

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY: LOOKING AT THE LINK BETWEEN PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE

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Abstract

Research investigating the risk factors for delinquency has found that single parent households are more criminogenic than two-parent households. Using data (N = 4,626) from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, this study expands on prior research by considering various types of households and parent-child relationship, along with three categories of delinquency: status offenses, property crimes, and violent crimes. Contrary to previous research, we find that juveniles living in single-parent households are significantly less likely to engage in all three types of delinquency than those from intact and stepparent households. Further, while an increased quantity of parents in the household does not lessen engagement in delinquency, the quality of the parent-child relationship does, as those who have stronger relationships with their parents are at lower risk of delinquent behavior. Our study highlights the importance of distinguishing between different types of delinquency and household structures, as well as how such classifications may influence research findings in this area.

Keywords: conceptualisation, corruption, defining corruption, ethics

Introduction

Delinquency theorists and researchers have long attempted to develop a better understanding of the factors that place juveniles at risk of engaging in deviant behaviors. More recently, scholars have favored an integrated or interactional model of delinquency, combining the effects of strain, control, and social learning theories to acquire a more holistic view of these risk factors for delinquency (e.g., Cernkovich and Giordano 1987; Edward and Rankin 1991; Gove and Crutchfield 1982; Rankin 1983; Stern and Smith 1995). One of the key findings that has emerged from these empirical studies is that household structure and family processes

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Received 18 January 2022; Accepted 11 April 2022

play prominent roles in juveniles' subsequent behavior (Austin 1992; Cernkovich and Giordano 1987; Edward and Rankin 1991; Gove and Crutchfield 1982; Hoffmann and Dufur 2008; Leiber, Mack, and Featherstone 2009; Mack et al. 2007; Rankin 1983; Stern and Smith 1995).

The popularity of research comparing the occurrence of juvenile delinquency in single- and two-parent households, however, has ebbed and flowed over the last 50 years. In her analysis of sociological literature from the early 1900s to 1972, for example, Wilkinson (1974) speculated that initial interest in the topic of 'broken homes' could be attributed to the influential role that the family plays in the formative years of juveniles' lives. During that time, the family was regarded as having an important influence on children, with family stability substantially impacting youths' subsequent development. Because of this, early research on single-parent households was initially rejected due to prevailing moral attitudes about divorce and the perceived importance of the two-parent family (Wilkinson 1974). Divorce was considered deviant, in that it was assumed to have a pathological effect on children, instilling delinquent tendencies and behavioral problems in those subjected to the instability it can cause (Amato and Cheadle 2008; Cavanagh and Huston 2008; Fomby and Cherlin 2007; Osborne and Sara 2007; Sun 2001; Wilkinson 1974).

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that close to 1 in 5 men and women have divorced at some point in their lives and that first marriages that end in divorce tend to last approximately 8 years (Kreider and Ellis 2011). Nearly three decades ago, Hirschi (1983: 138) argued that "the percentage of the population divorced, the percentage of the homes headed by women only, and the percentage of unattached individuals in a community are among the most powerful predictors of crime rates." However, as divorce rates have increased and single-parent households have become more common, sociologists and criminologists have grown more skeptical of the biases of early research (see Kim 2011; Mack et al. 2007). As a result of these debates, it is particularly important to consider how divorce and different household structures (e.g., households with two biological parents, a single parent, or a stepparent) might influence the lives – and especially the delinquency risk – of the children who reside within them.

Using data from the first wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), this paper examines the impact of household structure and parent-child relationship on juvenile delinquency. Previous research has concluded that children in single-parent households are at greater risk of engaging in delinquent behaviors than children in two-parent households (e.g., Juby and Farrington 2001; Rankin and Kern 1994). The present study expands on these findings by also considering the role of stepparents and the child's perceived relationship with each of their biological parents, in addition to accounting for the juvenile's gender, race, and age, and the family's socioeconomic status. Furthermore, previous research has tended to treat juvenile delinquency either as one monolithic category of behavior or as binary categories of behavior (e.g., non-serious vs. serious). Quite differently, this study utilizes three separate categories of delinquency, including juvenile status offenses, property crimes, and violent crimes, to determine which factors are more likely to predispose youth to engage in various types of delinquency, a nuance that previous studies have overlooked.

