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Adolescents' perspectives of social support: Child and family influences.

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ADOLESCENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT: CHILD AND FAMILY INFLUENCES

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To increase understanding of children's emerging sense of social support from family members and peers, especially as influenced by their own characteristics and family environment during the adolescent years, a population-based sample of 152 middle class children and families was studied longitudinally. Within their social networks, children rated their peers highest, followed by mothers, then fathers. Collectively, the data indicate that subjective impressions about the family ecology and social support show differentiated patterns of association. There appears to be a strong relationship between more adolescent problem behaviors and lower ratings of support provided by mothers, fathers, and peers. More family stressors in the home were associated with adolescents reporting higher support scores. Particular to fathers, positive parenting behaviors played an especially important role in adolescents' feelings of paternal social support. Interestingly, with regard to peer social support, the number of children in the family positively influenced adolescents' perceptions of their peer relationships but not of their parental relationships. Further, adolescent females tended to report more positive feelings of peer social support than did adolescent males.

Abstract Approved by: Committee Chairman Larry F. Ramey

Program Director Craig T. Ramey

Date 10/3/96 Dean of Graduate School John R. Roden

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Nancy Lynn Gaines, my brother, Edwin Ruthven Gaines, III, and my fiancé, Mark Stephen Lanzi, for their wonderful example of how a family and their social support can positively influence an individual's ever-evolving life, my life.

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INTRODUCTION

The family is central to children's social support and provides a primary framework for children's emerging sense of self and others. Within the family context, transactions occur among children and family members related to potentially supportive behaviors that can influence their expectations about and appraisals of social support as well as appropriate behaviors (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Families, however, are not static. Numerous developmental transitions (e.g., the transition to school, the transition into adolescence) occur, involving many challenges which may influence the transactions that occur within and outside the family. Similarly, changes in family structure (e.g., divorce, remarriage, birth of a child) and resources (e.g., income shifts, residential relocation) may differentially affect the individual family members and their social interaction. Family members' ability to provide positive social support to one another during these transitions may significantly influence children's development.

The present research specifically addresses the nature of social support during adolescence and across family life situations. Patterns of association among social support, parental style, stressors, and family size are delineated, taking into account multiple perspectives (i.e., ratings of children, mothers, and fathers) and individual characteristics of family members. Remarkably little research has focused on the significance of the family context over time (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1988).

Social support research has concentrated on three central issues: (a) who provides support to children delineating social networks (Gottlieb, 1983); (b) the developmental significance of actual *versus* perceived satisfaction with support (e.g., Heller & Swindle. 1983; Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983; Williams, Ware, & Donald, 1981); and (c) the various forms of support, such as emotional, instrumental, informational, and companionship support (e.g., Caplan, 1974; Cobb, 1976; Weiss, 1974). The present investigation concerns all three issues.

The field now is generating a sound empirical and developmental knowledge base about the effects of children's social support systems (e.g., Antonucci, 1993; Belle, 1989; Cauce, Ptacek, Mason, & Smith, 1992; Dubow & Ullman, 1989; Harter, 1985; Nestmann & Hurrelman, 1994; Reid, Landesman, Treder, & Jaccard, 1989; Reid, Ramey, & Burchinal. 1990; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce,1990; Wolchik, Sandler, & Braver, 1989). Belle (1989). in a first anthology of Children's Social Networks and Social Supports, underscored the importance of research concerning the impact of social networks and social support, given children's great need for support of various types from multiple sources. The relationship between children's social support, their own characteristics, and their family environment is discussed below.

Gender

In most samples of middle and upper-middle class families, girls report higher support than do boys from their mothers, fathers, and same-sex friends in elementary, middle, and high school. In terms of paternal support, adolescent boys rate support higher than do adolescent girls (Cauce, Felner, & Primavera, 1982).

Family Structure (Marital Status, Stability in Family Configuration, Family Events)

In a major review of research on children's social support, Nestmann and Hurrelmann (1994) conclude that social support research must take into account not only child characteristics, but also specific family and social ecological conditions. Research that addresses both the person-environment transactions as well as the available personal and social resources is needed. The ways in which perceptions of social support might moderate the impact of particular family contexts have been examined by few researchers.

Several characteristics of family structure have been shown to influence the form and content of children's social support networks. The composition and size of the family relate significantly to the size and composition of the support network and the potentially available supportive behaviors (Tietjen, 1989). These influences may vary with the child's age. Preschool children from large families, for example, have more siblings in their networks but no more adults or peers in their networks than do children from smaller families (Zelkowitz & Jacobs, 1985). School-age children, however, from large families have been shown to have more extensive contact with peers and more contact with their grandparents than do children from small families, who have had closer contact with parents (Bryant, 1985). It has been suggested that, in households with many children, parents may spend less time with each child and the siblings may rely more on each other and on peers (Tietjen, 1989).

