

# Does Permissive Parenting Relate to Levels of Delinquency? An Examination of Family Management Practices in Low-Income Black American Families

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## Abstract

This study examined the longitudinal trajectories of the delinquency of adolescents (11 to 18 years old) in relation to permissive parenting regarding *family rules, curfews, and parental monitoring*. The longitudinal analysis identified how these relationships develop and change through adolescence. Using data from the Mobile Youth Survey, a 14-year longitudinal study of high-poverty, primarily Black American youths living in Alabama ( $N = 4,800$ ), the relationship between delinquency and permissive parenting was analyzed using linear growth models. Findings showed that males with minimal family rules, minimal curfew expectations, and minimal parental monitoring were

at the greatest risk for delinquency. For females, no significant relationship between parental monitoring and delinquency was found over time. In addition, while holding curfew and family rules constant, adolescents with lower levels of parental monitoring exhibited higher levels of delinquency at age 11, which decreased slightly throughout adolescence.

## Introduction

Originally described by Baumrind (1967), permissive parenting is an indulgent parenting style in which parents make few demands on their adolescents, have low expectations for adolescent's self-control, yet allow adolescents considerable

self-regulation. Even though parenting styles may transform over time (Schroeder & Mowen, 2012), permissive parenting has been associated with poor academic achievement (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Huey, Saylor, & Rinn, 2013; Shumow, Vandell, & Posner, 1998), decreased psychological health and quality of life (Milevsky, Schlechter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007; Niaraki & Rahimi, 2013), and juvenile delinquency (Chan & Koo, 2011; Hoeve, Dubas, Gerris, van der Laan, & Smeenk, 2011). Permissive parenting provides little structure and often places youths at risk for poor psychosocial outcomes and increases adolescents' propensity to engage in delinquent acts. Empirical literature points toward the long-lasting effects of delinquency, which is of particular concern for those living in impoverished conditions. Multiple studies have shown that delinquency is associated with adult criminality (Cernkovich, Lanctot, & Giordano, 2008; Dilalla & Gottesman, 1989; Huesmann, Eron, & Dubow, 2002; Juon, Doherty, & Ensminger, 2006; le Blanc, 1992).

While measures of parenting style have been developed (see Darling & Steinberg, 1993), there has been little research examining family management practices that may be defined as permissive. Furthermore, at least one study of parenting strategies found that permissive parenting style may not be as harmful as originally thought (Bolkan, Sano, De Costa, Acock, & Day, 2010). The current study examines the confluence of permissiveness and family management practices on delinquency. Delinquency is of specific interest given research that indicates 1 in 3 Black American men and 1 in 18 Black American women will go to prison in their lifetime, compared to 1 in 9 of all men and 1 in 56 of all women (Bonczar, 2003). Because a greater than average proportion of Black American adolescents live in poverty (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012), delinquency is both an issue of race and poverty. We hypothesize that fewer family rules, absence of family curfews, and lower levels of parental monitoring are associated with greater

delinquency in a sample of Black American adolescents living in highly impoverished neighborhoods.

## Background

Family management practices include the practices parents use to socialize adolescents to comply with social norms and to enforce that compliance. Research has shown that as adolescents get older, family management practices such as parental monitoring decrease as parents apply fewer restraints on adolescents' behavior (Wang, Dishion, Stormshak, & Willett, 2011) and adolescents are increasingly exposed to influences outside the family. This decrease in family management practices is problematic because fewer and weaker family management practices are associated with adolescent delinquency (Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984). Permissive parenting is also associated with delinquency (Chan & Koo, 2011; Hoeve et al., 2011); however more research is needed to examine the confluence of these two constructs.

Reiss (1951) first proposed that delinquency resulted because of the failure of personal and social control; that individuals are unable or unwilling to abide by established rules. Furthermore, the absence of socialization agents, such as family members, may lead to the development of antisocial behavior among youths (Hirschi, 1969). Moreover, while individuals may learn patterns of behavior from socialization agents (Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, & Catalano, 2011), the existence of rules that establish guidelines for adolescent behavior (Zimmerman & Rosenthal, 1974) also helps to prevent delinquency (Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Mason, Kosterman, Hawkins, Haggerty, & Spoth, 2003). Therefore, when caregivers provide and enforce structure in the form of family rules, the behavior of adolescents may be positively impacted, resulting in an increase in pro-social behavior and a decrease in delinquency.

Curfews are among the rules that help adolescents avoid delinquency (McDowall, Loftin, & Wiersema, 2000; Sasse, 1999). Curfews may be imposed by parents or they may be legislated by communities. The implications of curfew laws on communities and juveniles have been debated (Adams, 2007). However, curfew laws have been shown to reduce both violent and property crimes (Kline, 2012). Despite the research on curfew laws, there has been little examination of curfews imposed by parents. By setting curfews, parents ensure that they are able to keep track of their adolescents by asking questions that often come along with conversations about curfews (e.g., what time will you be home? and where are you going?) or by enforcing a time that their adolescents will be home, allowing them to monitor their adolescents. Similarly, parental monitoring is one way that family rules are imposed (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Like other family rules that establish guidelines for adolescent behavior (Zimmerman & Rosenthal, 1974), curfews may influence adolescent behaviors, including reducing delinquent behaviors. By observing and monitoring youths, parents are able to set boundaries and may prevent or restrict substance use (Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2006; Steinberg, Fletcher, & Darling, 1994) and association with delinquent peers (Church, Tomek, Bolland, Hooper, Jaggars, & Bolland, 2012), for example.

