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Psycho-Behavioral Consequences of Parenting Variables in Adolescents

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Abstract

The aim of the present paper was to investigate the effect of some parenting variables on the internalizing and externalizing problems of adolescents, in the Romanian context. We had 380 Romanian adolescents, 46% girls and 54% boys, 78% Orthodox, from Suceava, Romania, the mean age being 16,3 years. The results indicated that psychological control has the most detrimental effects on child development, while conflict intensity in parent-adolescent (P-A) relationship explains better the outcomes in children than conflict frequency. The research findings emphasize the crucial role parental practices play in the economy of child development in the familial context and the explanatory role of emotions.

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1. Introduction

Parental figures represent the most important and influential people in the lives of children. They assure the primary socialization, learning of skills, transmission of values, attitudes, morals, and they help the character formation and their recovery in crisis.

Literature emphasized the fact that in rising children the particular practices, as well as the way they are applied, are both the same important in predicting child psycho-behavioral outcomes. For example, healthy parenting implies a high degree of parental support and control, but psychological control (Baumrind, 1971), represents a pathological form of parental control. Psychological control refers to the parental attempt to control the emotions and thoughts of children in an intrusive and manipulative manner, which hinders child's individual expression and autonomy (Barber & Harmon, 2002). A qualitative study on Romanian adolescents found "strong evidence that, within the Romanian cultural context, formal-type variables such as "psychological aggression" or "insisting demands of parents upon adolescents" as well as content-type variables such as "intrusion into the personal jurisdiction of adolescent" lead to P-A conflict" The same study found high levels of psychological control in P-A relationship in Romanian culture (Turliuc&Marici, 2013). In addition, there is ample evidence that psychological control is associated with many negative outcomes in children (see Barber& Harmon, 2002). Thus, we predicted that psychological control will be associated with the most negative outcomes for adolescents.

Moreover, parental rule setting is a form of control and a basic component in rising children, as long as they need structure, boundaries, and limits in order to be protected, and interiorize values and life principles. Rule setting, although necessary to parents, can lead to negative consequences if control is exerted in the personal domain of adolescents and if it is used extensively. Parental rule setting is the prerequisite, necessary for parental monitoring and discipline. Socio-cognitive domain theory states that when parents attempt to control the personal domain of adolescents, this leads to an increase in P-A conflict, and represents an attempt of adolescents to acquire more autonomy in a domain of their own, called the personal domain (Smetana, 2011).What is more, any form of behavioral control, which is applied inappropriately, with anger, used too frequently, accompanied by unreasonable requests perceived by adolescents, turns into psychological control, becoming thus manipulative and intrusive into the lives of adolescents.

Furthermore, P-A conflict in itself it is neither negative nor positive as long as it is not associated with further unhealthy outcomes for children, although it is normative in adolescence. In adolescence conflict intensifies, especially in the personal domain, as a sign of the adolescents claim to more autonomy. Research showed that although conflict frequency increases in adolescence, conflict intensity seems to be a better predictor of negative outcomes, than its frequency or its content (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). As a result we predicted that there will be more negative outcomes associated with conflict intensity than conflict frequency.

Finally, parental support is known to be a very good predictor of positive outcomes and a good mediator between parental practices and child psycho-behavioral consequences. Rohner concluded that there is "universal tendency for children and adults everywhere to respond in essentially the same way when they perceive themselves to be accepted or rejected by the people most important to them, especially attachment figures"(Rohner, Khaleque&Cournoyer, 2012, p. 18).Rohner states that about 26% of the variance in psychological adjustment in children and adults is accounted by the perceived acceptance-rejection. Thus, we expect that parental support should not to be associated with negative outcomes in adolescents.

