DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH
*A peer-reviewed, open-access journal of population sciences*

***DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH***

**VOLUME 44, ARTICLE 13, PAGES 333–348**
**PUBLISHED 11 FEBRUARY 2021**
https://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol44/13/
DOI: 10.4054/DemRes.2021.44.13

*Descriptive Finding*

# Exploring the concept of intensive parenting in a three-country study

**Anne H. Gauthier**

**Caroline Bryson**

**Luisa Fadel**

**Tina Haux**

**Judith Koops**

**Monika Mynarska**

# Contents


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Introduction | 334 |
| 2 | Data and methods | 335 |
| 3 | Analytical strategy | 338 |
| 4 | Results | 339 |
| 4.1 | Results from the pooled analysis | 341 |
| 4.2 | Variation by sociodemographic characteristics | 342 |
| 5 | Conclusion | 343 |
| 6 | Acknowledgements | 345 |
| | References | 346 |

*Demographic Research*: Volume 44, Article 13
*Descriptive Finding*

# Exploring the concept of intensive parenting in a three-country study

**Anne H. Gauthier**[1]

**Caroline Bryson**[2]

**Luisa Fadel**[3]

**Tina Haux**[4]

**Judith Koops**[5]

**Monika Mynarska**[6]

## Abstract

**BACKGROUND**
In recent decades there has been growing interest in the concept of intensive parenting. However, the literature is mostly qualitative and based on Anglo-Saxon countries. This raises the question of how best to operationalise the concept in a wider cross-national setting.

**OBJECTIVE**
This paper aims to operationalise the theoretical concept of intensive parenting in a cross-national perspective.

**METHODS**
The data for this study come from the CROss-National Online Survey panel [CRONOS], conducted in Estonia, Great Britain, and Slovenia in 2017. The analysis is based on 18 items on norms related to raising children. Exploratory factor analyses were carried out to identify dimensions of intensive parenting. Variation by respondents' sociodemographics for the different dimensions was also analysed.

[1] Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI-KNAW) and University of Groningen, Netherlands. Corresponding author Anne H. Gauthier: Email: gauthier@nidi.nl.
[2] Bryson Purdon Social Research LLP and the London School of Economics, UK
[3] Université Catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain), Belgium
[4] University of Kent, UK
[5] Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI-KNAW) and University of Groningen, Netherlands
[6] Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Institute of Psychology, Poland.

**RESULTS**
The results reveal four main dimensions regarding contemporary norms of parenting: a child-centred approach, a focus on stimulating children's development, personal responsibility to do one's best for one's children, and pressure to follow experts' advice. These four dimensions were found in all three countries.

**CONCLUSIONS**
The results partly confirm the conception of intensive parenting originally suggested by Hays (1986). They also reveal that the phenomenon is not restricted to Anglo-Saxon countries but can be operationalised in a similar way in other countries. The findings also reveal some variation by sociodemographic characteristics, but not in a systematic way.

**CONTRIBUTION**
This is the first study to use random probability population-based samples to operationalise the concept of intensive parenting in a cross-national perspective.

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades the time and money that parents invest in their children has increased substantially (Gauthier, Smeeding, and Furstenberg 2004; Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013). Simply doing one's best for one's children or meeting a child's basic needs are no longer deemed enough. Today's parents are instead expected to devote considerable time and resources to their children (Ishizuka 2018).

Hays (1986) originally captured this new standard of parenting in the term 'intensive mothering', which she defined as "child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive and financially expensive" (p.8). These norms, she argued, have been partly fuelled by scientific evidence showing the importance of child-centred and child-intensive mothering practices for children's development (Gunderson undated; Wall 2010). Since then, the concept has received increasing interest in the literature, either under the original label of intensive mothering or that of intensive parenting to reflect its relevance to fathers (Wall and Arnold 2007). Findings from this literature have highlighted the pressure on parents to conform to this new standard, even at the expense of their own well-being (Rizzo, Schiffrin, and Liss 2013).

