

**PARENTING PRACTICES AND PERSONAL VALUES:
COMPARISON BETWEEN PARENTS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED
AND NON-INSTITUTIONALIZED ADOLESCENTS**

Anu Aavik, Toivo Aavik, Jaan Kõrgesaar

University of Tartu

Abstract. The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between personal values, parenting practices and adolescents' institutionalization. We investigated differences between two groups of parents: 235 parents of adolescents attending regular schools and 92 parents of adolescents attending reformatory schools. The results indicate that benevolence was positively associated with parenting practices, but self-enhancement and hedonism had negative correlations with parenting practices. Parents of institutionalized adolescents rated benevolence and conservatism higher and broadmindedness lower than parents of non-institutionalized adolescents. Differences in parenting practices also emerged in connection with social norms, setting limits, and physical safety. We also established the effect of parents' socio-economic status on adolescents' institutionalization.

Keywords: personal values, parenting practices, and adolescents' institutionalization

1. Introduction

There has been an increase of interest in the risk factors that determine juvenile antisocial behavior. The complex etiology of the problem has produced a variety of approaches to the issue. Although the sources of juvenile antisocial behavior have been studied extensively, little is known about their correlation with the values of their parents.

1.1. Personal values

For a long time values have been seen as a powerful tool for explaining behavior (Rokeach 1973). Schwartz and Bilsky (1987, 1990) have generated a contemporary conceptual definition of values that incorporates the five formal features of values mentioned in literature on the topic. Values are (1) concepts or beliefs; (2) pertain to desirable end states or behavior (aims); (3) transcend specific

situations; (4) guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events; and (5) are ordered by their relative importance. Parents differ in the characteristics they value in their lives and these differences could contribute to differences in parenting behavior too. In 1963, Kohn proposed the following causal sequence: social class → conditions of life → parental values → parental behavior. For instance, he claimed that the parent, who attaches greater importance to self-realization, emphasizes supportive rearing practices with regard to the child. Kohn in 1977 argued that all parents want certain things for their children – that they would do well at school, be happy, etc. However, parents differ in the emphasis they place on some characteristics, and especially on the extent to which they value self-directed independent behavior in their children. For Kohn, these emphases are related to parents' position in the social stratification system. Thus, parents who do not have higher education and have non-professional jobs are more likely to want their children to learn to obey rules and to conform to external standards. This theory has been supported also by Luster et al (1989). Tudge et al (1999) have tested Kohn's hypotheses in a comparative study of Estonia, USA, South Korea and Russia. Their results clearly supported Kohn's work linking social class and values, as well as that of Luster and his colleagues connecting class, values, and specific child-rearing beliefs.

Predominantly, other people are the sources of value socialization - most values are learned from parents, adults who are not relatives, peers and the media (Rowe 1994). Therefore, the parents of adolescents are among the most important socialization agents to be studied. We assume that the values that are personally important to them are most probably also transferred to their children. Rohan and Zanna (1996) have found similarities between the value profiles of parents and of their adult offspring. Their results showed that the right-wing authoritarian attitudes of parents most strongly influenced the transfer of values from parents to children. Right-wing authoritarianism was also positively correlated with such values as conformity, traditions, safety, power, and benevolence. The study of Bogenschneider et al (1998) demonstrated that the values of a family and close relationships between family members were important factors influencing adolescents' alcohol and drug use, running away from home and choice of friends. Thus values of a family and the aims of child rearing are critical determinants of parental behavior (Bogenschneider et al 1998, Darling, Steinberg, 1993). Schaefer and Edgerton (1985) found that children of parents who valued self-direction scored higher on language and math scales than children of parents who valued conformity. Teachers also rated the first mentioned children higher than the children whose parents valued more conformity.

Parental values have also been studied at the University of Tartu. In 1990 a study that compared families with small children in Estonia and Finland was conducted within the framework of the partnership agreement between the University of Tartu and the University of Kuopio (Raudik 1995). It was discovered that an increase in the level of education was accompanied by a foregrounding of self-directed values such as self-realization while the emphasis placed on material well-being decreased. The results are comparable to those of Tudge et al (1999). Hereby there is strong

causal evidence that personal values affect action choices (Feather 1995), thus – may have causal impact also to parenting practices.

