

Relationship between parent supervision and anti-social behavior in juvenile offenders from the State of Morelos

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Original article

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Parental supervision is constituted by a series of correlated parental behaviors involving children care, knowing their whereabouts, which activities they are performing, and the situation of their adaptive processes. In order for parental supervision to take place, it is necessary that communication and mutual support exist between mother and father, as well as between parents and children so that the family environment becomes pleasant. Supervision is one of the most studied factors related to anti-social behavior, and it has been observed that its absence or inconsistency allows for the occurrence of anti-social behavior, which in the more serious cases leads to delinquency.

Objective

To know the relationship between family environment, supervision and the seriousness of anti-social behavior in juvenile offenders confined in a state penitentiary from Morelos.

Method

A survey was used to collect data from a population of 86 juvenile male offenders from a state penitentiary located in Morelos.

Results

Parent-children communication and support are interrelated and form the familiar environment. Thus, children's communication predicts proper supervision and monitoring, specifically in the area of knowing children's activities, which, at the same time, predict less serious anti-social behavior.

Discussion and conclusion

It is important that families have an environment based on communication and support. It is also relevant to encourage adolescents to freely communicate with their parents so supervision and monitoring become common elements that help adolescents to stay away from behaviors that could lead them to crime.

Key words: Anti-social behavior, juvenile offenders, familiar environment, parental monitoring, State of Morelos.

RESUMEN

Introducción

La supervisión parental comprende: cuidado de los hijos, conocimiento de su paradero y actividades y adaptación. Para que ésta se dé es necesario que exista comunicación y apoyo entre padres e hijos, de manera que el ambiente familiar sea agradable. Por otro lado, se ha encontrado que la inconsistencia o ausencia de ésta es un factor de riesgo de la conducta antisocial y, en casos más graves, de delincuencia en los hijos.

Objetivo

Conocer cuál es la relación que existe entre el ambiente familiar, la supervisión parental y la gravedad de la conducta antisocial en menores infractores.

Método

La población estuvo conformada por menores infractores de un Centro Tutelar del Estado de Morelos. El instrumento se aplicó a 86 hombres.

Resultados

La comunicación del hijo fue un predictor de: 1. el manejo de reglas y conocimiento de pares, y 2. el conocimiento de las actividades del hijo. Esto último es lo que predice de manera significativa la gravedad de la conducta antisocial.

Discusión y conclusión

De acuerdo con los hallazgos, es importante que exista un ambiente familiar basado en la comunicación y el apoyo, que fomente una comunicación más libre de los adolescentes con sus padres, de manera que la supervisión parental se consiga más fácilmente. Esto ayudará para que los jóvenes no se involucren en comportamientos que los puedan llevar a delinquir.

Palabras clave: Conducta antisocial, menores infractores, ambiente familiar, supervisión parental, Estado de Morelos.

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INTRODUCTION

The number of teenagers engaged in anti-social behavior, as well as its severity and violence has increased in our country.¹⁻⁴

In Cuernavaca, in the State of Morelos, the number of juvenile offenders* has greatly increased. The Office for Crime Prevention at the Secretariat for Metropolitan Public Safety considers this situation may extend until it becomes a real social problem. Numbers reveal that during 2005, the proliferation of juvenile offenders in the center of the city was 30%, not considering the surrounding areas.⁵

Anti-social behavior refers to several different actions which violate social rules and the rights of others. The fact that certain behavior is regarded as anti-social depends on considerations about its severity and its estrangement from regulatory guidelines, as related to age of the child, gender, social class and other conditions.⁶ Anti-social behavior during the adolescence consists of actions which may break the law and which imply infractions: Running away, assault, rape, murder, robbery, damage on third party property, and serious violation of rules and regulations.⁶⁻⁸

Family is of the utmost importance in child development, and the quality of the relationship between the parents and the children is one of the first experiences which have a positive or negative impact in the child.⁷ On the other hand, means of socialization (family, school, peers, among others) play an important part in getting involved, or being protected from, problem behavior in adolescence, including drug consumption, law infractions by minors and criminal conduct.¹⁰

Whatever the family organization may be, contacts between its members or its relationship to the community, the loss of family authority in the life of the teenager, morally as well as emotionally, implies loss of parent supervision, thus increasing the probability of anti-social conduct and delinquency.^{11,12}

Stattin and Kerr¹² define parent supervision as a set of behaviors comprising the care of children, the true knowledge of their whereabouts, their activities and adaptation of activities outside the home, and it is related to the effort made by parents to find out what their children are doing by means of solicitation and control. On the other hand, there is monitoring, which depends on the voluntary description that children make for their parents about their leisure activities, i.e., the communication and spontaneous disposition of adolescents to convey information.^{13,14}

Barnes and Farrell¹⁵ point out that a strong parent support and a high level of supervision are the key factors in the prevention of alcohol abuse and of other problematic

or anti-social behavior; "support" meaning the behavior of parents towards their children, such as praising, encouraging and showing affection (physically), which shows the adolescent he is accepted and loved.

