

# The Effects of Parental Monitoring on Adolescent and Emerging Adult Contribution: A Longitudinal Examination

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore empirical associations between parental monitoring and for the first time contribution to self, family and community, as outcome of positive youth development, across time among Lithuanian youth. Data for this study are drawn from the first two available waves of an ongoing longitudinal Positive Youth Development research project (POSIDEV), conducted in Lithuania. The sample size for this study was  $N = 1098$  (54.5% girls and 45.5% boys). Measurements used: parental monitoring scale and three-dimensional contribution scale. Results indicated that parental monitoring at Time 1 predicted all components of contribution: to self ( $\beta = .37, p < .001$ ), to family ( $\beta = .49, p < .001$ ) and to community ( $\beta = .23, p < .001$ ) at Time 2. Results also indicated that parental monitoring is more strongly related to contribution in emerging adults group than in adolescents group. To conclude, results of current two-wave study highlighted the importance of the parental monitoring on the outcomes of positive youth development one year later.

**Keywords:** parental monitoring, positive youth development, contribution, adolescence, emerging adulthood

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Parental Monitoring

Parental monitoring is one of the central dimensions of parental behavior (Barber, Stolz, Olsen, Collins, & Burchinal, 2005; Kerr & Stattin, 2000) that is linked with children's adjustment, development and well-being (e.g. Kerr, Stattin, & Burk, 2010; Lewin-Bizan, Bowers, & Lerner, 2010; Napolitano et al., 2011). Monitoring is typically operationalized as parental awareness of children's whereabouts and knowledge of their activities and adaptations (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Small & Kerns, 1993). Monitoring does not require a parent to be with a child constantly nor does it imply intrusiveness. Instead it entails an active interest, awareness, and involvement in a child's day-to-day life (Small & Eastman, 1991). In fact, Stattin and Kerr (2000) pointed out, that "monitoring" is not only a parental activity, but it is also a children's contribution, voluntary descriptions of their free-time activities.

Research has indicated that parental monitoring is a multidimensional construct and that parental knowledge of adolescents' activities is positively associated with a wide range of positive outcomes and negatively associated with a wide range of negative outcomes. For example, parental monitoring is most closely associated with lower levels of problem and delinquent behavior (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Pettit, Laird, Dodge, Bates, & Criss, 2001; Stattin & Kerr, 2000), substance use (Farmer, Sinha, & Gill, 2008; Fletcher, Steinberg, & Williams-Wheeler, 2004; Shillington et al., 2005), vulnerability of adolescents (Small & Kerns, 1993), risk involvement (Li, Feigelman, & Stanton, 2000; Li, Stanton, & Feigelman, 2000), risky sexual behavior (Borawski, Ievers-Landis, Lovegreen, & Trapl, 2003), and depressive symptoms (Hamza & Willoughby, 2011). From the positive perspective appropriate monitoring sometimes is seen also as one of the features of authoritative parenting style (Gunnore, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999). An increase in perceived monitoring was associated with greater academic motivation and, in turn, showed higher grades (Henry, Merten, Plunkett, & Sands, 2008). In other study perceived parental monitoring predicted future civic engagement (Bebiroglu, Geldhof, Pinderhughes, Phelps, & Lerner, 2013). In addition, positive parenting, as measured by high levels of maternal warmth and parental monitoring, was positively related to individual self-regulatory behaviors, which in turn positively influenced higher levels of positive youth development (PYD) and youth community contributions (Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010; Napolitano et al., 2011).

Life period in which parental monitoring takes place is also very important (Tilton-Weaver, 2014). It seems particularly important to study the effects of parental monitoring in emerging adulthood because the very nature of the time period calls for greater amounts, not less, of autonomy granting by parents (Arnett, 2000).

In line with these recent developments of the parental monitoring literature, in this study I sought to further unravel the positive correlates of the parental monitoring by examining associations between contribution as outcome of positive youth development in adolescence and emerging adulthood.

