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Parenting Practices and Perceived Social Support: Longitudinal Relations with the Social Competence of Mexican-origin Children

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Abstract

Social bonds and supportive relationships are widely recognized as being indispensable to healthy psychological functioning and well-being. Social support is a psychological resource that is expected to also contribute positively to parenting practices. The present study longitudinally examined the relations between mothers' ($N = 674$) and fathers' ($N = 430$) perceived social support and parenting behaviors, and their relations with children's social competence during early adolescence in Mexican-origin single and two-parent families. Our constructs of interest (warm parenting, monitoring, perceived social support, and children's social competence) were significantly correlated at T1, and demonstrated significant stability across time for both parental models. Parental warmth (as reported by the child, and opposite parent) and parental monitoring (self-reported by mothers and fathers) were correlated and also showed bidirectional associations across time. Parental monitoring at T2 positively predicted change in children's social competence at T3 (controlling for T1 social competence) for mothers. Parental warmth at T2 positively predicted change in children's social competence at T3 (controlling for T1 social competence) for fathers. For mothers, the indirect effect of social support at T1 on children's social competence at T3 via parental monitoring at T2 (and controlling for prior levels) was significant. Findings suggest that maternal perceived social support contributes to children's social competence due to its positive relation to maternal monitoring. Results may also suggest that mothers' and fathers' parenting behaviors differentially relate to children's social competence in Latino families, although additional work focused on comparing parenting behaviors in two-parent families is needed.

Keywords

Mexican-origin; social support; warm parenting; parental monitoring; social competence

While it is generally recognized that the majority of youth in the U.S. today face challenges as they transition from middle childhood into adolescence, these issues are often markedly exacerbated for Latino youth whom are disproportionately exposed to higher concentrations of poverty, traumatic life events, racism, risky neighborhoods, and other socioeconomic disadvantages. Latino youth in particular are exposed to risk factors such as discrimination and poverty that are negatively associated with peer and school success, two components of social competence (Cauce, Cruz, Corona, & Conger, 2011; Coltrane et al., 2004). Effective parenting practices such as parental warmth and monitoring are expected to help buffer youth from such risks and have been shown to be important factors in predicting social competence in children and adolescents (Gardner & Cutrona, 2004). Therefore, examining processes that positively relate to parenting behaviors and in turn social competence of children may have important developmental implications for Latino youth, particularly as researchers have most often focused on deficit models that emphasize Latino families' vulnerabilities rather than examining how families successfully promote the well-being of their children (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). The present study was interested in social influences that facilitate positive parenting behaviors for Latino parents that promote their children's adjustment. Specifically, we hypothesized that social support networks could provide important financial, emotional, and childcare support, which in turn facilitate positive parenting behaviors, and social competence in Latino youth.

Social Support as a Positive Contributor to Parenting

Perceived Social Support

Social bonds and supportive relationships are widely recognized as being indispensable to healthy psychological functioning and general well-being, especially in relation to the development and course of psychopathology (Ensel & Lin, 1991, Kessler, Price, & Wortman, 1985; Robinson & Garber, 1999). Social support refers to one's social bonds, social integration, and primary group relations. It reflects a persons' feeling of being loved, valued, and able to count on others during times of need (Cobb, 1976, in Turner & Brown, 2010). Perceived support or 'emotional support' is the subjective belief that one has a caring and available social network, and is more strongly associated with mental health and well-being than other forms of social support (Turner & Brown, 2010). Researchers have found that social support can both prevent and alleviate stress; individuals with supportive social networks encounter fewer adverse circumstances and are more resilient to stressful situations when they occur (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Thompson, Flood, & Goodwin, 2006).

Examining social support processes in Latino families is of particular interest due to the importance placed on family connections and communal values within this population (Cauce & Domenici Rodriguez, 2002; Coltrane, Parke, & Adams, 2004). Researchers have found that Latino adults, compared to adults of other ethnic backgrounds, are more likely to rely on family members for instrumental and emotional support (Almeida, Molnar, Karachi, & Subramanian, 2009; MacPhee, Frit, & Miller-Heel, 1996). Social support may be particularly important for immigrant families who are often separated from extended family networks and must establish new support systems (Vega, Kolody, & Valle, 1987; Vega, Kolody, Valle, & Weir, 1991). Additionally, social support may be an important resource

for Latino families who experience higher than average levels of demographic risks such as low median household income, higher poverty rates, and lower educational attainment (Pew Research Center, 2013). From a family stress perspective, these demographic factors are often negatively associated with parenting behaviors and, in turn, child well-being and adjustment (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Consistent with this perspective, environmental risk factors have been shown to spill over to affect the quality of maternal parenting in Latino families (Loukas, Prelow, Suizzo, & Allua, 2008).

