

# Understanding Parental Monitoring of Adolescent Independent Behaviour

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# Overview

- Review monitoring literature
- Definition and controversy in current literature
- Theoretical model of monitoring
- Data testing model
- Implications for families
- Implications for research

# What is parental monitoring

- Construct used to explain parenting behaviours, knowledge, or attitudes that influence adolescent use of free time
- Developed by Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber in the Oregon Youth Study
  - Aimed to measure parents involvement in free time

# Associations between adolescent behaviour and parental monitoring

- Review of 113 studies showed poor parental monitoring is an important predictor of problem behaviours in adolescents
- Literature composition:
  - Predominantly research on USA participants
  - Predominantly correlational studies – only 4 experimental
  - Findings replicated in longitudinal and complex modelling designs
  - 91 (80%) of these studies used self-report survey data
  - 10 (9%) studies published by Patterson and colleagues used multi-method measures
  - 12 (10%) used alternative methodologies

# Problem behaviour and parental monitoring

- Poor monitoring associated with increased problem behaviours
  - Increased police arrests
  - Strongest predictor of police arrests and delinquent lifestyle ( $p < .0001$ )
  - Lowered monitoring allows increased opportunities for unpunished trials of delinquent behaviour (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984)
- 5 year growth curve modelling shown that levels of monitoring decreases when problem behaviour increases (Loeber et al., 2000)
- Early starters vs. late starters (Patterson et al. 1991)
  - Less monitoring amongst early starter extreme-risk boys
  - With early starters monitoring can breakdown as early as 7 years of age
  - Compared with late-starters when monitoring breaks down in middle adolescence

# Deviant peers and Parental Monitoring

- Poor monitoring associated with increases in deviant peers across several longitudinal studies
  - Greater likelihood that poorly monitored boys would seek out like minded peers and thereby increase and expand their problem behaviours
  - Poor monitoring at age 10 predicted deviant peer associations at age 12

(Dishion et al., 1991)

# Substance use and Parental Monitoring

- 24% of studies linked poor monitoring with substance use:
- General drug use
  - Longitudinal research shows higher monitoring associated with 2-year delay in onset of general drug use (Chilcoat & Anthony, 1996).
- Alcohol
  - Poorly monitored adolescents drink more, begin drinking earlier, more likely to have heavier drinking patterns (Hayes, Smart, Toumbourou, Sanson, 2004)
  - Higher monitoring at age 10 years predictive of lower alcohol use at age 21 years (Guo et al., 2001)
- Tobacco and marijuana
  - More likely to smoke cigarettes (Baker et al. 1999)
  - Low monitoring associated with 2.3 times greater likelihood of marijuana use in a female sample (DiClemente et al. 2001)

# Sexual Activity, Sexual Risk Taking, and Parental Monitoring

- Low monitoring linked with
  - Greater sexual activity,
  - Lower contraceptive use,
  - Lower safe sex practices,
  - Unwanted sexual contact
- For example poorly monitored and sexually active females shown to be:
  - 1.7 times more likely to have STD
  - 3.0 times more likely to have a new partner in past 30 days
  - (DiClemente et al., 2001)

# Psychological Adjustment and Parental Monitoring

- Low monitoring linked with
  - Increased depressive symptoms (Gil-Rivas et al., 2003; Patterson et al., 1992)
  - Greater stress (Hartos & Power, 2000a; Sagrestano et al., 2003)
  - Lowered self esteem (Patterson et al., 1992)
  - Increased suicidal ideation (King et al., 2001)
  - Increased homelessness (Whitbeck et al., 1997)
- Associated with academic achievement
  - Higher monitoring – greater academic achievement (Steinberg et al., 1992)
  - Lower monitoring – poorer achievement (Crouter et al., 1990)

