

ÉLETMÓD ÉS EGÉSZSÉGSZOCIOLÓGIAI  
INTERDISZCIPLINÁRIS KUTATÁSOK

IV. KÖTET

# Tudomány: út a világ megismeréséhez I.

SZERKESZTŐ:

Rusinné Dr. Fedor Anita



Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó  
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## Time Perspective, Mentalization and Perceived Social Support among Young Adults

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mentalization  
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### ABSTRACT

**Abstract**

**Background:** Mentalization is a key concept in integrating socio-cognitive skills and developing advanced interpersonal. In our study, we examined the relationship of perceived social support, mentalization and time perspective. **Methods:** 657 participants ( $M = 21.66$  years,  $SD = 2.57$  years) completed the Hungarian version of Self in the Future Questionnaire, The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and the Reflective Function Questionnaire. Data analysis was performed by cluster analysis.

**Results:** Perceived problem behavior is weakly or moderately associated with mentalization impairment. Decreased ability to interpret one's own intentions is negatively associated with positive future orientation. We formed three clusters: the emotionally driven show increased level of positive future orientation, confidence in controlling future events, self-efficacy and decreased level of uncertainty with the future. The balanced reported balanced levels of these variables, while the left alone show significant lower levels of future orientation.

**Conclusions:** Relational embeddedness of mentalization influences future orientation, herewith we managed to verify that relational safety is one of the conditions for successful mentalization.

---

**Kulcsszavak**

mentalizáció  
reflektív funkció  
jövő-orientáció

**Absztrakt**

**Háttér:** Tanulmányunkban az észlelt társas támogatás, a mentalizáció és az időperspektíva kapcsolatát vizsgáltuk. **Módszerek:** 657 résztvevő ( $M = 21,66$  év,  $SD = 2,57$  év) töltötte ki az Én a jövőben kérdőív magyar változatát, az Észlelt társas támogatás többdimenziós skáláját és a Reflektív funkció kérdőívet. Az adatok elemzését klaszterelemzéssel végeztük.

**Eredmények:** Az észlelt problémás viselkedés gyengén vagy közepesen összefügg a mentalizációs károsodással. A saját

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szándékok értelmezésének csökkent képessége negatívan kapcsolódik a pozitív jövőorientációhoz. Három klasztert alakítottunk ki: az érzelmileg motiváltak a pozitív jövőorientáció, a jövőbeli események irányításában való bizalom, az önhatékonyság és a jövővel kapcsolatos bizonytalanság csökkent szintjét mutatják. A kiegyensúlyozottak e változók kiegyensúlyozott szintjéről számoltak be, míg a másik csoport a jövőorientáció szignifikánsan alacsonyabb szintjét mutatja. Következtetések: A mentalizáció kapcsolati beágyazottsága befolyásolja a jövőorientációt, ezzel sikerült igazolnunk, hogy a kapcsolati biztonság a sikeres mentalizáció egyik feltétele.

---

This study was prepared on the basis of a presentation given as part of the XIV. International Nyíregyháza Doctoral Student and Postdoctoral Conference.

## Introduction

Time perspective and successful mentalization (Borelli et al., 2019) both are part of the social-cognitive processes and they play an important role in identity development and formation of social relations. Regarding process of creating integrated sense of identity, the Emerging adulthood is a widely studied developmental period. Our research is pioneering with regard to the joint examination of mentalization capacity and the dimensions of time perspective.

“Emerging Adulthood” is a term used to describe a period of development spanning from about ages 18 to 29, experienced by most people in their twenties in Westernized cultures. The term was initially defined by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000). Arnett (2000) studied this age group focusing on understanding the timing and consequences of transitional events, like leaving home, finishing education, finding employment or getting married. Researches focusing on anxiety and depression indicate specific emotion regulation and cognitive changes of this period (Fergusson & Woodward, 2002; Galambos et al., 2006; Salmela-Aro et al., 2008). Other researches focus on the factors that help the individual to successfully cope with significant developmental challenges (Blomgren et al., 2016; Dwivedi & Rastogi, 2017; Jenzer et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2010).