Parental monitoring is a set of interrelated parenting behaviors, specifically concerning the knowledge of the child's whereabouts and activities (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Parental monitoring is one aspect of enforcing family rules. Higher levels of parental monitoring are associated with lower levels of delinquent behavior (Fosco, Stormshak, Dishion, & Winter, 2012; Hoeve et al., 2009). Compared to stricter parents, permissive parents tend to monitor adolescents less, resulting in adolescents who are more likely to engage in risky behaviors (Borawski, Levers-Landis, Lovegreen, & Trapl, 2003). Therefore, when parents are cognizant of their child's activities, youths are less likely to exhibit problem behaviors.

Males and females have differing trajectories of delinquent and criminal behavior, with males tending to exhibit greater delinquency as they enter adolescence and young adulthood, and females exhibiting fewer problem behaviors (Miller, Malone, & Dodge, 2010). One explanation for these opposing trajectories is the socialization of gender differences, a process often undertaken by parents. Males, especially those in Black American households, are often viewed as being more mature than females (Hooper, 2013). The increased delinquency of males may be related to the tendency for males to receive less parental monitoring than females (Barnes et al., 2006). Therefore, permissive parenting in regard to their male adolescents may account for the differences in males' and females' rates of delinquency.

The current study was designed to analyze the relationship between permissive parenting and the delinquency of adolescents throughout adolescence. The longitudinal investigation provides increased insight into this relationship, as it can detail the relationship between individuals as opposed to larger samples, as would be typical of a cross-sectional investigation. A single research question was posed: To what extent does permissive parenting affect delinquency throughout adolescence?

## Method

### Sample and Procedures

The Mobile Youth Survey (MYS) is a 14-year longitudinal study of adolescents living in low-income neighborhoods in the Alabama port city of Mobile and the neighboring town of Prichard (Bolland, 2004; Bolland et al., 2013). Data were collected annually from adolescents between the ages 9.75 and 19.25 between 1998 and 2011, resulting in over 36,000 data points from more than 12,000 adolescents. In 1998, the immediate response rate was approximately 50%; however, the eventual response rate of those identified as eligible participants in 1998 was between 72% and 78% (Bolland, 2004).

The MYS was a multiple cohort design in which new cohorts were added annually. Adolescents were encouraged to participate on a yearly basis, provided the age requirement was met. Due to the size of the study itself, a brief description of the MYS methodology is reported here. Full details of the methodological and sampling procedures are available elsewhere (Bolland, 2004; Bolland et al., 2013). Within the identified target neighborhoods (i.e., low-income) in Mobile and Prichard, the MYS research team identified homes using census data where adolescents meeting the age requirements (between 9.75 and 19.25) resided. After identification, investigators attempted contact with both adolescents and/or their adult caregivers. The purpose of the survey was presented and adolescents were invited to participate. The MYS was administered in a group setting, where an MYS researcher read items aloud to groups of 10 to 20 adolescents. Answers were marked by participants in an answer booklet. While group administrations were typical, those having difficulty with the survey worked one-on-one or one-on-two with an intern to complete the survey. The survey administration procedure took approximately 1 hour and each participant received \$10 prior to 2005 and \$15 in subsequent years for his or her time (Bolland, 2004).

Although every attempt was made to follow the adolescents across all ages of data, many adolescents participated in the MYS only briefly (i.e., 1 or 2 data points). Because we did not want our parameter estimates biased by these adolescents, their data were excluded from the analysis. In addition, data points at the ages of 9, 10, and 19 were excluded from the analysis due to the low frequency of these ages. The final sample used for this study contained 4,800 adolescents with 3 or more data points in the MYS between the ages of 11 and 18. Among the 4,800 participants, 2,497 were male (51.2%) and 2,383 were female (48.8%). The sample consisted predominantly of Black American youths ( $n = 4,725$ , 96.8%), with few Hispanic youths, ( $n = 144$ , 3.0%) and even fewer White American youths ( $n = 11$ , 0.2%). As this

sample was targeted to low-income adolescents, a majority qualified to receive free or reduced-cost lunches at some point during their participation in the study.

In an analysis of school system records, demographic characteristics and functional characteristics of MYS participants (e.g., school violations and resulting disciplinary actions and achievement test scores) were not found to be significantly different from those in the population that did not participate (Bolland, 2012). Thus, the use of both active and passive sampling strategies resulted in a representative sample of adolescents living in the targeted low-income neighborhoods.

### Measures

**Delinquency.** Adolescent delinquency was measured by 19 self-report items, which targeted engagement in risky or delinquent behaviors. A composite measure was generated using self-report measures of the following behaviors: carrying a gun, carrying a knife, pulling a gun or knife on someone, cutting, stabbing, or shooting someone, as well as arrest history and gang involvement.

First, participants were asked four questions regarding whether they had ever carried a gun, carried a knife, pulled a gun or knife on someone, or cut, stabbed, or shot someone, (yes = 1, no = 0). Each of these four items also was followed up with questions regarding recency of the behaviors. For both the gun and knife *carrying* questions, four additional items were asked regarding engagement in the previous year, the last 90 days, the last 30 days, and the last 7 days. Only two additional recency items were asked regarding gun or knife *pulling* and cutting, stabbing, or shooting someone, specifically the past 90 days and the past 30 days. These recency items were measured using the trichotomous scale options “no,” “yes, just once,” or “yes, more than once.”

Two items assessed participants' arrest history, whether they had ever been arrested (yes = 1, no = 0), and whether they had been arrested within

the last year (no = 0; yes, just once = 1; yes, more than once = 2). Participants' gang involvement was measured using three items: whether they had ever been involved in a gang; whether they were currently involved in a gang; and whether they hang out with gang members; each measured dichotomously (yes = 1, no = 0).