Household structure and delinquency risk

Household structure and its influence on family processes have been central units of analysis in criminological research, particularly within the context of juvenile delinquency (e.g., Farrington 2010; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Hirschi 1969). One of the most prominent criminological theories that addresses the relationship between household structure and delinquent behavior is Gottfredson and Hirschi's theory of self-control, also known as the General Theory of Crime. According to this theory, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that family structure, and especially the number of biological parents in the household, plays a monumental role in shaping children's behavioral outcomes, including their delinquency risk. Notably, they argue that adolescents raised by two biological parents are less likely to engage in delinquent and deviant activities than those raised by a single parent because they tend to experience higher levels of supervision, monitoring, and discipline, causing them to develop higher levels of self-control. Conversely, children who live in single-parent households are more likely to exhibit lower levels of self-control, due to diminished levels of parental supervision, monitoring, and discipline (also see Hirschi 1969; Matza 1990). Interestingly, Gottfredson and Hirschi predicted that children raised in step-families (or families with one biological parent and one stepparent) will experience similar outcomes as those raised in single-parent households. Thus, Gottfredson and Hirschi recognized that family structure, and especially the number and presence of a child's biological parents, was a salient factor in children's development of self-control – and by extension, children's likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviors.

Overall, research on the nexus between family structure and delinquency has consistently shown that children from households with two biological parents are less likely to engage in delinquent behaviors than those from single- and step-parent households (e.g., Apel and Kaukinen 2008; Brown and Rinelli 2010; Juby and Farrington 2001; Rankin and Kern 1994). Specifically, studies have found that those who grow up in homes with a single-parent or a stepparent engage in a wider range of deviant and delinquent activities, including truancy (Song, Benin, and Glick 2012), running away from home, teenage pregnancy (Hogan and Kitagawa 1985), substance abuse (Brown and Rinelli 2010), property crime, and violent crime (Rebellion 2002), when compared with their counterparts from intact families. This has led scholars to refer to some of these acts as “family” or “authority” offenses, in which children react to their confusing home situation by running away, refusing to go to school, or temporarily escaping through the use of substances (see Austin 1992; Rankin 1983). In this regard, it is estimated that juveniles from single-parent households are between 10 to 15% more likely to engage in delinquency than those from two-parent households (Edward and Rankin 1991; Rebellion 2002).

Interestingly, while the majority of research has shown that single-parent households are associated with behavioral problems, some studies have found that step-families (including those that are cohabitating and married) may be the most criminogenic type of household, as the children raised within them have significantly higher involvement in delinquency than those from intact or singleparent families (e.g., Apel and Kaukinen 2008; Brown 2006; Manning and Lamb 2003; Rankin 1983; Schroeder, Osgood, and Oghia 2010; Vanassche et al.

2014). For example, Schroeder et al.'s (2010) research revealed that transitioning from a single-parent household to one with a stepparent was associated with increased delinquency as a result of decreases in family time and parental attachment. Despite this, they found that moving from an intact family with two parents to one with a single parent was not associated with any direct increase in offending. They argue that introducing children to a new spouse alters family dynamics and routines, which could produce more conflicts between children and their custodial parents. These changes are likely to have a negative impact on parent-child relations and increase offending (Brown 2006; Rebellon 2002).

In addition to examining the influence of family structure on delinquency, it is important to consider whether girls or boys are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors when raised by a single parent. Previous research has indicated that boys tend to be involved in more delinquency than girls, but that girls who engage in delinquent behaviors come from single-parent households more often than boys (e.g., Gove and Crutchfield 1982; Hoffmann and Dufur 2008). Some studies have suggested that this could be because girls are more likely to report having conflict with their parents, and their behaviors could simply be a way of reacting to a troubled home life (Cernkovich and Giordano 1987; also see Rankin 1983). It has been speculated that girls are traditionally subjected to greater control and supervision than boys (Cernkovich and Giordano 1987; Hagan and Foster 2003), which could explain why girls tend to report greater levels of conflict with their parents. Further, the highest levels of disapproval are reported by girls who live with a mother and a stepfather (Cernkovich and Giordano 1987).

Within the context of family disruption, research has also shown that boys are significantly more likely to engage in externalized behaviors, namely aggressive behavior and delinquency, while girls are more likely to engage in internalized behaviors, such as emotional difficulties, depression, and anxiety (Pasqualini, Lanari, and Pieroni 2018). Contrary to these results, other studies that have examined the influence of family structure and processes on gender have found that there is no significant difference in the externalized and internalized behaviors of boys and girls (e.g., Krohn, Hall, and Lizotte 2009; Mack, Peck, and Leiber 2015). Overall, there is a scant body of research that focuses on the relationship between family structure and differences across gender, especially as it pertains to the kinds of delinquent behavior each gender is likely to engage in. The reasons why household structure has a different effect on girls and boys, then, deserves further examination, particularly given mixed findings about the relationship between family structure and differences (or lack thereof) in delinquency outcomes across gender.

