FAMILY STRUCTURE, PARENTAL MONITORING, AND ADOLESCENT PROBLEM BEHAVIOR IN MIDDLE-CLASS AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES

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The present study examined the roles of family structure and parental monitoring on adolescent problem behavior in African American families. Data were collected longitudinally from adolescents and their mothers over two years between early and middle adolescence (11-16 years). Concurrent analyses were conducted on 88 families (43 males and 45 females) and longitudinal analyses on 79 families (39 males and 40 females). At both times, fifty-six percent of the adolescents lived in intact family households with both natural parents. An "additional adult hypothesis" was rejected; the presence of a stepfather in the household did not buffer against adolescent problem behavior when compared to single-parent families. Parental monitoring was found to mediate the relation between intact family status and problem behavior. However, gender did not moderate this mediation as expected.

Author Notes

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Introduction

Dornbusch, Carlsmith, Bushwell, Ritter, Leiderman, Hastorf, and Gross (1985) reported that adolescents living in single-family homes engaged in more problem behavior than adolescents living with two parents. They concluded that the presence of an additional adult in the home decreased deviance rates. Steinberg (1987) tested the finding, which he called the "additional adult" hypothesis. In contrast to Dornbusch et al. (1985), he demonstrated that while adolescents living with both natural parents were less *susceptible* to pressure from friends to engage in deviant behavior, adolescents from stepfamilies and from single-mother homes were equally at risk. Thus, the validity of the additional adult hypothesis is still unclear. Therefore, the first goal of the present study was to test the additional adult hypothesis. The focus was on adolescent *engagement* (rather than susceptibility) in problem behavior in middle-class African American families. The hypothesis would be supported if single-mother homes reported the most deviance, and if there was no difference between the deviance rates of intact and stepparent families. However, based on Steinberg's (1987) research on susceptibility and other research demonstrating parenting deficiencies in stepparent families, (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1978), it was hypothesized that the additional adult hypothesis would be rejected.

The connection between family structure and adolescent problem behavior also was explored. Dornbusch et al. (1985) and Steinberg (1987) found that family structure had a significant unique effect on problem behavior even after controlling for different family decision-making patterns, although the mechanism mediating the identified relationship was not examined. Dornbusch et al. (1985) suggested three possible sources: (1) lack of surveillance or monitoring, (2) lack of appropriate teaching, or (3) lack of social support. Research has shown that parental monitoring has been found to be a consistent, significant factor even after accounting for other parenting behaviors (Patterson & Strouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Forehand, Miller, Dutra, & Chance, 1997). As a result the second goal of the study was to test a moderated-mediational model, which, as depicted in Figure 1, proposed that monitoring/surveillance mediated the relation between family structure and problem behavior. Based on research identifying gender differences of parenting practices (Majors & Billson, 1992; Rose & Deskins, 1991) and in problem

behavior (Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995) it was further hypothesized that the mediation was moderated by adolescent gender. Specifically, girls from intact families were hypothesized to receive more monitoring and thus engage in less problem behavior than their male counterparts.

As part of the Rochester Youth and Family Project, this study focused on middle-class African American families assessed longitudinally over two years in an effort to understand variations in normative family processes without confounding race with SES.

