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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PARENTAL ROLE IN PREVENTING DRUGS  
AND ALCOHOL USE OF THEIR CHILDREN

PhD Thesis Summary

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## **Abstract**

The thesis is built in the field of sociology and the social psychology of parenthood and is studying through qualitative paradigm the phenomenon of parents' perceptions of their role in preventing drug and alcohol use by their children. The first chapter presents a theoretical background of the parenting role and parenting style, and elevates its challenges in the contexts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in light of the phenomenon of the adolescents' tendency to experiment with drugs and alcohol. The second chapter presents phenomenology as the qualitative research approach, and the grounded theory and the narrative approach for data collection and analysis. Based on the interpretation of data collected from 24 parents, Part Three argues that parents' perceptions of their prevention role reflect a fluctuation between present and absent parenting. Parenting is perceived within four different aspects, three different parenting style and three leading storylines which demonstrate that parents wish to establish effective parenting but at the same time they feel unable to do so. Chapter Four discusses the construction of the parental role perceptions into parental identity which is influenced not only by traditional socio-cultural and intergenerational internalized perceptions but rather also by internal and external factors such as a poor sense of self efficacy and the bi-directional relationship with the children.

Key words: parenting, adolescents, risk behaviours, drug and alcohol use, prevention

## **Chapter 1 Theoretical background**

Chapter one presents two parts whereby the first examines the psychosocial aspects of parenting and the second relates to the psychosocial aspects of adolescence. Both chapters discuss the context of parents-adolescent relationships and the parenting role in the prevention of adolescents' risk behavior.

Part One explores the way the literature relates to the role of parenting; the social construction of parenting including changes, developments and dilemmas in the role of parenting adolescence, the "parenting style" model as a platform for understanding children's outcomes, the importance of the parental authority versus parental presences and the role of parents in children's drug and alcohol use. Part Two relates to the characteristics of adolescence and to adolescents' risks behaviors; including drug and alcohol use as a central parenting challenge. The chapter also refers to parents and adolescents in the context of the Israeli family and ended by referring to the gap in knowledge the current research aims to fill.

The first part presents the psycho-social construction of parenting as a most significant role in the family, however parenting adolescents as a distinct researched topic, distinguishable from studies on parenting children of other ages is considered a new researched area (Bar Yosef, 1996; Cohen, 2007; Holmbeck, Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1995). The source of the term "parenting" is the Latin verb 'parere' which means, to bring forth, to develop or to educate. Therefore, "parenting" refers more to the activity and to the process of developing and educating, rather than to the person who 'does the work', the parent himself. It reflects a process, an activity and an interaction carried out by adults, with children, but not necessarily their own (Hoghughy & Long, 2004).

Some authors like Newbergers' social cognitive developmental theory (1980) argue that the parenting experience changes people mostly in unconscious ways. Parenting affects the personal identity and the fundamental existential sense and thus influences the whole course of life. The social cognitive developmental theory (Newberger, 1980) related to four levels of parental awareness: Level 1, the "Egoistic orientation": The parent understands the child as a projection of his own experience, and the parental role is organized around parental desires and needs only. Level 2 is the "Conventional orientation": Childhood is understood in terms of externally derived such as tradition, culture, authority definitions and social acceptable explanations. In that level, the parental role is organized with relation to socially-defined concept of correct practices and responsibilities. In Level 3, the "Subjective-individualistic

orientation", the child is viewed as a unique individual who is understood through the parent-child relationship rather than by external definitions of childhood. The parental role is focussed on identifying the needs of the child rather than as the fulfilment of predetermined role obligations and expectations. Level 4, the "Process orientation" is the highest level of parental awareness of which the parent understands the child as a complex and changing psychological self system. Newberger (1980) emphasizes that the parent, like the child, grows in his role, and he recognizes that the relationship and the role are established not only on meeting the child's needs but rather also on finding ways to balance his own needs so that each can be responsibly met.

It is argued that parenting's extensive impact on the socialization of children includes a broad spectrum of psycho-social influences amongst teaching skills and behavior patterns, values and motivation, encouraging emotional regulation and school success as well as ensuring safety, structuring the child's environment, and stimulating and providing social connections (Bradly, 2007; Grucec & Hastings, 2007; Maccoby, 1992, 2007). The "parenting style" model clarifies that parenthood is performed according to different parenting styles which provide robust indicators of parenting functioning that can influence on the child well-being and indicate children outcomes across a wide spectrum of child's development (Baumrind, 1966, 1967, 1989, 1991a, 1991b; Darling & Steinberg 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The parenting style model is based on the factor of control and relates to the measure of authority that the parent uses in order to establish his parenting.

Even though authoritative parenting is related to positive outcomes, over the years parents show less and less ability to perform authority not only as a result of the changes which are required in their role performance in adolescence, but rather due to socio-cultural changes (Amit, 2006; Holden, 2010; Elkind, 1994; Omer, 2000, 2002, 2008). As parents have accepted the pluralism which characterizes the modern society as an axiom it reflected the "old imbalance" which is characterized by investing in the child's emotional and material needs and placing him in the top of the "priority list" (Elkind, 1994).

It seems that this resignation from the traditional parenthood damaged the ability to establish parental authority (Alon & Omer, 2005; Omer, 2000, 2008). Following the transition from a traditional to a modern society, parents have lost the "guiding code" of how to behave in different and unexpected situations that children are placing within everyday life (Amit, 1997). Although authoritative parenting has often been considered an effective educational and preventive tool (Steinberg, 2001) modern parenting is not interested in

raising children in a traditional authoritative way, however it is not clear what the alternative should be (Omer, 2000).

As the parent-child relationship is considered a social and emotional resource for adolescents during that developmental stage, (Carlo *et al.*, 2011; Collins & Laursen, 2004; Hair, Jager, & Garrett, 2001; Steinberg, 2001) their relationship is facing a stressful transition (Amit, 2006; Belsky, 1984; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kuczynski, 2003). It is proposed that parenthood is progressing through a series of six psychological stages of which the fifth; the interdependent stage - as the child reaches adolescence - the parent is facing and must interact with a "new" child. As such all aspects of the prior relationship must be addressed and renegotiated (Galinsky, 1987; Levinson 1978, 1986).