# Parent-adolescent Relationships and Parental Monitoring

- Higher monitoring linked with:
  - Greater relationship enjoyment
  - Higher levels of parental involvement (Laird, Pettit, Dodge et al., 2003)
- When antisocial behaviour rises, adolescents perceive that their parents should know less about their activities (Laird, Pettit, Dodge et al., 2003)
- Spontaneous adolescent disclosure of free-time activity significant predictor of monitoring (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Kerr et al., 1999; Stattin & Kerr, 2000)
- Parents with poor monitoring shown to trust their adolescents less, whilst allowing more negotiated unsupervised time (Borawski et al., 2003)

# Changes in Parental Monitoring across adolescence

- Hours of unsupervised time across age largely ignored in literature
- Increases unsupervised hours seen with advancing age in adolescence (Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984)
  - 10.1 year old – average hours unsupervised 0.78 per day
  - 13.3 year old – average hours unsupervised 1.02 per day
  - 16.3 year old – average hours unsupervised 2.06 per day
- Reduced monitoring scores demonstrated as age increases
- Gender differences
  - Mixed findings
  - Monitoring shown to decrease for boys but not girls (Laird, Pettit, Bates et al., 2003; Laird, Pettit, Dodge et al., 2003)
  - Some evidence boys and girls perceptions of monitoring differ

# Current Monitoring Research – Controversy surrounding the definition

- Recently emerged debate with opposing definition

 Social learning definition (Patterson et al. 1992, Dishion & McMahon, 1998)

- Parent is active agent – monitoring is what parents do
- Parental awareness of the adolescent activities
- Monitoring occurs through network of rules and expectations and time spend with adolescent

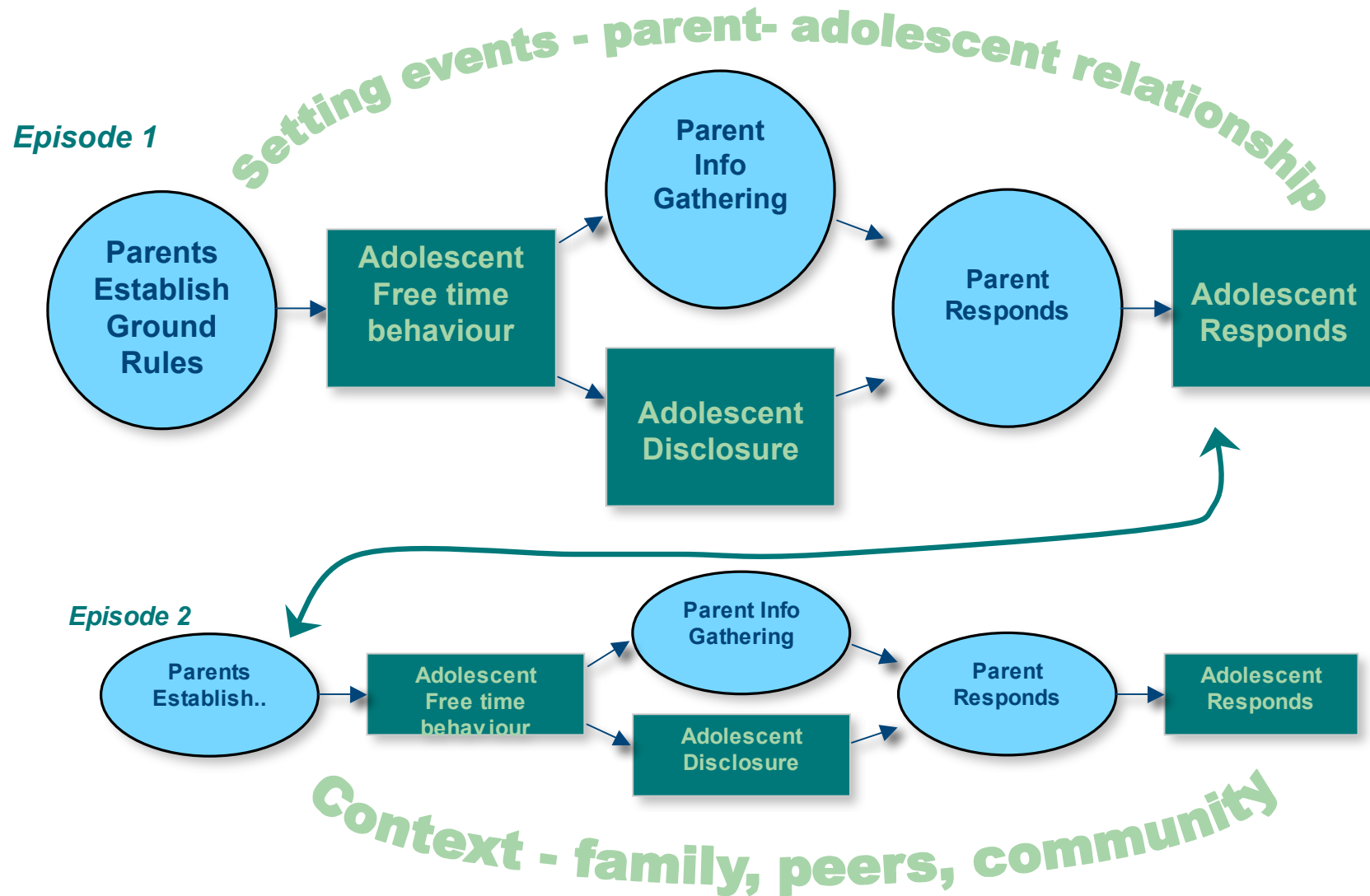
 Knowledge definition (Stattin & Kerr, 2000)

