

PARENTS' AND PEERS' INFLUENCE ON NORMS AND NORM-BREAKING BEHAVIOR OF SLOVAK ADOLESCENT BOYS AND GIRLS*

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Abstract: The study is part of a cross-cultural (Swedish-Slovak) research project, whose aim is to study norm-breaking behavior, attitudes and maladjustment symptoms in 15-year-old adolescents. It is a study of parents' and peers' influence on self-evaluation, behavior intentions and real behavior of adolescents in 8 situations (representing norm-breaking behavior). The studied sample of 1843 participants is a representative sample for a Slovak city with 100,000 inhabitants. The SEM model of these influences in boys and girls is verified. The goodness of fit of the model and its generalisability across gender is tested.

Key words: adolescents, norm-breaking behavior, structural equations model

Some authors describe adolescence as a life period beginning in biology and ending in society (Petersen, 1988 - in Lerner, Galambos, 1998).

There are diverse influences during this period of development - from biological through individually-psychological, interpersonal to cultural and historical. Many authors draw attention to the interaction of these influences and to the fact that none of them is the sole or the only major determinant of the changes during this period of development. Even the timing of biological changes is influenced by psychological, social and cultural-historical context (Magnusson, 1988; Stattin, Magnusson, 1990; Lerner, Galambos, 1998; and others).

The adolescent's relations to his/her closer environment, especially his/her family and peers, but also school and society, are a moving force of development in adolescence as well.

Apart from family - the most important influence in childhood - the influence of peers gradually increases in adolescence. A lot of research studies around the world are devoted to this problem-complex. Although studies of adolescents (white, middle class) in the USA predominate, there are also many European studies, especially from Western Europe and Scandinavian countries.

The majority of studies agree that during adolescence the process of development is characterized by increased variability and there are great inter-individual differences and large variability of intra-individual changes (timing), all within the "normal healthy development of an adolescent".

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Concerning the problem of adolescent development, the main focus is on research into risk behavior of adolescents (alcohol and drug abuse, sex and teenage pregnancy, school underachievement and drop-out as well as violence and delinquency). Lerner and Galambos (1998) mention e.g., an extensive growth of violence and criminality in adolescents during the 1980s and 1990s in the USA - up to 35.5% of all arrested criminals were adolescents.

Often discussed within the context of risk behavior are the problem behavior theory and the so-called "risk behavior syndrome" (Jessor, Jessor, 1977; Jessor, 1991), which includes several types of risk behavior occurring simultaneously. Also studied are protective factors supporting the positive, healthy development that have a preventive function with regard to the aforementioned risk behavior in adolescence (e.g., self-control, parenting style, social control, social support, etc.).

The importance of the relationship to parents and their influence on the opinions, approaches, behavior and well-being of adolescents is confirmed by the results of many research studies (e.g., Raaijmakers et al., 2002; Bogenschneider et al., 1998; and others).

The quality of the parent-adolescent relationship is generally considered to be the basic aspect of this relation and the context of the related mutual communication. According to several authors (e.g., Dekovič, 1999; Dekovič et al., 2004; Stattin, Kerr, 2000; and others) a negative quality of such relation (high level of conflict situations and low emotional bond) as well as weak communication with parents and low level of disclosure of the adolescent to the parents is related to more frequent antisocial and norm-breaking behavior.

The most important reference group in adolescence is the group of peers. Rela-

tions with peers (especially deviant ones) have shown themselves in several research studies to be a relevant predictor of a higher occurrence of norm-breaking behavior, drug abuse, school-related problems and generally more frequent antisocial behavior (Brendgen et al., 2000; Aseltine, 1995; Berndt, Keefe, 1995; Dishion et al., 1991 - all citations in Dekovič et al., 2004; Morgan, Grube, 1989; Gardner, Steinberg, 2005; Poulin et al., 1999; Pilgrim et al., 1999; Jaccard et al., 2005; Steinberg et al., 2001).

