

Parent-child Relationship As a Moderator in the Relationship between Economic Hardship and Adolescents' Delinquency in Divorced Families

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Abstract. This study aimed to determine the moderating effect of parent-child relationship in the relationship between economic hardship and delinquency among adolescents of divorced families. A sample of 800 adolescents (424 girls and 376 boys) aged between 15 and 18 years completed the Parental Bond Scale (Van Wel, 1994), Economic hardship Questionnaire (Lasley, 1984), and Youth Self-Report Questionnaire (YSR; Achenbach, 1991). Hierarchical multiple regression analysis unveiled that parent-child relationship play a vital role as a moderator in the relationship between economic hardship and adolescents' delinquency. When there is low parent-child relationship, the relationship between economic hardship and delinquency is stronger.

Keywords: Adolescent, Parent-child Relationship, Economic Hardship, Delinquency.

1. Introduction

Parental economic hardship increases the risk of a variety of problems for children, including delinquency (Agnew, 2008; Conger, 2005). The stress associated with economic problems contributes to parental depression and distress, which in turn may lead to poor parenting practices such as low parent-child relationship, lack of warmth, low parental monitoring and harsh discipline on children (Conger et al., 1992). Few studies have focused on the consequences of growing up in economically disadvantages home for the well-being of children. A study by Leiber et al. (2009) examined the relationship between family structure, family processes, and economic resources on adolescent delinquency in a sample of 9636 African American, and Hispanic junior high schools adolescent in intact and non-intact (divorced, widowed, and never married mothers) families. Leiber et al. found that family structure was not a predictor of delinquency, but the quality of relationship with mother and supervision were determinants of delinquent behavior. These findings illustrated that adolescents who had stronger relationship with their mothers and those who experienced more maternal supervision reported lower level of delinquent behavior than those with weaker relationship and low supervision. Thus, the quality of parent-child bond may have a major role in the development of delinquency among adolescents. Burrell and Roosa (2008) also examined the relationship between mothers' economic hardship and adolescent problem behavior among 189 adolescents. Findings by Burrell and Roosa showed that mothers' economic hardship has positive association with depressive symptoms which have negative influence on parental monitoring. Burrell and Roosa concluded that economic hardship indirectly influences adolescent problem behavior through mothers' depressive symptoms, maternal monitoring, and deviant peer.

2. Research Objectives

- 1) To examine the relationships between parent-child relationship, economic hardship and adolescents' delinquency.
- 2) To examine moderating effect of parent-child relationship in the relationship between economic hardship and adolescents' delinquency.

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3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and Procedure

The study was conducted in Mashhad city in Iran. Mashhad is a big city which is located in north-east of Iran. The sample consisted of 800 high school adolescents of divorced families (424 girls and 376 boys) aged between 15 and 18 years ($M = 16.52$ years, $SD = 1.12$). The majority (52.9%) of the respondents was female, and 46.9% were male. The respondents were identified using probability proportional to size sampling technique. Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from Mashhad Department of Education. Then, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, handed a research packet, and asked to review the consent form. The students were told that their responses would be confidential (confidentiality was achieved by means of a code system).

3.2. Data Analysis

A descriptive statistical analysis (means and standard deviations) was undertaken to describe the variables of the study. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to measure the strengths of the relationship between the studied variables. The hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the moderating effect of parent-child relationship in the relationship between economic hardship and adolescents' delinquency.

3.3. Measurements

3.3.1. Adolescent Delinquency

The Youth Self-report Questionnaire (YSR, Achenbach, 1991) was used to measure adolescents' delinquency. The YSR consist of 13 items, which is rated on a 3-point Likert scale from 0 to 2 (0= not true to 2= very). The scale scores ranges from 0 to 26. Higher scores on YSR are interpreted as high delinquency. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha reliability for YSR is .93.

3.3.2. Parent-child Relationship

To examine parent-adolescent relations, the Parental Bond Scale (Van Wel, 1994) was employed. This scale has eight items with a 4-point scale (1 = entirely disagree to 4 = entirely agree) response. The scale scores ranged from 8 to 32. Higher scores indicate strong quality of parent-adolescent relationship. Reliability assessment of the parent-adolescent relationship scale in this study yielded an alpha coefficient of .79.

