

THE AUTHORITARIAN FATHER: THE PREDICTIVE ROLE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES AND THE ATTACHMENT DIMENSION

UDC 159.922.2:316.356.2-055.52-055.1

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Abstract. *The authoritarian parenting style with its negative connotation has many adverse effects on various aspects of children's development, so the aim of this paper will be to identify potential predictors of the authoritarian parenting style of fathers. The concept of attachment and conflict resolution styles used by fathers are part of the model used in this paper which, together with the age of the fathers, represent important predictors of a father's authoritarian parenting style. A convenience sample included 101 fathers and their children from the territory of Northern Kosovo. The instruments used in the research are The Experience in Close Relationship Scale (Hanak and Dimitrijević, 2013; Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998), Conflict Management Styles Assessment (Adkins, 2006,) and the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991). The results partially proved the hypothesis, and were discussed in the context of attachment theory and previous empirical research that provides a strong framework of reference for understanding the results of this research.*

Key words: *fathers, authoritarian parenting style, attachment, conflict resolution styles.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The parent-child relationship has a big impact on the child. The parents' parenting style is an important component that shapes the child's vision of himself and the world around him. Parents affect a child's self-confidence, adaptive behavior, self-esteem,

Received December 14, 2021 / Accepted April 13, 2022

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healthy way of thinking (Sartaj & Aslam 2010). Numerous studies have dealt with the effects of parenting styles on children: on children's academic success, cognitive development, emotional regulation, adaptation (Davidov & Grusec 2006; Lowe & Dotterer 2013; Jabaghourian et al. 2014). Compared to children who have a good relationship with their parents and who feel accepted, children who feel rejected show high levels of aggression and hostility, addiction, emotional instability, lack of self-confidence (Palmer & Hollin 2000; Russ, Heim & Westen 2003; Barnow, Lucht & Freyberger 2005). Also, the quality of the parent-child relationship has an impact on the development or prevention of risky behaviors in adolescents (Sartaj & Aslam 2010).

Most studies in the past focused on mothers. There have been few studies that have considered the father or at least controlled the effects of his involvement in raising children. Today, that is not the case, and we are witnessing the almost equal participation of the mother and father in the development of children.

A risk factor that dramatically affects adolescent behavior and emotional development is strict paternal discipline (Valiente et al. 2007). The link between strict discipline and negative outcomes is two-way over time, including fathers and children. Children who are sensitive to harsh discipline absorb the negative behavior from their fathers. Negative cognition can cause the development of negative self-image in adolescents (Miller-Perrin, Perrin & Kocur 2009).

Having in mind how many negative outcomes the authoritarian parenting style of fathers has, the aim of this paper will be to shed light on some of its antecedents.

2. ATTACHMENT THEORY

The notion of attachment was first introduced into psychology by John Bowlby who wished to describe the specific relationship that is established between a child and a person caring for the child. The basic function of this relationship is to ensure protection and security (Bowlby, 1988; according to Stefanović-Stanojević 2011). Bowlby states that the need for attachment is just as important as existential needs. An important term introduced here is the notion of internal working models of attachment (Stefanović-Stanojević 2011). During the first months of life, through interaction with the person who takes care of the child, the child forms an image of himself and that person (image of the world). What kind of image a child will form about himself and others depends on the behavior of the person who takes care of the child. We are talking about operational models of ourselves and significant others, which is based on a common history of relationships (Stefanović-Stanojević 2011). The child then behaves in accordance with the established internal work models, all in order to get what the child needs: love, attention, security (Stefanović-Stanojević 2004).

Based on Bowlby's work, Mary Ainsworth categorized patterns of attachment into 3 types: secure, avoidant, preoccupied, and later on, disorganized (Ainsworth & Eichberg 1991; according to Stefanović-Stanojević 2004). Avoidant attachment characterizes rigid and cold people. *"They cannot give what they did not receive in childhood (capacity for emotional reaction)."* (Stefanović-Stanojević 2011, 79). The image of others is negative, while the image of themselves is positive, so they invest only in themselves and material things that will not let them down. For securely attached children both internal work models are positive and they perceive the world as a safe and secure place. Individuals

with preoccupied attachment are usually immature and "clingy" people, with unresolved conflicts and accumulated anger. Disorganized style of attachment characterizes people whose parents were probably mentally ill or abused. They do not have the capacity to react emotionally, and are prone to excessive control of other people (Main 1999; according to Stefanović-Stanojević 2011).

3. CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES

In the literature, we come across five ways of conflict reactions. Two dimensions (self-care and care for others) are used to classify conflict reactions into five styles. The first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person tries to satisfy his or her own needs and interests. The second dimension tells how much a person wants to satisfy the interests of others (Rahim 1983; Thomas & Schmidt 1976). Johnson & Johnson (1994; according to Dincyurek & Civelek 2008) looked at conflict resolution styles through two dimensions: relationship dimensions and goal dimensions. By connecting these dimensions, five conflict management styles were obtained: the Collaborating, Competing, Avoiding, Accommodating and Compromising style. Collaborating (integrative style) is characterized by a high level of care for oneself and others. This style is called problem-solving. It involves cooperation between the conflicting parties and analyzing differences in order to reach a solution that is acceptable to both parties. The Competing style is characterized by great care for oneself, and little care for others. Dominant people do everything to achieve their goals, which is often at the expense of the interests of others. People with the Avoiding style withdraw from conflict situations, even at the cost of giving up on goals. The Accommodating style implies a great care for others, little for oneself. This style is an attempt to show the differences between the parties as little as possible, and to emphasize the similarities in order to satisfy the interests of the other party. When compromising, both parties need to give up on something in order to reach a mutually acceptable decision (Rahim & Magner 1994).

A study by Brewer and associates (Brewer et al. 2002) shows that men are more likely to use dominant conflict resolution styles than women. Also, men are more likely to use competitive, aggressive strategies to overcome conflicts (Berryman-Fink & Brunner 1987).

4. AUTHORITATIVE PARENTS - OUTCOMES

Diana Baumrind (1991) classified parents based on two dimensions of parenting style: authority and affection; based on that, she defined three different parenting styles: the authoritative (high care and high demands), authoritarian (low care and high demands) and permissive style (high care and low demands). The authoritarian and permissive style would be at the opposite poles, while the authoritative would be in the middle, as a parenting style that is desired and brings the greatest benefit to children.

Parents who embrace the authoritarian style limit their children's independence and force them to abide by strict rules, threatening to punish them if they violate them. Also, such parents are less responsive to their children's needs and show a lack of accepting behavior. Authoritarian parents are demanding and unresponsive to the needs of their children, trying to establish control over them without showing acceptance and warmth

(Maccoby & Martin, 1983). An authoritarian parent sets firm boundaries and control over adolescents, and allows little verbal exchange. This style is associated with socially incompetent adolescent behavior (Baumrind 1991). Parents set rules that cannot be disputed, rarely explaining why obedience is needed. They rely on power tactics to ensure the child's obedience. They have a "military" attitude expecting blind obedience (Darling 1999).

Authoritarian parents do not allow verbal exchange between them and their children. They set high standards for their children, they are not open to negotiation and communication is often one-way. They do not allow questions to be asked or contradictions. In families with an authoritarian parent, there are strict rules when one is allowed to speak and to step forward. They expect unquestioning obedience without exception. Also, authoritarian parenting style prevents the development of mental capacity in children (Fonagy et al. 2007).

4.1. Why fathers?

Significant global social, economic and demographic changes in the last fifty years suggest that the traditional approach focused on the mother as the most important person in children's development is outdated and that many children today do not have such an experience of growing up. Nowadays, fathers are more involved than ever in raising children. We can observe a neglect of the role of the father in various studies (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hefferth & Lamb 2000; Kalil, Ryan & Chor 2014). Most parenting studies do not involve fathers or control the effects of fathers' actions on children's development (Ryan, Claessens & Markovitz 2015).

