

Problematic Parent-Adolescent Communication and Adolescent Coping Strategies: Pathways of Adolescents' Depressive Symptoms

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Purpose

Problematic parent-adolescent communication may be an important predictor of adolescents' depressive symptoms because it is within the proximal context of the parent-adolescent relationship that adolescents receive feedback about their self-worth and learn ways to cope with interpersonal problems. Consistent with this view, contemporary developmental theory and empirical evidence has proposed that interpersonal processes within family relationships are significant influences on adolescent depressive symptoms and may provide one explanation for the gendered nature of depression (Grant et al., 2006; Kaslow, Broth, Arnette, & Collins, 2009). Few studies, however, have examined the roles that parent and adolescent gender play in the relationship between problematic parent-adolescent communication and adolescent depressive symptoms. Moreover, the mechanisms that explain how interpersonal stress leads to the risk for adolescent depression are not clear. Adolescent coping responses, defined as regulatory responses to stress, are possible mechanisms that may help explain this link. As such, the goal of this study was to examine whether adolescent coping strategies (i.e., denial, mental disengagement, venting emotions) mediate the relationship between parent-adolescent communication and adolescent depressive symptoms and whether adolescent gender moderates this pathway.

Sample & Design

- Participants included 686 adolescents attending a public high school in Maryland, Pennsylvania, or Delaware (53% female; Mean age = 16.15 ($SD = .75$)).
- Surveys were administered to adolescents in school during the spring of 2007 (Time 1: 10th & 11th grade), 2008 (Time 2: 11th & 12th grade), and 2009 (Time 3: 12th grade & post-high school).

Method

Problematic maternal- and paternal-adolescent communication: Adolescents reported on problematic communication with their mother and father, respectively, at Time 1 (The Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale; Barnes & Olson, 2003; $\alpha = .78$, maternal; $\alpha = .82$, paternal).

Coping strategies: Adolescents reported on their coping strategies including denial, mental disengagement, and venting emotions assessed at Time 2 (COPE Inventory; Carver et al., 1989; $\alpha = .83$, denial; $\alpha = .55$, mental disengagement; $\alpha = .83$, venting emotions).

Adolescent depressive symptoms: Adolescents reported on their depressive symptoms at Time 3 (The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children; Weissman et al., 1980; $\alpha = .90$).

Analysis Plan: Analyses were conducted using Mplus 6.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2006). To examine whether the pathways between problematic maternal- and paternal-adolescent communication, adolescent coping, and adolescent depressive symptomatology varied for boys and girls, moderated mediation models were examined using multigroup path analysis with indirect effects. Models were conducted for denial, mental disengagement, and venting emotions coping strategies, respectively. None of the pathways were moderated by gender. Therefore, boys and girls were combined for the primary analyses. Mediation analyses were conducted using bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals to predict adolescent depressive symptoms.

❖ Please contact Alyson Cavanaugh (amcavana@uncg.edu) for more information; this research was supported by grant K01-AA015059 to the second author. For a copy of this poster please visit <http://adolescentadjustmentproject.org>

Results

- Results revealed that the positive, specific indirect pathway linking maternal-adolescent problematic communication and adolescent denial coping explained a portion of the variance of the total effect (see Figure 1). That is, maternal-adolescent problematic communication predicted greater use of denial coping one year later, which in turn predicted higher depressive symptoms two years later.
- Problematic paternal-adolescent communication was not a significant predictor of the pathways.
- Also, mental disengagement and venting emotions were not significant indirect effects.

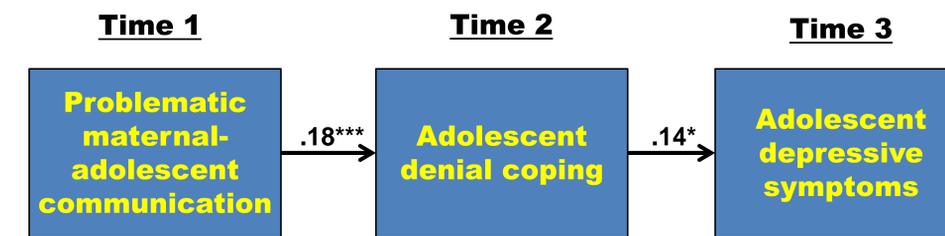


Figure 1. Specific indirect pathway predicting adolescent depressive symptoms 2-years later. The total effect of maternal-adolescent problematic communication on adolescent depressive symptoms was significant ($\beta = .168$, $p = .001$) and the direct effect showed a significant reduction once mediators were included ($\beta = .144$, $p = .004$). The specific indirect pathway displayed above was significant ($\beta = .024$; $CI = .003-.045$) and explained 14% of the total effect variance. Standardized coefficients are presented.

Conclusion

- These findings suggest that denial coping may be involved in the relationship between maternal-adolescent problematic communication and adolescent depressive symptomatology.
- Future research should examine if there are additional mechanisms that explain the link between paternal-adolescent problematic communication and adolescent depressive symptomatology.