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## Nannies' abilities to relate with the child as predictors for professional performance

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### Abstract

Starting from the increase of families hiring nannies, studies revealing the influence of the nanny's conduct on the child's development and the absence in Romania of standardized and valid tests for evaluating nannies' performance, the objective of this exploratory study was the evaluation of nannies' abilities to relate with the child, in relation to parental competence dimensions and professional performance criteria. The results of the research (conducted on 65 live-in nannies) proved that the adapted Parental Competence Questionnaire could be used for evaluating nannies' abilities to relate with the child and that these abilities were predictors for performance.

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### 1. Introduction

The challenges of the contemporary society (long working hours, the need for an extension and diversification of training programs in order to adjust to the professional requests, the need to permanently develop oneself and gather multiple specializations, the increase of the number of women occupying executive positions) hallmark the particularities of the modern family. In the specialized literature, there are numerous studies and researches proving the essential role of the family and especially of the mother in the cognitive (Durning & Pourtois, 1994), social

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(Briers, 2008; Salome, 1989), moral (Law Nolte & Harris, 2001) and cultural-value development of the child (Spock, 1998; Zimbardo, 1985). At the same time, a profile of the parental competence in relation to the satisfaction of the child's main needs has been revealed. The parental competence was defined by Glăveanu & Creangă (2009) as a system of knowledge, skills, capabilities, abilities and habits that allow the parent to successfully fulfill the parental responsibilities and also to prevent/deal with crisis situations in a manner that contributes to the child's development. Although the above studies stressed the importance of the parents' presence and also of their competence in accomplishing the parental roles, many families – in the situation in which the profession deeply absorbs both parents – often resort to the services of a nanny. According to the Romanian Occupational Standard (National Authority for Qualifications, 2011), a nanny is a qualified person that provides services like child caretaking, development and education at the child's home and that is responsible for implementing/applying the decisions planned together with the child's parents. The professional activity of a nanny is regulated by documents issued by the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection and the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports. A live-in nanny (who permanently lives with the family of the child and who takes on tasks almost completely delegated by the parents) plays an important part in the child's life and development and can have both a positive (Bassett, 1998) influence and an extremely negative one. There are authors who draw the attention on the risks of the total delegation of the parental roles to a live-in nanny. Friedman (2010) correlates this situation to the appearance of subsequent disturbances of the child's personality. The boys can become libertine adults, trying to achieve immediate satisfactions in the relations with women, as they grow up with the impression that there is always "another woman" who will fulfill their needs (the live-in nanny embodies this concept, suggesting that the mother, and later the wife, is not sufficient). On the other hand, the girls raised in this system will feel an unfulfilled need of affection that they may satisfy in adult life by alcohol, drugs, sex. One way to prevent such dysfunctional outcomes is to ensure a solid professional evaluation and also a standardized professional training/formation of the live-in nannies according to the general and specific competences described in the Occupational Standard; this would favor the building of a caretaking and educational environment favorable to the development of a harmonious personality of the future adult.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### *2.1. Purpose*

Starting from a series of studies showing the influence of the live-in nanny on the child (LaRowe, 2006) and from the fact that in Romania there were no tailored and standardized tests with the necessary psychometric qualities for being scientifically valid and generally applicable, the objective of this exploratory study was the evaluation of the live-in nannies' abilities to establish a good relation with the child, in reference to the main dimensions of the parental competence and the professional performance criteria.

The investigative process was guided by two hypotheses:

- The dimensions that characterized a live-in nanny's abilities to relate with the child corresponded to those of the parental competence and thus the Parental Competence Questionnaire (PCQ) could be adjusted (by eliminating, reformulating and particularizing some of the items) and used in this new context.
- If the aforementioned abilities (evaluated by the adapted PCQ) were predictors of the professional performance of live-in nannies, then the research responded to a practical necessity

### *2.2. Subjects*

The research was conducted on 65 live-in nannies (age  $M = 39.1$ ,  $SD = 17.45$ ) with high-school and/or university education, evaluated at a preliminary level by an agency in Bucharest providing specialized services.

