

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE FAMILY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BEHAVIOR DISTURBANCES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Summary

The aim of this paper is to identify the predictive values of communication within the family to behavior of the children of advanced primary school age. The results are founded on self-perception and self-reports of pupils attending seventh and eighth grades of primary schools in the city of Zagreb (N=484) concerning their behavior (PON) and the quality of communications within the family (KUO).

By means of regression analysis founded on seven latent dimensions of behavioral space and manifest variables (150) of communication space in the family, the strong connection between the observed spaces is stated, i.e. every behavioral factor can be explained by specific modalities of communication in the family. The results indicate the value of learning communication and other social skills as prevention of specific behavioral patterns in children, i.e. as enhancing the quality of family life.

Key words: communication in the family, behavior of the children, regression analysis

1. THE PROBLEM

Can behavior be predicted?

Are there variables which attain the desirable and necessary level of significance in the prediction of behavior?

Numerous scientific investigations are still trying to answer this question by asserting, depending on the object of study, as significant not only particular variables but also interactions between the phenomena described by these variables, regularly stating that these very interactions are what makes behavior so complex and difficult to predict. In that light, the significance of communication within the family for prediction of behavior of juveniles at the beginning of adolescence is imposing itself as only one possible determinant of that behavior. But, on the other hand, the communication space within the family is a very complex and dynamic space that usually encloses the totality of interpersonal relations within the family. So, additionally, it is not relevant neither in which developmental phase a child is, nor in which phase of parenthood are his parents.

The literature (Hurlock, 1968; Clarke-Stewart, Perlmutter, Friedman, 1988) points out that the basic characteristic of the relations in families with adolescent children is that the children are trying to gain control. Montemayor (as cited in Clarke-Stewart et al., 1968) very vividly defines that relationship maintaining

that all parents are in conflict with their adolescent children, but in some families it is temporary phenomenon, and in others a permanent situation. Conflict is stronger in the beginning of adolescence and it diminishes toward its end. But, nevertheless, as the research informs us, children in adolescence are still strongly attached to their family, feeling that they belong to it and that they should care for members of their family. Thus Erceg and Mandić (1987), investigating family relations among other things, on the sample consisting of 368 attendants of seventh and eighth grades of Sarajevo primary schools, found that over 60% of respondents hold that attachment to family is desirable and important; in addition, as much as 63% of respondents state that in difficult situations in life they prefer to seek advice and help from parents, and not from friends.

Bearing in mind the aim of this paper, the results of research by Himes-Chapman and Hansen (1983) of differences between normal and delinquent adolescents in the perception of family relationship and self-concept are especially relevant. The findings of this study indicate that delinquent adolescents perceive their families as far less cohesive. They see members of their families as conflict personalities, without orientation to planning, organizing, without cultural contents and without possibility to express family warmth. They see the members of their family as person

setting high standards, firm frames of reference, thus dictating to a juvenile what to feel and at the same time rejecting him as an individual.

At the same time, they described themselves as persons who doubt their own values, see themselves as not desired, depressive, unhappy and not having enough faith and self-confidence.

2. AIM, HYPOTHESES AND METHODS OF WORK

The basis of this paper is study of a segment of family functioning — communication, which is in this paper regarded as a predictor in explaining the complex phenomenon of children in primary school age. That is also the aim of this paper.

It is only logical to expect a connection between the spaces observed that is significant and greater in the case of the types of behavior which are themselves clearly and positively oriented, and smaller in the case of more complex behavioral phenomena in the sense of presence of distortion in behavior which etiology is more complicated and complex and its understanding goes beyond the space of communication within the family.

2.1. Sample of respondents

By random selection among the pupils of seventh and eighth classes of primary schools in Zagreb 484 pupils of both sexes have been selected.

2.2. Sample of variables

Two sets of variables have been used in this work. The first consists of manifest space of variable predictors — communication within the family (150)¹, and the second consists of seven orthoblique behavioral factors² of children in primary school age (criterion).

Information about communications in the family and about behavior of the pupils is collected on the basis of self-assessment, i.e. self-perception of respondents — children in primary school age.

2.3. The methods of data processing

The data used in this paper have been processed in several methodological ways until now (see Bašić, Žižak, 1991). We estimated it was important to use the regression analysis, which constitutes the methodological basis of this paper, in order to assess the predictive significance of communication within the family for the behavior of children.

