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## "SECRECY AND PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD: ASSOCIATIONS WITH PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND CHILD ADJUSTMENT": A REVIEW

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**Abstract:** The paper is basically a mini-review on "Secrecy and Parent-Child Communication During Middle Childhood: Associations with Parental Knowledge and Child Adjustment". Based on my review of the paper in terms of its contributions, that the results can suggest how parents know about children's experiences may be more important than how much they know, it should definitely be a nice article; however, there are still some points, which the coauthors may like to take for reference, that I will write them down here in order to enable the author to improve the article. In my opinion, it is clear that the authors attempted to provide their point that there should be a common interpretation of the link between low parental knowledge, and child-adolescent problem behavior<sup>1</sup>: "parents, by actively monitoring the nature of their adolescents' activities and companions, are [...] able to intervene, which in turn reduces the likelihood that their children will engage in [...] problem behavior [in the future]." Besides, it is good that they provide a great deal of scholars' ideas to support his point that processes. In this study, they focused successfully on two topics, parent-to-child communication and child secrecy, which their longitudinal associations with parental knowledge and child adjustment were also focused.

**Keywords:** Parent-child communication



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## INTRODUCTION

Based on my review of the paper in terms of its contributions, that the results can suggest how parents know about children's experiences may be more important than how much they know, it should definitely be a nice article; however, there are still some points, which the coauthors may like to take for reference, that I will write them down here in order to enable the author to improve the article.

First, in my opinion, it is clear that the authors attempted to provide their point that there should be a common interpretation of the link between low parental knowledge, and child-adolescent problem behavior<sup>1</sup>: "parents, by actively monitoring the nature of their adolescents' activities and companions, are [...] able to intervene, which in turn reduces the likelihood that their children will engage in [...] problem behavior [in the future]." Besides, it is good that they provide a great deal of scholars' ideas to support his point that processes, for examples, "parental warmth (or responsiveness)", nonetheless, "aspects of parent-child communication" like "youth disclosure" may be related to both the notions of parental knowledge and adolescent adjustment.

Then, in this study, they focused successfully on two topics, parent-to-child communication and child secrecy, which their longitudinal associations with parental knowledge and child adjustment were also focused. The authors hence shifted the focus to the traditional one, on the problem behavior of adolescents. In their study, their utilization of teachers' reports are based on general social competence, aggressive behavior, and etc. as indicators of psychosocial well-being of school-aged children. Their study, in sum, extended previous research on the implications of parent-to-child communication and child secrecy for parental knowledge and child adjustment while the co-authors can find out some limitations in related previous study: according to them, longitudinal investigations often have just assessed parent-child communication or secrecy at one point in time. While the fact that the authors of those studies could not test the possibility that child adjustment may possibly be related to changes over time in parent-child communication or child secrecy becomes the consequence, the fact that the very plausible scenario given that the relation between parental knowledge and adolescent adjustment appears to be reciprocal was another consequence.

The authors critically considered the limitations and the strengths of their study: e.g., "[a]lthough attrition limits generalizability, it also bolsters our confidence in our statistically significant findings, given that a byproduct of the attrition pattern was reduced variance in our

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<sup>1</sup> First contribution of the article

child adjustment outcomes." They also pointed out the related shortcoming - small sample size, but they then stated that the strong design for their questions has still been picked, as their models are carefully kept, and precisely speaking, they did not consider the variables that may have been informative in their analyses, e.g. they did not examine if the factor of child sex, or ethnicity, moderated the observed associations.

In methodology, the authors organized well: in terms of participants involved, their first-year sample included third- and fourth-graders and their teachers from all three elementary schools in a small town school district, in which of the 335 third- and fourth-graders enrolled in the district, 297 (89%) participants actively participated in the school-based survey, while 295 (88%) participants completed the whole survey. It is perfect that in the data collection process, most teachers completed ratings for 289 (98%) of the students, that shows the good planning of researchers. Near to a half (48%) of participant students were female.

Further, the authors reported that "[o]f students reporting ethnicity, [there were] European American [(80%)], [...] Asian [(11%)], [...] African American [(4%)], [...] Latino [(3%)], [while] the remaining [...] were American Indian, Pacific Islander, or other ethnicities [(2%)]; these rates closely resemble the racial/ethnic profile of the district as a whole. [In terms of] family structure, [most] of students [(82%)] reported living with [parents], [just a few, 12% of participants] reported living with mom only, and [only] 3% with dad [...]. Students reporting on maternal and paternal employment status indicated that 77% of mothers and 92% of fathers were employed at least part-time[...]" The sample is well-structured, and the design of method is innovative, nevertheless the types of questions are appropriate, although the questions set by researchers did not properly require students to report on family socioeconomic circumstances.

The results of this research successfully show the correlation below: one year later, children's secrecy was negatively associated with parental knowledge; "lower parent-child communication predicted increased secrecy over time". According to the authors of the article, first of all, children having greater parental knowledge seem to be viewed by teachers as more socially competent a year later; on the other hand, children having more secrecy seem to be later rated as less socially competent and more oppositional and aggressive. Lastly, those initially rated as less socially competent and more relationally aggressive *reported more communication one year later*. In the end of paper, they made a good and useful conclusion: results suggest that *how parents know* about children's experiences may be more important than *how much they know*; opposite to the evidence from studies of parental knowledge during

adolescence, in middle childhood, "poor adjustment" may result in increased the communication of parent-child.