Social Support and Parenting

Social support is a psychological resource that not only buffers individuals against poor psychological health, but may also promote positive behaviors. Supporting this hypothesis, social support has been positively linked to involved and nurturing parenting (Burchinal, Follmer, & Bryant, 1996; Hashima & Amato, 1994). When parents feel supported by their social networks, they are more likely to engage in positive parenting practices, such as warmth, monitoring and supportiveness, even when experiencing significant adversity or challenges (Conger et al., 1999; Lorenz, Conger, & Montague, 1994; McConnell, Breitreuz, & Savage, 2011). Additionally, parents who have higher levels of perceived social support report feeling more effective (MacPhee et al., 1996; Marshall, et al., 2001). For example, studies with African American single-mothers have found that mothers with higher levels of social support also engage in higher levels of parental warmth and monitoring (Ceballos & McLoyd, 2002; Miller, McKay & Baptist, 2007; Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willet, & Stephens 2001; Taylor, 1996; Taylor, Seaton, & Dominguez, 2008); behaviors that, in turn, promote positive adjustment and competence in children (Sashimi & Amato, 1994; Thompson, et al., 2006).

Researchers have less frequently examined associations between social support and parenting strictly in Mexican-origin families, especially across time (for exceptions see Ghazarian & Roche, 2010; Izzo, et al., 2000; MacPhee et al., 1996; Prelow, Weaver, Bowman, & Swenson, 2010), and none examined the role of social support on fathers' parenting behaviors. Prelow and colleagues (2010) found that social support networks buffered Latina mothers experiencing high levels of economic strain, from psychological distress, and in turn had positive effects on parenting behaviors. Cardoso and colleagues (2010) reported that social support lessened the parenting stress in a predominantly single-mother, low-income sample. Using a longitudinal study, researchers also found that the social support networks of low-income Latino and African American families facilitated engaged parenting which, in turn, deterred youth from delinquency in early adolescence (Ghazarian & Roche, 2010). Positive links between social support and parenting in Mexican origin families are likely as it appears that social support can help parents feel more efficacious (Izzo et al., 2000; Umaña-Taylor, Guimond, Updegraff, & Jahromi, 2013) and satisfied (MacPhee et al., 1996), consistent with the hypothesis that social support buffers the effects of hardships on parenting (Thompson, 2006).

Fathering in Latino Families—Although the majority of Latino children live in two-parent households, research on fathering in Latino families remains sparse, and has largely focused on fathering in early childhood (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Campos, 2008).

Additionally, few studies of Latino fathers assess fathers' parenting behaviors across time, so causality and direction of effects is hard to determine (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). Researchers have reported that Latino fathers demonstrate more responsibility and egalitarian attitudes toward child care and rearing than White fathers (Hofferth, 2003); however, there is not a clear set of fathering practices in Latino families that have been found to relate to positive adjustment in children (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012), or findings are mixed. For example, one study found that cultural values contributed to paternal parenting behaviors (Cruz et al., 2011), however other studies have not found such a link (Taylor et al., 2012). Family relationships, specifically the marital relationship, have been found to contribute to parenting behaviors (Taylor et al., 2012); however, no studies have examined how perceived social support may contribute to fathering behaviors in Latino families. Studies using nationally representative samples have reported that Latino fathers monitor their children less than Black or White fathers (Hofferth, 2003), whereas another reported that Latino fathers are more likely than White fathers to monitor and devote more time to their children (Toth & Xu, 1999).

Fewer researchers have examined fathering processes that contribute to children's adjustment and development. However, researchers have found that Latino fathers who are highly involved and engaged have children with higher levels of positive adjustment, more positive peer relations and social relationships, and higher levels of overall competence (for a review see, Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). Thus it is likely that Latino fathers make important contributions to children's development consistent with research based largely on middle-class European-origin families (Campos, 2008; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Parke, 2002; Pleck, 2007), although more research is needed.

