

Adolescent Problem Behaviour: Role of Family Functioning and Interpersonal Relationships

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Abstract

Adolescents' problem behaviour is a constellation of interrelated unconventional behaviour and is experienced as troublesome by adults. The present study assesses the association of adolescents' problem behaviour with family functioning and interpersonal relationships. The sample comprised 100 participants (50 boys and 50 girls) with age range from 12-18 years from Patiala District (Punjab). The participants were assessed by Child-Behaviour Checklist, family environment scale and clinical assessment of interpersonal relations. Results showed significant negative correlation of problem behaviour with control, father relationship and teacher relationship but conflict showed positive and significant relationship with it. Regression analysis indicated that family functioning and interpersonal relationship as social correlates significantly predict problem behaviour with grouping of internalizing and externalizing problems. Further, implications for the present study were discussed.

Key Words: *Problem behaviour, family functioning, interpersonal relationship.*

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Introduction

Adolescence is a time of change, exploration exuberance, and youth searching. It is also time of worry and problems, especially in today's world. Adolescence being a challenging and stressful transition stage of development, likely to increase the vulnerability to problem behaviour among adolescents, at least for some individuals. Adolescents are at high risk for the development of problem behaviors that are distressing and socially disruptive (Bartlett, Holditch-Davis, & Belyea, 2005; Brooks, 1997). When an individual's behaviour is atypical for a particular age and leads to poor adjustment it may be justly considered as "Problem behaviour". Problem behaviour in children and adolescents are those that are experienced as troublesome by adults (such as parents & teachers) or, are known to disrupt normative social development to be judged relative to the age of the child. When a child's behavioural difficulties are prolonged, extreme and

potentially harmful or dangerous this may be a sign that the child is at risk of, or is displaying behavioural disorders.

Behaviour problems in early childhood have been associated with a variety of difficulties later in life, including poor academic achievement, inhibition problems, antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, crime, and psychopathology. Many of these problems are not only difficult for the individual to deal with, but also impact society in terms of decreased productivity, damaged property, and increased costs associated with involvement in the justice system. Given these negative outcomes, it is important to intervene as early as possible, and empirical evidence supports the notion that earlier interventions are more likely to succeed. The most frequent problems in children and adolescents can be categorized in two broad categories: Internalizing and Externalizing. Internalizing refers to feelings of anxiety and depression, while externalizing reflects disruptive, aggressive and antisocial behaviour.

Family functioning is an important aspect of family environment that influences the physical, social and emotional well being of children. Family functioning is defined as the capacity of the family system to meet the needs of its members through developmental transitions or interactions with family members that involve physical, emotional and psychological activities. Families are considered the hub of well being, and how they function is crucial. While there is no single definition, it is generally agreed that family functioning is about how family members communicate, relate and maintain relationships and how they make decisions and solve problems (Silburn et al, 2006; Zubrick, Williams, Silburn & Vimpani, 2000). Family plays an important role in the development and maintenance of psychopathology in adolescents. Family factors are important for explaining the origins of the behaviour problems in youth. Good family functioning is generally associated with good outcomes for children. There has been a growing interest in how variations in family process may be differentially related to emotional and behavioural problems. Hadeley et al., (1993) reported that the degree of family dysfunctioning was significantly related to internalized shame, object relation deficits, presence of addiction, and emotional problems. Family functioning is a dynamic concept relating to the way family members interact and carry out tasks. More specifically, it is the process of fulfilling activities which contribute to the maintenance of the family unit and the well being of its members.

Interpersonal relationships are a driving force in our lives. An interpersonal relationship is a social association, connection, or affiliation between two or more people. Interpersonal relations is defined as the unique and relatively stable behavioural pattern that exists or develops between two or more people as a result of

individual and extra individual influences. Interpersonal relations show a relationship orientation of adolescents with parents (mother relation and father relation) and extra familial relationships (male peer relation, female peer relation and teacher). The quality of the relationship between adolescents and their peers as well as the type of peers they associate with, play important roles in aiding or impeding their current and future functioning. Interpersonal relations might be the single most important predictor or reflection of overall social emotional adjustment in children, adolescents and adults.

It is well known that by early adolescents, peer groups have a significant influence on children's behaviour. Children and adolescents who have difficulty forming and maintaining successful peer relations are often characterized by a number of both externalizing and internalizing behavioural problems. Research indicates that adolescents having good interpersonal relationships with their parents have high self-esteem than adolescents having poor relationships with their parents (Gecas & Shwalbe, 1986; Kernis et al., 2000). Failure to develop close relationships with agemates, however, often results in a variety of problem for adolescents – from delinquency and substance abuse to psychological disorders (Hopes, Davis, Alpert & Longoria, 1997). Children and adolescents experiencing difficulties with mental health also tend to have problems with physical health, relationships with family members and peers as well as with functioning at school (Jane-Lopis & Braddick, 2008).