Our study focuses on two social-cognitive processes that play important role in identity development in social context. According to Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) time perspective is a fundamental dimension in the construction of



psychological time, and emerges from cognitive processes partitioning human experience into past, present and future. This process determines the interpretation of events and our relationships with people, and it can also play a role in the assessment of life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). On the other hand mentalization is a form of imaginative mental activity that enables us to perceive and interpret human behavior in terms of intentional mental states (e.g., needs, desires, feelings, beliefs, goals, purposes, and reasons) (Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008). In his model Hagelquist (2017) identified the building blocks that can be related to successful mentalization. In our research we focused on two of these blocks: time perspective and perceived social support.

### The Current Study

The goal of the present study was to examine the relationship between the ability to mentalize and the different types of time perspective regarding perceived social support. Our aim was to explore the meaningful dimensions of mentalization and perceived social support and identify typical subgroups of young adults. Although there was no example of a similar study before, we established the following hypotheses based on the literature on mentalization and time perspective.

H1: mentalization impairment is positively correlated with negative time perspective

H2: high level of perceived social support is negatively correlated with negative time perspective

H3: high level of perceived social support is positively correlated with positive time perspective

H4: In the absence of similar research, we formulated an exploratory question about the possibility of identifying typical subgroups of young adults involving the dimensions of mentalization and perceived social support. We assumed that these groups significantly differ from each other on the basis of time perspective.

### Methodology

#### Sample and Data Collection

A total of 657 young adults participated in our online research which was part of a larger cross-sectional research (183 men and 474 females (Mean (M)age

= 21.66 years, Standard Deviation (SD)age = 2.57). Nobody was excluded from the analyses due to outliers. The participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary, and participants did not receive any benefit for completing the questionnaires. The participants were informed about the nature and the goal of the research. The research was approved by the Hungarian United Ethical Review Committee for Research in Psychology. The participants completed an online questionnaire that lasted 20 minutes on average. Data were collected during February-April 2022.

### Measures

First, demographic questions were asked about gender, age, and highest level of education.

*Reflective Function Questionnaire.* The Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ) measures the impairment of mentalization, its original version was developed by Fonagy and Ghinai (2008) (2008). During the adaptation of the Hungarian version (RFQ-H) (Szél & Szabó, 2020, 2023), a 15-item questionnaire was created, the items were organized into three scales: uncertain mentalization (5 items), excessive certainty (6 items), emotional awareness (4 items). The items are rated from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). The items of the emotional awareness subscale represents the recognition of the failure of mentalization (e.g., When I'm angry, I say things that I don't even know why I said them). The items of uncertain mentalization indicate lower-level but still active mentalization (e.g. I don't always know why I'm doing what I'm doing). The statements of the excessive certainty subscale include firm and inflexible ideas about the other's mental states (e.g. My intuitions are almost never wrong about people). There are no reverse-scaled items in the questionnaire. Higher score represents higher mentalization impairment. The reliability indicators of the questionnaire is excellent (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  total = 0.83, subscales: uncertain mentalization: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.77, excessive certainty: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.87 emotional awareness: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.82).

*Multidimensional Social Support Questionnaire.* The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) has evolved as one of the most extensively used social support outcome measure. It was originally developed in the United States (Zimet et al., 1990) and later translated into many languages, including Hungarian (Papp-Zipernovszky et al., 2017). The 10 item questionnaire can be classified into three scales: family (e.g. I can always count

on my family), friends (e.g. I can count on my friends when things go bad), and significant others (e.g. I have at least one important person in my environment, who I can count on when I need it). The items are rated from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true). The questionnaire is evaluated by averaging the item numbers for each item. Higher score indicates higher level of perceived social support. The reliability indicators of the questionnaire are also adequate for this sample (family: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.91; friends: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.91; significant others: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.89, reliability of the entire questionnaire: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.89).

