

Parent-Child Relationships and its Effects on Adolescence

Diana E. Nevárez Ramirez

McKendree University

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When we think of what a good parent-child relationship should have what are the first few things that come to mind? Some type of bond to hold the relationship together? Good communication? Caring? Whatever those things are, imagine a child growing up without them. What effects would it have on the child then? Some may argue that there is significance between the more attachment kids have with their parents and the less likelihood they are to commit violent acts. However, according to the Center for Disease Control (2015), “[youth violence] is the third leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 15-24.” So why is youth violence such a leading issue in this country?

One of the factors can be explained by Hirschi’s (1969) bonding theory. He states that people become deviant when there is a disconnection from society in attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. For the purpose of this study, I will focus only on the connection between attachment and belief when applied to parent-child relationships. Hirschi’s bonding theory will also help us understand how adolescents are affected when bonds within their family are broken and what causes the decision making that could potentially lead to violent behavior.

In this study, Hirschi’s bonding theory will be tested to determine whether social bonds stop us from committing acts of violence, even at a younger age. Even though Hirschi’s bonding theory has been used to explain deviance amongst youth, there has not been enough research done on the specifics of deviance, in this case violence. This study will therefore focus on deviant behaviors, but more specifically on violent behavior. The result of this study will serve as additional research pertaining to youth violence and Hirschi’s bonding theory to hopefully create better and long lasting parent-child relationships in our nation’s families.

Literature Review

The relationship between parent and child has been looked at numerous times especially what these relationships have to do with the child's tendencies involving deviant behavior. Using the central theme that revolves around Hirschi's social bonding theory, which assumes we as people are inherently self-interested, not much has been done regarding adolescent's violent behavior. Other theorists ask why people commit deviance but, Hirschi asks why we don't commit deviant acts since deviance makes it easier to obtain the results we want in situations. Deep down we all have the ability to be deviant but we choose not to. Here, we looked at the attachment and belief of parent-child relationships and what that relationship does to influence the violent behavior, if any, of their adolescent offspring.

Relationship with Parents

The independent variable discussed is that of parent-child relationships. A parent-child relationship has different components within itself that make it what it is. That includes parental attachment, monitoring, communication, and involvement. It is important to keep in mind that while thinking of these parent-child relationships, we are not talking about single-parent households. That would result in information very different from the one concluded now.

With that in mind, Strohschein and Matthew (2015) state that adolescents who receive parental support and encouragement are less likely to rebel against their parents. This type of interaction between parents and their children creates an attachment that allows children to feel that their parents really care about them. For the most part, a child would not want to disappoint someone they have grown a connection with. Therefore, disobeying their parents by rebelling would not be an option if this attachment to parents were to exist. This attachment keeps children

from participating in actions that they feel or know would disappoint their parents. Equally important, Higgins, Jennings, and Mahoney (2009) acknowledge that when parental attachment decreases, the probability of adolescents committing delinquent acts increases. Included in delinquent acts is violent behavior whether that is directed towards parents specifically or others in general. In order for a child to internalize the rules that their parents want them to abide by, they need to have a bond that holds them accountable. By having parental attachment, adolescents will be more likely to consider what the consequences of their actions are. If one of those consequences could be upsetting their parents or possibly letting them down, then chances are the adolescent will think twice before acting. Without this attachment, any consideration or second thought is gone.

However, Strohschein and Matthew (2015) point out that in order for adolescents to even refrain from taking part in deviant activities all together, their parents would have to be physically present. This brings up the second part of a parent-child relationship: monitoring. It could be argued that this parent-adolescent bond would not be enough to stop someone from being deviant. That is why parents' presence and monitoring would be necessary to keep the attachment between the two. Hirschi (2002) includes physical surveillance as one of the key points that lessens the likelihood of delinquency amongst children. Although the word surveillance sounds borderline invasive, there are good intentions behind it. For instance, he claims that when someone wants to engage in delinquency, it will require them to do so in a short amount of time. In other words, delinquency is not done long term but rather quickly. If that is the case, then if the opportunity is missed to partake in delinquency, chances are that person will not commit to carrying out the action another time. Once the opportunity is gone, it's gone. Most people will not go out of their way to carry the action out. This is where Hirschi

suggests that if parents monitor their children regularly – which includes knowing of their whereabouts and who they are with – that leaves even less room for adolescents to engage in delinquency (2002). This type of parenting should be balanced in a way that makes the child feel as though their parents are fair. If monitoring is overdone, the child will look at it more as an attack on them rather than as an act of care. As a result, parents who use more aggressive methods in their approach to discipline their children – whether that includes emotional or physical aggression – will most likely receive the same behavior from their children (Pagani et al., 2008). That is, adolescents return the aggressive behavior they are given. Unlike what was stated before though, this reciprocation of behavior would mean that the parent-adolescent relationship is still intact; meaning that because the adolescent returned the behavior as it was presented, the bond remained. Here again, the similarity remains that parent-adolescent relationships are the most significant.