Most of the mental health problems and disorders usually take their start in childhood and adolescence and significant mental health problems among adolescence require mental health services each year. As the number of children experiencing internalizing and externalizing problems continues to rise, further

research is needed to identify the correlates of such problems. There has been a growing interest in how variations in family process may be differently related to emotional and behavioural problems in adolescents. Human beings are strongly predisposed to be affected by the quality and nature of their interpersonal relationships. Family plays an important role in the development and maintenance of psychopathology in children and family factors are particularly important for explaining the origins of behaviour problems in youth. As adolescents grow older, their social networks expand and the frequency of their interactions with non familial individuals becomes very large segment of their social network. Peer relations are central to adolescent life and, therefore are crucial to understanding adolescent's engagement in various behaviours. Failure to develop close relationships with age mates, however, often results in a variety of problems for adolescents. The current study attempts to investigate the social correlates of problem behaviour with focus on family functioning and interpersonal relationships of adolescents.

Objectives:-

1. To determine the relationship between family functioning and problem behaviour among adolescents.
2. To examine the dimensions of interpersonal relationship with problem behaviour
3. To assess the relative contribution of social factors in predicting variance in problem behaviour among adolescents.

Hypotheses:-

1. (a) Cohesion & expressiveness in family functioning would be negatively related while conflict would be positively related with problem behaviour.

(b) System maintenance in family functioning would be negatively related with problem behaviour.

2. The quality of interpersonal relationship would be negatively related with problem behaviour.
3. Social factors would be the significant predictors of problem behaviour among adolescents.

Method

Participants

Participants for the study were 100 adolescents (50 boys and 50 girls) randomly selected from co-educational public schools in Patiala District(Punjab) within the age range of 12- 18yrs.

Measures

Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001):- The CBCL obtains report from parents, other close relatives, and /or guardians regarding children's competencies and behavioural/emotional problems. The CBCL has 113 items that describe specific behavioural and emotional problems, plus two open –ended items for reporting additional problems. Parents rate their child for how true each item is now or within the past 6months using the following scale: 0 –not true, 1- somewhat or sometimes true, and 2- very true or often true. The range of internal consistency is 0.78 to 0.97.

Family Environment Scale (Third Edition) (B.S. Moos & R.H. Moos, 1994)

The Family Environment Scale (B.S. Moos & R.H. Moos, 1994) is one of ten Social Climate scales published by its primary author. The scale comprises 90 true-false items and was designed to assess three dimensions of family environment viz. a relationship dimension, a personal growth dimension, and a system maintenance dimension ,thus encompassing ten subscales in all.

Clinical Assessment of Interpersonal Relations (Bracken, B.A., 1993)

The CAIR assessment of interpersonal relations in its five scales/dimensions-mother, father, male peer, female peer and teachers of individuals between 9-19 years. The scale is self administered and having 35 items repeated on each of five scales. The scale demonstrates technical adequacy with reliabilities well above .90 for each of the five scales as well as the total relationship index (TRI).

Data Analysis:-

The data collected were analyzed using correlation coefficient and stepwise regression to find out the relative strength of each of the dimension of family environment and interpersonal relationship in the prediction of adolescent's problem behaviour.

male peer relationship and total interpersonal relationship. Externalizing behaviour showed significant negative correlation with cohesion, control and total interpersonal relationship, but positively and significantly correlated with conflict. Father relationship, female peer relationship and teacher relationship all were negatively and significantly correlated with mixed syndromes. For the total problem behaviour control ($r = -0.24$, $P < 0.05$), father relationship ($r = -0.23$, $P < 0.05$), teacher relationship ($r = -0.25$, $P < 0.01$) and total interpersonal relationship ($r = -0.25$, $P < 0.01$) were significantly and negatively correlated but conflict ($r = 0.22$, $P < 0.05$) showed positive and significant correlation with it.

