



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Journal of Adolescence

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jado



Maternal and paternal parenting styles: Unique and combined links to adolescent and early adult delinquency

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A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Parenting styles
Delinquency
Sex-differences
Longitudinal

The present study examines the cross-sectional and longitudinal associations between fathers' and mothers' parenting styles and male and female delinquency using a sample of 330 Dutch families with a mid or late adolescent son or daughter (ages 14–22), followed across two measurement waves with a 5-year interval. Parenting styles of fathers and mothers were linked to delinquency. A significant parenting style by sex interaction was found: neglectful parenting was related to higher levels of delinquency in males and permissive parenting was linked to delinquency in females. A long term relationship was found between fathers' neglectful parenting style and delinquency in males. Furthermore, results revealed that levels of delinquency were the lowest in families with at least one authoritative parent and highest in families with two neglectful parents, indicating that the level of delinquency was dependent on the combination of mother's and father's parenting styles.

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Introduction

Wide interest has been shown in the domain of the family, attempting to uncover the origins of the development of delinquent behavior. Family characteristics and, in particular, parenting has been among the strongest predictors of criminal behavior (Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001; Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996). Parental attachment, harsh parental discipline, poor relationships with parents, poor supervision, and inconsistent discipline are among the family factors that have been linked to delinquency. Despite the fact that the link between parenting and delinquency has been extensively investigated, there are several shortcomings. Although various parenting behaviors have been found to be linked to delinquency, surprisingly few studies have focused on whether combinations of parenting dimensions, that is, parenting styles are related to delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009). In addition, the vast majority of studies has focused on parenting by the mother and has neglected the influence of paternal parenting delinquency, despite the fact that fathers' behavior and parenting have been linked to their sons' delinquent behavior (e.g., Simons & Conger, 2007). By examining both mother's and father's parenting styles it is possible to investigate whether the gender of parent and child moderates the link between parenting and delinquency and whether one parent can either compensate for or accentuate the associations found between the other parent's style and their

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sons' and daughters' delinquency. Finally, the majority of studies have concentrated on adolescence and have analyzed concurrent links or have short time intervals. To date, it remains unclear whether or not parenting contribute to the continuation of offending after onset or for later onsets after age 20 (Farrington, 2005). Thus, the main purpose of the present paper is to test whether fathers' and mothers' parenting styles are linked to sons' and daughters' delinquency and whether combinations of parenting styles influence their children's delinquent behavior. We concentrate on different phases of the life course from adolescence to early adulthood and analyze concurrent and longitudinal parenting-delinquency links. We first review the literature on various concepts of parenting, parenting styles and gender of parents and children and different stages in the life course in relation to parenting and delinquency. Then, we describe the current study in which we analyze the concurrent and prospective link between mother's and father's parenting styles and delinquency in male and female adolescents and (early) adults.

Parenting and delinquency

Two perspectives have been adopted in the parenting literature: research that is focused on dimensions of parenting and research focusing on typologies (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; O'Connor, 2002; Ten Haaf, 1993). Dimensions are concepts to categorize parenting behaviors such as affection, punishment, monitoring, whereas typologies are constellations of parenting dimensions such as an authoritative parenting style which is a combination of supportive parenting, attachment and guiding the child's behavior by explanation and appropriate expectations for conformity.

Although various *parenting dimensions* have been proposed (see for an overview Holden, 1997), two key dimensions, support and control, have been used to assess the quality of parenting behavior (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The *support dimension* (also labeled warmth, responsiveness or acceptance-rejection by some scholars), refers to parental behaviors toward the child that makes the child feel comfortable, accepted and approved (Rollins & Thomas, 1979). The *control dimension* (also labeled demandingness), has been defined as placing demands on and controlling the child.

Besides parenting dimensions, parenting *typologies or styles* are examined. Elaborating on the work of Baumrind (1966, 1971), Maccoby and Martin (1983) defined parenting styles according to a two-dimensional framework of support and control. They combined the support and control dimensions and identified four parenting styles: authoritarian (low support and high control), authoritative (high support and high control), permissive (high support and low control), and neglecting (low support and low control). For example, an authoritarian style is characterized by low levels of warmth and affection and high levels of punishment, restriction and supervision.

Parenting styles are configurations of attitudes and behaviors of parents towards their child and create a context or a climate for the parent's behavior and is displayed across many different situations (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). From a typological viewpoint single parenting dimensions do not properly account for the interactional nature and dynamics of families and therefore parenting dimensions should not be examined in isolation (O'Connor, 2002). Identifying differences among families on single dimensions, such as harsh parental discipline, supervision, and control, does not consider how these various dimensions coalesce within specific families. For example, the effect of very strict parenting on the development of the child may be dependent on the degree in which parents provide warmth, support and love to their child. Therefore, several scholars have argued that adopting a typological approach is more suitable for studying complex behavior such as parenting (Bergman & Magnusson, 1997; Henry, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 2005; Mandara, 2003; Mandara & Murray, 2002). This multidimensional approach may more fully cover the facets of child-rearing and may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of patterns of parenting characteristics on the development of delinquency than single parenting characteristics commonly used as risk factors in predicting delinquency.

Prior research revealed that an authoritative style had positive effects on child adaptation, whereas the remaining styles place the child at risk for negative child outcomes (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). A recent meta-analysis identified 161 studies on parenting and delinquency but concluded that parenting styles, that is, combinations of support and control, in relation to delinquency is understudied (Hoeve et al., 2009). The vast majority of studies in this meta-analysis concentrated on separate parenting behaviors, such as supervision, showing affection and punishment or on parenting dimensions, such as support and control. The strongest links were found for parental monitoring, psychological control, and negative aspects of support such as rejection and hostility. Given that both parenting dimensions of support and control were linked to delinquent behavior, parenting styles could be important risk factors for delinquency. In particular, a neglectful parenting style may be linked to delinquency (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). Although hardly any studies were found on the link between a neglectful parenting style and delinquency, studies that measured parental neglect unidimensionally resulted in strong links between neglectfulness and delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009).

In summary, although it has been stated that a multidimensional approach is more suitable to study parenting and both parenting dimensions, support and control, have been found to be linked to delinquency, it remains unclear whether parenting *styles* (i.e., combinations of support and control) are linked to delinquency. Therefore, the current study extends prior research by concentrating on parenting styles in relation delinquency.

Differences between maternal and paternal parenting and effects on sons and daughters

The majority of the above mentioned studies on parenting and delinquency have focused on parenting by the mother. Hoeve et al. (2009) found that fewer than 20% of the previous studies on the link between parenting and delinquency focused

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