed parents declared the use of both inductive and punitive parenting methods in each of the aforementioned situations (consistent with the results presented in Table 2, p. 140). However, only in selected situations (obstinacy, opposition-defiance, depreciation, despotism) did they declare using psychological aggression. For clarity, in the case of manifestations of negativism, 95 caregivers declared the use of inductive methods, while 25 opted for punitive methods. Then, in

Figure 2

The distribution of the frequency of parents' use of specific forms of reactive parenting methods according to the type of situation



situations of stubbornness, 102 respondents indicated the use of inductive methods, and 18 chose punitive methods. In response to obstinacy, 81 parents declared choosing inductive methods, 36 punitive methods, and 3 psychological aggression. In situations of a child's wilfulness, 114 caregivers opted for inductive methods, while 6 chose punitive methods. Regarding behaviors characterized by opposition – defiance, 70 surveyed parents reported using inductive methods, 46 punitive methods, and 4 psychological aggression. In situations of depreciation, 85 caregivers confirmed using inductive methods, 22 punitive methods, and 13 psychological aggression. In response to a child's despotism, 79 parents declared using inductive methods, 40 punitive methods, and 1 psychological aggression. However, it's essential to note that the group resorting to psychological aggression is represented predominantly by females, as surveyed males did not declare using this form of disciplining their children in any situation.

Regression analyses confirmed that the identified situations are good predictors of all types of reactive parenting methods ($R^2 = 0.942$; $p < .001$ for inductive methods; $R^2 = 0.832$; $p < .001$ for punitive methods; $R^2 = 0.508$; $p < .001$ for psychological aggression) (see Table 3, p. 143–144). Each type of behavioral manifestation of the crisis in two- and three-year-olds is related to the frequency of parents using inductive and punitive methods. The more instances of autonomous behavior a young child displays (i.e., more situations where they exhibit negativism, stubbornness, obstinacy, wilfulness, opposition – defiance, depreciation,

despotism), the lower the reported frequency of parents using inductive methods in favor of punitive methods. Concerning psychological aggression, the more instances of opposition and depreciation in a child's behavior, the more frequently surveyed parents (mothers) declared resorting to psychological aggression. Moreover, the more stubbornness, the less frequently surveyed parents (mothers) reported using psychological aggression.

Table 3

Determinants of frequency of inductive and punitive parenting methods and psychological aggression by surveyed parents (N = 120) based on the type of situation

Predictors	beta	SE with beta included	b	SE with b included	t	p
Inductive Methods						
Constant			190.486	3.359	56.715	.001***
Situation 1 (negativism)	-.217	.001	-13.158	1.406	-9.361	.001***
Situation 2 (stubbornness)	-.227	.001	-15.635	1.699	-9.198	.001***
Situation 3 (obstinacy)	-.277	.001	-12.956	1.145	-11.314	.001***
Situation 4 (wilfulness)	-.132	.001	-14.908	2.738	-5.446	.001***
Situation 5 (opposition – rebellion)	-.269	.001	-11.843	1.131	-10.475	.001***
Situation 6 (deprecation)	-.239	.001	-8.733	0.857	-10.187	.001***
Situation 7 (despotism)	-.285	.001	-14.209	1.347	-10.551	.001***
Punitive Methods						
Constant			-5.815	.386	-15.082	.001***
Situation 1 (negativism)	.227	.001	.933	.161	5.782	.001***
Situation 2 (stubbornness)	.283	.001	1.322	.195	6.776	.001***
Situation 3 (obstinacy)	.265	.001	.839	.131	6.383	.001***
Situation 4 (wilfulness)	.126	.002	0.961	.314	3.060	.001***
Situation 5 (opposition – rebellion)	.219	.001	.651	.130	5.015	.001***