The role of the father has changed over time. Today's socio-cultural climate shows a growing interest in fatherhood and the role of fathers in the family. Changes in economic and employment patterns, including an increase in the number of working mothers as well as transformation of societal attitudes about fatherhood and gender roles within the family have resulted in fathers being more actively involved in raising and caring for children (Cabrera et al. 2000). Some studies have found that fathers are usually the ones who possess an authoritarian parenting style, while mothers are often authoritative (Dwairy et al. 2006). A meta-analysis conducted by Khaleque & Rohner (2011) on a sample of 66 studies involving 19,511 respondents from 22 different countries in five regions found that paternal warmth had a stronger and greater impact on adolescent psychological health compared to maternal warmth. Authoritarian fathers are led by conservative ideology that focuses on reducing threats, maintaining the status quo, and dismissing individuals who do not belong to the group (Knafo 2003). In some earlier studies (Altemeyer 1998; Rohan & Zanna 1996), authoritarian fathers, more than non-authoritarian ones, express the opinion that they want conservative children who will recognize the importance of tradition and conformism, and be less self-centered. One of the central hypotheses of Adorno's work (Adorno et al. 1950) was that authoritarianism has its roots in the established "punishing home environment", where parents who are aware of their power punish children for unconventional behaviors. In one paper, paternal warmth is described as physical and verbal attachment to children by fathers (Kazarian, Moghnie & Martin 2010).

In families with an authoritarian father, the members are less attached to each other, they lack mutual communication, social skills, they feel helpless and lonely, and their self-confidence is low. Children were almost always disciplined by punishment and coercion on a physical and emotional level. As a result of this rude behavior of fathers,

children would grow into unhappy, dissatisfied, unstable, frightened and socially inhibited adults (Sartaj & Aslam 2010).

Children who had authoritarian fathers often isolate themselves (internalizing) or become aggressive (externalizing) to others. These adolescents are maladapted individuals who either have difficulty coping, due to a lack of self-confidence, or may bully others, ignoring the rights of others in the same way their rights have been neglected. In his research, Altaf (2002) notes that these are children who often feel anxious in social situations, fail to initiate certain activities, and lack communication skills.

4.2. Research overview

Studies have shown that fathers who exhibit hostile or rude parental behavior tend to cause more conflict with their offspring and disrupt a positive relationship with them (Ciciolla, Gerstein & Crnic 2014).

The authoritarian parenting style is correlated with a negative self-image (Krishnakumar & Buehler 2000). Neglect by parents or failure of the parents to engage in active child care, indifference or brutal discipline leave a mark on emotions and lead to the adoption of secondary attachment strategies, anxiety or avoidant attachment. Collins and Feeney (Collins & Feeney 2010) suggest that responsible care for others could be especially difficult for those who have difficulty expressing or regulating their emotions. These difficulties are associated with insecure patterns of attachment, especially the avoidant pattern, which is characterized by a low level of care for others.

Ineffective parenting can cause parent-adolescent conflict. Parent-adolescent conflict is more common when adolescents perceive parents as carefree and unresponsive (Hall 1987).

The way in which parents exercise control is perhaps even more important for the conflict between parents and adolescents, because most of the conflict revolves around the issue of parental control. Parents who respond to adolescents' aspirations for autonomy by becoming more authoritarian provoke more negative exchanges and conflicts with their children (Montemayor 1986).

The aim of this research is to examine the structure of the relations that exist between the authoritarianism of fathers observed by children and the attachment of fathers and their conflict resolution styles. Given the importance of previous studies that confirm the important role of communication and emotional development of fathers for the development of the authoritarian parenting style, a significant predictive role of these individual differences for understanding the authoritarian parenting style is assumed.

5. METHOD

5.1. The Sample

The convenience sample consists of 101 fathers and their children (101 children; 34 of which are male and 67 female) who are students of the University of Priština with temporary headquarters in Kosovska Mitrovica and the University of Niš. The average age of the fathers is 51.22 years ($SD = 5.60$), 75.25% of whom have a high school degree and 24.75% have a higher level of education. The average age when they became a father is 27.5 years ($SD = 4.61$). A total of 97% of the fathers are married with the average marriage lasting for 24.6 years ($SD = 4.08$).