3. The results and the discussion

Data presented in table 1 allow us to conclude that the predictor system (150 manifest variables) defined by the space of the intra-familial communication is in significant correlation with the criterium, i.e. with every orthoblique factor of behavior of children in primary school age.

Table 1 - Regression analysis of orthoblique behavior factors (OBQ1-OBQ7) of intra-familial communication manifest variables in families of children in primary school age.

CRITERIA	DELTA	PREDICTORS	
		KUO	1....150
		RO	Q
OBQPON1	.54	.74	.000
OBQPON2	.49	.70	.000
OBQPON3	.39	.62	.02
OBQPON4	.52	.72	.00
OBQPON5	.56	.75	.00
OBQPON6	.51	.72	.00
OBQPON7	.49	.70	.00

This general statement can be viewed in spaces of particular regression analyses in which particular orthoblique behavior factors (criteria) are related to significant variables of intra-familial communication area, as predictors.

The first orthoblique behavior factor is defined as factor of being socialized in accordance with age expectations, and its structure describes the type of behavior of young people without pre-delinquent manifestations, and especially delinquent manifestations with special orientation to comprehensive adaptation to the company of young people of the same age (and mostly of the same sex) in which they participate. The results from table 2 imply that such behavior process can be predicted on the grounds of characteristics of intra-familial communication.

Speaking specifically in terms of communications, such children know their parents' dates of birth, they gladly return home from the school, they want to adapt to other members of the family, they feel the need to inform their parents about issues they find important to them, they assess their families as a group in which the members consult one another and put their interests in accord, act by the rules, and carry on without rivalry.

Intra-familial communication, defined as a predictor of children's behavior, which is assessed as being socialized as expected for particular age, can be viewed as a family in which there is a relatively clear structure and clear rules, but what is especially pointed out is: mutual connections, emotional closeness, respect, and the need for mutual adjustment.

Table 2 - Results of regression analysis of OBQ1 as a criterion and the KOM variables as predictors

OBQ1	KOM	R	PART (R)	Beta	Q	CONTENTS OF VARIABLES
	predi- ctors					
006		-.26	-.22	-.21	.000	they know the birthdates of their parents
079		-.27	-.21	-.20	.000	I like to return home from school as soon as possible
143		.27	.18	.19	.001	I don't want to adapt myself to others, let them adapt to me
019		-.31	-.17	-.19	.003	I feel the need to inform my parents about what is important to me
014		-.28	-.15	-.16	.009	there is rivalry in my family
020		-.16	-.14	-.13	.013	I can't change my haircut until my parents allow me to

The second orthoblique factor in the behavior space of children of advanced primary school age is directed in one direction and defined by lack of interests of interviewed children, in any social context.

What enhances this behavior of children is a family characterized by lacking of communication or failing to communicate (they talk about the third member of the family, parents do not know what is their child's favorite subject, they do not exchange opinions about social problems), sparse communication, inefficient communication (family members

never do what they are asked to do, messages are direct and do not affect the behavior). Nevertheless, members of such families hold that they are better within them than without them; this may suggest that such families satisfy certain needs we have not enough information about. We may suggest that even the relations described in these cases are real relations.

It is relatively simple to justify such connection between the predictors and the criteria because what is essential for the development of interests of children of that age is the parents' leading and orientational activity, and not the complete lack of structure of family life.

Table 3 - Results of regression analysis of OBQ2 as a criterion and of KOM variables as predictors

OBQ2					CONTENTS OF VARIABLES
KOM	R	PART (R)	Beta	Q	
067	-.03	-.06	-.07	-.000	the conversation of two family members is about the third
004	.29	.19	.15	.000	my parents know what is my favorite subject in school
009	.29	.18	.19	.001	I exchange opinions on social problems with family members
115	-.10	-.17	-.20	.001	I never do what they ask me to because I know they'll forget it
087	.11	.14	.15	.010	the messages of family members are indirect
119	.12	.44	.13	.011	messages received in the family affect the behavior of the members
076	-.01	-.13	-.14	.015	family members think that they are better in the family than outside

The structure of the third orthoblique factor in children's behavior space points out to the presence of pre-delinquent and delinquent behavior such as: running away to other places, running from home for a few days, begging, interventions of social workers and the police, stealing in public places and in one's home, running from school and destroying other people's property.