The role of parent-child relationship in juvenile delinquency

When examining the causes of delinquency, it is important to consider the quality of the parent-child relationship in addition to the quantity of parents in the household in which juveniles live. Indeed, while many researchers have documented the clear relationship between family structure and delinquency, others have painted a more complex picture, noting that this relationship might be mediated by family processes, which has implications for parent-child relationship. For instance, Cernkovich and Giordano (1987) did not find a causal relationship between household structure and delinquency; however, their findings suggested that delinquency can be better explained by indicators related to the quality of parent-child

relationship and home life. Specifically, they found that higher degrees of parental control and parent-child conflict could result from a juvenile's engagement in delinquency as opposed to preceding it. In other words, internal family dynamics and processes may play a greater role in a child's likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviors than the structure of the household itself (Austin 1992; Cernkovich and Giordano 1987; Demuth and Brown 2004; Mack et al. 2007; Stern and Smith 1995). Similarly, Mack et al. (2007) found that family type was not a significant predictor of either non-serious or serious delinquency; instead, maternal attachment was the most important predictor of delinquent behavior, irrespective of family structure, economic factors, and race and ethnicity.

This line of thought is consistent with Hirschi's (1969, 1983) earlier formulation of social bond theory, which postulates that it is the quality of the parent-child relationship, rather than family structure, that will eventually play a greater role in children's involvement in delinquency. According to this perspective, a strong relationship between a single parent and a child buffers against and decreases the likelihood of delinquency when compared with a child who lives in an intact family but has weaker ties to their biological parents. In other words, it is the strength and the quality of the relationship a child has with their parents, rather than the family structure and number of biological parents the child lives with, that appears to be most influential to delinquent involvement. Research focusing on the link between household structure, family processes, and delinquency has documented that parental attachment and the quality of the parent-child relationship were inversely correlated with delinquency, especially among those raised in single-mother households (Hoeve et al. 2012; Mack et al. 2007). For example, in a study examining the mediating effect of family structure and parenting practices, Griffin et al. (2000) found that maternal attachment and spending quality time together (e.g., sharing a meal) were associated with a reduced rate of aggression and delinquency in youth, and particularly girls, from single-parent families.

While strong parental attachment and closeness can play a significant role in buffering against delinquency in single-parent households, the majority of research has suggested that having a second biological parent in the home increases the overall quality of parental attachment and emotional presence (i.e., indirect social control), as well as direct social control, which has been measured through various indicators related to child-rearing practices, such as parental monitoring, involvement, and supervision. Within this realm, scholars have identified that family transitions from intact to single- or step-parent households, along with any conflicts that result, constitute the biggest threats to parental efficacy and the quality of the parent-child relationship. In addition to producing changes in household structure, divorce and remarriage also alter parental bonds, parenting strategies, family functioning, roles, and routines, which have been shown to produce more parent-child conflicts (Brown 2006).

Laursen (2005), for example, found that children living with single mothers or in households with a stepparent reported having more disagreements with their mothers compared to those residing in intact families. One explanation for this may be that the transition from having an intact family to being a single parent forces parents to alter their child-rearing practices to match their new roles, which can increase parent-child conflict and diminish parental control. Similarly, the introduction of a stepparent into a single-parent family has been shown to increase the level of instability in the household because of both the number and magnitude of transitions that it produces in the child's life (Fomby and Cherlin 2007; also see Osborne and

Sara 2007). In fact, Schroeder et al. (2010), found that the transition from living with a single parent to residing with a stepparent was associated with increased levels of delinquency due to decreases in family time and parental attachment. They note that the introduction of a new spouse can significantly diminish the amount of attention given to children, consequently leading to less supervision and monitoring. Importantly, all of these factors, along with the new routines they produce, are likely to have a negative impact on the parent-child relationship and increase delinquency risk.

The present study

This paper analyzes the impact of household structure and parent-child relationship on three different types of delinquency, while controlling for the juvenile's gender, race, and age, and the family's socioeconomic status. Specifically, this study seeks to build on the findings of Demuth and Brown (2004), who conclude that there is a "delinquency gap" between youth living in single- and two-parent households when considering their likelihood of engaging in serious property or violent delinquency versus petty property delinquency. They find that family processes are more important than household structure (Demuth and Brown 2004). Additionally, we attempt to build on the findings of Leiber, Mack, and Featherstone (2009), who also utilized data from the first wave of the Add Health survey and argue that household structure alone cannot predict involvement in delinquency, but that maternal attachment matters more in both single- and two-parent households.