The answer to the question *what can parents do to prevent their children using drugs and alcohol* points out that monitoring and controlling can steer them away from risk behaviors while failing monitoring promotes deviant activities (Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Resnick *et al.*, 1997). In this respect, although peer influence is crucial in the initiation of drug and alcohol use among adolescents, parents' attitudes and practices are also significant (Coombs, Paulson, & Richardson, 1991; Fallu *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, the influence of parents on the self-image and psychological well-being of their children can be no less important than that of peers even during adolescence (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Greenberg *et al.*, 1983; Lasko *et al.*, 1996; Leung & Leung, 1992; Paterson *et al.*, 1994). As such, parents can take part in preventing risk behaviors amongst drugs and alcohol use but on the other hand they tend to not cooperate with different prevention programs (White, 1998).

The second part presents descriptive literature on adolescence including different theories explaining the unique characteristics and consequences of that life span developmental stage (Erikson, 1956; Freud, 1966; Hall, 1904; Lerner, 1987; Muuss, 1990; Piaget, 1962; Bandura, 1977). It is argued that the changes they are facing and as a result, the challenges which they are placing in front of their parents are consequences of a broad spectrum, from biological changes to socio-cultural ecological factors. As part of adolescents' developmental process they tend to experience with risk behaviors, including drug and alcohol use (Burt & Resnick, 1996; Jessor, 1998, 1987; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Donovan *et al.* 1991).

As the terms risk state and risk behavior are analyzed it is shown that state of risk comprises four indexes which function reciprocally: Risk Factors, Risk Markers, Risk Behaviours and Risk Outcomes. It is also acts like a "Risk chain" of which various prominent



Risk Factors, lead through certain interactions to Risk Behaviours and end up with Risk Outcomes ((Burt & Resnick, 1996; Kirbi & Fraser, 1997). Different theories examined the adolescents' tendency to use drugs and alcohol and explain it as a functional behaviour which serves the adolescents' developmental needs (Donovan, 1996; Jessor & Jessor, 1977, Jessor, 1987). Similar to any learned behaviour it is target oriented and used as a goal achievement tool. Drugs and alcohol help to obtain goals related to experiences, norms and everyday expectations. The adolescent attributes to drug and alcohol use a special meaning through these goals, the usage patterns, the way he experiences his behaviour and the affect of the drugs and alcohol have on him. It is also argued that adolescents tend to develop risk behaviours in stages, from mild risk to high risk behaviours. Severe risk behaviours appear gradually and can start with cigarette smoking. Alcohol use and cigarette smoking were found as "gate behaviours" to illicit drug use (Hoffrage *et al.*, 2003; Kandel, 2002; Kandel, 1982; Kandel, 1975; Zhang and Wiczorek 1997).

The initiation to use drugs and alcohol develops and strengthens within the social systems in which the adolescent lives and spends time with (Teichman, 2001). During that developmental stage the adolescents tend to relate with two significant groups; the peer group and the family. As the first experience with drugs and alcohol usually occurs during adolescence, many of the adolescents who do so can end up developing alcohol and drugs dependency for reasons of the need for psychological as well as social support (O'Malley, Johnston, & Bachman, 1998; Teichman, 1995).

However even though children in this age group tend to attribute a high level of importance to their social relationship with peer groups, they do show positive outcomes to parenting monitoring, especially as regards to the prevention of drug and alcohol use (Coombs, Paulson, & Richardson, 1991; Fallu *et al.*, 2010; Macaulay *et al.*, 2005; Resnick *et al.*, 1997).

In relation to the context of parents and children in Israel several specifics are examined; Israel as a young country as regards the age of the population, the unique ethnicity configuration and being constantly under security conflicts which results the duty to admit to a mandatory military service at the age of 18, three years for boys and two years for girls. In addition some statistics of risk behaviours amongst drugs and alcohol use is presented.

**Table 1: Alcohol and drug use in 2009 (in the past year)**

<b>The substance</b>	<b>Rates in %</b>
Alcohol	50
Illegal drug	10.7
Inhalants	14.1
Hagigat	8.3
An illegal drug + inhalant	20.1
An illegal drug + Hagigat	14.8
An illegal drug + inhalant + Hagigat	23.3

Source: Bar-Hamburger *et al.*, (2009) pp. 15

The first chapter is ended by presenting the gap in knowledge aimed to be filled in by the current research. This gap is defined by the construction of parents' self perceptions of their role according to their own point of view. Filling this gap can lead to the construction of counselling and treatment programs that are oriented to the parents' own needs in establishing their role in preventing their children's drugs and alcohol use.

## Chapter 2 Methodology and Data analysis

The second chapter presents the research objectives and the research questions, the methodology and the research approach, methods of sampling and data collection, the research process, the evaluation of the research quality, the role of the researcher and ethical issues and considerations.

It is only natural that while relating to the parenting experiences, the parents' point of view is crucial and significant. Considering the understanding that parenting is a role which is influenced by intrapersonal psychological factors and interpersonal ecological systems, the current study sees fit to examine the construction of the parental role within the context of the natural reality of the parents and to study it directly from them. As a result, this research aimed at two focal **objectives**, descriptive and interpretive; to describe parents role perception and to understand them. Therefore the objectives are **to study** the way in which the parents perceive their role as regards to the prevention of drug and alcohol use by their children, and **to expose** the challenges of parents in fulfilling their parental role in preventing drugs and alcohol use by their children.

