Chapter #8

PARENT-CHILD STRATEGIES AND PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: THE MEDIATION EFFECT OF PERSONALITY AND RULES INTERNALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores two different parenting strategies of rules setting to test the hypothesis that an autonomy-supportive strategy would relate negatively, whereas controlling strategy would relate positively, to adolescents' problem behaviour. Moreover, mediation analyse was explored to test whether associations among parenting strategies and adolescents' problem behaviour could be explained by personality domains and internalization of parental rules. A cross-sectional representative dataset from elementary schools was used (N=580, M=12.51 years, SD=0.59, 51.7% of boys). Problem behaviour of adolescent were measured by 21 items scale. Autonomy-supportive and psychological control were explored as two types of parental strategies. Internalization of parenting rules consist from four separate scales (1) identification; (2) introjection; (3) external regulation and (4) rebellion. Personality domains were assessed by Children personality questionnaire. Linear regression models and mediation analyses were used. Higher autonomy-supportive strategy related with less problem behaviour. Higher controlling strategy was related to higher rates of problem behaviour. The association among autonomy–supportive and psychological control strategy and problem behaviour was partially mediated by personality and by rules internalization. The results of this study point to importance of parental strategies in adolescence period as autonomy and controlling ways of setting rules may have opposite effect on problem behaviour.

Keywords: internalization, problem behaviour, parental strategies, psychological control, personality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Problem behaviour of Slovak school aged children has increased in recent years. The international study on teaching and learning by OECD (Jensen, Sandoval-Hernández, Knoll, & Gonzalez, 2012) has given alarming results in terms of school pupils' behaviour. Teachers in participating countries of the study has reported late arrivals (39.4%; in Slovakia: 13%) and absence of students (45.8%; in Slovakia: 39.8%). Given the absence and late arrival of pupils, the situation of Slovak teachers compared to the international average appears to be more flattering. However, other aspects of the discipline are to the detriment of Slovak school pupils. Compared to the international average, Slovak school teachers are more often confronted with distracting pupils during their lessons, their lies and cheating, vulgarism or the destruction of school furniture.

There is no doubt about the increase in non-discipline in schools, but it should be borne in mind that the issue of discipline goes beyond the institution of the school, because the level of discipline reflects the social situation. Discipline at school is to some extent a

mirrored reflection of discipline in society and family in particular. School and society in this sense represent continuous vessels (Bendl, 2001). But what is the society that produces an increasing number of problem behaviour pupils other than "previous" society? On such question, there can be multiple answers, and one of them is the nature of the relationship, which is no longer based on the asymmetry of the "superior and subordinate" relationship compared to traditional society and family as well. The relationship between a child and adults (parents) is based on partnership in a democratic structure and the child's obedience is then more difficult to claim.

There is considerable research interest how parents supervise and regulate the behaviour of their children. Regarding literature, the most frequently used terms to describe such parenting strategy are being parental 'behavioural control' and parental 'psychological control' (Symeou & Georgiou, 2017). In both strategies the primary aim of parents with regard to children is to evoke accepted behaviour or decrease the unwanted behaviour without any negative psychological consequences (Bačíková-Sléšková, 2019). Behavioural control (BC) is often described as a complex set of parental activities with aim to regulate children's behaviours in line with family, social and cultural norms. Behavioural control by operational definition includes aspect of monitoring as parents set and requires clear and consistent rules, supervision and management of children behaviour. Such parental monitoring may function as a protective factor also in situations directly exposed to risk factors outside of family (school environment, peers, going out with friends, etc.), (Berinšterová, Janovská, Gajdošová, Kalina, & Bačíková, 2015). However, recent approaches interpret parental monitoring as more as an interaction of mutual communication between parents and adolescents than a matter of pure observation. Therefore, the effectiveness of parental monitoring might be dependent on the quality of parent-adolescent communication. The issue that puts parental monitoring into specific position is adolescents' higher need for autonomy and independence and the fact that they spend more time outside their parental home in comparison to previous years (Berinšterová et al., 2015).