The number of parents (and adults) in the home is another key family factor with important implications for children's social support systems. Divorce has been associated with externalizing and internalizing problems, academic and cognitive deficits, as well as with difficulties in dating and heterosexual relationships among adolescents and young adults (Emery, 1988). To understand how marital status and stability of family configuration may

translate into adolescents' perceptions of social support, researchers have begun to examine potential mediating processes, such as post-divorce relationships among family members (Emery, 1988).

Parenting Practices

Parents are central socialization and support figures and can play a critical role, by having a direct effect on the child and also by mediating the effects of other influences. Normative studies of the parent-adolescent relationship are limited compared to studies of parents and young children (Hirsch, Boerger, Levy, & Mickus, 1994). Single mothers have been reported to engage in more permissive parenting with young children than do mothers in intact, two-parent households (Baumrind, 1991). Hirschi (1969) found that the less adolescents are "attached" to their parents, the greater the likelihood of delinquent behavior.

Thus, the current investigation centers around two main questions. First, which support providers are rated the highest by adolescents? And second, which child and family variables best predict adolescents' ratings of their support providers?

METHOD

Middle Childhood: Original Study

Original sample. Subjects in the Washington Family Behavior Study were obtained from a 1985 population-based screening of 18,000 middle-class households with school-aged children, using the Polk Directories for King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties in Washington state. Respondents recruited were those who met the following sampling criteria: a child in the home between 6 to 12 years old, ethnicity of the child was White/non-Hispanic or African American, minimum household income of $9,300, no change in family membership in the last 12 months, no alteration in family residence for the past 12 months, the child's mother born in the United States, and no report of major psychopathology in any family member. Nominations were used to identify other families to complete the cells that were not filled by the recruiting from the directory.

A total of 293 families were visited on three occasions in which contact information was maintained. The families were selected to represent approximately equal numbers of single (46%) and two-parent (54%) homes with one (27%), two (36%), or three or more (37%) children. The sample included 81% White/non-Hispanic and 19% African American children. About half of the African American families and all of the White/non-Hispanic families were recruited from the Polk directory. The remaining African American families were recruited by randomly selecting from the names of families nominated by those already

participating. The target children were between the ages of 6 to 12 (mean age 9.6). Girls comprised just over half the sample (54%).

The sample was relatively well educated and financially secure. All of the parents but one had graduated high school; 87% of the mothers had at least some college, with 42% graduating from a 4-year college; and 92% of the fathers had at least some college, with 50% graduating from a 4-year college. The family incomes were considerably above the national norms for 1986 to 1987, with a mean annual family income of $34,903 (SD $17,210).

Original data dollection. Twenty-two observers conducted three visits (5 hours each) to each family's home to gather data about the family's goals and values, social and material resources, parental characteristics (family of origin, personality, intelligence), parenting practices, quality of relationships among family members, family routines, and observed patterns of family interaction. These family environment measures (see Assessments), along with family structure and demographic variables, were studied in relation to major child outcomes: intellectual and academic competence, social and behavioral adjustment, children's positive self appraisal, and children's perceptions of social support and conflict. All major constructs were measured from at least two perspectives, frequently using at least two separate measures, administered two or more times.

Adolescence: Follow-up Study

Recruitment. Data were collected 7 years later, when target children were in adolescence. Each family was sent a postcard informing them of the follow-up to the Washington Family Behavior Study and that they would receive study material through the mail within a few weeks. Each family was then sent a letter describing the follow-up study

in detail and a self-addressed stamped card indicating their willingness to participate. Then, the subjects were sent the questionnaires, consent forms, and information about the study.

Follow-up subjects. Of the original 293 families, at least one person from 176 families (60%) responded. However, both mothers and adolescents responded in only 152 of the families. Thus, the present study focuses only on those 152 families. Sixty-two of these families were "ever-single." Ever-single refers to those families in which the target child's parents experienced some type of separation over time. These separations may include marrying someone other than the person the target child's mother was married to during middle childhood (n = 14), separating (n = 2), never being married (n = 6), being widowed (N = 6), or getting divorced (n = 36).

Comparisons between respondents and non-respondents in the follow-up study. As seen in Table 1, adolescent respondents and non-respondents were similar in age and gender, although significantly more White, non-Hispanic adolescents participated while more African American adolescents did not. Mothers and fathers who responded did not differ significantly in age or employment status from non-respondents. In this highly educated sample (> 80% with at least some college education), fathers who did and did not respond had comparable educational levels, while mothers who responded had significantly higher educational levels than those who did not respond. Respondents and non-respondents did not differ significantly in marital status, although household income was significantly higher (by approximately $4,200) for respondents than non-respondents.