The purpose of the present paper is to investigate the effect of some parenting variables on the psycho-behavioral consequences of adolescents, in the Romanian context.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Davern, Staiger and Luk (2005) showed that adolescents' perception concerning the interpersonal conflict is a significant predictor of adjustment whereas parents' perception is not. The authors concluded that adolescents'

perception is much more important than parents' perception regarding adjustment. Consequently, the respondents in this research were the adolescents. The research had a non-clinical, homogenous sample of adolescents, with intact families, with married parents who lived together in the last two months. Their parents did not suffer any DSM disorders, chronic diseases or physical handicap, which could seriously alter, in any way, their family life. We had 380 participants. 98% were Romanians, 54% girls and 46% boys, 78% of Orthodox religion, from Suceava. The mean age was 16,3 years.

For the missing data (1,1%) we used the Expectation-Maximization (EM) method for data imputation, in SPSS, which is considered the second best method of data imputation after Multiple Imputation method.

2.2. Instruments

The instruments used in the present research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The description of the instruments used in the present research

Crt.	Name/Instrument	Factors/Dimensions	Type/No. of items	Scoring
	Marici & Turluc (based on the methodology of Smetana, 1989)	P-A conflict in the Romanian culture (Conflicting themes between adolescents and parents)	21 items	-
	Smetana, & Asquith, (1994)	Conflict frequency	1 item	0 = never, 2 = often
	Smetana, & Asquith, (1994)	Conflict intensity	1 item	1 = calm, 5 = nervous
	Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment , (ASEBA, YSR), (Achenbach, 1991; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1987) (standardized Romanian version)	2 dimensions – internalizing and externalizing problems 7 dimensions: Anxiety/Depression (I), Withdrawal/Depression (II), Somatic complaints (III), Social problems (IV), Thought problems (V), Attention problems (VI), Rule-Breaking Behavior (VII), Aggressive Behavior (VIII).	112 items	0 = fals, 1 = somehow true, 2 = very true
	Revised CRPBI (Acceptance subscale) (Schaefer, 1965; Schuldermann & Schludermann, 1988, personal communication)	Parental suport	10 items α Crombach = 0,82	1 = Mother/Father is not like that at all 2 = Mother/Fatheris somehow like that 3 = Mother/Fatheris very much like that
	Sorkhabi, N. (2010)	The existence of parental rules	1 item	0 = no rules 1 = sometimes 2 = always
	Psychological Control Scale – Youth Self Report (PCS-YSR; Barber, 1996) from CRPBI	Parental control/Parental psychological control	8 items α Cronbach = 0,84	1 = Mother/Father is not like that at all, 2 = Mother/Fatheris somehow like that, 3 = Mother/Fatheris very much like that

2.3. Procedure

This is a quasi-experimental research based on questionnaires administered to adolescents. For the present research we contacted the principles of more schools in Suceava, Romania and we asked them for permission to apply a battery of tests. We established the date, and scheduled the classes, as well as the classrooms in which the research was going to take place. According to the Romanian laws and ethical considerations, we asked the participants for the written parental consent of their minor children, participating in the research. 11% of them refused. The participants received information about the name of the researcher, his education and profession and the aim of the research, as well as details about confidentiality. The adolescents were asked to read carefully, answer sincerely to every item, and fill in with an alert rhythm. At the same time the researcher explained the way the

questionnaires should be answered by giving examples from every type of item. The completion took 30-40 minutes. The statistical analyses were performed using AMOS 20 and SPSS functions.

3. Results

In order to test the influence of the parenting variables on the psycho-behavioral outcomes in adolescents we performed multiple linear hierarchical regressions in SPSS. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The best linear hierarchical regression model concerning psycho-behavioral consequences of parental practices.