### 2.3. Methods

For the evaluation of live-in nannies' abilities to establish a good relation with the child a questionnaire-based investigation was carried out, using the Parental Competence Questionnaire, developed by Glăveanu and validated in 2009-2010 on 535 parents with the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) ( $r = .7$ ,  $p < .001$ , two-tailed) (Glăveanu, 2012). The PCQ was adapted to the particularities of the live-in nannies' situation (some items have been removed, others slightly reformulated, and the questionnaire remained with 55 items out of 81); for this reason, the Cronbach alpha coefficients have been recalculated (taking into consideration the statistical criteria) and the items were reanalyzed from the point of view of their internal consistency.

The items were grouped on the following five dimensions:

- Knowing the specificities of the child ( $\alpha = .7$ ) – the live-in nannies' ability of becoming aware of the child's level of development, therefore being able to understand the child's reactions and needs and to provide adequate answers.
- Affective support and stress management ( $\alpha = .78$ ) – the capacity to provide affective assistance that helps the child to manage and overcome negative emotions.
- Disciplining ( $\alpha = .79$ ) – the capacity of being assertive in relation to the child and of adequately managing the reward-punition system in order to stimulate the development of a well-balanced personality.
- Time management ( $\alpha = .72$ ) – the ability of guiding the child's time by creating situations that are stimulative for the development of creative thinking, aesthetic sense etc. and that sustain the child's social insertion.
- Crisis management ( $\alpha = .75$ ) – the capacity of being a good leader, of finding solutions to the child's problems together with the child, consequently overcoming the educational, personal etc. crises and stimulating the development of critical (rational) thinking and problem-solving capacity.

The scaling of the items was done by assigning numbers from 1 to 5 to the levels to which the subjects were characterized by the listed conducts; subsequently, the final score of the questionnaire was between 55 and 275. The existence of several dimensions having certain autonomy in the evaluation of the investigated construct allowed the elaboration of distinct standards for each of the five dimensions of the questionnaire. The item analysis revealed the difficulty coefficient of the items (between 0.3 and 0.7) and their discrimination coefficient (between 0.23 and 0.54). The exploratory analysis revealed the communality (0.5 and 0.66), the saturation (over 0.4) and the degree of sample adequacy (KMO coefficient = 0.63). The psychometric qualities of the questionnaire (fidelity and validity) were revealed as follows: for the internal consistency the calculation of the Cronbach alpha coefficient revealed statistically acceptable values (the lowest = 0.70, the highest = 0.79); the content validity was mostly ensured by extracting behavior samples from the results of the qualitative research and by using expert analysis.

The professional performance of the live-in nannies was analyzed using the Parents' Questionnaire for the Evaluation of the Live-in Nanny's Conduct, comprised of 53 items and built within this study in relation to the following general criteria/competences described in the Romanian Occupational Standard: activity planning, communication to the child, ensuring the physical safety of the child, building a context of emotional stability, stimulating the development of child's personal and social autonomy, development of a positive relation with the family. The above mentioned questionnaire also included criteria for analyzing the live-in nanny's conduct in relation to potential critical events (divorce, disease/death of a member of the family etc.) and to individual features (qualities that recommended that person for the job, identified areas for improvement/development). The scaling of the items was done by assigning numbers from 1 to 5 to the levels to which the subjects were characterized by the listed conducts; subsequently, the final score of the questionnaire was between 53 and 265. Regarding the psychometric qualities of the questionnaire, its fidelity was proved by the Cronbach alpha statistically acceptable values (the lowest=0.60, the highest=0.81), while its validity came from the fact that it was built on the competences and activities described in the Romanian Occupational Standard which was conceived by numerous experts.

### 3. Results

The first hypothesis of the research was investigated in reference to the psychometric qualities of the PCQ. In order to adjust the questionnaire to the particularities of the live-in nanny's activity, the construct/conceptual validity

was guaranteed by collecting information from the specialized literature and extracting conducts from the qualitative research, but also by requesting experts' analysis (10 experts evaluated the relevance of the items for the investigated construct; they were researchers who took part, together with experienced nannies, in the conceiving and implementation of nannies' professional performance standard). As a result, some items were eliminated or reformulated. Regarding the internal consistency (estimation of the fidelity derived from the inter-correlations between the questionnaire items), the Cronbach alpha coefficient denoted statistically acceptable values (the lowest – 0.70, the highest – 0.79), but slightly lower than in the case of the initial PCQ (between 0.71 and 0.82). The new questionnaire had 55 items and could be used for the investigation of the live-in nannies' abilities to establish a good relation with the child.