For parental supervision to take place, it is necessary that communication and mutual support exist between parents and children, as well as a pleasant family environment. The family environment is a consequence of the contribution of all family members, especially of the parents. The members of the family create the environment and they may as well modify it. Likewise, the environment is able to modify erroneous behavior of the members and to promote the one considered to be right.¹⁶

Communication is essential for the proper development of the family environment and for having a feeling of fraternity and respect within the family. Communication is guided by feelings and by the information that is transmitted and understood. When there is good communication within the family, comradeship, mutual understanding and a feeling of union and affection are more likely to develop in the household. Thus, there will be mutual respect and values will be more deeply established.¹⁷

Another important aspect is support within the family nucleus. This is based upon the need and obligation to protect, shelter, educate, understand and offer all kind of material and emotional satisfiers, as well as the teaching of social conventions to the members of the family.¹⁷

A good relationship between parents and children, based on communication and support, must work as prevention, and be a two-way process, including both the solicitation of parents for the knowledge and control of the behavior of their children as well as the children's willingness to include their parents as part of their lives.¹²

Accordingly, this research was conducted to find the relation between family environment and parent supervision as predictors of the severity of anti-social behavior in juvenile offenders in a reformatory state penitentiary in the State of Morelos, Mexico.

METHOD

Population and sample

The research was done considering all juvenile male offenders from a reformatory state penitentiary located in Morelos, Mexico. The sample was made up of 86 underage males ranging between 12 and 21 years of age, with an average age of 16.4 years and a standard deviation of 1.6 years.

Instrument

A self-administered test was used, considering different problem areas in teenagers. It had been previously validated

* Teenagers between 11 and 17 years and 11 months of age who have violated the law and are arrested by the police on account of those actions, who take part in legal procedure depending on the laws of their State.⁹

ed and its main indicators have been maintained in different surveys.^{18,19}

The sections used in this study are:

1. *Anti-social behavior scale:* It is made up of 12 items regarding the kind of anti-social behavior presented by the adolescent during the last year, by means of questions related to situations such as: taking a car without the owner's permission, taking money or things, participating in fights, beating or hurting someone on purpose, selling drugs and using a weapon to hurt somebody or to take someone's belongings.¹⁸

The scale was originally classified according to two factors: Stealing and participating in fights, on the one side, and those behaviors with more serious consequences on the other. This study was intended to assess the different levels of severity for each of the different types of behavior; thence, a validation was carried out by a group of expert judges using the method of paired comparisons.²⁰ For such purpose, all items were organized in pairs, generating all possible pair combinations. 12 expert judges, psychiatrists, psychologists and researchers of anti-social behavior in adolescents, were asked to point out which behavior they considered to be the most problematic in adolescents out of every pair of behaviors shown to them, by means of the following instruction:

These are some questions related to adolescent behavior, organized in pairs; for each pair of questions, mark with an "X" which of them you consider to be the most problematic.

Each judge was shown every one of the possible combination of pairs of items so they can point out which, out of every pair, they considered the most problematic. Later, they were set in a matrix with the frequencies each item was chosen as more problematic than its pair. A *p* matrix, where all frequencies were changed

into probability to be chosen before the other, and a *z* matrix, where all probabilities were substituted by its equivalent in *z* grade. From this matrix, the grades per reactive used in the present study were derived, assigning the value 0 to not having performed any anti-social behavior through a value 10, which was identified as the maximum level of severity (table 1).

2. *Family environment:* It includes communication and support sub-scales, made up of 12 items validated in Mexican school population.¹⁹ Such sub-scales were obtained from factorial loads higher than 0.50 and correlations higher than 0.80 are shown in each one of the communication and support areas.¹⁹ The factors used at the present study are organized as follows:
 - a) Child communication (3 items).
 - b) Parent support (3 items).
 - c) Parent communication (3 items).
 - d) Customary support of the child (3 items).
3. *Supervision scale:* It consists of 15 items which explore the different ways of supervision used by parents as well as how interested they are about their children's activities. The adolescents are also asked whether they follow the rules which would make parent supervision easier.