### *1.2 Contribution*

Positive youth developmental model particularly emphasizes the importance of family context and parent-child relationships (Chandetal, 2013; Lerner et al., 2005). Positive youth development (PYD) is strengths-based model focused on the main assumption that the youth possess particular strengths and have potential for healthy successful development. PYD model recognizes importance of an individual's and his or her environment's connectivity and how those relationships shape human development (Benson & Saito, 2000; Benson, 2003; Chandetal, 2013; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Lerner, 2005). The literature has distinguished five positive youth development indicators (called Five C's) stimulating youth's positive developmental results. Those indicators are competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner, 2005; Lerner et al., 2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). In turn, Lerner (2004), Lerner, Dowling and Anderson (2003) have suggested that, when these five Cs are present in a young person, there emerges a sixth C, contribution. Contribution is conceptualized as behavioral and ideological positive contributions to self, family, community and civil society, arising as an outcome of positive youth development (Geldhof et al., 2014; Lerner et al., 2005). In other words, the young person possesses an identity that specifies that such contributions are predicated on moral and civic duty (Lerner et al., 2003). Recent studies of Positive Youth Development in different countries has found that higher levels of positive youth development components (the Five Cs: Caring, Character, Connection, Confidence, Competence) are positively associated with higher levels of contribution (e.g. Geldhof et al., 2014; Lerner et al., 2005; Mueller et al., 2011).

### *1.3 The Current Study*

The purpose of this study was to explore empirical associations between parental monitoring and for the first time contribution to self, family and community across time among Lithuanian youth.

Despite growing body of research on positive parenting practices and positive youth development the findings are contradictory, as in some studies parental monitoring and positive development were strongly related (e.g. Bebiroglu et al., 2013) when in other studies relationships between those two constructs were not found (e.g. Amato & Fowler, 2002). The question remains what role monitoring plays in positive youth development model. Could monitoring be described as a strengthening factor of family ecological system that predicts positive outcomes? Therefore first aim of this study was to establish longitudinal associations between parental monitoring and contribution.

Previous studies (e.g. Napolitano et al., 2011; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010) associated contribution with positive parenting factors, but only measurements concerning contribution to community were used. Considering this, the second aim was to examine these associations including not only contribution to community, but also contribution to self and family.

In addition to these two research questions, I paid close attention to age effects. The two age groups were distinguished. First one consisted of adolescents aged 14-16 years, second -beginning of the emerging adulthood (age 17-19 years). According to Arnett (2000) emerging adulthood extends from the late teens to the mid-to-late 20s.

In this study, I sought to improve understanding of how parental monitoring affect youths' contribution in adolescence and emerging adulthood. Specifically, effect of monitoring reported by adolescents on contribution to self, family and community was studied for the first time, paying attention to all three aspects of contribution.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Participants*

Data for this study are drawn from the first two available waves of an ongoing longitudinal Positive Youth Development research project, "Mechanisms of promoting positive youth development in the context of socio-economical transformations (POSIDEV)", conducted in Northeastern Lithuania, administrative region of Utena. This study community sample consists of students from five high schools participating in the first two waves (T1 and T2) of the project, collected with a 1-year interval. A total of 1,787 students (9-12 grades)

participated in the first assessment (participation rate—98.9%). For this current study, only three younger cohorts (10-12 grades at T2, N=1308, participation rate—99.1%) and only the participants who filled all relevant measures were included in the analyses. Thus, the sample size for this study was N = 1098 (54.5% girls and 45.5% boys). The age of participants ranged from 14 to 18 (M=16.61, SD=1.24) at T1 and from 15 to 19 (M=17.1, SD=0.93) at T2. The sample was diverse in terms of family and socio-economic background sat T1, 69.6% of the participants lived with two parents, the rest had a range of other family situations due to parental divorce (18.2%), loss (5.0%), migration (3.7%), or other reasons. With regard to the socio-economic status, 22.5% received state economic support (free nutrition at school), and in 23% of cases at least one of the parents was jobless. The sample was homogeneous in terms of ethnic background (i.e., absolute majority of the participants were Lithuanian and 0.6% were of different ethnic background).

## 2.2 Measures

### 2.2.1 Parental Monitoring

Parental monitoring was assessed by an eight-item scale (Small & Kerns, 1993). It assesses the extent to which parents know the whereabouts of their youngster after school and at night (e.g. My parent(s) know where I am after school), show an interest in who the teen spends time with, and discuss their child's social plans (e.g. I talk to my parents(s) about the plans I have with my friends), it also covers some youths' tendencies to provide unsolicited information (e.g. I tell my parent(s) whom I'm going to be with before I go out). The PMS scale has been reported to have adequate reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .87) and predictive validity (Small & Kerns, 1993). In the present data set, the McDonalds  $\omega$  for the PMS is 0.91 [0.90, 0.91] at T1 and 0.92 [0.91, 0.93] at T2.