1.2. Parenting practices and antisocial behavior

Baumrind's (1966, 1991) work on the classification of parenting styles has greatly influenced research on parenting behavior and its effects on children. Her four-part classification system has been found to be related to school performance, delinquency, drug use (Steinberg et al 1994) and disruptive playground behavior (Hart et al 1992). Consistent with Baumrind's work, some other authors have found that deficiency of parental emotional support may be one reason, direct or indirect, to the development of antisocial behavior (Carlo et al 1998, Stice, Gonzales 1998, Engels et al 2002). In 1993 Darling and Steinberg distinguished parenting practices from parenting styles. Parenting practices are defined as "specific, goal-directed behaviors through which parents perform their duties" (p. 488). In their model, parenting practices have a direct effect on the children's results because they have immediate consequences for a child. Both parenting styles and parenting practices result in part from the goals the parents have set to themselves and the values they hold.

Historically, Merton (1938) considered delinquency as developing from an impeded access to conventional aims. Based on this theory, delinquents share similar personal aims (e.g., economic well-being, success and achievement) with non-delinquents, but use different ways of achieving the desired goals. Sykes and Matza (1957) proposed that the learning of inappropriate techniques in adolescence could turn individuals into delinquents although the values themselves may be conventional. Hirschi's (1969) theory of social control pointed out that delinquency is associated with the person's value system. Therefore, the parents of adolescents are among the most important socialization agents to be studied. We assume that the values which are personally important to them are most probably also transferred to their children. The parents' antisocial behavior has been demonstrated to precede adolescents' behavioral problems (Wasserman, Seracini 2000). Thus, parenting practices are implicated as having a direct effect on a child's future – serious parenting problems can be predicted on the basis of knowledge about the parents' behavior already before the children are born (Altemaier et al 1984, Quinton, Rutter 1988). Along the same line of reasoning, we hypothesized that parental practices may be related to adolescents' antisocial behavior. However, the relationship between family interaction and antisocial behavior is complex and likely to be a reciprocal one. The child's disruptive behavior may be a result of the parents' dysfunctional parenting style (Stice, Barrera 1995, Mak 1996, O'Connor et al 1998, Rueter, Conger 1998). Most researchers assume that child behavior may provoke certain parenting practices towards child (e.g. Belsky 1990, Ambert 1992). Parenting also depends on socio-economic status (SES, see also Kohn 1977, Pinderhughes et al 2000, Belsky 1990, 1993): low-income parents tended to endorse more harsh discipline responses in part because they held stronger beliefs about the value of spanking, and they experienced higher levels of stress. Thus there is strong evidence

that relation between parenting and a child's antisocial behavior has many facets but the nature of their associations is still inadequately understood.

1.3. The aims of the study

Although personal values are central concepts in understanding individuals, there is still little research evidence how they are related to specific parenting practices. On the basis of Kohn's hypothesis we assumed that specific personal values would be related to specific parenting practices. Furthermore, we assumed that there would be significant differences in the parenting practices and personal values of the parents of institutionalized adolescents and the parents of non-institutionalized adolescents.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The data for this study were a part of the Reaction Pattern Research Project (RPR, Rink et al, 2000). Current data were derived from a pool of data collected within the framework of a larger research project that analyzed the antisocial behavior of adolescents and the causes of such behavior. The present study was based on data from 327 Estonian families. Two groups of participants were studied. The first group comprised 235 randomly chosen families of adolescents attending regular schools (114 boys and 122 girls), from the 6th to the 8th grade (12–16 years old). The parents' ages were between 27 and 69 years ($M = 40.3$, $SD = 5.9$) and education (8 secondary school, 151 high school and 76 had some university degree). The second group comprised 92 Estonian families of adolescents attending reformatory schools for adolescents with behavioral problems (55 boys and 32 girls) from the 6th to 8th grades (12–17 years old). Their parents' age was between 28 and 67 years ($M = 41.2$, $SD = 8.3$) and education (27 secondary school, 56 high school and 5 had some university degree). Reformatory schools are intended for youngsters with a criminal record and the placement decisions are made by the court of law. Earlier studies have shown that reformatory school students are a homogeneous group, judging by the main indicators – behavior problems and social problems (Research report for the Estonian Ministry of Education, 1999). Hereafter we name the second group as “institutionalized adolescents”.