On the other hand, the concept of psychological control (PC) refers to parental control of the child's or adolescent's psychological world parents are usually and often purposely lack quality of response to the children's psychological and emotional needs. Basically, it may refer to control attempts (e.g., importance, affiliation, appreciation or love withdrawal, devaluation, guilt induction) that 'constrain, invalidate, and manipulate a child's psychological and emotional experience and expression' (Barber, 1996) by keeping the child emotionally dependent on the parent (Symeou & Georgiou, 2017). Psychological control has been associated with several types of health risky behaviour including internalizing types of behaviour such as depression and a lack of self-confidence (Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss 2001). It was confirmed association between parental psychological control and depressed mood in sample of adolescent boys. This can be explained by experiencing the psychological control from parents – non-responsive to adolescents emotional and psychological needs, and this encumbers the adolescents' abilities to trust their own uniqueness and ideas (Barber, 1996). Further research also bring evidence that psychological control may be associated with externalizing symptomatology (Rogers, Buchanan, & Winchell, 2003) as study by Cui, Morris, Criss, Houltberg, and Silk (2014) found an indirect significant association between psychological control and adolescent aggressiveness.

For such reasons the psychological control is considered a destructive form of parental control regarding adolescents vulnerable to ill-being (Barber, 1996). Research concerning psychological control has shown that such parenting is associated with negative

developmental outcomes during different life periods, ranging from early adolescence to emerging adulthood (Costa, Hausenblas, Oliva, Cuzzocrea, & Larcan,2015). Several studies have underlined the necessity of understanding the associations between psychological control and negative outcomes (Gugliandolo, Costa, Cuzzocrea, & Larcan, 2015). Some authors suggested that mechanism among psychological control and negative behaviour outcomes can be partially described within the Self-Determination Theory (STD), (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Specifically, SDT examines the degree to which human behaviours are autonomous or self-determined, as well as the personal and contextual factors which facilitate or undermine people's intrinsic motivation, psychological development and well-being (Ryan & Deci 2000). Crucial role in this process is assign to satisfaction of basic psychological needs as SDT postulates three universal psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and their satisfaction is related to effective people's survival, growth, integrity and psychological functioning and health (Ryan & Deci 2000; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996). The desire to self-organize own experience and to feel own behaviour as freely chosen is characterized by individual with high fulfilled need of autonomy. The need of connected to others, to love and to care express the relatedness and finally the need for competence refers to the desire to feel effective and skilful in activities (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Current research on parental psychological control suggest that it could have a direct influence on all three needs and could explain why parental psychological control is related to ill-being (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). If parents frequently use intrusive techniques they may create a psychological pressure on children to comply with their own personal standards and needs, what is irrespective of the children's needs and values thus psychological control thwarted experiences of autonomy in children and adolescents (Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens, & Soenens, 2005). It was thought to disrupt the development of emotional autonomy by interfering with adolescents' ability to establish and express their own thoughts and feelings and by disturbing the psycho-emotional boundary between parents and their children (Barber, 1996).

Whereas parents with psychological control type of parenting would represent need thwarting behaviours, autonomy supportive parenting type would represent need supportive behaviours (Vansteenkiste & Ryan 2013). The parental autonomy support seems to be crucial especially in the period of adolescence what is considered as period of emergence of various autonomous functioning (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000; Steinberg, 1989). Parental autonomy support should be understand as active support of the child's capacity to be self-initiating and autonomous therefore youngsters should develop their own opinion and try to get their ideas across even when their parents disagree with them (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Parental autonomy support should not shift to promoting permissiveness, or neglect. Permissiveness, in fact, would reflect the opposite of parental structure while neglect would reflect the opposite of parental involvement rather than a lack of autonomy support (Chirkov, Ryan, & Sheldon, 2010).