The final summative scale had a range between 0 and 28 points, with higher values indicating greater delinquency. As this scale was created for use in this study, a principle components analysis was conducted to determine the viability of creating a single summative score. A single summative scale accounted for 51% of the variance in the items, with an eigenvalue of 3.08, with all other eigenvalues less than 1. The single summative scale then appears to be valid for use, with a high reliability of the items, Cronbach's alpha  $\alpha = .80$ .

**Permissive parenting.** Permissive parenting, in this study, is operationalized through three adolescent self-report scales: *family rules*, *curfew*, and *parental monitoring*.

**Family rules.** Family rules were measured using three self-report items on the MYS. Participants responded "yes" (coded as 1) or "no" (coded as 0) to the following items: "Does your family have rules about when you do your homework?," "Does your family have rules about dating?," and "Does your family have rules about fighting and hitting people?" A principle components analysis was conducted on the three items to determine the validity of utilizing a single summative scale. A single summative scale, ranging from 0 to 3, accounted for 55% of the total variance in the items with an eigenvalue = 1.64. All other eigenvalues were below 1. On this scale, higher scores indicated more perceived family rules by the adolescent. Although a single summative scale appears valid, the internal reliability was relatively low ( $\alpha = .59$ ), yet still acceptable (Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991).

**Curfew.** Curfew was measured using a scale adapted from Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch (1991) and includes four dichotomous

self-report items (e.g., "Are you allowed to stay out as late as you want on school nights?" and "Are you allowed to stay out after dark on school nights?") that were reverse scored and summed to create a scale ranging from 0 to 4, in which higher scores indicated more perceived presence of a curfew by the adolescent. Internal reliability for the adapted scale was acceptable ( $\alpha = .71$ ).

**Parental monitoring.** Parental monitoring was measured using a six-item self-report scale adapted from Lamborn et al. (1991). Participants responded to two dichotomous items (e.g., "Does your mother or father know who you hang out with?"), three trichotomous items, (e.g., "How much does your mother or father really know about how you spend your time?"), and one item with four response options (e.g., "How much does your mother or father really know about where you go at night?"). To create a summative scale with the items, each of the responses was recorded to comparable values; that is, all response codings ranged between 0 and 2 for each item. This resulted in a summative scale that ranged between 0 and 12, with higher numbers indicating greater perception of parental monitoring by the adolescent. Internal reliability for the adapted scale was good ( $\alpha = .74$ ).

**Age and gender.** Age was measured as age in years at the time of each survey administration, as reported by the participant. The ages in this study ranged between 11 and 18, with age centered at age 11 for ease of interpretation of parameter estimates in the model. Gender was self-reported and coded dichotomously (males = 0, females = 1).

### Data Analysis

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to generate the means for the three permissive parenting variables (family rules, curfew, and parental monitoring) and to determine whether significant gender differences exist. The longitudinal analysis modeled the longitudinal trajectories of delinquency of the adolescent in relation to permissive parenting.

Growth models are particularly robust to missing data points (Singer and Willett, 2003); however, those adolescents with only one or two data points would contribute solely to the group parameter estimates, as individual parameter estimates would not be estimated for them. Therefore, these adolescents, who comprised more than 50% of the full sample in the MYS, were removed prior to analysis. In this way, the parameter estimates are based on those with 3 or more data points. Imputation methods were not implemented for the final data set ( $n = 4,800$ ), as the complexity of the MYS data base would require significant time to impute missing observations.

For this study, two linear growth models were estimated. The first model estimated was the unconditional growth model, with delinquency as the dependent variable. The unconditional growth model, using Singer and Willett's (2003) notation, is as follows:

$$\text{Level 1: } Y_{ij} = \pi_{0i} + \pi_{1i} * \text{age} + \epsilon_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \pi_{0i} = \gamma_{00} + \zeta_{0i} \\ \pi_{1i} = \gamma_{10} + \zeta_{1i}$$

Second, a conditional growth model was estimated with delinquency as the dependent variable. To create the conditional growth model, the three permissive parenting variables (family rules, curfew, and parental monitoring) were added to the Level 1 portion of the model as time-varying predictors. The model was too complex to allow for estimation with all three permissive parenting variables as random effects. In our attempts at estimation, it was noted that only a single random effect could be added to the intercept and slope. Not enough computational memory was available to estimate the additional random effects. Parameter estimates of the model did not significantly change based on which variable was chosen to be included as the additional random effect. Therefore, parental monitoring was chosen as the additional random effect, as it had the largest range. Gender was added to each of the Level 2 models to test for any moderating effects

of gender. Both the unconditional and conditional growth models were estimated using Proc Mixed in SAS 9.3 with Full Information Maximum Likelihood and an unstructured covariance matrix.

## Results

Descriptive measures for the three permissive parenting variables were computed. The overall mean for the perception of family rules was 2.83 ( $SD = 1.83$ ) on a range from 0 to 5; the overall mean for the perception of curfews was 2.17 ( $SD = 1.37$ ) on a range from 0 to 4; and the overall mean for the perception of parental monitoring was 8.34 ( $SD = 2.92$ ) on a range from 0 to 12. The mean values represent moderate to high values on each of the scales. Significant gender differences were found within the three variables using a MANOVA, Wilks' Lambda = .95,  $F(2,21121) = 372.53$ ,  $p < .001$ . Females reported significantly higher levels of perceived family rules than males,  $F(2,21123) = 736.49$ ,  $p < .001$ . The female average was 3.17 ( $SD = 1.80$ ), while the male average was 2.50 ( $SD = 1.80$ ). Females also reported significantly higher perceived levels of curfew than males,  $F(2,21123) = 276.56$ ,  $p < .001$ . The female average was 2.32 ( $SD = 1.34$ ), while the male average was significantly lower at 2.02 ( $SD = 1.38$ ). Finally, females reported significantly higher levels of perceived parental monitoring than males,  $F(2,21123) = 659.63$ ,  $p < .001$ . The females average almost one point higher ( $M = 9.32$ ,  $SD = 2.67$ ) than the males ( $M = 8.34$ ,  $SD = 2.92$ ) in the sample. Males perceived significantly more permissive parenting in the sample, as all of their sample means were lower.