The Instruments

The Experience in Close Relationship Scale – Serbian version (SM – ECR – R) (Hanak and Dimitrijević 2013; Brennan, Clark & Shaver 1998) is one of the most well-known instruments for assessing attachment. The two-factor structure (Anxiety and Avoidance dimensions) has been confirmed in most studies. The Serbian version of this questionnaire also showed satisfactory reliability and good convergent and predictive validity, and confirmed the assumed factor structure (Hanak & Dimitrijević 2013). The SM – ECR – R questionnaire consists of 36 items, which the respondent uses to specify the level of agreement regarding specific statements, using a seven-point Likert-type scale (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). The reliability of the questionnaire on the examined sample on the Avoidance dimension is low and amounts to 0.6, while on the Anxiety dimension it is satisfactory and amounts to 0.85.

The Conflict Management Styles Assessment Questionnaire (Adkins, 2006) contains 15 items that assess 5 conflict management styles (the Collaborating, Competing, Avoiding, Accommodating and Compromising style). Respondents rate their agreement with a statement on a scale of 1 (sometimes) to 4 (always). The reliability of this instrument on the tested sample is low. Cronbach's α on all the subscales ranges from 0.53 to 0.56.

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) (Buri 1991), initially contained 48 items whose descriptions matched the permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative parenting style proposed by Baumrind. In the end, 30 items were left, 10 that measure permissiveness, 10 authoritarianism, and 10 authoritative. Two questionnaire forms were created: one measuring authority of the mother and the other of the father. In this study, the respondents (students) assessed the authority of their fathers on a five-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree). In the end, we get scores for the father's authoritarianism, father's permissiveness, and father's authoritative. The scores for each variable range from 10 to 50; a higher score indicates a higher perceived authoritarianism. Cronbach's alpha for the dimension of the father's authoritarianism is 0.87, father's permissiveness 0.74, and father's authority 0.92.

Fathers filled out The Experience in Close Relationship Scale, The Conflict Management Styles Assessment Questionnaire, and Questionnaire about sociodemographic variables, and the children filled in out The Parental Authority Questionnaire.

5.2. Data collection process

Data were collected using the paper-pencil method. The respondents previously confirmed that they were aware of their rights and testing rules, and then moved on to the questions section. Also, the respondents were told that they could leave at any time. The data were collected during May 2020 on the territory of Kosovska Mitrovica and Leposavić.

6. RESULTS

Table 1 shows Spearman's correlation coefficients between the basic variables used in the study, descriptive indicators, and data on the reliability of the instruments.

Table 1 Correlation coefficients, descriptive indicators, and the reliability of instruments

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Age ⁽¹⁾	-									
Age of becoming father ⁽²⁾	0,63**	-								
Avoidance ⁽³⁾	0,18	0,16	-							
Anxiety ⁽⁴⁾	0,06	0,10	0,19	-						
Authoritarian style ⁽⁵⁾	-0,34**	-0,23*	0,18	0,30**	-					
Competing style ⁽⁶⁾	-0,14	-0,07	0,03	0,17	0,33**	-				
Compromising style ⁽⁷⁾	-0,12	-0,15	-0,13	0,02	-0,07	0,31**	-			
Accommodating style ⁽⁸⁾	-0,18	-0,18	-0,15	0,17	0,18	0,17	0,32**	-		
Collaborating style ⁽⁹⁾	-0,08	-0,05	-0,03	-0,10	-0,08	0,19	0,55**	0,39**	-	
Avoiding style ⁽¹⁰⁾	0,02	-0,07	-0,01	0,25*	0,20	0,15	0,17	0,42**	0,09	-
Min	41	18	43	18	10	3	3	3	4	3
Max	64	43	112	94	50	12	12	12	12	12
Mean	51,22	27,50	72,34	54,60	28,24	7	8,20	8,26	8,77	7,50
SD	5,61	4,60	13	17,40	9,14	1,77	1,85	1,90	1,90	2,21
K-S	0,10*	0,09*	0,05	0,04	0,70	0,17***	0,13***	0,14***	0,13***	0,13***
A	-	-	0,68	0,87	0,86	0,45	0,54	0,53	0,53	0,45

*** - p<0,001; ** - p<0,01; * - p<0,05; K-S – Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality;
 α - Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability of internal consistency

In order to test the hypothesis of a statistically significant contribution of attachment and conflict resolution styles to the prediction of the father’s authoritarianism, a multiple hierarchical regression analysis with three sets of predictors was calculated. The first set of predictors is the variable Age of becoming a father. In the second step, two dimensions of attachment were added, Anxiety (working model of self) and Avoidance (working model of others), and in the third step, we added five dimensions of conflict resolution styles. Data on the regression model are given in Table 2.