The present study expands on previous work by accounting for a more complex consideration of household structure (measured as more than simply single- versus two-parent households) and parent-child relationship, in addition to including more nuanced delinquency measures than previous studies. Studies conducted by Brown (2006), Demuth and Brown (2004), and Pearce and Haynie (2003), for example, all use single additive scales containing multiple items to represent the dependent variable of delinquency in their analyses. Notably, research in this area has treated delinquency either as one monolithic category or as a binary (i.e., serious versus non-serious delinquency). Thus, the present study considers juveniles' risk of engaging in three different categories of delinquent behavior, including juvenile status offenses, property crimes, and violent crimes, as they are defined on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) annual Uniform Crime Report (UCR). Arguably, using these qualitatively distinct types of delinquency, along with a wider variety of family structures, allows us to gain a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between family structure, parentchild relationship, and delinquent behavior.

Hypotheses

Previous research has concluded that children from single-parent households are more likely to engage in minor acts of delinquency (defined here as "juvenile status offenses"), such as skipping school or running away from home, as a way of reacting to their confusing home environments (e.g., Austin 1992; Rankin 1983). Because of this, we hypothesize that children from single-parent homes and homes with stepparents will be more likely to engage in juvenile status offenses than children from homes with both biological parents, and that there will be no difference in engagement in property and violent crimes among children from these three types of households. Further, it is anticipated that juveniles will be less likely to engage in

delinquent behaviors of all types when the quality of their relationship with their parents is high, but more likely to engage in delinquency when the quality of the parent-child relationship is low.

Methods

Data

Consistent with previous research on this topic (e.g., Demuth and Brown 2004; King 2007; Leiber et al. 2009; Mack and Leiber 2005; Mack et al. 2007), the analyses for this study are based on the weighted public-use data from the first wave of the Add Health survey, which was comprised of a nationally representative sample of youth. In wave 1, in-school questionnaires were distributed to adolescents in grades 7–12 during the 1994–1995 academic year, and follow-up in-home interviews with the adolescent respondents and their parent(s) were subsequently conducted. The in-school questionnaire was distributed to adolescents from 80 eligible high schools and 52 middle schools, and included a total of 20,745 participants between the ages of 11 and 21. To maintain the confidentiality of respondents, the Add Health public-use data contains a representative subset of the total study sample with approximately 6,500 respondents (UNC Carolina Population Center 2011); however, respondents who were 18 years old or above, did not reside in the three specific household types, or were missing data on any of the variables of interest were dropped from the analysis. This produced a final sample size of 4,626 juvenile respondents.

The data used in the present study are primarily those from the adolescent respondents themselves. Specifically, this iteration of the Add Health survey asked adolescents to identify those currently living in their households and their relationships to those individuals; to describe the quality of their relationship with each of their parents; and to indicate whether they had ever engaged in a variety of delinquent behaviors, including truancy, vandalism, theft, running away from home, fighting, smoking, and alcohol use.

Dependent variables

The dependent variables in this study consist of the various types of delinquent behaviors that have been used in previous research examining the role of household structure in juvenile delinquency. These behaviors include those used in Rankin's (1983) influential study, such as running away from home, truancy, vandalism and property damage, theft, smoking, alcohol use, and fighting. The present study, however, relies on three different categories of delinquency, as opposed to just one. These categories include juvenile status offenses, property crimes, and violent crimes, as they have been defined by the FBI's UCR.

The Add Health survey consists of measures assessing the respondent's involvement in a wide range of delinquent behaviors. Some of these items measure juvenile status offenses, such as running away from home, skipping school, smoking cigarettes, or drinking alcohol – all of which are illegal for those under the age of 18. Other items measure engagement in property offenses, as categorized by the FBI's UCR, such as vandalism and property damage, shoplifting, theft of items under 50 dollars, burglary, and car theft (see Snyder 2001). There are also items that measure engagement in violent crimes, as categorized by the FBI's UCR, such as theft of

items over 50 dollars (used here as a proxy for robbery, which was not directly measured on the Add Health survey), threats made with weapons, physical assault of another individual, and use of weapons (see Snyder 2001).

In the Add Health dataset, the majority of these delinquent acts were measured using the following answer categories: “never,” “one or two times,” “three or four times,” and “5 or more times.” For the questions about truancy and alcohol use, however, respondents were free to specify the number of times that they had engaged in these activities, from 0 (or never) to 500. Consistent with previous research on this topic (e.g., Leiber et al. 2009; Mack and Leiber 2005; Mack et al. 2007), all measures of delinquent behavior were recoded into dichotomous categories, with a zero assigned to respondents who had never engaged in a particular act, and a one to those who had engaged in a particular behavior one or more times. The respective measures associated with each category of delinquency were added to generate three separate scales.

The descriptive statistics for each category of delinquency, along with those for each of the other variables that will be used in this analysis, are included in Table 1. On average, juvenile respondents reported engaging in about one of the four juvenile status offenses, and none of the six property crimes (mean of 0.859) or the five violent crimes (mean of 0.502).