The validity of this scale was obtained through analysis of hierarchical conglomerates of items to know how they were organized; in order to obtain reliability, internal consistency Kuder Richardson coefficient 20 was used. The items were grouped according to two factors: the first was named "Rules and peer knowledge" and its reliability was calculated KR20 = 0.73; the second, "Knowledge of the child's activities" and its reliability was KR20 = 0.89. The overall reliability of the scale was KR20 = 0.89 (table 2).

Table 1. Levels of severity of the items of the Anti-social Behavior Scale

	Grade
0. No anti-social behavior.	0.00
2. Taking money or things which do not belong to you, with a value of \$50 Mexican pesos or less.	1.79
5. Taking merchandise from a shop without paying for it (without causing damage).	2.84
3. Taking money or things which do not belong to you, with a value of \$500 Mexican pesos or less.	3.76
6. Hitting or damaging something (object or property) which does not belong to you.	4.32
1. Taking a car without the permission of the owner.	4.35
10. Participating in fights or quarrels.	4.44
4. Forcing a lock to enter somewhere apart from your own house.	5.56
11. Setting fire on purpose to objects that do not belong to you.	6.21
8. Selling drugs (such as marijuana, cocaine, etc.).	6.83
9. Hitting or hurting someone on purpose, not taking into account any arguments or fights with your siblings.	7.68
12. Using a knife or gun to get an object from another person.	9.21
7. Attacking someone using an object such as a firearm, knife, stick, switchblade, etc.	10.00

Table 2. Parent supervision scale

Rules and knowledge of peers (KR20 = 0.7275)	Conglomerate
c. Do your parents know the friends you go out with?	1
k. Do your parents care about the activities you do at school?	1
l. Have your parents set any rules about who you spend your spare time with?	1
m. Have your parents set any rules about where you can spend your spare time?	1
i. Have your parents set clear rules about what time you must be home?	1
j. Do your parents ask you about your homework?	1
h. Do your parents usually know who you go out with?	1
Knowledge of child's activities (KR20 = 0.8926)	
n. When you go out, do you tell your parents where you are going?	2
p. When you go out, do you tell your parents what time you are coming back?	2
o. When you go out, do you tell your parents who you are going out with?	2
q. When you go out, do you get home at the time agreed?	2
f. Do your parents usually know where you are?	2
e. Do you tell your parents what activities you are involved in while you are with friends?	2
d. Do your parents know where your friends live?	2
g. Do your parents usually know that places you visit when you go out?	2

KR 20 overall scale = 0.8951
Item hierarchical conglomerates.

Table 3. Description of the sample of male juvenile offenders from the State of Morelos ($n = 86$)

Age	\bar{X}	s
	16.4	1.6
	f	%
School grade you are in		
I have never gone to school	2	2.4
Primary school	30	35.3
Secondary school	36	42.4
High school or Prep school	17	20.0
Do you usually live		
At home	56	65.1
Sometimes at home and sometimes on the streets	25	29.1
On the streets	2	2.3
Did not answer	3	3.5
Do you have a dad?		
I have a dad	54	62.8
Another relative is in his place	9	10.5
I do not have a dad and nobody is in his place	13	15.1
Someone else is in his place	8	9.3
Did not answer	2	2.3
Do you have a mom?		
I have a mom	75	87.2
Another relative is in his place	3	3.5
I do not have a mom and nobody is in her place	4	4.7
Someone else is in her place	1	1.2
Did not answer	3	3.5
At the moment, you are living with:		
None of my parents	15	17.4
Only with my mom	28	32.6
Only with my dad	2	2.3
Sometimes with dad and some with mom	5	5.8
With my mom and dad	24	27.9
With my mom and her current couple	8	9.3
With my dad and his current couple	3	3.5
Did not answer	1	1.2

Procedure

The survey was administered to 86 male juvenile offenders from a reformatory state penitentiary in Morelos.

The research project was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of National Psychiatry Institute Ramón de la Fuente Muñiz. It was also approved and received funding from the National Council of Science and Technology through agreement CONACYT-P-42273-H.

The authorities of the penitentiary act as legal guardians of the minors during their stay; thence it was them who granted access to the facilities and gave their consent for interviewing the minors. Interviewers went into two classrooms and asked the teenagers whether they agreed to answering a survey; thus, their verbal consent was obtained. They were guaranteed that their answers would be confidential and that it would not have any positive or negative consequence upon their legal process. Minors who had literacy issues had the survey administered in person. There were no rejections. The average time for the survey administration was 60 minutes per group.

