A Longitudinal Examination of the Predictors of Parenting Efficacy

Family Social Science

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Background

- Parenting efficacy refers to parents’ beliefs about their ability to be a successful parent; it is a cognitive construct related to child outcomes and family functioning (Jones & Printz, 2005).
- Parenting efficacy has been shown to predict parents’ psychological functioning, parenting skills, and child outcomes (Costigan & Koryzma, 2011, Jones & Printz, 2005; Weaver et al., 2008).
- Education, social support, and gender have emerged as predictors of parenting efficacy (Biehle & Mickelson, 2011; Leahy-Warren et al., 2011). Beyond that, we know little about antecedents; longitudinal studies are needed to better understand processes that promote parenting efficacy (Jones & Printz, 2005).
- Self-efficacy theory provides a critical lens through which to better understand these relationships. Social capital (particularly bonding and bridging) may promote mastery experiences in parenting (Leahy-Warren et al. 2011).

Current Study

The goal of the current study was to examine predictors of parenting efficacy over time. Consistent with past research, cohabiting/marital status, income, parent education, and gender will be controlled. The following hypotheses guided this study (see Figure).

H1: A direct relationship will exist between adolescent report of parent closeness and parenting efficacy.
H2: Bonding and bridging experiences in young adulthood will partially mediate the relationship between adolescent report of parent closeness and parenting efficacy.
H3: Bridging capital, bonding capital, and human capital will predict parenting efficacy for parents at age 32.

Methods

Participants and Data Source

In 1987, YDS participants (N = 1,010) were recruited as ninth graders from the St. Paul public school district via random sampling (Mortimer, 2003). We analyzed data from a subset of participants who indicated they were parents (n = 542) in 2005. In our analytic sample, 60% were female, 86% were Caucasian, and 70% were married or cohabiting. The mean income was $63,486 (SD = $35,941), and 76% reported having technical training or schooling beyond high school.

Measures

- Parent closeness (wave 4): closeness for both mothers and fathers, measured by a 6 item scale (6 items; 1 = not close to 4 = close; a = .86 [.87]). An example of a closeness item is “How often do you do things with your mother/father that you enjoy?”
- Bridging capital (wave 8): volunteering (0 = never, 1 = temporarily, 2 = regularly), attendance at religious meetings (1 = never to 5 = more than once a week), and employment (0 = not employed to 1 = employed).
- Bonding capital (wave 8): friendship closeness (1 = not close at all to 4 = extremely close), friend support (1 = No, I don’t to 4 = Yes, I am very sure I do)
- Education (wave 12): Response options ranged from 1 = less than high school to 7 = Ph.D. or professional degree.

Modeling Antecedents of Parenting Efficacy

![Diagram of Parenting Efficacy Model]

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to examine predictors of parenting efficacy in early adulthood. A direct relationship between parent-adolescent closeness and parenting efficacy was entirely accounted for by three pathways. Closeness with parents in adolescence (age 18) had an indirect relationship with feelings of parenting efficacy (age 32) through three pathways. First, closeness with parents (age 18) predicted experiences of bridging capital in young adulthood (age 22), which in turn predicted educational attainment (age 27). Although there was not a direct path from bridging closeness to parenting efficacy as hypothesized, the level of education that participants achieved mediated the relationship between bridging capital and a sense of parenting efficacy (age 32). Second, a pathway was confirmed where closeness with parents in adolescence had an indirect effect on parenting efficacy through friendship experiences in young adulthood. Third, closeness with parents in adolescence was related to cohabitating with an intimate partner or being married at age 32, which in turn predicted parenting efficacy.

Conclusion and Implications

- These findings suggest that individuals who have close relationships with their parents as they transition into adulthood are likely to experience forms of bonding and bridging capital which later influence their experience of parenthood.
- Findings suggest that different resources may be available to an individual based on his or her past relationships.
- These data also suggest that bridging and bonding capital, educational attainment, and relationship status are crucial factors for more fully understanding the relationship between parent-child closeness and parenting efficacy, and ultimately child well-being.
- Understanding how contextual and individual differences may moderate the relationship between social capital and parenting variables is an important future direction of this research.

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