

# A review of the 2013 paper by tochilovsky, arnold, and baker on gender and ethica...

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The study being reviewed was conducted in 2013 by Marianne H. Tichovolsky, David H. Arnold and Courtney N. Baker, three accomplished professionals and academics specialised in child and adolescent psychology, family medicine and prevention / intervention programmes respectively.

From a structural viewpoint, the journal article is divided into four main sections, i. e. an Abstract, an untitled Introduction, a Method section and a Discussion part which illustrates the study's findings and summarises its most significant results. The article lacks a Conclusion, which would have made it easier for readers to locate and appreciate the evidence accumulated throughout the paper. However, the Discussion section summarises all the relationships investigated by the authors in a While the authors' observations, chosen methodology and findings are presented in a perfectly understandable and concise way, the article is clearly meant for an audience that is familiar with basic psychological concepts and theories. The authors' writing style is expository, in the sense that their main goal is to represent all sides of the phenomenon being analysed, and illustrate their findings in an objective manner – taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of their chosen methodological approach. The study's goals are certainly ambitious, as not only did the authors investigate the impact of ineffective discipline, single parenthood, parent involvement, social support and parent support on pre-schoolers' behavioural issues, they also meant to determine whether and to what extent child gender and ethnicity interfered with the effects of the aforementioned variables on children's behavioural problems.

With society becoming increasingly multicultural and nuclear families (i. e. traditional families consisting of a mother, a father and at least one child) becoming less common each day, all of the themes covered in the study are certainly interesting and highly relevant. The reason behind the authors' decision to explore the factors that trigger children's behaviour problem is that even though psychological research has demonstrated that aggressive, non-compliant and anti-social behaviour is very common among toddlers and pre-schoolers, we still do not know what factors predict such behaviour. Considering that the aforementioned issues can cause children to experience a variety of difficulties as they grow up, it is crucial that more emphasis should be placed on their causes in order for experts to be able to develop effective intervention and prevention programmes.

In order to provide readers with a general understanding of the existing body of literature concerning children's behaviour problems, the authors began by reviewing a number of previous studies which have explored the relationship between each of their chosen variables, i. e. discipline, social support, parenthood, parent involvement and parent support, and various behaviour problems. From an analysis of the diverse materials cited in the journal article being reviewed, it emerged that the authors did not misinterpret or misrepresent the work of other researchers. It is also worth pointing out that all external sources are accurately referenced, which adds to the study's credibility and solidity. Even though the article lacks an explicit Literature Review section, the authors dedicated the first two pages to presenting other researchers' findings and conclusions. These pages serve two main purposes: on the one hand, they provide readers with valuable background

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information about the research topic and variables chosen by the authors; on the other hand, they highlight the limitations and weaknesses of previous studies, thus making it clear that the authors' goal is to address a serious gap in the existing body of literature.

As explained in the “ Methods” section, 129 pre-schoolers, their parents (129 individuals) and teachers (36 individuals) took part in the study. Considering that pre-schoolers spend a considerable amount of time at school, the authors' decision to involve both parents and teachers allowed them to analyse children's behaviour from two different points of view, thus collecting much more reliable and accurate data. The sample consisted of children from both advantaged and disadvantaged families; as far as ethnicity is concerned, the study involved African American, Puerto Rican, European American and mixed race children.

On the basis of the findings produced by previous researchers, the authors identified a number of hypotheses which they sought to test through the study being reviewed. These are:

When parents overreact or are too relaxed when it comes to discipline, their children's behaviour problems tend to get worse. Moreover, the authors aimed to determine whether gender and ethnicity had any impact on the relationship between discipline style and children's behaviour problems.

Single parenthood brings a series of consequences, such as increased stress and less time available to focus on children's problems, which are likely to result in externalising issues.

When parents are involved into their children's problems are willing to support them, their children's behaviour problems tend to weaken with the passage of time.

When parents suffer from prolonged depression, their children's behaviour problems are likely to persist for a long time.

Since the authors were unable to find previous evidence concerning the moderating effect of gender on children's behaviour problems, they thought it would be appropriate to take gender into consideration so as to be able to identify any noteworthy patterns. From a methodological perspective, different measures were used to explore each variable; parent discipline was assessed using the so-called Parenting Scale, i. e. a self-report survey consisting of 30 items whose main purpose is to help assess the effectiveness of parents' discipline techniques. Single parenthood was relatively easy to investigate as all parents had to do was fill out a demographic questionnaire at the beginning of the study. Similarly to parent discipline, parent support was also measured through a self-report scale known as the Social Support Appraisals Scale, which helped the authors determine whether and to what extent parents felt supported by the people in their lives; later on, parents were administered the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, a shorter self-report survey. Parent involvement was evaluated by asking teachers to fill out a modified version of the Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire, a questionnaire consisting of ten questions whose main purpose is to assess parents' involvement in their children's school activities and willingness to communicate with their

teachers. Parents' depressive symptoms were identified through the Brief Symptom Inventory, a highly effective and reliable tool that allows respondents to assign scores to a number of depressive symptoms, such as feeling blue and not interested in anything, to name but a few.