Table 1:- Correlations for all the variables in the study

Variables	Internalizing	Externalizing	Mixed Syndromes	Total PB
Cohesion	-0.05	-0.21*	0.10	-0.07
Expressiveness	-0.13	-0.04	-0.08	-0.10
Conflict	0.17	0.27**	0.10	0.22*
Organization	-0.10	-0.13	-0.11	-0.14
Control	-0.23*	-0.24*	-0.13	-0.24*
Mother Relation	-0.11	-0.19	-0.09	-0.16
Father Relation	-0.14	-0.12	-0.25**	-0.23*
Male peer Relation	-0.33**	0.03	-0.05	-0.12
Female peer Relation	0.17	-0.09	-0.20*	-0.11
Teacher Relation	-0.16	-0.15	-0.25**	-0.25**
Total IR	-0.24*	-0.20*	-0.14	-0.25**

Results And Discussion

The present study examined the association of adolescent's problem behaviour with family functioning and interpersonal relationship. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlations were computed for a sample of 100 adolescents (50 girls and 50 boys) and their significance was checked. It is very clear from Table 1 that internalizing behaviour showed significant negative correlation with control,

Note: PB= Problem Behaviour, IR= Interpersonal Relationship * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the amount of variance in the dependent variable (Problem behaviour) that could be accounted for by the different variables (family functioning, interpersonal relationships) and the impact of each independent variable in the prediction of the dependent variable. In order to delineate the

variables significantly contributing towards the dependent variable, F-ratios were calculated and the level of significance was checked. The results of regression analyses and the F-ratios are presented in Table 2.

The results for stepwise multiple regression analyses revealed that male peer relation (11%) and teacher relation (4%) together accounted for 15% of the variance in internalizing problems. In case of externalizing problems the results revealed that 15% of the variance was being explained by conflict, cohesion, control, total interpersonal relationship and male peer relation, in which conflict (7%) and cohesion (4%) significantly predict the variance with 11%. Hornor (2005) reported that children and adolescents exhibited a high rate of behaviour problems, particularly when they are witnesses or sufferers of conflicts in a family atmosphere. The relationship between the teacher and student particularly during adolescent is very important. Positive student-teacher relationships involving students with high incidence disabilities have a positive effect on conduct problems, delinquency, anxiety and depression (Murray, C. & Greenberg M.T, 2006) and Students who perceive their teachers as highly supportive have better attendance and avoid problem behaviour (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Brown, 2000).

Table 2:- Regression analysis of problem behaviour with family functioning and interpersonal relationships.

Dependent Variables	Predictors	R	R ²	R ² change	F change
Internalizing	Male peer Relation	0.33	0.11	0.11	11.75 **
	Teacher Relation	0.38	0.14	0.04	4.16 **
	Conflict	0.40	0.16	0.02	2.13
Externalizing	Conflict	0.27	0.07	0.07	7.85 **
	Cohesion	0.33	0.11	0.04	3.97 **
	Control	0.36	0.13	0.02	1.97
	Total IR	0.37	0.14	0.01	0.09
	Male peer Relation	0.39	0.15	0.01	1.60
Mixed Syndromes	Teacher	0.25	0.06	0.06	6.35 **
	Female peer Relation	0.32	0.11	0.04	4.91 **
	Father Relation	0.38	0.15	0.04	4.99 **
	Cohesion	0.41	0.17	0.02	2.73
	Control	0.43	0.190	0.02	2.13
Total Problem Behavior	Total IR	0.25	0.06	0.06	6.66 **
	Female peer Relation	0.34	0.11	0.05	5.94 **
	Control	0.38	0.15	0.03	3.25
	Conflict	0.40	0.16	0.01	1.60

Note: PB= Problem Behaviour, FE= Family Environment, IR= Interpersonal Relationship

Further, results revealed that for mixed syndromes teacher relation, female peer relation and father relation is significantly contributing with 14% of variance. Moreover, total interpersonal relationship (6%) and female peer relation (5%) together accounted 11% of significant variance in total problem behaviour.

Adolescents who have difficulty forming and maintaining successful peer relations are often characterized by a number of both externalizing and internalizing behavioural problems.

Research indicated that peer relationships are important for psychological health and adjustment in adolescence (Rice &

Dolgin, 2002). As shown by Lansford, Criss, Petti, Dodge, & Bates (2003), positive relations with peers may even moderate the relation between negative parenting and adolescents' negative behaviour. Family plays an important role in the development and maintenance of psychopathology in children and family factors such as, poor parental monitoring, disorganized family management strategies & ineffective parenting practices are particularly important for explaining the origins of behaviour problems. Weisman & Jenson (2002) reported that family relationship variables of high discord, low cohesion and less control were all predictors of child psychopathology with incidences of depression and anxiety.

Significance of the present research finding can be understood in the fact that development of problem behaviour (Externalizing & Internalizing) among adolescents is related to number of risk factors. These factors range from individual risk factors to family influences. The current line of research can be seen as a step forward in grasping the multitude of influences & consequences concerning adolescent problem behaviour with focus on proposition of the family-based and self-based approaches in an integrative manner. The present findings indicate that social (Family Functioning & Interpersonal Relationship) correlates exert effects on internalizing and externalizing problems, suggest that interventions for clinically referred adolescents should target both the individual adolescent and his/her family.

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