The unconditional growth model of delinquency was estimated first, with parameter estimates displayed in Table 1. Delinquency was found to be significantly greater than 0 at age 11,  $\gamma = 3.62$ ,  $t(4871) = 39.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . Delinquency significantly increased as the adolescent aged,  $\gamma = 0.35$ ,  $t(4789) = 16.11$ ,  $p < .001$ . Delinquency was relatively low at age 11 (3.62 out of 28 points), yet significantly increased every year between the ages of 11 and 18.

Table 1. Estimated Model Parameters for Permissive Parenting and Gender on Delinquency

Model Parameter	Unconditional Growth (Model 1)		Reduced Conditional (Model 2)	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
<b>Fixed Effects</b>				
Intercept	3.622**	0.092	13.328**	0.367
Gender	--	--	-3.600**	0.351
FR	--	--	-0.376	0.031
PM	--	--	-0.588**	0.036
Gender*PM	--	--	0.209**	0.369
Curfew	--	--	-0.940**	0.065
Gender*Curfew	--	--	0.178**	0.601
AgeC	0.350**	0.022	-0.278**	0.071
AgeC*PM	--	--	0.301**	0.008
AgeC*Curfew	--	--	0.078**	0.014
AgeC*Gender*FR	--	--	0.025**	0.010
AgeC*Gender*PM	--	--	-0.020**	0.005
<b>Random Effects</b>				
Var (Intercept, $\zeta_{0i}$ )	13.307**	0.800	50.294**	3.406
Var (AgeC, $\zeta_{1i}$ )	0.472**	0.043	0.357**	0.038
Var (PM, $\zeta_{2i}$ )	--	--	0.246**	0.025
Residual ( $\epsilon_{ij}$ )	23.558	0.303	21.053**	0.297
<b>Fit statistics</b>				
Deviance	127,437.9		120,691.7	
AIC	127,449.9		120,729.7	
BIC	127,488.9		120,853.0	

Note. FR = Family Rules; PM = Parental Monitoring; AgeC = Centered Age; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Next, the permissive parenting variables (family rules, curfew, and parental monitoring) were added to the unconditional growth model along with gender. The full model was estimated, with non-significant parameter estimates removed through backwards elimination. The remaining significant effects are displayed in Table 1.

First, the effects of delinquency at age 11, the intercept, will be discussed. Males with no level of perceived family rules, no level of perceived curfew, and no level of perceived parental monitoring reported the highest levels of delinquency, which were significantly greater than 0 at age 11,  $\gamma = 13.33$ ,  $t(4861) = 36.28$ ,  $p < .001$ . Females

at these same levels, however, were significantly different from their male counterparts,  $\gamma = -3.60$ ,  $t(5789) = -9.46$ ,  $p < .001$ . Females with no level of perceived family rules, no level of perceived curfew, and no level of perceived parental monitoring reported significantly lower levels of delinquency than their male counterparts at age 11.

At age 11, a significant negative relationship was found between perceived family rules and reported delinquency at age 11,  $\gamma = -0.38$ ,  $t(5789) = -12.29$ ,  $p < .001$ . Adolescents reporting greater perceived family rules also reported significantly lower levels of delinquency. This effect was consistent for both genders.

There was a significant negative relationship for males between perceived curfew and reported delinquency at age 11,  $\gamma = -0.94$ ,  $t(5789) = -14.53$ ,  $p < .001$ , with females showing a significantly weaker negative relationship at this age than males,  $\gamma = 0.18$ ,  $t(5789) = 2.94$ ,  $p = .003$ . Adolescents reporting higher levels of perceived curfews reported significantly lower levels of delinquency at age 11, with reported delinquency lessening more for males with the same perceived curfews as females.

A significant negative relationship was also found between perceived parental monitoring and reported delinquency at age 11 for males,  $\gamma = -0.59$ ,  $t(4032) = -16.32$ ,  $p < .001$ , with this negative relationship significantly weaker for females,  $\gamma = 0.21$ ,  $t(5789) = 5.67$ ,  $p < .001$ . Adolescents reporting greater levels of perceived parental monitoring reported lower levels of delinquency at age 11, with males reporting significantly lower levels of delinquency than females at the same level of perceived parental monitoring.

Next, the change in delinquency over time will be discussed. Adolescents with no level of perceived family rules, no level of perceived curfew, and no level of perceived parental monitoring report a decrease in reported delinquency over time,  $\gamma = -2.78$ ,  $t(5789) = 3.92$ ,  $p < .001$ . These adolescents also reported the highest levels of delinquency at age 11, therefore a decrease over

time is not surprising. There were no differential gender effects for this relationship.

The negative relationship between family rules and delinquency was consistent over time for males, but a significant negative relationship over time was found for females,  $\gamma = 0.03$ ,  $t(5789) = 2.47$ ,  $p < .001$ . The level of perceived family rules decreased delinquency for males, but this effect was stable between the ages of 11 to 18. However, although females with higher levels of perceived family rules had lower levels of delinquency at age 11, females with higher levels of perceived family rules also exhibited less of a decrease in delinquency over time. That is, the level of perceived family rules had a greater negative impact on delinquency for females at age 18 than for females aged 11 to 17; however, males' perceived family rules did not have a differential impact on delinquency as they aged.