The statistical analysis of the data was carried out using SPSS statistics package version 20.²¹ Means and standard deviations were obtained from the sociodemographic data, from the supervision and family environment scales as well as from the Pearson correlation coefficients of the communication, support and parent supervision variables. Linear regressions were also made to establish the relations between family environment, supervision and severity of anti-social behavior.

Table 4. Grades in the supervision, communication and support scales for male juvenile offenders from the State of Morelos ($n = 86$)

Scale (Minimum-maximum possible scores)	\bar{X}	s
Severity of anti-social behavior (0-10)	4.7	4.2
Family environment		
Child communication (1-4)	2.5	.9
Parent support (1-4)	3.0	.9
Parent communication (1-4)	2.6	.9
Significant support of the child (1-4)	3.0	.8
Parent supervision		
Handling of rules and knowledge of the persons that the child goes out with (0-7)	5.5	1.7
Knowledge of child's activities (0-8)	5.1	2.9
Total (0-15)	10.6	4.3

RESULTS

Sample description

Most minors (42.4%) were studying secondary school. Before entering the reformatory center, over half of them (65.1%) lived at home most of the time; almost a third (29.1%) lived part of the time at home and part of the time on the streets. 62.8% had a father, and 15.1% mentioned not having and that nobody was in his place. On the other hand, 87.2% mentioned having a mother. 32.6% lived only with her, 27.9% with both of their parents, and 17.4% did not live with any parent (table 3).

Regarding anti-social actions during the last year, 59.3% reported having committed violent acts or theft, and 51.2% admitted to having committed severe anti-social actions. It must be underscored that 38.4% mentioned some of his relatives had been in trouble with the police; 47.7% reported someone in his family had been arrested, and 20.9% informed that some relative was arrested at the time of the research.

The average severity of anti-social acts was 4.7 (where the highest grade was 10) In the family environment subscales: For "Parent support" and "Significant child support", a mean of 3.0 was obtained, where the highest mark was 4 points. In the supervision scale, for the "Rules and peer

knowledge" factor, a mean of 5.5 was obtained, where the highest was 7. The overall Supervision scale had an $\bar{X} = 10.6$ out of a maximum of 15 (table 4).

Relation between supervision, communication and family support and the severity of anti-social behavior

Pearson product-moment coefficients were obtained and it was found that the Parent Support, Children Support, Parent Communication and Children Communication variables were significantly interrelated. They were also related to the "Knowledge of the child's activities", which is part of the supervision scale (table 5).

On the other hand, Child Communication, Rules and Peer Knowledge, and Knowledge of the child's activities were significantly related to the severity of the anti-social behavior. Such relationship was negative or inverse, that is, the greater the communication of the child was, the better the handling of rules and knowledge of the child's activities, the lesser the severity of the anti-social behavior (table 5).

Predictors of supervision with the severity of anti-social behavior

Different models of linear regression were carried out to assess how the family environment, parent supervision and severity of the anti-social behavior areas were interrelated. The objective of the first linear regression was knowing the relation of the four family environment factors with the parent supervision factor named "Rules and peer knowledge". The second was carried out with the intention of knowing how the four family environment factors were related to the factor named "Knowledge of the child's activities". Finally, the third linear regression was made with the intention of knowing how the two factors which are part of Parent Supervision are related to the severity of anti-social behavior.

On the first linear regression, it was found that child communication significantly predicted the handling of rules and the knowledge of those persons the child goes out with. On the second, child communication also predicted signifi-

Table 5. Relationship between supervision, family environment and anti-social behavior in juvenile offenders from the State of Morelos ($n = 86$)

	Severity of anti-social behavior	Child communication	Parent support	Parent communication	Significant support of the child	Handling of rules and knowledge of peers
Child communication	-0.329*					
Parent support	-0.182	0.660*				
Parent communication	-0.128	0.721*	0.709*			
Significant support of the child	-0.120	0.613*	0.657*	0.589*		
Setting of rules and knowledge of peers	-0.321*	0.358*	0.268**	0.210	0.171	
Knowledge of child's activities	-0.585*	0.484*	0.306*	0.315*	0.326*	0.661*