On the whole, parents and peers have a relevant role in the explanation of antisocial or norm-breaking behavior. As we have mentioned before, the majority of these studies are conducted on American adolescents, but there is a growing trend of cross-cultural studies dealing with the parent and peer influence within different nations or ethnic groups. Their aim is to find out whether the same theoretical model of parent and peer influence on problem behavior can be applied on different ethnic groups (e.g., Dekovič et al., 2004). What is especially interesting for our study purposes the division occurring in several cross-cultural studies - that is the comparison of groups in which individualistic orientation prevails (autonomy and independence as a value) and with collectivistic orientation (where social harmony, mutual relations and to some extent conformity is considered of high value). These orientations are related also to the historical background, socio-economic environment and religiosity of the studied populations or ethnic groups.

Our study is a part of the research into adolescents' creation of their own norms, which is naturally influenced by their parents' and peers' perceived norms.

The research project that we (as one part of it) refer to in this study is a Swedish-

Slovak collaboration: cross-cultural research into norm-breaking behavior, attitudes and maladjustment symptoms in 15-year-old adolescents. We focus on the degree of parents' and peers' influences in the Slovak sample.

Norms regulate the adaptation of the individual to the social system he/she lives in. They are rules describing what a person may and may not do. Descriptive norms describe a real situation, a common way of solving some situations, what really happens in these situations, what is common and typical for their solving. On their basis, new forms can arise or fixed injunctive norms can be modified as rules of behavior in a certain social context.

The internalization of social norms proceeds through various phases for young people. They move from norms more or less implied in their childhood by parents to a more independent understanding of reality and to creating their own systems of values. Here, internal (personality) and external influences are important - firstly the influence of the socio-economic and cultural environment of the individual and secondly the important influence of peer referential groups.

The theoretical approach that our study is based on is holistic interactionism (Magnusson, 1988) - personality/situation interaction is considered the basis of behavior. On the side of personality there are cognitive, emotional and motivational characteristics, on the side of situations there is the psychological meaning of the situation (how the situation is perceived and evaluated by the subject).

Norms are a complex phenomenon and they can be studied from different viewpoints. Important is the analysis of components that are employed in their creation. These are evaluation, intention of acting (behavior) and sanction tendencies.

When evaluating a certain behavior in the given situation, we focus on how (positively or negatively) the adolescent evaluates the situation and how he/she perceives the behavior to be evaluated by his/her friends and parents.

Intention of acting (behavior) represents the dimension of norms that is constantly clashing with what "should be" or "should not be" done. The study of this dimension is necessary to determine the effectiveness of norms, or what the real behavior tendencies are in the given time period or for the given generation (cohort).

Sanction tendencies have to do with the consequences of breaking the norms that are implied by the individual's social system.

The theoretical-methodological background of the verified SEM model lies in the modified theory of reasoned action (TRA - Ajzen and Fishbein, in Chinapah, 2000, or Chinapah et al., 1998) (Figure 1).

According to this theory, behavior intentions are the central element expressing motivation factors influencing behavior and determining action. At the same time, intentions are represented as functions of the individual's attitudes and of subjective norms (determined by the individual's tendency to conform to the opinions of significant close persons).

In the verified model, attitude is represented by the adolescent's own evaluation of the given type of behavior (OV) and subjective norm is represented by parents' and friends' values, as perceived by the adolescent, concerning the same type of (norm-breaking) behavior (PPV, PFV).

