

## **Relationship between parenting practices and problem behavior in 11 and 12 year old boys and girls**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the relationship between parenting practices and problem behavior in 11 and 12 year-old boys and girls. It is important to investigate this relationship because problem behavior has negative effects on the child's own development, as well as on his or her family. Because there is a reciprocal influence between parenting and problem behavior in children, it is important to gain insight into the two different directions, as well as the magnitude of this relationship. A total of 458 children participated in the study, with boys comprising 47% of the population and girls 53%. Using information gathered from self-reports, the degree of externalizing and internalizing problem behavior was related to the perception of children about positive and negative parental behavior. No gender differences were found. Consistent with one of the hypotheses, ANCOVA analyses show an inverse relationship between positive parenting and externalizing problem behavior. No relationship was found between positive parenting and internalizing problem behavior, a finding inconsistent with one of the research hypotheses. A positive relationship was found between negative parenting on the one hand, and both internalizing and externalizing problem behavior on the part of the child on the other. This is consistent with one of the research hypotheses. The above-mentioned relationships reveal a vicious circle of negative parenting and problem behavior.

**Keywords:** parenting; externalizing problem behavior; internalizing problem behavior

### **Introduction**

Children and their caregivers are in constant interaction with one other. It is therefore impossible to understand child behavior without taking into account the parenting practices of a child's parents or caregivers. A reciprocal influence of parents and children on each other's behavior has been recognized (Hipwell, Keenan, Kasza, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Bean, 2008). In research on etiology of problem behavior in children, a distinction has been made among three groups that can be distinguished according to risk and protective factors that may contribute to problem behavior. These three groups are: child characteristics, environmental factors and parent characteristics (Bosmans, Braet, Van Leeuwen, & Beyers, 2006). The present paper focuses on parent characteristics. "Parenting style" is an important aspect of parent characteristics, and has a great influence on the development of children (O'Connor,

2002). In this research, parenting styles will be divided into “positive” and “negative” parenting practices.

In literature on this subject, a distinction has been made between externalizing and internalizing problem behavior (Liu, 2004). Externalizing problem behavior, also called disruptive behavior, refers to easily observable problem behavior that is recognizable and has a negative effect on the external environment. “Disturbing behavior”, hyperactivity, aggression or rule-breaking behavior all fall within this category (Liu, 2004). Conversely, internalizing problem behavior is not as overtly expressed, and is thus more difficult to recognize. Such behavior affects the intrapersonal environment of the child (i.e., emotions, mood and cognition) more than the external environment. Internalizing problem behavior involves withdrawn and inhibited behavior, anxiety and depression (Zahn-Waxler, Klimes-Dougan, & Slattery, 2000).

The aim of this study is to explore whether there is a relationship between parenting, be it positive or negative, and problematic child behavior, whether externalizing or internalizing. The possibility of gender differences will also be examined.

### ***Patterson’s coercion theory***

A bidirectional effect between parenting and problem behavior has been described in the widely applied coercion theory of Patterson (1976). This theory states that harsh punishment and problem behavior constitute a vicious circle. Thus, parents can reinforce the negative behavior of their child through inconsistent and severe disciplining, which is classified as “negative parenting.” According to Patterson, a child’s problem behavior often results from the behavior of family members. Parents’ inconsistent and/or harsh punishment of their children’s problem behavior tends to increase such behavior in the future, provoking even more harsh punishment, and more problem behavior, *ad infinitum*. This is what constitutes the vicious circle.

### ***Positive parenting***

Positive parenting is characterized by parents being involved in children’s lives, offering support, promoting autonomy and setting rules (Bosmans et al., 2006). The provision of positive rewards is also believed to be part of positive parenting (Van Leeuwen & Vermulst, 2004).