*Time Perspective Questionnaire.* The short version of Zimbardo's Time Perspective Questionnaire (Orosz et al., 2017) aims to explore individual's relation to the past, present, and future. The 17-item questionnaire distinguishes five time factors: the past negative dimension (4 statements, e.g.: "I have too many unpleasant memories that I don't like to think about.") the past positive dimension (3 statements, e.g.: "The old happy memories of good times."), the present hedonistic dimension (3 statements, e.g.: "I take risks so that my life does not become boring.") the present fatalistic dimension (3 statements, e.g.: "It is not really possible to plan for the future, because things change a lot."), and the future-oriented dimension (4 statements, e.g.: "I am able to resist temptations if I know I have to finish a job/task.") The items are rated from 1 (not typical at all) to 5 (very typical). The higher score on the subscale indicates the higher orientation of the specific future dimension. The reliability indicators of the questionnaire are also adequate for this sample (past negative: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.86; past positive: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.76; present hedonistic: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.79, present fatalistic: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.79, future orientation: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.75, reliability of the entire questionnaire: Cronbach- $\alpha$  = 0.69).

### Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using JASP 0.160.4 (JASP Team, 2022). First, descriptive statistics were computed for separate factors. Next, correlational relationships were tested between the study variables. Then cluster analysis was conducted involving the subscales of the Reflective Function Questionnaire and the Multidimensional Social Support Questionnaire. Before the cluster analysis, principal component analysis was performed to make sure that the involved variables could be grouped into latent dimensions. Finally, the characteristics

of the dimensions of time perspective was examined using the multivariate ANOVA method along the groups formed in the cluster analysis.

## Results

Descriptive data for main study variables are reported in Table 1. The mean age for this sample was 21.66 ( $SD = 2.57$ ), 28 percent of the sample was male and 72 percent female. As the convenience-collected sample was not balanced by gender, this aspect was not taken into account in the analysis. Twenty-four percent of the sample finished college or university with 0.61% having postgraduate degree. The rest of the sample finished elementary (6.54%) or secondary (high) school (69.41%).

**Table 1. Descriptive data of the variables (N = 657).**

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>Age</b>	21.66	2.57	18	30		
<b>MSSST</b>						
family	15.73	4.37	4	20	-0.96	0.01
friends	13.08	2.68	3	15	-1.53	1.82
significant others	14.10	1.93	3	15	-2.47	5.93
<b>RFQ</b>						
uncertain mentalization	16.17	6.00	5	30	0.22	-0.64
excessive certainty	23.02	6.58	7	36	-0.13	-0.64
emotional awareness	12.31	5.43	4	24	0.30	-0.83
RFQ total	51.50	12.74	20	89	0.25	-0.17
<b>ZTPI</b>						
past negative	2.70	1.12	1	5	0.29	-0.99
past positive	2.54	0.76	0.75	3.75	-0.27	-0.73
present hedonistic	2.14	0.78	0.75	3.75	0.13	-0.75
present fatalistic	1.97	0.67	0.75	3.75	0.20	-0.45
future orientation	3.66	0.81	1	5	-0.43	-0.25

### Time perspective

Descriptive statistics in Table 1 shows that the main mentalization impairment is *excessive certainty* followed by *uncertain mentalization* and *emotional awareness*. Looking at the characteristics of time perspective, the highest score was obtained in *future orientation* and the lowest value in *present fatalistic* time perspective.

Regarding the association of mentalization and time perspective first we hypothesized (H1) a relationship between mentalization impairment and time perspective. As skewness and kurtosis were higher than 2, normal distribution was not assumed. The assumed relationship was verified by correlation analysis shown in Table 2. According to the Spearman's correlation analysis *past negative* and *present fatalistic* time perspective are strongly related with *uncertain mentalization*. Regarding the other aspects of poor mentalization, *excessive certainty* and *emotional awareness* were weakly correlated with all dimensions of time perspective. The direction of the correlation was consistent with our preliminary expectations.

**Table 2. Correlation analysis of the variables.**

Variable	past negative	past positive	present hedonistic	present fatalistic	future orientation
uncertain mentalization	.45 ***	.04	.19 ***	.34 ***	-.22 ***
excessive certainty	.14 ***	.15 ***	.16 ***	.03	.14 ***
emotional awareness	.28 ***	.20 ***	.21 ***	.19 ***	-.12 **
RFQ total	.40 ***	.18 ***	.26 ***	.24 ***	-.08 *
family	-.45 ***	.32 ***	.01	-.11 **	.17 ***
friends	-.23 ***	.21 ***	.09 *	-.04	.13 **
significant others	-.12 **	.24 ***	.06	-.05	.14 ***

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

Regarding perceived social support we assumed negative correlation with negative time perspective (H2) and we also hypothesized positive correlation between high level of perceived social support and positive time perspective (H3). The Spearman's correlation analysis verified our expectations. Taking into consideration moderate or stronger significant correlations, *perceived social support from the family* negatively correlates with *past negative* and positively correlates with *past positive* time perspective. Regarding *support from friends* or *significant others*, participants reported weak significant relationship with all dimensions of time perspective except *present fatalistic* attitude. The direction of the correlations was consistent with our preliminary expectations.