Correspondingly, two research questions were placed: *how do parents perceive their parental role in general and as regards to the phenomenon of children's drugs and alcohol use in particular? And, how do parents consider that they should act and what do they do in order to prevent the use of drugs and alcohol by their children?*

Chapter Two describes first the methodology as based on the constructivist qualitative paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which resulted from the theoretical background and the research objectives and questions. Due to the same reasons it is based on the phenomenological – narrative approach which emphasizes the holistic attitude towards the human phenomena (Stake, 1995) and the importance of listening to peoples' authentic stories, told in their own voices, in their own natural environment (Sabar-Ben Yehoshua, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The way the constructivist paradigm sees data organized in a multidimensional fashion, according to which the events and interactions are related to each other in a complex tapestry of significances (Shkedi, 2006, 2010) also suited the current study's topic.

The theoretical background elevated parenting as a multifaceted role, influenced by previous experiences as well as by actual and immediate events and interactions, not

necessarily connected only to parents themselves but rather also for example to peers, media, and socio-cultural factors. As a result of the complexity of the phenomenon of parenting, and out of the qualitative paradigm, the in depth interview was used as a research tool (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Seidman, 1991) and the grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Shkedi, 2006, 2010) was used as the main analysis approach together with the narrative-holistic method (Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 2010, 1998). As some researches have noted the great importance of interviewing couples together (Babbie, 2004; Ledyard & Morrison, 2008; Seymour, Dix, & Eardley, 1995; Whisman, Uebelacker & Weinstock, 2004) all of the interviews of the couples were conducted as conjoint interviews. It was seen appropriate that shared issues such as the preventing role should be discussed with both parents. This "brought depth and richness" (Ledyard & Morrison, 2008; p. 242) to the data collection.

A total of 24 participants participated in the research; 10 married couples, 3 single parents (1 divorced father and 2 divorced mothers) and 1 married mother. Their age range was 39-53, while their children age range was 6-27. All parents except for 1 mother and 1 father were employed in a wide variety of professions. 14 have high school diplomas while 10 acquired academic education (Table 2). The participants answered the following prerequisites: being parents of at least one child who at the time of the interview was 12-18 years old since that age group is likely to experience drugs and alcohol use. It was important to reveal the most authentic voices of parents, based upon actual and present experiences, and not only upon memory or imagination and thus to "picture" the most relevant current issues at the time of the interview. The second criterion reflected avoiding participants who might have been under the researcher's care or had met her on a professional basis. It was important to "clear" the research of any personal interest or need of the parents as well as not to turn the interviews into a "treatment arena".

The research process included a preliminary performance of 2 exploratory interviews which were not analyzed yet increased the certainty of the current study's importance. These exploratory interviews illustrated parents' interest in telling and sharing their story despite the initial concern regarding discussing sensitive and intimate issues with them.

In the period April 2009 – July 2010 the researcher conducted 14 in-depth interviews with 10 couples and 4 single parents. All of the interviews apart from one were held in the participants private homes at their own preference. In order to establish trust and to enable parents to feel free to relate to the issues addressed to them, the interviews were conducted with support and sensitivity to the informants' needs and wishes. To enhance the quality of

the research design, some relevant actions for the validity and reliability of the findings were taken. In this context, alternative terms for traditional measures of validity and reliability as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1989) were used: "**credibility**" rather than internal validity, "**transferability**" rather than external validity and "**conformability**" rather than objectivity.

As the interviews were recorded, transcribed and read several times the data analyzed included 2 stages of content analysis to reveal **what** was told and **how** it was told (Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 2010; Shkedi, 2010). Stage one comprised 2 phases of which the first produced 4 different aspects of parents' role perceptions. The second phase produced 3 different parenting styles which reflect the way parents are establishing their parenting. In stage two, a holistic-form content analysis was performed which produced 3 different representative storylines (Table 3).

**Table 3** Analysis and findings

First stage analysis Content analysis ( <b>What</b> was said)	Phase one	Aspects of parents' perceptions	1. Difficulties 2. Functioning 3. Relationship 4. Partnership
	Phase two	Parenting styles	1. Protective parenting 2. Paralyzed parenting 3. On-hold parenting
Second stage analysis Holistic-form analysis ( <b>How</b> the story was told)		Storylines	1. Time storyline 2. Causality storyline 3. Generalization storyline

The first phase of the content analysis included 4 different levels; Level 1, the primer analysis produced very detailed coding of the data (Table 5, Appendix E). Level 2, the mapping analysis, produced detailed categories which were manifested in each interview (Appendixes A, F). Level 3, the focused analysis, created high categories which illustrate the way the informants conceptualized their parenting role in prevention of drug and alcohol use by their children (Figure 1) and Level 4, the theoretical analysis, produced the theoretical framework of that conceptualization (Shkedi, 2010).

**Table 4** levels of grounded analysis of the parenting interviews (phase one)

Level 1. Primer analysis, coding	Delimiting units of significance (Table 5), list of unit names (Appendix E)
Level 2 Mapping analysis	Establishing detailed categories (Appendix E) and the, individual maps of categories (Appendix A)
Level 3. Focussed analysis	Establishing hierarchical categories and the categories trees
Level 4. Theoretical analysis	Theoretical framework

Additional analysis was used in phase two in order to develop the 4 aspects which were found in phase one (Table 6). That analysis used interpretive observation which aimed to broaden the parents' self perceptions of their prevention role and to understand it. That analysis reflects an interpretation of the aspects as representations of parenting styles which characterize the parenting experience in general.

Further into the second stage of analysis, the holistic form-analysis (Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 2010, 1998) searched for the unique way in which the informants answered the research questions and chose to tell their personal story. Three principal representatives "storylines" were found as characterizing the unique manner of **how** their story was told.