How important for adolescents are the opinions of their parents and peer referential groups? What is most influential in forming one's own opinions and personal norms of behavior? By presenting the

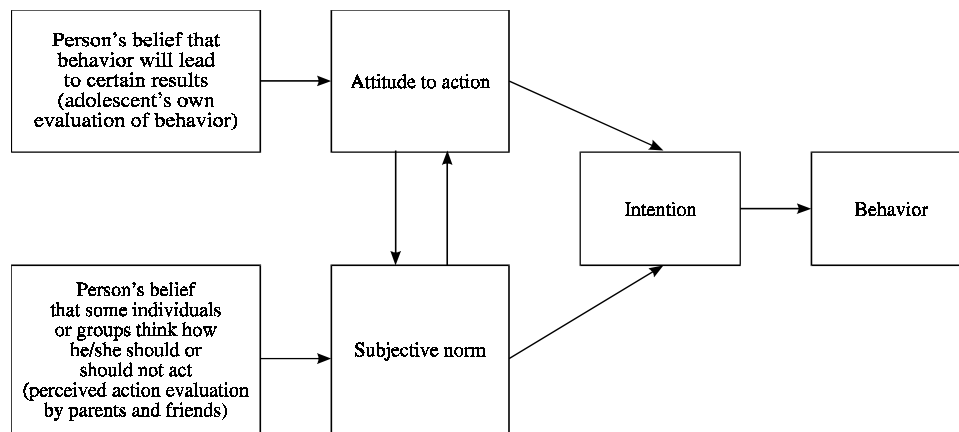


Figure 1. Modified Theory of Reasoned Action m-TRA (Ajzen, Fishbein - see Chinapah, 2000)

research results we are trying to find answers to these questions.

The aim of the research is the study of:

- the adolescent's own evaluation of behavior in particular situations and his/her intentions to action;
- perception of peers' evaluation and intentions;
- perception of parents' expectations of the adolescent's behavior;
- sanctions for breaking norms that the adolescent expects.

The aim of our study is also to study intersexual differences in how peers and parents influence adolescents in creating their own norms as well as to verify whether the SEM model, based on the modified Ajzen and Fishbein's Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (see Chinapah et al., 1998; Chinapah, 2000) and estimated for the Swedish sample will also be valid for the data of Slovak adolescent boys and girls, as the Slovak part of the research uses the same methods as the Swedish part. The selected norm dimensions deal with

home, school and free time, items represented in the dimensions relate to corresponding situations in the Norm Questionnaire.

METHOD

The Norm Questionnaire (authors: Magnusson and Dunér) is composed of two parts focusing on a) the analysis of behavior in concrete situations of different type, and b) the analysis of how the adolescent's own evaluations are related to the evaluations of his friends and parents.

Respondents' own evaluations and perception of parents' and friends' evaluations of the eight items of behavior (situations) were rated on seven-point scales: very silly, silly, rather silly, not really ok, rather ok, ok, quite ok.

The adolescents' own evaluations of norm-breaking behavior at home, in school and during free time will be referred to as own values home OVH, own values school OVS, own values free time OVFT. Percep-

tions of friends' evaluations of norm-breaking behaviors at home, in school and during free time will be referred as PFVH, PFVS, PFVFT, perceptions of parents' evaluations of norm-breaking behaviors at home, in school and during free-time as PPVH, PPVS, PPVFT.

When assessing behavioral intentions, i.e. intentions of engaging in different types of norm-breaking behavior, there was a need to place each of the eight types of behavior in a concrete situation. Each adolescent was requested to make a decision when confronted with the situation. A question dealing with how the adolescent him/herself would act in the same situation as actor came after the situation description. Ratings were made on seven-point scales from "would absolutely not do" to "would most certainly do". Adolescents' own intentions of performing eight different types of behavior will be referred as OIH (own intentions home), OIS (own intentions school), and OIFT (own intentions free-time).

Finally, the question "Have you ever cheated?" (or seven other concrete types of behavior), was asked. Ratings were made on five-point scales: "never", "once", "2-3 times", "4-10 times", "more than 10 times". Adolescent's own behavior will be referred to as OBH (own behavior home), OBS (own behavior school), and OBFT (own behavior free time).

Situations applied in research (included in questionnaire's parts):

- cheat at exams (school related);
- play truant from school (school related);
- stay out late without permission (home related);
- ignore parents' prohibitions (home related);
- smoke marijuana (free-time related);
- get drunk (free time related);
- pilfer from shops (free time related);

- loiter about town every evening (free-time related).

