

# Impact of Neighborhood Safety on the Association Between Parental Knowledge and Delinquency

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## Introduction

### Background

- Parental monitoring has been historically assessed by evaluating parents knowledge of their child's activities and whereabouts.
- It is now evident that there are three sources of knowledge: child disclosure (child's spontaneous sharing of information), parental solicitation (parents' efforts to ask children for information), and parental control (parents' imposed rules on their children's activities).
  - Child disclosure has been found to be the most important source of knowledge in predicting norm breaking behavior.
- Neighborhood structure can also influence behavior, with poor neighborhood factors linked to high levels of delinquency. Previous research has shown that neighborhood context can also moderate the association between parenting and child behavior problems.

### Present Study

- Goal: Investigate the impact of sources of knowledge on child delinquency within the context of neighborhood safety.

**Hypothesis:** Perceived neighborhood safety would moderate the relation between parental knowledge and child delinquency.

- When neighborhoods were perceived as being less safe, high levels of both parental control and child disclosure were expected to be associated with low levels of child delinquency. However, it was expected that solicitation would be associated with delinquency regardless of neighborhood safety.

## Methods

### Participants & Procedures

- 89 children (N=50 male) 9 to 12 years of age (M=10.44) and their primary caregiver (85% mothers) from a midsized southeastern community.
- Children and parents were interviewed simultaneously but separately. Parents received \$45 and children received a small prize.

### Measures

- Perceived Neighborhood Safety** (Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999; Posner & Vandell, 1994): 6 items- measures caregivers' feelings of personal safety as well as the safety of their child. ( $\alpha=0.87$ ).
- Parental Knowledge** (Kerr & Stattin, 2000): 5 items per each subscale (child disclosure, parental solicitation, parental control) measures how parents obtain information regarding their child's whereabouts, activities, and associations. Child disclosure ( $\alpha = 0.68$ ), parental solicitation ( $\alpha = 0.69$ ), parental control ( $\alpha = 0.63$ ).
- Delinquency** (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001; Fergusson, Woodward, & Horwood, 1999): 17 items, parent-report of child rule-breaking/delinquent behavior ( $\alpha=.75$ ) and 14 items of child-reports of delinquency.

## Results

Table 1. Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	—							
2. Gender	-0.08	—						
3. Neighborhood safety	0.17	-0.21	—					
4. Child disclosure	-0.14	0.06	0.10	—				
5. Parental solicitation	-0.20	-0.01	-0.04	0.44*	—			
6. Parental control	0.05	0.04	0.31*	0.40*	0.42*	—		
7. Child Self-report delinq.	0.10	-0.16	0.06	-0.17	0.05	0.10	—	
8. Parent-report delinquency	0.08	0.02	-0.11	-0.32*	0.04	0.02	0.40*	—
Mean	10.44	—	5.13	4.52	4.30	4.94	.53	1.15
Standard dev.	1.14	—	0.78	0.45	0.49	0.16	0.93	0.17
Min	9	—	1.83	3	3.20	4.20	0	1
Max	12	—	6	5	5	5	4	1.79
Range	9-12	—	1-6	1-5	1-5	1-5	0-14	1-3

\* $p < .01$

Table 2. Regression Models

Variable	Child-reported delinquency		Parent-reported delinquency	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Model 1: First-order effects	$R^2 = .10$		$R^2 = .16$	
Age	.06	.11	.07	.11
Gender	-.15	.11	.03	.11
Neighborhood safety	-.00	.12	-.11	.14
Child Disclosure	-.27*	.12	-.43*	.12
Parental solicitation	.11	.13	.18	.12
Parental control	.17	.13	.14	.12
Model 2: Interaction effect	$R^2$ change = .04**		$R^2$ change = .06*	
Child dis. $\times$ neigh. safety	-.22**	.10	-.26*	.10
Model 3: Interaction effect	$R^2$ change = .05*		$R^2$ change = .04*	
Solicit. $\times$ neigh. safety	-.25*	.12	-.22*	.11
Model 4: Interaction effect	$R^2$ Change = .01		$R^2$ Change = .01	
Control. $\times$ neigh. safety	.10	.13	-.10	.12

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p = .05$

- Child disclosure was uniquely associated with child and parent reported delinquency (see Table 2).