The issue whether parental strategy will outcome in desirable child behaviour is also function of internalization of parental rules as several different personality approaches converge to suggestion that internalization of parental rules is an important determinant of the likelihood that parental rules will result in desired outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kochanska, 2002; Reitza, Dekovic, & Meijerb, 2006). Internalization is generally described as individual, active process through which external regulations is transformed into personally held values and through which they may integrate regulations into the self (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994). The Self-determination theory distinct four levels of internalized form of behavioural: (1) *Rebellion, behaviour is characterized to be* against or

rejection of parental authority following the feeling of being controlled by parental rules (e.g. children purposely act in opposite way as they are requested by parents). (2) *external regulation*, behaviour is characterized only to comply with an external demands in order to get a reward or to avoid a punishment therefore individuals may perceive pressure and control to comply with an externally imposed rules (e.g. children may follow their parents' guidelines regarding problem behaviour to avoid parental punishment); (3) *introjected regulation*, in often characterized as motivation from an internalized pressuring voice as the source of motivation for behaviour is guilt, shame or worry (Assor, Vansteenkiste, & Kaplan, 2009). For instance, adolescents may follow parental guidelines for problem behaviour domains to avoid feeling guilty about their behaviour; (4) *identified regulation*, in which person has personally identified with the importance of a behaviour and accepted it as a regulation of her own. E.g. adolescents follow parental rules regarding problem behaviour because they understand why their parents ask them to do so and because they view their behaviour as conducive to their self-endorsed goals.

Self-determination theory also propose that a lack of internalization and the behavioural problems associated with such a lack may increase controlling and decrease autonomy-supportive parenting (Grolnick, 2003). Parents usually prohibit their child from numerous types of problems behaviours by threatening to punish the child or by withdrawing privileges. Moreover, parents also use emotional type of pressure as they appeal to the child's feelings of guilt and shame or by limiting their love and acceptance when the child does not follow the rules. These types of covert control are consistent with the concept of psychological control (Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyten, Duriez, & Goossens, 2005). In contrast to controlling styles of prohibition, parents may use an autonomy-supportive style of prohibition, as they take the adolescent's frame of reference and provide a relevant and clear rationale for prohibition while also minimizing pressure (Deci et al., 1994).

We expected that adolescents in this study would be more likely to internalize their parents' rules regarding problem behaviour when they perceive their parents using an autonomy-supportive style. In other words, an autonomy-supportive style is facilitative of the process of internalization and thus would be associated with identified regulation. In contrast, we expect that adolescents in this study would be less likely to internalize parental rules when parents will use a controlling style. A controlling style of prohibition would thus foster more controlled and less internalized reasons for adopting parents' guidelines regarding problem behaviour.

In recent years the attention of research regarding family processes has been more focused to the personality of each child involved in this processes (e.g. Van Leeuwen, Mervielde, Braet, & Bosmans, 2004; Manders, Scholte, Janssen, & De Bruyn, 2006). Previously, the process of nurture was perceived as a major role of parents while now most of the researches perceived this processes as mutual interaction between parents and child. Therefore, factors on adolescent side (e.g. personality, decision making styles, internalization of rules) are important moderators and may significantly shape the effect of behavioural or psychological control from parents. The role of personality characteristic in context of parental control has been explored mostly regarding big five personality structure as the specific traits of big five were explored as moderators (Mabbe, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Van Leeuwen, 2016). However, the study by Mabbe et al. (2016) confirmed only small amount of interactions among personality traits of adolescents and psychological control by parents what indicates negative impact of psychological control – independent from personality. In our study we decided to explore personality factors as mediator of relationship among autonomy-supportive or psychological control

parenting strategy and problem behaviour. We expected that certain personality tendencies may be influenced by types of parental strategies (e.g. autonomy-supportive or psychological control strategy) and may have also influence the internalization of parental rules (Graph 1).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the association among two types of parental strategies and problem behaviour of adolescent in schools. We also expect that personality traits and rules internalization will mediate this relationship.

