



## Perceived teacher support as a correlate of externalizing behavior of adolescent students

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### Abstract

Personality of children is significantly influenced by their school, where they come into contact with the teachers and friends. At home the children's ideals are parents while in school they form their ideals around the teachers. During schooling, teachers become the most influential in children's life who aid them in their transition into education system and the complex social environment. Not only do teachers provide guidance in academic achievement, they also support students socially and emotionally. It is an indisputable verity that supportive relationships play a crucial role in shaping adolescent behavior and successful development. Such supports can act as a buffer against stress and mental health problems. The school environment and related factors like experience and interpersonal relationships formed at school settings have the potential to develop maladjustment and behavioral problems. Researches posit that maladjustment is a well established predictive factor for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBDs) among adolescents. The present study focuses on one category of EBD namely externalizing behaviors which are readily apparent in children's behavior, plays out in their actions that are negative and directed to the external environment. Through this study, the researcher attempt at understanding the correlation between teacher support as perceived by students and its implications on externalizing behavior. Sample consists of 60 adolescent students from various schools across Kerala.

**Keywords:** adolescence, externalizing behavior, maladjustment, students, delinquency

### Introduction

Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBDs) are the most common forms of psychopathology among children and young adults (Liu, 2004) [12]. Externalizing behavior problems are one group of EBDs, which are more evident with relatively visible characteristics and consequences directed towards the external environment (Gresham *et al.*, 1999) [8]. Researches show that externalizing behavior problem are not only a frequent and serious problem on prevalence, but a substantial number of children with early externalizing symptoms are at risk to enter a trajectory of relatively persistent antisocial and delinquent behaviors (Loeber & Farrington, 1998, Losel & Bender, 2003) [13, 14]. Undoubtedly these problems become very detrimental to a child's social and academic development and found to reduce children's quality of life as well as that of their family (Moffitt, 1993) [16]. Therefore the persistence and aggravation of externalizing problems is a serious threat not only for the child but also his family and society. Many developmental and behavioral disorders are found to have their beginning in classrooms and such developmental disruptions can produce great difficulties for a child throughout their schooling experience and consequently throughout the rest of their lives (Snyder *et al.*, 2005) [20]. The social and emotional support from parents, teachers, peers, and school play a momentous role in the physiological, psychological and social development of adolescents. As adolescents spend most of their active and productive time in school and are constantly in interaction with teachers and other significant people at school, these

'authority figures' are most likely to become role models and perceived as the main source of support.

Teacher and student relationships are important characteristics of the school environment and are highly essential to appropriate development. Students form emotional bond with their teachers. Teachers not only provide guidance in academic achievement of students but also supply children with social and emotional support (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001) [6, 9]. The extension and the degree of intensity of relationships established with teachers, play a vital role in shaping subsequent classroom behaviors. When these relationships are perceived as warm and supportive a positive learning environment is created (Donlevy, 2001) [5]. The kind of relationships maintained at school have high emotional significance which serve to promote either adaptive or maladaptive developmental trajectories (Ladd, 1996; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) [10, 18]. Most importantly the relationship formed with teachers at school provides a context in which children learn, or continue to utilize, maladaptive interpersonal strategies (Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993; Van Acker, Grant, & Henry, 1996) [10, 21].

Teachers are presented to students as important knowledgeable persons, and second next category of people who could influence and regulate them greatly, other than their parents, play an integral role in their students' social, emotional and behavioral development (Crosnoe *et al.*, 2004) [4]. The multifaceted role of teacher within the classroom and the large amount of time the teacher spends with each child