Finally, communication is the last parent-child relationship component that either makes or breaks the bond between parents and their kids. This being so, adolescents become particularly sensitive to certain ‘you’ statements directed at them by their parents (Pagani et al., 2008). This kind of communication creates a disconnection between parents and children because these sorts of statements come off so judgmental therefore; the strength of the parent-child relationship lessens. This also sheds light on the sensitivity adolescents have when it comes to changes in communication with their parents. If a child were to initially have a warm relationship with their parents but later have one a bit more hostile, the change would definitely impact how the parent and child interacted with each other. On the contrary, when adolescents are shown support and encouragement instead of disapproving behavior by their parents, they develop a sense of belonging (Strohschein & Matthew, 2008). If this is true, there needs to be a

genuine connection between the parent and adolescent, especially on the parent's side, in order to successfully maintain a good parent-adolescent relationship. Also, when a parent is not around their kids enough and are made out to be too controlling, their kids see that as a justification for being rebellious. With higher levels of attachment and monitoring (parents physically present) adolescents are less likely to engage in violent acts (Strohschein & Matthew, 2008). Yet again, for this reason, bonds between parents and adolescents are important. Having a parent come try and discipline a child after not being around enough is a sure way to create a disconnection between the two. On top of that, the stronger the bonding systems between adolescents and their parents, the less of a reason they will have to engage in violent behavior.

Furthermore, the violent behavior or physical aggression we are looking at is not limited as something done towards others only; it includes harm done to oneself as well. However, for the most part, studies focused on violent behavior towards parents and violent behavior in general. Pagani et al. (2008) found that parent and child aggression is a likely reason for the development of aggression later on in adolescence. A possible reason for this development can be the aggression that adolescents display is taught to them by their parents earlier in their life. When a child demonstrates patterns of violent behavior, then there is a high chance those behaviors will follow in their adolescent years. In addition, what might have started as verbal aggression could have translated to physical aggression during adolescence as a way to resolve conflict (Pagani, et al., 2008). Violent behavior in adolescence may develop as a way to retaliate against a parent's harsh punishment, especially amongst adolescents who do not know how to manage their anger. Regardless of that, Karriker-Jaffe, Foshee, Ennett, and Suchindran (2012) argue that violent behavior can be prevented from expanding into adolescence if parents are

Careful to stop it. Hence, this means that the parent-child attachment has a chance of being preserved if it is enough to change a child's behavior from the start.

Lastly, "limited parent-child involvement" plays a huge role in why adolescents sort to violent behavior in the first place since it is hard for adolescents to value someone they have little communication with (Pagani et al., 2008). For this reason, adolescents turn to their peers over time for approval. When parents no longer show they care by being a part of their child's life, their peers will take their place. This break in attachment supports Hirschi's social bonding theory (1969) in that once the attachment is broken from the said bond from – in this case parents – then adolescents are prone to be deviant. Both of these statements focus on the fact that parental involvement is vital to the outcome of a child's behavior. It is easy to see why a child would turn to delinquency when there is no one there to stop them from doing so. Successful parenting is done when there is a balanced commitment to the attention and guidance a child needs. Without it, adolescents can continue to be influenced by the wrong people.