As part of the research process the researcher examined her **role and involvement** in the current study and found it related to her professional experience, perceptions, values and the knowledge which she has accumulated. In order to avoid a possible effect on the research configuration, and based on Lincoln and Guba (1985) there was a constant awareness and examination of this possibility throughout the interviews and the research process. However it should be noted that parents are not easily forthcoming in revealing the personal angles of their parental roles, particularly relating to threatening and shameful issues within the family. Considering this difficulty, Lincoln and Guba (1985) praised the researcher as a research tool and claimed that this "tool" can relate to all the environmental and personal messages, allusions and difficulties which arise during the interview. They emphasize human sensitivity and as a result the ability to be responsive and to be a part of the interview. In accordance with Lincoln and Guba (1985) it was the researcher's goal to serve as a principal "research tool" and to contend with the profusion of details.

The research process was held according to **ethical considerations**. The qualitative approach entails two processes which are different but complementary: on the one hand, receiving intimate information, and on the other hand, creating total trust. As required, the

researcher aimed to convey respect, to show high interest and curiosity while offering attentiveness, understanding and politeness (Sabar-Ben Yehoshua, 2006; Shkedi, 2006). At the same time, the informants were encouraged to tell their personal stories in their own special way.

**Informed consent** as an ethical tool was also used in the current study (Appendix C). That tool aimed to guarantee that the informants had evaluated for themselves the feasibility of the participation in the current research. Likewise, it was aimed to ensure that the informants had made their own decision to participate in the research (Sabar-Ben Yehoshua, 2006). The informants received an accurate and detailed explanation regarding the nature of the research, its objectives, its process and the character of the questions and of the interview which was about to take place (Appendix B). The researcher also aimed to ensure that the potential interviewees would have **no** interest in pleasing her. As such, the informed consent constituted an obligation for preserving the autonomy and the individuality of the informants and their right to receive information regarding the significance of the exposure of details of their personal life. Moreover according to the researcher's experience, it constituted a "work agreement" between the researcher and the informants.

**Privacy and anonymity** were also tools which aimed to ensure the preservation of ethics in the current research. Together with the researcher's desire to reach as many levels of the reality researched as possible, there was an obligation to protect the informants' privacy and therefore the researcher avoided publishing private details which could expose the identity of the informants.

### **Chapter 3 Findings**

The description of the findings is presented according to the data analysis in two stages. The first stage shows two phases which presents the parents' natural voices illustrating their role perceptions. These voices referred to the parents' experiences by using a descriptive "map" of categories which illustrates the aspects of their parenting roles' perceptions. The second phase of that part showed a typology of parenting styles which were interpreted and integrated from the aspects. The second stage of the findings presented a holistic-form analysis of three storylines which were expressed in the parents' stories and represented their own unique ways of constructing their parenting.

The detailed presentation of the analysis includes large quoted episodes from the interviews. The researcher has deliberately chosen to present **richer** analysis units aiming to allow the reader to understand the personal stories more authentically. Furthermore, it should be noted that the analysis of the interviews indicated that although each parent can be classified by a predominant aspect, style and storyline, **most** of them were found to demonstrate not one but several characteristics of different aspects, styles and storylines.

The **first phase** of the first stage of the content analysis suggested that the parents' perceptions of their role are manifested by four main aspects which revealed **what** the parents have told. These four **aspects** constitute the key categories which were found in the content analysis:

- A. Parents' *difficulties*
- B. Parental *functioning*
- C. Parents' *relationship* with their children
- D. Parental *role – partners* (school system, the establishment)

According to the **difficulties** aspect the parents perceive their role performance mainly as complicated, challenging and almost impossible to implement. The difficulties were characterized by fear and by the perceived loss of parental authority. Parents stated that the fear and loss of authority disturbs them in fulfilling their role as parents as they would have wished and planned.

The **functioning** aspect expressed the parents' perception of their role through the key and predominant function they have adopted. Parents, who were characterized by this aspect, perceive themselves as moving between the supervisory roles and the lifesaver role. They described their role in terms of actions, for example: guarding, saving, dissuading and instilling fear.



The aspect of their **relationship** with their children, revealed the parents' perceived parental role through the character of their relationship with their children. The prominent characteristics were doubts and confusion concerning their parental identity, when questioning themselves whether they should be their children's friends. Furthermore, they described themselves as being paralyzed while facing their children. This was manifested by self-doubt and a feeling of being "superfluous".

The last aspect which expresses parents' perception of their role concerned to the **need for partners**, according to which parents found it necessary to have partners in order to execute their parental role. They expressed disappointment in those perceived as partners but did not function as such. Those parents perceive their role as merely partial, lessened its importance and its likelihood of influencing their children. They perceive school, teachers and state authorities as potential partners holding the power which they, as parents, lack when facing their children. At the same time they expressed disappointment with those "partners".

The **second phase** deepened the content analysis and presented a typology which indicated that the parents can be classified by three **parenting styles**:

- A. **Protective** parenting, derived from the difficulties and to the functioning aspects
- B. **Paralyzed** parenting, derived from the difficulties and relationship aspects.
- C. **On hold** parenting, derived from the relationship and role – partners aspects.

The essence of the experience of the protective parenting style is the parents' need to act as a "bodyguard" for their children, together with the feeling of lack of tools to supervise and protect. Parents who expressed this style understood their role as an authoritative one, but did not have the means to fulfill it. These parents adopt instruments which were derived from their general experiences of contemporary reality, rather than from examination of the role with which they are identified.

The paralyzed parenting style was manifested mainly by an emotional experience which was characterized by fear together with a sense of a loss of power and paralysis. The parents described fear as an ever-present factor, which decisively affected their lives and their relationship with their children. On the one hand, they perceived it as inevitable in light of the current socio-cultural reality, and on the other hand, it motivated them to take "educational" actions which contradicted their basic perceptions of their role as parents. The parents described this conflict as paralyzing.

The essence of the third style, the "on hold" parenting style considered the actuality and relevance of parenthood as a legitimate authority source which holds traditional, social and

acceptable roles. In other words, it reflected consideration of the essence of parenthood. They expressed doubt regarding the necessity of authority in their children's daily lives. Parents perceived their role as significant, but failed to identify the elements of which this role is comprised. They noted that parenthood as they knew it was gone, while the contemporary parenthood is not clear yet. These parents expressed a need for assistance in rearing their children while facing the challenges they pose. They admit having difficulty in doing so on their own, despite their understanding that it is their responsibility. The parents, who ponder the concept of "education", viewed school and the establishment in general as significant forces as regards to the prevention of drug and alcohol use, but at the same time they expressed their disappointment in them for not performing their part of the "mission".