Independent variables

The independent variables in this study include (1) the juvenile’s household structure and (2) their perception of the strength of their relationship with each of their biological parents. Included in the analyses are those respondents who indicated that they reside in a household with both biological parents, a single biological parent, or a biological parent and a stepparent, comprising three different categories of household structure. Small sample sizes for those living with a single mother or a single father and for those living with a biological mother and stepfather or a biological father and stepmother made it necessary to combine the latter two categories of household structure. Those who indicated living with someone other than a biological parent, such as foster or adoptive parents, were dropped from this analysis.

Over 56% of the juvenile respondents indicated that they were living in a two-parent household, in which both their biological mother and father were present. About 33% resided in a household with a single biological parent, and about 10% indicated living with a biological parent and a stepparent. To determine the impact of household structure on a juvenile’s likelihood of engaging in various delinquent acts, dummy variables for each type of household were created, with the two-parent family used as the reference category.

With regard to our second independent variable, there are six items on the Add Health survey that are used to assess the quality of the juvenile respondent’s relationship with each of their biological parents. Some items ask general questions about the parent-child relationship, including how close the child is with their mother and father (measured on a scale of 1 for “not close at all” to 5 for “extremely close”) and how much the child thinks each parent cares about her or him (measured on a scale of 1 for “not at all” to 5 for “very much”). Other items ask juvenile respondents about their satisfaction with their level of communication with each parent, their perception of whether each parent is warm and loving, and their assessment of

the overall quality of their relationship with each parent. These items are measured on a 5-point likert scale and were reverse-coded for this analysis so that a one (1) represents those who “strongly disagree” with a particular statement and a five (5) represents those who “strongly agree.” The final measure that is included in each scale represents how many times per week the juvenile eats dinner with at least one of their parents with response categories ranging from 0 to 7 days per week.

These six items were summed to generate two parent-child relationship scales: one to assess the quality of the juvenile’s relationship with their mother and the other to assess the quality of the juvenile’s relationship with their father. Higher numbers on the scales correspond with a stronger parent-child relationship. Each scale ranges from 0 to 32, and the average score on the mother-child relationship scale is around 26, while that on the father-child relationship scale is around 20.

Control variables

The control variables in this study include the age, gender, and race of the juvenile respondent, in addition to the family’s annual household income, as reported by one of the juvenile’s parents. Although the Add Health survey includes juvenile respondents ranging in age from 11 to 21, the analyses in this paper are restricted to those who are 17 years of age and under, as those 18 and over are legally considered to be adults. The average age of those included in the study is about 15, as indicated in Table 1. Additionally, gender is included in the models as a dichotomous variable, using boys as the reference category. Girls comprise about 52% of the sample.

The Add Health survey asks respondents to categorize their race or ethnicity by one of the following categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, or Other. Due to small sample sizes, race is included in the models as White, Black, and Other, which includes each of the latter four categories noted above. More than two-thirds (67.2%) of the juvenile respondents identified as White, nearly one-quarter (22%) identified as Black, and about 11% identified as Other. Race is included in the models as a dummy variable, with White as the reference category.

Annual household income was measured by asking parents to provide their total household income. Respondents were free to state any number in the thousands as their annual household income. Income is included in the models as a continuous indicator of socioeconomic status, with parents reporting an average annual household income of just over 47,500 USD.

Method of analysis

Because the dependent variables in this study are not continuous but are instead skewed count variables reflecting the number of juvenile status offenses, property crimes, and violent crimes, respectively, that juvenile respondents have reported engaging in, count models are used. Specifically, Poisson regression analysis was used to assess engagement in juvenile status offenses in relation to the juvenile’s household structure and perceived quality of their relationship with each of their parents, while controlling for their age, gender, and race, and

the family's household income. Alternatively, to assess juveniles' participation in property and violent crimes, negative binomial regression was used because the two dependent variables are over dispersed. This means that the variance for property and violent crimes is greater than each variable's respective mean (Land, McCall, and Nagin 1996). A total of three models were conducted, with one for each category of delinquency.

Results

Juvenile status offenses

The first model focuses on the factors that place a juvenile at risk of engaging in status offenses, such as running away from home, skipping school, smoking cigarettes, or drinking alcohol. As shown in Table 2, this model is statistically significant ($p < .001$). It illustrates that juveniles who are older are about 17% more likely to engage in these acts than those who are younger ($p < .001$), while gender is not statistically significant, meaning that girls and boys have a similar likelihood of committing status offenses. Blacks are about 36% less likely than Whites and those of other races to commit these acts ($p < .001$). Juveniles living in households with a single biological parent are about 16% less likely to engage in status offenses than those living in the other two household types of interest ($p < .01$), while those living with a biological parent and a stepparent are about 16% more likely to commit these acts ($p < .01$). Further, those who have stronger relationships with their mothers are about 3% less likely to participate in these behaviors than those who have weaker relationships ($p < .001$), while those who have stronger relationships with their fathers are about 2% less likely to commit these acts ($p < .001$).