Predictors	beta	SE with beta included	b	SE with b included	t	p
Situation 6 (deprecation)	.068	.089	.169	.098	1.716	.089
Situation 7 (despotism)	.314	.001	1.058	.155	6.841	.001***
Psychological Aggression						
Constant			-.519	.175	-2.972	.004**
Situation 1 (negativism)	-.011	.871	-.012	.073	-.163	.871
Situation 2 (stubbornness)	-.184	.011	-.228	.088	-2.576	.011**
Situation 3 (obstinacy)	.081	.257	.068	.059	1.138	.257
Situation 4 (wilfulness)	.041	.565	.082	.142	.577	.565
Situation 5 (opposition – rebellion)	.227	.003	.178	.059	3.031	.003**
Situation 6 (deprecation)	.678	.001	.442	.045	9.923	.001***
Situation 7 (despotism)	-.071	.370	-.063	-.070	-.900	.370

Inductive methods: $F(7,112) = 276.84$, $p < .001$, standard estimation error = 5.970; $R^2 = 0.942$

Punitive methods: $F(7,112) = 85.347$, $p < .001$, standard estimation error = 0.685; $R^2 = 0.832$

Psychological aggression: $F(7,112) = 18.566$, $p < .001$, standard estimation error = 0.310; $R^2 = 0.508$

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p < .05$

Determinants of Reactive Parenting Methods Used in Response to Two- and Three-Year-Old Children's Anger

Based on the study, it was established that the reactive parenting methods declared by the surveyed parents are differently influenced by the parent's gender, age, education level, and place of residence (see Table 4, p. 145).

The information in Table 4 demonstrates that both the age and education level of the parent proved to be significant predictors of the frequency of using inductive and punitive parenting methods by the surveyed parents. The study revealed that concerning inductive methods: the younger the parent, the higher the reported frequency of using these methods. Additionally, a higher level of parental education was associated with a higher reported frequency of employing these parenting methods. Conversely, for punitive methods, an inverse relationship was observed. This suggests that older parents with lower levels of education more frequently declared using these forms of disciplining their child.

The gender of the parent and place of residence did not differentiate the frequency of using inductive and punitive methods. However, they played a significant role in explaining the frequency of using psychological aggression by the surveyed parents in response to their two- and three-year-olds' displays of anger. In situations involving their children's displays of anger, only women resorted to psychological aggression, whereas men did not declare using such forms of disciplining their children at all. The study also established that residents of small towns and rural areas declare more frequent use of psychological aggression.

Table 4

Determinants of the frequency of use by surveyed parents (N=120) of inductive and punitive parenting methods, as well as psychological aggression

Predictors	beta	SE with beta included	b	SE with b included	t	p
Inductive Methods						
Constant			90.386	20.721	4.362	.001
Parent's age	-.229	.089	-1.023	.396	-2.586	.011**
Education	.180	.090	7.523	3.773	1.994	.049*
Place of residence	.144	.089	4.677	2.878	1.625	.107
Parent's gender	-.163	.092	-8.064	4.563	-1.767	.079
Punitive Methods						
Constant			3.350	19.722	.17	.865
Parent's age	.26	.089	1.120	.383	2.922	.004**
Education	-.193	.091	-7.789	3.659	-2.129	.035*
Place of residence	-.099	.088	-3.128	2.752	-1.137	.258
Parent's gender	.108	.091	5.157	4.309	1.197	.234
Psychological Aggression						
Constant			11.815	4.660	2.536	.013
Parent's age	-.12	.087	-.137	.099	-1.382	.172
Education	-.118	.086	-1.309	0.953	-1.374	.172
Place of residence	-.183	.084	-1.518	.695	-2.184	.031*
Parent's gender	-.375	.085	-4.721	1.073	-4.399	.001***

Inductive methods: $F(5,114) = 3.300$, $p < .008$, standard error of estimation = 23.660; $R^2 = 0.088$

Punitive methods: $F(6,113) = 3.511$, $p < .003$, standard error of estimation = 22.520; $R^2 = 0.112$

Psychological aggression: $F(5,114) = 6.305$, $p < .001$, standard error of estimation = 5.720; $R^2 = 0.182$