The presence of perceived curfews also had a significant negative effect on delinquency over time,  $\gamma = 0.08$ ,  $t(5789) = 5.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . Those with greater levels of perceived curfews had lower levels of delinquency at age 11, yet also exhibited less of a decrease in delinquency over time. Higher levels of perceived curfews were less impactful in reducing delinquency as the adolescents aged. This effect was identical for both genders.

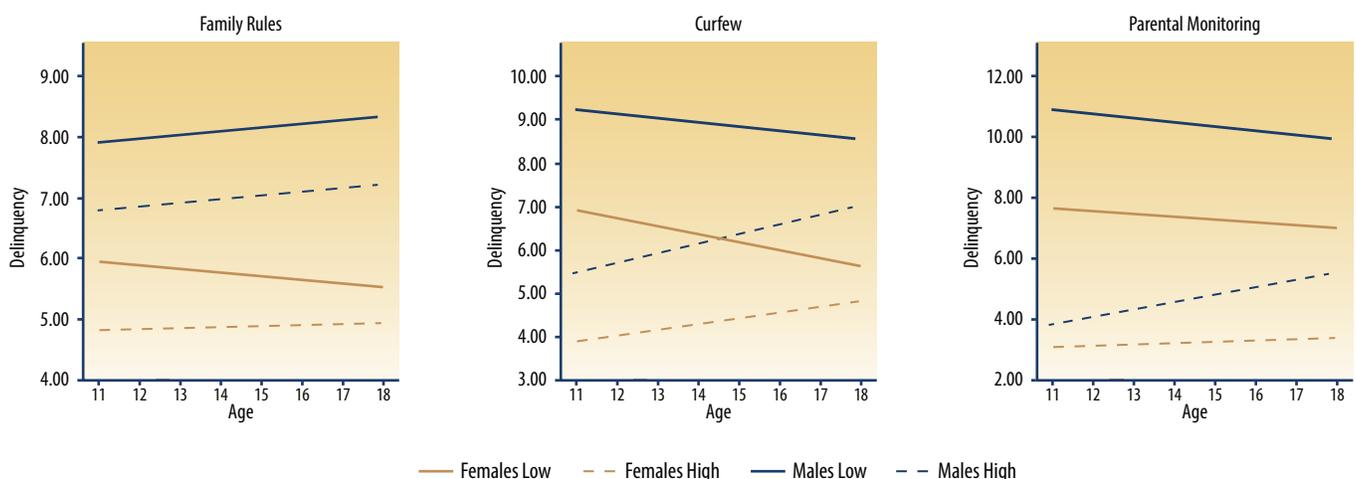
Higher levels of perceived parental monitoring had a significant negative effect on delinquency

over time,  $\gamma = 0.30$ ,  $t(5789) = 3.87$ ,  $p < .001$ , with females exhibiting a significantly weaker negative relationship over time than males,  $\gamma = -0.02$ ,  $t(5789) = -3.74$ ,  $p < .001$ . Males with higher levels of perceived parental monitoring had lower levels of delinquency at age 11, yet decreased in their delinquency at a slower rate than males with lower levels of perceived parental monitoring. Females reported this same trend; however, the rate of decrease was significantly greater. That is, females with greater levels of reported family rules had a greater decrease in delinquency over time than males with an identical level of reported family rules.

The plots of the trajectories of delinquency over time in relation to the three permissive parenting variables are displayed in Figure 1 to better visualize the relationships between the variables. The trajectories plot changes in delinquency as the independent variable of interest is altered, while holding the other two parental monitoring variables constant at their average value.

While holding curfews and parental monitoring constant, overall, adolescents with fewer perceived family rules had higher levels of delinquency throughout adolescence. For males, higher levels of perceived family rules had higher lower levels of delinquency, with an increase throughout adolescence for males with both high and low levels of perceived family rules. Females

Figure 1. Trajectories of delinquency based on permissive parenting and gender.



with higher levels of perceived family rules also had lower levels of delinquency than those with lower levels of perceived family rules. However, females with lower perceived family rules had a decrease in delinquency over time, yet females with higher family rules were stable in their levels of delinquency across adolescence. Females with high perceived family rules had the lowest levels of delinquency throughout.

While holding family rules and parental monitoring constant, overall, adolescents with lower levels of perceived curfews reported higher levels of delinquency. Males with higher levels of perceived curfews had lower levels of reported delinquency than those with lower levels of perceived curfews, yet reported an increase in delinquency as they aged. Males with lower levels of perceived curfews, however, exhibited a decrease in delinquency over time, yet they remain higher in their delinquency levels throughout adolescence. Females with higher levels of perceived curfews reported lower levels of delinquency, yet exhibit an increase in delinquency over time. Although females with higher levels of perceived curfews reported higher levels of delinquency at age 11, delinquency levels decreased throughout adolescence. Females with high levels of perceived curfew had the lowest levels of delinquency throughout.

While holding curfew and family rules constant, overall, adolescents with lower levels of perceived parental monitoring had higher levels of delinquency. Males with higher levels of perceived parental monitoring report lower levels of delinquency, yet report an increase in delinquency over time. Although their levels of delinquency were higher throughout adolescence, males with low levels of perceived parental monitoring reported a decrease in delinquency over time. Females with higher levels of perceived parental monitoring had lower levels of delinquency throughout adolescence at a fairly stable level throughout as compared to females with lower perceived parental monitoring. The lower perceived parental monitoring resulted in higher

delinquency levels, yet there was a decrease in delinquency as the adolescents aged. Females with high levels of perceived parental monitoring had the lowest levels of delinquency throughout adolescence.

## Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine the confluence of permissiveness and family management practices on delinquency. As hypothesized, permissive parenting was associated with greater delinquency. For the current study, permissive parenting was operationalized by examining family rules, curfew, and parental monitoring. Adolescents with fewer perceived family rules, few perceived family curfews, and less perceived parental monitoring reported higher levels of delinquency, which supports current literature (see Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013).

