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The Risky Behaviour of Hispanic Females as a Function of Mother-Daughter Openness and Father-Involvement

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Abstract:

This study investigated, within the Hispanic community, the impact of daughter-mother communication and father-involvement on the daughter's perceived willingness to engage in risky behaviour. A purposive sample of 134 Hispanic females completed four self-report scales: Perceived Father Involvement Scale and the Risky Behaviour Scale. Results indicate an inverse relationship exists between daughter-mother openness and daughter's risky behaviour. Further, a significant relationship between perceived father-involvement and daughter's risky behaviour was also found.

Keywords: *Self-disclosure, risky behaviour, family communication, father-involvement*

1. Introduction

Even though national statistics report an overall decline in teenage risky behaviour (CDC, 2014), the U.S. remains a leader in the devastating consequences associated with risky behaviour. The Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2014) estimates that there are 20 million new sexually transmitted disease (STD) infections each year, and almost half of them are among young women 15 to 24 years of age. An estimated \$16 billion is spent on STDs annually in the U.S. (CDC, 2014). In addition, the U.S. ranks highest for teen pregnancies and births among comparable countries (Martin et al., 2010). Hispanics are consistently ranked among the highest for those teens engaging in risky behaviours (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, Curtin, & Mathews, 2013). Specifically, Hispanics are more likely to drink and drive, contemplate suicide, use illegal drugs on school property, practice unprotected sex, use diet pills, and fail to be taught about HIV/AIDS in school (CDC, 2011).

While there are many contributing factors to risky behaviours among Hispanics, family communication is clearly fundamental (Warren, 1992; Guilamo-Ramos, 2010). While the U.S. culture, as a whole, has become more liberal since the 1960s, engaging in risky behaviours, such as unprotected sex or drug use, remains topics that both parents and teens/young adults are hesitant to openly discuss (Coffelt, 2010; Jaccard & Dittus, 1991; Mazur & Hubbard, 2004). This reticence potentially becomes a contributing factor to the many consequences of risky behaviours, such as STDs, unwanted pregnancies, suicides, and addiction.

Hispanics are ranked among the highest for those engaging in at-risk behaviours. Although Hispanic women represent only 7% of the US population, they account for 20% of female AIDS cases (CDC, 1999). In 1997 the teen birth rate among Latinas was almost twice the National average (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1999). Poverty, discriminations, and health care barriers, among other cultural factors, have been previously used to explain such risky behaviours (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001). Open communication about sex with mothers has been associated with a significant decrease in the risk of HIV (Kagunpu, Baptiste, McBride, Robinson-Brown, Crowl, & Parikoff, 2010). The present study is particularly interested in investigating, within the Hispanic community, the impact of daughter-mother communication and father-involvement on the daughter's perceived willingness to engage in risky behaviour.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Risky Behaviour

Health related at-risk behaviours contribute to mortality and morbidity among children. These "risky" behaviours are established during childhood and extend into adulthood (Riesch, Anderson, & Krueger 2006). Health risk behaviours can be categorized into six areas; (1) behaviours that contribute to unintentional and intentional injuries, (2) tobacco use,

(3) alcohol and other drug use, (4) sexual behaviour that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (5) dietary behaviours, and (6) physical inactivity (Brener, Collins, Kann, Warren, & Williams, 1995). These six areas were originally incorporated in the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (YRBS) (Brener et al. 1995). This survey was designed by the U.S. Center for disease control as an instrument designed to measure health risk behaviours of high school students nationwide. State and local agencies and nongovernmental organizations use YRBS data to set health education and health promotion goals, support curricula or program modifications, support legislation that promotes health, and to seek funding for new initiatives (Grunbaum, Kann, Kinchen, Ross, Hawkins, Lowry, Harris, McManus, Chyen & Collins, 2004).

Research encourages the examination of factors, such as parental separation, divorce, and parental educational background, which may increase the likelihood of engaging in health-risk behaviours (Riesch et al. 2006). In addition, perceived, poor parental communication is strongly associated with adolescent self-harm (Tulloch, Blizzard, & Pinkus, 1997). Communication characterized by open expression of ideas and feelings of satisfaction with the family system, family caring, and the ability to manage conflict have been shown to reduce health-risk behaviour (Riesch et al., 2006).