However, the existing empirical evidence is limited in two ways. First, the concept of intensive parenting has mostly been examined in qualitative small-scale studies or in quantitative studies based on non-random samples. For example, the two recent attempts to quantitatively measure intensive parenting are both based on convenience samples recruited from the web (Liss et al. 2013; Loyal, Sutter Dallay, and Rascle 2017). In both cases, the samples over-represented highly educated respondents. It therefore remains

unclear whether the results can be generalised to the broader population (Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne 2013; Forbes, Donovan, and Lamar 2020; Romagnoli and Wall 2012).[7] Second, the large majority of studies come from English-speaking countries (Gauthier 2015). This not only raises the question of the generalisability of the concept of intensive parenting across countries, but also whether the survey items which capture intensive parenting in one country translate well to other countries. For example, the recent study by Loyal, Sutter Dallay, and Rascle (2017) shows that some of the survey items that perform well in the United States (Liss et al. 2013) do not do so in France.

The current paper presents the findings of a unique study in which questions related to the concept of intensive parenting were fielded in a large nationally representative survey in three countries: Estonia, Great Britain, and Slovenia. Its aim is to operationalise the concept of intensive parenting and, especially, to analyse if the dimensions inherent in this concept are the same across the three countries.

## 2. Data and methods

The data for this study come from the CROss-National Online Survey panel [CRONOS] (2018) conducted in Estonia, Great Britain, and Slovenia. The panel was set up in 2017 as an add-on to the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 8, which itself is based on nationally representative random probability samples. Around one-third of the Round 8 ESS respondents participated in wave 2 of CRONOS (in which our parenting items were fielded): 34% in Estonia, 38% in Great Britain, and 38% in Slovenia (own calculation based on Villar et al. 2018). The total sample size for wave 2 across the three countries was 1,828, reduced for our analysis to 1,695 after the deletion of cases with missing values. The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are summarised in Table 1.

[7] The only exception is a recent American study in which a nationally representative sample was used to study parenting norms using a vignette approach (Ishizuka 2018). However, the study did not aim to measure norms of intensive parenting but rather norms related to concerted cultivation, based on Lareau's work.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics for CRONOS wave 2 respondents, by country. Percentage values (weighted data)**

| | Great Britain | Estonia | Slovenia |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Gender*** | | | |
| Male | 46.30 | 46.85 | 49.25 |
| Female | 53.70 | 53.15 | 50.75 |
| ***Age*** | | | |
| 18–29 | 21.08 | 18.01 | 16.68 |
| 30–54 | 32.70 | 34.93 | 32.79 |
| 50+ | 46.23 | 47.06 | 50.53 |
| ***Marriage/Legal union*** | | | |
| Yes | 52.58 | 43.37 | 54.30 |
| No | 47.42 | 56.63 | 45.70 |
| ***Children*** | | | |
| Yes | 65.81 | 75.56 | 75.38 |
| No | 34.19 | 24.44 | 24.62 |
| ***Education level*** | | | |
| Low | 27.40 | 14.61 | 18.05 |
| Medium | 29.14 | 51.06 | 57.00 |
| High | 43.46 | 34.34 | 24.95 |
| ***N*** | 643 | 598 | 454 |
| Total N = 1,695 | | | |

*Note*: Education level was recoded based on the ISCED categories with low = ISCED 1 and 2, medium = ISCED 3 and 4, and high = ISCED 5 and 6.

The 18 items fielded were designed to capture the four dimensions inherent in Hays' definition of intensive mothering (see Table 2):

- **Child-centred:** referring to the key premise that children should be the centre of parents' attention, even at the expense of parents' own needs.
- **Expert-guided:** referring to pressure on parents to rely on experts' knowledge on how best to parent.
- **Resource intensive:** referring to the expected time and money investments in children, including the importance of 'being there for the children', as well as the importance of investing in children to provide a good head start in life (e.g., extra-curricular activities).
- **Emotionally absorbing:** referring to the emotional work associated with being a good parent and its related worries and feeling of guilt.

