SINGLE PARENT HOMES EFFECT ON ADOLESCENCE

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Abstract

This paper reviews the interrelationship among family structure, patterns of single parent decision making and deviant behavior among adolescents. It reviews family income and non custodial parent involvement. Patterns of family decision making and family structure both have a significant effect on adolescent deviance behavior. Data on the child’s behavior, the child’s life at home, and parental relation with the child are collected through self reports. Understanding the family structure can have an important role in the intervention and prevention of deviant behavior in the child. More parental monitoring was associated with less delinquency in a single parent household. We examine family structure including two parent families, single mother families, single father families, and stepfamilies. This paper addresses the implications of different theories and findings designed to reduce deviance.
Single Parent Home Effect on Adolescence

Deviant behavior among youth has increased in the United States (Steinberg, 1987). According to the *Nature and Meaning of Deviance* (2008), deviant behavior is described as actions or behaviors that violate cultural norms including enacted rules and social norms. This paper will examine the social factors associated with deviant behavior among juveniles. It will explore the correlation, if any, between single parent homes and the rise in deviant behavior in juveniles. The two disciplines, Psychology and Sociology, will help evaluate the importance between the single parent homes and the effect it has on juvenile deviant behaviors. Evaluating the reasons for the rise in juvenile delinquency in our nation is complex but most alarming is the young ages of juveniles involved in deviant behavior that are now being reported.

**Literature Review**

This research paper will address the influence that a single family home has on the youth. Parental separation and divorce has a tremendous effect on children. Research shows that divorce has become very common experience in the United States (Barber, 1992, Eccles 1992). Barber (1992) and Eccles (1992) articles mention how most research uses structure crisis theory perspective, looking for the negative outcome associated with single parent homes and divorce. It would be interesting to focus on positive outcomes associated with a single family home. Certain situations such as a violent household environment might be beneficial for the family to separate; but the child’s emotional responses towards the situations are going to play a very significant role in the outcome of his behavior. Research has only focuses on the immediate
impact followed after a broken family situation. Only a few studies have been done on the long
term effect on children growing up in a single parent home.

The social control theory emphasizes that people act in deviant behavior because of the thrill
they experience from acting in deviant ways (Katz, 1997, Dunham, 1997, & Zimmerman, 1997). It is believed that children display in deviant behavior when social control is ineffective, such as in a single parent home. Establishing a family structure is the first step in teaching the child norms but when a household goes through a change, the child often loses sense of values and norms. Studies show that a single headed parent home deprive the child from learning proper social norms as the child would experience from a two parent household. Every household outcome is different; they vary between the gender of the child, resources, household income, education, parent and child interaction and much more.

Control theory views lack of supervision as a disrupted, parent child bonding seen in single parent homes. The less time the parent interacts with the child, the more time the child has to engage in deviant activities. It’s viewed that a child in a single parent homes lack internal control and fails to indentify proper norms. Large scale surveys provide correlation between youth negative attitudes towards school, work and authority, and tend to be more antisocial in single parent homes (Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985). Observations in single parent homes have illustrated children’s deviant acts are often ignored or not responded to correctly (Patterson, 1990). During separation in the home, the children can experience feelings of confusion, anger, and despair that can cause them to react in a way they might not have experience previously. In order to view the long term effect on the children, examining children’s adaption over a long
period of time is very crucial. Patterson conducted series of structural equation modeling studies that support the theory of disrupted family homes are casually related to deviant behavior.

The Power control theory implicitly illustrates procession issues in the household to determine gender differences in delinquency. Early research examining the power control theory focused solely on two parent households; however more analyses followed including single parent homes. Findings from single parent homes have been inconclusive. Some studies find the relation between family structure and gender differences in delinquency. Many researchers have acknowledged the theoretical complications in adding extended measures of family structure to a power control model. Researchers suggest that addressing these complications and improving the model specifications is needed before structure can be addressed by the power control theory (Hagan, 1990). Researchers illustrate that children from a single parent or stepfamily may have lower levels of control placed on them then children from a biological households. If relational control is measured as how much the child wants to be like the parent, the child might have a weaker connection to a non-custodial or step parent then the biological parent. Studies also illustrate those children from step families often experience low levels of control as stepparents adjust to the parenting roles.

