

Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem/Rationale

The keys to effective parenting have long been discussed and debated. Since Baumrind first popularized the study of different parenting styles in the 1960's, there has been much research devoted to what types of parenting are most beneficial for children. Baumrind (1966) pointed to the effectiveness of the "authoritative" parent, who sets firm limits and gives proper supervision, but also was able to be affectionate, accepting, and somewhat flexible. This parenting type contrasted with the "authoritarian" parent, who was overly strict and autocratic, and the "permissive" parent, who was not strict enough and lacked proper supervision. Because supervision was thought to play a large part in successful "authoritative" parenting, aspects of parental supervision soon came to the forefront of research. One aspect of parental supervision that has received much attention over the past 30 years is parental monitoring.

Parental monitoring has largely been defined as the knowledge that parents have about what their children are doing, where they are doing it, and with whom they are doing it. Previous researchers have linked parental monitoring with many factors of child adjustment. Patterson and colleagues have done extensive research and have found a lack of parental monitoring to be a strong influence on the development of antisocial and delinquent behavior (Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller & Skinner, 1991; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984). Specifically, a lack of proper parental monitoring is hypothesized to be a key factor in the development of conduct-disordered behavior in children. Conduct problems in childhood then lead to rejection by the peer group and

academic failure. These failures then lead to increased risk for depressed mood and involvement in a deviant peer group. The result of this developmental progression is chronic antisocial behavior into adulthood (Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989).

In support of the theory of Patterson and his colleagues, numerous researchers have concluded that a lack of proper monitoring is linked with negative outcomes. Kim, Hetherington, and Reiss (1999) found that a lack of monitoring had direct associations with adolescent externalizing behavior as well as indirect links with externalizing behavior through deviant peer associations. Kilgore, Snyder, and Lentz (2000) have linked poor parental monitoring in childhood with conduct problems in school. Jacobsen and Crocket (2000) found that lower levels of parental monitoring were associated with lower adolescent grade point average and higher levels of adolescent depression. Numerous investigators have linked improper monitoring practices with increased alcohol use, illegal drug use, and drug trafficking (Borawski, Ievers-Landis, Lovegreen, & Trapl, 2003; Xiaoming, Stanton, & Feigelman, 2000). A lack of parental monitoring has also been directly associated with risky sexual activity (Borawski et al.; Xiaoming et al.; Forehand, Miller, Dutra & Chance, 1997). Finally, proper monitoring has been linked with a decrease in delinquent behavior, such as fighting, weapon carrying, and police contact (Flannery, Williams & Vazsonyi, 1999; Forehand et al.; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001).

Protective role of parental monitoring.

Although the increased use of parental monitoring has been directly linked to positive outcomes, parental monitoring also appears to play a protective role as a moderator and mediator between other variables. The level of parental monitoring has

been found to moderate marijuana use for those that had positive family relations and knowledge of drugs (Ramirez, Crano, Quist, Burgoon, Alvaro, & Grandpre, 2004). Monitoring has also been found to moderate alcohol usage for those adolescents that have opportunities to use alcohol (Webb, Bray, Getz, & Adams, 2002; Wood, Read, Mitchell, & Brand, 2004). Ceballo, Ramirez, Hearn, and Maltese (2003) studied the effects of exposure to community violence on psychological well-being. They found that children who had more experiences with victimization reported more depression and hopelessness. Children who reported receiving more parental monitoring, however, also reported experiencing less depression and feelings of hopelessness. Finally, Dishion, Nelson, and Kavanagh (2003) found that parental monitoring mediated the association between a family centered intervention focused on family management skills and substance abuse in high-risk adolescents. Dishion and colleagues concluded that it was the parental monitoring piece of the intervention that was responsible for the decrease in substance abuse.

Types of parental monitoring.

