

# Fears of Visually Impaired Pre-School Children and Their Parents

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**Abstract.** The article analyses the fears of preschool age children, with visual impairment, and the fears of their parents. It was aimed to define whether the fears of preschool age children, with vision problems, differ from the fears of the same age children, with no vision problems. The hypothesis was formed that the parental childhood fears can be transmitted to their mature age, and present fears can be transmitted to their children. The results of the research revealed such tendencies as follows: the participating in the research preschool age children, with vision problems, do not have any exceptional fears, comparing to the children of the same age but with no vision problems; the larger number of fears reflected in those children, whose parents have a high educational level, comparing to the parents, with a lower educational level; children from incomplete families have more fears; mothers used to have less fears in childhood than they have now; the fears, children and some parents have, might have been transmitted from parents to children.

**Keywords:** *preschool children, visual impairment, children's fears, parental fears.*

## Introduction

The fear is a human emotion, which strengthens the self-protection sensation. The fears, becoming too big and extreme, transform into phobias. Nowadays the attempts are made to understand, what kind of fears and phobias are typical for the inhabitants of a particular country (Zlobin, 2016). There is a variety of reasons for phobias to appear, but (as a majority of fears) they come from a childhood. A child's central nervous system is particularly sensitive and can be quickly damaged. The fears can be influenced by frights, diseases, conflicts or disasters. Paradoxally, the educators (parents, relatives, preschool teachers and specialists) are guilty of a majority of fears, appearing in a childhood, as they emotionally emphasize and indicate the dangerous situations lurking around: "Don't approach too much – you will fall", "Don't touch – you will get burnt", "Don't stroke – it will bite" etc. It is not clear for a preschool age child what it really means, but the child is already able to understand the sign of a danger, so, the reaction towards a fear appears from regulating a child's behaviour (Zaharov, 2007).

It is supposed that some of the fears are natural (e.g., of strangers, sharp noises, height, and pain). Children usually feel these kinds of fears during approximately the 8th month of life. One year old children feel fear because they usually imagine the danger and threats. The fear is provoked by the objects, related to a stressful situation, experienced before (e.g., if a child had fallen into the water before – he will be afraid of water, if he had ever been burnt – he will be afraid of fire, if he had been attacked by a dog – he will be afraid of a dog, etc.). A one year old child will remember a person or an object, provoking an unpleasant situation, and later on, he will be able to associate it with negative experiences. During this period of age another reason for fear – parental, especially, of mothers – appears. If parents, being a child's social safety guarantee, are afraid of something and evidently demonstrate it unambiguously, it can be considered that a preschool age child, with no ability to critically comprehend the things still in such an age, will be afraid of that spider, mouse or frog as well. Another rule for parents to take into a consideration – they cannot threaten a preschool age child with/by anything/anybody. A psychologist A. Pundzevičienė emphasizes that it is great, if parents realise their own fears and do not transmit them to their children. The best form to react towards children's fears – not to take them seriously enough, without proper fears, judgements or punishments. It is not necessary to be afraid or get scared just because a child is afraid or is scared. A majority of fears disappear during the process of a child's growth, only if we ourselves will not hang upon those fears. It is not necessary to protect, teach, and worry for what it can happen to a child, as this provokes much more stress and fear. It is only necessary to listen to and believe in that the child will be able to face his/her own fears by himself/herself. When parents believe in that, children start gaining more self-confidence and become more independent (Pundzevičienė, 2008). Also, it is necessary to talk with a child, starting 5 years of age,

about fears in simple words in the same way as with an adult, and explain everything, without letting the fear to take root, or even worse, to transform into phobias in the future. As it was mentioned, phobias are characteristic to people, having psychopathy, neurosis, central nervous system indispositions, treatments with psychotherapy means. Many modern book writers consider and give recommendations on how to overcome fears and phobias (Clarkson, 2005; Molicka, 2007, 2009; Marina, 2010; Kovpak, 2012; Cirtautienė & Meslinienė, 2012; Kurpatov, 2013; Merfi, 2013; Picugin, 2013; Frenkel, 2014; Elc, 2014 etc.).

