



# The transactional process between the relationships with caregivers and children's externalizing behavior



Isabelle Roskam \*, Marie Stievenart, Jan de Mol

Psychological Sciences Research Institute, University of Louvain, Belgium

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 19 May 2014

Received in revised form 6 November 2015

Accepted 13 November 2015

Available online 30 November 2015

### Keywords:

Externalizing behavior  
Quality of relationships  
Transactional model  
Mothers  
Fathers  
Teachers

## ABSTRACT

Externalizing behavior (EB) has been found to be pervasive in children across different interactional systems. The transactional model is one of the most interesting and plausible mechanisms explaining the development of behavioral problems (Sameroff, 2009). The main goal of the study is to test bidirectional and recursive transactional relations between the quality of the caregiver–child relationship and children's externalizing behavior. The transactional model was tested in three-wave longitudinal cross-lagged models involving 117 children (78.5% boys) aged 4 at the beginning of the study and three caregivers, i.e. their mother, father and teacher. All of the children had been clinically referred for externalizing behavior. The multi-informant three-wave design was an original feature of this research. The results provided no evidence for a transactional process. The results suggest the singularity of each of these three interactional systems. They are discussed from the theoretical viewpoint and in terms of their clinical implications.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Externalizing behavior (EB) is characterized by arousal, aggression, defiance and impulsiveness. For some children, EB is pervasive across settings and interactional systems, with an increased risk of antisocial outcomes (Reef, Diamantopoulou, van Meurs, Verhulst, & van der Ende, 2011). Hypotheses have been formed about the mechanisms explaining both the emergence and the maintenance of EB in children, and contextual impact has received considerable attention (Bartels et al., 2004). The extent to which children's EB can be related to the quality of the caregiver–child relationship (QR) has been particularly studied. QR can be approached as a combination of behaviors, feelings, and expectations that are unique to a particular caregiver and a particular child. It is a broad concept encompassing both positive dimensions such as closeness, responsiveness, warmth, involvement, support, and positive affect, and negative dimensions such as negative affect, criticism, intrusiveness, irritability, control, and harsh discipline (MacFie & Swan, 2009; McCall, Groark, & Fish, 2010; Recchia, 2012; Vu, Hustedt, Pinder, & Han, 2015). Significant relations between QR with caregivers and children's EB have been widely reported in previous studies, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally (Caspi et al., 2004; Daley, Renyard, & Sonuga-Barke, 2005; Peris & Baker, 2000). Overall, a relationship characterized for instance by emotional support and warmth has been related to positive outcomes in children (Boeldt et al., 2012). Conversely, a relationship characterized for instance by criticism and rejection has been repeatedly identified as a risk factor for developing EB (Hoeve et al., 2009). The main objective of the current study is to test the transactional relations

between QR with caregivers (mothers, fathers and teachers) and children's EB as a plausible mechanism underlying the development of behavioral problems.

## The transactional model

One of the most important ecologically oriented theories about the relations between children and their caregivers is the transactional model (Sameroff, 2009). Central to the transactional model is the emphasis on *bidirectional relations* and the interdependence of children and their social environment. Since the transactional model involves a developmental perspective, it also postulates *recursive relations* whereby the caregiver at T1 relates to the child at T2, who in turn relates to the caregiver at T3, and whereby the child at T1 relates to the caregiver at T2, who in turn relates to the child at T3. The transactional model viewing children and their parents as interdependent over time integrates empirical evidence about both children's effects on caregivers and caregivers' effects on children.

With regard to EB, caring for externalized children is often described as more challenging and less rewarding than caring for other children, leading to lower levels of satisfaction, negative feelings, and higher criticism in caregivers as well as to more negative childrearing behaviors (Coleman & Karraker, 2003; Meunier, Roskam, & Browne, 2011; Slagt, Deković, de Haan, van den Akker, & Prinzie, 2012). At the same time, EB is thought to be more likely to emerge or persist when caregivers resort to criticism, controlling or harsh discipline that in turn reinforces children's problematic behavior (Dishion, French, & Patterson, 1995; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989; Slagt et al., 2012; Snyder, Reid, &

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: isabelle.roskam@uclouvain.be (I. Roskam).

Patterson, 2003). It has therefore been suggested that negative transactions account for the development of EB. Children's EB leads to negative behaviors, feelings, and expectations in caregivers, which in turn reinforce negative behaviors, feelings, and expectations in children, and vice versa. These links have most commonly been found in the family context, but have also been identified between negative relationships with teachers, characterized by criticism and a lack of positive comments, and pupils' conduct problems (Daley et al., 2005).

Transactional relations have previously been empirically tested with longitudinal cross-lagged models for mother–child dyads and to a lesser extent for both father–child and teacher–child interactional systems (Doumen et al., 2008; Meunier et al., 2011). This is because longitudinal cross-lagged models are the most appropriate for testing transactional relations, although they do not enable causality issues to be addressed. In order to provide a very focused literature review, only existing studies based on such designs that tested bidirectional relations (with at least two waves of data collection) or both bidirectional and recursive relations (with at least three waves of data collection) between caregiver–child QR and children's EB will now be reviewed. Empirical studies that do not correspond to these requirements will be excluded.