Various aspects of children's behaviour was evaluated using the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory – a rating scale that helps investigate children's externalising attitudes -, and the Eyberg intensity factor, which reveals how frequently observed behaviour problems occur. Teachers were administered a particularly detailed survey consisting of over 100 items, all of which were meant to produce an accurate profile of each participating child's behaviour. Finally, children's behaviour was observed by a team of researchers and analysts through relatively short video recordings – the average duration was 41 minutes. In order to process the abundant amount of unstructured data emerged from the video recordings, the researchers identified a number of recurring coding categories, such as absent behaviour, present behaviour and misbehaviour.

The relationship between each variable and three the aforementioned measures of behaviour issues was examined by conducting eighteen regression analyses. At first, the impact of child gender as a moderator was taken into consideration; then, the effect of ethnicity was investigated. The authors' decision to employ Hierarchical Linear Modeling to make sense of the data they collected clearly resulted from careful consideration, as unlike change scores, this technique makes it possible for observers to gain a better understanding of how children nest within the classroom and

highlights significant behavioural changes. From their results, it emerged that families' income level affects children's behaviour much more strongly than ethnicity and gender. Specifically, the authors found that 37% of participating children had single, economically disadvantaged parents. Most of these children were either Puerto Rican or African American. Their parents turned out to be a lot less involved in their children's school activities than European American parents who were not economically disadvantaged. The fact that parents and teachers' reports were very similar adds to the credibility of Tichovolsky, Arnold & Baker's study, as this suggests that most participating adults were truly committed to the research and did their best to represent facts in an accurate way. At this point, it should be noted that misrepresentation and underrepresentation are among the main weaknesses associated with self-report studies, as participants may either exaggerate or belittle the severity / intensity of their symptoms or experiences as a result of shame, poor memory, fear of being judged, as well as many other factors. Consequently, the fact that teachers and parents produced similar accounts of participating children's behaviour indicates that the data gathered by the authors portray facts in a reliable manner.

Comparing the data collected at T1 and T2, the authors observed that most children's behaviour did not change in a way that was statistically significant. Nevertheless, between 12 and 29% of participating children did exhibit behaviour changes are the authors thought were worth mentioning. Overall, the study revealed that:

- discipline is not a predictor of behaviour problems

- single parenthood is a mild predictor, as single parents' children's problems decreased less than those of partnered parents' children
- based on teachers' reports, social support contributed to weakening boys' behaviour problems much more than girls' behaviour problems
- based on parents' reports, parent involvement is a predictor of behaviour problems for both boys and girls. As parent involvement increased, children's behaviour problems decreased
- based on parents' reports, parent depression has a stronger impact on girls' behaviour problems than boys' behaviour problems. As parents' depressive symptoms decreased, girls' behaviour problems also decreased
- based on teachers' reports, a lax approach to discipline increased Puerto Rican children's behaviour problems and decreased European American children's behaviour problems
- based on parents' reports, single parenthood increased African American and Puerto Rican children's behaviour problems
- social support decreased African American and Puerto Rican children's behaviour problems
- ethnicity had no statistically significant effect on children's behaviour
- based on parents' reports and researchers' observations, parent depression increased Puerto Rican children's behaviour problems

In view of the above findings, it can be inferred that Tichovolsky, Arnold & Baker succeeded in demonstrating that gender and ethnicity moderate the interaction between single parenthood, discipline, parent involvement, social support and parent depression on children's behaviour problems. The



conclusions drawn in this study may serve as a starting point for further research within the field of children's behavioural problems, as well as a source of valuable information for parents, educators and child psychologists. For example, by crossing Tichovolsky, Arnold & Baker's results, it is found that higher levels of social support are likely to have a positive impact on Puerto Rican boys' behavioural problems. Knowing this may assist practitioners in developing ad hoc prevention and intervention programmes aimed at addressing specific behaviour problems in pre-schoolers.

However, it should be noted that the article has two main limitations, namely reliability and generalisability. In fact, by deciding to observe children's behaviour problems over the course of five months, the authors may have missed interesting changes and relations that emerged after the study ended. Moreover, the sample was somewhat limited considering the broad scope of the study. While previous studies produced similar results, we will have to wait until Tichovolsky, Arnold & Baker's results are replicated to determine the extent to which they can be applied to diverse contexts.

Reading this article would certainly contribute to scholars and practitioners' understanding of children's behavioural problems as it approaches a number of widespread issues, namely absent behaviour, present behaviour, misbehaviour, externalising problems and acting out, from an etiological point of view. From an analysis of previous studies, it emerged that nobody had ever sought to identify the predictors of the aforementioned behaviour problems whilst taking into consideration the moderating effect of gender and ethnicity, which have been largely disregarded in the past. In today's <https://assignbuster.com/a-review-of-the-2013-paper-by-tochilovsky-arnold-and-baker-on-gender-and-ethnic-differences-in-childrens-behavior/>

multicultural society, it is becoming increasingly important for psychological researchers to unveil ethnicity-related trends that may help adults make more informed decisions when it comes to children. Hopefully, future research will confirm Tichovolsky, Arnold & Baker's findings and highlight the reasons why gender and ethnic differences exist in children's behavioural problems.