

# The Role of Parenting Practices in Shaping Externalizing Behavioural Problems: A Comprehensive Analysis

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**Abstract**—This article explores the intricate relationship between parenting practices and externalizing behavioral problems in children, focusing on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and conduct disorder (CD). Rooted in a bio-psychosocial perspective, the study investigates the influence of parental factors on the development of externalizing behaviors. It examines the impact of parenting practices on these issues. Empirical evidence reveals a strong association between negative parenting practices, such as poor supervision and harsh discipline, and the manifestation of externalizing behavioral problems. This article underscores the critical role of parental intervention, particularly through psychosocial parent training programs, in mitigating these issues. Findings suggest that positive parenting practices correlate with reduced behavioral problems, emphasizing the importance of a supportive family environment. The study concludes by highlighting the implications for social work professionals, advocating for tailored interventions, and emphasizing the interconnectedness of early childhood development with later life stages. This comprehensive analysis provides valuable insights for practitioner.

**Keywords-** Child development, Externalizing behavioural problems, Parental training, Parenting practices, Social work

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood development is of greater significance. This importance lies in its influence on an individual's later stages of life, which in turn has consequences on the future of society (Pelto et al., 1999). A comprehensive analysis of a child's development could be achieved by adopting a bio-psychosocial perspective. Parents, in particular, have a substantial influence on the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of a child's development. The biological inheritance, also known as nature, along with the internal and external environment, also known as nurture, and the interplay between these factors, collectively shape an individual's characteristics. The environment encompasses various factors such as family, neighborhood, socioeconomic level, ethnicity, and culture (Papalia et al., 2004). Inadequacy in the environment of the child restricts cognitive, social and behavioural development (Pelto et al., 1999). Environment can have direct as well as indirect influence on the child. Family is one of the immediate environments with which the child has frequent interactions. Family in turn gets influenced by other environmental factors. Characteristics in the family environment such as commitment, help, support, expressiveness, unconditional acceptance, caring, independence, involvement in planning family activities, and limit setting promote high adjustment in children, whereas conflict among family members results in negative effect (Ramaprabou, 2014). Characteristics of the child and that of the caregivers also influence child development (Pelto et al., 1999).

Considering the relevance of family in child development, this article attempts to search for the answer to the question; in what ways do parenting influence the problem behaviours in children?

### I.I. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Numerous empirical studies provide support for the relationship between parenting and child development. Holden (2015) emphasizes the significance of parenting in the different life stages of a child. The warmth from parents fosters in infants a sense of being loved and respected, as well as facilitates the development of trust. For a toddler, parenting needs to be more structured, stimulating, monitoring, and disciplining. Behavioural issues are probable in preschoolers who are exposed to various types of environmental stressors; parents can serve as a significant protective or coping mechanism for the child. During middle childhood, having a good quality relationship between the child and parents will help the parent to properly monitor the child.

There are many factors that influence parenting, one of which is the type of parenting to which the parents themselves have been exposed. It is probable that parents will adopt parental strategies that they themselves have acquired through their own socialization (Arnett, 1995). (Abidin, 1992)Belsky (1984) categorizes the determinants of parenting into parental personality and psychological well-being, child characteristics, and contextual factors including social support and stress. Parenting, an already a challenging role, becomes further challenging with the presence of difficulties in these determining factors.

Behavioural disorders in children are classified as either internalizing or externalizing. Those that are directed inward to the child are called internalizing behavioural disorders and this includes depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and somatic complaints (Liu et al., 2017). Externalizing behavioural disorders are those that are directed to the external world and include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Conduct Disorder (CD). Child behavioural problems focused in this paper are externalizing behavioural problems. According to Polanczyk et al. (2015) ADHD was identified with a worldwide prevalence rate of 3.4%, ODD exhibited a prevalence rate of 3.6%, and CD was found to have a prevalence rate of 2.1%. Externalizing behavioral issues are one of the most significant predictors of later-life mental health issues (Mazzucchelli, 2018).

The presence of externalizing behavioral disorders in children has consequences that extend beyond childhood and continue into adolescence and adulthood. Given that parents play a significant role in shaping a child's behavior, it is important to understand the association between parenting and externalizing behavioral problems. This understanding will help in designing psychosocial interventions to address these problems and minimize their long-term effects.

## **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study seeks to elucidate the correlations between parenting practices and externalizing behavioral disorders in children. This study aims to thoroughly examine and clarify the parental factors that influence children's behavior to provide valuable insights for targeted interventions. The author emphasizes the following objectives to develop this study:

- Investigate the role of parental factors in developing externalizing behavioral problems in children.
- Examine the association between parenting practices and the occurrence of externalizing behavioral problems, focusing on ADHD, ODD, and CD.
- Identify specific parenting practices, both positive and negative, linked to the emergence and maintenance of externalizing behavioural problems.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of parent training programs, in reducing externalizing behavioral problems

## **II. METHODS**

This study used a systematic literature review to investigate the impact of parental factors on externalizing behavioral problems in children. It analyzed the relationship between parenting practices and behavioral problems, and the effectiveness of parental intervention in reducing externalizing behavioral issues. Thorough integration of research findings was done, aiming to contribute to the academic discourse on parenting, externalization of behavioral issues, and intervention effectiveness.