In the **second stage** of the analysis, the holistic-form analysis, three principles representing salient storylines were found: a **time** storyline, in which the current story was told in three dimensions of time, a **causality** storyline, in which the story was explained over and over again by different explanations which were considered as important as the story itself. The third, the **generalization** storyline in which the one person story turned into "everybody" stories. These storylines characterized the way in which the parent chose to elevate their narrative. In addition those storylines expressed parents' perceptions of the parental role in entirety and explained it from that unique point. This led to a focusing on the formative structure which characterized the overall story of the narrative. This analysis involved strict and firm reading which aimed to answer the question of **how**: In what way is the whole narrative realized? How did the central plot developed into the story? To what measure did the narrative and its fragments answer the causative principles in life? Was there any constancy whatsoever in the narrative? Was it possible to see, as Gergen and Gergen (1988) emphasized, that the story can be characterized by different and certain forms?

The findings constitute a complete tapestry of the formulated powers which demonstrate the parents' role perception. The current study shows that the world of the parents' role perceptions, as regards the challenges that their maturing children are placing in front of them, fluctuates between fillings of fear and a wish to be initiative. This stress is expressed on the continuum between **presence** and **absence**. The parents express a wish to influence and to contribute to their children's well being, but at the same time they declare and complain this can not be realized. It seems that the components which formulate the parents' role perception act on the one hand reinforce the parenting, and on the other, weakens it. The parents who participated in the current study described also how they experienced parenthood in their

childhood – using memories of their own parents. Those experiences helped them to develop parenting approaches which created an anchor for their present perception of parenting. They described their parents as clear parental figures although they were strict, decisive and authoritative; they created clear rules, constructed a correct hierarchy and used their authority to set appropriate boundaries while they as children who accepted the authority. Their childhood socio-cultural reality was characterized by a balance between the dangers and the threats on the one hand, and suitable tools to cope with them on the other hand. As they took with them those primer experiences and while building their own families they experience present absent parenting whereby although they wish to implement what they have assimilated, they feel precluded from it.

The findings of the current study also show that parental perceptions and parental experience are influenced by the gap which characterizes the relationship between themselves and their children. The parents' perceptions of their role within the identified four aspects show that their role experience consequences the character of the dynamic occurs both on their intra-personal level and in the interpersonal level. These aspects lead to the classification of three characteristic parenting styles. These parenting styles show that they can be developed within the parent child spacious gap and be influenced not only by elements related to the parents themselves but rather also by the children themselves: their lifestyles, their areas of interest, their habits and their communication style with the parent. The parents felt that as a result of their encounter with the inevitable world of interest of their children, their ability to establish authority and control was taken from their hands. The communication style which was familiar to them from their own childhood and from the early childhood of their children was diminished and as a result, an abstention from authoritative parental functioning was created. This also reflected a position of reactive parenting - rather than an initiative parenting which in fact, represented the essence of their role as frightened anticipation for danger and risk factors, and their unsuccessful trail to response to them. Overall the findings indicated a fragile parenting perception which tend to move between present parenting that wishes to perform control and monitoring, to use authority and to direct their children to the safe way but on the other hand they are unable to execute these goals and they end up absent from being the parents they wanted to be.

