The Effects of Mother-Child Relationship on Delinquency

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Research Questions
- Does a strained relationship between mother and child lead to delinquency in the child’s young adulthood?
- Does the association vary by gender?

Significance
- Delinquency has long-term consequences for young adults’ economic and relationship success.

Background
- Lower levels of warmth resulting in a higher propensity for adolescents to engage in delinquent behaviors (Jaggers et al., 2017).
- Parenting practices and youth relationships with their parents have direct impacts on delinquent behavior (Alarid et al., 2015).
- Attachment between mother and daughter was the strongest of the parent-child dyads (Alarid et al., 2015).

Hypothesis
- The closer the child is to their mother, the less likely they will be involved in delinquent activities.
- Women will be affected more negatively by a poor relationship with their mother than men will be.

Data
- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)
- Wave III (2001-2002) public data (N = 4,882)
- U.S. young adults aged 18-26
- Gender of respondents
  - Male 46.1%
  - Female 53.9%

Analysis
- Cross tabulation and Chi-square test using SPSS

Dependent Variable
- Delinquency Scale
  - Sum of 12 questions about the past 12 months (e.g., stealing, robbery, fights, using or selling drugs, using someone’s credit care). Response categories were 0 = never, 1 = 1 or 2 times, 2 = 3 or 4 times, or 4 = 5 or more times (Range 0 – 36). The scale is divided into three categories:
    - Never (0) 73.4%
    - Just one (1) 11.8%
    - Two or more (2 – 36) 14.8%

Independent Variable
- Relationship to Mother
  - How close do you feel to your biological or stepmother? (1 = extremely close, 2 = quite close, 3 = somewhat close, 4 = not very close, 5 = not close at all). Compiled the responses into three categories:
    - Extremely close (1) 60.2%
    - Very close (2) 26.8%
    - Not close (3 – 5) 13.0%

Control Measure
- Gender of respondents
  - Male 46.1%
  - Female 53.9%

Results
- Figure 1. % Distribution of Number of Delinquent Instances by Their Relationship to Their Mother
  - Extremely close Very close Not close
  - Chi-square test was significant at p < .001.

- Figure 2. % Distribution of Number of Delinquent Instances by Their Relationship to Their Mother for Young Women
  - Extremely close Very close Not close
  - Chi-square test was significant at p < .001.

- Figure 3. % Distribution of Number of Delinquent Instances by Their Relationship to Their Mother for Young Men
  - Extremely close Very close Not close
  - Chi-square test was significant at p < .001.

Summary of Findings
- For both males and females, the more delinquent activity they are involved in, the more likely they will have a distant relationship to their mother.
- Males are more likely to have reported being involved with two or more instances of delinquency, but overall both males and females reported low instances of delinquency.

Policy Implications
- We can begin to focus on a warm style of parenting in order to best shape the involvement your child has with delinquent activities.
- Expressing support, setting standards, engaging in consistent discipline, and refraining from harsh punishments would help foster a close mother-child relationship (Jaggers et al., 2017).

References