According to data which are provided by the school district included by the authors:

"[Nearly 30% (28.3%)] of elementary students in the [school] district qualified for free/reduced school lunch at Year 1. Of teachers who reported demographic information, 94% were European-American, and 86% were female. Teachers averaged 46.3 years of age at Year 1 and had an average of 15.5 years of teaching experience (SD = 11.4). Eighty-six percent of participating teachers had completed a graduate degree."

The above information provided by the authors show that they are well-prepared, having sound knowledge of the background of the present situation, nevertheless a good sense of statistics:

"In the second year of the study, 203 (69%) [...] the survey [was repeated by students], and teachers completed ratings for 170 (84%) of these students. Annual attrition rates of 40-50% are [common] in school-based longitudinal studies [according to Horton & Lipsitz, 2001], so our attrition rate of 31% is less than might be expected. Attrition in this sample was likely due to two factors. First [of all, even if] we were unable to determine how many Year 1 participants moved out of the school district before the Year 2 survey was administered, the annual attrition rate of the school district as a whole is roughly 10-15%. Second, we needed to obtain active parental consent each year, and [due to the reason that parents had already given permission in Year 1 and mistakenly assumed that they did not need to complete the consent form prior to Year 2, they] may have failed to return consent forms during the second year [...]. Given that mobility is often higher among at-risk student populations (Coleman, 1988; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996) [...]"

However, it may be ambiguous in the following explanation:

"[...] we expected to find, and did indeed find, that the group of students for whom data were not available in Year 2 differed from longitudinal participants on some of the variables central to this study: Longitudinal participants had slightly higher scores at Year 1 on self reports of parental knowledge ( $t(293) = 2.04, p < .05$ ) and parent-child communication ( $t(287) = 2.69, p < .05$ ); they also had higher scores on teacher reported social competence ( $t(287) = 3.08, p < .01$ ) and lower frequencies of oppositional behavior as rated by teachers ( $t(287) = 2.67, p < .05$ )."

Still, researchers described quite clearly in terms of methodology, for example, consider:

"Instruments completed by teachers were employed to assess ["oppositonality"] (3 items; Year 1 alpha = .75; Year 2 alpha = .74), overt aggression (5 items; Year 1 alpha = .80; Year 2 alpha = .76), relational aggression (5 items; Year 1 alpha = .96; Year 2 alpha = .92), and social competence (9 items; Year 1 alpha = .91; Year 2 alpha = .93). The scales for ["oppositonality"] (e.g., "Has trouble accepting authority"), overt aggression (e.g., "Yells at others", "Fights"), relational aggression (e.g., "Spreads rumors about some peers"), and social competence ("Friendly", "Controls temper when there is a disagreement") were from the Teacher Observation of Classroom Behavior-Revised (Corrigan, 1993; Werthamer-Larsson, Kellam, & Wheeler, 1991) and were rated on<sup>2</sup> six-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 ("Never") to 6 ("Almost Always")."

Nevertheless, the authors adapted the index of parental knowledge from Stattin & Kerr (2000) and hence assessed children's perceptions of how much their parents know about their daily activities and whereabouts. Each item (e.g., "my parents know where I go with my friends") in their instruments in the study was assessed using a five-point scale ranging from "YES!" (strong agreement) to "NO!" (strong disagreement). It is well-designed.

In *discussion* session, the authors wisely found some relevant scholars' views to be his/her evidence to discuss the followings: "[a]s Crouter et al. (2005, p. 869) [stated that], "unraveling

the meaning of parental knowledge requires focusing on how parents learn about their children's daily lives.'" and "[p]erhaps the most important contribution made by these recent investigations is the identification of parent-child communication processes as central to the acquisition of parental knowledge (Crouter et al., 2005; Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Waizenhofer et al., 2004), which has encouraged researchers to consider the ways in which youth play an active role in the acquisition of parental knowledge"; overall, it is a nice description for a good discussion session.

To a larger extent, the data in the authors' current study suggested that "potential sources of parental knowledge matter a great deal during the middle childhood years, in ways that both support and diverge from patterns that have been documented with adolescent samples"; it was also proved by the authors that "secrecy" played a more important role than parent-child communication. Furthermore, the data also suggested that, during the middle childhood years, children actively manage the extent of knowledge of parents about their daily activities, which is a process that tends to be, to a larger extent, more important than "parental knowledge" in

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<sup>2</sup> This is a good traditional design method.

predicting the child adjustment. All these findings by the authors further expanded the literature in the scope of psychology.

In summary, this article is well-structured, supported by relevant points referenced from related quotes by scholars in the relevant field, although there may be some places in the article needed to be modified by the authors so as to enable this article to be a clearer one. In addition, in design of the study, third-fourth graders ( $N = 203$ ) participating in a short-term longitudinal study completed questionnaires administered during the school day: the size is enough for writing an article; a majority of classroom teachers, during the data collection, completed measures of child adjustment, that shows the authors' leadership for the whole research.

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