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Original Contribution

INFLUENCE OF FAMILY SUPPORT ON ENTREPRENEURIAL ATTITUDES - A CASE FROM BULGARIA

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Abstract: *This report examines the dynamics between the perceived support from one's immediate social circle and the degree of personal autonomy in decision-making and the undertaking of new initiatives. Based on quantitative research (using a 5-point Likert scale among 645 respondents from Bulgaria in 2025 and 2026), the study analyzes attitudes regarding exclusive trust, emotional confidence, and the need for external approval. The results reveal a pattern of „supported autonomy", wherein high levels of psychological security and acceptance do not lead to complete individual independence, but rather to a form of regulated social interdependence. The study's design incorporates methodological controls to validate the reliability of the findings.*

Key words: ***P****ersonal autonomy, Supported autonomy, Personal independence, Social validation, Family support, Entrepreneurial attitudes.*

1. Introduction

Some publications are focused on the extent to which personal autonomy is formed as an independent internal resource or fostered by external social approval [4, 7]. During young adulthood, the balance between personal autonomy and the need for family support determines not only an individual's adaptability to stress, but their readiness to take calculated risks and start a business, too [2, 8, 10].

The objective of this publication is to study how the subjective perception of support from family and one's inner circle influences daily behaviors related to sharing problems, making decisions, and launching entrepreneurial initiatives. The study contributes by providing a methodological tool for identifying the behavioral mechanisms that determine risk-taking, decision-making, and the development of autonomy, thereby establishing a foundation for creating more sustainable strategies to foster authentic autonomy. The current study is quite significant for the family business theory, especially in the context of the family support to the would-be entrepreneurs to start their business.

The findings in this study are based on responds of 645 students and alumni from Bulgaria, collected in the period 2025-2026 by a survey on the base of Likert scale. The findings confirm the these of this study (scientific novelty): the immediate environment in Bulgaria, from one hand, could be a psychological regulator, and from the other hand – it simultaneously creates a risk of delayed initiative in the absence of prior approval.

The next chapters could contribute to academic units (center and departments), which aim to support students and alumni in their entrepreneurial initiatives.

2. Related work

The external social approval to entrepreneurial intentions is object of different scientists [4, 7]. Other scientists give their priority to the risk management in the entrepreneurial process [2, 8, 10]. This dynamic is particularly evident in the analysis of entrepreneurial intentions, where the sense of control interacts with perceived social support from one's inner circle. When young people feel secure support from their families, their autonomy is not diminished; on the contrary, it transforms into a sense of psychological security that reduces the fear of failure. In this context, the social environment does not isolate the individual but acts as a stimulus for personal self-assertion and economic activity [1, 9].

Such a dependency challenges the traditional view of the entrepreneur as an isolated figure relying solely on their own determination. In reality, the willingness to undertake economic initiatives proves to be heavily dependent on the density of the social networks in which the individual is embedded. When one's inner circle provides a stable emotional and informational foundation, the subjective perception of risk diminishes, and the obstacles to launching a venture are viewed as surmountable challenges rather than insurmountable barriers [3].

On the other hand, the importance of a supportive environment becomes most evident during times of economic uncertainty and structural change. Under such conditions, the presence of social support not only mitigates the pressure associated with potential failure but also fosters proactive behavior among young people. Examining these interactions makes it possible to identify the specific mechanisms through which external approval translates into internal resilience [6].

Although support from one’s inner circle is often viewed as a constructive factor, it also carries the potential to turn into a limiting dependency. When the pursuit of external approval becomes a primary guiding force for an individual, the boundary between seeking validation and lacking independence easily blurs. In such instances, heavy reliance on those close to us does not foster personal autonomy; instead, it breeds hesitation and paralyzing self-doubt in the absence of their explicit approval. This flip side of social connection demonstrates that intense concern from one’s environment can inadvertently stifle the entrepreneurial spirit and the willingness to take risks independently. Instead of acting as a springboard for new initiatives, the need for constant family approval can hinder personal self-assertion and turn independent decision-making into a source of uncertainty [5].

3. Problem description and results

By framing behavioral questions within the fundamental tenets of trust and acceptance, the report tests the hypothesis of whether high levels of trust from close associates facilitate independent action, or whether a supportive environment fosters a functional dependence on external approval.