Property crimes

The second model focuses on the factors that place a juvenile at risk of engaging in property crimes, such as damaging someone else's property, shoplifting, stealing items under 50 dollars, burglary, and car theft. As shown in Table 2, this model is also statistically significant ($p < .001$). While age was statistically significant in Model 1 for juvenile status offenses, it is not significant in Model 2, indicating that those between the ages of 11 and 17 have a similar likelihood of engaging in property crimes. Model 2, however, does indicate that girls are about 38% less likely to participate in property crimes than boys ($p < .001$). Blacks are over 30% less likely to commit property crimes than Whites and those of other races ($p < .001$), while those of other races (including respondents who self-identified as American Indian or Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, or Other) are about 18% more likely to engage in these acts than Whites and Blacks ($p < .05$).

With regard to the impact of household structure, those living with a single biological parent are about 49% less likely to commit a property crime than those living in the other two household types ($p < .001$). Further, those who have stronger relationships with their mothers are nearly 5% less likely to engage in these acts than those with weaker relationships ($p < .001$), and those who have stronger relationships with their fathers are about 4% less likely to participate in these acts ($p < .001$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for variables used in analysis.

Variable	Mean or Percent	SD	Min	Max
Juvenile Status Offenses	1,217	1,120	0	4
Property Crimes	0.859	1,330	0	6
Violent Crimes	0.502	0.811	0	5
Household Structure				
Both Biological Parents	0.565	0.496	0	1
Single Biological Parent	0.331	0.471	0	1
Biological Parent and Stepparent	0.104	0.305	0	1
Parent-Child Relationship				
Relationship with Biological Mother	26,289	6,155	0	32
Relationship with Biological Father	20,223	10,879	0	32
Age	15,266	1,335	12	17
Gender				
Female	0.519	0.500	0	1
Male	0.481	0.500	0	1
Race				
White	0.672	0.470	0	1
Black	0.220	0.414	0	1
Other	0.109	0.311	0	1
Household Income (in thousands)	47,766	46,099	0	999

Violent crimes

The third model focuses on the factors that place a juvenile at risk of engaging in violent crimes, such as theft of items over 50 dollars (used as a proxy for robbery, which was not directly measured on the Add Health survey), threats made with weapons, fighting, fighting with weapons, and shooting or stabbing someone. As shown in Table 2, this model is also statistically significant ($p < .001$). Similar to Model 2, which measured engagement in property crimes, age is not significantly related to juveniles' engagement in violent crimes. This model further indicates that girls are 53% less likely to participate in violent crimes than boys ($p < .001$). For the first time in the analysis, Blacks are about 20% more likely to commit violent crimes than Whites and those of other races ($p < .01$), while those of other races are about 21% more likely to commit violent crimes ($p < .05$). Juveniles living in higher-income households are slightly less likely to participate in these acts when compared with those from lower-income households ($p < .01$).

Additionally, those living in households with a single biological parent are about 22% less likely to engage in violent crimes than juveniles living in either of the other two household types ($p < .05$). Like before, those who have stronger relationships with their mothers are about 4% less likely to engage in violent crimes ($p < .001$), while those who have stronger relationships with their fathers are just over 2% less likely ($p < .001$).

Table 2. Regression coefficients, incident rate ratios, and marginal effects for engagement in delinquency.

