Caring and Cognizant Caregivers: The Relationship Between Parental Monitoring, Parental Support, and Academic Engagement

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INTRODUCTION

This study examined how parental monitoring and parental support are related to academic engagement during adolescence. Specifically, we (a) compared the unique effects of support and monitoring on academic engagement, (b) the interaction between the two, and (c) if the relationship changes based on gender.

Academic engagement is known to be a significant predictor of academic performance. Determining the factors of engagement, can further assist adolescents in their success in school and encourage families to engage in the most academically beneficial parenting practices. Parental monitoring is seen as a known correlate of academic performance (Lowe & Dotterer, 2013; Malczyk & Lawson, 2017). As is parental support (Chen, Wium, Dimitrova & Chen, 2019; Elsséser, Heath, Kim, & Bourn, 2018; Pan, Zaff & Donlan, 2017). Some research shows that monitoring may be more effective in promoting engagement among males (Malczyk & Lawson, 2017).

We tested the following predictions:
1. Parental monitoring and social support would both uniquely relate to increased academic engagement.
2. Parental monitoring and social support would interact to predicted increased academic engagement.
3. Effects of parental monitoring would be greater for males.

MEASURES

Parental Support: Adolescents responded to survey questions about how much they agreed to statements about familial support. A 1-7 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) was used.

Example – “I get the emotional help and support I need from my family” (4 items, α = .84)

Parental Monitoring: Adolescents responded to survey questions about how often they felt their parents did the following: A 1-5 Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = very often) was used.

Example – “Know what you are doing when you are away from home” (5 items, α = .85)

Academic Engagement: Adolescents responded to survey questions reflecting on their experiences in class within the past 30 days. A 1-5 Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = very often) was used.

Example – “I pay attention in class” (10 items, α = .92)

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

Participants were drawn from Project AHEAD (Advancing Health and Education for Adolescent Development), a national quota sample of teens across the United States. The analytic sample included 609 adolescents between the ages 14 and 17 (51.6% male, 48.3% ethnic minority, 40.1% middle class).

RESULTS (cont’d)

To address our hypotheses, we conducted a Hierarchical Multiple Regression analysis. Academic engagement was examined as the dependent variable.

Findings revealed (see Table 1) a positive association with sex, (b = .17, SE = .05, p < .01) social class, (b = .10, SE = .03, p < .001) ethnic minority (b = .17, SE = .05, p < .001), social support (b = .22, SE = .03, p < .001), parental monitoring (b = .23, SE = .05, p < .001), and the interaction between monitoring and social support (b = .12, SE = .04, p < .01).

DISCUSSION

Referring to our original hypotheses, social support and parental monitoring do have unique effects on an adolescent’s academic engagement. But they also both have a synergistic effect. The effect of monitoring is enhanced when there is more support from the parent. In other words, when a parent is supportive, his/her monitoring will be more effective on the adolescent’s academic engagement. Interestingly, the effects of monitoring and social support did not differ based on gender. Since this study gathered data based on self-report, future studies should also include parent report to get a better sense of the true extent of parental practices rather than solely perceived monitoring and support.

Going forward, parents can implement effective parenting to assist their adolescents in school by being both supportive and aware of their child’s doings. Parents also do not have to parent their sons and daughters differently. Male and female adolescents can be treated equally and still have the same outcome of increased academic engagement.