The problem is that the fears preschool children have, can be transmitted into the adulthood.

The goal of the research – reveal the fears of preschool age children with vision problems, and the childhood and present fears of their parents.

The objectives: to compare the fears of preschool age children, with vision problems, who participated in the research, according to the gender; to compare the preschool age children fears, with vision problems and without vision problem, that participated in the research, with the fears, described in literary resources; to compare the fears of parents, who participated in the research, according to the gender; to compare the childhood present fears of parents, who participated in the research; to define if the present fears, parents have, are being transmitted to their children.

## The sample of the research

217 respondents participated in the research. 75 of them were preschool age children, having vision problems (V with cc 0.2 to 1), and 142 parents of these children (75 mothers and 67 fathers). The level of education of the parents: basic – 5 (3.5%), secondary 37 (26%), special education – 23 (16.2%), higher education – 77 (54.2%).

**The methods of the research.** Parents indicated their childhood and present fears as well as the fears of their own children in an anonymous questionnaire. The research consisted of two stages: I stage – questionnaire form; II – volunteering parents consulted with a psychologist about their children's and their own present fears. 111 parents participated in consulting. 53 parents indicated preschool children fears were present (from 55 in a questionnaire) (see Table 1). Children, who participated in a research, did not have fears about phone calls and doorbells according to a questionnaire.

## Children fears

Anxiety and fear are natural human emotions, but children feel fear more intensively. The spectrum of children fears is much wider than the one of the adults (see Tables 1, 2, 3).

Table 1

*The fears of preschool age children with vision problems, who participated in the research*

No.	Children fears	Number of chil- dren	Percent	Girls	Boys
1.	Fear of losing family, relatives	47	62.6	25	22
2.	Fear of fire	45	60	25	29
3.	Fear of getting lost in a crowd	44	58.6	24	20
4.	Fear of monster	41	54.6	20	21
5.	Fear of repulse	40	53.3	22	18
6.	Fear of burglars	39	52	20	19
7.	Fear of various animals	39	52	19	20
8.	Fear of being separated from parents	38	50.6	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>
9.	Fear of new places	38	50.6	18	20
10.	Fear of assaulters	38	50.6	18	20
11.	Fear of medical syringes	36	48	17	17
12.	Fear of witches	36	46.6	17	18
13.	Fear of death	35	46.6	20	15
14.	Fear of unexpected sharp sounds	35	46.6	18	17
15.	Fear of war	32	42.6	14	18
16.	Fear of darkness	32	42.6	14	18
17.	Fear of thunder, lightening	30	40	15	15
18.	Fear of ghosts	28	37.3	14	14
19.	Fear of loneliness	28	37.3	11	17
20.	Fear of getting injured	28	37.3	14	14
21.	Fear of fire	28	37.3	13	15
22.	Fear of being separated from a mother	28	37.3	14	14
23.	Fear of medical procedures	27	36	15	12
24.	Fear of being kidnapped	25	33.3	13	12
25.	Fear of devils	24	32	12	12
26.	Fear of a new environment	24	32	12	12
27.	Fear of a new environment	24	32	12	12
28.	Fear of possible punishments	22	29.3	12	10
29.	Fear of noisy mechanisms	21	28	8	10
30.	Fear of strange human appearances	20	26.6	14	6
31.	Fear of height	19	25.3	9	10
32.	Fear of closed spaces	19	25.3	9	10
33.	Fear of strangers	17	22.6	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>
34.	Fear of film characters	17	22.6	8	9
35.	Fear of hospital	16	21.3	7	9
36.	Fear of dentists	16	21.3	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>
37.	Fear of other doctors	11	14.6	6	5
38.	Fear of nightmares	10	13.3	2	8