	Model 1: Juvenile Offenses			Model 2: Property Crimes			Model 3: Violent Crimes		
	Coeff. (Std. Err.)	IRR	ME	Coeff. (Std. Err.)	IRR	ME	Coeff. (Std. Err.)	IRR	ME
Age	.161 (.012)***	1,174	.185	-.017 (.020)	.983	-.014	-.031 (.020)	.970	-.014
Gender									
Male	reference	-	-	reference	-	-	reference	-	-
Female	-.020 (.029)	.980	-.023	-.478 (.052)***	.620	-.385	-.755 (.056)***	.470	-.347
Race									
White	reference	-	-	reference	-	-	reference	-	-
Black	-.441 (.045)***	.644	-.436	-.360 (.072)***	.698	-.253	.181 (.066)**	1,198	.087
Other	-.055 (.049)	.947	-.062	.169 (.073)*	1,184	.144	.193 (.083)*	1,213	.094
Household income	-.000 (.000)	1,000	-.000	.000 (.000)	1,000	.000	-.003 (.001)**	.997	-.002
Household structure									
Both biological parents	reference	-	-	reference	-	-	reference	-	-
Single biological parent	-.173 (.052)**	.841	-.193	-.665 (.103)***	.514	-.478	-.250 (.104)*	.779	-.108
Biological parent and stepparent	.151 (.044)**	1,163	.185	-.155 (.089)	.857	-.116	.009 (.092)	1,009	.004
Relationship with biological mom	-.027 (.002)***	.973	-.031	-.050 (.004)***	.952	-.040	-.039 (.004)***	.962	-.018
Relationship with biological dad	-.021 (.002)***	.979	-.024	-.040 (.004)***	.961	-.032	-.024 (.004)***	.976	-.011
Constant	-1.022 (.223)***	.360		2.646 (.385)***	14,100		1.769 (.400)***	5,864	
Chi-square	805.040***			331.280***			416.900***		
N	4.626			4.626			4.626		

Discussion

The findings from this study do not support earlier claims that single-parent homes place children at greater risk of engaging in delinquent behaviors than homes with both biological parents (Amato and Cheadle 2008; Austin 1992; Demuth and Brown 2004; Edward and Rankin 1991; Gibson and Tibbetts 2000; Gove and Crutchfield 1982; Kowaleski-Jones and Dunifon 2006; Mack et al. 2007; Matherne and Thomas 2001; Rankin 1983; Sun 2001). Specifically, the majority of previous research has consistently concluded that divorce and living with a single parent makes children more prone to engage in delinquent behaviors. To explain such findings, some have pointed to the transitions and trauma that divorce can produce, which may cause kids to act out (see Brown 2006; Fomby and Cherlin 2007), while others have argued that moving from a two-parent to a single-parent household can be criminogenic for children as it reduces social control and adult supervision (e.g., Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Hirschi 1969; Matza 1990).

Surprisingly, and contrary to these arguments, the present study found that those who live with single parents are significantly less likely than those living in other types of households to engage in all three categories of delinquency: juvenile status offenses, property crimes, and violent crimes. Our results contribute to and extend a small body of prior work which suggests that children living in single-parent households do not necessarily engage in delinquency at higher levels (e.g., Brown 2006; Schroeder et al. 2010). In stressing such findings, Schroeder et al. (2010) argue that divorce can sometimes be beneficial to children, especially in cases of domestic violence and other instances where conflict between parents is commonplace. However, this is not to say that divorce does not have negative effects on children. In fact, Kim (2011) found that divorce has a myriad of negative effects on children's cognitive and emotional development, but oddly, not on their use of externalized behaviors, such as those that are impulsive and aggressive.

To explain our finding that those living with a single parent are less likely to engage in all forms of delinquency, one could argue that children in these households might have more family-related obligations (e.g., assisting with chores or caring for a younger sibling), which could limit their opportunities to engage in delinquent behaviors. Consistent with this line of thought is Moffitt's (1993) argument that some youth may skip the gap between biological and social maturity and abstain from engaging in crime during adolescence, as a result of early initiation into adult roles. Thus, it is entirely possible that children who experience divorce and transition into homes with only one custodial parent may be forced to mature more quickly than their peers as they assume household chores and responsibilities that would ordinarily be taken care of by a second parent (also see Weiss 1979). Such responsibilities may ultimately function to shrink the maturity gap (Moffitt 1993) of those in single-parent households, while also structuring their time and limiting opportunities to engage in delinquency (also see Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Hirschi 1969; Matza 1990).

Additionally, the present study aimed to expand on the conclusions of previous research by going beyond the simple dichotomy of the single- or two-parent household to examine the impact that stepparents and the child's perceived relationship with their biological parents can have on their likelihood of engaging in various types of delinquency. Interestingly, we found

that those who resided with a biological parent and a stepparent were more likely to commit status offenses than those living in other households. It is possible that juveniles living in these households may have experienced more familial transitions (first from an intact household to a single-parent household, and then to a household with a stepparent) and that their engagement in these more minor acts of delinquency may function as a way of them rebelling against or escaping from a confusing home environment (see Cernkovich and Giordano 1987; Fomby and Cherlin 2007; Rankin 1983).

While we found that an increased quantity of parents in the household is not predictive of a juvenile's engagement in delinquency in the ways that were expected based on previous research, the present study also uncovered that the quality of juveniles' relationships with their parents does indeed matter. Regardless of household type, strong parent-child relationships with mothers and fathers were influential in reducing youths' likelihood of participating in all three types of delinquency. It may be that such relationships with either parent function as a form of social control, shielding kids from engagement in delinquency. Further, kids who have strong relationships with their parents may feel that they have more to lose by engaging in delinquency; thus, they refuse to risk those relationships by doing something that would upset their valued bonds with their parents (see Hirschi 1969).