Table 1

Characteristics of Respondents and Non-Respondents: Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages

Variable	Respondents N = 152	Non-Respondents N = 109	Test Statistic
CHILD	**N = 152**	**N = 109**	
Age(M,SD)	9.6 years (1.51)	9.7 years (1.71)	t(257) = -.56
Gender	48% males 52%females	43%males 57%females	$X^2(1) = .53$
Ethnicity	87% White, non-Hispanic 13% African American	74% White, non-Hispanic 26% African American	$X^2(1)=7.52^{**}$
MOTHERS	**N = 152**	**N = 109**	
Age (M,SD)	38.2 years (4.5)	37.7 years (4.9)	t(260) = .91
Education	41% some college 49% 4-year college grad.	51% some college 31% 4-year college grad.	$X^2(3)=10.56^{*}$
Employment	70% full-time	70% full-time	$X^2(2) = .42$
FATHERS	**N = 90**	**N = 53**	
Age (M, SD)	41.0 years (4.9)	40.0 years (5.5)	t(140) = 1.19
Education	38% some college 54% 4-year college grad.	40% some college 43% 4-year college grad.	$X^2(3) = 2.29$
Employment	97% full-time	91% full-time	$X^2(2) = 4.20$
FAMILY	**N = 152**	**N = 109**	
Family structure	58% Married/Intact	51% Married/Intact	$X^2(1) = 1.27$
Income	$36,550 (17,767)	$32,328 (15,892)	t(258)= 1.98*

*p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

Follow-up data collection. The mailing included a cover letter, a Mother Questionnaires envelope, and an Adolescent Questionnaires envelope. In each envelope there was $5.00 (as partial advance compensation for participating), separate consent forms,

individual instrument packets, separate self-addressed stamped envelopes, and pencils. We asked mothers to give their children the enclosed "Adolescent Questionnaires" envelope, which contained a letter of invitation to the adolescent. There were separate consent forms for mothers and adolescents to sign. Upon receiving completed questionnaires, we compensated each family member an additional $10.00 each, for a total of $15.00 each.

In the "Parent's Questionnaires" envelope, we also included an envelope for the target child's father. Mothers were asked to give this envelope to the child's father, which included an invitation for him to participate in the study. Upon receipt of the father's completed form, he was sent the same mailing packet of information and received equal compensation ($15.00).

Assessments

The selection of measures for families and children has been guided by a social ecological framework (Landesman, Jaccard, & Gunderson, 1991; Reid et., 1990) that underscores the importance of four elements in family functioning: (a) goals and values; (b) strategies to realize goals; (c) resources available to the family; and (d) individual experiences and behavioral qualities of family members. The following section includes descriptions of the instruments.

Parent/Family Measures

1. Family Background Interview (Landesman & Jaccard, 1986) includes questions about SES level based on the Duncan Occupational Prestige Scale, years of education, marital and child bearing history, family of origin information, mental and physical health, current work status, political orientation, and religiosity. This instrument was used at both time periods.

2. Child Rearing Practices Report (CRPR) (Block, 1965) consists of 91 socialization-relevant statements that are administered in a Q-sort format with a forced-choice, seven-step distribution. These 91 items reflect beliefs, practices, feelings and miscellaneous aspects of family life, and satisfaction. These items were reduced to 22 items that are more closely related to actual practices and beliefs likely to affect parenting practices, and this 22-item measure was administered at both time periods (See Appendix for details on factor analysis). To make administration more convenient, the items were presented in the form of a question that utilized a 6-point Likert type scale for its response choices. The Likert scale ranged from 1= not-at-all descriptive of me to 6 = highly descriptive of me. Similar to others (e.g., Rickel & Biasatti, 1982), we found that the modified version of the CRPR facilitates administration and interpretation of the scale and enhances its usefulness as an effective instrument. The average 8-month test-retest reliability of each item of the original CRPR is .71, with a range of .38 to .85.

Adolescent Measures

1. My Family and Friends (Reid et al., 1990) is a recently developed self-report, social support tool which was designed for children and adolescents to provide highly reliable and valid data about their social networks including (a) the young person's perspective of the people in his or her everyday life who provide support (and conflict) and (b) the young person's satisfaction with the different types of support offered by each of these people. This instrument was used with the original sample and is based on social support research (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and yields separate scores for emotional support, instrumental support, affiliation, informational support, and conflict. Also, the overall

satisfaction with each support person in the network is computed by averaging the ratings across types of support.