No.	Children fears	Number of children	Percent	Girls	Boys
39.	Fear of collapse	9	12	6	3
40.	Fear of infections	9	12	6	3
41.	Fear before getting asleep	8	10.6	4	5
42.	Fear of gipsies	8	10.6	5	3
43.	Fear of police officers	8	10.6	4	4
44.	Fear of death in sleep	7	9.3	2	4
45.	Fear of going in a car	7	9.3	3	3
46.	Fear of flying by plane	7	9.3	3	3
47.	Fear of nurses	7	9.3	2	5
48.	Fear of lifts	5	6.6	3	4
49.	Fear to sleep	5	6.6	1	4
50.	Fear of digestion	3	4	3	–
51.	Fear to swim	2	2.6	1	1
52.	Fear to use a chamber-pot	2	2.6	1	1
53.	Fear of sailing	1	1.3	–	1

There were not any essential differences noticed between the girls' fears and the boys' fears, regarding a quantity or a variety. Slightly larger quantitative differences have been reflected in hardly several types of fears: girls tend more to have fear being separated from parents and have fear of strangers. Various kinds of point views were noticed towards the tolerance of pain, according to the gender. (Robinson, Gagnon, Riley, & Price, 2003). However, boys are more likely to have fear of dentists (including toothaches) than the girls. The most frequent fear of children, who participated in the research, was a fear of losing family members (62.6%) because parents are the guarantee of safety for children. In comparison with literary resources information about preschool children fears, the participants (60%) of our research had a larger fear of fire. The reason for this fear might be explained, as recently, there was a fire in the town, where the research was being performed, and two little children died during that fire. This accident was widely published in media and commented on TV programmes, and it is evident that this accident was mentioned in families as well. A half (50.6%) of children, who participated in the research have fear of a *new place*. If such a fear does not disappear till the age of 6 years, it can transform into a school fear (Dagienė, 2006). A part of children fear – is a reflection of an adult anxiety (Martinkienė, Galiauskas, & Bandžiulienė, 2006). Parental and adult conversations, unlimited adult TV programmes watching for a preschool age consciousness provokes the non-childish fears. Children in this age start realising the fear of death (Slaughter, 2005). 9.3% children, participating in the research, had a fear of death. In spite of all the classical kinds of fears such as monsters, witches, ghosts, we can notice fears, reflecting the parental insecurity (e.g., fear of burglars) Although

just several parents had fears of war, the mentioned anxiety provoked this new fear in a child's consciousness, taking into consideration the fact that the fear of war is not characteristic of children at all. Preschool age children do not have critical comprehension, thus, it provokes various kinds of fears. For this reason, it is not allowed to threaten a child ever with anything. A child should not notice the parental fears. If a mother, who is a social safety guarantee for a child, demonstrates her panic to a tiny mouse, and her child observes mother's emotions towards that animal, this child can apply the same fear to him/her and even for the rest of his/her life.

Regarding the children fear of various animals, the number between girls and boys is rather similar (47 – 40). 1, 16% of fears of animals belong to one child, participating in a research. The majority (51 children – 68%) have fear of insects: bees 20 (26.6%), hornets 14 (14.6%), spiders 14 (14.6%), fleas 3 (4%), ticks 3 (4%), mosquitoes 2 (2.6%), „bugs“ 1 (1,3%). 36 children (48%) have fear of other animals: dogs 8 (10.6%), wolves 7 (9.3 %), snakes 5 (6.6%), tigers 2 (2.6%). Each child individually indicated a fear of: dinosaurs, gorillas, leopards, foxes, lions, bears, rhinoceros, toads, mice. 8 children had more fears than one, those, who lived in the incomplete families without a father. A larger number of fears are common for preschool age children, participating in the research, whose parents have a high educational level, in comparison with parents, who have a lower educational level. Fears, as well as other negative emotions, weaken the preschool age children central nervous system, which can be easily damaged.

## Parental fears

18 (8.3%) parents did not have any fears in their childhood: mothers 4 (5.3%), 14 (20.9%) fathers. A part of parents had indicated in a questionnaire that they do not remember any fears, experienced in their childhood, thus, their answers were included into the answer option for „had no fears“.