**Table 2: Wording of the 18 items on intensive parenting tested in CRONOS, classified according to their theoretical concept**

| Theoretical dimension/ Short label | Variable number | Exact wording of the item |
|---|---|---|
| ***Child-centred*** | | |
| ChNeeds[1] | w2q55 | Children's needs should come before those of their parents |
| FamRoutine[2] | w2q59* | A family's daily routine should be organised around what works best for parents rather than for their children |
| ChAttention[3] | w2q63 | Children should be the centre of their parents' attention |
| PaLife[4] | w2q70* | Parents have a life of their own and should not be asked to sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of their children |
| ChTalents[5] | w2q67 | It is a parents' role to discover and develop their children's special talents |
| ***Expert-guided*** | | |
| AdviceProf[6] | w2q56 | It is best that parents listen to the parenting advice of professionals rather than simply relying on family and friends |
| BadJob[7] | w2q60* | Parents who seek advice on parenting are admitting that they are not doing a very good job |
| PaKnow[8] | w2q64* | Parents naturally know how best to bring up their children |
| AwareExperts[9] | w2q68 | Good parents should be aware of what experts say and write about the development of children |
| ***Resource-intensive*** | | |
| LessAvailable[10] | w2q57* | It is alright for parents to, now and then, be less available to their children |
| AlwaysAvailable[11] | w2q61 | Parents should always be available to their children |
| Activities[12] | w2q65 | To reach their full potential, it is important that children take part in a wide range of organised activities outside of their home |
| BasicNeeds[13] | w2q69 | Parents should make sure their children's basic needs are met, even if it means cutting down on essentials for themselves |
| LatestToys[14] | w2q71* | Good parents are those who buy their children the latest toys and gadgets |
| ***Emotionally absorbing*** | | |
| ChSuccess[15] | w2q58 | A child's successes and failures mostly reflect how well their parents are bringing them up |
| ChMistakes[16] | w2q62* | Parents need to give children the freedom to learn from their own mistakes |
| PaWorry[17] | w2q66 | Good parents constantly worry about their child's well-being and comfort |
| PaStress[18] | w2q72 | Parenting is very stressful if you want to do it right |

*Note*: The original response scale was from '1' strongly agree to '5' strongly disagree. Items with an asterisk were coded accordingly, while the others were reverse-coded, so for all items a higher score means a higher support for the intensive parenting norm. Note also that originally the phrasing of the item 'Latest Toys' was meant to capture the resource-intensive aspect of the measured concept. However, after further consideration, we concluded that with the mention of "gadgets", the item could be interpreted as an indicator of "negative investment", which might even hinder a child's development. As a result, we decided to view this item as capturing the opposite of intensive parenting.
*Sources* of the items: (1) Liss et al. (2013). The original wording was "Children's needs should come before their parents". (2) Liss et al. (2013). The original wording was "A child's schedule should take priority over the needs of their parents". (3) Liss et al. (2013). The original wording was "Children should be the center of attention". (4) The World Value Survey and the European Values Survey. (5) Own item. (6) Adapted from The UK CANparent evaluation (Lindsay et al. 2014). (7) Adapted from The UK CANparent evaluation (Lindsay et al. 2014). (8) Own item. (9) The New Families In the Netherlands Study (Poortman, Van der Lippe, Boele-Woelki 2014). The original wording was: "Good parents are aware of what experts say and write about the development of their children". (10) Own item..(11) Own item. (12) Adapted from Liss et al. (2013). (13) Own item. (14) Own item. (15) The Pew Research Center (2015). (16) Own item. (17) Own item. (18) Own item.

Some items were adapted from previous surveys, while others were developed by our team on the basis of Hays' definition together with results of other qualitative studies (Leigh et al. 2012). All items were phrased to capture social norms (e.g., what is expected of good parents) rather than parenting behaviour (e.g., what good parents do). They were also phrased so that the whole adult population could answer them, not just parents.

For all items, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed using a five-point scale (Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree). Responses were recoded (where applicable, see Table 2) so that a high score represents high support for the notion of intensive parenting. Importantly, the order in which respondents were shown the eighteen items did not follow the four domains listed above. Instead, the items were mixed to avoid repetitive response patterns. The same order was used for all respondents.