Intraclass correlation coefficients for rankings and ratings revealed a median test-retest reliability of 0.68 for rankings and 0.69 for ratings. A content analysis of children's open-ended responses about the measure revealed that 90% of the children had good comprehension of the social support questions. Children's responses were consistent with general definitions of social support provided by Cohen and Wills' (1985) seminal social support paper.

2. Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) (Greenberg & Armsden, 1989) is a 75-item questionnaire (5-point Likert scale) assessing the adolescent's perceptions of how well their parents and peers serve as sources of psychological security. The theoretical framework is attachment theory, originally formulated by Bowlby (1969/1982). The IPPA contains 25 items in each of three sections--mother, father, and peer--which each yield a total attachment score.

For both the mother and father attachment scale, there are three subscales: trust, communication, and alienation. To obtain the total attachment score, the alienation subscale is reverse-scored and summed with the trust and communication subscales. The peer attachment scale was modified as follows: six of the original peer items differ from the mother and father items; because we sought to make direct comparisons among mothers, fathers, and peers on the same constructs, we wrote parallel items for peers from the mother and father scale. Examples include "my friends listen to what I have to say" and "I feel alone or apart when I'm with my friends."

The 3-week test-retest reliabilities for a sample of 27 adolescents were 0.93 for parent attachment and 0.86 for peer attachment. Internal reliabilities are: mother attachment, 0.87; father attachment, 0.89; peer attachment, 0.92. In terms of validity, parental attachment scores are moderately to highly related to Family and Social Self scores from the Tennessee Self Concept Scale and to most subscales on the Family Environmental Scale among late adolescents (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Among late adolescents, those who experience more secure mother and father attachment report less conflict between their parents and experience less loneliness (Armsden, 1986). Peer attachment is positively related to social self concept, as assessed by the Tennessee Self Concept Scale and family expressiveness on the Family Environment Scale, and has a strong negative correlation with loneliness (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

3. Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes (FILE) (McCubbin, Patterson, & Wilson, 1981) is a 71-item (yes/no) questionnaire cataloguing major life changes in nine areas: intra-family strains, partner (marital) strains, pregnancy and childbearing strains, finance and business strains, family transitions, illness and family care strains, deaths/separations, transitions in and out of family household/roles, and family legal violations (e.g., arrests, abuse, school dropout). This family stressors measure was administered at both time periods, providing an index of the amount of variability in life changes over the 6- to 7- year period. Total amount of family strains is scored by summing the responses: 1 = occurrence of family strain; 2 = no occurrence of family strain. Thus, the range of responses is 71 (most family strains) to 142 (fewest family strains).

4. Youth Self-Report and 1991 Profile (YSR) (Achenbach, 1991b). The YSR can be completed by adolescents who have at least fifth grade reading skills. It has most of the

same competence and problem items as the CBCL/4-18 (Child Behavior Checklist; Achenbach, 1991a) administered to parents. Sixteen CBCL problem items are replaced with socially desirable items endorsed by most youths. The profile for scoring the Youth Self-Report includes two competence scales, total competence, 8 cross-informant syndromes, internalizing, externalizing, and total problem scales. Scales are based on 1,272 clinically referred youths, normed on 1,315 nonreferred youths. The YSR was used in the follow-up study only. For purposes of this study, total problem behaviors were assessed.

Content validity was shown by the ability of most items to discriminate significantly between demographically matched referred and nonreferred youths. Criterion-related validity was revealed by the ability of the quantitative scale scores to discriminate between referred and nonreferred youths after controlling for demographic effects.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved two levels. For the first stage of analysis, analyses were conducted to assess which support providers had the highest ratings of support. To evaluate this, a repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted with one within factor for source of support (mother, father, peer). Only subjects who provided full ratings on mothers, fathers, and peers were included in this analysis (N = 136). The Greenhouse-Geisser correction factor was applied to the degrees of freedom. The follow-up tests used a strategy of all possible pairwise t tests with a Bonferroni per comparison alpha of .0167.

For the second analysis stage, child and family characteristics hypothesized to be related to perceptions of social support were regressed on each type of support for each support provider. A total of 12 such regression analyses were conducted. Initial analyses

were conducted for total attachment to each of the support providers. Alpha levels used to evaluate predictors in these total attachment analyses were .05. Follow-up analyses on the three subscales (trust, communication, alienation) for each support provider were conducted using a Bonferroni correction -- each predictor was tested with alpha of .0167.

