



# Parental efficacy, parental monitoring efficacy, and monitoring among Asian-Indian parents of adolescents living in Chennai, India



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between parental efficacy and a new concept entitled parental monitoring efficacy, and to examine the association between parental monitoring efficacy and monitoring. We conducted two studies on two samples of Asian-Indian parents and adolescents living in Chennai, India. In the first study of 241 parents of adolescents in grades, 9–12, we constructed a new measure of parental efficacy that included two factors. The first factor, responding competently to negative adolescent behavior was more strongly predictive of parental monitoring efficacy than the second factor, instilling positive behavior. In the second study of 215 parents and adolescents in grades 10 and 12, parental monitoring efficacy predicted monitoring, especially adolescent disclosure and parental control. The importance of parental control as a monitoring technique among traditional Indian parents was discussed.

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The primary purpose of the present study was to develop and examine an important new parenting construct called *parental monitoring efficacy* designed to assess the confidence parents have about their ability to effectively monitor their adolescents. We were unable to find any reference to parental monitoring efficacy, and we suspect that the present study is the first to examine this new construct. Parental monitoring efficacy is best viewed as a transactional construct: parents who possess high monitoring efficacy should be more effective monitors of their adolescents; and as parents have more successes monitoring their adolescents they should show an increase in parental monitoring efficacy. In the present cross-sectional study, we investigated the interrelationships among several variables theoretically related to parental monitoring efficacy. These relationships were examined among parents and adolescents who live in Chennai, India.

We view the relationship between parental monitoring efficacy and parental monitoring as reciprocal, but in the present cross-sectional study we examine parental monitoring efficacy as a predictor of parental monitoring. The present study is not a longitudinal study, however, so it is not possible to determine the true temporal order of monitoring efficacy and monitoring. Although efficacy beliefs emerge from behavior, it was Bandura, himself, who highlighted the importance of perceived self-efficacy as a contributor to behavior in his original formulation of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1997) linked self-efficacy to human agency, and proposed that intentional behavior is a reflection of individuals' perceptions that they are exercising control over what they do. Extrapolating from this general conceptualization to monitoring, parents high

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in monitoring efficacy should believe they have some control over the monitoring process and should engage in behaviors designed to actively monitor their adolescents, further strengthening their monitoring efficacy. In contrast, parents low on monitoring efficacy may believe they have little ability to monitor their adolescents and, therefore, try only halfheartedly to monitor their children, quickly giving up when they encounter difficulties, confirming their initial beliefs. In the present study, we expect parental monitoring efficacy to be an indicator of parental monitoring.

Although the concept of parental monitoring efficacy is new, an extensive body of research exists on the global concept of parental efficacy, which has been defined broadly as the expectations parents have that they can successfully parent their children (Coleman & Karraker, 1998). According to Jones and Prinz (2005), parental efficacy has been defined and assessed in three ways: general parental efficacy, the degree to which a parent feels competent to perform the role of parent; task-related parental efficacy, based on a summation of many specific parenting tasks; and narrow-domain parental efficacy, which focuses on one parenting domain assessed with several task-specific items. Our initial conceptualization of parental efficacy was to define it as a combination of general and narrow-domain efficacy. We developed a set of questionnaire items designed to assess parents' beliefs in their general ability to parent their adolescents and in their specific ability to monitor their adolescents. Our first hypothesis is that a factor analysis of the items measuring parental efficacy will reveal two factors: general parental efficacy; and parental monitoring efficacy.

One of the most important and difficult challenges associated with parenting adolescents is monitoring them, a critically important task related to the prevention of adolescent involvement in risky activities (Crouter & Head, 2002). As it was originally defined, parental monitoring was the knowledge parents had about where their adolescents were, whom they were with, and what they were doing when the adolescents were not with their parents (Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984).

Little research exists on the relationship between parental efficacy and monitoring. The research that does exist is based on the original conceptualization of monitoring as parental knowledge. In one study, the relationship between perceived parenting competence, a variable similar to general parental efficacy, and parental monitoring (knowledge) was examined. Findings revealed that parents who reported higher parental competence had adolescents who reported that their parents were well-informed about their lives (Bogenschneider, Small, & Tsay, 1997). In another study, general parental efficacy was related to parental monitoring (knowledge) about who their adolescents spent time with and where their adolescent were when they were not at home (Shumow & Lomax, 2002). Based on these findings, our second hypothesis is that parental efficacy will be associated with parental monitoring efficacy.

The present study extends previous research on parental efficacy and monitoring in three directions. First, we expect parental monitoring efficacy to be separate from, but related to, general parental efficacy. Second, we expect general parental efficacy to be associated with parental monitoring efficacy. Third, we expect to find a positive relationship between parental monitoring efficacy and a newer conceptualization of monitoring as the *processes* by which parents acquire information about their adolescents.

Monitoring is now seen as the processes by which parents obtain information about their adolescents, and not the knowledge itself, which is viewed as an outcome of monitoring (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Kerr and Stattin identified three important monitoring processes, all of which are examined in the present study: parent solicitation of information from the adolescent; the adolescent's voluntary disclosure of information to a parent; and parental attempts to control the adolescent. Stattin and Kerr (2000) reported that parental knowledge of adolescent behavior was more highly related to adolescent self-disclosure than it was to parental solicitation or to parental control, a finding replicated in several studies of parents and adolescents in the U.S. and Scandinavia (Stattin, Kerr, & Tilton-Weaver, 2010). In an important longitudinal study of Swedish adolescents, youth disclosure at time one was a significant predictor of parental knowledge and low delinquency at time two, but parental solicitation and parental control were unrelated to knowledge or delinquency (Kerr, Stattin, & Burk, 2010).

The finding that adolescent disclosure is a more important monitoring process than solicitation or control may not generalize to non-Western parents. The significance of self-disclosure over solicitation and control is part of a general Western ethos that emphasizes the importance of adolescent autonomy and of the need for parents to relinquish control of their adolescents. In contrast, in Asian countries attachment to family remains high even during adolescence, and parents remain deeply involved in the lives of their adolescents. India has an ancient tradition that emphasizes parental obedience and family communality. Intrusive and inquisitive parental behaviors, such as solicitation and control, are viewed as protection and care, and are accepted and expected by both parents and adolescents (Kapadia, 2008). Research on monitoring in non-Western societies is needed to determine the cross-cultural generalizability of the finding that adolescent self-disclosure is a more important monitoring process than parental solicitation or parental control.

Numerous studies have found that in societies such as India that stress interdependence, parents, especially fathers, emphasize control and obedience over autonomy (Rudy & Grusec, 2006; Sriram, 2011). In collectivist societies parental strictness is a style of parenting accepted as normal by adults and children of all ages, including adolescents, and it is not viewed as prying or mistrust Kağıçbaşı (1996). In these types of societies, adolescents may accept parental solicitation and attempts to exercise control over them as legitimate forms of monitoring arising from love and concern. Although India is a society in the midst of profound cultural change, many parents continue to subscribe to a traditional parenting philosophy that emphasizes parental control and obedience to parents (Garda & Alexander, 2009). Based on these considerations, our third hypothesis is that Indian parents who are efficacious monitors not only rely on adolescent disclosure, but also on parental solicitation and control.

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