One problem with past research in parental monitoring is that researchers have basically ignored how parents obtain information about their children's activities. Because of this negligence, many researchers have concluded that parental monitoring is necessary without considering how the monitoring is performed (Jacobsen & Crockett, 2000; Flannery et al., 1999). In their research, Kerr and Stattin (2000) and Stattin and Kerr (2000) imply the way in which parents obtain information about their children plays an important role in childhood adjustment. Specifically, they found that voluntary child disclosure of information was the strongest predictor of positive child adjustment. When

parents solicited information about their children (e.g., asking them or asking other parents) or attempted to control their behavior (e.g., requiring their children to ask permission before being allowed to go somewhere, making children tell them with whom they are going out), it was not associated with positive child adjustment in most cases. In fact, in some cases, solicitation and control predicted factors of negative adjustment, including low self-esteem and delinquent behavior. Based on the work of Kerr and Stattin, it appears that parental monitoring is linked with positive outcomes when information is obtained through Child Disclosure rather than Parental Solicitation and Parental Control.

There are many forms of parental solicitation. Kerr and Stattin (2000) define parental solicitation generally as “gathering information about children’s activities by asking the children themselves and talking to their friends and their friends’ parents” (p. 367). Other forms of parental solicitation include covert observation of children and searching their rooms. It is reasonable to believe that children would have different reactions to covert and overt forms of solicitation. Covert forms of solicitation are likely to be viewed more negatively by children because they are done without the child’s knowledge and may be considered more intrusive than simply asking a child for information. Because Kerr and Stattin found that Overt Parental Solicitation was not predictive of positive outcomes, it appears probable that Covert Parental Solicitation would be even more likely to be associated with negative outcomes. Negative outcomes could be related to either internalizing or externalizing behavior depending on the specific affect and coping responses used by the child. This researcher intends to examine the specific effects of Covert Parental Solicitation on childhood adjustment.

Parental monitoring and victimization.

Children who are victimized by peers exhibit numerous developmental problems, including depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and school avoidance, among others (Egan & Perry, 1998; Hodges, Malone & Perry, 1997; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996).

The majority of previous research involving peer victimization has examined the behavioral characteristics of victimized children and the influence of peers. Those few researchers that have examined parental factors in the development of peer victimization have primarily focused on parent-child attachment and parental socialization processes.

One parental factor that has yet to be directly linked to victimization is parental monitoring. Esbensen, Huizinga and Menard (1999) attempted to examine the predictive ability of parental monitoring as it pertains to victimization, but they only found results that tended toward significance. The link between parental monitoring and peer victimization is not as obvious as some of the outcome measures already discussed.

What does knowing what your children are doing have to do with their being victimized by peers? The answer might lie in the way parents receive information about their children.

Researchers suggest that victimized boys are more likely to have overprotective and intrusive, demanding mothers (Finnegan, Hodges, & Perry, 1998; Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 1998). In addition, boys who are nonassertive and submissive are more likely to become victims than their assertive counterparts (Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993). Perry, Hodges, and Egan (2001) indicate that withdrawn, depressed, and anxious children (internalizing children) are probably seen as vulnerable targets by aggressive peers. Children who assertively respond to peer attacks, on the other hand,

discourage future attacks (Schwartz et al., 1993). Finnegan et al. (1998) suggest that overprotective parenting may lead to victimization in boys because overprotection interferes with the development of agentic behaviors (e.g., risk taking, physical play) that are valued by peers and may lead to poor self-evaluation and internalizing behavior. It is argued here that Covert Parental Solicitation and Parental Control are more intrusive and overprotective in nature than Overt Parental Solicitation and Child Disclosure. Parental Control may impede the developing autonomy and assertiveness of an adolescent by requiring the adolescent to review all plans with his parents. In addition, Kerr and Stattin (2000) found that feeling controlled was linked with internalizing behavior, which, in turn, has been linked to victimization (Hodges & Perry, 1999). Covert Parental Solicitation could be perceived as highly intrusive and an indication that a parent does not trust a child to act appropriately on his own. Therefore, because these techniques may interfere with the development of agentic behaviors, autonomy, and assertiveness, it is hypothesized that Parental Control and Covert Parental Solicitation will be more likely to predict victimization.

The role of children's feelings.

An interesting aspect of the Kerr and Stattin (2000) study is that when children believed they were being controlled by their parents, it was almost exclusively associated with negative child adjustment, including measures of juvenile delinquency, school problems, family discord, and internalizing behavior. In this instance it appears that perceptions of parental monitoring are a factor in childhood adjustment.