The arithmetic means represent the numeric values of variables in the areas mentioned.

Sample

Complete population of 15-year-old boys and girls (the pupils of all types of schools in the city) from a medium-sized Slovak city (ca. 100,000 inhabitants), $n = 1843$ adolescents, with 891 boys and 952 girls. The drop-out rate was 6%. The data collections were carried out in the schools. To reduce dishonest responding, all participants were guaranteed anonymity.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by the Amos 4 program (Arbuckle, Wothke, 1999). To estimate the model's parameters the maximum likelihood (ML) method was used. Initially the model was estimated for the whole sample and is shown in Figure 2. Then the estimation for the individual boy and girl samples was conducted. These results are presented in Figures 3 and 4.

Specifications of the Model

This model is a recursive model with 22 fixed and 67 free (estimated) parameters. For simplification reasons, figures do not include free correlations (covariations) of residual variables - residual variables within the groups H (home), S (school) and FT (free time) are allowed to correlate. On the whole we speak about 3×10 correlations (covariations) (see e.g., Urbánek, 2000).

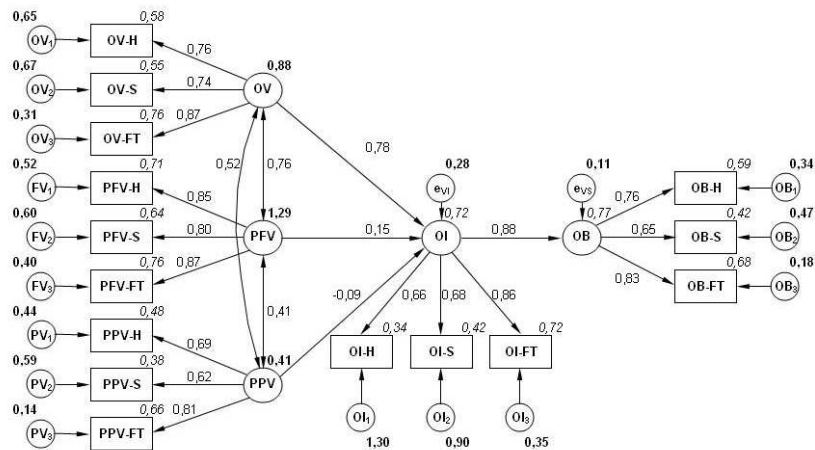


Figure 2. Model estimation results (whole sample)

Legend to the model: OV - own values; PFV - perceived friend values; PPV - perceived parent values; OI - own intentions; OB - own behavior; H - home; S - school; FT - free time

Numbers in regular print - regression coefficients or correlations

Numbers in bold - variances

Numbers in italics - squared multiple correlations

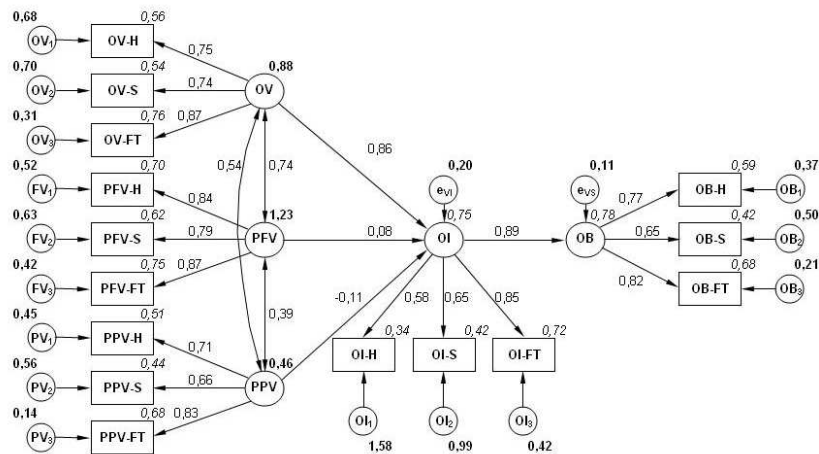


Figure 3. Model estimation results (boys)