The methodology is based on a questionnaire with 40 questions, designed under the international academic network INTERGEN. The questions have been translated into the national language of each country, including Bulgarian. A 5-point Likert scale was used for

the responses, where 1 is „Totally disagree", while 5 stands for „Totally agree". The respondents have been approached by Messenger from the database of the Entrepreneurship Center of the University of Ruse „Angel Kanchev", asking to fulfill the online questionnaire. This design allows not only for measuring average levels of agreement but also for analyzing the internal consistency between psychological safety and actual behavioral autonomy. The survey was conducted among 645 Bulgarian respondents in 2025 and 2026.

For the purpose of this publication the focus is on five of the questions: the initial declarative statement regarding unconditional family support (Question 1) and the final control question concerning general social satisfaction frame the specific manifestations of autonomy (Question 5). In the study, the first and last questions serve as fundamental postulates (statements); in this sense, the responses obtained act as controls for the other three questions. Placing Question 5 at the end, rather than immediately after Question 1, serves to verify the reliability and internal consistency of the individual responses.

The second, third, and fourth questions present the respondents' behavioral responses. A test of statistical significance (p-value) was applied to assess whether the observed differences between the studied groups were genuine or the result of chance during sample formation. Including this analysis ensures that the conclusions drawn regarding the population are based on mathematically proven relationships rather than random data combinations. A p-value of less than 0.001 was recorded for all three questions, confirming the high reliability of the results. This ensures a high degree of objectivity and credibility for the obtained data and the resulting findings.

Table 1. Summary of survey results

N = 645	**Responds (number, %)**				
Questions / **Scale**	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
5 ***(Totally agree)***	**330** 46%	**206** 27%	**243** 30%	**229** 29%	**297** 43%
4 ***(Agree)***	**113** 21%	**143** 30%	**145** 33%	**133** 31%	**175** 34%
3 ***(N/A)***	**113** 15%	**161** 23%	**144** 22%	**156** 20%	**122** 14%
2 ***(Disagree)***	**36** 8%	**80** 14%	**60** 10%	**55** 12%	**32** 5%
1 ***(Totally disagree)***	**53** 10%	**55** 6%	**53** 5%	**72** 8%	**19** 4%

Question 1: „I am convinced that only my family can support me unconditionally." (control question) – measures the degree of exclusive trust placed in the family as the sole source of absolute, unrivaled support. The calculated mean score is 3.98. This high average value reflects the family's traditionally high status as a reference point. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (67%) agree with the statement, indicating that for most people, the family remains the most important psychological and social motivator. Responses to this question serve as a control measure to validate the reliability of proceeding with the remainder of the survey.

Question 2: „When making decisions, I consult relatives and friends." (This question reveals personal behavior/reaction) – it assesses the degree of reliance on external opinions and the tendency to seek support from one's immediate social circle when making decisions.

The average score from the collected responses is 3.57 (57% of respondents), a figure that can be characterized as moderately high. Although people value their loved ones, they maintain a certain level of autonomy in their decision-making; in this context, consulting others is not viewed as a mandatory requirement.

Question 3: „When I have a problem, I share it with relatives and friends." (This question reveals personal behavior/reaction) – it measures the level of emotional confidence and the tendency to seek emotional support during crises. Based on the data obtained, the average score is 3.72. More than 60% of respondents are open to sharing problems with their inner circle. This indicates a functioning level of personal social engagement, although nearly 15% prefer to keep their problems to themselves rather than share them.

Question 4: „To start something on my own, I need the support of my loved ones." (This question reveals personal behavior/reaction) – it indicates the level of personal autonomy/initiative in relation to the need for external approval and the consent of loved ones. The average score obtained from respondents is 3.61. The result reveals that for the majority (60%), personal initiative is strongly linked to social validation. Support from loved ones acts as a motivator for undertaking new ventures.

Question 5: „I feel valued and supported by the people around me." (control question) – provides a general subjective assessment of the quality of the social environment and the level of social satisfaction/acceptance. The mean value of the responses to this question is 4.08 (77%). This question also serves as a final check on the responses to the preceding questions, which reveal the respondents' behavioral attitudes. The high score on this question confirms that the high results obtained in the behavioral section of the survey (Questions 3, 4, and 5) are not the product of social anxiety, constraints, or pressure, but rather stem from a genuinely positive, healthy, and supportive environment.

4. Discussion

Based on the high support ratings for the two control questions (Questions 1 and 5), identified as baseline statements, and the moderately high levels of seeking approval and support (Questions 2, 3, and 4), we can distinguish five analytical aspects, given in Table 2.