One purpose of the present investigator is to explore more fully the feelings children have toward their parents' monitoring behavior. For example, are children

angry, sad, or happy with their parents' behavior and how are different feelings related to different types of adjustment? In this study, it is proposed that adolescents will have more positive feelings toward Child Disclosure and Overt Parental Solicitation because they appear to be the least intrusive and most open ways for parents to receive information about their child. Parental Control and Covert Parental Solicitation, in contrast, are parenting behaviors that appear to be more intrusive and restrictive, and therefore it is expected that these monitoring styles will be associated with less positive feelings. Grych and Fincham (1990) propose that children's feelings about parental behavior is key in determining the impact on adjustment. Specifically, Grych and Fincham propose that children first react to parental behavior through affect, and this affect informs their attribution for the cause of the behavior and ultimately the coping response. Therefore, measuring a child's affect should allow one to understand better how a child copes and behaves in response to parental monitoring behavior.

The importance of children's emotional coping in regards to parental monitoring is a subject that has been relatively ignored in the parental monitoring literature. There has been research indicating the importance of children's perceptions of parent-child relationships in relation to childhood antisocial behavior and depression (Neiderhieser, Pike, Hetherington & Reiss, 1998), but in this research, the authors did not measure monitoring behavior directly. Sim (2000) examined the mediating relation of children's parental regard between parental monitoring and antisocial susceptibility. He found that adolescents' regard for their parents did mediate the relation between monitoring and antisocial susceptibility. Unfortunately, Sim based his definition of monitoring on

knowledge only and did not consider how parents obtained information about their children.

Perry, Hodges, and Egan (2001) proposed a schematic model in which they highlight the importance of how children perceive parental behavior (including monitoring behavior), perceive themselves, and perception's influence on subsequent behavior. In other words, children's perceptions of parental behavior are integral to understanding how they cope and their own subsequent behavior. According to Perry et al.'s conception, without understanding children's perceptions about parental behavior, there is no way to determine how they will behave in reaction to it. In the present study, it is believed that monitoring will predict internalizing behavior and victimization most strongly in conjunction with high levels of internalizing feelings (i.e., sadness). Researchers have suggested that children with internalizing feelings are more likely to be victimized (Hodges & Perry, 1999). Similarly, it is believed that monitoring will predict externalizing behavior most strongly under high levels of anger. Finally, it is believed that monitoring will predict positive outcomes, but be moderated by happy feelings. If a child perceives his parents' monitoring behavior positively, then the monitoring dimension is likely to be linked with a positive outcome. By examining children's feelings on parental monitoring behavior, the current researcher hopes to further explore the role of children's feelings in regard to how they behave.

Causality and direction of effect.

The majority of research done on parental monitoring has made the assumption that parenting affects child behavior. However, the notion that the child's behavior affects or, at the very least, interacts with parenting behavior is gaining popularity. For

example, Anderson, Lytton, and Romney (1986) concluded from their research that the maladaptive interactions between parents and conduct-disordered children were initiated and sustained mainly by the child, as opposed to the mother's behavior. Bates, Pettit, Dodge, and Ridge (1998) found parental control (i.e., reactive efforts to manage potentially harmful child actions) to be a *moderator* between child temperamental resistance to control and externalizing behavior. Although in his model of the development of antisocial behavior Patterson begins with ineffective parenting and monitoring practices, he has concluded that children's coercive behavior simultaneously interacts with maladaptive parenting in order to produce eventual social rejection and school failure (Patterson et al., 1989; Snyder, Dishion, and Patterson, 1986). Finally, Maccoby and Martin (1983), in an exhaustive review of the socialization literature, dedicate a section of their paper to "bi-directional processes" (p. 59), concluding that the interaction between children and their parents appear to be responsible for eventual outcomes.

The present researcher intends to provide preliminary evidence for the causality of parental monitoring behavior on child adjustment. Although the author of a correlational study cannot ascertain cause and effect, the longitudinal nature of the present research may allow one to begin to hypothesize the directionality of parent behavior and child adjustment. Longitudinal research conducted by other researchers in the domain of parental monitoring has already begun to build support for the effect of parental monitoring on childhood adjustment (Xiaoming et al., 2000; Ary, Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1999). By measuring child adjustment before a residential summer camp session, and over two points during a camp session, the development of child

behavior can be separated from pre-camp parental influence. This design relies on the assumption that the effects of parental monitoring are internalized and will affect the child's subsequent behavior in different settings. In other words, the received monitoring will have long-term effects that will remain when the child is no longer in the presence of his parents. This school of thought is in contrast to the belief that behavior changes according to context, rather than remaining stable over different situations (Harris, 1995). The hypothesized directionality of the present study is not meant to dispute the findings that the parent-child interaction is integral to adjustment. In fact, it could be argued that it is the interaction of parental monitoring and children's emotional coping on adjustment that is the crux of the present research.