*Externalizing problems.* Longitudinal studies on the influence of positive parenting on externalizing problem behavior has shown a negative correlation (Bosmans et al., 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2005). Behavioral control and monitoring by parents can contribute to the prevention of undesired, risky and aggressive behavior (Barber, Olsen, & Shagle, 1994; Barnes & Farrel, 1992; Domenech Rodriguez, Davis, Rodriguez, & Bates, 2006; Galambos, Barker, & Almeida, 2003). The fact that a high rate of monitoring and involvement of parents has been associated with less delinquent and externalizing behavior is also shown by other longitudinal research (Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001; Reitz, Dekovic, & Meijer, 2006). Lack of positive parenting practices, like setting clear rules, increases the chance of externalizing problem behavior. Setting rules also has proven to be important in research on the use of alcohol and smoking (Dalton et al., 2006; Mares, Lichtwarck-Aschoff, Burk, van der Vorst, & Engels, 2012).

*Internalizing problems.* Positive parenting can also lower internalizing problem behavior (Finkenauer, Engels, & Baumeister, 2005; Greenberger, Chen, Tally, & Dong, 2000). The setting of rules and limits by parents decrease the probability of internalizing problem behavior in children. (Domenech Rodriguez et al., 2006; Galambos et al., 2003). In addition, a high rate of monitoring by parents reduces the risk of children internalizing problem behavior, and especially of their developing depression (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000;

Pettit et al., 2001). However, monitoring could have a negative influence and increase the chance of internalization when a child has the feeling of being constantly controlled by parents. Other research has found that internalizing problem behavior in children can increase when the latter perceive excessive parental involvement (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Reitz et al., 2006).

Little is known about the relationship between rewarding and externalizing and/or internalizing problem behavior in children. A somewhat dated study shows that parental overemphasis on rewarding could undermine pro-social and intrinsic motivation of their children (Fabes, Fultz, Eisenberg, May-Plumee, & Christoffer, 1989). Other studies portray rewarding as part of parent-training programs promoting positive parental behavior (Sanders, Bor, & Morawska, 2007). There is therefore some support for the conclusion that positive parenting leads to reduced problem behavior.

The above-mentioned findings are consistent with literature on positive parenting and problem behavior. One study shows that adolescents living in a nurturing, supporting family with responsible and loving parents, are inclined to show less problem behavior than adolescents who grow up in dysfunctional families in which parents are unresponsive and negative (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991).

*Gender differences.* Most studies have generally not reported gender differences (Bosmans et al., 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Finkenauer et al., 2005; Greenberger et al., 2000). However, the positive influence of monitoring related to externalizing and internalizing problem behavior showed stronger effects for girls than for boys (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000; Pettit et al., 2001; Webb, Bray, Getz, & Adams, 2002).

### ***Negative parenting***

Harsh and punitive parenting is generally conceptualized in research studies as “negative parenting,” because it is thought to be responsible for negative short- and long-term results in children (Ritchie & Buchanan, 2009). Parents punish their children as a consequence of their inappropriate behavior by either imposing an adverse consequence or removing something pleasant from their environment (Dadds & Salmon, 2003). The aim of punishing is to diminish the chance of recurrence of a specific behavior. There are different punishment methods, including corporal punishment, denial, imposition of some disagreeable activity and threatening some adverse consequence (Buldukoglu & Kukulu, 2007). Examples of more mild punishments include verbal reprimands, penalties or a short time-out (Maag, 2001). The harshest punishment children can receive is generally considered to be physical in nature (Wicks-Nelson & Israel, 2006).

*Externalizing problems.* Parenting practices can cause different externalizing problem behavior in toddlers (Barling, MacEwen, & Nolte, 1993). The more a parent punishes, the more behavioral and attention problems a child will tend to display. Research by Weiss and colleagues (1992) also shows that physical punishment of school-age children can predict later problem behavior. It has been shown that harsh punishment by parents is correlated with later aggressive behavior of children. Similar results have been reported in a more recent study by Amato and Fowler (2002). They tested five to 18 year-old children using the same kind of longitudinal design as Weiss, Dodge, Bates and Pettit (1992). The results of this research show that harsh punishment is correlated with poor academic performance, a weaker capacity for adaptation, and later problem behavior.