Study Objectives

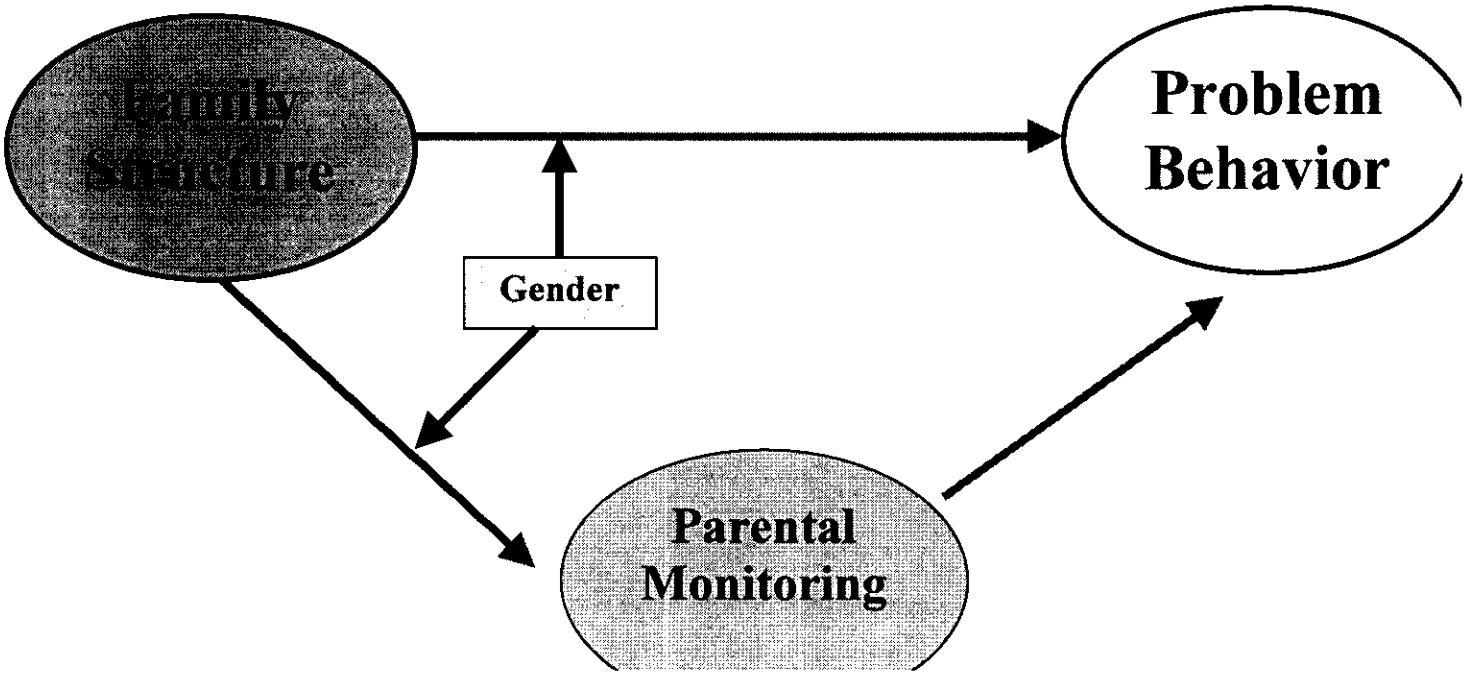
1. Test "Additional Adult Hypothesis"

- Does an additional adult in the home decrease deviance? Specifically, are there differences in behavior *engagement* between adolescents from stepparent, intact, and single-parent families?

2. Test Moderated-Mediational Model (Figure 1)

- First, does parental monitoring mediate the relation between family structure and problem behavior engagement?
- Second, is this mediation moderated by adolescent gender? Specifically, do girls from intact families receive more monitoring and thus engage in less deviance than their male counterparts?

Figure 1. Proposed Moderated-Mediational Model



Methods

Participants

	Early Adolescence	Middle Adolescence
N of Families	88	79
-Boys	43	39
-Girls	45	40
Teen Age	13.21 (SD = 1.28)	15.05 (SD = 1.28)
Mom Age	40.22 (SD = 6.41)	42.20 (SD = 6.48)
Median Income	$50,000 - $60,000	$50,000 - $60,000
Family Structure		
Intact	49	45
Nonintact	39	34

Procedures

- Families were recruited through African American churches and professional/social organizations (see Smetana & Gaines, 1999).
- Parents and adolescents separately completed questionnaires at home or the university as part of the University of Rochester Youth and Family Project. The same procedure was repeated two years later for all participating families.

Measures

Intact Family Status.

- Intact: married with both natural parents
- Nonintact: single/never married, stepparent, cohabitating/living together, or single/divorced

Family Income.

- 7-point scale: (1) less than 25,000/year - (7) more than $70,000/year

Adolescent Problem Behavior.