Variables	B	β	R	R^2	R^2_{adj}	Partial correlations	Part correlations	F
Somatic complaints			,427	,182				F(2, 208) = 22,9. P < .000
Parental psychological control	2,38	,335**				,328 (10,7%)	,313 (9,79%)	
Conflict intensity	,464	,171**				,174 (3,02%)	,160 (2,56%)	
Anxiety/Depression			,378	,143				F(2, 208) = 17,2. P < .000
Parental psychological control	2,89	,327**				,331 (10,9%)	,325 (10,5%)	
Setting rules	,863	,159**				,169 (2,85%)	,158 (2,49%)	
Aggressive behaviour			,409	,167				F(2, 208) = 20,8. P < .000
Parental psychological control	3,94	,331**				,321 (10,30%)	,309 (9,54%)	
Conflict intensity	,680	,149**				,151 (2,28%)	,140 (1,96%)	
Rule-Breaking Behavior			,311	,097				F(3, 208) = 7,31. P < .000
Parental psychological control	1,38	,156*				,152 (2,31%)	,146 (2,13%)	
Setting rules	-1,179	-,218**				-,216 (4,66%)	-,211 (4,45%)	
Conflict intensity	,607	,180*				,169 (2,85%)	,163 (2,65%)	
Withdrawal/Depression			,389	,151				F(3, 208) = 12,17. P < .000
Parental psychological control	1,64	,237*				,228 (5,19%)	,216 (4,66%)	
Setting rules	,840	-,198**				,208 (4,32%)	,196 (3,84%)	
Parental support	-1,07	-,147*				-,145 (2,10%)	-,135 (1,82%)	
Attention problems			,338	,114				F(2, 208) = 13,2. P < .000
Conflict intensity	,576	,210**				,204 (4,16%)	,196 (3,84%)	
Parental psychological control	1,436	,200**				,195 (3,80%)	,187 (3,49%)	
Thought problems			,413	,170				F(2, 208) = 21,1. P < .000
Parental psychological control	2,18	,280**				,284 (8,06%)	,270 (7,29%)	
Conflict frequency	,787	,238**				,244 (5,95%)	,229 (5,24%)	
Social problems			,402	,162				F(2, 208) = 19,86. P < .000
Parental psychological control	2,07	,295**				,289 (8,35%)	,276 (7,61%)	
Conflict intensity	,50	,187**				,188 (3,60%)	,175 (2,40%)	

Note 1: *p < .05, ** p < .01, + p < .09.

3. Discussion

The purpose of the present paper was to investigate the psycho-behavioral consequences of some parenting variables in adolescents.

The results showed that psychological control was associated with all negative consequences measured, while parental support was not. The sign of the regression coefficient shows that the association between parental support and withdrawal/depression is negative (see Table 3). Psychological control represents a deep negative experience for children who feel devalued and treated inhumanly. Children subjected to psychological control reported being upset,

they used superlatives to express their amazement that their parents dared to show intrusiveness towards them, and they considered psychological aggression to be a serious wrongdoing (Turliuc&Marici, 2013).

In addition, parental rule setting buffers rule breaking behavior and, as a control method, it is associated with anxiety and depression. We speculate, based on the socio-cognitive domain theory that the overall score for anxiety/depression could actually be explained by the anxiety/depression in the personal domain of the adolescents, owing to parental control. What is more, conflict intensity was associated with more negative consequences than conflict frequency, supporting the idea that higher levels of anger in P-A conflict leads to more negative outcomes for adolescents. In fact, as Emde and Easter-Brooks (1985) sustained emotions are a sensitive barometer of parent-child relationship.

Table 3: Summary of the standardized regression coefficients from the models analyzed

	Somatic complaints	Anxiety/ depression	Aggressive behaviour	Rule-breaking behavior	Withdrawal/ depression	Attention problems	Thought problems	Social problems
Psychological control	,335**	,327**	,331**	,156*	,237*	,200**	,280**	,295**
Conflict intensity	,171**		,149**	,180*		,210**		,187**
Setting rules		,159**		-,218**	-,198**			
Parental support					-,147*			
Conflict frequency							,238**	

Note: (1) *p < .05, ** p < .01., (2) blank space represent insignificant values

The effects of parental practices on adolescents depend on the multitude of attributes contained in the parental styles, and emotions definitely play a crucial role in predicting child negative outcomes. The effect of parenting practices does not rely only on the type of practice parents use, but also on the pragmatic way parents implement them and on the parental attitudes regarding these practices.

The findings of the present have implications for the psycho-educational programs with parents and for the parent-child relationship. They indicate that having a positive, supportive and the right attitude in parent-child interactions, it is a necessity that leads to positive psycho-behavioral outcomes in adolescents.

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