2.2. Mother-Daughter Openness

Mothers and daughters have a unique relationship that involves a constant negotiation between openness and privacy (Baxter, 1993). Mother-daughter openness has previously been defined as openly disclosing or discussing thoughts, feelings, or viewpoints about the self, others, or events (Dailey, 2006). The benefits associated with the distinctive relationship between mothers and daughters has been examined from numerous perspectives, all of which indicate that open, honest communication results in positive outcomes (Krieger, Kam, Katz, & Roberto, 2011). For example, open communication between mother and daughter has been associated with an increased connection to the mother (Dennis & Wood, 2012), an increase in daughter's self-worth and sexuality (Coffelt, 2010); an increased ability for daughters to make informed and responsible decisions about sex (Wilson & Koo, 2010); improved sexual health of daughters (Browne & Chan, 2012); an increase in the number of young girls/women opting for HPV vaccination (Browne & Chan, 2012); a decrease in the risk of contracting HIV (Kagunpu, Baptiste, McBride, Robinson-Brown, Crawl, & Parikoff, 2010); and reduced likelihood for eating disorders (Krieger, Kam, Katz, & Roberto, 2011). Family communication regarding sex facilitates adolescents' openness with dating partners and has been positively linked with birth control (Krieger, Kam, Katz, & Roberto, 2011).

While there is clearly a negative relationship between open mother-daughter communication and daughter engaging in risky behaviours, this relationship does not exist in a vacuum. There are numerous factors, such as perceived father-involvement, which may play an important role in a daughter's willingness to communicate openly and her willingness to engage in risky behaviours.

2.3. Father-Involvement

More than half a century ago, father-involvement was described and limited to instrumental functions such as providing financial support and disciplining children; while mothers were limited to expressive functions such as care giving, companionship, and leisure activities (Parsons & Bales, 1955; Nielson, 2001). A father was considered involved based on the quantity of his interaction with his children (e.g., Crockett, Egge been, & Hawkins, 1993). With the social and sexual revolution in the 1960s - 1970s, a more liberal interpretation of gender roles emerged (Finley & Schwartz, 2004). As a result, more women have entered the workforce and men have taken on more domestic duties (Matthews, 2014). Today, father-involvement is a more nuanced concept that is based on both quantity and perceived quality of his interactions with his children (Day & Lamb, 2003; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002).

High-quality father involvement is beneficial to children's well-being and development (Lamb, 2004). The relationship between fathers and daughters is one of the most influential in a young woman's life (Ahrns, 2004; Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). It is in this relationship that girls typically learn how to interact with and engage in future relationships with men (Flouri, 2005). Unfortunately, most daughters reportedly do not receive the benefits of a satisfying relationship with their fathers (Fisher & Miller-Day, 2006; Nielson, 2001). Daughters who are dissatisfied with their relationship with their fathers are more likely to experience poor peer relationships, unhealthy romantic relationships, have questionable decision-making skills, and engage in risky behaviours (Leonard, 1982; Punyanunt-Carter, 2008).

3. Rationale

The continual increase in risky behaviours and their consequences among Latinas is an indication that, from a cultural and social perspective, this subordinate group requires further investigation. Focusing specifically on family communication in the Hispanic context can help to explain the relationships between mother-daughter open communication, perceived father-involvement, and daughters' willingness to engage in risky behaviours. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are posited:

- H1: There will be an inverse correlation between perceived and desired father involvement and risky behaviour.
- H2: There will be an inverse correlation between daughter- mother openness and risky behaviour.

4. Methods

4.1. Participants and Procedures

This study used a convenience sample of 239 participants from which a purposive sample of 134 respondents was drawn. For the purposive sample only Female Hispanic subjects were included in the sample. Those originally selected who were not female and Hispanics were not included in the sample. All participants were students enrolled in a variety of lower-division basic courses in two southern universities. The majority (85%) of the participants reported to be 18-24 years of age, which corresponded to the 15 to 24 age range group and ethnicity ranked by the CDC to be among the highest for engaging in risky behaviours (CDC, 2011).

4.2. Instruments

The instrument employed was a questionnaire composed of four sections. The first section consisted of 5 demographic items regarding participants' sex, ethnicity, age, religiosity, and parental educational background.

The second section, contained the Father-Involvement Scale (Finley & Schwarz, 2004), which assesses the extent to which young, female adults perceive their fathers to have been involved in different domains of their lives during childhood and adolescence. The measure included two subscales (perceived- and desired-involvement; only the measured *perceived* father-involvement scale was used for this study. This scale is composed of 20-items, or domains. These domains represent the aspects of a person's life in which a father may be involved. For each domain in the perceived father involvement scale subjects were asked to indicate, using a scale from (1) never involved to (5) always involved, how much involvement they believed that they received from their father. Possible scores range from 20-100 on the scale. For this specific study, the perceived father-involvement scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .981 ($M=63.8$, $SD=25.6$).