form an emotional bond between them, which may be either positive or negative (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Marshall & Weinstein, 1986) <sup>[2, 15]</sup>. The dimensions of closeness and conflict have been found to be distinct components of teacher-child relationship (Pianta & Stenberg, 1992) <sup>[17]</sup>. Conflicting relationship with teachers is often associated with unfavorable school attitude such as absenteeism, disinterest in studies, laziness (lack of commitment to educational pursuits, poor school attachment) and negative behavior outcomes (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Marshall & Weinstein, 1986) <sup>[2, 15]</sup>. Negative and conflicting teacher-student relations predicted externalizing behavior above and beyond that of child aggression and exerted high impact for children with a past record of hostile behaviors (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd & Burgess, 2001) <sup>[9, 11]</sup>. Every student is expected to get equal support and care from teacher. This is, particularly, important for students who have Behavioral and Emotional disorders (EBDs). However, it is found that the student- teacher relationship of children having problem behavior is not as often as supportive as what is needed for such children (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001) <sup>[6, 9]</sup>. Children with externalizing behaviors are often those mostly in need of a close and supportive relationship with their teacher but are less likely to develop them owing to the negative interactions between the child's behavior and their environment (Romano, Tremblay, Boulerice & Swisher, 2005). In addition, children who do not exhibit externalizing behaviors and whom are relatively easier for teachers to attach to are more likely to form closer and supportive relationships with their teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1998) <sup>[2]</sup>. However little is known about children with externalizing problems and the extent of supportive relationship being mutually shared between teacher and student. Whether the extent of support perceived by student has a subsequent bearing on the persistence of emotional and behavioral problems is an important area to be explored.

There are substantial researches on factors associated with teacher –student relationships and the increased risk of developing and sustaining externalizing behavior problems. As teacher support remain an essential component for the all round development of student, it is equally important to know how the students perceive this support. Many of the studies, mentioned above, (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Donlevy, 2001) <sup>[9, 11, 5]</sup> examined teacher support and closeness in contributing the classroom behavior of students. It is equally important to understand the way it is being perceived by the students. Though teachers provide support, students may tend to perceive it differently. The study is first of its kind in the current literature of externalizing behavior, undertaken with a view to examine the student's perception of support from their teachers and its association with externalizing behavior problems.

### The Present Study

Researchers have paid attention to teacher–student relationships and the long lasting implications on both academic and social development of students. The nature and extent of relationships shared with teachers provide a context in which the maladaptive behavior patterns of children may persist or aggravate. Teacher's support is an important aspect in any teacher-student relationship and play an important role

in shaping subsequent classroom attitude and behavior of students. As classroom interaction is a two way process, the perception of students is also significant. The study is designed with an objective to examine the relationship between perceived teacher support and externalizing behavior of adolescent students. It is hypothesized that there exists no significant relationship between perceived teacher support and externalizing behaviors of adolescent students

### Method

#### Participants

The sample for the study is constituted with 60 adolescent students of which 65% were males and 35% were females, aged between 15 and 17, in Ernakulum district of Kerala. The participants were selected by means of random sampling method.

#### Instruments

1. Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale: The Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale developed by Malecki, Demaray and Elliott (2000) measures the perceived social support of children and adolescents. It is a 60 item scale consisting of 5 subscales (parents, teachers, classmates, close friends, and people in my school) with 12 items each. For the purpose of the present study, only the subscale on teachers was made use of. It assesses the students' perception about their teachers support. The respondents are asked to read each statement and rate each statement regarding how often they perceive that support. The frequency ratings are anchored on a 6 point rating scale. The reliability of total frequency score using Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.97 and the scale has reasonable validity.
2. Externalizing Behavior Inventory: Externalizing Behavior Inventory developed by Sinto and Jayan (2015) measures the externalizing behavior problems of adolescents and youth. It is a 57 item scale in which responses are elicited on a 5 point likert scale. The participants could mark his or her responses in the response sheet ranging from 1–never to 5 –always. The reliability coefficient of the scale is calculated using Cronbach alpha and found to be 0.75 and reasonably valid with a criterion validity of 0.36.

#### Procedure

Written approval to conduct the study in the schools were collected from the head of the institutions. Participants were informed about the rationale of the study prior to data collection. The research instruments were distributed among students and asked them to go through it carefully and mark their response as per the instruction. The confidentiality of the responses was assured. Instruments were scored as per the scoring scheme provided in the manual. The responses were fed into a spread sheet and processed using appropriate statistics.

#### Results and Discussion

Within the classroom, the parent's authority is being substituted by the teacher and become role model for the students in the classroom. When students experience difficulties and confront with problems, it is the teacher to

whom the students will look for guidance and support. The extent to which teacher's support is being perceived by students become significant when we recognize the integral role teachers play in their student's social, emotional and behavioral development. The present study aims at understanding the relationship between perceived teacher support and externalizing behavior problems of adolescents. In order to understand the association between perceived level of teacher support and externalizing behavior problems of adolescence Pearson product moment correlation was calculated. With correlation analysis, it is possible to find out whether there exists any relationship between the variables under study, the strength of correlation, and the direction of the relationship. The results of the study are presented in the table below.