2.2. Instruments and measures

Parenting practices were studied with a specially constructed questionnaire (QTP – Questionnaire of Rearing Tasks for Parents). QTP is based on the results of observations of parents and specialist literature in the field (Rink et al, 2000). The questionnaire should cover all different aspects of rearing activities that parents could engage in during the child-rearing process. Based on factor analysis six scales were derived with eight separate items in each (Õuema et al 2002). Respondents had to rate items on a 5-point scale (from 1 = not at all to 5 = very

much) to what extent the parent has engaged in this activity while rearing the child up to the present. The reliability (Cronbach alpha coefficient) of six 8-item sub-scales varied from 0.75 to 0.87. The scales were labeled as follows: *Communication* was the composition of the items representing the parents' communication with the child (for example: "listened to the child's opinions", "replied to the child's questions"). *Setting limits* included any discipline-related items such as orders, rules, limits and punishment ("set a bed-time curfew for the child and told him/her to keep to it"). *Social norms* scale consisted of items that emphasize teaching social norms in relation to the social relations ("taught the child how to negotiate and reach an agreement when it comes to rules"). *Psychological environment* included items that represent the activities parents can perform to provide favorable psychological conditions at home ("tried to avoid the incitement of the family members against each other"). *Physical safety* scale consisted basically of the activities parents can engage in to ensure the daily safety of the child ("taught the child the rules of the road"). *Free-time* scale included activities parents can engage in to ensure that their child spends his or her days in an effective and meaningful way ("introduced different fields of hobbies – music, sports – to the child").

Personal values were assessed with the Estonian Value Inventory (EVI), a 56-item questionnaire in which the personal values of parents were assessed in six sub-scales developed previously from a lexical hypothesis (for details see Aavik, Allik 2002). These sub-scales may be interpreted as follows: *benevolence* – this sub-scale stressed complaisance and helpfulness in everyday transactions, consideration to cultural standards and inhibition disruptive emotions and behaviors (for example: "helpfulness", "kindness"); *self-enhancement* consisted of items emphasizing power, economic and emotional success and promoting them to others ("power", "successfulness"); *broadmindedness* items largely represented tolerance of other peoples' behavior, opinions and beliefs ("tolerance", "creativity"); *hedonism* associated with items that seem to stress the importance of experiencing pleasure and fun in life ("excitement", "entertaining"); *conservatism* consisted of items emphasizing dislike of change, wish that things should stay as they are and the preservation of traditional Estonian values ("industry", "order", "poise", etc.); *self-realization* items focused on respect for oneself and the realization of personal capabilities ("self-improvement", "experience"). The respondents rated the importance of each value as a guiding principle in their life on a 9-point scale from "I am opposed to it" (-1) and "not important" (0) to "of supreme importance" (7). For the present sample, the reliability of the measures was assessed according to Cronbach's alphas and found to be from .79 to .88. As well as Schwartz's Value Survey, the EVI focused on the value system, not on a particular narrow set of values. This way we were able to investigate relations between personal values and parenting practices at a more comprehensive level. Demographic data such as the level of education, employment status, etc. were also collected.

2.3. Procedure

The parents were identified by the data received from the schools. All investigated families received questionnaires by mail, with an enclosed letter describing the general objectives of the research project and inviting them to participate in the research. We asked the parent “who is the main rearing person” of the child to fulfill the questionnaire. Since the number of fathers who responded was too small (18), it was impossible to make any decisions about gender differences based on our sample. Completed questionnaires were received from approximately 75% of families. This figure probably resulted partly from the number of incorrect addresses. In all cases, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.

3. Results

3.1. Relations between personal values, parenting practices and institutionalization

Pearson product moment correlations were calculated between the six sub-scales of the EVI and the six sub-scales of the QTP. Since the overall score for all items in the EVI was positively correlated with all parenting practices (which may be the effect of scale use bias), we decided to standardize data. Table 1 reports the correlations between the six QTP sub-scales and six Estonian value sub-scales measured by EVI.