*Internalizing problems.* Research by Marchand and Hock (1998) has shown that restriction and punishment by parents are predictors of internalizing problem behavior in children. However, few studies have been published that explore the relationship between negative parenting and internalizing problem behavior.

*Gender differences.* Longitudinal research on the relationship between harsh punishment and specific disorders in boys 7 to 12 years old shows that harsh punishment is often correlated with a child's diagnosis of Conduct Disorder (Burke, Pardini, & Loeber, 2008). Although there appears to be no research on gender differences, the relationship between harsh punishment and internalizing problem behavior may be weaker in boys than in girls. This is expected because boys on the average show less internalizing problem behavior (Dulmus & Hilarski, 2006). In addition, previous research shows no clear relationship between punishment and internalizing problem behavior in boys (Burke et al., 2008).

Girls who are harshly punished more often show internalizing problem behavior (e.g., depression) in comparison to boys (Dulmus & Hilarski, 2006). It has been shown that harsh punishment by parents predicts externalizing problem behavior as well as depression in girls. Conversely, depression and problem behavior also predict the use of harsh punishment by parents. This correlation between harsh punishment and problem behavior in girls is shown in other research as well (e.g., Miller, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2009).

### ***Hypotheses***

The main hypothesis of this study is that there is an inverse correlation between positive parenting on the one hand, and externalizing and internalizing problem behavior, on the other. No gender differences are expected. Furthermore, a positive relationship between negative parenting and both kinds of problem behavior is expected. In these relationships, a gender difference is expected (i.e., boys are expected to show more externalizing problem behavior in cases of negative parenting, while girls are expected to show externalizing as well as internalizing problem behavior in such instances).

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

For our research, 494 Dutch children in the fifth and sixth grades were selected for participation. These children were enrolled in 18 different elementary schools throughout the Netherlands, in both rural as well as urban areas. A total of 458 children (92.7% of those initially contacted) took part in the research. Of the 36 pupils that did not take part, 22 of them did not obtain the consent of their parents, 3 children did not participate because of other academic commitments, and 11 children were ill or attending the dentist. The distribution of boys and girls was reasonably equivalent: 214 boys (47%) and 244 girls (53%). All children fell into the 11-13 age range, with an average age of 11.8 (SD = 0.59). The average age for boys was 11.9 (SD = 0.59). For girls the average age was 11.8 (SD = 0.59). The majority (95%) of the participating children were born in the Netherlands. The other 5% were immigrant children.

### ***Instruments***

Scales of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997; Van Widenfelt, Goedhart, Treffers, & Goodman, 2003) were used in order to measure the extent of participants' internalizing and externalizing behavior. This questionnaire uses self-reporting and is suitable for adolescents between 11 and 17 years of age. Two scales were created for the present study that make use of the existing scales. The "externalizing scale" comprises the scales "conduct problems", "peer relationship problems" and "hyperactivity/inattention," (items 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, and 25) while the "internalizing scale" consists entirely of the existing "emotional symptoms" scale (items 3, 8, 13, 16, and 24). Students received one of the following scores on each item: 0 = not true, 1 = a bit true, and 2

= completely true). The sum of scores on these scales was calculated for each student. Previous research has shown the SDQ to be a valid instrument (Achenbach et al., 2008). The reliability of the internalizing and externalizing scales of the SDQ in our research sample is .72 and .43 respectively. Thus, the internalizing scale has a high reliability, and the externalizing scale has a low reliability.