The child and family characteristics included child gender, family structure, previous social support, number of children in the family, family stressors as rated by adolescents, parenting practices (nurturance, restrictiveness, independence), and adolescent's behavioral problems (as rated by adolescents on the YSR). The interaction between child gender and family structure was also tested. The means and standard deviations of these child and family characteristics are presented in Table 2.

For maternal social support, mothers' ratings of their own parenting style were included in regression models; whereas, for paternal social support, fathers' ratings of their own parenting style were included in the regression models. For peer social support, previous maternal social support was hypothesized to be significantly related to adolescents' perceptions of peer social support based on prior research (e.g., Baumrind, 1991) that indicates that mothers serve as the primary foundation for later attachments. Thus, both previous maternal and peer social support were included as predictor variables for peer social support.

Table 2

Key Child and Family Characteristics: Ranges, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	N	Range (Possible - Observed)	Means (SD)
YSR: Total behavior problems	151	22 - 100 24 - 80	49.48 (10.09)
Number of children in the family	147	1 - 8	2.31 (1.30)
FILE: Total family stressors	152	71 (most) - 142(fewest) 71 (most) - 142(fewest)	124.43 (17.60)
Parenting practices: Maternal nurturance	151	8 - 40 24 - 35	30.93 (2.21)
Parenting practices: Maternal restrictiveness	151	10 - 50 16 - 38	25.64(4.46)
Parenting practices: Paternal nurturance	90	8 - 40 21 - 34	29.18 (2.84)
Parenting practices: Paternal restrictiveness	90	10 - 50 20 - 40	28.17 (4.29)
My family and friends: Previous maternal support	152	0 - 200 75 - 200	160.86 (27.89)
My family and friends: Previous paternal support	109	0 - 200 10 - 200	151 (35.87)
My family and friends: Previous peer support	150	0 - 200 41 - 200	124.05 (33.60)

RESULTS

Adolescents' Ratings of Their Support Providers

From the repeated measures analysis of variance, significant effects of support provider were revealed for total attachment [F (2,272) = 57.43, $p < .0001$], trust,[F (2,272) = 30.96, $p < .0001$], communication [F (2,272) = 68.61, $p < .0001$], and alienation [F (2,272) = 42.51, $p < .0001$].

Table 3 displays the mean ratings adolescents assigned to different providers for each type of support. Adolescents clearly perceived their peers to be the best multipurpose social support providers in their network. This was trus for total attachment and for both trust and communication. Further, adolescents rated their mothers as more supportive than fathers in terms of trust, communication, and total attachment. In terms of alienation, adolescents reported feeling more alienated from both mothers and fathers than from their peers, but there were no reliable differences in adolescents' ratings of alienation from mothers and fathers, $p = .12$.

Prediction of Social Support From Family and Child Characteristics

Maternal social support. Table 4 displays the summary statistics for the multiple regression analyses for adolescents' perceptions of maternal total attachment and for each of the three subscales: trust, communication, and alienation. Overall, child and family characteristics accounted for a reliable amount of the variance in adolescents' perceptions

Table 3

Adolescents' Ratings of Social Support from their Mothers, Fathers, and Peers (N=136)

Provider		Total attachment (25 - 125)	Trust (10 - 50)	Communication (9 - 45)	Alienation (6 - 30)
Peers	M	103.74	43.76	35.61	11.62
	(SD)	(14.46)	(5.61)	(7.07)	(3.67)
Mothers	M	93.96	41.27	26.48	14.57[a]
	(SD)	(16.83)	(6.84)	(7.55)	(4.57)
Fathers	M	85.35	38.00	26.48	15.23[a]
	(SD)	(19.18)	(8.99)	(7.55)	(4.63)

[a] With the exception of the mother-father alienation comparison, all pairwise comparisons among support providers were statistically significant, t's(136) > 3.84, p's < .0001.

of maternal support for the total attachment score [R^2 = .22; F (10, 143) = 3.65; p < .001] and the three subscales: trust [R^2 = .19; F (10, 143) = 3.03; p < .01], communication [R^2 = .16: F (10, 143) = 2.50; p < .01], and alienation [R^2 = .26; F (10, 143) = 4.67; p < .0001].

Adolescents who reported fewer family stressors also reported greater attachment to their mothers; this was largely attributable to the communication subscale. Additionally, adolescents who had more problem behaviors reported lower maternal attachment scores; however, this was largely a function of the trust and alienation subscales.