### Transactional relations between mother–child QR and child's EB

Most studies focus on the reciprocal relations between mothers' behavior and children's EB. Such relations were for example studied in a community sample in which negative maternal behavior at age 3 was seen to contribute to children's EB at age 6 (Combs-Ronto, Olson, Lunkenheimer, & Sameroff, 2009). In the other direction, children's EB at age 3 was found to influence negative maternal behavior at age 6. The interaction between negative maternal behavior and children's EB were also demonstrated in another large population-based study (Larsson, Viding, Rijdsdijk, & Plomin, 2008). A bidirectional influence was found between the two variables at age 4 and age 7. Similar findings were made in a community sample, with children's EB at age 4 influencing the controlling behavior they received from mothers at age 5, and supportive behavior of mothers at age 4 influencing children's EB at age 5 (Meunier et al., 2011). In another recent study, bidirectional relations were not confirmed, but only a caregiver effect between mothers' behavior at age 4 and children's EB at age 5 (Newland & Crnic, 2011). In addition to these two-wave studies, longitudinal cross-lagged studies based on three waves of data collection have been helpful in studying both bidirectional and recursive relations. For example, transactional effects were demonstrated in a clinically referred sample of boys (Burke, Pardini, & Loeber, 2008). Annual measures of EB and maternal behavior from age 7–15 to age 17 provided evidence of both mother and child effects. Another transactional analysis of negative maternal behavior and EB in children was conducted with three time points in a community sample (Zadeh, Jenkins, & Pepler, 2010). Both bidirectional and recursive effects were demonstrated between maternal behavior and EB at ages 10–11, 12–13 and 14–15. Finally, a study was conducted with mothers and adolescents from the general community at ages 13, 14 and 15 (Hale et al., 2011). A strong adolescent effect was reported, with a link between EB at age 13 and QR at age 14, and the same relation between EB at age 14 and QR at age 15. Transactional relations were only found between mothers' irritability and adolescents' EB: irritability at age 13 was linked to EB at age 14, which in turn was linked to irritability at age 15, and EB at age 13 was linked to irritability at age 14, which was in turn related to EB at age 15. These studies were among the first to provide empirical evidence for transactional processes, i.e. both bidirectional influences and recursive effects, between mother–child QR and children's EB. In sum, both bidirectional and recursive effects in the mother–child dyad have been found in previous studies (Combs-Ronto et al., 2009; Larsson et al., 2008; Meunier et al., 2011). However, only a caregiver effect was identified by Newland and Crnic (2011) and a strong child effect was found in adolescence by Hale et al. (2011).

### Transactional relations between the father–child relationship and children's EB

While several cross-lagged studies testing the transactional influences between mother–child QR and children's EB are available, there is far less evidence for bidirectional effects and no evidence at all for recursive effects within the father–child dyad. Since the importance of differential contributions from mothers and fathers to child's behavioral outcomes has been suggested (Lewis & Lamb, 2003), empirical studies testing transactional processes with fathers are needed. Results in a study based on a two-wave data collection showed that the way fathers and mothers influence and are influenced by their child's EB is different (Meunier et al., 2011). In this community-based study, only child effects were displayed for the fathers. In particular, children's EB at age 4 was seen to influence both supportive and controlling behavior in fathers at age 5, but the influence of fathers' behavior at age 4 did not contribute significantly to children's EB at age 5. In sum, the present state of our knowledge is far from sufficient to fully understand the transactional relations between father–child QR and children's behavioral adjustment. Children's EB was found to relate to the father–child relationship, but no evidence of bidirectional influences was found (Meunier et al., 2011). Recursive effects were also not tested in a study encompassing at least three waves of data collection with father–child dyads.

### Transactional relations between teacher–child QR and children's EB

Existing studies focusing on the relation between teacher–child QR and children's EB conceptualize QR according to the concepts of closeness and conflict (Pianta & Nimetz, 1991). Closeness refers to teachers' feelings of affection for and open communication with children, while conflict refers to the extent to which teachers experience discordant interactions and a lack of positive rapport with children (Pianta & Nimetz, 1991). Relations between these two constructs and children's EB have been shown (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Silver, Measelle, Armstrong, & Essex, 2005). Bidirectional relations were tested in a two-wave study encompassing preschoolers from the general community (Zhang & Sun, 2011). Teachers reported about teacher–child QR and children's EB at 3 months after starting school and at the end of the school year among children aged 2–3 years. No evidence was found for bidirectional relations between teacher–child closeness and EB, but conflict in the first wave was linked to EB in the second wave and vice versa. Another three-wave study was conducted among preschoolers from the general community and their teachers who reported about children's aggressiveness towards peers and about teacher–child closeness and conflict. Three measurement moments were organized, i.e. 1 to 3 months after starting school, in the middle, and at the end of the kindergarten school year. The results showed recursive relations between EB and teacher–child conflict but not closeness (Doumen et al., 2008). Children's aggressiveness at the beginning of the school year was related to higher teacher–child conflict mid-year, which in turn was linked to aggressiveness in children at the end of the year. A reciprocal transaction starting with teacher–child conflict in wave 1 was not observed. In sum, both bidirectional and recursive effects have been demonstrated for teachers, but only with regard to conflict with children (as reported by teachers), and not with regard to reported closeness (Doumen et al., 2008; Zhang & Sun, 2011).

### The current study

There is a limited set of empirical studies testing the transactional processes between caregiver–child QR and children's EB with appropriate longitudinal cross-lagged models. Most existing studies considered caregivers' behaviors towards children rather than feelings or expectations. They were mainly conducted with community samples and less

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6842850>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6842850>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)