Peer Influence as a Third Variable

Put together, research on the connection between parent-child relationships and violent behavior demonstrates a need for intervention amongst families because such is the influence parents have on their children which leads to the influence of what people they associate with. Another valid argument regarding parent-child relationships and its effects on adolescence is that it is inevitable to leave out the connection with peer influence as well. Although this research does not focus on peer influence, it is inevitable to talk about it. Thus, when there is a decrease in family influence, adolescents are more likely to associate with deviant peers (Childs, Sullivan, Gullledge, 2011). It is not always the case that parents are the direct cause of violence amongst

adolescents but, rather violent peers that influenced them to commit violent acts in the first place (Childs, Sullivan, & Gullede, 2011). Looking at the same concept but with a different approach, positive parent-adolescent communication will lead to a positive peer to peer association (Noyori-Corbett & Moon, 2013). It still holds true that breaking the attachment between parents and adolescents still affects the adolescent's actions but, it is their peers that actually influence their violence, therefore proving the connection between these three variables: parent-adolescent relationships, peer influence, and violent behavior. Likewise, harsh parenting styles lead adolescents to believe harsh communication is the only way to correspond to others. By believing this to be true, adolescents will reject nonviolent peers and associate with violent peers, therefore adopting their methods. Adolescents are less likely to associate with violent peers when their families are well connected and have good parenting (Henry, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 2001; Benson & Buehler, 2012). That includes communicating with their parents on rules in their homes, school progress, and overall well-being. Yet another factor of parent-child relationships that influences violent behavior is the lack of bonding and control (Karriker-Jaffe, Foshee, Ennett, & Suchindran, 2012). When parents do not take the initiative to take control of their child's violent behavior at an early stage, then the chances of their child continuing to engage in violent behavior is very high. Without a parent's intervention, the chances are slim of reducing violent behavior since parents are probably the most influential factors in an adolescent's life.

Theory

Hirschi's social bonding theory is only one of the ways to approach delinquency, in this case violent behavior amongst adolescents. Social bonding theory as stated by Hirschi (1969, p. 16), "[embraces] two highly complex concepts, the *bond* of the individual to *society*". As

mentioned earlier, when bonds between adolescents and their parents are broken, adolescents resort to unusual behavior that is normally not accepted by society. This is an example of a break in attachment, which is one of the four social bonds in this theory. Under this circumstance, the adolescent's freedom of society's expectations can turn to aggression (Hirschi, 1969). Moreover, studies showed that a break in parent-child attachment is the first step in leading up to a change in beliefs, the fourth social bond. The accumulation of bad parenting, little to no communication, and overall family conflict leads adolescents to accept and believe the norms of their violent peers.

It follows that there is a relationship amongst these two elements: attachment and belief. Hirschi (1969) points out that the *respect* we have for those we look up to is what holds that attachment together. When that respect lessens or is lost, so is the attachment. The same goes for the relationships adolescents have with their parents. When parents are absent so frequently and they communicate false promises to their children, their child loses respect for them. When parents are not involved in their children's lives, they lose respect for them. Yet another reason is when parents resort to coercive parenting so frequently, their children lose respect for them. In other words, this type of bad parenting leads to a higher chance of aggressive behavior directed either at their parents or others.

Although we are given various reasons as to why adolescents turn to violence – some of them being family conflict, coercive parenting, and emotional disconnection – Hirschi explores further into the theories of others. He reasons that what was once a justification of animal behavior has turned into something that is inevitably in all of us – the urge to be deviant (Hirschi, 1969). For this reason, we can assume that although parents are the most influential factors of an

adolescent's choices, the wanting of engaging in violent behavior is in all of us. We all are naturally deviants but we choose not to be.

Methods

Given the information of how influential parents are on their children, the study focuses on the effects of parent-child relationships on their children and the likelihood of them engaging in violent behavior. The questions in the following survey helped reveal early implications of Hirschi's theory (1969) that states we are all capable and willing to be deviant, but we choose not to be. By focusing on questions regarding violent behavior and parental involvement, we are able to reason a relationship between the two.

Sample

The data used were that of Wilcox and Clayton (2001) which included a survey of students, grades 6 to 12 throughout the state of Kentucky. This Kentucky Youth Survey was intended to question students about delinquent behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and drug use (Wilcox and Clayton, 2001). Even more, it questioned aspects of their family background, attitudes towards school, school involvement in victimization and violence, peer behaviors, and religious attitudes (Wilcox and Clayton, 2001). However, this study focuses on the aspects of parental background and involvement and how it relates to violence in adolescents.

Measurement of Variables

Parent-adolescent relationship. In order to measure parent-child relationships the Kentucky Youth Survey asked a series of questions such as: how often my parent(s) seems to understand me, how often my parent(s) makes rules that seem fair to me, how often my parent(s)

knows where I am when I'm not at home, how often my parent(s) knows who I am with when not at home, how often my parent(s) is concerned with how I am doing in school, how often I share my thoughts and feelings with my parent(s), how often I feel unwanted by my parent(s), and how often I do things with my parent(s). These eight questions included responses that were coded 1=never, 2=almost never, 3=sometimes, 4=most of the time, and 9=missing. I created an index out of these eight questions called the parent-child relationship index. The parent-child relationship index included responses that were coded 0=almost never and 1=most of the time.