2. METHODS

2.1. Sample

Participants were recruited from the national project VEGA focused on parental processes in context of health risky behaviour of adolescents. The stratified data collection among 12 basic school from Slovakia was used to reach the high level of representativeness. In each school students of all 7th grades we asked to participate in this study. Students voluntarily filled out questionnaire without presence of their teachers. The final sample consisted from 580 (51.1% males; mean age = 12.51; SD = 0.59).

2.2. Measures

Problem behaviour of adolescent in school environment as outcome variable was measured by 21 items scale (e.g. "Did you take something what did not belongs to you?") as each respondent indicate the answer on first 18 items on five-point scale (*never – almost every day*) and last three items on four-point scale. The score ranges from 21 to 106 point as the higher score indicates higher level of problem behaviour. Cronbach's alpha for problem behaviour was 0.840.

Two types of parental strategies were explored:

(1) autonomy-supportive parental strategy was measured by 7 items scale (e.g. "My father/mother allows me to make decision by my own") using the Autonomy Support Scale of the Perceptions of Parents Scale (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). The score ranges from 7 to 35 points as the higher score indicates higher level of autonomy-supportive strategy. The sum score was computed separately for mother and father. Cronbach's alpha for mother/father autonomy-supportive strategy was 0.527/0.578.

(2) psychological control parental strategy was measured by 8 items scale (e.g. „My father/mother reminds me my previous mistakes whet criticizing me") using Psychological Control Scale–Youth Self-Report (Barber, 1996). The score ranges from 8 to 40 points as the higher score indicates higher level of controlling strategy. The sum score was computed separately for mother and father. Cronbach's alpha for mother/father controlling strategy was 0.747/0.721.

Internalization of parenting rules was assessed by Internalization of parental rules in the moral domain (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010) questionnaire which consist from four separate scales for (1) identification (e.g. "I understand why this rule is important for me"; (2) introjection (e.g. "I will accept this rules, otherwise I would have bad feeling from myself"); (3) external regulation (e.g. "I will keep such rules, otherwise I would lost all privileges which I have") and (4) rebellion (e.g. "I am doing exactly the opposite what my mother wants from me"). This questionnaire regards only internalization of rules provided by mother. The sum score was computed separately for mother and father. Cronbach's alphas for these scales ranges from 0.728 to 0.866.

Personality of adolescents were assessed by Children personality questionnaire (REF) a self-report personality test for children from ages 8 to 12. It can be used to measure their personal, social, and academic development and aspects of their personality that mediates performance in school and social adjustment both inside and outside the classroom. The test measures 14 dimensions of personality in children. For the purpose of this study we select three dimensions: (1) Reserved (detached, critical, cool, aloof) vs. Warm-hearted (outgoing, easy-going, participating); (2) Obedient (mild, accommodating, easily led) vs. Dominant (assertive, competitive, aggressive, stubborn); (3) Expedient (disregards rules) vs Consciousness (persevering, staid, rule-bound). Cronbach's alphas for these scales ranges from 0.620 to 0.792.

2.3. Statistical analyses

Firstly, we selected only those respondents which completely answered the questionnaire regarding problem behaviour and other explored variables. After that using regression models we explored whether types of parental strategies were associated with problem behaviour of their children and similarly we explored whether type of internalization of rules will mediate this relationship.

3. RESULTS

As it was predicated the parenting strategies were significantly associated with level of problem behaviour of adolescents. Higher autonomy-supportive strategy by mother and father was related with less problem behaviour (B = -0.124* in mothers; B = -0.147* in fathers). On the other hand, higher psychological controlling strategy by mother and father was related to higher rates of problem behaviour (B = 0.172* in mothers, B = 0.201* in fathers). Regarding personality traits, we found that Reserved- Warm-hearted trait was not significantly associated with outcome variable (B = 0.043), therefore was not used in further mediation analyses. However, traits Obedient-Dominant and Expedient-Consciousness were positively (B = 0.324***) and negatively (B = -0.298***) associated with problem behaviour. As we have been able to analyse only internalization of rules by mothers the following results – presented in four mediation models includes only parental strategy (control / autonomy) by mothers.