## 3. Analytical strategy

In the first part of the analysis, we carried out a series of Exploratory Factor Analyses using principal component analysis with varimax rotation involving the polychoric correlation matrix, using the Stata-user written command "polychoric" (Kolenikov and Angeles 2004). This was appropriate due to the ordinal nature of our items. Internal consistency of the factors was assessed by the ordinal alpha using the method suggested by Zumbo, Gadermann, and Zeisser (2007). In the second part, the scores for scales were computed based on the polychoric rotated loading matrix, using the command "predict" in Stata. Finally, variation in the support for intensive parenting by the respondents' sociodemographic characteristics was analysed using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. While this does not constitute a systematic validation of the scales, it is a step towards understanding whether specific subgroups of the population support intensive parenting to a greater extent than others.

We performed all of our analyses in Stata and used the provided weights (W2WEIGHT), which "incorporate the ESS8 design weight and adjustments for nonresponse at both ESS8 and the respective CRONOS wave" (Villar et al. 2018). The mean value of the weights for each country was equal to 1, ensuring that each country counted equally in our pooled analyses.

## 4. Results

A series of preliminary analyses was carried out for each country separately and for the cross-nationally pooled dataset in order to identify the best factor solution. This preliminary stage revealed a four-factor solution based on 14 of the 18 items. This solution mapped the items in almost the same way in Britain and Slovenia, with some differences in Estonia (further discussed below). Factor loadings for the pooled data appear in Table 3.

**Table 3: Factor loadings from the exploratory factor analysis on the pooled cross-national data**

| Item | Child-centred | Stimulation | Parental responsibility | Expert-guided | Original dimensions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ChNeeds | **0.6518** | –0.0122 | 0.1924 | 0.0805 | Child-centred |
| LessAvailable | **0.5434** | –0.0932 | –0.2936 | –0.1350 | Resource (time) |
| AlwaysAvailable | **0.7429** | 0.1509 | –0.1346 | 0.0146 | Resource (time) |
| ChAttention | **0.6140** | 0.2680 | –0.2753 | 0.2218 | Child-centred |
| BasicNeeds | **0.4915** | 0.2164 | 0.4692 | 0.1159 | Resource-intensive |
| PaLife | **0.5657** | 0.0181 | 0.4190 | –0.1605 | Child-centred |
| Activities | –0.0426 | **0.6993** | 0.1590 | 0.0831 | Resource (activities) |
| PaWorry | 0.2528 | **0.6987** | –0.2080 | 0.0406 | Emotionally absorbing |
| ChTalents | 0.0757 | **0.7577** | –0.0990 | 0.1037 | Child-centred |
| BadJob | 0.0228 | –0.1038 | **0.7251** | –0.0204 | Expert-guided |
| LatestToys | –0.1318 | –0.0216 | **0.6471** | –0.4079 | Resource (goods) |
| PaKnow | –0.1518 | –0.3533 | **0.5523** | 0.2560 | Expert-guided |
| AdviceProf | 0.0155 | –0.0721 | 0.0167 | **0.8490** | Expert-guided |
| AwareExperts | 0.0363 | 0.3434 | –0.1029 | **0.7546** | Expert-guided |

*Note*: weighted data; figures in bold show the highest loading (14 items) - based on preliminary analyses, the following items were excluded: FamRoutine (w2q59), ChSucess (w2q58), ChMistakes (w2q62), and PaWorry (w2q66).

These results are compared below with those of the aforementioned American and French studies, which also used Hays' work as a starting point (see Table 4).

## Table 4: Comparison of the dimensions of intensive parenting and related items in our study and in two others

| Own study (CRONOS) | Liss et al. (2013)[1] | Loyal, Sutter Dallay, and Rascle (2017)[1] |
|---|---|---|
| ***Child-centred*** | ***Child-centred*** | ***Child-centrism*** |
| Children's needs | Children's needs | Children's needs |
| Centre of attention | Centre of attention | Child's schedule |
| Less available* | Child's schedule | |
| Always available | | |
| Basic needs | | |
| Parents' life of their own* | | |
| ***Stimulation*** | ***Stimulation*** | ***Stimulation*** |
| Activities | Educational opportunities | Must stimulate |
| Parents worry | Classes, lessons, activities | On their level |
| Child's talents | Intellectual stimulation | |
| | Interact regularly | |
| ***Parental responsibility*** | | |
| Bad job* | --- | --- |
| Parents know best* | | |
| Latest toys* | | |
| ***Expert-guided*** | | |
| Professional advice | --- | --- |
| Aware of experts | | |
| | ***Challenging*** | ***Challenge*** |
| | Demanding job | Demanding job |
| | Corporate executive | Corporate executive |
| --- | No mental break | |
| | Exhausting | |
| | No time for oneself | |
| | Wide-ranging skills | |
| | | ***Sacrifice*** |
| --- | --- | Time for oneself |
| | | Personal life |
| | | Not allowed to be tired |