In order to investigate the second hypothesis of the research, the multiple regression analysis was used. A decisive role in the regression analysis was played by multicollinearity. Ideally, the independent variables (the predictors) should not significantly correlate to one another, but they have to correlate with the criterion. In the analysis of the variables correlations matrix, it has to be considered that the significance of the correlation coefficients was calculated using the Bonferoni method; thus, the minimal threshold of .05 is divided to the number of variables in the matrix (Sava, 2004) and a new limit threshold ( $.05/5 = .01$ ) is obtained. Under these circumstances, it can be noted that the relation between the predictor variables is not significant ( $p > .01$ ). Also, there are and significant correlations between the predictor variables: knowing the specificities of the child ( $r = .74$ ,  $p < .001$ ) affective support/stress management ( $r = .80$ ,  $p < .001$ ), disciplining ( $r = .76$ ,  $p < .001$ ), time management ( $r = .78$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and crisis management ( $r = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the criterion variable (the live-in nanny's professional performance). The statistic results indicate that 62% of the variation of the professional performance are determined by the five dimensions regarding the child relating abilities – knowing the specificities of the child, affective support/stress management, disciplining, time management and crisis management ( $R = .78$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .62$ ) and that all predictor variables influence together the criterion variable ( $F(5, 60) = 5.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The values of  $t$  at a  $p < .05$  in Table 1 indicate that all the coefficients have significant values, proving that the predictor variables are important for the estimation of the criterion variable live-in nanny's professional performance.

Table 1. Signification of the predictor values for the regression line

	Nannies' professional performance			
	B	$\beta$	t	p
Live-in nannies' abilities to establish a good relation with the child	264.375		23.279	.000
Knowing the specificities of the child	24.186	.142	7.246	.005
Affective support/stress management	7.287	.108	3.733	.002
Disciplining	20.549	.745	6.852	.000
Time management	13.283	.629	4.368	.005
Crisis management	6.451	.038	3.281	.008

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

The statistical data proved that the dimensions of the live-in nannies' abilities to establish a good relation with the child corresponded to those of the parental competence; also, the analysis of the psychometric qualities showed that the adjusted PCQ could be used for evaluating the aforementioned abilities. The results of the research empirically validate the theories and ideas of authors like Murkoff & Mazel (2004) and LaRowe (2006) who strengthened the importance of the nanny's conduct for the development of the child, given the major delegation of caretaking, raising and education tasks and responsibilities by the parents. At the same time, it is proven that the child-relating abilities (knowing the specificities of the child, affective support/stress management, disciplining, time management and crisis management) are predictors of live-in nannies' professional performance. Thus, the research responds to a practical necessity to evaluate the live-in nannies' activity by standardized and valid means – together with standardizing the nannies' professional formation and monitoring, the afore mentioned necessity also was one of the

main objectives of the National Program for Women's Qualification and Accreditation as Baby Sitters/Nannies (Romanian Angel Appeal Foundation, 2011), the first program of its kind in Romania, co-financed from the European Social Fund through the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007-2013 – and to provide the premises for an educational climate oriented towards the development of a harmonious personality of the future adult. The limitations of the research were generated by the small number of subjects, but its results correspond to the particularities of an exploratory research and provide an overall vision/a base on which more complex investigations can be developed. The future research directions will focus on finer differences between the various cases, taking into consideration variables like socio-demographic/age data, training level (high-school/academic education), nanny's personality traits and their relation with the particularities of the child, nanny's training and specialization field (social/human sciences, psychology etc.) and, also, other qualification and development courses etc. These are meant to provide the basis for the construction of a structural model that will incorporate the multitude of the determinant variables, evaluate the nannies' professional performance, and allow the development of specialized programs to ensure the quality of their activity.

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