Pearson correlation, * $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$

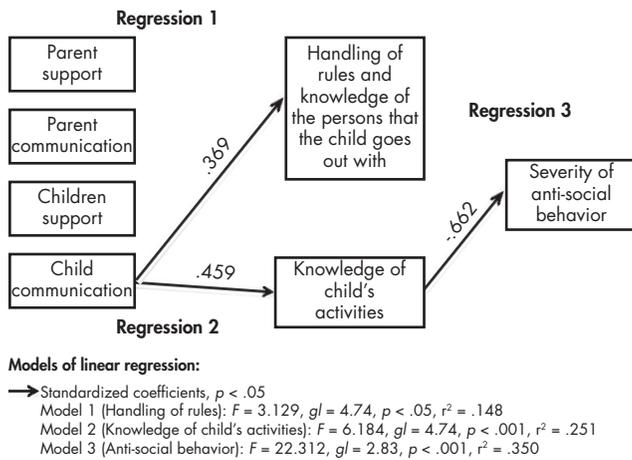


Figure 1. Relationship between anti-social behavior, communication and support within the family and parent supervision in juvenile offenders in the State of Morelos.

cantly the knowledge of the child's activities. Finally, on the third, knowledge of the child's activities predicted the severity of anti-social behavior inversely, that is, the greater parent supervision is, the lesser the severity of the anti-social behavior (figure 1).

Even when parent communication, children support, parents support and child communication are interrelated and make up the family environment, the only significant relation was between child communication and handling of rules and knowledge of those people the child goes out with, and knowledge of the child's activities (figure 1).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Medina¹⁷ mentions that a family is not merely a group of persons or a structure, but a complementary union, full of diverse affective bonds that go in different directions. The importance of the family in the raising of children is essential, since this group is the one that provides the tools and the criteria for adolescents to learn how to protect themselves from situations and people that may be harmful. Thus, the quality of the family environment and of family relations does not necessarily depend on the structure of the family or on who the adolescents live with, but rather on the ability of parents to relate with, communicate with and support their children at important times; this creates a healthy family environment which promotes supervision.

Communication and parent and children support are interrelated and make up family environment. Child communication predicted adequate supervision specifically about knowledge of the child's activities; this predicted a lower severity of the anti-social behavior for this sample of juvenile offenders, which is in agreement with Dishion and McMahon,¹³ who propose that good communication and

problem-solving skills may help in keeping a healthy relationship between parents and adolescents, as well as in the supervision of children in their everyday activities.

Taking into consideration the statements of Dishion and McMahon¹³ about how monitoring may be a factor of protection for children and young adults living in high-risk environments, child communication predicted an adequate supervision, especially in the Knowledge of the child's activities area, which predicted a lower severity of anti-social behavior.

According to these findings, it is important to encourage support and communication within the family environment and promote that adolescents can communicate freely with their parents, so that parent supervision may take place more easily; this may contribute to minors having more tools to help them not to relapse, and regarding teenagers in general, so that they will not get involved in anti-social behavior.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that a high percentage of these minors have relatives who had been arrested or who were under arrest at the time of the survey. This is a relevant issue, since several scholars point out that criminogenic example at home is very significant in the development of anti-social behavior in adolescents.^{6,7} However, there are not enough studies in this regard, which is why future research must be undertaken which analyzes the relation between offending behavior, its severity, and the relation with relatives under arrest, apart from identifying how this relation affects the family environment and the supervision of children.

A limitation of the present study is that it was made with a close-ended question instrument; thus, further research should be undertaken thoroughly to find out about interaction in families of juvenile offenders. It would also be important to take into account not only the perception that adolescents have of parent supervision, but to also know the opinion of the parents and find out about their supervision strategies and whether or not both parties consider them useful.

The present research was conducted only on juvenile offenders. It would be important to have information about juvenile offenders as well as minors who are not offenders, with the intention of analyzing the situation in different populations to enrich the findings of this research. It would also be relevant to conduct similar research with female juvenile offenders and to analyze the results to identify any differences in structure and family relations to be able to have a proper impact upon them.

Despite the limitations, the present work has great relevance since it offers information about a hard-to-reach population, which allowed for having a scope of their particular situation in order to propose preventive actions and treatment that are in accordance with their needs.

This population has the stigma of living in a situation of conflict with the law. Dealing with them from an objective

point of view about the way they perceive their family environment allows the different sectors that are in contact with them to influence the way this group can be approached, especially for the preparation of preventive programs which include the necessary conditions for these young people to go back to their family abode. Programs should also offer strategies to families for the proper supervision of their children protecting them from relapse in committing a crime, and to keep them, as well as those adolescents who do not engage in these activities, away from leading risky behavior in general.

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Conflict of interest

None of the authors has any conflict of interest whatsoever.

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