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p < .05$

Discussion

The discussion in the study reveals that parents, in response to displays of anger by their two- and three-year-old children, present two tendencies in the use of reactive parenting methods. On one hand, they declare a propensity for simultaneous use of inductive and imperative methods (punitive methods and psychological aggression), which aligns with the findings of Taillieu and Brownridge's research (2015). On the other hand, in line with Dallaire et al.'s stance (2006), an orthogonal character of the indicated parenting methods is observed. The reasons for this observed discrepancy may be found in the parental approach to upbringing (Dominiak-Kochanek, 2017). The study indicates that parents find both reducing their child's subjectivity through punishment, demanding reparation, and exploiting the emotional dependence of their child, as well as opposing methods, acceptable. Within the latter methods, parents tap into their child's cognitive potential, model appropriate behavior, and aim to understand and internalize a norm for the child, determining whether a specific behavior is desirable or violates the rules of the upbringing system. External factors might also contribute to the varied use of reactive parenting methods. Literature suggests that fatigue, sleep deprivation, health issues, low mood, or experiencing stress might influence a parent's behavior towards their child, leading to the use of imperative methods with low socialization and educational value (Dominiak-Kochanek, 2017; Grzegorzewska, 2012; Mash & Johnson, 1990). The obtained results from the current study are concerning as they indicate that with the increase in behavioral manifestations of autonomy in young children and the intensification of their undesirable behaviors, the declared inclination of surveyed parents to use inductive parenting methods, considering the child's subjectivity, decreases in favor of punitive methods. Moreover, situations involving a child's opposition, their recurring tendency to reject adult proposals, and devaluing the parent's worth contribute to an increased reported frequency of a parent's use of psychological aggression. Consequently, the use of this parenting method by a parent may shape the belief of a lack of acceptance for expressing one's own will in the child. This implies that the child may abandon attempts at autonomous functioning to maintain a sense of security and avoid aggressive reactions from parents. This presents a significant obstacle to the successful accomplishment of the developmental task crucial at this stage of a young child's life (Erikson, 2004; Vygotsky, 2002). The child's sense of competence, independence, or ability to self-regulate gives way to feelings of shame, helplessness, uncertainty, and inappropriate ways of expressing emotions and engaging in social interactions (Czub, 2014; Erikson, 2004). The study also suggests that parents resorting to inappropriate forms of disciplining young children (psychological aggression) might stem from a flawed interpretation of the child's behavior (e.g., related to devaluing the parent).

McKay et al. (2013) similarly describe that a parent assigns negative intentions to a child's behavior, particularly when their authority is threatened, influencing the parent's behavior aimed at maintaining an authoritarian position in the parent-child relationship. Another significant finding from our research was

that the predictor of psychological aggression in response to the anger expressions of two- and three-year-olds is the parent's gender. It turns out that only surveyed women declared using this form of disciplining their child. These findings support the conclusions of many scientific publications that indicate a greater tendency for women to use relational aggression compared to men. Relational aggression focuses on manipulating the quality of relationships through acts of ignoring, threatening, insulting, or breaking off relationships to gain control over the other person. The justification for this type of aggression can be found in socio-cultural concepts (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Kielar-Turska, 2011; Szczepanik, 2007). Another differentiating factor in the frequency of using psychological aggression by surveyed parents was their place of residence. It was observed that exploiting emotional dependence in interactions with young children occurs mainly in smaller towns and rural areas. This result aligns with the findings of Truskolaska (2010), who demonstrated that living outside metropolises is associated with a traditional parenting approach largely based on authoritarian parenting methods. Additionally, other researchers point out a higher risk of unemployment in smaller towns and rural areas, which might impact a parent's emotional state and their relationship with their immediate environment (Sypniewska & Rawa-Siarkowska, 2015). Also, the degree of popularization of knowledge about child development, factors promoting or limiting their growth, differs in urban and non-urban areas, influencing a parent's use of psychological aggression. However, for the frequency of using inductive and punitive parenting methods, significant determinants were the parent's age and education level. Based on our study, more frequent use of inductive methods was associated with a higher education level, while resorting to punitive methods was characteristic of individuals with lower education. Explanations for this relationship may lie in the level of parental knowledge about a child's psychological development and familiarity with parenting methods and the consequences of employing a system of punishment and rewards for a child's psychosocial functioning. Żurawski (2011) demonstrated that parents with higher education are more inclined to expand their knowledge about child needs by utilizing specialized literature, parenting guides, or psychological-pedagogical journals. Conversely, among parents with basic, vocational, and secondary education, there prevails a belief in the effectiveness of punishment as a perceived form of disciplining young children. These individuals also more frequently employ parenting methods prevalent in their family of origin and transfer the responsibility for a child's socialization to educational institutions (Żurawski, 2011). Additionally, regarding the parent's age, it was observed in our research that the older the parent, the higher the reported frequency of using punitive methods. Conversely, among younger parents, inductive methods were more frequently reported. Hence, it can be inferred that younger parents more accurately recognize a child's autonomy manifestations, which enables their responses to be more aligned with the developmental needs of the child. Research on parents' knowledge about the psychological needs of young children confirms the aforementioned connection: younger parents are capable of considering the child's potential in their approach, which contributes to the successful internalization of rules for desired behavior in two- and three-year-olds