*Note*: '*' marks the items that were phrased in reverse. See Table 2 for details.
1. The two other studies also found one dimension related to gender (i.e., who is best at parenting) (which they both labelled 'essentialism'), and one related to 'fulfilment' (e.g., parenting as greatest joy). They are not reported in this table since they do not capture per se the 'intensification' of parenting.
Sources: Liss et al. (2013): results from Table 2 (25 items from the initial set of 56). Loyal, Sutter Dallay, and Rascle (2017): results from Table 2 (21 items).

### 4.1 Results from the pooled analysis

The results show that the four factors have some similarities to the dimensions inherent in Hays' definition and those found in previous studies, but also some differences. The identified factors can be interpreted as follows.

The first factor captures elements of **'Child-centredness',** the key premise being that children should be the centre of parents' attention, including a significant time investment. It comprises six items, combining items related to Hays' 'child-centred' and 'time-intensive' dimensions. This first factor explains 23% of the variance with an ordinal alpha of 0.78. However, one of the items, BasicNeeds, also loaded on the Parental Responsibility factor, suggesting that it relates to two latent concepts. The other two studies found a similar factor.

The second factor is related to '**Stimulation',** in that it emphasises the importance of parents stimulating their children's development; for instance, by nurturing their talents and enrolling them in extra-curricular activities. It explains 17% of the variance and has an ordinal alpha of 0.80. In the case of Estonia, this factor also included the two items related to parental time. In the other two countries and in the pooled solution, these items instead aligned with the previous 'child-centred' dimension. This stimulation factor is not explicitly part of Hays' conception of intensive parenting. However, it is in line with the concept of "concerted cultivation" in Lareau's (2002) work, which refers to a cultural logic of childrearing requiring a high level of parental investment. The other two studies found a similar factor.

The third factor is related to '**Parental responsibility'.** It captures the overall pressure that parents feel in terms of their own personal responsibility to do their best for their children. It combines the item capturing disapproval of irresponsible expenditure on children and an item related to 'expert-guided' parenting. It explains 16% of the variance and has an ordinal alpha of 0.78. A similar factor was not found in the other two studies.

The final factor is related to '**Expert-guidance'**. It is in line with Hays' definition in terms of focusing on the importance of listening to experts on how best to raise one's children. It explains 15% of the variance and has an ordinal alpha of 0.84. Interestingly, items related to expert guidance were included in the initial set of items in the American study, but were not retained in the final analysis (Liss 2018).

Where our findings diverge from our original theoretical expectations is that they did not reveal any distinct factor related to emotional involvement. Of the four items that we had included to tap into this concept, only one remained in our final solution and it loaded on the Stimulation factor. This is in contrast to the American and French studies, which found two factors related to emotional investment: parenting as challenging and as involving sacrifice.

### 4.2 Variation by sociodemographic characteristics

Based on the above results, we then computed four subscales and used them as dependent variables in a series of regression models. We used as covariates characteristics of the respondents that we theoretically expected to be associated with intensive parenting norms. We included the age, sex, and education level of the respondents, as well as the presence of children in the household (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Results of regression analyses using four subscales as dependent variables (pooled sample, N = 1,695)[1]**