Social Support, Parenting, and Child Adjustment

Addressing factors that potentially relate to positive parenting behaviors in Latino families is important, as researchers have found that positive outcomes are possible for Mexican-origin youth if family processes such as effective parenting behaviors are maintained in spite of challenging circumstances (Dennis et al., 2003; Dumka, et al., 2009; Eamon, 2005; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2012; Loukas & Prelow, 2004; Prelow, Loukas, Jordan-Green, 2007). For example, involved and warm parenting has been associated cross-sectionally with Mexican-origin adolescents' grades, school behavior and peer competence (Dumka et al., 2009). Loukas and colleagues (2008) found that mothers' parenting (school involvement, monitoring, communication) negatively predicted associations of Mexican-origin youth with deviant peers; while other researchers reported that mothers' positive parenting behaviors predicted improvements in children's self-efficacy (Leidy et al., 2012).

Positive parenting, such as support and monitoring, as well as traditional Mexican cultural values have been linked to Mexican-origin youth's academic success (Dumka, Gonzales, Bonds, & Millsap, 2009; Eamon, 2005; Gonzales, et al., 2008; Plunkett, & Bámaca-Gómez, 2003). Supportive parenting has also been linked to lower internalizing and externalizing problems in Mexican-origin youth (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Henry, & Florsheim, 2000; Manongdo & Garcia, 2007). These studies suggest that positive parenting behaviors are an

important resource for child and adolescent competence and success in Mexican-origin families.

Present Study

In the present study we longitudinally examined the relations between mothers' ($N = 674$) and fathers' ($N = 430$) perceived social support and parenting behaviors, and their relations with children's social competence during early adolescence in Mexican-origin single and two-parent families. Specifically we tested whether mothers and fathers perceived social support would predict changes in parental monitoring and parental warmth, and in turn contribute to children's social competence. In the present study, we focused on children's social competence as a measure of adjustment, given that the transition into adolescence is typically a period of significant risk for delinquency and other developmental problems that are linked with poor social and academic competence (Scaramella, Conger, & Simons, 1999). We expected that perceived social support would positively predict both parental monitoring and warm parenting, and that parental monitoring and warm parenting would positively relate to children's social competence.

This study extended previous research in several ways. First, most prior research examining social support has been cross-sectional, and therefore has been unable to assess whether social support has an effect on parenting behaviors across time. We examined relations between warm parenting, parental monitoring and perceived social support using two time points; therefore, we were able to test both cross-sectional relations as well as predictions across time. Furthermore, few studies have examined relations between social support and parenting behaviors in Mexican-origin families, and no studies have examined these relations with both fathers and mothers. A second strength of the present study is that we assessed whether parenting behaviors predicted change in children's social competence from 5th to 7th grade, which is an important developmental period for both peer and academic competence. Last, our study focuses on positive functioning in Mexican-origin families rather than on risk and vulnerabilities, consistent with a family resilience perspective (Walsh, 2006). For example, past research has found that factors such as dispositional optimism (Taylor et al., 2012) and family cohesion (Behnke, Macdermid, Coltrane, Parke, Duffy, & Wildman, 2008) are beneficial for maintaining positive parenting behaviors in Mexican-origin families. The present study examines whether social support also contributes positively to parenting and child adjustment in Mexican-origin families.

Methods

Participants

Data for the current study were drawn from the California Families Project (CFP), an ongoing longitudinal study of Mexican origin families in a metropolitan area in Northern California. The overall aim of the project was to examine developmental processes associated with risk and resilience in Mexican American children and families during the transition from late childhood to early adolescence. Families included two-parent ($N = 549$, 82%) and single-parent ($N = 125$, 18%) families who were recruited from school rosters during the 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 school years when their child was in fifth grade.

Criteria for inclusion in the study included: (a) the biological mother and father identified as Mexican or Mexican American; (b) the father in two-parent families had to be the biological father of the focal child; (c) single-mother families were eligible if there was no other adult living in the household; and (d) the child had to be living with their biological mother. Sixty-nine percent of eligible families agreed to participate, which is comparable to the response rates reported by other community studies that attempt to recruit multiple family members (Capelin & Patterson, 1987).