Paternal social support. Table 5 displays the summary statistics for the multiple regression analyses for adolescents' perceptions of paternal total attachment and the three subscales: trust, communication, and alienation. Overall, child and family characteristics accounted for a reliable amount of the variance in adolescents' perceptions of paternal support for the total attachment score [R^2 = .36; F (10, 87) = 4.41; p < .0001] and the three

Table 4

Summary of Multiple Regression Models - Maternal Social Support Scores as a Function of Child and Family Characteristics (N = 144)

Criterion	Gender	Family structure	Previous support	Number of children	Family stressors	Nurtur-ance	Restrictive-ness	Indepen-dence	Problem behavior scale	Gender X family structure
	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b,t
Total attachment	4.18	-3.17	0.08	1.78	0.18**	0.56	-0.53	-0.66	-0.40**	-2.88
	1.24	-0.84	1.70	1.78	2.46	0.93	-1.76	-0.93	-2.88	-0.56
Trust	0.57	-1.58	0.04	0.77	0.07	0.39	-0.17	-0.39	-0.15**	0.15
	0.40	-1.01	1.74	1.86	2.16	1.58	-1.37	-1.30	-2.58	0.07
Communication	3.31	-0.70	0.02	0.46	0.08**	0.18	-0.25	-0.02	-0.07	-2.06
	2.21	-0.42	1.19	1.03	2.59	0.68	-1.87	-0.06	-1.18	-0.91
Alienation	-0.31	0.89	-0.02	-0.55	-0.03	0.02	0.11	0.26	0.18***	0.98
	-0.33	0.87	-1.68	-2.01	-1.53	0.09	1.34	1.34	4.73	0.70

** $p < .0167$. *** $p < .0001$.

Table 5

Summary of Multiple Regression Models - Paternal Social Support Scores as a Function of Child and Family Characteristics (N = 88)

Criterion	Gender	Family structure	Previous support	Number of children	Family stressors	Nurtur-ance	Restrictive-ness	Indepen-dence	Problem behavior scale	Gender X family structure
	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b,t
Total attachment	0.76	6.55	0.01	0.70	0.21**	1.48**	-0.88**	-0.03	-0.62***	-0.85
	0.24	0.62	0.29	0.57	2.52	2.52	-2.48	-0.03	-3.62	-0.07
Trust	0.54	-0.76	-0.01	0.14	0.09[a]	0.49	-0.35	0.01	-0.20[a]	2.87
	0.34	-0.14	-0.27	0.22	2.07	1.62	-1.90	0.02	-2.27	0.43
Communication	0.31	3.05	0.02	0.26	0.08	0.74**	-0.39**	0.03	-0.24***	-0.34
	0.23	0.71	0.78	0.51	2.34	3.06	-2.65	0.08	-3.35	-0.06
Alienation	0.09	-4.26	-0.01	-0.30	-0.04	-0.25	0.15	0.07	0.18***	3.38
	0.13	-1.73	-0.45	-1.06	-2.16	-1.84	1.76	0.30	4.57	1.11

[a] $p < .05$. ** $p < .0167$. *** $p < .0001$.

subscales: trust [$R^2 = .22$; F (10, 87) = 3.03; $p < .05$], communication [$R^2 = .38$; F (10, 87) = 4.67; $p < .0001$], and alienation [$R^2 = .38$; F (10, 87) = 4.65; $p < .0001$].

As previously observed for maternal attachment, adolescents with more problem behaviors reported less paternal attachment. For paternal attachment, this finding was to a large degreea function of the communication and alienation subscales. Adolescents who reported fewer family stressors also reported greater paternal attachment. Fathers' self-rated nurturance was predictive of higher adolescent reports of paternal attachment. This finding was mostly attributable to the communication subscale. Conversely, fathers' self-rated restrictiveness was predictive of lower adolescent reports of paternal attachment, which was also revealed in the communication subscale.

Peer social support. Table 6 displays the summary statistics for the multiple regression analyses for adolescents' perceptions of peer total attachment and the three subscales: trust, communication, and alienation. Overall, child and family characteristics accounted for a reliable amount of the variance in adolescents' perceptions of peer support for the total attachment score [$R^2 = .27$; F (11, 140) = 4.41; $p < .0001$] and the three subscales: trust [$R^2 = .18$; F (11, 140) = 2.55; $p < .01$], communication [$R^2 = .29$; F (11, 140) = 4.70; $p < .0001$], and alienation [$R^2 = .23$; F (11, 140) = 3.50; $p < .001$].

Adolescents reporting more problem behaviors also reported greater feelings of alienation from peers. Adolescents with more children in the family reported greater peer attachment and lower peer alienation. Additionally, adolescent females reported greater attachment to their peers, largely a function of better communication.