Another factor increasing juveniles' likelihood of committing status offenses was age. Consistent with juvenile court statistics more generally (see Hockenberry and Puzzanhera 2018), we found that as juveniles approach the age of legality, they become more likely to commit acts like drinking, smoking, skipping school, and running away. It is possible that older juveniles are more likely to report engaging in status offenses because they are closer to the age of 18, at which these acts are no longer considered illegal. These older juveniles may also be more likely to associate with peers who participate in these acts themselves.

The findings regarding gender differences in juveniles' engagement in these three categories of delinquency align with predictions of power-control theory (see Hagan and Foster 2003; Hagan and Kay 1990; Hagan, McCarthy, and Foster 2002). One of the implications of this theory is that "females will be deterred more by the threat of legal sanctions than males" (Hagan and Kay 1990: 394), which may explain why boys are more likely than girls to be involved in property and violent crimes. Further, Hagan, McCarthy, and Foster (2002) argue that boys are socialized to value physical dominance, resulting in more direct forms of aggression, while girls are socialized to value relational connections with others, resulting in more indirect expressions of aggression (see Crick, Bigbee, and Howes 1996; Heimer and De Coster 1999).

Hagan and Foster's (2003) later expansion of this theory suggests that girls tend to be more controlled by their parents than boys (also see Cernkovich and Giordano 1987), which causes them to internalize their aggression as boys are more likely to act upon it. Thus, girls who subscribe to traditional notions of femininity will be less likely to engage in aggressive and violent acts, while boys who accept traditional notions of masculinity will be more likely to participate in these behaviors (Heimer and De Coster 1999). Such arguments may help to account for boys' greater involvement in property and violent crimes, both of which tend to be more aggressive, directly impacting or harming others.

Previous literature suggests that gender often trumps race in certain forms of juvenile delinquency (Austin 1992; Gardner and Shoemaker 1989; Mack and Leiber 2005). The findings from this study, however, suggest that race often matters as much as gender. Specifically, we found that Blacks were significantly less likely to engage in juvenile status offenses and property crimes when compared with Whites and those of other races, while those of other races were significantly more likely to engage in property crimes when compared with Whites and Blacks. However, Blacks and those of other races were significantly more likely to engage in violent crimes when compared with Whites. Our findings echo those of Leiber et al. (2009), who also found differences across racial and ethnic lines in juveniles' engagement in non-serious and serious delinquency.

It is important to reemphasize and return to the fact that this study aimed to understand the impact of household structure and parent-child relationship on juveniles' engagement in three qualitatively distinct types of delinquency. As noted previously, prior research on this topic has typically measured delinquency either with a single additive scale containing multiple acts that vary in seriousness (e.g., Brown 2006; Demuth and Brown 2004; Pearce and Haynie 2003) or with two separate scales of non-serious versus serious acts (e.g., Leiber et al. 2009; Mack et al. 2007). Using a series of similar delinquent acts that have been analyzed in these previous studies, we instead categorized these behaviors according to the FBI's UCR, placing them into more specific scales for juvenile status offenses, property crimes, and violent crimes. These differences in the measurement and operationalization of delinquency may be why our results appear at odds with earlier studies that used the very same wave of the Add Health survey and found that those in single-parent households are more likely to engage in delinquency. Our study highlights the importance of more clearly distinguishing between different types of delinquency, as well as how such classifications may drive our research findings, the policies they ultimately influence, and the social stigmas they produce. Making these distinctions will provide us with a more nuanced understanding of the contextual and family-related factors that place youth at risk of engaging in certain types of delinquency.

As such, future studies on this topic – whether cross-sectional or longitudinal – should consider using different and more distinct categories of delinquency, instead of relying on one monolithic category or binary categories (e.g., non-serious vs. serious). Doing so could provide us with a clearer understanding of the etiology of various forms of delinquent behavior, particularly within the context of the family. Future work should also examine this topic using more recent data, as this is one of the central limitations of our study. The Add Health survey is now more than two decades old. It is possible that as divorce has become more normalized over the past 20 years, its impact on children and how they cope with various familial transitions may have changed. Additionally, the gender composition of parents has changed during this time. Our study focused on heterosexual two-parent households, single-parent households, and households with stepparents. Future research on the relationship between household structure and juvenile delinquency should examine the impact that residing in a household with same-sex parents has on the child's likelihood of engaging in delinquent activities, particularly because the gender dynamics that exist between children and same-sex parents may be different than those that exist between children and heterosexual parents.

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