Table 2. Analytical aspects

Analytical aspect	Manifestation	Core thesis
The family as a primary resource	Exclusive trust in the family environment (Question 1)	The family functions as a primary stress regulator and a source of absolute security, taking precedence over institutional support.
Personal autonomy versus personal interdependence	Balance between independence and seeking advice (Question 2)	There is a model of „supported autonomy", in which individuals are independent but act most confidently when they have secure support behind them.
Mechanisms of emotional regulation	Sharing as a stress-coping strategy (Question 3)	Active social coping predominates – tension is reduced through communication with loved ones rather than through withdrawal and isolation.
The need for external validation	Dependence of new initiatives on approval (Question 4)	Risk of „postponed initiative" – the need for support from loved ones can hinder enterprise and the willingness to take individual risks.
The general climate of social satisfaction	Subjective sense of acceptance and appreciation (Question 5)	The subjective perception of being supported acts as a protective factor against personal „giving up" and a lack of initiative.

An analysis of the obtained results reveals a „confidence paradox“. In this context, an analytical matrix can be structured based on the results of the control variables (Question 1 and Question 5) and the behavioral variables reflected in Questions 2, 3, and 4.

Table 3. Interrelationship between control and behavioral variables in the survey

Analytical mechanism	**Role of Questions 1 and 5 (control variables)**	**Effect on Questions 2, 3, and 4 (behavioral variables)**	**Results (Outcomes)**
Confidence Paradox (Overconfidence)	**Question 1 (3.98)** Absolute trust within the family **Question 5 (4.08)** Strong sense of support	**Highest-scoring item 4 (3.61)** Need for support to start something on one's own **Highest-scoring item 2 (3.57)** Seeking advice when making decisions	The assurance of protection from loved ones does not foster personal autonomy and confidence; rather, it leads to greater dependency. The more secure you feel at home, the less likely you are to take risks without the approval of those close to you.
Emotional regulator (Independence, autonomy)	**Question 1 (3.98)** The family as the sole unconditional source	**Raises Question 3 (3.72)** Willingness to share problems	Confidence facilitates sharing (Question 3) but may hinder individual readiness to cope.
Pseudo-autonomy	**Question 5 (4.08)** The feeling of being valued by one's environment.	**It limits full autonomy regarding Question 2 and Question 4.**	When we feel highly valued (Question 5), we subconsciously fear making independent decisions (lest we alter that high regard) which prompts us to defer to the opinions of our loved ones (Question 2).

The data indicate that the subjects do not transform their high level of confidence (Questions 1 and 5) into individual self-assurance and independence, but rather into emotional dependency. While their immediate social circle provides a sense of calm, security, and support, the results suggest that – instead of fostering personal autonomy and confidence regarding future decisions and initiatives – this actually creates a lasting attachment and a need for approval.

5. Conclusion

The results paint a picture of a stable, supportive environment in which the respondents feel protected and connected to their loved ones. High scores for unconditional family support (Question 1 – 3.98) and general social support (Question 5 – 4.08) indicate a healthy, functional environment that acts as an effective protective factor against stress and emotional exhaustion. Sharing problems (Question 3 – 3.72) emerges as the preferred strategy over isolation.

At the same time, the study reveals a distinct „confidence paradox“. Confidence in the protection provided by loved ones does not produce fully independent individuals; rather, it fosters a model of „supported autonomy“. Moderately high scores regarding the need to consult others (Question 2 – 3.57), and especially the need for prior support for new undertakings (Question 4 – 3.61) indicate that individual initiative is closely linked to a need for approval from those close to the individual. There is a tendency toward delayed independence: respondents are willing to act but prefer to embark on new endeavors only after securing approval from their social circle.

The methodological positioning of the final control question (Question 5) demonstrates that the need for external support is not perceived by respondents as a restriction on their freedom, but rather as an expression of security and trust. In this context, it is important to encourage the transition from "supported autonomy" to full independence, ensuring that the absence of immediate external approval does not stifle personal initiative or the willingness to take individual risks.

The practical value of this study lies in revealing the subtle dynamics between the sense of security and the readiness for independent action. By conceptualizing the relationship between social support and personal initiative, the study offers a new analytical perspective on how external approval can simultaneously serve as a psychological resource and as a factor contributing to delayed autonomy. It opens up avenues for future research into the factors underpinning the resilience of family businesses.

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