### 2.2.2 Contribution

Contribution was assessed by three-dimensional contribution scale (Truskauskaitė-Kunevičienė, Kaniušonytė, & Žukauskienė, 2014). The scale consists of three five-item subscales measuring contribution to self (e.g. I like to try different activities),  $\omega = 0.87$  [0.85, 0.88], contribution to family (e.g. I often show interest in how are my family members doing),  $\omega = 0.89$  [0.88, 0.91] and contribution to community (e.g. I'm engaged in volunteering activities),  $\omega = 0.91$  [0.90, 0.92]. CFA showed acceptable model fit ( $\chi^2 = 344.9$ ,  $df = 88$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.92$ , CFI = .93, RMSEA = .092 [.082, .103]).

## 3. Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables are reported in Table 1. An analysis indicated that contribution to self, to family and to community were interrelated and they were all positively associated with parental monitoring at T1 and T2.

Table 1. Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and inter correlations among study variables (parental monitoring at both time points and contribution to self, family and community)

	Age of the participants			2	3	4	5
	Total (N=1098) M(SD)	14-16 years (n=707) M(SD)	17-19 years (n=390) M(SD)				
1. Parental monitoring T1	4.09 (.73)	4.06 (.77)	4.15 (.66)	.59**	.34**	.45**	.24**
2. Parental monitoring T2	4.06 (.77)	4.07 (.77)	4.03 (.78)		.46**	.58**	.31**
3. Contribution to Self	3.85 (.72)	3.87 (.72)	3.81 (.72)			.73**	.49**
4. Contribution to Family	3.76 (.78)	3.77 (.78)	3.76 (.77)				.40**
5. Contribution to Community	3.23 (.94)	3.20 (.95)	3.27 (.90)				

Note. \*\*p < .01.

Structural Equation Model (SEM) analyses was conducted using Mplus 6.12 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). A model (see Fig.1) consisting of five latent variables: parental monitoring at T1 and T2 (i.e., defined by eight observed indicators), contribution to self (i.e., defined by five observed indicators), contribution to family (i.e.,

defined by five observed indicators) and contribution to community (i.e., defined by five observed indicators) was tested. The model fit was tested by means of the (a)  $\chi^2/df$  ratio that should be lower than 5 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985), (b) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), that should be higher than .90, and (c) the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), that should be lower than .08 (Kline, 2011).

Results indicated that the model fitted the data reasonably ( $\chi^2 = 1997.45$ ,  $df = 424$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 4.71$ ,  $CFI = .93$ ,  $RMSEA = .058$  [.056, .061]) and revealed that monitoring at Time 1 predicted all components of contribution: to self ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ), to family ( $\beta = .49$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and to community ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In order to test if path coefficients were comparable (in two age groups - adolescence and emerging adulthood) I used a multi-group approach. Findings indicated that the model in which regression coefficients were free ( $\chi^2 = 2665.62$ ,  $df = 900$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.96$ ,  $CFI = .93$ ,  $RMSEA = .06$  [.057, .062]) to vary across the two groups (younger than 17 at T1 vs. older than 17 at T1) was significantly different ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 10.12$ ,  $\Delta df = 3$ ,  $p = .017$ ;  $\Delta CFI = .00$ ,  $\Delta RMSEA = .00$ ) from the model in which regression coefficients were fixed equal ( $\chi^2 = 2675.75$ ,  $df = 903$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.96$ ,  $CFI = .92$ ,  $RMSEA = .06$  [.057, .062]) across groups. Thus, parental monitoring is more strongly related to contribution in emerging adults.