Theoretically, values measured by EVI form two dimensions where the first dimension consists of *self-realization* and *broadmindedness* versus *conservation*, and the second dimension comprises *benevolence* versus *hedonism* and *self-enhancement*. The correlation matrix clearly reflects this classification, for instance *benevolence* has a positive correlation to all parenting practices, contrary *self-enhancement* and *hedonism* have negative correlations to all parenting practice sub-scales. *Self-realization* and *broadmindedness* versus *conservatism* values demonstrated a less perfect correspondence with proposed structure – each value

Table 1. Correlations between the EVI sub-scales and the QTP scores

EVI sub-scale	QTP Scores					
	comm- unication	setting limits	social norms	ps. envi- ronment	physical safety	free time
Self-enhancement	<u>-.27</u>	-.12	<u>-.09</u>	-.17	-.13	<u>-.09</u>
Hedonism	-.13	-.18	-.05	-.14	-.18	-.07
Conservatism	-.02	.15	-.03	-.09	.10	-.02
Benevolence	.17	.13	.00	.02	.23	.06
Broadmindedness	.08	-.06	.04	.33	-.13	.13
Self-realization	.01	.06	.06	.18	-.01	.06

Note. $N = 325$. EVI = the Estonian Value Inventory. QTP = the Questionnaire of rearing tasks for parents. Correlations higher than $|.12|$ are significant at the level $p < .05$. Boldfaced correlations are significant at $p < .01$. Underlined are the highest correlations for the QTP sub-scales.

type was related to many sub-scales of parenting behavior while relevant correlation was both positive and negative. On the basis of personal values we may assume that *communication* as a parenting practice requires a high level of *benevolence* and a low level of *self-enhancement* while limits are set by those parents who value *conservatism* highly but *hedonism* to a lesser extent. Parents who are concerned about the *psychological environment* at home probably value *broadmindedness* and *self-realization*. Behaviors related to the physical security of the child are most common with parents who have high scores on the *benevolence* scale and low on the *hedonism* scale. Since *social norms* and *free-time* activities do not have a statistically significant correlation with personal values, we may assume that these types of behavior are not related to the person's value system.

Some other results are listed below. The age of the parents was negatively correlated to all parenting practices, but significantly ($p < .05$) to *communication* ($r = -.15$), *psychological environment* ($r = -.14$) and *physical safety* ($r = -.12$). The age of the child was correlated positively to *social norms* ($r = .14$, $p < .05$). The education of the parents had a significant correlation with the frequency of *free-time* activities ($r = .25$, $p < .01$) and *psychological environment* at home ($r = .14$, $p < .05$). It appears that more the parents worked outside home, the less time they spent with their children – they significantly less emphasized on *communication* ($r = -.19$, $p < .01$) and *psychological environment* at home ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$). The number of children in the family was related to the higher frequency of all parenting practices but not at a statistically significant level.

3.2. Comparison of institutionalized and non-institutionalized adolescents' parents

To investigate the possible effect of personal values and parenting practices to the institutionalization, we compared the parents of institutionalized adolescents with parents whose adolescents attend a regular school. Personal values, parenting practices and other important measures were again compared between the two groups by one-way analysis of variance. To remove the different scale use effect in personal values the centralized sum variables method was applied. The results are shown in Table 2.

An ANOVA was performed to determine whether or not the two subgroups differ at the level of self-reported personal values. The parents of institutionalized adolescents attached statistically significantly higher importance to *benevolence* and *conservatism* values; and less importance to *broadmindedness*. It is worth noting that values promoting personal interests (*hedonism* and *self-enhancement*) and emphasizing one's own independent thought and action (*self-realization*) did not demonstrate any significant difference between these two groups. At the level of reported frequency of parenting practices, the parents of institutionalized adolescents more frequently set limits to their children, taught social norms and did something for the physical safety of the child.