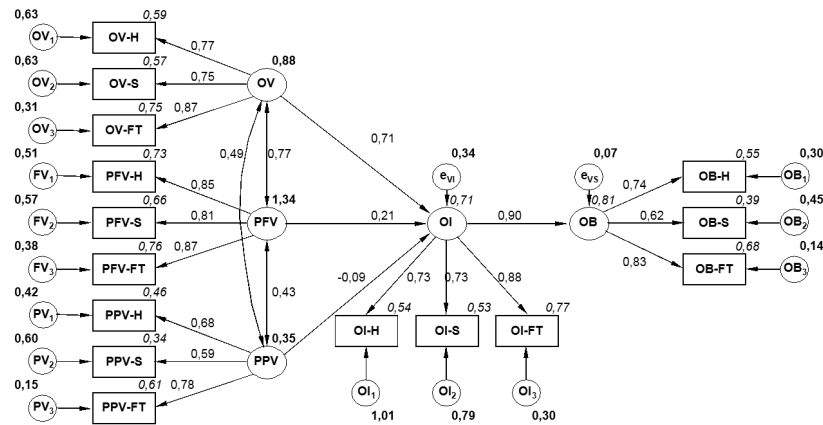


Figure 4. Model estimation results (girls)

Analyses Results

Table 1 contains basic information on data sample and selected goodness-of-fit

Table 1. Goodness-of-fit measures (whole sample)

Indices	Whole sample
N	1843
Number of free parameters	67
χ^2	171.89
df	53
p	0.000
χ^2/df	3.243
GFI	0.988
RMSEA	0.035
Hoelter 5%	761
Minimum residual correlation	0.172
Maximum residual correlation	0.466

indices. Table 2 contains this information for subsamples of boys and girls. We can declare the goodness of fit to be satisfacto-

Table 2. Goodness-of-fit measures (boys, girls)

Indices	Boys	Girls
N	891	952
Number of free parameters	67	67
χ^2	103.75	163.228
df	53	53
p	0.000	0
χ^2/df	1.958	3.08
GFI	0.985	0.978
RMSEA	0.033	0.047
Hoelter 5%	610	414
Minimum residual correlation	0.174	0.143
Maximum residual correlation	0.487	0.471

ry. The figures do not include residual correlations (they would be too confusing). All parameters listed in the figures are statistically significant.

Analyses conclusions

The analyses results correspond to a large extent with the results of the Swedish authors (Chinapah, 2000; Chinapah et al., 1998).

DISCUSSION

The research study verifies the level of influence of perceived parent and friend values on creating adolescents' own norms and on behavior intentions as well as real behavior of adolescent boys and girls.

The results show significant influence of parents and peers on creating their own norms (through their own evaluations) by adolescents and only low direct influence on intentions and real behavior. This is apparent in the high values of the correlation coefficients (PPV-OV, PFV-OV) for boys and for girls and (contrary to the presumption of the m-TRA theory - in Chinapah, 2000) in the relatively low values of regression coefficients (PPV-OI, PFV-OI) for boys and girls. Coefficients (OV-OI, OI-OB) indicate a highly significant contribution of adolescents' own evaluations of norm-breaking behavior in the process of creating behavior intentions and in real behavior.

The extent of the influence of parents' and peers' evaluations of norm-breaking behavior does not show any significant difference between boys and girls, in boys the correlation coefficient value between their own values and perceived parent values is slightly higher than in girls. According to many research results, the bond to parents is considered during the transi-

tion from early to mid-adolescence to be slightly lower for both sexes, whereas in girls higher fluctuations were found in the relations to parents during this period (Raaijmakers et al., 2002).

On the basis of a direct comparison of the Swedish and Slovak model coefficients it is possible to speak about a high degree of similarity of parent and peer influence in both countries. An individual study will be dedicated to this analysis.