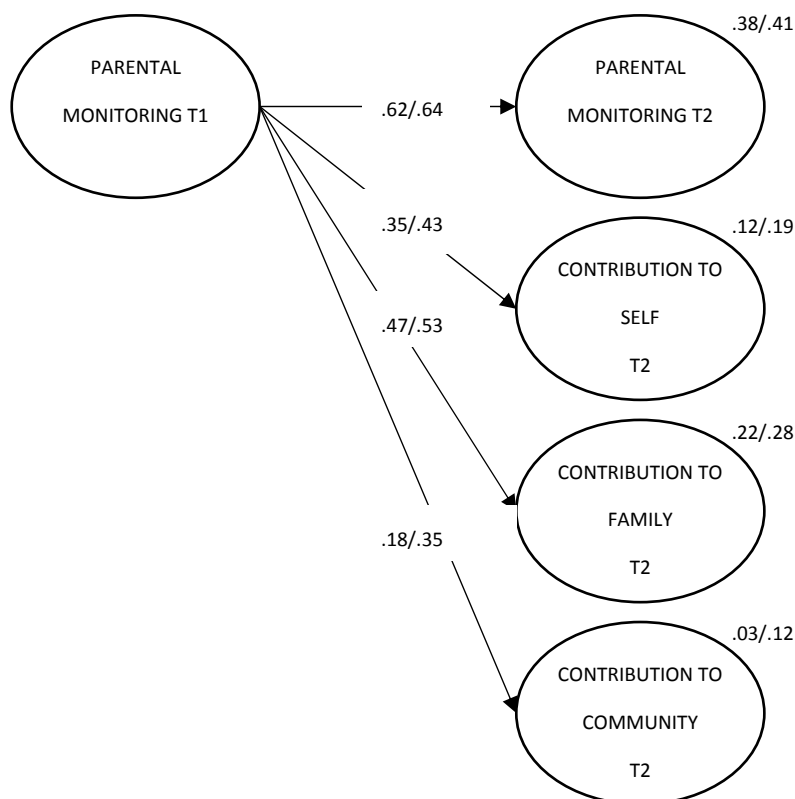


Figure 1. Standardized solution of the model tested for the adolescents (age 14-16 at Time 1) and emerging adults (age 17-18 at Time 1)

*Note.* Values for adolescents are in front of slash (/), and values for the emerging adults are behind the slash;  $p < 0.001$ .

#### 4. Discussion

The present study sought to examine the relations between parental monitoring as positive parenting factor and contribution to self, family and community. Results of current two-wave study highlighted the importance of the parental monitoring on the outcomes of positive youth development one year later.

##### 4.1 Parental Monitoring and Contribution

Evidence presented here suggests that parental monitoring is strongly related to contribution as outcome of PYD. Parental monitoring significantly predicts all three dimensions of contribution: contribution to self, to family and to community. It supports and expands their cent findings (Bebiroglu et al., 2013; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010;

Napolitano et al., 2011) that parental monitoring is important in predicting and forming civic engagement and contribution to community. Moreover in this study for the first time contribution to self and family was added into analysis, parental monitoring predicted contribution to self and family even better than contribution to community and explained more variance in these two dimensions. This result could mean that parental knowledge about their children is related to child's willingness to invest in self and family more than it's related to involvement in the community, but this association could not be interpreted directionally, reciprocal process should be considered.

#### 4.2 From Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood

Secondly I found that pattern of perceived parental monitoring differs between age groups, that means that for emerging adults parental monitoring is even more important and better predicts contribution to self, family and community. Furthermore, parental monitoring in emerging adults' group explained more variance in all three contribution dimensions, than in younger group. This lends support to the idea that in middle adolescence monitoring is less effective, than in late adolescence or even in the emerging adulthood (Tilton-Weaver, 2014). In another study on emerging adulthood parental monitoring and parental knowledge was also associated with more positive developmental outcomes (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Madsen, & Barry, 2008). The other explanation could be related to conception of monitoring itself. As Kerr and Stattin (2010) stated monitoring is more parents' knowledge of youngster's whereabouts than active surveillance and that knowledge is gained from youngster willing disclosure. If knowledge itself is not completely correct it could impact its predictive power. This idea is supported by Jensen and colleagues (2004) research, which concludes that emerging adults is less accepting of lying and reported less frequent lying to parents, compared to adolescents (Jensen, Arnett, Feldman, & Cauffman, 2004).

It is important to emphasize that contribution to community show most different pattern of contribution dimensions across age. Results show that in younger group parental monitoring predicts contribution to community relatively weakly, and for older group that prediction notably increases. It suggests the idea that appropriate monitoring in the late adolescence is important in formation of civic values and morality (which reflect contribution to community) in the beginning of emerging adulthood. Comparing adolescents' and emerging adults' means of contribution to self, family and community supports the idea that nowadays emerging adults are less civically engaged than thinking about how to create a good and satisfying life for themselves and those they love (Arnett, 2007). But the finding that outcomes related to community increases with age on the other hand bears further examination.

#### 4.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study has several limitations that should be noted. The sample of emerging adults in current study covered only the beginning of this period, it would be important to explore these connections including older participants. Second limitation is that the model postulate directional effect which is quite simplistic. Indeed scholars state that parent-child relationship is reciprocal process (Amato & Fowler, 2002) and further research is needed, then, to clarify these processes including also more parenting factors to view these connection from holistic perspective.

### 5. Conclusion

Parental monitoring significantly predicts contribution to self, family and community and this effect is stronger in emerging adulthood.

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