Who Can I Tell?: The Role of Confidants in Rule-Violating Behavior

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Confidants are generally viewed as positive influences on people’s lives, especially for adolescents. Previous research shows that having a confidant is related to:

- Increased quality of relationship with the parents
- Increased interpersonal relationships
- Higher psychological well-being (self-esteem)
- Decreased acts of delinquency
- Decreased depressive affect
- Decreased feelings of loneliness and depression
- Having no confidant is linked to opposing results, including higher depressive symptomology

Having a parental confidant is related to:

- Higher parental support and monitoring
- Lower levels of RVB

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Compared to having any adult confidant, having no confidant is associated with higher levels of depression and rule-violating behavior.

Hypothesis 2: Compared to any other type of confidant, having a parental confidant is associated with the lowest levels of depression and rule-violating behavior.

Method

- New Hampshire Youth Study (NYHS), a longitudinal study focusing on determining reasons for adolescents’ rule-violating behavior.
- Of the 684 participants, the average age was 14.7 and were mostly female at 57.6%.
- The data used was collected at two time-points:
  - Fall of 2008 (T1)
  - Spring of 2009 (T2)

- Measures:
  - If they had an adult confidant (T1)
  - If yes, to list what relation they had to that person (T1)
  - How many RVBs they had engaged in during the last 6 months (T2)
  - Variety measure
  - In the past 6 months how many times have you hit or seriously threatened to hit someone?
  - To report their level of depression over the last 6 months (T2)

- Rule-Violating Behavior (RVB) data was used determining reasons for adolescents’ rule-breaking behaviors (RVB) and levels of depression.

Results

- Adult Confidant vs. No Confidant

- Parental confidants were associated with the lowest levels of depression and rule-violating behavior.
- Theft was significantly higher in both the non-family and no confidant category compared to having a parental confidant.

Implications

- The results supported our hypotheses.
- Having any type of confidant is associated with lower levels of depression and less RVB than having no confidant.
- Parental confidants were associated with the lowest levels of depression and RVB.
- In general, having any type of confidant is beneficial to adolescents, because of its association with decreased depressive symptomology and engagement in RVB.

Limitations & Future Directions

- One limitation of this study is that the data, although longitudinal, could only show correlation, not causation. A lot more information would be available if an experiment could be created to show causation between having a confidant and levels of RVB.
- A future direction for this research would be to look at whether having adolescent peer confidants is also associated with decreased depression and RVB.

References