The set of predictor variables which enhances the delinquent and pre-delinquent behavior, and enters the field of communication within the family, can be defined as lacking in communication (they do not listen to each other, they do not force each other to accept some opinion, they do not talk freely, what they do does not equal to what they say). Parallel to this, the positive messages do not exist. An additional characteristic is that the union is maintained only to provide material security, and this tells us a lot about the communication between the members of such family. This could suggest that in these families only the basic psychological needs are being satisfied, and what is missing is gratification of all other aspects of psychological needs, what is being carried out in terms of communication. That is

why we refer to them as psychological: they require communication with other people. It is worth mentioning that these results refer to so-called normal children population, not to negatively selected group of pre-delinquent and delinquent children population.

Concerning the relations with parents of children who run from home, the studies show the lack of consistency in parents' behavior, the lack of efficient upbringing procedures and unrealistic expectations of the parents concerning the acceptable behavior of their children. The model of family interpersonal relations in these families is described as, before all, negative, which means that parents predominantly tend to criticize, threaten, make negative statements and carry out physical punishment; what is missing are positive interactions — positive statements, rewards, positive physical contact and so on. (Wodarski and Amons, 1984). Peterson (as cited in Wolk and Brandon, 1987) confirms this and finds out that dimensions of interest and parents' control of the adolescents have good predictive value for presence and absence of delinquency, for success in school, friendship with children of the same age and for the overall happiness of their adolescent children.

Table 4 - Results of regression analysis of OBQ3 as a criterion and of KOM variables as a predictor

OBQ3					CONTENTS OF VARIABLES
KOM	R	PART(R)	Beta	Q	
015	.11	-.06	-.07	.000	behavior of family members is in accord with their opinions
081	-.19	-.06	-.07	.000	parents usually don't listen when I speak
110	-.08	.16	.21	.003	family members force each other to accept some conclusions
012	.20	.12	.15	.031	family members talk openly with each other
057	-.20	-.13	-.16	.024	family is together because of material situation
094	.07	.13	.18	.020	what we do corresponds to what we say
127	-.03	.11	.13	.042	mother's favorite saying is - behave fine and you'll be fine

The fourth orthoblique factor of children's behavior is named as school failure factor (bad marks, low concentration, does not ask explanations from teachers, frequent absence from school), certain specific difficulties (with themselves and with their parents) manifested in school situations. If we look for the «source» of these difficulties in the field of communication within the family, as can be seen in Table 5, then it is possible to view them in several levels. One of them is the lack of positive messages from parent to child, with

criticism and reproach. The second level points out to conflicts in the relations, which is not a problem by itself, but becomes a problem if there is awareness that conflict situations are the result of malice and distrust. Third, although conflicts exist, it is important to emphasize that the family stays together because the members are tied with material situations and self-pronounced formal unity, and the perception of equity and honesty. When trying to sum up predictive significance of such communication within the family for children's failure in school, we come to the conclusion concerning certain type of disturbed family life at certain level, although the family mostly survives.

Table 5 - Results of regression analysis of OBQ4 as a criterion and KOM variables as predictors

OBQ4					CONTENTS OF VARIABLES
KOM	R	PART(R)	Beta	Q	
035	.25	.18	.19	.001	flaws in the family are being solved by pointing out to positive behavior
044	-.11	.16	.17	.004	family members are not interested for events in the family
077	-.19	-.15	-.15	.006	disagreements in the family are present
006	.20	.13	.13	.019	I know the birthdates of my parents
057	-.29	-.12	-.13	.034	family members are together because of material situation
062	-.04	-.11	-.11	.052	in my family everything is based on fairness and honesty
083	.16	.13	.15	.015	there is firm trust between the family members
096	-.08	.14	.14	.015	family members spare each other in the conflict

097	-.27	-.13	-.14	.018	conflict situations are results of malevolence
107	-.06	-.11	-.10	.048	my parents usually ask me where I want to spend my holidays
115	-.24	-.12	-.13	.031	my parents charge me with F's I already rectified

The fifth orthoblique factor of children's behavior is named as factor of defiance to authority although it is perhaps easier to view it as defiance to their companions of the same age, teachers and adults in general, combined with the need to withdraw themselves in bad company.