Table 2 Presentation of the results of the hierarchical regression analysis with two sets of predictors

Criteria	Set	R	aR2	F	ΔaR2	ΔF
Authoritarianism	1	0,26	0,06	7,44**	-	-
	2	0,47	0,19	8,94***	0,13	9,08***
	3	0,61	0,32	6,94***	0,13	4,71***

During the analysis, the variable *age of becoming a father* was entered in the first step, as we assumed it will have a statistically significant effect on the model. In the second step, a statistically significant contribution was made by the dimensions of attachment, which in addition to 6% of the variance explained in the first step, further explained another 13%. Furthermore, another additional 13% of variance was explained by adding conflict resolution styles in the third step; therefore, the overall model explains 32% of the variance of the father's authoritarian parenting style.

The collinearity analysis does not indicate a high variance inflation coefficient that would indicate that a variable should be excluded from the predictor set.

Table 3 Partial contributions of predictors obtained by the hierarchical regression analysis

		β	T	P	$r0$	SR2
Step 1	Age of becoming a father	-0,26	-2,73	0,01	-0,26	-0,07
	Age of becoming a of father	-0,32	-3,53	0,00	-0,26	-0,10
Step 2	Anxiety	0,32	3,45	0,00	0,32	0,10
	Avoidance	0,16	1,68	0,10	0,19	0,02
Step 3	Age of becoming a father	-0,28	-3,24	0,00	-0,26	-0,07
	Anxiety	0,20	2,20	0,03	0,32	0,03
	Avoidance	0,16	1,80	0,08	0,19	0,02
	Collaborating style	-0,07	-0,71	0,48	-0,09	-0,00
	Competing style	0,35	3,90	0,00	0,37	0,10
	Avoiding style	0,08	0,82	0,41	0,21	0,01
	Adaptive style	0,16	1,53	0,13	0,22	0,02
Compromising style	-0,25	-2,40	0,02	-0,08	-0,04	

$r0$ – zero-order correlation; SR2 – The squared semi-partial correlation coefficient

Table 3 shows the regression coefficients of individual predictors in all three models, as well as semi-partial contributions to the explanation of variance. The age of becoming a father achieved a statistically significant low negative contribution in the first step, which remains statistically significant by adding two dimensions of attachment in the second step, with a statistically significant contribution made by positive Anxiety. Both dimensions retain a significant predictive value, even when joined in the third step by the dimensions of conflict resolution styles – a positive Competing and negative Compromising style. The squared semi-partial correlation coefficient shows that the largest independent contribution in the final model has the Competing style dimension, which explains 10% of the variance.

7. DISCUSSION

The main goal of this research was to examine the structure of the relations that exist between the perceived authoritarianism of fathers as seen by their children, and the attachment of the fathers, as well as their conflict resolution styles. A significant predictive role of these individual differences for understanding the father's authoritarian parenting style has been hypothesized. Authoritarian parents are interested in their children's development, but it seems that this kind of involvement can be bad, if the intransigence of boundaries is taken into account. Authoritarian fathers are emotionally distanced, set rigid behavioral standards, and as such, although involved in raising children, the question is how much such involvement is positive for their children (Simons & Conger 2007). Parental involvement and presence are also manifested when the parent exercises power, for example – in the vital task of supervising children (Omer et al. 2013).

