

PARENTAL REARING PRACTICES AND PROBLEM BEHAVIOURS IN MALE DELINQUENT ADOLESCENTS VERSUS CONTROLS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate possible relationships between parental rearing practices and problem behaviours in a sample of male delinquent adolescents versus controls. A total of 97 subjects and 113 matched school- children were assessed by means of the EMBU questionnaire and Youth Self-Report. Delinquents were more severely treated by parents and had more pronounced internalized and externalized problem scores. Furthermore, problem scores were found to be highly correlated with parental rejection and overprotection, when emotional warmth wasn't. We conclude, that parental rearing practices, such as rejection and overprotection may influence the development of problem behaviours. However, for control group negative association has been found for delinquency score with emotional warmth. Therefore, emotional warmth both from father and mother could be considered as protective factor in child development. The implications of these findings with regard to preventive measures are discussed.

Keywords: Parental rearing practices, aggression, delinquency

Introduction

Theories of parent child interactions suggest that parent-child transactional styles substantially influence children's acquisition of appropriate social interaction skills, as well as impacting related adjustment outcomes (Parke & Buriel, 1998). Socialization research, for example, has linked parenting qualities to children's social adjustment in peer relations. According to family interactional theory, a close parent-child bond is linked with greater sociability with peers and militates against the development of aggressive and aversive behaviour. Mothers who are warm and affectionate with their children are more likely to have children who are more socially competent and less aggressive with their peers (Mize & Pettit, 1997). Similar findings have been reported for fathers (Kahen, Katz, & Gottman, 1994).

Early childhood experiences have frequently been suggested as causal factors in the development of psychopathological manifestations in adulthood. In particular, dysfunctional rearing practices appeared to be highly correlated with different types of psychopathology or psychological problems developed later in life. Research has shown convincingly that early conduct problems and antisocial, aggressive and criminal behaviour are associated with authoritarian, harsh, erratic and punitive discipline, and with hostile, strict and rejecting parental attitudes (Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Loeber, Farrington, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1998; McCord, 1988; Patterson, 1995). There is clear evidence that hostile and intrusive parenting behaviours are related to children's aggression. For example, parental

physical and verbal coercion have been linked to overt aggression in the peer group (Parke, Burks, Carson, Neville, & Boyum, 1994). Most studies with young children have focused on maternal coercion; nevertheless, there is some evidence of the relation between paternal power assertion and aggression in younger children (Crockenberg, Jackson, & Langrock, 1996). As noted by Patterson (1982), an authoritarian style in parents enhances angry reactions from their offspring. Childhood abuse and neglect were also shown to increase the risk for the development of later delinquency (McCord, 1983). Furthermore, juvenile delinquency was reported to be associated with parental aggressiveness and conflict, poor parental supervision, neglecting attitudes and harsh discipline (McCord, 1979).

Overly permissive and lax parenting, manifested in a lack of monitoring and supervision of the child, have often been related to delinquent and antisocial development (Farrington & Loeber, 1998; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). Parker et al. (1992) found that parental care influences attachment and socialization. Parental overprotection and perceived lack of parental care were considered as predisposing factors for the development of conduct and oppositional disorders (Rey, Plapp, 1990) and delinquent behaviour (Howard, 1981).

Both the use of punishment and lack of supervision predict early delinquency (Haapasalo & Tremblay, 1994). At their extreme, authoritarian parenting with punitive discipline may escalate into physical abuse, and laxness may lead to neglect. Studies have reported that abused and neglected children are at risk for aggressive, violent and criminal behaviour (Lewis, 1992; Malinosky-Rummell & Hansen, 1993; Widom, 1998).

Nevertheless, despite an increasing number of studies, the results were generally criticized as rather inconsistent and as not providing valid information on this matter (McCrae, Costa, 1994). This partly could be explained by the fact that many of the studies used different instruments, which covered diverse aspects of the topic. Furthermore, retrospective approaches to the assessment of parental rearing styles were criticized for possible subjective deformation of data by the respondents, on the grounds that social desirability may have influenced the subject to report their parental rearing in a more positive light than it has been in reality (McCrae, Costa, 1997), or that the time lag might distort recall. However, it was demonstrated that the retrospective nature of the EMBU inventory did not affect the reliability and validity of data, due to recall errors (Arrindel, et al., 1983). The EMBU was developed on the basis of data collected among 2442 students from Italy, Hungary, Guatemala and Greece (Arrindell, et al., 2001). On the basis of the psychometric findings from these four national contexts, it was concluded that the three factors of parenting practices are factorially-invariant across nations and demonstrated significant predicted correlations with specific personality measures.

At the same time, there is still a lack of information about the role of parental rearing in the development of behaviour problems in children and adolescents. The present study was aimed at investigating parental rearing factors that might be related to behavioural problems in delinquent adolescents versus controls. We aim to explore, if the same factors of parental rearing influence the development of similar problems in diverse groups of adolescents in the same way? Are different problems related to the same factors of parental rearing?