The third section of the questionnaire measured Mother-Daughter Communication Openness using an adaptation of the original Barnes and Olson's (1982) Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale. The original 20-item scale was reduced to a 10-item scale focusing only on the daughter's behaviour and openness in family communication and omitted items designed to measure the mother behaviour (Dailey, 2006). The scale was further modified by elevating the level of measurement of the original scale from a nominal level (yes vs. no) to an interval level using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree; Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .85 (Dailey, 2006).

In order to enhance the validity of the measure instrument for the current study, three further modifications were made to the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale. First, the word "father" was omitted from each item because the focus of the present study was openness towards mothers. A second modification altered the number of scale options from a 7-point to a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Finally, the original scale was reduced from 20 items to 16 items for the purposes of obtaining more focused responses from participants, and specific topics were added to 10 of remaining 16 items. The topics added (sex, pregnancy, contraception, and drugs) were derived from a Hispanic women's focus group conducted by the researcher prior to adjusting the instrument. The focus group identified topics that participants considered to be difficult to discuss with their mothers. For example, an original item stated "I don't think I can tell my mother how I really feel about some things", was changed to "I don't think I can tell my mother how I really feel about *pregnancy*." The current study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .907 ($M=56.18$, $SD=13.74$).

The fourth and final section of the questionnaire addressed Latinas' willingness to engage in risky behaviours and was measured using the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (National Center on HIV/AIDS, 2011). The original 75-item multiple choice questionnaire consists of six at-risk categories: unintentional and intentional injuries, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, sexual behaviours that contribute to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, dietary behaviours, and physical inactivity. Only four of the six at-risk categories were used. These four areas were chosen based on their consistency with the four avoidance topics (sex, pregnancy, contraception, and drugs) derived from the Latina focus group. The original multiple-choice questions were changed to fit a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) Never to (5) Very Often. Each of the 11 items in the revised scale asked participants to indicate the extent to which they have practiced a specific risky behaviour in their lifetime. The current study yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .867 ($M=23.7$, $SD=9.31$).

4.3. Data Analysis

In order to test all hypotheses, bivariate correlations and t-tests were computed.

5. Results

The first hypothesis predicted that there would be an inverse correlation among perceived father- involvement and risky behaviour. This hypothesis was supported. There was a significant negative relationship between perceived father-involvement and risky behaviour ($r = -.322$, $p < .0001$). Accordingly, as father-involvement increased, daughter's risky behaviour decreased.

The second hypothesis predicted that there would be an inverse correlation between daughter-mother openness and risky behaviour. The hypothesis was supported ($r=-.217$, $p < .05$). Results revealed that as daughter-mother openness increases, the daughter's risky behaviour decreased.

6. Discussion

Results provided encouraging support for those relationships hypothesized, specifically, the association between mother-daughter openness and risky behaviours as a function of father-involvement.

As predicted, father-involvement was found to be inversely related to daughter's risky behaviour. As daughters reported increased ratings for father involvement, the reported levels of daughters' risky behaviour decreased. The association revealed a moderate effect size of 10%. These results support the importance of communication, attention, and presence of fathers to the security of their daughters. Accordingly, these results suggest that improving the quality and quantity of the involvement fathers have with their daughters can enhance resistance to engaging in harmful behaviours.

Additional descriptive statistics revealed that the instrumental functions or domains of the father-involvement instrumental were perceived higher than the expressive roles. The instrumental functions include providing income ($M=3.6$) and providing discipline ($M= 3.5$). Expressive functions include perceived companionship ($M=3.0$) and perceived leisure, fun, or play ($M=3.0$). Despite a shift in expected parental functions resulting from the 1960s-1970s social and sexual revolution (Finley & Schwartz, 2004), the mean scores on the instrumental functions indicated that this particular group of Hispanics chose to accommodate their functions according to what they perceived. These results are in-line with the traditional roles of the 1950s (Parson & Bales, 1955), which emphasize instrumental functions as those expected to be fulfilled by fathers and expressive functions to be addressed by mothers.

Finding related to hypothesis two reveal a similar but milder reduction in the likelihood of daughters engaging in risky behaviour as the self-disclosure between mother and daughter increased. The obvious recommendation, given these results, is to encourage, foster and increase the communication between mother and daughter. These interactions appear to have a beneficial impact on a daughter's willingness to perform behaviours that could lead to unintended pregnancy, drug use, or physical harm.

In sum, the current study offers the following conclusions: First, mother-daughter openness has a significant negative relationship with daughter's willingness to engage in risky behaviours. Second, perceived father-involvement is negatively related to daughter's willingness to engage in risky behaviours. More specifically, father-involvement is negatively related to daughters' willingness to engage in risky behaviour. Finally, results indicate that Hispanic daughters perceive their fathers as fulfilling more instrumental roles (traditionally masculine) than expressive roles (traditionally feminine) in their life.

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