This investigator intends to examine the relations between child disclosure, parental solicitation of information, parental control of information, and childhood adjustment, including peer victimization. Because children's emotional coping responses about their parent's monitoring behavior appears to be a factor in adjustment, these feelings will be examined as possible moderators of the parental monitoring-child adjustment association.

Hypotheses

Conceptual hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Intrusive and distrustful types of parental monitoring will be associated with more negative child adjustment in general.

Hypothesis 2. Less intrusive and more trusting types of parental monitoring will be associated with more positive child adjustment in general.

Hypothesis 3. Children of parents who display intrusive and distrustful parental monitoring will perceive their parents' behavior as more negative than children of less intrusive and more trusting parents. However, children's feelings regarding their parents' behavior will moderate the relation between parental monitoring and child adjustment either negatively or positively, depending on the type of feeling.

Operational hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Child Disclosure of information will be negatively associated with peer victimization, aggression, internalizing behavior and juvenile delinquency. It will be positively associated with the positive outcomes of peer acceptance and friendship. Therefore, children who disclose information will exhibit more positive adjustment and children who do not disclose information will exhibit more negative adjustment. It is believed that most adolescents would have happy feelings about disclosing information to their parents. Feelings regarding Child Disclosure will moderate the association between Child Disclosure and adjustment. In particular, Child Disclosure is more likely to predict victimization when children use internalizing coping methods (i.e., sadness) and more likely to predict aggressive behavior when they use externalizing coping methods (i.e., anger). Happy feelings regarding Child Disclosure should increase the association of Child Disclosure with positive outcomes.

Hypothesis 2. Covert parental solicitation will be linked with negative adjustment in general. Therefore, parents who use covert parental solicitation will have children who exhibit negative adjustment and parents who do not use covert parental solicitation will have children who exhibit more positive adjustment. However, differential adjustment (i.e., victimization vs. externalizing) is expected from covert monitoring as a function of

children's emotional coping (i.e., it is expected that children's emotional coping will moderate the relation of covert monitoring to adjustment). Specifically, it is expected that covert solicitation will be most strongly related to victimization under conditions of high internalizing coping (i.e., sadness) and be least related to victimization under low levels of internalizing coping. In addition, it is expected that covert monitoring will be most strongly related to aggressive and delinquent behavior under conditions of high externalizing coping (i.e., anger) and least related under low externalizing coping.

Hypothesis 3. Overt forms of parental solicitation will be viewed less negatively than covert solicitation (i.e., less sad and angry responses, more happy responses). Overt forms of solicitation will be associated with less externalizing behavior and peer victimization, as well as other forms of negative adjustment, when compared to covert solicitation. Overall, overt solicitation will not be significantly associated with positive or negative indicators of adjustment unless children's affective reactions are more extreme (e.g., very happy, angry, or sad). For those children who employ internalizing or externalizing coping, it is expected that overt solicitation will be most strongly related to victimization under conditions of high internalizing coping (i.e., sadness) and be least related to victimization under low levels of internalizing coping. In addition, it is expected that overt monitoring will be most strongly related to aggressive and delinquent behavior under conditions of high externalizing coping (i.e., anger) and least related under low externalizing coping.

Hypothesis 4. Parental Control will not be significantly associated with negative or positive measures of child adjustment, unless parental behaviors elicit strong affective reactions from children (i.e., very sad, angry, or happy). Specifically, it is expected that

parental control will be most strongly related to victimization under conditions of high internalizing coping (i.e., sadness) and be least related to victimization under low levels of internalizing coping. In addition, it is expected that parental control will be most strongly related to aggressive and delinquent behavior under conditions of high externalizing coping (i.e., anger) and least related under low externalizing coping.