Method

Subjects

This study was performed on two samples of adolescents, matched by sex, age and socio-economic status. The delinquent subjects were voluntarily recruited from the juvenile correction facilities in the Vilnius region. All delinquents were referred to this institution by a court decision. The reasons for correction were repeated thefts (about 50%), hooliganism and robbery. Data were obtained during winter and spring 2002, from the total population of the institution, (excepting refusals) 97 youths. The age of the present group ranged from 15 to 18 years (mean age 16.6 year, SD 0.8).

Comparative data were obtained from a group of 113 male schoolchildren from secondary schools in the same area. The age in this group ranged from 14 to 17 years (mean age 16.8 years, SD 0.9). For the present analysis only adolescents having two-parent families were selected (108 youths). All subjects were informed that participation in the study is voluntary. Furthermore, the information was given that the staff would not obtain any information about the results. The investigation was individually performed by paper- and pencil-tests, in several small group sessions (2-3 subjects).

Instruments

EMBU (a Swedish acronym for „Own memories of parental rearing“, in Swedish: „Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran“). For measuring young persons perceptions of their parent's rearing behaviour, the short version of EMBU questionnaire (Arrindell, et al., 1999) has been used. This inventory assesses an individual's own memories of perceived parental rearing behaviour. It comprises 23 questions grouped in 3 subscales, with two additional questions referring to consistency and strictness of parental rearing behaviour, to be answered on a four-point Likert scale (1 – No, never; 2 – Yes, but seldom; 3 – Yes, often; 4 – Yes, most of the time), separately for the father and for the mother. From factor analysis three factors were derived: rejection, emotional warmth and overprotection. These proved in a large transcultural study comprising 14 countries from various parts of the world [29], to be generalizable across cultures.

The first factor, **rejection**, is characterized by physical punishment, rejection of the subject as an individual, hostility, lack of respect for his/her point of view and ridiculing and/or criticizing his or her inadequacies and problems in front of others.

The second factor, labelled **emotional warmth**, represents warmth and loving attention, giving help without being intrusive, respect for the subject's standpoints and intellectual stimulation.

The third factor, defined as **overprotection**, appears to reflect an attitude of parental protection of the subject, although in an exaggerated way – a comparatively high level of intrusiveness, high standards of achievement, imposition of strict rules, and a demand for indisputable obedience.

The translation of these scales into Lithuanian followed established guidelines, including appropriate use of independent back translations.

Youth Self-Report. This instrument was designed to obtain standardized self-reports on youth's competencies and behavioural/emotional problems (Achenbach, 1991). The problem scoring part contains 112 items that describe specific behavioural/emotional problems. Items are scored 0 if they are „not true“ of the child, 1 if they are „somewhat or sometimes true“ and 2 if they are „very true or often true“. A total problems score is computed, with higher scores indicating endorsement of greater behavioural and emotional problems. The Youth Self-Report has been widely used in research and mental health practice. The translation of these scales into Lithuanian followed established guidelines.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Means and standard deviations were calculated for describing the variables under investigation. The differences between variables were tested by two-tailed t-tests for independent samples.

Results

In our study, the delinquents scored significantly higher in almost every aspect of parental rearing, with the exception of mother's and father's Emotional Warmth (Table 1): delinquents scored higher on parental rejection and overprotection both on father's and mother's rearing practices, when no significant differences were found between delinquents and control group for emotional warmth.

Table 1. Scores of delinquents and controls on the EMBU (Own memories of parental rearing) questionnaire and *t*-test results.

	Delinquents		Controls		<i>t</i> test	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Father						
Rejection	11.64	4.18	9.08	3.24	5.41	.001
Emotional warmth	15.53	4.73	16.10	4.78	-.86	.088
Overprotection	20.00	5.00	17.96	5.02	2.87	.004
Mother						
Rejection	11.46	3.96	9.42	2.80	5.13	.001
Emotional warmth	15.93	4.28	16.62	3.80	-1.26	.072
Overprotection	21.57	4.16	19.85	4.65	2.95	.003

Delinquents also scored significantly higher on all problems scores (Table 2), both on internalizing (withdrawal, anxiety/depression, and somatic complaints) and externalizing (delinquency and aggression) problems. They also scored significantly higher on attention, thought and social problems.

Table 2. Results of the Youth Self-Report of behaviour/emotional problems for delinquents and controls

	Delinquents		Controls		<i>t</i> test	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Withdrawn	6.70	4.34	5.33	2.56	3.262	.001
Somatic complaints	4.60	4.07	2.56	2.56	4.944	.001
Anxious/depressed	10.32	6.18	5.68	4.29	6.869	.001
Social problems	3.54	2.58	2.25	2.08	4.044	.001
Thought problems	1.82	1.82	.84	1.32	4.724	.001
Attention problems	3.08	3.10	.84	1.32	9.379	.001
Delinquent behaviour	5.48	2.90	3.30	2.25	6.263	.001
Aggressive behaviour	12.00	6.07	7.86	4.31	6.130	.001

Our findings show that parental rejection had a significant influence on problem behaviours, measured by Youth Self-Report. Parental overprotection and rejection was correlated with aggression, delinquency, anxiety/depression, somatic complaints, withdrawal and social problems score. No significant correlations were found between parental emotional warmth and problem behaviours for the total sample. However, correlational analysis of control group (separately from delinquents' group) revealed the fact, that delinquency score was negatively associated with emotional warmth both from father ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.01$) and mother ($r = -0.25^{**}$). No significant associations were found for delinquency score with emotional warmth both from father and mother.

Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficients between parental rearing practices and problem scores in delinquent adolescents and controls.

	Rejection	Emotional warmth	Overprotection
Maternal rearing practices			
Withdrawn	.381**	-.065	.281**
Somatic complaints	.224**	.002	.205**
Anxious/depressed	.421**	.038	.370**
Social problems	.403**	.026	.382**
Attention problems	.164**	.032	.251**
Delinquent behaviour	.287**	.048	.282**
Aggressive behaviour	.292**	.032	.327**
Paternal rearing practices			
Withdrawn	.302**	-.058	.113
Somatic complaints	.228**	-.052	.141**
Anxious/depressed	.392**	.024	.259**
Social problems	.304**	.024	.264**
Attention problems	.141*	.053	.119
Delinquent behaviour	.253**	.025	.221**
Aggressive behaviour	.291**	.062	.199**

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Discussion

The present study sought to demonstrate possible relationships between parental rearing and behavioural problems in delinquent adolescents versus controls. In order to avoid problems related with recall bias, we preferred in this study to use the EMBU questionnaire (as we described earlier, Arrindell et al. (1984) have shown that the retrospective nature of this inventory does not impact on the reliability and validity of data). As could be expected, we found a significant difference between delinquents and controls concerning almost all factors of parental rearing as well as concerning problems scores. Delinquents were more severely treated by parents and had more pronounced problem scores, which is in accordance with previous studies (Shaw, Scott, 1991). Nevertheless, the fact that they scored significantly higher on all scales indicates a wide range of overrepresented psychopathology and raises the question of whether symptom states and problem behaviours are two independent processes or whether they contribute to each other.

Furthermore, our results show that most of the psychological problems in both groups under investigation were related to the parental rearing practices in the family. The present findings indicate that, in spite of different levels of problems, some specific correlational patterns between rejecting rearing practices and problem scores could be observed. Based on these results, we suggest that parental rejection, as described by the EMBU, in terms of physical punishment, rejection of the subject as an individual, hostility, lack of respect for his/her point of view, and ridiculing and/or criticizing his or her inadequacies and problems in front of others, may contribute to the development of various psychopathological manifestations, irrespective of the study group. This is also in accordance with previous findings (Howard, 1981), and consequently parental rejection and overprotection could be considered as a predisposing factor for later delinquency.

It should be stressed, however, that for control group negative association has been found for delinquency score with emotional warmth. Therefore, emotional warmth both from father and mother could be considered as protective factor in child development.

These findings are in line with previous studies and provide us with a basis for the further development of preventive programmes directed towards families, e. g. programmes on expressed emotions in family therapy.

However, we do not consider it legitimate to conclude from our data that parental rearing practices play a causal role in the development of the above mentioned problems. We would rather emphasize that parental rearing represents just one of the possible causes of later delinquency and aggression, which has to be further elucidated in terms of a multifactorial interactive framework comprising biological characteristics of the individual and cultural and psychological variables.

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TĖVŲ AUKLĖJIMO STILIAI IR ELGESIO PROBLEMOS: DELINKVENTINIŲ PAAUGLIŲ IR KONTROLINĖS GRUPĖS SKIRTUMAI

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Santrauka

Šio tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti galimus tėvų auklėjimo stiliaus ir delinkventinių paauglių elgesio ryšius, lyginant juos su kontroline grupe. Delinkventiniu elgesiu pasižymintys 97 paaugliai iš nepilnamečių globos institucijų ir 113 kontrolinės grupės tiriamųjų buvo apklausti naudojant EMBU klausimyną ir Jaunuolio elgesio tyrimo klausimyną (YSR). Nustatyta, jog delinkventiniu elgesiu pasižyminčių paauglių tėvai dažniau taikė labai griežtus arba, priešingai, pernelyg lengvabūdiškus auklėjimo metodus. Šiems paaugliams būdingi statistiškai reikšmingai stipriau išreikšti eksternalūs ir internalūs elgesio sunkumai. Daroma išvada, jog tėvų auklėjimo metodai gali iš dalies lemti elgesio sunkumus. Išanalizavus visos imties duomenis paaiškėjo, jog elgesio sunkumai stipriai koreliavo su atstūmimu ir pernelyg didele globa, tuo tarpu emocinės šilumos ir elgesio sunkumų ryšių nerasta. Analizuojant atskirai delinkventų ir kontrolinės grupės duomenis nustatytas neigiamas kontrolinės grupės delinkvencijos įverčių ir tėvo bei motinos emocinės šilumos ryšys, todėl emocinė šiluma gali būti laikoma apsauginiu veiksniu asocialaus elgesio raidoje. Aptariama, kaip ši informacija galėtų būti pritaikyta kuriant intervencines ir prevencines programas.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: tėvų auklėjimo stiliai, agresija, delinkvencija