Two dimensions of attachment were added to the predictor model, where it was shown that Anxiety (negative working model of self) was in a statistically significant correlation of low intensity with the authoritarian parenting style. People who seek a secure haven and support and try to minimize distance from others and win their love through action and control have an insecure working model (Mikulincer 1998). This type of control can be manifested in relationships with children. The need for control, which is aimed at approaching

others due to feelings of their own insecurity, creates a consistency in behavior that can be reflected in the parenting style and in general, in the relationship with the child. Erozkán's research (Erozkán 2012) also found a link between increased anxiety and the perceived authoritarian parenting style. Such results are in line with those obtained in this study, where the negative working model of others can be viewed as a predictor of behavior in the field of the authoritarian education of children. Although marginally significant, the avoidance dimension (the internal working model of others) can also be seen as an important correlate of the parents' authoritarian parenting style. The internal working model of others also refers to the way we adapt to other people and adapt our behavior to get what we need: attention, love and security (Shomaker & Furman 2009). This model also affects relationships with other important people - with friends, children, one's partner. In one study, students who had high avoidance scores said they would exercise strict discipline with their children and when they became parents their children would be emotionally independent and less attached to them (Rholes, Simpson & Friedman 2006).

The third step in our predictor model included inserting five dimensions of conflict resolution styles. Both dimensions (age of becoming a father and anxiety) retain a significant predictive value (Table 3), and in the third step they are joined by a positive Competing and negative Compromising style. The Competing style of conflict resolution, which implies competition and domination in problem solving, is in a statistically significant positive correlation with the Authoritarian parenting style. It is possible that authoritarian fathers use competition, doing everything to achieve their goals, even at the cost of discontinuing contact with others, because they rely on power and do not accept compromise, all with the aim of maintaining firm boundaries (Rahim 1983). The negative Compromising style has also proved to be an important predictor of the Authoritarian parenting style, which tells us that fathers with an authoritarian parenting style are not willing to sacrifice part of their goal to reach a solution, and do not allow the exchange of concessions (Johnson & Johnson 1994; according to Dincyurek & Civelek 2008). As their boundaries are strong and uncompromising, they do not allow verbal exchange, they require unconditional obedience of the child. Such individuals probably nurture such a parenting style that was formed under the influence of uncompromising behavior.

The practical and theoretical implications arising from this paper are important for testing previous empirical results and assumed theoretical hypotheses. However, one should keep in mind the methodological limitations that primarily relate to the sample size and the low reliability of the Conflict Management Styles instrument, which is why the results obtained should be interpreted with additional caution. Certainly, in addition to eliminating the stated shortcomings, the recommendation for future researchers is to also include other variables from the domain of personality in this model, as well as individual differences that we assume could have a strong influence on the relationship confirmed in this study between, on the one hand, the authoritarian parenting style, and on the other hand, attachment and conflict resolution styles. Also, the question arises "do authoritarian fathers raise authoritarian children?" i.e. the issue of transgenerational transfer of the authoritarian parenting style, so it is recommended that the father's family be included in some future studies, and perhaps monitor the children of fathers in a longitudinal study until they come into their parental roles, thus gaining insight into three generations and the transfer of the authoritarian parenting style.

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AUTORITARNOST OČEVA: PREDIKTIVNA ULOGA STILOVA REŠAVANJA KONFLIKATA I DIMENZIJA AFEKTIVNE VEZANOSTI

Autoritarni vaspitni stil sa svojom negativnom konotacijom ima mnoštvo nepovoljnih uticaja na razne aspekte razvoja dece, pa će stoga cilj rada biti otkrivanje potencijalnih prediktora autoritarnog vaspitnog stila očeva. Koncept afektivne vezanosti i stilovi rešavanja konflikata koje očevi koriste su u ovom radu deo modela koji zajedno sa godinama za preuzimanje uloge oca predstavljaju značajne prediktore autoritarnog vaspitnog stila očeva. Uzorak istraživanja je bio prigodan i činila ga je 101 dijada otac – dete sa teritorije Severnog Kosova. Instrumenti korišćeni u istraživanju su Skala iskustva u bliskim odnosima (Hanak i Dimitrijević, 2013; Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998), Upitnik o stilovima upravljanja konfliktima (Adkins, 2006) i Upitnik roditeljske autoritarnosti (Buri, 1991). Rezultati su delimično potvrdili pretpostavke, a diskutovani su u kontekstu teorije afektivne vezanosti i prethodnih empirijskih istraživanja koji predstavljaju snažan referentni okvir za razumevanje rezultata ovog istraživanja.

Ključne reči: očevi, autoritarni vaspitni stil, afektivna vezanost, stilovi rešavanja konflikata.