### Pattern analysis of time perspective

In the absence of similar research, we formulated an exploratory question about the possibility of identifying typical subgroups of young adults involving the dimensions of mentalization and perceived social support (H4). We assumed that these groups significantly differ from each other on the basis of time perspective.

In order to examine the relational aspects of mentalization we performed cluster analysis involving the subscales of the Reflective Function Questionnaire and the Multidimensional Social Support Questionnaire. First we performed principal component analysis to make sure that the six variables could be grouped into latent dimensions. The principal component analysis determined two principal components (Table 3) which represent 61.7% of the variance of the original six variables. It can be observed that the first principal component explains 33.2% of the total variance while the second principal component explains 28.5%.

**Table 3. Total variance explained by main components.**

	Unrotated solution			Rotated solution		
	Eigen-value	Proportion var.	Cumulative	SumSq. Loadings	Proportion var.	Cumulative
Component 1	2.118	0.353	0.353	1.989	0.332	0.332
Component 2	1.581	0.264	0.617	1.710	0.285	0.617

The factor loadings obtained with Varimax rotation of the principal component analysis are presented in Table 4. In accordance with our preliminary ideas the first principal component is determined by the dimensions of perceived social support and the second principal component by the subscales of impaired mentalization.

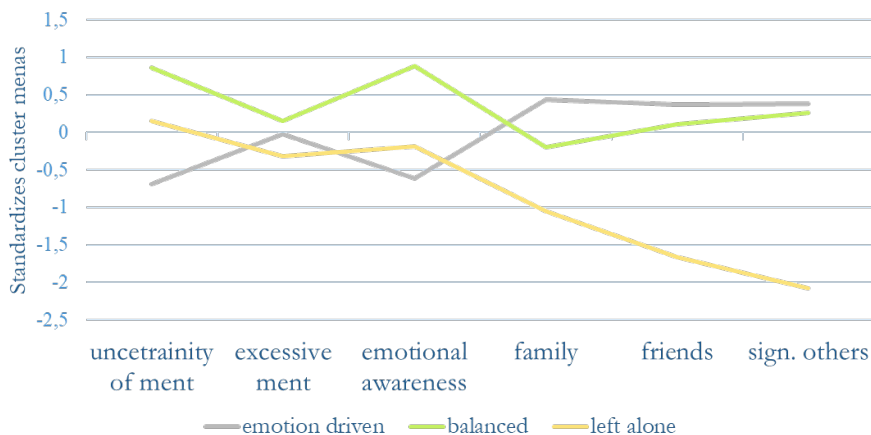
**Table 4. Component loadings.**

	PC1	PC2	Uniqueness
uncertain mentalization		0.877	0.182
excessive certainty		0.283	0.870
emotional awareness		0.879	0.227
family	0.685	-0.282	0.451
friends	0.833		0.305
significant others	0.853		0.265

Note. Applied rotation method is varimax.

The next step of our analysis was to determine the number of groups that could be created using the features of mentalization and social support. Non-hierarchical K-centered cluster analysis was used to determine the number of clusters. Center averages were determined with the Hartigan-Wong algorithm. The optimal number of clusters to be formed was three which was selected using the elbow method based on the BIC indicator. The visual presentation of the clusters is shown in Figure 1. The indicators supporting the model (AIC = 2405.9 6 BIC = 2486.710, Shilouette = 0.259) were adequate (Nerurkar et al., 2018), the explained variance was 39.7%.