Males who had no curfew, no family rules, and no parental monitoring reported the highest levels of delinquency. Females with no curfew, no family rules, and no parental monitoring reported significantly lower levels of delinquency than their male counterparts, yet still engaged in relatively high levels of delinquency. Prior research has explored boundary setting for at-risk youths. When allowed to go unmonitored and unfettered, youths tend to engage in more delinquent activity. Youths who have boundaries tend to perform better in school (Smokowski, Bacallao, Cotter, & Evans, 2015), engage well interpersonally (Hashimoto, Onuoha, Isaka, & Higuchi, 2011; Piko & Balazs, 2012), and report better relationships with their parents (Smetana, Crean, & Campione-Barr, 2005) than those with fewer boundaries. The current study supports those findings.

Interestingly, when examining family rules, a significant age effect was found with only the females in the sample. For both the male and the female samples, the increase in family rules was associated with a significant decrease in delinquency, as one would expect. However, no significant relationship between the number of

family rules and delinquency across adolescence was evidenced in the male sample. Females with more family rules, on the other hand, experienced the same decline in delinquency as females with fewer family rules. Though the presence of family rules seemed to lead to declines in delinquent behaviors, the number of rules may not be the important factor. Rather, it seems the presence of rules themselves decreases delinquency among females. Adolescents with fewer family rules had higher levels of delinquency throughout adolescence. Not surprisingly, males exhibited significantly higher levels of delinquency than females, but both groups of males (those with fewer and those with more family rules) increased delinquent behavior throughout adolescence at the same rate.

Delinquency significantly decreased over time for females with fewer rules, and those with more rules had significantly lower delinquency that remained fairly stable throughout adolescence. It appears that family rules hold stronger influence over females than males in mitigating delinquent behavior. However, prior research has also shown that parents respond differently to sons and daughters (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010), and this may also hold true for the enforcement of family rules, a construct not examined in the current study. Still, given the typical pattern of delinquency by gender, and what is known of parenting styles, these results are not unexpected.

When curfew was examined for both males and females, curfews did have a significant effect over time. However, when examining males and females by level of curfew (i.e., more stringent and less stringent curfews), adolescents with more stringent curfews tended to engage in more delinquent behavior as they aged. The literature suggests juvenile curfew laws have become a pervasive and popular strategy for controlling juvenile crime. Public opinion is solidly behind the use of curfews, and the primary basis for this support is the notion that curfews make streets safer. However, Adams (2003) conducted a systematic review of curfew policies and did not find support

for the argument that curfews prevent crime and victimization. Juvenile crime and victimization are most likely to remain unchanged after implementation of curfew laws. The current study supports Adams' findings.

Parental monitoring has been shown to be a significant contributor to youth delinquency and a lack of monitoring has been shown to lead to delinquency (Baumrind, 2005; Wright & Wright, 1994). The current study found that adolescents with lower levels of parental monitoring had higher levels of delinquency. The current study supports prior research in that a significant negative relationship was found between parental monitoring and delinquency. Males seem to have responded more negatively to greater parental monitoring than females, in the sense that males exhibited a significant increase in delinquency over time, while females exhibited fairly stable levels of delinquency over time. Both males and females with low levels of parental monitoring significantly decreased their delinquency over time, yet remained significantly higher in their levels of delinquency throughout adolescence than those with higher levels of parental monitoring. Males seemed to respond to high levels of parental monitoring by becoming more delinquent when compared to females. In some Black American families, young males are seen as being more mature or competent than their female counterparts (Hooper, 2013). Parents who excessively monitor young males may violate cultural expectations and unintentionally stimulate delinquent behavior (Hooper, 2013).

### **Limitations and Strengths of the Study**

While adolescent perceptions are arguably important and influential over behavior, it must be noted that the measures used in this study are limited to self-reports from adolescents. More specifically, study constructs (parental monitoring, family rules, curfew, and delinquency) are derived from responses from the adolescents' perspectives. Parental reports of these same items may not be consistent with the child's

perspective or with that of other family members. Nonetheless, and consistent with other researchers' recommendations, understanding the child's or adolescent's view of parental monitoring and its relation to their behaviors is an important area of study.

The current analysis relies on correlational relationships, therefore it does not establish causation. Thus we cannot conclude that permissive parenting causes changes in delinquency. Similarly, we cannot conclude that levels of delinquency influence parental decisions about curfews and questioning and monitoring their adolescent's activities, friends, and whereabouts. We can conclude, however, that levels of delinquency are directly and significantly related to these factors of perceived permissive parenting.

This study is both limited and strengthened by the characteristics of the sample. The MYS sample consists of mainly Black American adolescents who live in similar highly impoverished conditions, all within one metropolitan statistical area. Because of the homogeneity of the sample, it is difficult to draw conclusions that can then be generalized beyond Black American adolescents who are living in impoverished conditions. However, because of the homogeneity of this sample, we are essentially removing the effects of race and socioeconomic status, which may contribute to changes in delinquency.

An additional limitation worth noting is that of our measure of delinquency. Our composite measure of delinquency weights each of the delinquency measures equally. That is, each delinquent act is treated the same way in the analysis. For example, shooting someone is not weighted differently from carrying a gun. Furthermore, we acknowledge that many of these acts of delinquency are not independent of each other. For example, someone who has shot someone else most likely also indicated that he or she pulled the gun *and* carried it as well. We hypothesized that adolescents engaging in more severe delinquent behaviors will have higher delinquency

scores. Finally, the measures of permissive parenting used in this study are not complete. That is, there may be other factors influencing parenting or permissive parenting that might relate to delinquency.

