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Timothy Hagen
Clemson University

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The Intergenerational Transmission of Marriage Relationship Satisfaction: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent and Adult Health 1994-2008

Timothy Hagen
Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life, Graduate Program in Family and Community Studies, Clemson University

Study Purpose

• To explore the intergenerational transmission of relationship satisfaction using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health; 1994-2008).

• Hypothesis: Intimate partner relationship quality of the parent in Wave 1 is significantly related to the intimate partner relationship quality of the adult student in Wave 4 13 years later.

Method

Study Sample

• Add Health is a longitudinal study with a stratified, nationally representative sample of students from high schools and feeder schools across the US who were in 7th through 12th grade in 1994.

• The analytic sample consisted of 6,504 in Wave 1 and 5,114 in Wave 4 of the 15,243 original adolescents whose responses were included in the public use Add Health longitudinal dataset used for this study.

Measures

• Outcome variable: Relationship satisfaction scale of students in Wave 1 who are adults in Wave 4

• Predictor variables: Parental relationship satisfaction in Wave 1

• Covariates: Gender, race, parental marriage status, adult student marriage status, parenting acceptance, parenting control, number of children

Sample Descriptives

• Age (Wave 4): M = 29, SD = 1.78

• Gender: 48% male

• Race: 58% White, 23% Black, 11% Hispanic

• Married parent (Wave 1): 70%

• Married once (Wave 4): 46%

• Number of children (Wave 4) M = 1.58, SD = 1.13

Descriptive Statistics

Predictor Variable

• Parental intimate relationship satisfaction (PRS) on a single-item, ten-point scale: M = 8.41, SD 1.66

• Covariates and controls:

  • All sample descriptive variables except age

  • Parental acceptance (α = .78) on a four-item, five-point scale (Wave 1): M = 4.02, SD = .70

  • Parental control (α = .62) on a seven-item scale of zero to one (Wave 1): M = .26, SD = .22

  • Interaction terms: PRS with all covariates

Outcome Variable

• Relationship satisfaction of participants (α = .89) at Wave 4 reported in a seven-item scale: M = 4.07, SD = .82

Analytic Approach

• Hierarchical regression analysis using demographic variables, main effects, and interaction terms

Findings

• No significant interaction or moderation terms.

• Parental relationship is a significant predictor (p < .05).

• Race, parental acceptance, and being married only once are significant covariates.

Standardized Regression Coefficients for Predictors on Wave 4 Relationship Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Bivariate</th>
<th>Single covariatesa</th>
<th>Full Multivariatec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRS</td>
<td>.05**</td>
<td>.05**</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.08***</td>
<td>.05*</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental marital status</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental control</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental acceptance</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>.14***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married once</td>
<td>.15***</td>
<td>.14***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Each covariate was calculated individually with PRS.

b PRS at .05** for all individual covariates except parental acceptance (PRS β = .03) and number of children (PRS β = .06**).

c PRS calculated while controlling for all covariates.

* p ≤ .05. ** p ≤ .01. *** p ≤ .001.

Conclusions and Implications

• Parental partner relationship satisfaction does significantly predict a child’s later adult relationship satisfaction, although significance fades when parental acceptance is included as a covariate.

• The data suggest that interventions and further research to improve parental relationship quality and parental acceptance are warranted.

This work was conducted as part of a secondary data analysis course taught in IFNL by Dr. Martie Thompson.