**Figure 1. Cluster analysis – groups.**

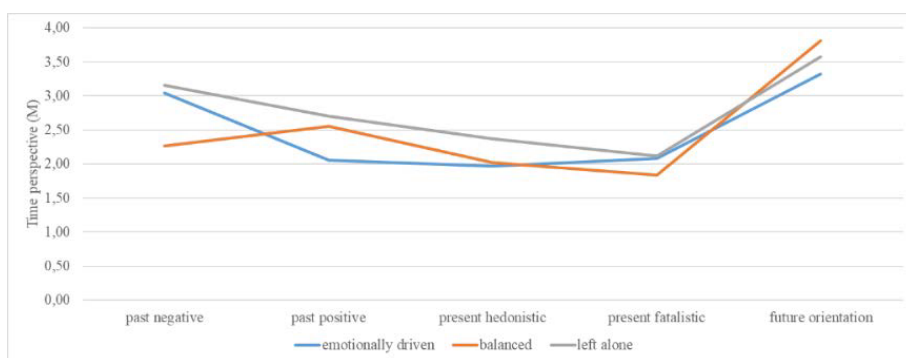


The first cluster (*the emotionally driven*) had the highest values of impaired mentalization. This group could be characterized by the least effective mentalization expressed in the areas of uncertainty of mental states and emotional awareness. The level of perceived social support was lower than in

the second cluster but higher than in the third cluster. In the second cluster (*the balanced*) social support was perceived more strongly while reflective functions scores showed properly functioning mentalization skills. In the third cluster (*the left alone*) average mentalization scores were found and extremely low level of perceived social support.

The final step of pattern analysis was exploring time perspective characteristics of the clusters. Based on our results presented in Figure 2 and Table 5 there was a significant difference between the groups along the subscales of time perspective.

**Figure 2. Characteristics of time perspective in the clusters.**



**Table 5. Descriptives of time perspective in the clusters.**

	the emotionally driven (N=88)		the balanced (N=326)		the left alone (N=242)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
past negative	3.04	1.15	2.27	0.97	3.16	1.09
past positive	2.06	0.69	2.55	0.75	2.70	0.72
present hedonistic	1.97	0.74	2.02	0.77	2.37	0.75
present fatalistic	2.08	0.72	1.84	0.65	2.12	0.64
future orientation	3.32	0.86	3.81	0.75	3.57	0.82

Note. The gray background represents the highest time perspective scores of the group

Examining the subscale means we can conclude that *future orientation* is the typical time perspective dimension in all the three groups (shown with grey background in Table 5) while *past negative* perspective has relatively high scores in *the emotionally driven* and *the left alone* group. Regarding *the balanced* they can be characterized by positive attitude to time with high values of *future orientation* and *past positive* perspective.



The final step of pattern analysis was the comparison of time perspective scores of the clusters. Multivariate ANOVA indicated significant difference between the groups (Table 6) in all the dimensions of time perspective. According to the post hoc tests with Tukey correction *the balanced group* showed significantly lower scores on negative time perspective dimensions like *past negative* and *present fatalistic* attitude and significantly higher degree of positive attitude toward time dimension with the highest value of *future orientation*. According to our findings the *emotionally driven* group had significantly lower scores than *the left alone group* regarding *past positive*, *present hedonistic* and *future orientation* time dimensions.

**Table 6. Time perspective dimensions in the clusters.**

<b>MANOVA: Pillai Test</b>					
<b>Cases</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Approx. F</b>	<b>TracePillai</b>	<b>Num df</b>	<b>p</b>
(Intercept)	1	6126.883	0.979	5	< .001
groups	2	22.790	0.298	10	< .001
Residuals	653				
<b>ANOVA tables</b>					
<b>Cases</b>		<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b><math>\eta^2</math></b>
past negative		2	56.866	< .001	0.148
past positive		2	24.850	< .001	0.071
present hedonistic		2	17.279	< .001	0.050
present fatalistic		2	14.339	< .001	0.042
future orientation		2	15.104	< .001	0.044
<b>Post Hoc Tests</b>					
<b>Past negative</b>		<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p<sub>Tukey</sub></b>
emotionally driven	balanced	0.772	0.124	6.203	< .001
	left alone	-0.119	0.129	-0.925	0.625
balanced	left alone	-0.891	0.088	-10.139	< .001
<b>Past positive</b>		<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p<sub>Tukey</sub></b>
emotionally driven	balanced	-0.495	0.088	-5.639	< .001
	left alone	-0.640	0.091	-7.035	< .001
balanced	left alone	-0.145	0.062	-2.338	0.051
<b>present hedonistic</b>		<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p<sub>Tukey</sub></b>
emotionally driven	balanced	-0.049	0.091	-0.540	0.852
	left alone	-0.397	0.094	-4.216	< .001
balanced	left alone	-0.348	0.064	-5.420	< .001
<b>present fatalistic</b>		<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p<sub>Tukey</sub></b>
emotionally driven	balanced	0.247	0.079	3.149	0.005
	left alone	-0.034	0.081	-0.422	0.906
balanced	left alone	-0.282	0.055	-5.078	< .001
<b>future orientation</b>		<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p<sub>Tukey</sub></b>
emotionally driven	balanced	-0.484	0.095	-5.090	< .001
	left alone	-0.248	0.099	-2.519	0.032
balanced	left alone	0.236	0.067	3.510	0.001