The Verkorte Schaal voor Ouderlijk Gedrag (VSOG; “Short Scale for Parenting Behavior”), which consists of items extracted from the longer SOG (see Van Leeuwen & Vermulst, 2004), was used in order to measure parenting styles. The scores for fathers and mothers of participating children were totaled, and this sum score was used in the analyses. The VSOG was designed to measure the perception of children from eight year old about the parenting strategies of their parents related to delinquency and behavioral problems. New scales have been assembled out of the existing ones. The scales “positive parental behavior”, “setting rules,” and “rewarding” comprise the “positive parenting” scale (items: 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24) and the scales “harsh punishment” and “punishment” comprise the “negative parenting” scale (items: 3, 5, 7, 8, 12, 14, 20, 22, 25). Each item is scored on a five-point scale (from 1 = never to 5 = always). The total scores of the scales have been used in the present study. Previous research has shown that the SOG, of which the VSOG has been derived, is a valid instrument (Van Leeuwen & Vermulst, 2004). The reliability values of the scales “positive parenting” and “negative parenting” in our research are respectively .94 en .91. Thus, both of these scales have a high reliability.

### ***Procedure***

Principals and teachers of the chosen schools were initially contacted with a proposal that students in their schools participate in the study. A letter then informed parents of the pupils about the survey taking place, and invited them and their children to participate. Informed consent was obtained from all parents agreeing to participate and to have their children participate. The questionnaires were distributed and completed in classrooms by one of the researchers with the teacher present. The children were informed that the research would be totally anonymous, that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers on the questionnaire, and that they were free to ask the researcher any questions they might have. Students were also told that they each had to fill out the questionnaire on their own, and were given approximately 50 minutes to do so.

### ***Statistical analysis***

Descriptive and evaluative statistics were used to analyze the research data. By using t-tests, boys and girls were tested and compared on their perception of parenting practices and the level of externalizing and internalizing problem behavior. After that, four ANCOVA's were used to determine whether there was interaction and/or main effects of gender and the different forms of parenting on problem behavior in children. If there was a significant interaction, a follow-up test on correlations was conducted on both genders independently. Afterward, the difference between boys and girls in the relationship between externalizing and internalizing problem behavior, on the one hand, and positive or negative parenting on the other, was analyzed.

## **Results**

### ***Descriptive statistics***

It was first determined if differences in gender were responsible for either levels of externalizing or internalizing problem behavior or the perception of positive and negative

parenting. The results of the analysis, which were conducted using t-tests, are shown in Table 1. The analysis, based on Levene's test, shows no significance regarding externalizing and internalizing problem behavior. Therefore, equal variances were assumed for the purpose of analyzing the test results. Levene's test shows significance for different parenting styles. These test results did not assume equal variances. The analysis shows significant differences between boys and girls regarding externalizing as well as internalizing problem behavior (respectively  $t(427.19) = 4.50, p < .001$  and  $t(454.64) = -4.18, p < .001$ ). Boys scored higher on externalizing problem behavior and girls scored higher on internalizing problem behavior. No significant differences between boys and girls were shown with respect to "positive parenting" ( $t(456) = -1.13, p = .259$ ). However, there were significant differences for "negative parenting" ( $t(456) = 2.07, p = .039$ ). Boys scored higher on their perception of negative parenting than girls did.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics on problematic child behavior and parenting styles

| Variable         | Boys   |       | Girls  |       | T     | Df     | p     |
|------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
|                  | M      | SD    | M      | SD    |       |        |       |
| Problem behavior |        |       |        |       |       |        |       |
| Externalizing    | 8.61   | 4.25  | 6.91   | 3.76  | 4.50  | 427.19 | <.001 |
| Internalizing    | 2.31   | 2.11  | 3.21   | 2.49  | -4.18 | 454.64 | <.001 |
| Parenting        |        |       |        |       |       |        |       |
| Positive         | 109.32 | 21.13 | 111.58 | 21.50 | -1.13 | 456    | .259  |
| Negative         | 33.68  | 10.31 | 31.71  | 9.96  | 2.07  | 456    | .039  |

*Note.* The testing values of problem behavior in this table assume equal variances, because Levene's test showed no significance. The test values of parental behavior in this table do not assume equal variances, because Levene's test shows significance.