The current paper conducted literature search with following hypotheses:

- Parental factors play a role in the development of externalizing behavioral issues.
- Parenting practices are associated with the occurrence of externalizing behavioural problems
- Parental intervention can effectively mitigate externalizing behavioral problems and induce positive modifications in parental behaviour

In order to test these hypotheses literature review was conducted. Externalizing behavioural problems and its etiology were briefed, parenting practice was defined, empirical evidences for association between parenting practices and externalizing behavioural problems as well as impact of parental intervention were analyzed.

## **III. CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW**

### **III.1. EXTERNALIZING BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS**

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is characterized by symptoms of inattention and or hyperactivity/impulsivity. According to Spaniard et al. (2017) these symptoms interfere with the social and educational functioning of the child. The risk factors for ADHD include in-utero risk factors, perinatal risk factors, certain childhood illnesses, and psychosocial adversities. Psychosocial adversities associated with ADHD include poverty, childhood maltreatment, negative parenting, and family discord. ADHD in childhood can result in impairment in adolescence and adulthood.

According to Connor, F. (2017) conduct disorders and oppositional defiant disorder are characterized by difficulties regulating one's emotions and behavior, which manifest as confrontations with authority figures. In the early phases, ODD manifests most notably towards parents; as the disorder progresses, its influence extends to authority figures within the school and community. The interplay between the biological as well as environmental risk and protective factors explains the etiology of ODD. The important sociological risk factors of ODD includes poor family cohesion, family discord, inconsistent discipline practices, poor parental monitoring of the child's whereabouts, family stress, and poverty.

The comorbid conditions in childhood ADHD includes ODD, CD, anxiety, mood disorders, tics or Tourette syndrome, learning disorder and autism spectrum disorders (Spaniard et al., 2017). In ODD comorbidity as well as risk for developing certain psychiatric disorders such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, ADHD, substance use disorder and antisocial personality disorders are observed (Connor, 2017). Comorbidities of CD include ADHD, bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety and substance use disorder (Connor, 2017). Presence of CD and ADHD together shows worse prognosis than having each disorder alone. It is estimated that 40 percent of the adolescents with conduct disorder will eventually progress to antisocial personality disorder (Connor, 2017)

### **III.II. PARENTING STYLE AND PARENTING PRACTICE**

Parenting style can be defined as the “constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which the parent’s behaviours are expressed” (Darling and Steinberg,1993 p. 488). Baumrind classified parenting styles into authoritarian, authoritative and permissive based on the dimensions of parental support and behavioural control. Parenting practices are “behaviours defined by specific content and socialization goals” (Darling and Steinberg,1993 p. 493). Parenting practices can be positive or negative. Positive parenting includes warmth, involvement with the child, and reinforcement of desirable behaviour whereas negative parenting includes harsh, inconsistent discipline (Pauli et al., 2021). “Parenting style differs from parenting practices in that it describes parent-child interactions across a wide range of situations, whereas practices are by definition domain specific” (Darling and Steinberg,1993 p. 493). Parenting practices has direct influence on the development of specific child behaviours whereas parenting style has an indirect effect by moderating the relationship between parenting practice and child outcome (Darling and Steinberg,1993).

This role of parenting style takes place by way of influencing factors such as the nature of parent-child interaction and child’s personality (Darling and Steinberg,1993).

### **III.III. PARENTING PRACTICE AND EXTERNALIZING BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS**

There are many evidences suggesting the relationship between parenting practice and externalizing behavioural problems. According to Connor (2017), oppositional behaviours in children are perceived to be learned, exacerbated and maintained by the maladaptive interactions between parents and children. Lack of parental supervision, coercive family practices, harsh or inconsistent discipline and domestic violence in families will cause the normative ODD behaviours in infancy and early childhood such as oppositional, fussy, irritable, temper tantrums, fight with peers or siblings, conflict with parents to increase in aggression and antisocial behaviour in middle childhood. This will result in associating with deviant peer group resulting in adolescent conduct problems and high probability of poor adjustment in young adulthood. Positive reinforcement is found to be associated with reduction in the symptoms of ODD (Pauli-Pott et al., 2021). Increase in the use of negative parenting practices is found to be associated with increase in the conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and total difficulties of the child (Ahmed et al., 2021). Positive parenting practices had been associated with social skills whereas negative parenting practices with behavioural problems in children (Bolsoni-Silva & Loureiro, 2020). Corporal punishment was found to have association with externalizing behavioural problems in children (Bravo et al., 2023). Parental stress was found to have partial mediation role between parental ADHD and parenting-practice (Ros-DeMarize et al., 2022).

Child behavioural problems are shown to influence parents and parenting. Externalizing behavioural problems has effect on parenting over time (Gadeyne et al., 2004), coercive parenting (Deault, 2010), chaos in family (Deater-Deckard et al., 2009), parent’s quality of life, daily activities, family relationships (Cappe et al., 2017).