Note. P-value adjusted for comparing a family of 3

## Discussion

The aim of our study was to examine the relationship between the ability to mentalize and the different types of time perspective regarding perceived social support. We aimed to explore meaningful dimensions of mentalization and perceived social support and identify typical subgroups of young adults. As there was no example of a similar study before, our research was fundamentally phenomenological.

Regarding mentalization our result suggested that the main mentalization impairment among young adults was *excessive certainty* followed by *uncertain mentalization* and *emotional awareness*. *Excessive certainty* refers to firm and inflexible ideas about the other's mental states, a kind of overconfidence in the capacity of making judgements about others. This can be explained by the fact that confidence and self-esteem are crucial factors of life satisfaction during the period of young adulthood (Cheung et al., 2015; Galambos et al., 2006; Szcześniak et al., 2021). Looking at the characteristics of time perspective, the highest score was obtained in *future orientation* and the lowest value in *present fatalistic* time perspective, our results resembled time perspective characteristics of other researches (Anagnostopoulos & Griva, 2012; Dwivedi & Rastogi, 2017).

In the absence of similar research, we formulated an exploratory question about the possibility of identifying typical subgroups of young adults involving the dimensions of mentalization and perceived social support. Our analysis identified three groups. The first cluster (*the emotionally driven*) had the highest values of impaired mentalization, expressed in the areas of uncertainty of mental states and emotional awareness. The level of perceived social support was lower than in the second cluster but higher than in the third cluster. In the second cluster (*the balanced*) social support was perceived more strongly while reflective functions scores showed properly functioning mentalization skills. In the third cluster (*the left alone*) average mentalization scores were found and extremely low level of perceived social support. We assumed that these groups significantly differed from each other on the basis of time perspective. *The balanced group* showed significantly lower scores on negative time perspective dimensions like *past negative* and *present fatalistic* attitude and significantly higher degree of positive attitude toward time dimension with the highest value of *future orientation*. According to our findings the *emotionally driven* group had significantly lower scores than *the left alone group* regarding *past positive*, *present hedonistic* and *future orientation* time dimensions.

Our findings could be linked well into the concept of time perspective, which is both a cognitive construct deriving from an individual's thinking, and a motivational construct influencing individual decisions and behavior (Mello

& Worrell, 2015). Theory suggests that sensitivity to mental states and the individual's positive representation of oneself as being able to deal with situations effectively can shape positive attitudes towards categories of present, past and future, while negative representations of relationships, increased distrust, a reduced sense of control may produce a hedonistic view or negative, resigned attitudes towards time and time-related events associated with impulsive behavior (Blomgren et al., 2016).

Based on the limitations of the study when evaluating the results it should be taken into account that although the sample size was acceptable from a statistical point of view the sample is not representative due to access-based sampling. The cross-sectional arrangement does not provide the opportunity to follow developmental changes so it may be worthwhile to repeat the examination in longitudinal arrangement as well. The participants were recruited from healthy young adults in this study which did not give us the opportunity to explore the relation of impaired mentalization and time perspective in the case of psychological disorders.

Finally it can be concluded that our research verified that perceived social support and mentalization skills influence the level of time perspective herewith we managed to verify our model that relational safety is one of the building blocks for successful mentalization.

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