Violent behavior. In order to measure experience with violent behavior amongst the adolescents of Jefferson County, the Kentucky Youth Survey asked questions such as have you ever shoved or tripped someone, ever sat on someone or pinned someone down, ever hit, punched, or slapped someone with your hand or fist, ever hit someone with an object you were holding or threw, ever pulled, twisted, squeezed or pinched part of other's body, ever laid a trap for someone so he/she would get hurt, and ever been in a fist fight. These seven questions included responses that were coded 1=yes, 2=no, and 9=missing. I created an index out of these seven questions called the violence index. The violence index included responses that were coded 0=no and 1=yes.

Control variables. The last of the variables were the three control variables sex, age, and race. The sex of the student was determined by 1=male and 0=female. The students were able to write in their age themselves from a range of 10-21 years old. However, missing ages were coded to equal 99. Lastly, the race of the students was recoded and determined by 0=non-white and 1=white.

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptives of our variables which include the mean, standard deviation, and range. We can see that the mean parent-child relationship of respondents is 5.24 out of a range of 8. We can also see that the mean violence of respondents is 3.10 out of a range of seven.

Table 2 illustrates the bivariate relations amongst the study variables. It is worth noticing there is a significant relationship between parent-child relationships and violence. In addition, the variables sex, race, and age proved to have a significant relationship with parent-child relationships and violence as well. Thus, parent-child relationships proved to be significantly related to violent behaviors amongst adolescents at the bivariate level.

To test the effects of parent-child relationships on violent behaviors amongst adolescents, while controlling for sex, race, and age, I used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models for each outcome variable. As seen in Table 3, parent-child relationships were significantly related to violent behaviors amongst adolescents. The results indicated that parent-child relationships were significantly and positively associated with violent behaviors amongst adolescents. In other words, for every unit increase in parent-child relationships, there was a corresponding increase in violent behavior by .17, controlling for all other variables. Although the age in adolescence was a miniscule factor in this study, it is important to note that violence in adolescents was significantly related to the age in adolescents, which could range from 10-21 years old. The results indicated that age was significantly and negatively associated with violence.

Conclusion

It is important to keep in perspective how parent-child relationships were defined in this study. Parent-child relationships included parental attachment, monitoring, communication, and involvement. With that being said, my analysis did not confirm my hypothesis that as parent-child relationships improved, violent behaviors amongst adolescents decreased. A limitation in my data restricted my violence index to measure parental attachment, monitoring, communication, and involvement at its most basic level. The lack of variables in my violence index greatly affected my results. Each of my categories for parental-child relationships lacked questions that would demonstrate a better understanding of what relationships were like amongst the Kentucky Youth and their parents which resulted in my data not supporting my research.

Although my hypothesis was not supported, it does encourage further research on whether a correlation between the two would depend on which category had more of an impact: parental attachment, monitoring, communication, or involvement. Another strength of this study is that it provides a sense of parent and child dynamics in the city of Louisville, Kentucky.

Further research should be conducted on how parent-child relationships affect violence in youth according to non-white groups, since this survey's youth turned out to be predominantly white. As our nation continues to diversify, it is important to explore what changes in relationship dynamics could occur according to the implications being non-white may bring. My data also proved to be significant in levels of violence and sex. Further research should seek to distinguish youth interactions with their parents according to sex and how that affects levels of violence between sexes.