If we wanted to assess our results in the context of studies of parent and peer influences on adolescents, it would be necessary to say that only a few of those studies accessible to us differentiate between the influence on behavior as a whole and the influence on creating norms of one's own, intentions as well as the real behavior that is its consequence. The majority of models deal with behavior as a whole (whereas they probably include assessment and intention in the behavior variable description) and focus on individual specific types of behavior, especially alcohol, smoking, drug abuse and antisocial behavior (e.g., Nash et al., 2005; Madarasová Gecková et al., 2005; Jaccard et al., 2005; Dekovič et al., 2004; Pilgrim et al., 1999; Gardner, Steinberg, 2005).

Peer influence is largely characterized as the occurrence of a given type of risk behavior in peers (also in some parental influence as occurrence of a given type of behavior in parents). In the majority of cases these influences appear as significant.

Within such a broad context we can consider our results as similar (or not contradictory) to those of the majority of authors, confirming parent and peer influence on adolescents' behavior. In our case, however, this influence must be specified as influencing adolescents' creation of their personal norms of behavior, which accord-

ing to the model (through own values) have a significant influence on behavior intention and real behavior in norm-breaking situations.

We consider it important to mention several restrictions or disadvantages in our approach. The perceived parental evaluations are taken as a whole, the difference between mother and father is not stated. The conception of model variables did not take parenting styles into account, which are subject to a more detailed study in newer research studies concerning parent influence on adolescents (e.g., Stattin, Kerr, 2000; Pilgrim et al., 1999). Similarly, with perceived friend evaluations, we do not deal with the differentiation between the influence of friends and the selection of friends discussed in the newer research studies (e.g., Jaccard et al., 2005; Pilgrim et al., 1999). These facts can be included in a more precise analysis in a further study.

Some authors (e.g., Jessor et al., 1995 - in Lerner, Galambos, 1998) unanimously include several of these influences (e.g., some parenting styles) among protective factors, decreasing the probability of problem behavior of adolescents (through personal control and social control).

Similar findings (higher level of good relations between parents and adolescents, connected to a lower occurrence of problem behavior) were also confirmed in previous analyses of the Slovak adolescent sample (Ruiselová, 1998, 2001) in boys as well as in girls.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that in accordance with the given theoretical background, subjective norms (represented by the PPV - perceived parent values and PFV - perceived friend values) influence

behavior intentions as well as adolescents' real behavior. However, this is not a direct influence, but done through influencing adolescents' own evaluations (and attitudes) in concrete situations of norm-breaking behavior concerning home, school and free time.

The estimated SEM model was proved as plausible also for the description of behavior norm creation and application in the representative sample of 15-year-old Slovak adolescent boys and girls, whereas the corresponding model coefficients indicate the dominant influence of the adolescent's own evaluation on intentions and his/her real behavior. Analysis of cross-cultural (Sweden-Slovakia) details and differences will be the subject of the next study.

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VPLYV RODIČOV A ROVESNÍKOV NA NORMY A NORMY-PORUŠUJÚCE SPRÁVANIE SLOVENSKÝCH ADOLESCENTNÝCH CHLAPCOV A DIEVČAT

Z. Ruiselová, T. Urbánek

Súhrn: Štúdia je súčasťou kros-kulturálneho (švédsko-slovenského) výskumného projektu zameraného na výskum normy-porušujúceho správania, postojov a maladjustačných symptómov 15-ročných adolescentov. Zaoberá sa vplyvom rodičov a rovesníkov na vlastné hodnotenie, intenciu k správaniu i skutočné správanie adolescentov v 8 situáciách (reprezentujúcich normy-porušujúce správanie). Skúmaná vzorka 1843 probandov je reprezentatívnou pre slovenské mesto veľkosti cca 100 000 obyvateľov. Spracovaný je SEM model týchto vplyvov u chlapcov a dievčat. Testuje sa jeho zhoda s dátami a jeho zovšeobecniteľnosť z hľadiska pohlavia adolescentov.