Figure 1. Child Disclosure and Delinquency (Parent Report) at Low and High Levels of Neighborhood Safety

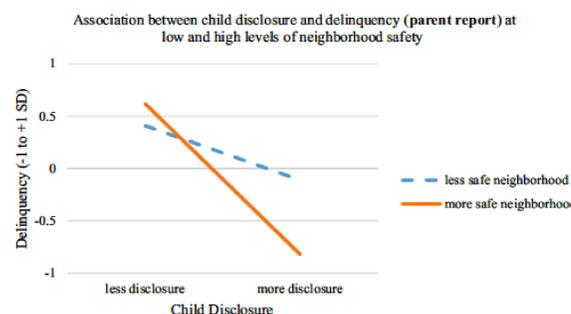
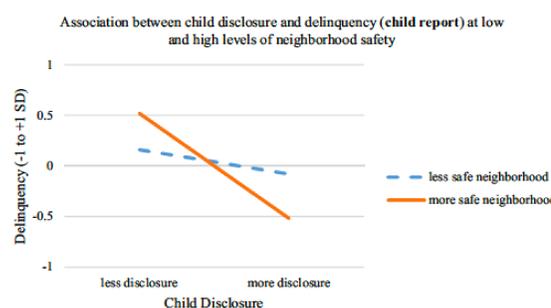
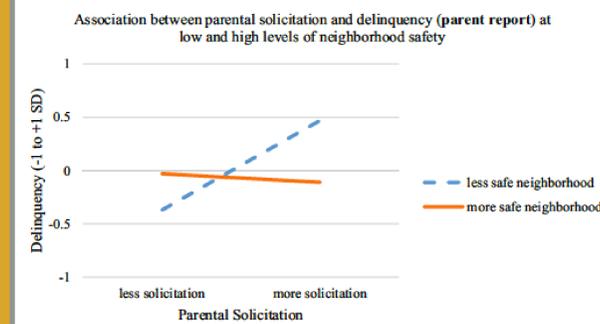


Figure 2. Child Disclosure and Delinquency (Child Report) at Low and High Levels of Neighborhood Safety



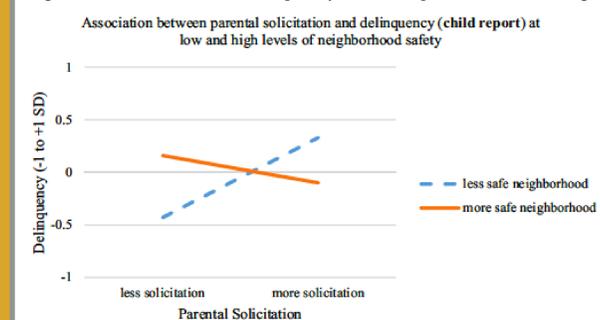
- When neighborhoods were perceived as being safer, child disclosure was significantly associated with parent-reported ( $\beta = -.72, p = .00$ ) and child-reported delinquency ( $\beta = -.52, p = .00$ ), such that high levels of disclosure were associated with low levels of delinquent activity (Figs. 1 and 2).

Figure 3. Solicitation and Delinquency (Parent Report) at Low and High Levels of Neighborhood Safety



- When neighborhoods were perceived as being less safe, high levels of parental solicitation was significantly associated with high levels of parent-reported ( $\beta = .42, p = .02$ ) and child-reported delinquency ( $\beta = .38, p = .03$ ; Figs. 3 and 4).

Figure 4. Solicitation and Delinquency (Child Report) at Low and High Levels of Neighborhood Safety



## Discussion

- Consistent with previous research, child disclosure was the most important source of knowledge associated with child delinquency but the present study only shows this effect within the context of a safe neighborhood.
  - Safe: Children who disclose may have less to hide because they are not involved in delinquency.
  - Unsafe: Lack of environmental resources that contribute to positive socialization may reduce the protective effect of child disclosure.
- Consistent with previous research, parental solicitation was associated with more delinquency, but this was only within an unsafe neighborhood context.
  - Children in unsafe neighborhoods tend to have more opportunities to get involved in delinquent activities and this might be related to parents questioning more often.

- Future Directions: A longitudinal study would give us a better understanding of the causal and bidirectional relations between sources of knowledge and delinquency within neighborhood context. Studies should examine prosocial interventions in unsafe neighborhoods to further determine effective ways to prevent delinquency.

## References

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