Table 2

*The dynamics of fears of mothers, who have and take care of preschool age children*

Fears	
<i>Childhood fears</i>	<i>Present fears</i>
1. <b>Darkness</b> 17 (25,3%)	1. <b>Height</b> 13 (17,3%)
2. <b>Height</b> 8 (10,6%)	2. Lose family members 5 (6,6%)
3. Spiders 5 (6,6%)	3. <b>Snakes</b> 4 (5,3%)
4. <b>Snakes</b> 5 (6,6%)	4. Spiders 3 (4%)
5. Monsters 3(4%)	5. <b>Darkness</b> 3 (4%)
6. Worries about a mother 2(2,6%)	6. Diseases 3 (4%)
7. <b>Burglars</b> 2(2,6%)	7. <b>Closed spaces</b> 3 (4%)
8. <b>Earthworms</b> 1(1,32%)	8. Lose a job 2(2,6%)
9. Sleeping alone at night 1(1,32%)	9. Loneliness 2(2,6%)
10. Water 1(1,32%)	10. <b>Dogs</b> 2(2,6%)
11. <b>Dogs</b> 1(1,32%)	11. Fear about children2(2,6%)
12. <b>Mice</b> 1(1,32%)	12. <b>Blood</b> 2(2,6%)
13. <b>Blood</b> 1(1,32%)	13. Accidents 2(2,6%)
14. Be alone 1 (1,32%)	14. <b>Burglars</b> 2(2,6%)
15. <b>Closed spaces</b> 1(1,32%)	15. <b>Earthworms</b> 1(1,32%)
16. <b>Needles</b> 1(1,32%)	16. <b>Needles</b> 1(1,32%)
17. Dentist 1(1,32%)	17. <b>Mice</b> 1(1,32%)
18. Dirt the hands 1(1,32%)	18. War 1(1,32%)
19. Thunder 1(1,32%)	19. Lose a child 1(1,32%)
20. Funeral 1(1,32%)	20. Stare at the sea 1(1,32%)
21. Aliens 1(1,32%)	21. To get injured 1(1,32%)
	22. Frogs 1(1,32%)
	22. Funeral 1(1,32%)
	23. Flying by plane 1(1,32%)
	24. Death 1(1,32%)
	25. Blood 1(1,32%)
	26. Unable to adapt 1(1,32%)
	27. Lose home 1(1,32%)
	28. Fear of a child's health 1(1,32%)
	29. Public speech 1(1,32%)

Table 3  
*The dynamics of fears of men, who have and take care of preschool age children*

Fears	
<i>Childhood fears</i>	<i>Present fears</i>
1. Darkness 6 (8,9%)	1. Lose family members 5 (7,5%)
<b>2. Dogs 5 (7,5%)</b>	<b>2. Height 5 (7,5%)</b>
<b>3. Height 3 (4,5%)</b>	3. Diseases 2 (3%)
<b>4. Snakes 2 (3%)</b>	4. Death 2 (3%)
<b>5. Needles 1 (1,5%)</b>	<b>5. Snakes 1 (1,5%)</b>
6. Death 1 (1,5%)	<b>6. Dogs 1 (1,5%)</b>
7. Monster 1 (1,5%)	<b>7. Needles 1 (1,5%)</b>
8. Frog 1 (1,5%)	8. War 1 (1,5%)
9. Wolf 1 (1,5%)	9. Faith of fugitives 1 (1,5%)
10. Blood 1 (1,5%)	10. Sharks 1 (1,5%)
11. Dentist 1 (1,5%)	11. To speed 1 (1,5%)
12. Imaginary beasts 1 (1,5%)	12. Accidents 1 (1,5%)
13. Drunk people 1 (1,5%)	13. Hornets 1 (1,5%)
14. Red colours 1 (1,5%)	14. Snakes 1 (1,5%)
15. Rooster 1 (1,5%)	15. Lose a family 1 (1,5%)
16. Devil 1 (1,5%)	16. Public speech 1 (1,5%)
17. Hospitals 1 (1,5%)	
18. Planes 1 (1,5%)	
19. Insects 1 (1,5%)	
20. Ghosts 1 (1,5%)	
21. People with masks 1 (1,5%)	