From the viewpoint of prediction such child behavior structure, it is enhanced by following structure of family variables: family is not a pleasant place for a child to return after school, there is no parent — child communication, all messages parent — child are

mostly transmitted in the negative direction, positive rewards are missing, and family members regard themselves as individualists who reciprocally disrespect each other.

As previously described, the family obviously does not offer the possibility to gratify a child's psychological needs, especially needs to belong and to be loved, to be respected; it also does not offer a model for adequate social relations, and the child is developing the way we described, defying everything that comes from the outer world and finding space for itself among similar children, in whose company it finds love and respect.

Table 6 - Results of regression analysis of OBQ5 as the criterion and KOM variables as the predictors

OBQ5					
KOM	R	PART	(R) Beta	Q	CONTENTS OF VARIABLES
058	-.03	.18	.20	.000	members of the group are together because they tolerate each other, but do not love
127	.09	.15	.15	.006	my mother's favorite saying: behave fine and you'll be fine
028	.38	.06	.07	.007	I think it is pleasant to live in my family
079	.31	.15	.14	.007	I like to return home from school as soon as possible
004	.28	.15	.13	.008	my parents know what is my favorite subject in school
071	-.23	-.14	-.15	.010	you don't know anything about life - my parents' favorite saying
051	-.18	-.14	-.13	.014	members of my family are individualists
038	-.18	-.14	-.14	.014	there are many punishments and restrictions in my family

The structure of the sixth factor of children's behavior is named as factor of formal undiscipline, which predominantly reveals itself in school and in relations with children of the same age.

Although the results of regression analysis, presented in Table 7, suggest the significance of previously shown variables of communication in the family for the criterion

variable, behavior of children (OBQ6), we do not find it justified to interpret their connection. In this case we found inadequate relations, but there is not enough indicators to enable us to make conclusive statements about the essence of these inadequate relations. It seems that the space of intra-familial communication, as defined in this paper, is insufficient to explain such specific behavior of children.

Table 7 - Results of regression analysis of OBQ6 as the criterion and KOM variables as the predictors

OBQ6					
KOM	R	PART(R)	Beta	Q	CONTENTS OF VARIABLES
069	-.19	-.06	-.06	.000	the conversation of two family members is about the third
075	.10	-.16	-.19	.003	mutual relations in the family are unsatisfying
150	-.33	-.15	-.16	.006	I don't think about my parents' feelings
079	.26	.14	.14	.010	I like to return home from school as soon as possible
006	.27	.14	.13	.013	I know the birthdates of my parents
004	.24	.12	.11	.030	my parents know what is my favorite subject in school
019	.32	.11	.13	.047	I feel the need to inform my parents about what is important to me
039	.00	.12	.12	.026	my parents treat me as a child when I want to go out, but as an adult when I have to do something
064	-.13	.11	.14	.042	everybody loves only themselves
094	-.24	-.11	-.12	.050	what we do in the family corresponds to what we say
145	-.13	.11	.12	.054	family members get the most when they burst into crying

Seventh orthoblique factor of children's behavior is defined by variables that primarily do not belong to behavior space (they were in the questionnaire but they explain it contextually. That factor is named as the factor of perceiving bad situation in the surroundings. In this case, the surroundings are: family, school and children of the same age.

Variables that build a significant predictor set (KOM) do not give enough information to confirm bad family situation perceived and declared by children (in the behavior questionnaire). We may propose that the relative confusion in family communication chain is what children perceive as bad family situation. Results of some research (Wolk and Brandon,

1977) suggest that delinquent adolescents tend to rationalize their unacceptable behavior through bad family situation. Even with this interpretation, and concerning the so-called normal population which talks also about their behavioral disturbances, there still remains the question of predictive value of specific variables of communication within the family for the children's behavior or for their perceiving of bad family situation. Possible answers are to be sought in the methodological direction. Namely, the seventh orthoblique factor of children's behavior is the last in the structure and if, as such, it reaches the smallest percentage of valid variance of system of variables from which it is isolated, and the smallest (nothing) corresponds to behavior space itself.