- Adolescent is active agent – monitoring is what adolescents tell parents
- Monitoring identified by parents knowledge acquired through adolescent disclosure

# Towards a Model of Monitoring

- Our starting point and central assumptions
  - Parental monitoring is a complex interactive process - few studies acknowledge or test this
  - Evaluating the monitoring process requires understanding of parent AND adolescent behaviours
  - Monitoring occurs in an episodic process
  - Parental characteristics contribute to monitoring interactions
  - Adolescents characteristics contribute also
  - Interplay of family context, peers, school, and community important

# Theoretical Model of Interactions



# Preliminary Tests of Proposed Monitoring Model

## Qualitative interviews

- N= 50, 12 through to 16 years ( $M = 13.2$ )

## Population data from adolescent survey

- N=1285, Adolescents aged 14 and 15 years

## Parent and adolescent survey

- N = 202 adolescents, N = 210 parents
- Adolescents aged 12 to 17 years

## Exploratory intervention

- Single subject design
- Two families undergoing treatment for parent-adolescent conflict

# Qualitative results - 12 years

- Activities childlike – play at friends homes, parents drive them, single sex groups
- Expect parents to ask questions before they go out
- Clear concrete rules on parental expectations
  - *Be home before dark*
- Expect parental control and questioning when they get home
  - *I get heaps of questions, my Mum is interested in what I do*