Despite the limitations of my research, my research confirmed that the more attachment adolescents have to their parents, the less likely they are to commit delinquent acts, specifically violent acts. Some notable factors affecting parent-adolescent relationships were parental support, encouragement, presence, and monitoring. Without a doubt, parents proved to be the first significant influence in a child's life. Without parental bonds holding the parent-adolescent relationship together, the child will only look elsewhere for approval or simply continue living however seems comfortable at the time. Youth violence remains a concern even after the results of this research.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Metric	Descriptive Statistics		
		Mean	S.D.	Range
Parent-Child Relationship	(0=almost never, 1=most of the time)	5.24	3.00	0-8
Violence	(0=no, 1=yes)	3.10	2.33	0-7
Sex	(0=female, 1=male)	0.50	0.50	0-1
Race	(0=non-white, 1=white)	0.82	0.38	0-1
Age	(number)	14.11	1.98	10-21

Table 2. Zero-Order Correlations among Study Variables

	1	2	3	4
1. Parent-Child Relationship				
2. Violence	.27*			
3. Sex	-.13*	-.31*		
4. Race	.12*	.13*	-.01	
5. Age	.09*	-.04*	.03*	.01

* p < .05

Table 3. OLS Regressions Models Examining the Effect of Parent-Child Relationships on Violent Behavior in Adolescents

Violence	Parent-child relationship		Age		Race		Sex	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
.17*	.01	-.06*	.01	.63*	.04	-1.30*	.03	
								26208

*p<.05

Figure 1

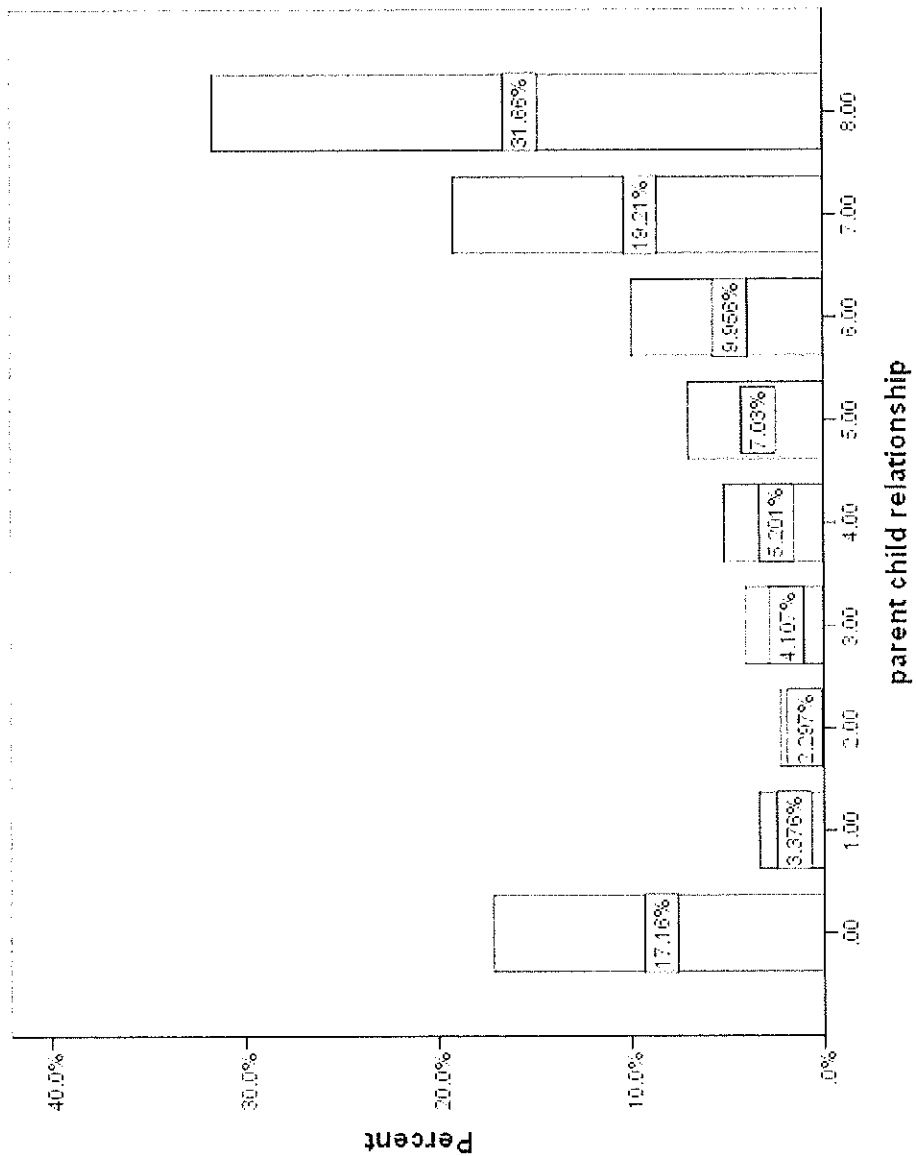


Figure 2