While there are several limitations, a strength of the current study is the longitudinal nature of the research design. The longitudinal design, coupled with the large sample size, allows for more complex inferences to be made regarding the associations among the study variables. Although we cannot establish true causality, we can examine the correlational patterns over time.

### Implications

The current study examined family management practices and perceived permissive parenting in a low-income sample of Black American youths. The primary outcome of the current study, delinquency, is of particular interest because previous research indicates 1 in 3 Black American men and 1 in 18 Black American women will go to prison in their lifetime, compared with 1 in 9 of all men and 1 in 56 of all women in the general population (Bonczar, 2003). Family functioning and accompanying family practices may be one of the most significant forces shaping youths. The current study provides support for the notion that family practices, while intended to be helpful, can sometimes lead to an increase in delinquency, which is opposite of the intent.

While the purpose of the current study was to examine permissiveness and its association with delinquent behavior, surprisingly, the results point toward the harmful effects of authoritarian parenting. Parents who exert too much control over their adolescents, known as authoritarian parents, have adolescents who engage in delinquent activities similar to those of permissive parents (Thompson, Hollis, & Richards, 2003). When authoritarian parenting behavior manifests itself in an excessive number of rules and potential rule enforcement, delinquent behavior may exist or increase. That is, excessive rules and rule

enforcement often results in a paradoxical outcome: delinquent behavior among adolescents (Baumrind, 2005). Yet, in this study, the presence of more family rules, stricter curfews, and greater parental monitoring were all associated with decreased delinquency. Thus, the nuances and differences between authoritarian and permissive parenting is most certainly an area for further examination. Future research should focus on determining which parenting practices are associated with each parenting style and to what degree.

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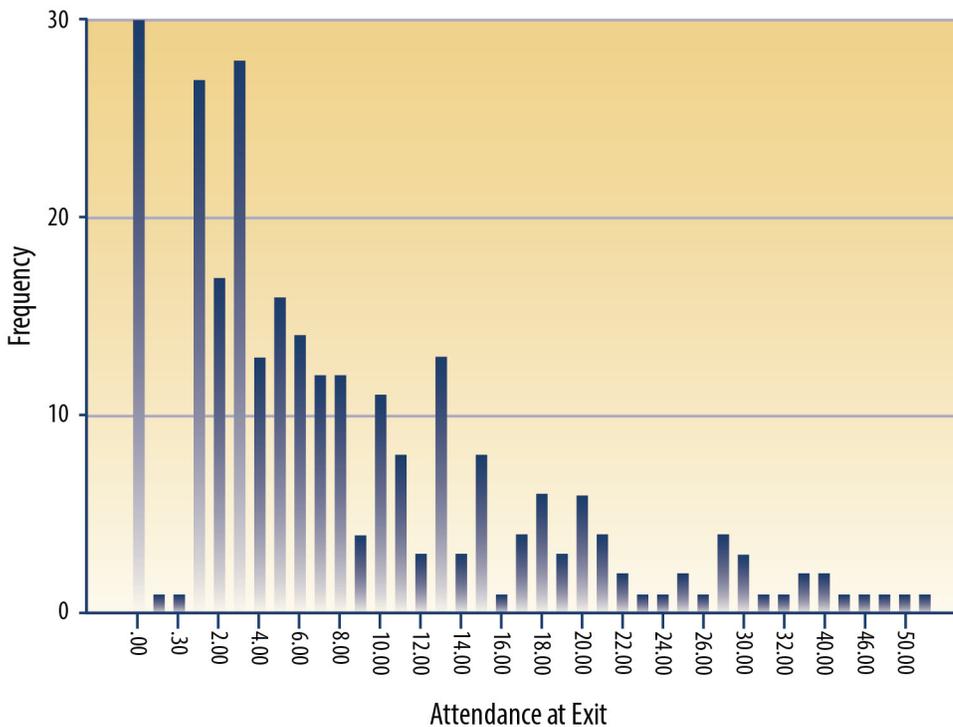
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Figure 2. Attendance at exit.



intervention outcomes. In addition, a two-tailed Pearson Correlation test was completed for bivariate analyses for ratio levels of data. The number of visits a student had with the case manager was positively related to the number of show cause hearings a student attended; this was statistically significant at the  $p = .001$  level. An additional statistically significant relationship was found between a student's attendance at entry and the number of visits a student received from the case manager while the case was open ( $p < .05$ ). These outcomes reveal that contact with the case manager was an important variable.

Table 2. JP3 Case Outcomes

Variable	Attribute	Frequency	Percent
Dismissal Rate	CONVICTED	97	31.2
	TRANSFERRED	14	4.5
	DISMISSED	200	64.3
Number of Show Cause Hearings	1	112	36.0
	2	127	40.8
	3	62	19.9
	4	9	2.9
	5	1	.3
Number of Visits with Case Manager	1	98	31.5
	2	96	30.9
	3	55	17.7
	4	23	7.4
	5	14	4.5
	6	4	1.3
	7	9	2.9
	8	2	.6
	9	3	1.0
	10	2	.6
	11	4	1.3
	14	1	.3

A two-tailed Spearman Correlation Coefficient was conducted to complete a bivariate analysis on both nominal and ratio levels of data. This analysis revealed several statistically significant correlational findings at both the .001 and .05 levels. For example, the number of show cause hearings was positively related to family household income ( $p = .001$ ).