(Wójtowicz-Dacka, 2012). Investing time in seeking reliable sources of knowledge about the psychological needs of young children and actively involving parents in implementing acquired knowledge in their daily lives may be crucial for the harmonious psychological development of a young child. It can also serve as an opportunity to prevent both internalizing and externalizing disorders in the child's further development (Dominiak-Kochanek, 2017). Therefore, the various reactions employed by parents in response to the anger expressions of their two- and three-year-old children not only determine the quality of the socialization and upbringing functions fulfilled but also can significantly impact the mental health of their offspring and the emotional reactions displayed by young children.

Limitations

The conclusions drawn from our research have certain limitations. Primarily, the analysis of factors differentiating parents' reactive parenting methods only included selected demographic variables, such as gender, age, education, and place of residence. This was a deliberate choice stemming from an analysis of earlier literature that primarily focused on these variables. However, it would be worthwhile to consider including additional variables in future studies, for instance, parents raising a child alone versus those in full families². Additionally, the overrepresentation of participants with higher education residing mainly in large cities, compared to those with lower education and living in smaller towns or rural areas, might partially limit the generalization of the study's findings to the entire population of parents. This discrepancy was due to the fact that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when access to participants was partially restricted. Future research should ensure a more balanced selection of participants based on the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. It's important to note that due to space constraints in the published text, it was not possible to present the full range of conducted analyses, such as demonstrating the variations in the frequency of using reactive parenting methods exclusively in male and female samples or separately by the parent's and child's gender. Hence, there is a consideration for developing another publication, offering an opportunity to broaden the perspective of the analyses undertaken so far.

References

- Appelt, K. (2021). Wiek poniemowlęcy. Jak rozpoznać potencjał dziecka? [Toddler age. How to recognize a child's potential?] In A. I. Brzezińska (Ed.), *Psychologiczne portrety człowieka. Praktyczna psychologia rozwojowa [Psychological portraits of a human being. Practical developmental psychology]* (pp. 119–126). Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.

² At this point, I would like to thank the reviewer of this work for his valuable advice.