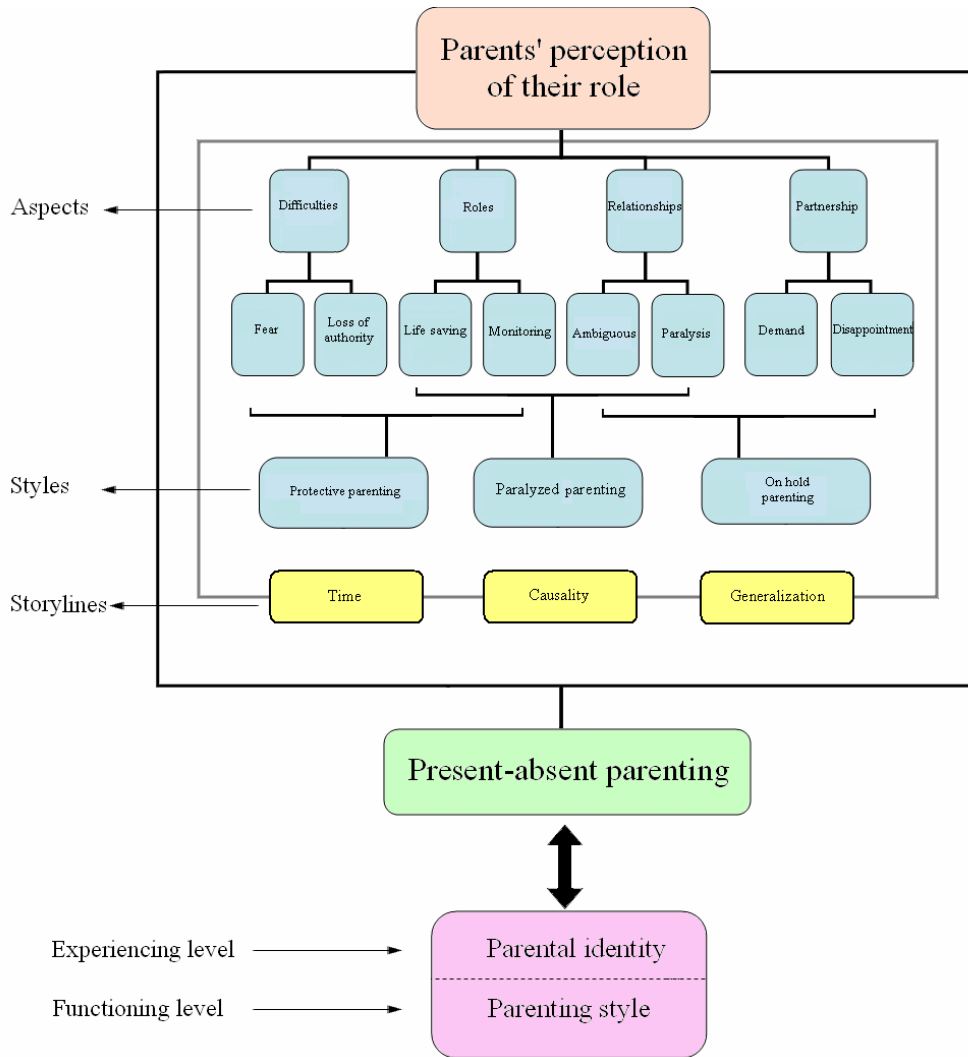


Figure 2: Findings

## Chapter 4 Discussion and conclusions

This chapter is presented in two parts; the discussion and the conclusions. The chapter focuses on the formation of the parenting identity as a developing process. The researcher suggests that implementing the parenting role in preventing children's drugs and alcohol use constitutes the parents' role identity in general. Thus, it is possible to theoretically conclude the findings upon the parenting experiences on the whole, especially as regards to the relationship with adolescents which demonstrate the structure of their parental identity.

**The discussion** concentrates on the construction process of the parental identity and its sources of influence according to the identity and role theory (Cast, 2004; Kuzminsky & Kloyer, 2010; Stryker & Burke, 2000) the narrative approach (Bruner, 1999, 2004; Freeman, 1993) the self determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the self efficacy approach (Bandura, 1989, 1977). Based on the research findings, a review of the factors which affect the consolidation of the parenting identity was conducted. The epilogue of the discussion elevates the similarities between the role of a parent and the role of a leader. Finally the discussion examines the limitations of the study.

According to the **identity theory**, the individual's identity is created by the internalization of role significances and expectancies, which are "external" and associated with the positions of social structure (Stryker & Burke, 2000). In this sense, the parents' perception of their role can be seen as a product of social structuring which developed from their inter-generational context, and influenced by socio-cultural changes. These changes create a shaking up of the foundations which compose this structuring and thereby the confusion which characterizes parental identity. The parents, who internalized their role as parents while they were children, currently encounter a different arena of role performance which does not correlate with the structuring of the functional parental identity which was familiar to them.

Parenthood is a functional identity based not only on the mere birth of the child but rather on the relationship of the parent with his child. The identity of the parents is conditioned by their children and is influenced by the relationship that they are establishing. Parents tend to search for a feeling of significance coming from their children while the parent's recognition of being significant for their children contributes to the formation of parenthood (Cast, 2004; Stuve & Pleck, 2001). The current study shows that the parents' perceptions of their role are influenced directly by the style of the parent-child relationship.

This relationship style is also influenced by different factors which are not specifically personality-based but rather are dependent on cultural, social, and technological developments. In this sense, parental identity faces a conflict between the social definition and expectation of parenthood and the ability to implement these expectations.

Becoming a parent activates previous parental identity and the new parents begins to look at verifying meanings about themselves as parents in order to create their parental identity. If parents have incongruent expectations, each parent will have difficulty verifying his parental identity (Cast, 2004). From this and according to the findings of the current study it can be clearly seen that children, in their relationships with their parents, create verification and satisfy their parents' need for verification as part of the identity activation. In other words, the influence of children's verification of their parents is significant in the formation of the parental identity. This study correlates with this approach as it shows that in this way the perception of the parents who participated in the study can be explained by the extent that they attribute to their relationship with their children. It was found that the parents conduct can be called a "covert discourse" with the way their children perceive them. On the one hand, their children's imagined perceptions influence their feelings, their reactions and their relationships with them and at the same time, their children's behaviour towards them reinforces this verification. This is a "closed circuit" of those influencing and those influenced which works bi-directionally and affects the style of parenting. As such, the study shows that the parents' perceptions of their role are constructed by the style of the parent-child relationship.

Another angle of the discussion is considered to the individuals' identification with the entire group which creates the social identity and constitutes the foundation on which the perception of the individual himself, as part of the group, is founded (Doise, 1993; Moscovici, 1994). The definition of a group such as parents brings about recognition of its unique identity and thereby also the entire relationship of the social representations which characterize it. The social representations are not only schemas of information but rather also "a guide for action", which aim to offer behavioural scenarios in various situations. As such, the findings of the current study show that the structure of the cognitive and emotional matrixes of the parents includes more than one parental functional identity. They indeed see themselves as parents, however in addition also as friends to their children, as well as detectives and bodyguards. In this way, a situation exists in which the parents simultaneously hold several "social relationships" which are diverse social identities that do not necessarily

complement each other. These "multiple identities" supply an explanation for the sense of disorientation, confusion and helplessness presented by the parents and can constitute a basis for the growth of the present-absent identity.

**Narrative approaches** see the parental identity developing throughout life, from childhood, and it is influenced by both personal and social experiences. This in comparison to studies dealing with parenting that emphasize that the parental role starts occurring during the transition to parenthood. As such, it becomes clear that the formation of the parents' identity as a present – absent identity is based on the events which occur during their life. This formation is taken from the most significant experiences which they chose to reveal, whether consciously or unconsciously. The parents revealed a constant dialogue between the different kinds of parenting; the one they have wished to perform which for example leaned on the story of their parents' parenting, and the one they can actually perform, out of their real current life. The current study demonstrates that the parents structure the identity of their role is based on the measure and the style of their involvement in their own parenting story. While retelling the fragments of the parental experiences, the parents demonstrated involvement and non-involvement simultaneously. Their vision of involvement or non-involvement, which was conceptualized in the study as a state of presence – absence, created the need to deal with it, to explain and justify it and furthermore to understand it. In this respect, the storylines arising from the holistic form – analysis can be seen to reinforce the story of the parental aspects and the parenting styles.