Mediation model (Figure 1) explored the associations among parental psychological control strategy and problem behaviour through personality domain Obedient-Dominant and rebellion (type of rules internalization). The presented overall model explained 21.9% of variance of problem behaviour and significantly predicted indirect effect of parental psychological control on problem behaviour through two mediators. However, the effect of psychological control after adding two types of mediators significantly decreased but still remains significant (B= 0.203**).

Mediation model (Figure 2) explored the associations among parental psychological control strategy and problem behaviour through personality domain Obedient-Dominant and external regulation n (type of rules internalization). The presented overall model explained 16.2% of variance of problem behaviour and significantly did not predicted indirect effect of parental psychological control on problem behaviour through mediators. The effect of psychological control after adding two types of mediators decreased but still remains as significant (B = 0.274***).

Mediation model (Figure 3) explored the associations among parental autonomy support strategy and problem behaviour through personality domain Expedient-Consciousness and introjection (type of rules internalization). The presented overall model explained 21.3% of variance of problem behaviour and significantly predicted indirect effect of parental autonomy support on problem behaviour through two mediators. However, the effect of parental autonomy support after adding two types of mediators significantly decreased but still remains significant (B= 0.215**).

Mediation model (Figure 4) explored the associations among parental autonomy support strategy and problem behaviour through personality domain Expedient-Consciousness and identification (type of rules internalization). The presented overall model explained 22.2% of variance of problem behaviour and significantly predicted indirect effect of parental autonomy support on problem behaviour through two mediators. However, the effect of parental autonomy support after adding two types of mediators significantly decreased but still remains significant (B= 0.193**).

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study confirmed important role of parental strategies in context of problem behaviour among adolescents in school behaviour. It was also found that children itself may play important role by theirs personality setting and by capacity of parental rules internalization. A further research should run a longitudinal study design, especially looking at involved family members as the maternal and paternal role could differ. These sources could increase the understanding of some inconsistencies in the field of family processes and problem behaviour research. Finally, our results are strongly dependent on the assumption of what participants say is what they did. Therefore, self-reported perception of parental strategies and problem behaviour may be vulnerable to various types of information biases, like memory effects and social desirability bias.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship among two different parental strategies (autonomy support strategy and psychological control strategy) and children problem behaviour. Also the role of personality and types of rule internalization were tested as mediators. It was that different parental strategies differently affect the problem behaviour - autonomy support strategy with negative associations and psychological control with positive associations. Moreover, we also expected specific personality traits together with rules internalization will mediate the parental strategy and problem behaviour relationship.

The results in line with other studies (Barber & Xia, 2013) confirmed that parental psychological control has increased the level of problem behaviour among adolescents. Problem behaviour was also positively associated with personality domain Obedient-Dominant and rebellion (type of rules internalization) as these two variables partially mediates the role of psychological control.

Contrary to psychological control the parents with more autonomy support strategy towards children are more likely to decrease their problem behaviour. However, this relationship was partially mediated by personality domain Expedient-Consciousness and by two types of rules internalization (identification and introjection).

In contrast to parental expectation the psychological control based on manipulative strategies such as guilt induction, disappointment, shaming, isolation, personal attacks or love withdrawal is not associated with desirable behavioural outcomes of their child. Contrary, many studies showed negative consequences of psychological control on full range of adolescents' behaviour. However, such findings should be interpreted carefully as research demonstrates discrepancies between parental reports and youth self-reports as longitudinally links between problem behaviour and psychological control emerged primarily from adolescent reports what may indicate that designate that links between behaviour and control is, in fact, in the mind of the adolescent due to a negative cognitive bias (Rogers et al., 2003).

To conclude, that results of this study point to importance of parental strategies in adolescence

period as autonomy and controlling ways of setting rules may have opposite effect on problem behaviour. Moreover, both strategies may impact the personality traits and the processes of rules internalization (identification, introjection and rebellion) which seems to be very important in this context.