Summary. Overall, there appears to be a strong relationship between more adolescent problem behaviors and lower ratings of support provided by all three sources of support:

Table 6

Summary of Multiple Regression Models - Peer Social Support Scores as a Function of Child and Family Characteristics (N = 141)

Criterion	Gender	Family structure	Previous support (peer, maternal)	Number of children	Family stressors	Nurturance	Restrictiveness	Independence	Problem behavior scale	Gender X family structure
	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b, t	b,t
Total	10.14***	-0.36	0.05	2.24**	-0.03	-0.65	-0.01	0.63	-0.29[a]	1.23
Attachment	3.38	-0.11	1.31	2.54	-0.44	-1.25	-0.05	0.90	-2.41	0.27
			0.09							
			2.04							
Trust	2.73[a]	-0.22	0.02	0.61	-0.01	-0.09	0.07	0.23	-0.08	0.51
	2.23	-0.16	1.71	1.70	-0.42	-0.40	0.64	0.80	-1.69	0.28
			0.03							
			1.49							
Communi-	5.79***	-0.22	0.01	0.99[a]	-0.01	-0.31	-0.00	0.48	-0.10	1.04
cation	4.00	-0.14	0.76	2.33	-0.40	-1.23	-0.00	1.45	-1.73	0.47
			0.04							
			1.73							
Alienation	-1.62	-0.08	-0.01	-0.64**	0.00	0.26	0.08	0.08	0.11***	0.32
	-2.04	-0.09	-0.93	-2.75	0.29	1.86	1.16	0.45	3.36	0.27
			-0.03[a]							
			-2.28							

[a] $p < .03$. ** $p < .0167$. *** $p < .0001$.

mothers, fathers, and peers. More family stressors in the home were associated with adolescents reporting higher support scores. Particular to fathers, positive parenting behaviors played an especially important role on adolescents' self-reported total attachment to fathers and communication with fathers. Interestingly, with regard to peer social support, the number of children in the family positively influenced adolescents' perceptions of their peer relationships but not of their parental relationships. Finally, adolescent females tended to report more positive feelings of peer social support than did adolescent males.

In contrast, previous social support, self-rated independence parenting behavior, and family structure were never reliably related to parental or peer social support in the present sample. Additionally, the interaction between child gender and family structure did not reliably relate to parental or peer social support.

DISCUSSION

This study had two interrelated purposes. The first purpose was to determine which social support providers adolescents rated the highest. The second purpose was to examine correlates of different child and family characteristics associated with children's perceptions of social support.

Consistent with prior research (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Cauce et al., 1982), these results indicate that adolescents perceive their peers as the best multipurpose providers of social support, followed by their mothers, and then their fathers. This finding was true for the overall attachment score as well as for the trust and communication subscales. In terms of the alienation subscale, adolescents report feeling more alienated from their parents than their peers. There were, however, no differences between adolescents' ratings of their feelings of alienation from their mothers and fathers.

These findings are further substantiated by research on adolescence. As adolescence involves systematic changes in the nature of peer relationships, there is a growing reliance on peers as support providers (Petersen, Silbereisen, & Sorenson, 1996). Adolescents' peer groups increase in size and complexity, with adolescents spending more time with particular chosen friends rather than assigned school classmates (Cairns & Cairns, in preparation). Additionally, adolescents are more involved and intimate with peers than when they were children (Hartup, 1983).

The analysis of family and child characteristics associated with children's perceptions of social support revealed a number of interesting findings. The particular influences on children's perceived social support varied as a function of the provider of support. This may be attributable to at least three things: (a) children may be perceiving support differentially, because they may have different expectations for each provider in their social network; (b) mothers and fathers may be treating their children differently; and (c) the global measures of the family ecology may not capture adequately the specific processes affecting outcome.

There were, however, some clear patterns of association across children's perceptions of social support. For instance, there was a strong relationship between adolescent problem behaviors and their ratings of support provided by parents and peers. A clear finding in the adult social support literature is that perceived social support and well-being are positively associated (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In terms of the child social support literature, the relationship is less clear. This is due to both the limited number of studies conducted and the lack of straightforward results from these studies. Wolchik, Beals, and Sandler (1989) in a recent review of the child social support literature concluded that support from family members and other adults was usually positively related to adjustment and that support from peers was often unrelated or negatively related to indices of adjustment. Most studies focusing on adolescents, however, indicate a positive relationship between peer support and adjustment and a negative relationship between peer support and distress (e.g., Hirsch & Dubois, 1992). Cotterell (1992) has argued that peer support will influence adolescent adjustment only "under those circumstances where adolescent psychological well-being is associated with the level of attachment to friends, rather than to parents" (p. 39).