Meanwhile analysing the results of parental fears, it is necessary to emphasize that mothers and fathers had a similar number of fears in their childhood. Mothers, even 7 of them, have maintained fears from their childhood (height, snakes, dogs, mice, earthworms, closed spaces, burglars). The fears of mothers, that reflected in a childhood and had transmitted to an adult age are marked in black (see Table 2) A part of children have the same fears as their mothers. Thus, it can be concluded that some fears are transmitted to children from their mothers because some children have the same fears as their mothers have. The number of fears of fathers is rather similar between the childhood (21) and now (16) (see Table 3). Though, the number of mothers' fears, having now and then, is evidently different: 22 fears, experiences in childhood and 35 present fears now. The larger variety of mother's fears is evident as well. Some common characteristic fears belong to mothers as well as fathers: *fears of height, a loss of a family member, diseases, death, snakes, dogs, war*. Only four fears of fathers, that they had in their childhood and still have now, were noticed among the respondents – *height, dogs, snakes and needles*. Meanwhile the number of mother's fears, which “came from“ their childhood and still being felt till now, is much bigger and rises till 10 – *height, darkness, spiders, snakes, mice, dogs, earthworms, funeral, blood, needles*. Inexperienced in a childhood fears also appeared for women. Obviously, the opportunities to travel more provoked more fears,



related to travelling, such as *fear of flying by plane, stare at the deepness of sea waters* etc. It can be concluded that a stronger feeling of responsibility of mothers influenced the origin of such fears as *fear of a child's health, of losing a child, or fear of something bad can happen to a child*. As it is much more complicated for women, who take care of preschool age children, to get a job, such fears as *losing a job or inability to adapt* have been noticed as well (Petraitienė, 2005). The investigation, performed in 2017, reflects children and adult fear tendencies nowadays. It is necessary to provide well-timed psychological help for preschool age children, having various kinds of fears so that those fears would not transform into phobias (Vard, 2002; Gudonis, 2009; Kovpak, 2012). The conclusions are based on the hypothesis because the investigational samples are not expanded enough.

## Conclusions

The preschool age children, who participated in the research and have visual problems, do not have exceptional fears, in comparison with the same age children, who have no visual problems.

A larger number of fears have those children, participating in the research, whose parents have a high educational level, in comparison with parents, who have a lower educational level.

Children, participating in the research and who live in the incomplete families, have many more fears.

Mothers, who participated in the research, have fewer fears now than they used to have in their childhood.

The same fears, children and parents have now and who participated in this investigation, could have been transmitted from parents.

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# Ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikų, turinčių regėjimo sutrikimų, ir jų tėvų baimės

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## Santrauka

Baimė yra kiekvienam žmogui būdinga emocija, kuri stiprina savisaugos jausmą. Pernelyg didelės baimės gali virsti fobijomis. Ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikų turimos baimės gali būti perkeltos į suaugusiųjų amžių. Tyrime dalyvavo 217 respondentų. Iš jų 75 ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikai, turintys regėjimo sutrikimų (V su cc 0,2 iki 1), ir 142 šių vaikų tėvai (75 mamos ir 67 tėčiai). Anoniminėje anketoje tėvai nurodė savo vaikų ir savo turėtas vaikystėje ir turimas dabar baimes. Tyrimas buvo atliekamas dviem etapais: I etapas – anketinė apklausa, II etapas – norintys tėvai konsultavosi su psichologu dėl vaikų ir savo turimų baimių. Konsultacijose dalyvavo 111 tėvų. Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, kad tyrime dalyvavę ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikai, turintys regos sutrikimų, neturi išskirtinių baimių, palyginti su šio amžiaus įprastinės raidos vaikais, neturinčiais regos sutrikimų; didesnę baimių skaičių turi vaikai, kurių tėvai turi aukštąjį išsilavinimą, palyginti su tėvais, turinčiais žemesnį išsilavinimą; daugiau baimių turi vaikai, gyvenantys nepilnose šeimose; motinos vaikystėje turėjo mažiau baimių, negu turi dabar; baimės, kurias turi tyrime dalyvavę ir vaikai, ir kai kurie tėvai, gali būti vaikų perimtos iš tėvų.

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**Esminiai žodžiai:** ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikai, regėjimo sutrikimai, vaikų baimės, tėvų baimės.

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