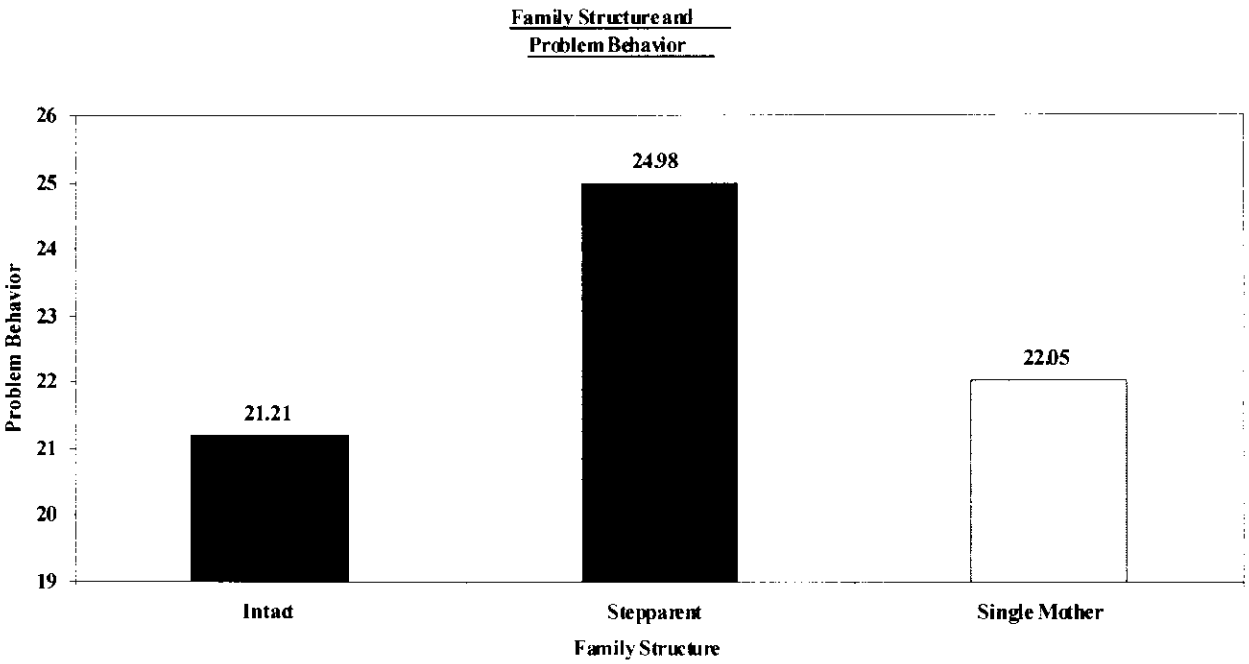
- 19 item Problem Behavior Survey (Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1996)
- 7 point scale: (1) Never happens – (7) Happens very often
- Included Precocious Sexual Activity, Drug and Alcohol Use, and Delinquency
- Mean of Adolescent and Mother Reports

Parental Monitoring.

- 4 items from the Parental Monitoring Scale assessing parental knowledge of the adolescent's whereabouts and behaviors when not at home (Dornbusch et al., 1985)
- 5-point scale (1) Never know – (5) Almost always know
- Mean of Adolescent and Mother Reports

Results

Additional Adult Hypothesis



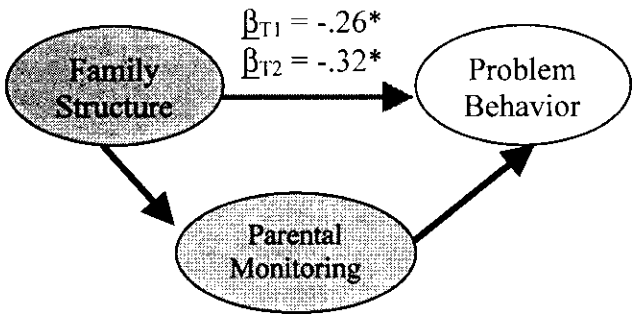
- Significant family structure main effect for participation in problem behavior

  (F (2, 85) = 4.96, p < .01)

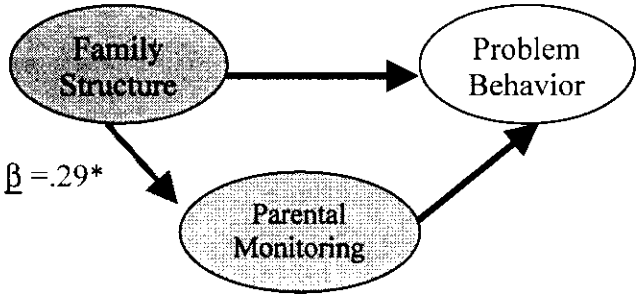
  - Stepparent Homes > Intact Homes
  - Stepparent Homes > Single-Mother Homes
- Thus, the presence of a stepparent was associated with more, not less, problem behavior.
- Therefore, as predicted, the "additional adult hypothesis" was rejected.

Test of Mediation

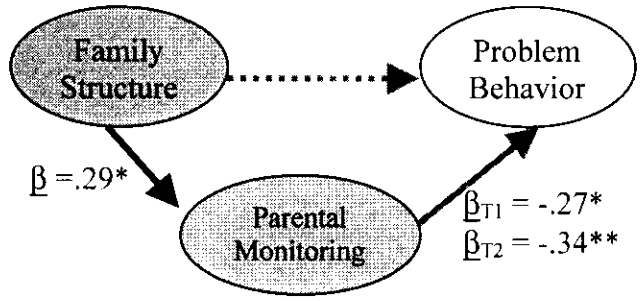
a.



b.



c.