- Aronson, E., Wilson T. D., & Akert, R. M. (1997). *Psychologia społeczna. Serce i umysł* [Social psychology. Heart and mind]. Zysk i S-ka.
- Baron, R. A., & Richardson, D. R. (1994). *Human Aggression*. Plenum Press.
- Basiaga, J. (2020). Style wychowania zawodowych rodziców zastępczych [Upbringing styles of professional foster parents]. *Wychowanie w Rodzinie* [Upbringing in the Family], 23(2), 99–119. <https://doi.org/10.34616/wvr.2020.2.099.119>
- Białecka-Pikul, M. (2011). Wczesne dzieciństwo [Early childhood]. In J. Trempała (Ed.), *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka. Podręcznik akademicki* [Human development psychology. Academic textbook] (pp. 172–201). Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Czub, M. (2014). Rozwój dziecka. Wczesne dzieciństwo [Child development. Early childhood]. In A. I. Brzezińska (Ed.), *Niezbędnik nauczyciela. Seria I: Rozwój w okresie dzieciństwa i dorastania* [Teacher's Handbook. Series I: Development in childhood and adolescence] (pp. 7–21). Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych.
- Dakowicz, L., Halicka, M., & Skreczko, A. (2015). Kompetencje wychowawcze białostockich Rodziców [Educational competencies of parents in Białystok]. *Studia nad Rodziną* [Family Studies], Vol. XIX 2(37), 165–182. <https://doi.org/10.21697/snr.2015.37.2.08>
- Dallaire, D. H., Pineda, A. Q., Cole, D. A., Ciesla, J. A., Jacquez, F., LaGrange, B., & Bruce, A. E. (2006). Relation of Positive and Negative Parenting to Children's Depressive Symptoms. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 35(2), 313–322. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15374424jccp3502_15
- Domański, H., Przybysz, D., Wyrzykowska, K., & Zawadzka, K. (2022). Praktyki wychowawcze a transmisja wzorów kulturowych w rodzinie [Parental upbringing practices and transmission of cultural patterns in the family]. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* [Culture and Society], 66(1), 123–148. <https://doi.org/10.35757/KiS.2022.66.1.6>
- Dominiak-Kochanek, M. (2017). *Metody wychowawcze rodziców a agresja interpersonalna młodych dorosłych* [Parental upbringing methods and interpersonal aggression in young adults]. Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej.
- Eagly, A. H., & Steffen, V. J. (1986). Gender and Aggressive Behavior. A Meta-Analytic Review of the Social Psychological Literature. *Psychological Bulletin*, 100(3), 309–330. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.100.3.309>
- Engle, J. M., & McElwain, N. L. (2010). Parental Reactions to Toddlers' Negative Emotions and Child Negative Emotionality as Correlates of Problem Behavior at the Age of Three. *Social Development*, 20(2), 251–271. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2010.00583.x>
- Erikson, E. (2004). *Tożsamość a cykl życia* [Identity and the life cycle]. Zysk i S-ka.
- Fraćzek, A. (1980). *Z zagadnień psychologii agresji* [On issues of aggression psychology]. WSPS.
- Grzegorzewska, I. (2012). Czy zachowania rodziców wobec dzieci są niezmiennie? Uwarunkowania stabilności i zmienności sprawowania funkcji rodzicielskich [Are parental behaviors towards children unchanging? Determinants of stability and variability in performing parental functions]. *Edukacja Dorosłych* [Adult Education], 1(66), 89–98.
- Keefer, L. R. (2005). Defiant Behavior in Two- and Three-Year-Olds: A Vygotskian Approach. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33(2), 105–111. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-005-0001-y>

- Kielar-Turska, M. (2011). Średnie dzieciństwo – wiek przedszkolny [Middle childhood – preschool age]. In J. Trempała (Ed.), *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka. Podręcznik akademicki [Human development psychology. Academic textbook]* (pp. 202–233). Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Kozłowski, W., & Matczak, E. (2015). Wartości wychowawcze rodziców: dawniej i dziś [Upbringing values of parents: then and now]. *Journal of Modern Science*, 1(24), 107–128.
- Krahé, B. (2005). *Agresja [Aggression]*. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Lasota, A. (2017). Responsywność opiekuna a poczucie autonomii dziecka we wczesnym dzieciństwie [Caregiver responsiveness and child autonomy in early childhood]. *Nauki o Wychowaniu. Studia Interdyscyplinarne [Educational Sciences. Interdisciplinary Studies]*, 2(5), 84–100. <https://doi.org/10.18778/2450-4491.05.06>
- Mash, E. J., & Johnston, Ch. (1990). Determinants of Parenting Stress: Illustrations from Families of Hyperactive Children and Families of Physically Abused Children. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 19(4), 313–328. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15374424jccp1904_3
- McKay, M., Fanning, P., Paleg, K., & Landis, D. (2013). *When Your Anger Hurts Your Child*. MiND.
- Obuchowska, I. (2000). Agresja dzieci w perspektywie rozwojowej [Children's aggression in developmental perspective]. In B. Kaja (Ed.), *Wspomaganie rozwoju. Psychostymulacja i psychokorekcja*, t. 3 [Development Support. Psychostimulation and psychocorrection, Vol. 3] (pp.16–26). Akademia Bydgoska.
- Okoń, W. (1992). *Słownik pedagogiczny [Pedagogical Dictionary]*. PWN.
- Ostafińska-Molik, B., & Wysocka, E. (2014). Style wychowania w rodzinie pochodzenia w percepcji młodzieży gimnazjalnej i ich znaczenie rozwojowe – próba teoretycznej i empirycznej egzemplifikacji [Upbringing styles in the family of origin in the perception of junior high school students and their developmental significance – an attempt at theoretical and empirical exemplification]. *Przegląd Pedagogiczny [Pedagogical Review]*, 2(25), 213–234.
- Skorny, Z. (1989). *Mechanizmy regulacyjne ludzkiego działania [Regulatory mechanisms of human action]*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Surzykiewicz, J. (2000). Agresja i przemoc w szkole. Uwarunkowania socjoekonomiczne [Aggression and violence in schools. Socioeconomic determinants]. CMPP.
- Szczepanik, R. (2007). Kulturowo społeczna płęć agresji. Perspektywa pedagogiczna [Socio-cultural gender of aggression. Pedagogical perspective]. In J. Wawrzyniak (Ed.), *Socjologiczne i psychopedagogiczne aspekty przemocy [Sociological and psychopedagogical aspects of violence]* (pp. 57–68). Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej.
- Szczęsna, J. (2021). *Sposoby reagowania rodziców na przejawy złości dwu- i trzyletnich dzieci [Ways of reacting by parents to two- and three-year-olds' expressions of anger]* [Unpublished master's thesis]. UKW.
- Sypniewska, B. A., & Rawa-Siarkowska, O. (2015). Regionalny rynek pracy w opinii mieszkańców wsi i miast [Regional labor market in the opinion of rural and urban residents]. *Zeszyty Naukowe PWSZ [Scientific Papers of PWSZ]*, 22, 289–298.