### **ANCOVA's positive parenting**

Two ANCOVA's have been conducted regarding both positive parenting and internalizing and externalizing problem behavior. In both ANCOVA analyses, positive parenting is taken as covariate and gender as a fixed factor. In the first ANCOVA, externalizing problem behavior is a dependent variable while, in the second, internalizing problem behavior is the dependent variable.

First, main and interaction effects of positive parenting on externalizing problem behavior were tested. Table 2 shows the results of the correlation between positive parenting and externalizing problem behavior. The analysis shows a significant main effect of positive parenting on externalizing problem behavior, ( $F(1, 453) = 54.59, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$ ). The partial  $\eta^2$  shows a small effect. The *B*-value of  $-.06$  ( $SE = .01$ ) shows a negative relationship between positive parenting and externalizing problem behavior. This corresponds to the stated hypothesis. The analysis shows no main effect on gender, ( $F(1, 453) = .91, p = .340$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ ). An interaction effect could not be detected ( $F(1, 453) = .02, p = .899$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ ). This also corresponds to our hypothesis.

**Table 2** ANCOVA main effects of positive parenting and gender on externalizing problem behavior and interaction effect of gender and positive parenting on externalizing problem behavior

| Variable                  | df  | F     | p     | $\eta^2$ | B    | SE   |
|---------------------------|-----|-------|-------|----------|------|------|
| Main effect               |     |       |       |          |      |      |
| Positive parenting        | 1   | 54.59 | <.001 | .06      | -.06 | .01  |
| Gender                    | 1   | .91   | .340  | .00      | 1.79 | 1.87 |
| Interaction effect        |     |       |       |          |      |      |
| Gender*Positive parenting | 1   | .02   | .899  | .00      |      |      |
| Error                     | 453 |       |       |          |      |      |

Furthermore a main and interaction effect of positive parenting on internalizing problem behavior was tested. The results are shown in Table 3. The ANCOVA shows no significant main effect of positive parenting on internalizing problem behavior, ( $F(1, 453) = .23, p = .629$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ ). This does not support the expected hypothesis based on the literature. The analysis shows no significant major effect of gender ( $F(1, 453) = 1.84, p = .176$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ ). In addition, no significant interaction effect was found ( $F(1, 453) = .35, p = .555$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ ). These findings are consistent with the above-mentioned hypothesis.

**Table 3** ANCOVA main effect of positive parenting and gender on internalizing problem behavior and interaction effect of gender and positive parenting on internalizing problem behavior

| Variable                  | df  | F    | p    | $\eta^2$ | B     | SE   |
|---------------------------|-----|------|------|----------|-------|------|
| Main effect               |     |      |      |          |       |      |
| Positive parenting        | 1   | .23  | .629 | .00      | .00   | .01  |
| Gender                    | 1   | 1.84 | .176 | .00      | -1.56 | 1.15 |
| Interaction effect        |     |      |      |          |       |      |
| Gender*Positive parenting | 1   | .35  | .555 | .00      |       |      |
| Error                     | 453 |      |      |          |       |      |

### ANCOVA's negative parenting

The next two ANCOVA's were conducted with negative parenting as covariate and with gender as fixed factor. In the first ANCOVA, externalizing problem behavior is a dependent variable, while in the second, internalizing problem behavior is the dependent variable in the analysis.

The results of main and interaction effects of negative parenting on externalizing problem behavior are shown in Table 4. There is a significant main effect of negative parenting on externalizing problem behavior ( $F(1, 453) = 24.89, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$ ). Partial  $\eta^2$  reveals only a small effect. The *B*-weight ( $B = .06$  (SE = .03)), indicates a positive relationship. This corresponds to the stated hypothesis. Analysis shows a significant main effect of gender ( $F(1, 453) = .21, p = .646$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ ). No interaction effect was found ( $F(1, 453) = 3.15, p = .077$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ). This is also consistent with the research hypothesis, and with previous reports in the literature.