3.3.3. Economic Hardship

Economic hardship was assessed by the Economic Hardship Questionnaire that contains 12 items drawn from the Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll (Lasley, 1984). These items focused on changes in the family's style of living. The scale scores ranged from 10 to 40 with higher scores indicating high level of economic hardship. Reliability assessment of the maternal economic hardship scale in this study yielded an alpha coefficient of .82.

4. Results

4.1. The Relationships between Parent-child Relationship, Economic Hardship, and Adolescents' Delinquency

The Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to test the relationship between parent-child relationship, economic hardship and delinquency among adolescent of divorced families. As depicted in Table 1 economic hardship was positively associated with adolescents' delinquency ($r=.511$, $p<0.01$). The positive associations indicated that adolescents of divorced families who experienced high level of economic hardship tend to report higher level of delinquency. This finding is consistent with previous research (Amato & Keith, 1991; Conger et al., 1992; Conger, 2005; Agnew et al., 2008) which emphasized that parental economic hardship contributes to economic pressure which in turn predicted parental irritability and emotional distress. Parents in these condition practice poor parenting such as less parental warmth and

acceptance, lower level of parental involvement, supervision, and monitoring and used harsh or inconsistent discipline which contributes to delinquent behavior.

Also a statistically significant strong and negative correlation was found for parent-child relationship and adolescents' delinquency ($r=-.834, p<0.01$). The finding revealed that adolescents' of divorced families who experienced positive quality of parent-child relationship tend to exhibit lower delinquency. The result of this study is consistent with past studies (Fanti et al., 2008; Gerard et al., 2006) which found that the quality of parent-adolescent relationship is more likely to associate with delinquent behavior. Children who perceived warm and close relationships with both parents have lower level of delinquency. Adolescents who have strong and positive relationship with parents are more likely to express their thoughts, feelings and their daily activities to their parents which decrease the opportunities for delinquent behavior and foster adolescents' responsiveness to the expectations and desires of their parents which is likely to restrain adolescents from becoming involved in behavior that parents disapprove (Kerr & Stattin, 2000).

Table 1: Bivariate Correlation Coefficients of Variables in the Study

Variables	1	2	3
1. Economic hardship	-		
2. Parent-child relationship	-.538**	-	
3. Adolescent delinquency	.511**	-.834**	-

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

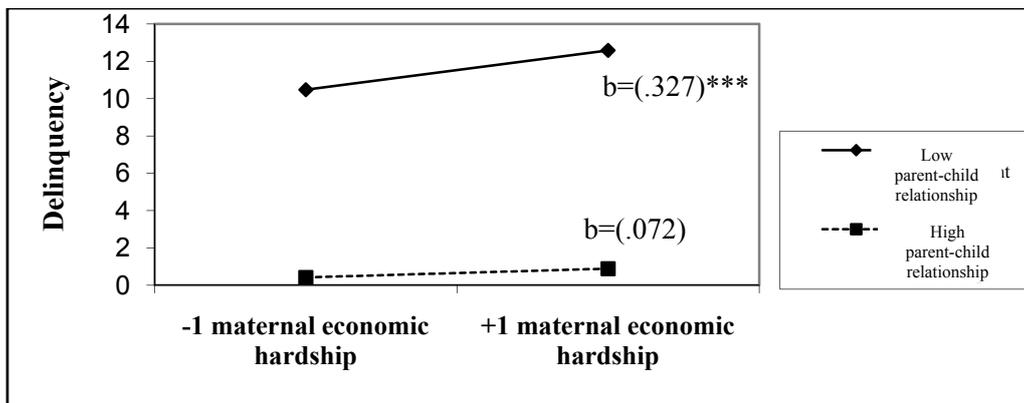
4.2. The Moderating Role of Parent-child Relationship