National representative samples illustrate that deviant behavior is associated with the family structure in which they live in (Steinberg, 1987). The data showed that adolescence that lives in a single parent home are more likely to engage in deviant behavior, also illustrating that a different decision making process pattern in a single parent household has significant effect on deviant behavior in adolescents. Another great point that the article pointed out was the research did not
focus on step parent families. After reviewing a different article, it was brought to my attention that recent reports illustrated that youngsters living in stepfamilies homes were equally at risk for involvement in deviant behavior as those in a single parent setting (Society for Researching in Child Development, 1987). A child may feel a sense of anger once a parent remarries leading the child to act out with such deviant behaviors.

Patterson focuses on the role of family relations, parent child interaction, in order to determine factors in the development of conduct disorder. He outlines a developmental model of antisocial behavior. Several issues are discussed in this article, such as ineffective parenting, academic failure, peer rejection, and increased risk for depressed mood (Patterson, 1990, DeBaryshe, 1990, & Ramsey (1990). This occurs during early adolescence and children who follow that developmental sequence are at high risk in engaging in chronic deviant behavior. Empirical studies indentify family variables as an early antisocial behavior that leads to deviant behavior.

Most of the research on youth deviant behaviors refers to the antisocial behavior approach though some facts still remain unclear; there are many known factors that contribute to deviant behavior. Studies have shown that a strong parent child relationship can decrease adolescence delinquent behavior. Parents having a set dinner time, and checking homework can have a great impact on the child’s emotional stability.
Interdisciplinary Approach

Most of the literatures reviewed for this paper used the qualitative approach in researching deviance behavior among adolescence. Many of the articles used nationally representative samples, which integrates both disciplines, focusing both the psychological and sociological effect on adolescence leading to deviant behavior. Self report questionnaires were also used by many researchers in understanding frequently used measures, such as family structure, demographic variables including race and gender.

Parenting factors were associated with adolescence deviant behavior. Many researchers observed family decision making. Findings supported that single parent homes have the highest rates of children engaging in deviant behavior. Studies also show that there are many contributing factors such as limited financial resources, and greater social isolation, research also illustrates that adolescence are more susceptible to peer pressure.

Single parent homes played a significant role in the research. Research showed that the presence of an additional adult provided greater control over the adolescence behavior. Few studies examined both family structure and parenting practices together. Infrequent communication between two parents and the strength of child and parent bond were found to be associated with higher rates of deviance behavior. Also, it seems that lack of family financial resources is one of the main factors in the development of deviant behavior. Parental monitoring plays a very important role in the child’s development as well. A single parent is force to work twice as hard to maintain the household causing less time for parental attention.
Other research illustrates stepfamilies homes are equally at risk for involvement in deviant behavior. It illustrates how many families only spend a short time in a single parent home, since remarriage is very common. Studies have several limitations in the cross sectional design, limiting the ability for researchers to examine casual pathways among variables. A longitudinal design would allow an examination of how changes in family structure over a period of time affect adolescent behavior.

Researchers using multivariate statistical methods on researching deviant behavior in children have not always agreed as to the exact number and nature of the dimensions involved in the studies. The Behavior Problem Checklist (BPC) (Quay & Peterson, 1975) is a 3 point scale used to rate problem behavior traits occurring in childhood and adolescence. It reviews conduct problem, personality problem and inadequate maturity and has been derived from the factor analysis of behaviors of both deviant and non deviant subjects. A 4 point scale Social delinquency study is composed from factor analytic studies of case history records but due to these behaviors being also observe in household setting they have been included in the BPC. More definitive specifications of the nature of the behavioral deviance being observed are warranted.