- Taillieu, T. L., & Brownridge, D. A. (2015). The Impact of Aggressive Parental Discipline Experienced in Childhood on Externalizing Problem Behavior in Early Adulthood. *Journ Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 8(4), 253–264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-015-0063-y>
- Truskolaska, J. (2010). Opieka wychowanie i partnerstwo w rodzinach wiejskich i miejskich [Care, education, and partnership in rural and urban families]. KUL.
- Wałęcka-Matyja, K. (2013). Zachowania agresywne adolescentów jako efekt stylu wychowania w rodzinie pochodzenia [Aggressive behaviors of adolescents as an effect of upbringing style in the family of origin]. In D. Borecka-Biernat (Ed.), *Zachowania agresywne dzieci i młodzieży. Uwarunkowania oraz możliwości ich przewycięzania* [Aggressive behaviors of children and adolescents. Determinants and possibilities of overcoming them] (pp. 99–123). Wydawnictwo Difin.
- Wąsiński, A., & Górniok-Naglik, A. (2016). Style wychowania w rodzinach miejskich i wiejskich. Zderzenie preferencji gimnazjalistów i ich rodziców [Upbringing styles in urban and rural families. Collision of preferences of junior high school students and their parents]. *Wychowanie w Rodzinie* [Upbringing in the Family], 13(1), 215–256. <https://doi.org/10.23734/wwr20161.215.256>
- Wojciechowska, J. (2003). Wczesne dzieciństwo – drugi i trzeci rok życia: zagrożenia rozwoju [Early childhood – the second and third year of life: development Threats]. *Remedium*, 6(124), 21–25.
- Wolińska, J. M. (2004). *Agresywność młodzieży: problem indywidualny i społeczny* [Youth aggression: an individual and social problem]. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.
- Wójtowicz-Dacka, M. (2012). Wiedza o potrzebach psychicznych małych dzieci w opinii dwóch pokoleń rodziców [Knowledge about the psychological needs of small children in the opinion of two generations of parents]. *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* [Pedagogical Review], 1(25), 286–298.
- Wygotski, L. S. (2002). Kryzys trzeciego roku życia [The crisis of the third year of life]. In B. I. Brzezińska & M. Marchow (Eds.), *Wybrane prace psychologiczne. T. II: Dzieciństwo i dorastanie* [Selected psychological works. Vol. II: Childhood and adolescence] (pp. 131–140). Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka.
- Zimbardo, P. G., & Gerrig, R. J. (2019). *Psychologia i życie* [Psychology and life]. PWN.
- Żurawski, T. (2011). Świadomość wychowawcza a wykształcenie rodziców [Upbringing awareness and parental education]. *Pedagogika Rodziny* [Family Pedagogy], 1(2), 185–193.