

Risk factors contributing children behavior problem



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Child behaviors become problematic and these affect not only the family, but also in social and academic functioning. As working in a low-banding secondary school in Hong Kong, I have found a lot of students who are burdened with different behavior problems. These externalizing behaviors affect not only their academic achievement, but also their relationships with teachers, peers, and family, but further disrupt their future. Early intervention is essential to prevent progressive decline in children's behavior. The principal goal for this review is to investigate different risk factors that contribute in child behavior problem.

Child Behavior Problem

Children's behavior problems are divided into two major dimensions, they are internalizing and externalizing expressions (Henricson & Rydell, 2006). Externalizing problems are behaviors that being harmful, disruptive, and impulsive. These behaviors are mostly stable and usually associated with long term negative outcomes (Henricson & Rydell, 2006). Internalized problems are signified by emotions and moods. These symptoms are usually less consistent and cannot predict outcomes (Henricson & Rydell, 2006).

According to Achenbach's Child Behavior Checklist, children's behaviors are identified into different syndromes. " Syndromes" refers to problems that tend to occur together. The eight syndromes that Achenbach had identified are Withdrawn, Somatic Complaints, Anxious/Depressed, Social Problems, Thought Problems, Attention Problems, Delinquent Behavior, and Aggressive Behavior. Five of the eight syndromes are grouped into Internalized and Externalized Behavior Problems (Achenbach, 1991).

“ Internalizing” is also called “ Personality Problems” and “ Inhibition”. Three syndromes, Withdrawn, Somatic Complaints, and Anxious/Depressed, are grouped under this heading. This group reflects children’s emotional problems (Achenbach, 1991). “ Externalizing” is variously called “ Conduct Problems” and “ Aggression”. Two syndromes, Delinquent Behavior and Aggressive Behavior, are grouped under this heading. This group shows children’s behavioral problems (Achenbach, 1991). Aggression is defined as acts that impose harm on others (Aylward, 2003). Aggressive Behavior is under the grouping of Externalizing (Achenbach, 1991). Externalized aggressive behaviors are stable and are associated with long term negative outcomes (Henricson & Rydell, 2006).

Risk Factors

There are different risks factors that lead to children behavior problem, including children’s personal factors, risks from school, parents’ marital relationship, parent-child relationship, and parenting and discipline style.

Child’s Personal Factors

Stacks (2005) conceptualized risk factors for externalizing behavior by using ecological framework. Children’s temperament, developmental problems, and gender determine the severity of initial behavior problems. Personal factors, such as genetic factors, cognitive deficit, and hyperactive, also plays an important role in affecting children’s behavior. Children who have behavior problems tend to have cognitive deficit, they are lower problem solving skills (Pettit, 2004).

Research shows that depressive symptoms predict antisocial behavior (Vieno, Kiesner, Pastore, & Santinello, 2008). The correlations between depressed symptoms and behavioral problems were significant. This finding was also consistent with past studies by Patterson et al.(1992) and Beyers & Loeber (2003). However the study suggested that the impacts of depressive symptoms to antisocial behavior occur within relatively short period of time (Vieno, Kiesner, Pastore, & Santinello, 2008).

Risks from School

The quality school environment also plays important role in affecting predict behavior because many children spend most of the time at schools (Stacks, 2005). Studies also showed that conflictual teacher-child relationships and teachers' negative responses are associated with children behavioral problems (Stacks, 2005). Pettit (2004) highlighted different risk factors for children antisocial behavior, including poor peer relationships and school failure. These factors cumulate to higher the risk of violent behavior, which was brought from early childhood to adolescent (Pettit, 2004).

Parents' Marital Relationship

Children react to marital conflicts more negatively than other forms of family difficulties, and as a result, marital conflict is a predictor of children's difficulties (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Graham, 2002). It was said that marital conflict impacts children's adjustment problems. These conflicts between parents consistently associated with externalized behavioral problems of children. These problems further influence children's intellectual and academic achievements (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Graham, 2002).

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Research also showed that children who experienced parents' divorce are at higher risks of behavior problems (Stacks, 2005). Moreover, overt marital conflicts of parents were significantly risk predictors to youth maladjustment problems (Garard & Buehler, 1999).

Parent-Child relationship

The parent-child relationship also plays an important role in influencing child development. The origin and developmental dynamics of antisocial behavior are said to be children's early insecurity (Kochanska, Barry, Stellern, & O'Bleness, 2009). Parental power assertion and resentful opposition lead to the insecurity of children. Poor parent-child relationship has shown impacts on children's future antisocial behavior (Kochanska, Barry, Stellern, & O'Bleness, 2009).

Parenting Style & Discipline

Prevatt (2003) claimed that family risk and negative practices are highly predictive to children's disruptive behavior and emotional adaptation.

Negative family factors, such as inadequate parental involvement and poor parenting, primarily accounts for externalizing behavior (Prevatt, 2003).

Dishion and Bullock (2002) also suggested that parenting practices plays an important role in children's problem behavior. Both coercive limit-setting and poor monitoring are having direct influences on child negative behavioral outcome.

Externalized behavior, such as outer-directed aggressive behavior, is one of the main indicators of maladjustment (Garard & Buehler, 1999). There are

three important correlates of youth maladjustment are repeatedly exposure to hostile and poor parenting. The poor parenting environment and the use of hostile are influencing risk factors to youth by showing negative interaction patterns within the family (Garard & Buehler, 1999).

Research shows that parenting put impacts on the development of disruptive behavior (Stacks, 2005). Parental warmth, responsiveness, and consistent limit setting are important to children's development. Negative family interactions and functioning bring about aggression and violence to children's behavior. Children who experienced violence directly are said to be in higher risks for externalizing behavior. These violent experiences include corporal punishment and physical abuse (Stacks, 2005).

Childhood and developmental outcomes are associated with mild and harsh parental physical discipline (Lansford et al., 2009). Social context and family system leads to developmental consequences to children. Children's externalizing behaviors are found to be associated with parents' use of physical corporal discipline (Lansford et al., 2009). Lansford et al. (2009) also suggested that the antisocial behavior resulted from negative discipline may continue in later development.

Corporal physical discipline in early childhood is related to increase in children's behavior problems which would more likely to show in later years (Alink et al., 2009). Children learn to be aggressive through social learning theory (Bandura, 1973), they are also reinforced to use negative behavior to get parents' attention (Alink et al., 2009)

Conclusion

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Externalizing behaviors have great consequences to children's eventual developmental pathway in their future. Research over the years has tried to determine how different factors contribute in deviant children behavior.

Many factors can be added to the risks for externalizing antisocial behavior.

Not only personal factors, risks from school, but also family factors, such as parenting style, parent-child relationship, parents' marital relationship are also very influencing factors on child behavior problems. In sum, negative parenting is evitable in enabling poor child behavior, it is worthwhile to go into the family context and study the effect of parenting style to children behavior problem.