According to the **self determination theory** and the **self efficacy approach** the parents of the current study show that their inner aspects of motivation and commitment which are considered significant factors in establishing any role, especially parenting, are damaged. It can be seen that the three psychological needs; the need for relationship, belonging and security; the need for a feeling of capability; and the need for autonomy of which their satisfaction contributes to optimal development, internal motivation, well being and successful adaptation are not satisfied. As a result parents perceived their role the way they did. The parents' internal motivation to influence their children, to change their behaviour and to prevent them from using drugs and alcohol is labile and relationship dependent. Their basic role perceptions testify to high commitment and motivation, however, the character of their relationship with their children influences the perceptions of autonomy and personal determination and thereby also their internal motivation and weaken it. All these lead to parental behaviour expressed by moving from presence to absence.

Overall the study shows that the parenting style typology (Baumrind, 1966, 1989) which serves till this very day in discussing the quality of parenting and correspondingly its influences over children's outcomes is no longer sufficient, as parents perceptions of their role should also be considered. Even though the factors of control and parental authority are still considered important, this consideration remains "theoretical" as parents do not have the means to establish it. This leads to the most important finding of the current study which introduces absent parenting that does not succeed in realizing its goal in preventing risk behaviours of their children.

The **epilogue** which elevates the connection between parenthood and leadership demonstrates that similar to parenthood, the phenomenon of the leadership is in fact, the story of the leader, his characteristics and his behaviours (Popper, 2009; Yukel & Van Fleet, 1992). As most of the common theories and research on leadership describe how the leader influences his followers, researches on parenting do the same. The researcher of the current study wishes to claim that this perception, similar to parenthood, leads to a bi-directional leader-follower relationship. In light of this, one needs to take into account both parties and the reciprocal influences between them in a unique context. Thus, it can be noted that parenting, similarly to leadership, is undergoing a process of redefinition whereby the central components of this definition are the factors that affect these roles.

The study indicates several **limitations** regarding the research tool, the research analysis and the research population. Firstly, as most of the interviews were conjoint interviews, it can reflect a limitation in this study as regards the willingness of the parents to expand the description of their parenting and to go into intimate difficulties and experiences. It could have been possible that a debate that could have arisen would lead the interview to an undesirable place. Although the researcher aimed to relate to each detail that was raised in the interview and to the stimulation created around the debates as an advantage, she is aware of the possible limitation in the use of this tool.

Another limitation of the study relates to the analysis of the interviews as it dealt with verbal aspects of the text and did not relate enough to the non-verbal aspects such as body language, dominance as compared to passiveness, expressions of crying, laughter or silences. It should be noted that these aspects have a very significant content in their own right and in the understanding of the whole picture, and it is important to examine them and analyze them.



The last limitation relates to the research population. The objectives of the study dictated the use of a snow ball sampling tool for recruiting participants as such they were those who consented to take part in it in spite of the described obstacles. Although the researcher tried to create diversity in the characteristics of the participants, and even though the constructivist paradigm does not see this as a disadvantage of this study's genre, it should be noted that participation based only on participants' willingness could be considered as a limitation. Additionally, the researcher avoided asking the informants about their attitudes towards drug and alcohol use including their own use patterns. The researcher has tried to avoid being in a position of a therapist in particular as this is her area of expertise. Nevertheless it is important to question whether parents' unique self perceptions of their role are related to any personal experience of this sort.

The second part, the **conclusions**, presents the contribution of the study, the ramifications for practice and intervention with parents, and issues for future study.

The **contribution** of the study is demonstrated in several areas. The First is considered to the classical typology of parenting style as the findings indicate that there are additional and different parenting styles derived from the parents' self perception of their role. The study illustrates that there is great importance in listening to the inherent voices of the parents, in their own natural environment, and to learn their role formation not only from the children's outcomes but rather also **directly** from them. From this it can be concluded that the parenting styles can also be conceptualized by the parents' self perspectives of their roles and as a result, appropriate consulting programs can be built.

Another contribution reflects a reinforcement of Kuczynski and Parkin's (2009) approach and shows that parents are in dialogue not only with their children but rather also with themselves as regards their bi-directional relationship with their children. While observing their relationship with their children they see it as a central source of frustration rather than satisfaction. Kuczynski and Parkin (2009) argue against linear thinking and propose viewing individuals as not fully formed but as continuously changing in a dialectical process of mutual engagement. The current study reinforces Kuczynski and Parkin's (2009) approach and shows that parents are in dialogue not only with their children but rather also with themselves as regards the type of their relationships with their children. This dialogue affects their perception of the relationships with their children and how they perceive themselves within that relationship by observing their relationship with their children and see it as a central source of frustration.

The current study also shows that the parents indicate what the ecological model calls "ecological transitions", however they refer to them as a factor of crisis transitions accompanied by difficulties. By revealing the configuration of the parental identity, the study exposes this personal view of the transitions and validates it.

The ramifications for **practice** and **intervention** with parents indicate that both the family therapy and the general policy of relevant services for the family should take into consideration not only the child's needs but rather also the parents' needs in coping with their children's problem especially in adolescence. Moreover and since parents tend not to cooperate with prevention programs, attention should be attributed to the reasons for that resignation not only as regards technical reasons (timetable, cost) but rather the way parents feel towards those programs and to identify their specific needs and respect them.

In this context, there is a need to strengthen the parenting "institution" and in particular the parents' self confidence and to assist them in "reconnecting" with the parental role, to re-identify with it according to their self perceptions.

The treatment implications include development of focussed and practical models for intervention with parents on the initial, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention. The initial prevention is mainly by education toward the creation of a good climate and effective conditions which will prevent the creation of possible problems. The secondary prevention should be designed for treatment of a problem at the outset and its termination in the initial stages to prevent deterioration into the more difficult stages. The tertiary prevention should be intended for treatment of a problem in its complex stages including external intervention by a professional. The processes of stimulation of preventive parenting should start in the preliminary stages which accompany parenthood and will form empowerment and functional identity.