Table 8 - Results of regression analysis of OBQ7 as the criterion and KOM variables as predictors

OBQ7					
KOM	R	PART(R)	Beta	Q	CONTENTS OF VARIABLES
094	.17	.06	.07	.000	what we do in the family corresponds to what we say
105	-.17	.06	.07	.000	we suppress different opinions in the family
004	.27	.12	.12	.028	my parents know what is my favorite subject
012	.29	.11	.13	.044	we openly discuss everything in the family
081	-.35	-.12	-.13	.037	my parents don't listen to me when I speak
084	.07	-.11	-.12	.048	family members know what they should do

4. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

Based on self-reports of children of advanced primary school age about their behavior and on self-perception of communication in their families, regression analysis was used to determine the predictive significance of communication for children's behavior.

Generally speaking, it is possible to conclude that we found significant predictive value of communication within the family for children's behavior. By studying the individual regression analyses it is evident that children's behavior, viewed through latent structures of behavior, can be predicted on the grounds of different significance of particular structures of intra-familial communication variables.

It is possible to present the results this way:

INTRA-FAMILIAL COMMUNICATION	→	BEHAVIOR
- mutual connections between family members - emotional ties - need for mutual respect - clear structure and rules	→	socialization as expected for their age
- no communication - lack of communication - directness of communication - inefficient communication - it is better in the family than outside	→	lack of interests
- insufficient communication (they do not listen to each other, they do not talk sincerely, they do not engage) - insincere communication - no positive messages - together only for material reasons	→	pre-delinquent and delinquent behavior
- lack of positive messages - criticism and reproach - conflicts in relations - malevolence and distrust - being together only to provide material security - "fairness and honesty"	→	failure in school
- insufficient communication - family is not a nice place - negative messages - family members are individualists - mutual undervaluation, belittling	→	showing resist to authorities
- impossible to make a meaningful interpretation	→	formal undiscipline
- confusion in family communication	→	perceiving bad situation in social surroundings

According to the results (the same research) cited by Brajša (1991) it is possible to maintain that what is important for the behavior of children which is considered adequate and expected for their age is intra-familial communication in the function of family togetherness, within a broader frame of family cooperation and understanding.

Contrary to this, what is causing the aberration from expected and adequate behavior are various forms of disfunctioning in communication between the members of the family. These various forms may be classified as follows: insufficient communication, insincere communication, lack of togetherness, orientation towards particular family members

— individualists, negative messages, criticism, undervaluation, being together only to provide material security.

According to cited results, the possibility of predicting children's behavior by studying the particularities of communication within the family is obvious. However, we should emphasize that we feel the need to approach the prediction of behavior by studying other (bio-psycho-social) possible "sources" of various forms of children's behavior as well. But if we limit the study to intra-familial communication, it is important to state

that the communication is a knowledge of its kind, it is also a skill, so it can be learned and trained.

When we are dealing with parents, especially with parents of so-called normal population and with their quality of communication, then, aiming to prevent the disorders in children's behavior, we might think about organizing training in communication, schools for parents or similar forms of work with parents. The results cited are an encouragement to begin such training on a larger scale and to evaluate its effectiveness.

5. LITERATURE

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1 The questionnaire of communications within the family (KUO) is constructed by P. Brajša, M. Mejovšek, J. Bašić i A. Žižak. It covers five basic areas of family interpersonal dynamics (150 variables), following P. Brajša:

1. characteristics of family interpersonal system,
2. characteristics of family interpersonal circularity,
3. characteristics of family interpersonal relations,
4. characteristics of family interpersonal communication,
5. characteristics of family interpersonal adaptation.

The assessment of metrical characteristics of the Questionnaire of communications within the family show that this instrument has completely satisfying reliability and validity.

2 The questionnaire about children behavior (PON, 58 variables) is constructed by V. Kovačević intending to assess the manifest behavior in different situations in which the pupil population can be.

The factors of behavior of the pupils are:

- OBQPON1 — being socialized as expected regarding the age
- OBQPON2 — lack of interest
- OBQPON3 — pre-delinquent and delinquent behavior
- OBQPON4 — failure in school
- OBQPON5 — resisting authorities
- OBQPON6 — formal undiscipline
- OBQPON7 — perceiving bad situation in its surroundings