To determine the moderating role of parent-child relationship in the relationship between economic hardship and adolescent delinquency, hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses was conducted. Independent variable and moderator are centred prior to conducting hierarchical multiple regression analyses. Economic hardship entered at step 1, explained 26.2% ($R^2 = .262, p<.001$) of the variance in adolescents' delinquency. After entry of parent-child relationship at step 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 70.3%. The addition of parent-child relationship at second step resulted in a substantial R^2 change of 43.9%, F change (2,797) =931.60, and this increase is highly significant $p<.001$. The two independent variables accounted for 43.9% of the variance in delinquency. All the two variables were statistically significant, with parent-child relationship recording a higher beta value (Beta= -.79, $p<.001$) than economic hardship (Beta=.09, $p<.001$). Parent-child relationship emerged as the strongest predictor of adolescents' delinquency. To check for moderation effect, new conditional independent variable and moderator variable (centred economic hardship \times parent-child relationship) was computed. The computed variable was entered at step 3. Examination of the variables in the third step revealed that the value of R^2 change was .003 when the interaction variables were added. This change is significant: F (3,796) =628.32, $p<.001$. According to Table 2 the interaction variables which is economic hardship \times parent-child relationship (B=.23, Beta=.08, $p\leq .05$) was a significant predictor of adolescents' delinquency. These findings indicated that parent-child relationship did indeed moderate the relationship between economic hardship and adolescent delinquency. To clarify the moderating effect of parent-child relationship on adolescent delinquency, post-hoc probing was conducted. This procedure creates high and low value variables for the moderator by adding and subtracting one standard deviation from its centered values. Thus, two new variables were created (high and low parent-child relationship). The high and low conditions were tested and regression equations were generated. As illustrated in Figure 1, a significant relationship was found between economic hardship and adolescent delinquency for low level of parent-child relationship.

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Economic Hardship and Parent-Child Relationship on Adolescent Delinquency

Variable	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	
Economic hardship	1.10	.07	.51***	.19	.05	.09***	.20	.05	.09***	
Parent-child relationship				-1.13	.03	-.79***	-1.12	.03	-.78***	
Economic hardship × Parent-child relationship							-.03	.01	-.05*	
R^2		.262			.700			.703		
ΔR^2		.262			.439			.003		
Adjusted R^2		.261			.700			.702		
F		$F(1,798)=282.60***$			$F(2,797)=931.60***$			$F(3,796)=628.32***$		

Note: B= unstandardized regression coefficient, Beta= standardized regression coefficient, * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$



Relationship on Adolescents' Delinquency. b=unstandardized coefficient(simple slope), *** $p<.001$.

Fig. 1: Graphical Plot of the Interaction between Maternal Economic Hardship and Parent-child.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This first purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parent-child relationship, economic hardship and adolescent delinquency. The results of bivariate correlations revealed that parent-child relationship has an important influence on adolescents' delinquency. This finding is consistent with past research which emphasized the critical role of the quality of parent-child relationship in influencing delinquent behavior among adolescents, specifically those from divorced families. Adolescents who experienced negative relationship in the family tend not to internalize parental values and norms and may express their frustration through negative behaviors (Schickedanz et al., 2000). The results of this study also found that higher level of economic hardship was associated with high level of delinquency among adolescents of divorced families. This finding supports previous research (Amato & Keith, 1991; Conger et al., 1992; Conger, 2005) which emphasized that economic problem may contribute to parental socio-emotional instability that consequently leads to poor supervision and disciplining of children. The second and main purpose of this study was to examine the moderating effect of parent-child relationship in the relationship between economic hardship and adolescents' delinquency in divorced families. As hypothesised, the results of moderation analysis demonstrated that relationship between economic hardship and adolescents' delinquency is statistically moderated by parent-child relationship. When there is low parent-child relationship, the relation between economic hardship and delinquency is stronger. Previous studies (Fanti et al., 2008; Gerard et al., 2006) revealed that economic hardship indirectly affect parenting behavior through its adverse impact on parental psychological well-being. Distressed parents reported feeling less effective in disciplinary interactions with their child and were observed to be less affectionate in parent-child relationships (Loukas & Prelow, 2004). A good quality parent-child relationship may be especially important in adolescence because during this developmental period, peers become increasingly

influential. Adolescents with a good quality parent-child relationships are less likely than their counterparts to be influenced by deviant peers and, in this way, escape elevated levels of delinquent behavior. Parent-child relationship quality may protect adolescents from delinquent behaviors by weakening the negative influence of risk factors such as economic hardship.

This finding implied that parent-child relationship quality needs to be enhanced in order to promote positive behavior development among adolescents of divorced families. Therefore, educational programs targeted for adolescents and parents must provide appropriate knowledge and skills on how parents and adolescents can interact positively with each other.

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