**Issues for future study** can focus on increasing the research into the children's perception of their parents' role as regards the findings of this study and in general. The question is raised as to whether children experience their parents as the parents experience themselves, whether they experience them differently, and how the parents' experiences influence their children from the children's perspective.

Another area of recommended research is the style of discourse held in families with adolescent children. Although the parents' perception of the discourse style is not surprising due to the developmental stage of the children, the understanding can be expanded regarding

this phenomenon both in the context of its universality and from the aspect of its ramifications.

Further study can deal with the understanding regarding the unique effect and significance of the position of the adolescent in the family as regards the parents' perceptions for example: whether he is the eldest or the youngest child in the family. From the study it becomes clear that the difficulties and experiences described, even if they are familiar in style, are often described in a different fashion, with a different intensity in different families. It is appropriate to examine whether the difference is connected to the initial confrontation by the parents with the issues and relevant coping with adolescence or the familiar encounter.

The researcher also suggests studying the relation between parenting and leadership as parenting can be noted as a role which requires leadership skills which parents report that they have lost. Parents' stories reveal that they are looking for that role but at the same time do not feel the legitimacy to implement it. Studying this relationship can contribute to redefining parenting and strengthening it by correlating it to leadership. At the end of the day, strengthening parenting can lead to better children outcomes.

In conclusion, an additional area which seems appropriate for future study relates to the question: Parenthood – where is it heading? In what ways can it redefine its objectives and thus become a clearer role once more. The current study shows that parenthood (and the family) is constantly changing as part of the historic social evolutionary process. The researcher recommends augmentation of the research of parenthood and the family from the contemporary social cultural perspective while examining the changes relating to the parent-adolescent relationships during their occurrence in genuine "real time".

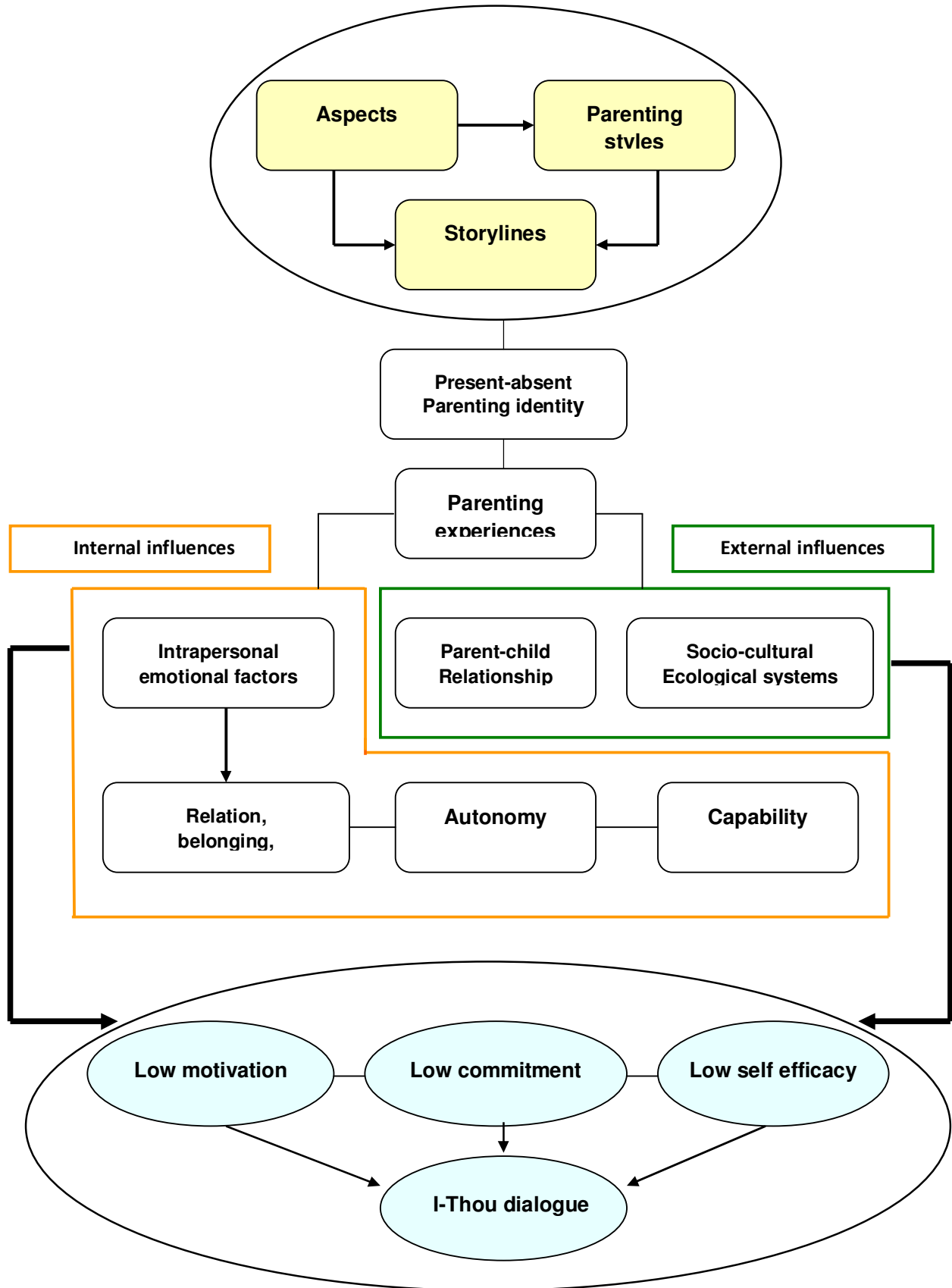


Figure 6: Parents' perceptions model

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