**Table 1:** Correlation of the variables teacher support and externalizing behavior

Correlations			
		teacher support	external bhvr
teacher support	Pearson Correlation	1	-.630**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
external bhvr	Pearson Correlation	-.630**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From table 1 it is clear that, teacher support and externalizing behaviors are related and the correlation is found to be 0.63. It clearly indicates that there is a high correlation between the variables. Also observed that the correlation is negative which means when one variable increases the other one decrease. In other words, those adolescents who perceive high support from teachers tend to have low externalizing behavior problems. The same coefficient value 0.63 has been obtained for the reverse relationship as well which indicates that when externalizing behavior is high the perceived teacher support is low. When the teacher- student relationships are warm and supportive a positive learning environment is created. Within these classroom environment students likely to display more positive attitudes, better the academic performances, improve the appropriate emotional and social behaviors. Consistent with studies indicating teacher-student relationship as a significant predictor of problem behaviors the results of the present study underscores the fact that teacher support as perceived by students whether high or low, has a strong association with problem behaviors (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd & Burgess, 2001) [2, 9, 11]. It is an established fact that students who share close positive supportive relationships with their teachers attain high levels of achievements than those students with more conflicting relationship. In the present study students distinguished good teacher support when they felt that they are always being cared well, treat fairly, approachable and render help by giving right information as and when required. High levels of teacher support is likely to be perceived when students sense that their efforts are being appreciated, were given due consideration and teachers spend time with them as and when required. Moreover students who share strong emotional bond

with teachers tend to perceive good support in their academic as well as personal life.

A student who feels strong support from teacher tends to remain in touch with teacher, talks freely and frequently and may receive constructive guidance and appreciation rather than just criticism which is a common element in conflicting relationships. The students trust her teacher more, show more engagement in learning, and perform well. As cited earlier researches show negative and conflicting teacher-student relationship is a risk factor for emotional and development disorders including externalizing behaviors (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Marshall & Weinstein, 1986; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd & Burgess, 2001) [2, 15, 9, 11]. Students normally spend more time at school and their interactions mostly revolve around teachers than parents. Teachers exert profound influence on their students. Depending on whether positively or negatively influenced, students subsequently tend to develop adaptive or maladaptive behavior patterns. When deprivation of proper care and support is being perceived, students tend to get detached from any kind of commitments not only towards teachers but also to oneself, in its extreme form. Consequently students become disobedient, show disrespect, and engage in negative behaviors such as aggression, bullying, fighting, hyperactivity, and even theft. Externalizing behavior is a serious threat subsequently leading children to become delinquents and antisocial in later life. The findings of the present study support the fact that those who perceive teacher's support are less likely to indulge in maladaptive behaviors. Therefore, it is apparent that the extent of support perceived by student has a subsequent bearing on the persistence of emotional and behavioral problems. The research clearly establishes the relationship between the two variables and found that the perceived support of teachers reduces the higher probability of externalizing behavior among the adolescent students.

Students often consider their teacher as a source of emotional and informational support. The results of the present study also support that children with externalizing behaviors often mostly in need of close and supportive relationship with teachers but at the same time, it is less likely to develop too (Romano, Tremblay, Boulerice & Swisher, 2005). The negative interaction between child's behavior and their environment hinder the development of healthy supportive relationships. When the students perceive lack of good support and care from their teachers, they feel less motivated to exhibit appropriate classroom behaviors and more likely to engage in deviant behaviors. Obviously children who do not exhibit externalizing behaviors are more likely to form closer and supportive relationships with teachers. Besides, the present study highlights the importance of providing equal support and care to all students.

### Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of understanding the relationship between perceived teacher support and externalizing behavior. Finding shows that perceived teacher support and externalizing behavior are related and showed a strong inverse relationship. It is found that students who perceive high teacher support display very low externalizing behaviors and vice versa. The students'

perception regarding the emotional and informational support provided by teachers significantly influence the subsequent classroom behaviors of students Externalizing behavior is not only a frequent and serious problem but a considerable number of children having such problem tend to develop antisocial behaviors later in life. Moreover it is highly detrimental to successful personal and social well-being of an individual. Teachers, as the adult role models in the classrooms, have the potential to promote adaptive or maladaptive developmental trajectories among students. We are cognizant of the fact that teachers being helpful and act as source of support have the potential to mould the character and conduct in a more positive manner.

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