Wolchik et al. (1989), utilizing structural equation modeling, have shown that the greater the number of support functions, the greater the level of satisfaction with support. This holds true for both family and peer subsystems. Further, they report an inverse relationship of satisfaction with family support and conduct problems as well as depression. Thus, Wolchik and colleagues found that satisfaction with support relates to lower levels of symptomatology, while support functions provided are only indirectly related to symptomatology through their effects on support satisfaction. The authors suggest that even though sophisticated data-analytic strategies were utilized in the study, prospective longitudinal studies are needed to test theoretically based models of the causal relationship between support and children's behaviors.

The above mentioned points to an important point in this study--the relationship between adolescents' problem behaviors and perceived social support was unclear. Potentially, the negative relationship between adolescents' problem behaviors and perceived social support may be due to adolescents initially acting out and support providers responding by not providing as much support. Conversely, social support providers may not be perceived as providing adequate levels or types of support, thus the adolescent responds by exhibiting problem behaviors. As Wolchik et al. (1989) suggested, future research can address this question through both prospective, longitudinal studies and sophisticated data-analystic strategies (e.g., structural equation modeling).

With regard to fathers, positive parenting behaviors were particularly important for adolescents' perceptions of their fathers' support provision, which was not the case for adolescents' perceptions of their mothers' support provision. This may be a function of a number of things. First, there may be minimal differences in mothers' parenting style and

extreme variations in fathers' parenting style. Examination of the means and standard deviations of the parenting behaviors indicate, however, that the levels and variabilities of mothers' and fathers' parenting behaviors were similar. This leads to a second point--adolescents may have different expectations of their mothers and fathers. All adolescents may expect their mothers to be nurturing and non-restrictive but expect their fathers to be less nurturing but more restrictive. Thus, depending upon the type of parenting behavior exhibited by each parent, adolescents may rate their parents' support provision differentially. It is important to note, however, that the measure of parenting employed was completed by the parent not the adolescent. These perceptions may incorporate some systematic bias, thus future research should also include adolescents' reports of their mothers' and fathers' parenting style.

For peer social support, a greater number of the children in the family was associated with adolescents reporting more supportive relationships with their peers. Adolescents may have more opportunities to provide and receive supportive behaviors in larger families, thus positively influencing their interactions with peers. Consistent with prior research (Hurrelmann & Hamilton, 1996), adolescent females were shown to report higher peer attachment and better communication with their peers than adolescent males. Generally, adolescent females have been shown to share greater intimacy and understanding with their peers than have adolescent males.

Three comments on limitations and generalizability of the present work are in order. First, this study used a number of self-report measures. Specific to the measure of social support, the reliance on an individual's perceptions as the basis for assessing social support is not unique to perceived support measures. Almost all studies of social support depend

exclusively on individuals' perceptions of their support, regardless of whether the studies purport to measure social networks, enacted support, or perceived support. With reference to the measures of the family stressors and the YSR, adolescents' responses were used rather than the mothers' responses. Adolescents' responses were chosen to be included in the analyses because they were shown to greatly improve the amount of variance accounted for. There is, however, the possibility of self-report contamination. Second, a number of measures did not include validity information on their measures; thus, no validity data were included on those measures. Third, although comparisons between white/non-Hispanic and African American families were not conducted, preliminary analyses did not indicate major differences (Burchinal, Ramey, Reid, & Jaccard, 1995). The number of African American families (n=20) was too small to permit separate statistical analyses.

In summary, the findings of this investigation underscore the integrated nature of child development and the relationship of the family ecology. Advances in understanding the family as a complex social ecological system (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1988; Landesman, Jaccard, & Gunderson, 1991) emphasize the need to study the inter-relationships between changes in the family environment and changes in social support.

APPENDIX

Parenting Practices Factor Analysis

For the Parenting Practices instrument, items from the questionnaire were grouped based on a principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation. Cattell (1966) has suggested the use of a scree test for determining the number of factors for subsequent rotation. This procedure was employed, and results suggested that a two- or three-factor solution should be considered. Varimax rotations were applied in which two- and three-factor solutions were rotated. Each of these rotated factor solutions was examined. The three-factor solution was selected as the most interpretable of these. These factors included: (a) nurturance and warmth ("feel a child should be given comfort and understanding when s/he is scared or upset," "express affection by hugging, kissing, and holding my child," "my child and I have warm intimate moments together"); (b) restrictiveness ("believe a child should be seen and not heard," "have strict, well-established rules for my child," "believe that scolding and criticism makes my child improve"); and (c) fostering independence ("encourage my child to be independent of me," "if my child gets in trouble, I expect him/her to handle the problem mostly by himself/herself," "teach my child that s/he is responsible for what happens to him/her"). A summary score was obtained for each factor by adding the individual items that were retained for each factor and was used in analyses.

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