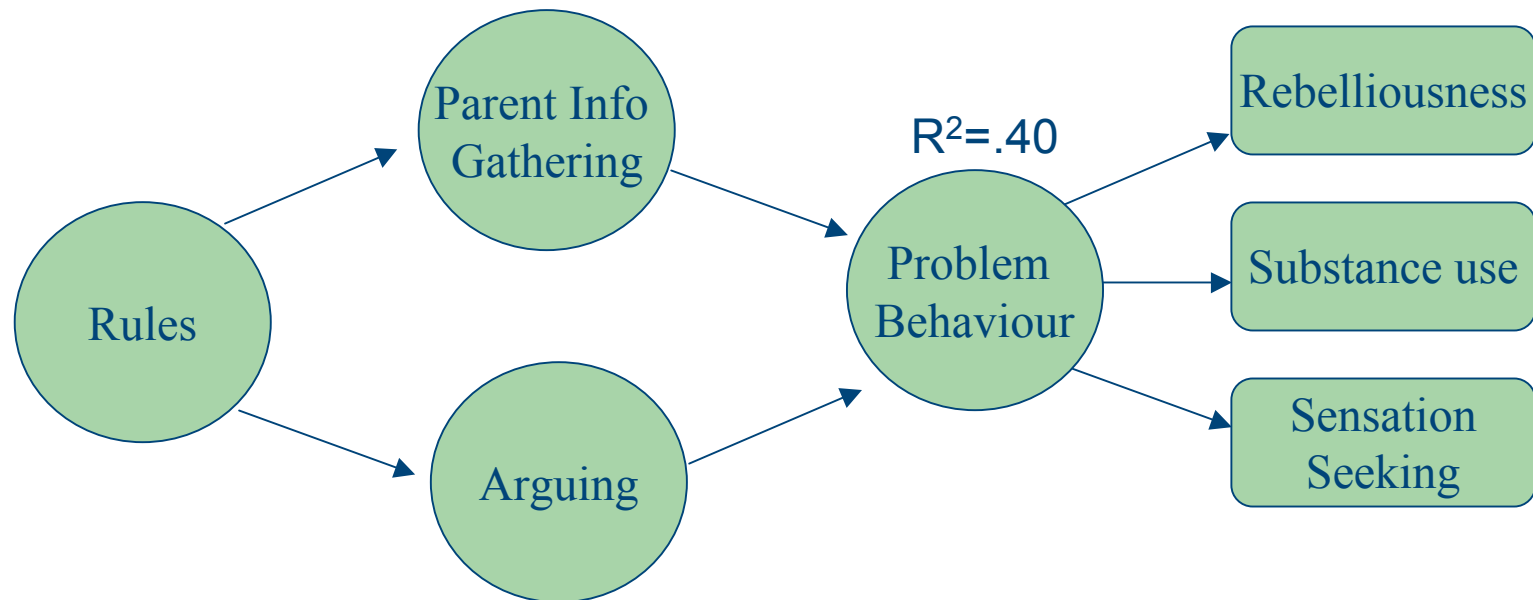
# Qualitative Results - 14 years

- Greater independence in free time – shopping, movies, skate ramp, single sex groups
- Perceive they have more freedom than at 12 years
  - *We're not treated like kids anymore*
- Curfews extended
- Sometimes selective in disclosure to parents before going out
  - *If I'm going to a friends house and we are going to a movie, I don't really tell them...they know I'm with her*
- Privacy very strong theme
  - *You don't want to tell them every detail, need to keep something for yourself*
- Negative perceptions of parental questioning
  - *It's like 20 questions*
  - *Yea, Mum says where have you been, why were you late, rah rah rah...*
- Deception and omission apparent
- Trust central theme

# Qualitative Results - 16 years

- Greater independence in free time – parties, shopping, hanging out, mixed sex groups, dating
- Curfew times important – extended to 11pm or later
- Increased decision making on adolescents part
  - Impromptu changes to activities
- Varying levels of disclosure and sharing with parents
  - Higher disclosure corresponded with adolescents perceiving good shared relationship with parents
- Parents aware of some risk behaviours
  - *I just say I'm going to a party. She drives me to buy the alcohol...she wants to know how much I drink so she buys it*
- Deception and omission apparent
- Trust central theme
  - *I was really late and Mum lost trust completely, I said I would be home at 7, but didn't get home until 11...I got a big lecture...took me ages to get the trust back*