Psychologists have found correlations between children’s scores on measures of general unhappiness and overt marital hostility of their parent. Research found that parent dissatisfaction with their own relationships may precipitate children’s behavior problem. Systematic research on the relation between childhood behavior and parent’s marital discord is sparse. Several
researchers have found communication difficulty between parents to have a significant impact on children deviant behavior. The emotional relationship between the parents was also a significant factor in deviance in children.

Many conflicts arise reaching a general conclusion on deviant behavior but efforts continue with this complex research. Most research looks for negative outcomes and doesn’t involve a focus on positive outcomes in single parent homes. Inconsistent findings in previous research illustrates that much more research is needed. Studies need to be developed from a framework other than from the crisis perspective of single parent home effect on adolescence.

**Methodology Discussion**

The literature I review used different research methods such as surveys, cross sectional analyses, and self reports. Representative samples were used in many of the articles, which uses characteristics relevant only to single parent homes. This form of research did not focus on step parent families. The concept of surveys serves as a protection on overgeneralizations in the study. Cross sectional analyses was another form of research used in the articles, it look for patterns appearing across several observations in children in single parent homes for short period of time. Only a few studies have been done on the long term effect on children growing up in a single parent home. Cross sectional studies limits the ability to examine casual pathways while a longitudinal design would allow a broader look on the changes in the family structure.
Self reports on children were also illustrated in the literature I review. The children used self report questionnaires on different aspects of behavior such as substances abuse and interpersonal aggression. Many researchers rely on self reports which can be viewed differently by each child involved. This type of research can be conducted throughout different cultures to get a broader response. Researchers can also do follow up surveys and stay in contact with their interviewees for a long period of time to get a better understanding on the long term effect on children growing up in single parent homes. The most common form of self administrative questionnaires is the mail survey, but there many other form of self administrative reports such as face to face encounters. There are many obstacles when mailing questionnaires, the issue of the return of the questionnaires. It can be too much trouble for certain respondent to send it back but there are many different solutions to get a better response rates such as providing envelopes or even making the questionnaire into a folded up booklet that can be easily sent back. The completion and returning of the questionnaire will improve the study and overall research.

**Conclusion**

Future research is needed to reduce deviant behavior in children. Family structure does indeed have an important effect on deviance in children from a single parent household. Researchers have not allowed for a full examination of various family forms. Studies should extend their definition of parents; most data does not give enough attention to the needed family structure such as non married parents, grandparents, sibling, foster parents and non custodial parents the best way to measure family structure is to ask series of questions that track all stages of family
formation through the child’s deviant behavior.

Another good research needed is financial stability in the home. Two parent household can afford better protection for their child while out of their supervision while a single parent household is obligated to work twice as hard to just meet end needs. There are many programs that support children in decreasing deviant behavior but might not be available for all parents. Future research is needed on family income. All classes are needed to be measure, from upper class, middle class and lower class, to get a better understanding of the correlation between the parent’s financial stability and deviant behavior.

Future research is needed on the single parent as an individual along with the non custodial parent. Studies have shown that single parent homes need more help monitoring their children. Research is needed to monitor the decrease in deviance behavior if there is an increase of children monitoring. Parenting classes could be another way of support for single parent homes to explain the importance of consisting children monitoring and family structure.

Future research should address the link between non custodial parent and custodial parent control in the home. It can illustrate further differences between single parent household and between single parent mothers and single parent fathers. According to Tienda and Angel (1982), the single parent household lack psychological or social support able to devote the necessary time to monitor the child’s behavior as of a two parent household. Many of the reports come directly from the parent, causing a problem in correct data. Many researchers rely on self reports which can be viewed differently by each parent involved. Questions pertaining to the parents should be linked to their structure in the questions while the children’s questions need to be addressed by
the children. More concerns that the questionnaires bring is the measure of retrospective design used in the questions that requires the respondent to report on the past. It would be beneficial to have a better understanding of why juvenile delinquency is at a rise in our nation?
References