**Table 4** ANCOVA main effects of negative parenting and gender on externalizing problem behavior and interaction effect of gender and negative parenting on externalizing problem behavior

| Variable                  | df  | F     | p     | $\eta^2$ | B    | SE   |
|---------------------------|-----|-------|-------|----------|------|------|
| Main effect               |     |       |       |          |      |      |
| Negative parenting        | 1   | 24.89 | <.001 | .05      | .06  | .03  |
| Gender                    | 1   | .21   | .646  | .00      | -.57 | 1.23 |
| Interaction effect        |     |       |       |          |      |      |
| Gender*Negative parenting | 1   | 3.15  | .077  | .01      |      |      |
| Error                     | 453 |       |       |          |      |      |

Finally, the relationship between negative parenting and internalizing problem behavior was tested. The results of this analysis (see Table 5) shows a significant main effect of negative parenting on internalizing problem behavior ( $F(1, 453) = 6.08, p = .014$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ). Partial  $\eta^2$  shows a small effect. According to the *B*-weight, there is a positive relationship ( $B = .01$ ;  $SE = .02$ ). These findings are in line with our hypothesis. There is a significant main effect of gender ( $F(1, 453) = 6.80, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ ). Partial  $\eta^2$  reveals only a small effect. The *B*-weight indicates a negative relationship ( $B = -.91$ ;  $SE = .73$ ). There is no interaction effect ( $F(1, 453) = 1.88, p = .171$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ ), this finding is inconsistent with the above-mentioned hypothesis.

**Table 5** ANCOVA main effects of negative parenting and gender on internalizing problem behavior and interaction effect of gender and negative parenting on internalizing problem behavior

| Variable                  | df  | F    | p    | $\eta^2$ | B    | SE  |
|---------------------------|-----|------|------|----------|------|-----|
| Main effect               |     |      |      |          |      |     |
| Negative parenting        | 1   | 6.08 | .014 | .01      | .01  | .02 |
| Gender                    | 1   | 6.80 | .009 | .02      | -.91 | .73 |
| Interaction effect        |     |      |      |          |      |     |
| Gender*Negative parenting | 1   | 1.88 | .171 | .00      |      |     |
| Error                     | 453 |      |      |          |      |     |

## Discussion

This study explored the relationship between parenting practices and problem behavior in 11 and 12 year-old children. Specifically, the interaction between positive and negative parenting, on the one hand, and internalizing and externalizing problem behavior, were examined. The study also distinguished between boys and girls. However, none of the analyses shows a gender difference in the relationship between positive and negative parenting and problem behavior in children. This is inconsistent with the hypothesis of a gender difference in internalizing problem behavior. On the basis of previously published literature, it was expected that boys who were harshly punished would express externalizing problem behavior (Burke et al., 2008) and that girls being punished harshly would show externalizing and internalizing problem behavior (Dulmus & Hilarski, 2006). Positive parenting correlates negatively to externalizing problem behavior. No relationship was found between positive parenting and internalizing problem behavior. This is not consistent with the hypothesis, which must therefore be rejected. There is a positive relationship between negative parenting and both internalizing and externalizing problem behavior. Except for the hypothesis regarding the relationship between positive parenting and internalizing problem behavior, all hypotheses can be accepted. There is a clear correlation between positive and negative parenting, on the one hand, and problem behavior on the other.

The finding that positive parenting corresponds to externalizing problem behavior is consistent with the literature. Children who grow up in a caring and supportive family in which parents show responsibility and affection for their children are less inclined to engage in problem behavior than children who grow up in dysfunctional families in which parents are negative and lack responsibility for their children (Bosmans et al., 2006; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Lamborn et al., 1991; Reitz et al., 2000).

A relationship between positive parenting and internalizing problem behavior was found in this study. This finding is not consistent with previous reports in the literature of an inverse relationship between positive parenting and internalizing problem behavior (Greenberger et al., 2000; Finkenauer et al., 2005; Pettit et al., 2001). One explanation for this finding is that children showing internalizing problem behavior and reporting positive parenting by their parents perceive this parental role as excessively controlling. This perceived control might not be interpreted by these children as supportive, and therefore end up maintaining internalizing problem behavior (Reitz et al., 2006).