Figure 1.
Mediation model predicting relationship among parental psychological control and problem behaviour through rebellion.
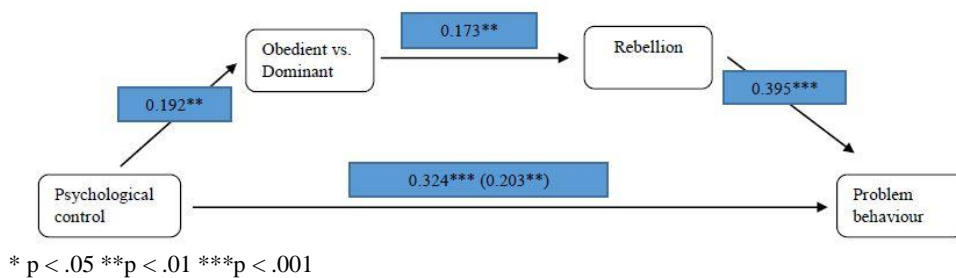

* p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Figure 2.
Mediation model predicting relationship among parental psychological control and problem behaviour through external regulation.
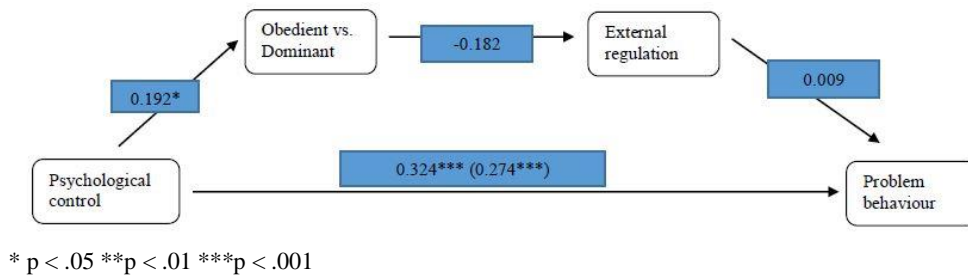

* p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Figure 3.

Mediation model predicting relationship among parental autonomy support and problem behaviour through introjection of parental rules.
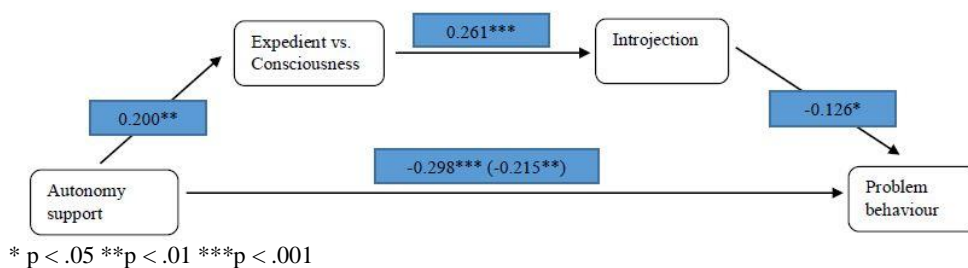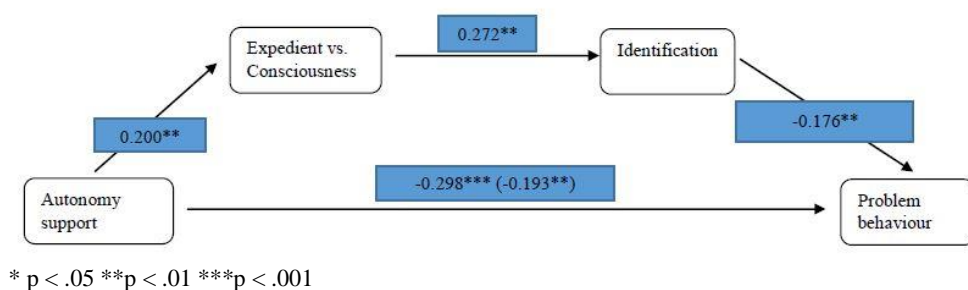

* p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Figure 4.

Mediation model predicting relationship among parental autonomy support and problem behaviour through identification with parental rules.

* p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

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