| | Child-centred | | Stimulation | | Parental resp. | | Expert-guided | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE | b | SE |
| ***Country*** | | | | | | | | |
| Great Britain (ref.) | | | | | | | | |
| Estonia | –0.15* | 0.06 | 0.09+ | 0.05 | –0.40*** | 0.06 | 0.38*** | 0.06 |
| Slovenia | –0.54*** | 0.06 | 0.14* | 0.06 | –0.39*** | 0.07 | 0.05 | 0.07 |
| ***Age*** | | | | | | | | |
| 18-29 (ref.) | | | | | | | | |
| 30-49 | –0.09 | 0.08 | –0.09 | 0.08 | –0.02 | 0.08 | 0.05 | 0.09 |
| 50+ | –0.29*** | 0.09 | 0.00 | 0.08 | –0.19* | 0.09 | 0.31*** | 0.09 |
| ***Gender*** | | | | | | | | |
| Male (ref.) | | | | | | | | |
| Female | –0.02 | 0.05 | –0.08+ | 0.04 | 0.14** | 0.05 | –0.02 | 0.05 |
| ***Educational level*** | | | | | | | | |
| Low (ref.) | | | | | | | | |
| Medium | –0.13 | 0.08 | –0.18** | 0.07 | 0.16* | 0.08 | 0.04 | 0.09 |
| High | –0.27** | 0.09 | –0.24*** | 0.07 | 0.51*** | 0.08 | 0.15+ | 0.08 |
| ***Children*** | | | | | | | | |
| Yes (ref.) | | | | | | | | |
| No | –0.24*** | 0.07 | –0.02 | 0.07 | 0.15* | 0.06 | 0.15* | 0.07 |
| Constant | 6.10*** | 0.12 | 5.06*** | 0.10 | 4.90*** | 0.11 | 3.24*** | 0.13 |
| AIC | 4172.23 | | 3992.90 | | 4057.46 | | 4131.78 | |
| BIC | 4221.15 | | 4041.82 | | 4106.38 | | 4180.70 | |
| $R^2$ | 0.09 | | 0.02 | | 0.15 | | 0.07 | |
| ***N*** | 1,695 | | 1,695 | | 1,695 | | 1,695 | |

Note: + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
1. Where a high value of the dependent variable means a higher support for intensive parenting.

Results show that the variation by sociodemographic characteristics is not systematically the same across the four subscales. In particular, we found no statistically significant difference between men and women in the support for intensive parenting,

with the exception of the subscale on parental responsibility, where women scored higher. Moreover, while older respondents scored higher on the expert-guided subscale, they scored lower on the child-centred and parental responsibility subscales. As to education, results show that more highly educated respondents scored lower on the child-centred and stimulation subscales (as compared to their less educated counterparts), while they scored higher on the parental responsibility and expert-guided subscales. No systematic pattern emerged for the other covariates.

The models also included country dummies, which can be interpreted as the country-level support for intensive parenting after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics. Results show that support for intensive parenting in relation to the child-centred and parental responsibility subscales is lower in Estonia and Slovenia than in Britain. The opposite result is found for the other two scales. In all these models the value of the R-square is low, suggesting that these sociodemographic characteristics explain only a very small fraction of the variance in the scales.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aimed to operationalise the theoretical concept of intensive parenting using a three-country random probability population-based sample. This is unique, as most of the literature in this field is qualitative or based on convenience samples. Moreover, our sample comprises respondents from the whole adult population, rather than parents only. This allows us to assess the extent to which the norm of intensive parenting is broadly endorsed within these three countries.

Our overall conclusion is that the concept of intensive parenting can be operationalised as involving four dimensions: a child-centred approach, a focus on stimulation activities, personal responsibility to do one's best for one's children, and a reliance on expert guidance. The first two of these dimensions were also found in the other two studies reviewed and therefore appear to be at the core of contemporary parenting. Furthermore, the dimension on stimulation is integral to Lareau's notion of 'concerted cultivation'. The dimension on parental responsibility was not found in the other studies. However, it echoes neoliberal discourses on personal responsibility, which have been highlighted in various qualitative studies on intensive parenting (e.g., Leigh et al. 2012). As to the expert-guided dimension, it is consistent with Hays' definition.

Contrary to our expectations, we found no separate dimension related to parental time investment or to financial investment. These items instead aligned with other parenting dimensions. This suggests that these two elements do not empirically form distinct dimensions. It is also possible that parenting norms and attitudes have changed since Hays' original study in the 1980s. In particular, the importance attached to different

aspects of parenting could have shifted; for example, with more weight being attached to stimulation activities.