Table 2. Results of analysis of variance for the personal values, parenting behavior factors and other measures

	Parents of adolescents attending regular schools	Parents of institutionalized adolescents	<i>F</i>
n ****	235	92	
Benevolence	1.20	1.27	11.43**
Self-enhancement	.62	.61	.33
Broadmindedness	1.02	.92	19.38***
Hedonism	.78	.73	3.36
Conservatism	1.13	1.18	6.50*
Self-realization	1.18	1.15	1.39
Communication	29.7	29.7	.41
Setting limits	28.5	30.3	7.36**
Social norms	26.5	29.2	10.91**
Ps. Environment	27.2	26.8	.11
Physical safety	29.1	31.2	4.92*
Free-time	23.5	23.4	.26
Age of parent	39.4	40.6	1.50
Education of parent	2.34	1.84	25.51***
Number of children	2.40	2.49	4.32*

Note. *n* = number of participants in subsample. (*) $p < .05$, (**) $p < .01$, (***) $p < .001$; Educational level: 1 = secondary school; 2 = high school; 3 = university degree.

3.3. Relation between personal values, parenting practices and institutionalization

In order to determine the contribution of personal values and different socio-economic factors to the prediction of institutionalization, logistical regression analysis was conducted. This analysis involved the estimation of a logistical regression equation using a forward stepwise procedure. In Step 1, six parenting practices explained 15% of variance. Lower levels of *communication* ($\beta = -.36$, $p < .01$), higher levels of *setting limits* ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$) and *physical safety* ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) contributed to institutionalizing child. In Step 2, when personal values were entered into regression after parenting practices, the model together added an extra 6% to predictive capacity (total $R^2 = .21$). Higher levels of *hedonism* ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$) and lower levels of *self-realization* ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$) of parent, may diagnose future institutionalization of child. In Step 3, the education and the age of parent, and the number of children added 5% to predictive capacity. Older ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$) and less educated ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .05$) parents' child has higher risk for behavioral problems. Thus, the total model explains 26% of variability ($R^2 = .26$; $F(15, 327) = 7.05$, $p < .05$). The comparison of parenting practices, personal values and some socio-economic factors revealed that the most influential factor in explaining the institutionalization of a child was as expected parenting behavior towards the child; personal values of parents and socio-economic variable accounted for approximately the same degree of variability.

In sum, there is considerable differentiation in some parenting practices and personal values of parents of institutionalized adolescents and parents of non-institutionalized adolescents that may have their impact on institutionalization. In

addition, parental education and number of children in a family, as well as its overall socio-economic status, seems to support differences in parenting practices.

4. Discussion

Two hypotheses were examined in this analysis: whether (a) specific personal values are related to specific parenting practices; and whether (b) there are significant differences in parenting practices and personal values of parents of institutionalized adolescents and parents of non-institutionalized adolescents.

Our first hypothesis was partly supported – the results show that there is a meaningful pattern of correlations between some personal values (EVI sub-scales) and parenting practices (QTP sub-scales). Schwartz (1992) claims that compatible value types are in close proximity and competing value types move in opposing directions. We found quite a similar systematic relation in the current research project. Values emphasizing selfish concerns and pleasure, even at the expense of others (*self-enhancement* and *hedonism*), have a negative correlation to all parenting practices. At the same time values opposite to the former – values that transcend personal interests and promote welfare of others (*benevolence* and *broad-mindedness*) – almost all have positive correlations with parenting practices. These results are in accordance with Kohn's 1963 model, where he proposed that the parent, who attaches greater importance to self-realization, emphasizes supportive rearing practices with regard to the child. Our findings both support and extend this assumption. The magnitude of correlations between personal values and parenting practices was $|.33|$, which we consider relatively moderate. Behavior in itself and child rearing especially is a complex activity that is influenced by many factors in addition to the ones mentioned above, such as situational, genetic, biological and economic factors. The magnitude of the found correlations was acceptable despite the occasional unevenness of the results: the correlations are sometimes low although statistically significant. But not all parenting activities were similarly correlated with the personal values of the parents – *social norms* and *free time* did not have any statistically significant correlations. Thus we can conclude that there are correlations between the personal values of parents and their parenting practices but that the associations do not hold for all parenting activities. In addition, weak or moderate associations may be evoked due to the problem that values may be too abstract to influence behavior directly (Homer, Kahle 1988).