As a follow-up test to correlation, a one-sample chi-square test was conducted to assess whether the number of case manager visits had an impact on a student receiving outside referrals. The results of the test were not significant,  $\chi^2(11, N = 311) = 15.70, p < .01$ . Although the results were not significant, they are still important since the proportion of visits with the case manager is related to outside referrals at the attribute level of "none" ( $P = .20$ ); two visits with the case manager were proportionately the same ( $P = .19$ ). The limited number of case manager visits with a student is associated with receiving no outside referrals. The chi-square test indicated a proportion of dismissed cases were significantly associated with zero truancy at the time of exit, at 10.7%,  $\chi^2(18,$

$N = 270$ ) = 166.52, ( $p = .000$ ). This clearly shows the improvement in school attendance after receiving services through the Travis County JP3 truancy prevention and reduction program.

### Regression

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate contact with a case manager and successful exit status from the JP3 program. Increased contact with a case manager, as the criterion variable that predicts successful exit from the program, and groupings of court measure variables were analyzed for a predictive model, including: court status at exit, attendance at entry and exit, number of days the case was open, and outside referrals. The linear combination of court measures was significantly related to the number of visits with a case manager,  $F(5, 263) = 5.289$ ,  $p < .000$ . The sample multiple correlation coefficient was .302, indicating that approximately 9% of the variance in the sample can be accounted for by the linear combination of court measures variables. Three of the five bivariate correlations were positive, with attendance at entry being negative, with three (attendance at entry, number of days case open, and outside referrals) of the five measures being statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). These results suggest that the less a student is attending school upon entry into the program, and the more contact they have with a case manager, may impact: the number of outside referrals, the amount of time a case is open, successful dismissal, and an increase in attendance upon exit from the JP3 program. These factors, in combination, provide a predictive model of success from the intervention.

In summary, descriptive and inferential data analyses suggest that developing a relationship of increased contact with a JP3 case manager can lead to more successful outcomes when a student is engaged in court intervention. Variables that revealed success for students in this program were increased contact with a case manager, dismissal status at exit from the program, and outside referrals.

### Discussion and Application to Practice

Students and their families who are cited with truancy are faced with various challenges in their efforts to alleviate consequences within court systems. It is important for the health of the student, family, school, and community to identify and treat the underlying problems that lead to truancy and to apply effective models of innovative interventions that include familial and environmental factors. The court system and the use of case managers to work directly with students, their families, the schools, and outside community agencies promises to be a positive and effective intervention for truant youth, as evidenced in this study of the JP3 court intervention. The results of this study indicate that the more time case managers spend with a student, including interactions that involve referrals, the more clearly the case managers can understand the issues underlying truancy for that student. This leads to the extension of time a case is open and more impactful resources for students and their families.

Elements that include parent/guardian involvement, a continuum of services, collaboration with community resources, school administrative support and commitment, and ongoing evaluation, like those identified by the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (Dembo & Gullede, 2009), show how an effective truancy program can be implemented. However, it is difficult to achieve commitment and follow-through from all the identified elements and to obtain adequate funding. The JP3 program offers an effective and economically feasible and sustainable intervention. The cost for a program such as JP3 is adequate to operate this intervention.

As indicated by this study, the development of a positive relationship with a caring adult is a key element in any intervention to prevent and reduce truancy. Visits with the juvenile case manager in this study helped to reduce the number of convictions for truancy that students or parents received. As noted in many therapeutic

interventions, it is the relationship between a client and therapist, in this case the case manager, that is most strongly correlated with positive change in clients (Corey, 2013).

The JP3 truancy prevention and reduction program is not without challenges. The JP3 program operates in a low-level court system and enforcement leverage is limited to fines for those who do not abide by the deferred conditions of the court. If a case is determined to be too difficult, the student is either convicted and a fine is imposed, or the student is transferred to the juvenile justice court system. Here, they are most often booked, released, and not provided with any additional services or followup.

Because truancy is considered a status offense, it is not given high priority in the juvenile justice system. Therefore, these students have an increased possibility of not receiving the help or services they need, and are at increased risk for dropping out of school. It is for this reason that the JP3 program is of the utmost importance in helping students, schools, and communities to alleviate truancy, as well as to address the community and familial issues surrounding truancy.

Positive outcomes for students are restricted due to the lack of funding and the limited number of juvenile case managers available to work with students. With only \$5,600 a year budgeted for operating funds, it is imperative that the impact of the JP3 program be far-reaching. The JP3 program delivers services to more than 300 students and parents a year. This translates into less than \$18 annually per student to help address the issue of truancy and the related issues that lead them to become truant; this is a small amount of money to keep a student out of the juvenile justice system.

### Implications of the Study

The findings of this study indicate the involvement of the court, in addition to the assignment of a case manager to work with the student, family, and school, has an impact on the student's

level of success in relation to attendance. While the JP3 intervention strives to be a case management multimodal program, developing a positive relationship with a caring adult, such as the juvenile case manager, has a positive impact on students. Although the use of a multimodal model is most ideal, and while costs can present challenges, the JP3 program is managing to provide services at minimal cost. With a program such as the one described in this study, spending and funding for increased staff such as juvenile case managers to help reach more students seems like a worthwhile investment.

### Study Limitations

Limitations of this study are that tracking and longitudinal measures from participants were not collected; the sample was limited to one geographic area; there was no comparison group and therefore no randomization; and the amount of time and resources spent on the prevention side of the program could not be evaluated due to a lack of available data.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should include an analysis of all samples and databases; a longitudinal study of the JP3 intervention, including analyses of additional variables such as specific outside referrals, student GPAs, whether or not students were promoted to the next grade level, and the history of siblings who had truancy issues or dropped out of school; and a study using a control group and randomization. It would be beneficial to know how much of the program's resources are being put into the prevention portion of the program in comparison to the intervention portion of the program. Moreover, it would be advantageous to know whether the program's prevention strategies are effective so that these strategies can be replicated. Further research on this program and its long-term effectiveness should be conducted in order to determine whether JP3 or programs like it are short-term or long-term solutions for truant students. Finally, a follow-up study using