The other main conclusion that emerged from our analysis is that the dimensions behind the concept of intensive parenting appear to be similar in the three countries in our study. This is an important finding, which adds to an emerging but still small – and mostly qualitative – international literature on the topic (e.g., Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne 2013; Ennis 2014; O'Brien et al. 2020).

Our results also reveal that support for intensive parenting varies across the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, but not systematically in the same way across the four subscales. For instance, two aspects of intensive parenting were found to have higher support among those with a higher level of education, while the opposite was found for the other two. This goes against both Lareau's thesis regarding systematic social class difference in childrearing norms and behaviour and a recent American study in which no significant differences were found in intensive mothering norms across several demographic characteristics (Forbes, Donovan, and Lamar 2020). Overall, what our results instead suggest is that specific dimensions of intensive parenting might carry different meanings for different subgroups.

These findings generate unique evidence regarding the operationalisation of intensive parenting. At the same time, this study has important limitations. First, while the original sample for this study was nationally representative, the overall low response rate makes it harder to generalise the results. This is especially the case if unobserved characteristics related to people's views on parenting have influenced their willingness to participate in the survey. Second, the study was carried out in only three countries, thus calling for further examination of the concept in other contexts. This is especially important in view of known cross-national differences; for instance, in the importance attached to education in Asia (Anderson and Kohler 2013). Third, as this study is exploratory, further testing of the items and subscales is needed to establish their validity.

Our findings have important implications for demographic research. In particular, societal norms around intensive parenting can help to explain the increase in parental time and financial investments in children that have been reported in other studies (e.g., Craig, Powell, and Smyth 2014). In turn, these large parental investments, which increase the overall cost of having children, can be posited as influencing decisions around having children. For instance, a recent study in Poland showed that men and women who perceive childrearing as demanding in terms of time, energy, and money express a weaker desire for parenthood (Mynarska and Rytel 2020). Further refinement of the measurement of intensive parenting norms is certainly needed. The inclusion of such items in future demographic surveys would allow researchers to explore the extent to which these norms are endorsed in other societal contexts, and how these norms influence individuals' fertility decisions.

## 6. Acknowledgements

The items on intensive parenting used in this paper were included in CRONOS as part of a collaboration between the European Social Survey and the Generations and Gender Programme. This was part of the project SERISS (Synergies for Europe's Research Infrastructures in the Social Sciences), which received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 654221. Monika Mynarska acknowledges financial support from the National Science Centre (Poland), grant number 2018/30/E/HS4/00449.

## References

Anderson, T. and Kohler, H.-P. (2013). Education fever and the east Asian fertility puzzle. *Asian Population Studies* 9(2): 196–215. doi:10.1080/17441730.2013.797293.

Craig, L., Powell, A., and Smyth, C. (2014). Towards intensive parenting? Changes in the composition and determinants of mothers' and fathers' time with children 1992–2006. *The British Journal of Sociology* 65(3): 555–579. doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12035.

CROss-National Online Survey panel [CRONOS] (2018). NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of CRONOS data for ESS ERIC.

Ennis, L.R. (2014). *Intensive mothering: The cultural contradictions of modern motherhood*. Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press.

Faircloth, C., Hoffman, D.M., and Layne, L.L. (eds.) (2013). *Parenting in global perspective: Negotiating ideologies of kinship, self and politics*. London: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780203103906.

Forbes, L.K., Donovan, C., and Lamar, M.R. (2020). Differences in intensive parenting attitudes and gender norms among U.S. mothers. *The Family Journal* 28(1): 63–71. doi:10.1177/1066480719893964.

Gauthier, A.H. (2015). Social class and parental investment in children. In: *Emerging trends in the social and behavioral sciences.* Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons: 1–14. doi:10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0306.

Gauthier, A.H., Smeeding, T.M., and Furstenberg, F.F. (2004). Are parents investing less time in children? Trends in selected industrialized countries. *Population and Development Review* 30(4): 647–672. doi:10.1111/j.1728-4457.2004.00036.x.

Gunderson, J. (undated). The historical rise of intensive mothering and its implications for women [unpublished manuscript]. Tallahassee: Florida State University.