One of the important variables which have association with parenting practice is maternal depression. Maternal depression predicted marital relationship, parenting practices, children's problem behaviour as well as social skills, and comorbidities (Bolsoni-Silva & Loureiro, 2020). Maternal depression was directly related to behavioural problems whereas it was inversely related to social skills in children (Bolsoni-Silva & Loureiro, 2020). Maternal depression has direct relation with negative marital relationship which in turn is associated with behavioural problems in children (Bolsoni-Silva & Loureiro, 2020). Mother's exposure to childhood maltreatment showed association with externalizing as well as internalizing behavioural problems in children (Bravo et al., 2023, Harris et al, 2023 ). According to the study conducted by Harris et al.( 2023), maternal depression plays a mediating role in the relationship between maternal childhood maltreatment and behavioural problems in children.

There was association between maternal childhood maltreatment and negative parenting practice measured in the dimensions of sensitivity, structuring, non-intrusiveness, and non- hostility (Harris et al., 2003).

### **III.IV. PARENTAL TRAINING IN EXTERNALIZING BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS**

Parent training is one of the psychosocial interventions which has shown efficacy in the treatment of externalizing behavioural disorders (Scott, 2022). Parent training programs aim to promote parenting practices which in turn is found to be effective in behaviour of the child. Parental training is one of the psychosocial interventions in the treatment of children with ADHD. In ODD, the treatment approach is mainly psychosocial learning based parent training model of behavioural intervention (Connor, 2017). According to Connor (2017) for children with CD, multimodal intervention is found to be successful. Among this, parental intervention focuses on reducing coercive process in family, inconsistent discipline, poor monitoring and also giving positive feedback for the child.

In parent training, parents are taught the behavioural principles through which they are enabled to modify their approach in parenting resulting in the decrease of undesirable child behaviour and increase in desirable child behaviour. These programs generally includes promoting skills in parenting such as supervision, positive reinforcement, non-aggressive limit setting, improving child-parent relationship, and age appropriate approach with the child (Beelmann et al, 2023). Studies on parent training program reveal that it is effective in increasing parenting self-efficacy, decreasing parenting stress (Health et al., 2015), improvement in positive parenting, reduction in harsh parenting (Lessard et al., 2016), reducing inconsistency in the use of disciplinary practices (Larsson et al., 2009), reduction in child conduct problems (Leijten et al., 2017), reduction in parental stress, improvement in child-parent relationship (Beelmann et al., 2023).

Including psychosocial interventions to support family as well as the emotional issues of parents was found to be effective in having long term effect(Chronis et al., 2004). Attachment and emotion focused parenting intervention, mindfulness based parenting programs are some of the other parent training programs which are found to be effective for improvement in parenting as well as child behavioural problem (Donovan et al., 2022; Jugovac et al., 2022)

In a study conducted by Nair et al.(2009)among mothers of Kerala, it was observed that the disciplinary practices adopted by most of the parents are verbal and physical abuse. The study emphasizes the importance of family intervention programs with focus on positive disciplining practice.

### **IV. FINDINGS**

The review of literature led to the following findings. Parenting is one of the significant psychosocial factors contributing to externalizing behavioural problems such as ADHD, ODD and CD. Comorbidity in externalizing behavioural problems is very high. ADHD, ODD and CD in childhood have the risk for developing disorders/impairments in adolescents and adulthood. Parenting practices such as poor parental supervision, harsh disciplining, corporal punishment, inconsistency in disciplining are found to be associated with externalizing behavioural problems. Coercive family interactions and domestic violence in family are found to be associated with externalizing behavioural problems. Positive parenting practices such as use of reinforcement is associated with reduction in externalizing behavioural problems. Child behavioural problems can have effect on the family by influencing the parenting practices, quality of life of parents, daily activities in the family and family relationships. Maternal depression influences parenting practices as well as child behaviour. Multimodal intervention is found to be effective in externalizing behavioural problems. Parental intervention is found to increase parental self-efficacy, decrease parental stress, improves child-parent relationship, improves positive parenting, reduce harsh disciplining, reduce inconsistency in disciplining, and reduce externalizing behavioural problems.

### **V. CONCLUSION**

The article highlights that parenting practice is associated with externalizing behavioural problems and intervention in parenting results in the modification of parental behaviour thus bringing about reduction in externalizing behavioural problems.

Social work profession adopts a 'person in environment' approach. As there is interconnectedness and interdependencies between the different parts of a person's environment, change in one part affects all the other parts. The current paper discusses that early childhood development has influence on the further life stages of an individual and family, especially, parents play an important role in the child development. The parenting practices adopted by parents have influence on the externalizing behavioural problems of children and parental training is one of the interventions for the treatment of externalizing behavioural problems. Social work methods of case work and group work could be applied in the intervention of families of children with behavioural problems. In case work approach, indepth understanding of the situation and intervention appropriate to the specific needs of the family could be applied. In group work, psychoeducation, skills training and mutual learning could be taken place by forming a homogenous group of parents of children with externalizing behavioural problems.

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