Secondly, we sought differences between the personal values and parenting practices of two groups of parents – institutionalized adolescents and adolescents studying in regular schools. As regards the six personal values described above, both groups valued *benevolence* the most and *self-enhancement* the least. Thus, there was a relatively clear concordance of what is the most important and least important personal value. At times the differences in the importance of a particular personal value were more distinct – for example, parents of reformatory school adolescents evaluated *benevolence* and *conservatism* values significantly higher

and *broadmindedness* values significantly lower than parents of adolescents attending regular schools.

Many explanations may be found for the differences in importance of personal values. First, deprivation model might be operating here. That is, people come to value what they do not have and thus parents who feel deprived of certain needs come to value them more. Superficial observation may lead to the conclusion that in this case parents of institutionalized adolescents feel more deprived of values *benevolence* and *conservatism* in selection or evaluation of their behavior than parents of non-institutionalized adolescents. Second interpretation might be that *broadmindedness* may be too abstract and redundant (Robinson et al 1985) for parents of institutionalized adolescents (whose level of education is significantly lower) to determine more concrete parenting objectives. It is also possible that the values parents of institutionalized adolescents report as being more important are the result of self-defending behavior because the institutionalization of their child gives them a greater incentive to convince others that they value “good” personal values higher and thus may give socially desirable responses. In this case these results are comparable to those reported by Kristiansen (1985), Goldsmith et al (1987) and Schwartz et al (1997) that the benevolence, tradition and conformity values are sensitive to socially desirable responding.

Parents of institutionalized adolescents reported a significantly higher rate of parenting practices in *setting limits*, *social norms* and *physical safety*. When asked to name specific behaviors, they mentioned giving orders to the child to clean up their room, also monitoring the companions the child keeps and explaining the necessity of rules to the child. Totally the practices explained in regression model 16% of variation, that is quite similar to Ehrensaf et al (2003) results (17%) of explaining frequency of child problem behavior. Although the study of Wasserman et al (1996) reported that low parental supervision and low monitoring are predictors for antisocial behavior in boys, our findings do not support it. A possible explanation of such comparatively higher rate of setting limits and explaining norms may be the fact that the relationship between family interaction and antisocial behavior is complex and likely to be reciprocal. Thus, the child’s disruptive behavior may be a cause of the parents’ parenting style and practices (Stice, Barrera 1995, Mak, 1996, O’Connor et al 1998, Rueter, Conger, 1998) and, at the same time, parents’ frequent use of *setting limits*, *social norms* and *physical safety* may be the determinant of the child’s antisocial behavior as well.

As already noted, parenting also depends on socio-economic status (Pinderhughes et al 2000, Belsky, 1990 and Belsky, 1993). For Kohn (1977), Luster et al (1989) and Tudge et al (1999) the differences were related to parents’ position in the social stratification system. Differences in level of education and the number of children in the family were statistically important – our results also corroborate previous research in this point. A lower level of education and a larger number of children are indicators of a lower socio-economic status in Estonia. It is equally plausible that the parenting practices and values of parents with higher, compared to lower level of education, are quite similar and have little relation with the type

of school. It seems possible that education indeed influences parental practices through personal values – thus may be as much a function of education or socio-economic status. Parents who do not have higher education and who hold non-professional jobs are more likely to want their children to learn to obey rules and to conform to external standards because they do not have enough time and resources to pay attention to their child's higher needs – needs for self-fulfillment and respect (cf. Pinderhughes et al 2000). The influence of education may be a valuable topic to investigate in future research but in this paper it is beyond the scope.

Perhaps the main lesson from this study is that there are significant relations between personal values of parents and their parenting practices, and institutionalization of child. The potential value of this awareness is the fact that if we are able to identify these practices and personal values influencing them, we will also be able to identify families and adolescents who are at risk. Of course, parents' rearing practices are not the only determiners that could cause delinquency, but they nevertheless affect children's behavior. Therefore, this information could be used in preventive intervention and could provide a valuable tool for future investigations.

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Address:

Toivo Aavik
Department of Psychology
University of Tartu
Tiigi 78, Tartu 50410
Estonia

Fax: +372 737 5900

Tel.: +372 737 5940

E-mail: toivo.aavik@ut.ee

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