Hays, S. (1986). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. New Heaven: Yale University Press.

Ishizuka, P. (2018). Social class, gender, and contemporary parenting standards in the United States: Evidence from a National Survey Experiment. *Social Forces* 98(1): 31–58. doi:10.1093/sf/soy107.

Kolenikov, S. and Angeles, G. (2004). *The use of discrete data in PCA: Theory, simulations, and applications to socioeconomic indices*. Chapel Hill: Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina.

Kornrich, S. and Furstenberg, F.F. (2013). Investing in children: Changes in parental spending on children, 1972–2007. Demography 50(1): 1–23. doi:10.1007/s13524-012-0146-4.

Lareau, A. (2002). Invisible inequality: Social class and childrearing in black families and white families. *American Sociological Review* 67(5): 747. doi:10.2307/3088916.

Leigh, J.P., Pacholok, S., Snape, T., and Gauthier, A.H. (2012). Trying to do more with less? Negotiating intensive mothering and financial strain in Canada. *Families, Relationships and Societies* 1(3): 361–377. doi:10.1332/204674312X656284.

Lindsay, G., Cullen, M.A., Cullen, S., Totsika, V., Bakopoulou, I., Goodland, S., Brind, R., Pickering, E., Bryson, C., Purdon, S., Conlon, G., and Mantovani, I. (2014). CANparent Trial Evaluation: Final Report Research. Coventry: University of Warwick.

Liss, M. (2018). Personal communication with the first author of this paper.

Liss, M., Schiffrin, H.H., Mackintosh, V.H., Miles-McLean, H., and Erchull, M.J. (2013). Development and validation of a quantitative measure of intensive parenting attitudes. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 22(5): 621–636. doi:10.1007/s10826-012-9616-y.

Loyal, D., Sutter Dallay, A.-L., and Rascle, N. (2017). Intensive mothering ideology in France: A pilot study. *L'Encéphale* 43(6): 564–569. doi:10.1016/j.encep.2017.08.002.

Mynarska, M. and Rytel, J. (2020). Fertility desires of childless Poles: Which childbearing motives matter for men and women? *Journal of Family Issues* 41(1): 7–32. doi:10.1177/0192513X19868257.

O'Brien, K.M., Yoo, S.-K., Kim, Y.H., Cho, Y., and Salahuddin, N.M. (2020). The good mothering expectations scale: An international instrument development study. *The Counseling Psychologist* 48(2): 162–190. doi:10.1177/0011000019889895.

Pew Research Center (2015). Parenting in America: Outlook, worries, aspirations are strongly linked to financial situation. Washington, D.C: Pew Research Center.

Poortman, A., Van der Lippe, T., and Boele-Woelki, K. (2014). *Codebook of the survey New Families in the Netherlands (NFN). First wave*. Utrecht: Utrecht University.

Rizzo, K.M., Schiffrin, H.H., and Liss, M. (2013). Insight into the parenthood paradox: Mental health outcomes of intensive mothering. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 22(5): 614–620. doi:10.1007/s10826-012-9615-z.

Romagnoli, A. and Wall, G. (2012). 'I know I'm a good mom': Young, low-income mothers' experiences with risk perception, intensive parenting ideology and parenting education programmes. *Health, Risk and Society* 14(3): 273–289. doi:10.1080/13698575.2012.662634.

Villar, A., Sommer, E., Finnøy, D., Gaia, A., Berzelak, N., and Bottoni, G. (2018). *CROss-National Online Survey (CRONOS) panel data and documentation user guide*. London: ESS ERIC.

Wall, G. (2010). Mothers' experiences with intensive parenting and brain development discourse. *Women's Studies International Forum* 33(3): 253–263. doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2010.02.019.

Wall, G. and Arnold, S. (2007). How involved is involved fathering? *Gender and Society* 21(4): 508–527. doi:10.1177/0891243207304973.

Zumbo, B.D., Gadermann, A.M., and Zeisser, C. (2007). Ordinal versions of coefficients alpha and theta for Likert Rating Scales. *Journal of Modern Applied Statistical Methods* 6(1): 21–29. doi:10.22237/jmasm/1177992180.