This study shows that there is a positive correlation between negative parenting and externalizing problem behavior. This is consistent with previous reports in the literature indicating a positive correlation between parental punishment and more behavioral and attention problems in their children (Barling et al., 1993; Burke et al., 2008; Hipwell et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2009). This relationship is mutual. In addition, a relationship between internalizing problem behavior and negative parenting has been shown. Previous research showed that restriction and punishment by parents predict internalizing problem behavior in the child (Marchand & Hock, 1998). This relationship is reciprocal, in that internalizing problem behavior predicts negative parenting as well (Hipwell et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2009).

This study contributes to the existing literature because of the fact that the age group of 11 and 12 year olds had not previously been the object of extensive research. The age of 11 and 12 year-old is an important developmental period in children's lives, during which they can be influenced a great deal (De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2008). Notwithstanding the fact that children of this age are typically becoming increasingly independent, it is of utmost importance that they receive proper and directed caregiving from their parents. Emotional and behavioral problems of school-age children not only have a disadvantageous impact on their wellbeing, but also on the wellbeing of their family and their school (Atzaba-Poria, Pike, & Deater-Deckard, 2004). It is important to reduce these problems, and investigating the factors that are influential on the problem behavior in children will help accomplish this. The present paper has also explored possible gender differences, which have not been extensively researched in this context. This study has gathered information by means of participants' self-reports. Children aged 11 and 12 years are typically becoming increasingly independent of their parents, resulting in parents recognizing fewer problem behaviors and therefore being unable to report such behaviors.

This study suffers from a number of limitations. First, data were recorded at only a single moment (in order to not lead to artificial manipulation of the parenting situation). For this reason, causal relationships could not be demonstrated. The only thing that can be reported here are correlations between the perception of children regarding their parenting and the problem behavior they engage in. Nothing can be said about the direction of this relationship. Acquiring such data would necessitate the manipulation of families, which is unethical in this kind of research. Another limitation of this study is the use of a non-clinical sample containing only a relatively small number of immigrant children. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to clinical (i.e., those with psychiatric diagnoses) or immigrant children. It is however possible to generalize the results to Dutch children in the age of 11 and 12 years of age attending regular primary education. Readers are also advised to exercise caution with

respect to generalizing the results of this study to children with externalizing problem behavior. The analysis shows that the externalizing scale of the SDQ is not reliable. Finally, another important weakness of this study is that only the self-reports of children were used. As previously indicated self-reporting has its advantages. One of its disadvantages, however, is that the resulting data reflect only the perception of children, which may not be an accurate reflection of reality. Future research should use more informants in order to enhance the validity of the findings.

The results of this study underline the importance of preventing a vicious circle of negative parenting and problem behavior in children (Patterson, 1976). This should be a goal of educational programs. It is important to avoid negative parenting as well as problem behavior and, conversely, to promote positive parenting. While the relationship between the two forms of behavior is probably mutual, it is important to give support both to children displaying problem behavior, and to parents who engage in negative parenting practices.

Further research should use a longitudinal design in which data are not limited to self-reports. Using more data sources and collecting data on more than one occasion will make it possible to more accurately portray the relationship between parenting and problem behavior in children and also to determine the directions of this relationship. In addition, the relationship between positive parenting and internalizing problem behavior has to be investigated further because the results found in this research did not correspond to previous research findings. Increasing knowledge of this subject will make it possible to improve counseling regarding desired parenting practices in case a child displays internalizing problem behavior.

## **Conclusion**

This research provides evidence of a relationship between positive parenting and externalizing problem behavior in children. In addition, the present study suggests a relationship between negative parenting, on the one hand, and externalizing and internalizing problem behavior, on the other. Gender differences have not been found between parenting and problem behavior. These findings might help improve parent training programs, and might also assist families in breaking out of the vicious circle of negative parenting and problem behavior on the part of the child.

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