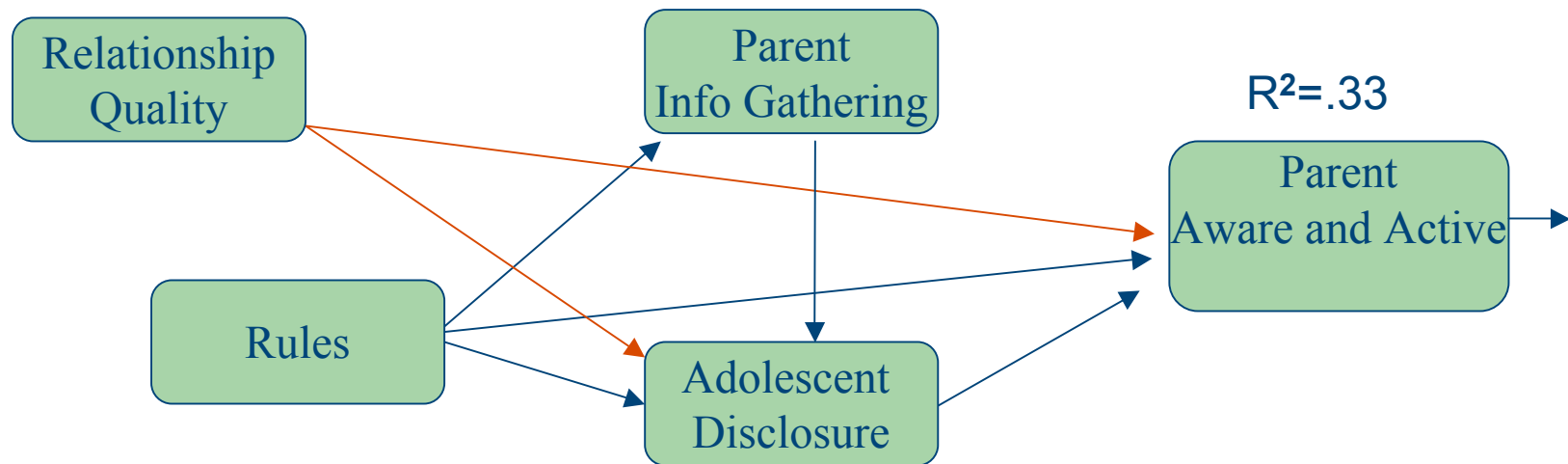
# Population Survey - Data Modelling



N=1285

Hayes, Hudson, & Matthews. (2004)

# Parent and Adolescent Survey



N = 202 adolescents, N = 210 parents

Note: Some differences in parent and adolescent strengths of statistical relationships

Hayes (2004). Doctoral Dissertation.

# Implications for Research

- Present research support Social Interactional definition of monitoring
  - Parents active agents
  - Adds – adolescents are active agents also
- Large research base demonstrating relationship between adolescent problem behaviors and poor parental monitoring
  - However - conclusion that increasing monitoring will reduce problem behaviors is widely accepted - but untested
- Strategies to increase monitoring not tested in research
  - The relationship between rules, supervision, questioning, and disclosure need to be further evaluated
  - Intervention trials demonstrating improved monitoring necessary

# Implications for Families

- Monitoring evolves with adolescent development
  - 14 years possibly greatest change
- Parents and adolescents are active agents in the process of monitoring
- Parents gradually lose control as independence increases
  
- Relationship quality essential starting point
- Rules – before free time - are foundation of higher monitoring
- Adolescent expectations that parents will ask questions is central
- Conflict is an important setting event that hinders monitoring
- Increasing parental questioning may increase conflict and lead to poorer monitoring

# Universal level - Families

- Education at universal level
  - Begin with strong relationship between parent and adolescent
  - Parents and adolescents take active role
  - Have clear and consistent rules
  - Set age appropriate limits
  - Maintain open free flowing communication around unsupervised time
  - Have expectation that communication will take place
  - Around 14 years possibly greatest change

# Intervention level - Families

- At intervention levels further research needed
- Some possible critical points:
  - Relationship quality key area
  - Conflict and coercion central area for change
  - Reduced capacity for parents to influence their adolescents choices
  - Improved knowledge of free time is not likely to resolve poor monitoring if parents have reduced influence

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