•As hypothesized, the relationship between problem behavior and family structure was mediated by parental monitoring both concurrently at Time 1 and longitudinally.

•Thus, children from intact households received more parental monitoring than those in nonintact homes, and subsequently, participated in less problem behavior.

Test of Moderated-Mediation

Analysis

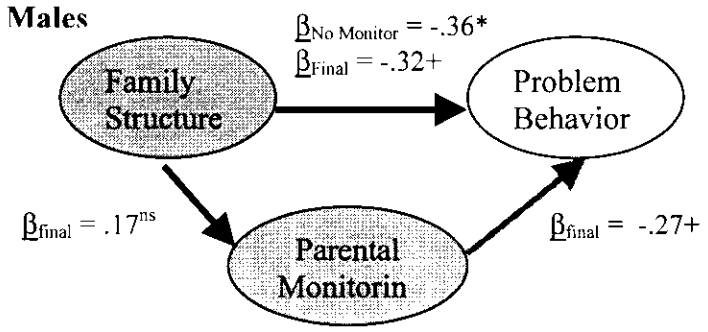
1. Examine whether gender moderates the association between family structure and problem behavior.

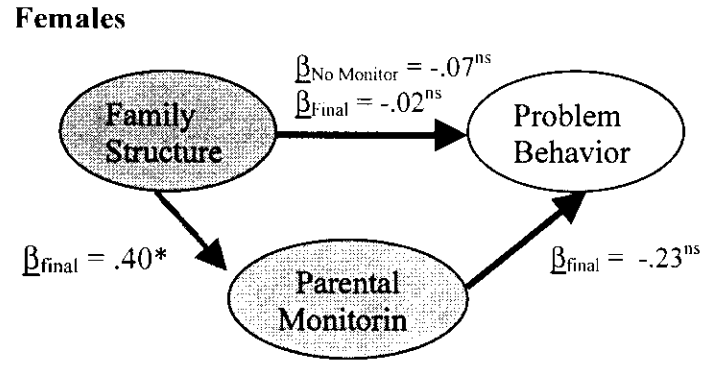
•Hypothesis: Boys from nonintact homes would participate in more problem behavior

2. Test for gender differences in how much parental monitoring mediates the link between family structure and problem behavior.

•Test using separate regressions by gender.

•Hypothesis: Increased parental monitoring will have more effect on problem behavior for boys than it does for girls.





Early Adolescence

- Differences in parental monitoring had a greater effect on problem behavior for boys than for girls.
- Monitoring for girls was more dependent on family structure than it was for boys.
    - Girls in intact families received more monitoring than girls in non-intact families.
- Monitoring accounted for much of the relationship between family structure and problem behavior for boys, as hypothesized, but all conditions for mediation were not met.

Middle Adolescence

- No mediational steps were satisfied

Discussion

The results indicated a rejection of the "additional adult" hypothesis. An ANOVA on problem behavior demonstrated that adolescents from stepparent homes engaged in significantly more problem behavior than those from intact homes. Additionally, adolescents from stepparent families engaged in marginally more problem behavior than those in single parent families. Thus, the presence of a stepparent was associated with more, not less, problem behavior.

In both concurrent and longitudinal analyses, parental monitoring was found to mediate the relationship between family structure and problem behavior engagement. Children from nonintact families received less parental monitoring than their counterparts in intact families, and were thus engaging in more problem behavior. While other mechanisms such as lack of teaching and support were not ruled out, parental monitoring did statistically explain the association between marital status and problem behavior. The data do not indicate why nonintact families provide less monitoring, but it can be suggested that single mothers may not have the ability to monitor due to increased stress and the fact that they are the sole adults in the family. While mothers in stepfamilies have the luxury of an additional adult, they may share similar stress as single mothers and may be just as alone in parenting. In fact, Hetherington & Clingampeel (1992) found that rather than assisting in parenting, stepfathers often compete with the child for the mother's time, stressing both mother and child. Furthermore, in some stepfamilies, 'boundary ambiguity' increases stress, as uncertainty exists regarding who belongs in the family and who is responsible for specific parenting tasks such as monitoring (Visher & Visher, 1989). In general, adolescence introduces its own confusion regarding parental authority and the addition of a stepfather may add further combustion. An adolescent who struggles with monitoring from his/her mother may absolutely reject disclosure of information to his/her stepfather.

Gender was not found to moderate the mediation effect of monitoring as hypothesized. There was a *marginal* effect when concurrent problem behavior was regressed on the gender-family structure interaction. While females were monitored more in intact families, monitoring did not predict decreased problem behavior as it did marginally for males. However, all of the conditions for a significant moderation effect were no met.