Interviews were conducted with the focal children, their mothers, and their fathers (if present), with all participants compensated for their participation. Of the two-parent families, 80% ($N=438$) of fathers directly participated in the interviews in T1. Children averaged 10.4 years of age at T1 ($SD = 0.6$), and were approximately evenly split across gender (51.9% female). Trained research staff interviewed the participants in their homes using laptop computers equipped with audio computer-assisted self-interviewing (ACASI), and participants were paid for their participation. Interviews were conducted in Spanish or English based on the preference of the participant.

The families in the study lived in urban or in suburban areas. Twenty-nine percent of the children, 84% of the mothers, and 88% of the fathers were born in Mexico (the remainder were all born in the United States). On average, mothers had spent 16.1 years ($SD = 10.6$) in the United States, and fathers 19.4 years ($SD = 9.8$). Thirty-eight percent of mothers and 40% of fathers did not attend high school; 25% of mothers and 25% of fathers completed some high school; 18% of mothers and 20% of fathers completed high school or had a general equivalency diploma; and 19% of mothers and 15% of fathers had some college, a college degree, or a graduate degree; of those who completed high school or less, the median grade achieved was ninth grade for both mothers and fathers.

The present study used three waves of data (T1, T2, and T3) when children were in 5th, 6th, and 7th, grade respectively. To investigate the potential impact of attrition, *t* tests comparing values of the major variables and demographic variables for children with no data with those with data at T3 ($N = 85$, or 12.6% for mother model, and $N = 47$, or 10.9% for father model). For the mother model significant differences were found for social support at T2 ($p = .02$, mean difference = $-.32$, standard error difference = $.14$, $t = -2.28$), and marginal differences for fathers' education ($p = .06$, mean difference = $-.99$, standard error difference = $.53$, $t = -1.89$) and mothers' education ($p = .06$, mean difference = $-.84$, standard error difference = $.43$, $t = -1.92$). For the father model significant differences were found for mothers' education ($p = .03$, mean difference = -1.29 , standard error difference = $.60$, $t = -2.15$), and marginal differences for fathers' education ($p = .06$, mean difference = -1.12 , standard error difference = $.60$, $t = -2.30$).

Procedures

Trained research staff interviewed families in either Spanish or English at their homes using laptop computers. Measures were translated from English to Spanish by bilingual staff, and back translated by different staff to assure that the meaning of all measures was equivalent across languages. Approximately 80% of the mothers, 80% of the fathers, and 20% of the children elected to complete their interviews in Spanish. Most interviewers were of Mexican

origin. Interviews were conducted in separate parts of the home so that answers to questions were confidential. Each participant (mother, child, and father if present) was interviewed separately so that family members could not hear each other's responses.

Measures

Perceived social support—This latent variable was self-reported by parents at T1 and T2 using two four-item scales from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). The MSPSS has been validated with Mexican-origin respondents (Edwards, 2004). Each scale was used as a separate indicator for the social support latent construct. The first scale asked about the support the subject received from relatives who did not live with the subject, and the second asked about support received from friends. Items included questions such as “You can count on your [relatives/friends] when things go wrong,” and “You have [relatives/friends] with whom you can share your joys and sorrows.” Responses ranged from 1 = ‘not at all true’ to 4 = ‘very true’ (T1: mothers $\alpha = .92$; fathers $\alpha = .89$; T2: mothers $\alpha = .89$; fathers $\alpha = .91$).

Parental monitoring—Parental monitoring was self-reported at T1 and T2 by parents using a 14-item scale adapted from one developed by Small and Kerns (1993), and Small and Luster (1994). Small's original scale was an adolescent self-report measure. The project investigators created an equivalent parent report version to assess parents' perspectives that has been used in prior work (Castro-Schilo et al., 2013; Taylor, et al., 2012). The time frame was changed to the past 3 months, and verb tenses were changed to past tense (e.g. “Over the past 3 months, you knew how [CHILD] was doing in his/her school work”). Responses ranged from 1 = ‘almost never or never’ to 4 = ‘almost always or always’ (T1: mothers $\alpha = .85$; fathers $\alpha = .85$; T2: mothers $\alpha = .85$; fathers $\alpha = .87$). In order to construct a latent variable with 3 indicators for this construct the 14 items were randomly distributed into parcels with 5 items in each of the first two indicators, and four items making up the third indicator (Coffman & MacCallum, 2005; Kishton & Widaman, 1994).

Warm parenting—The latent variable for warm parenting used the nine-item warmth subscale from the Behavioral Affect Rating Scale (BARS), which measures warmth and hostility within a marital or parent-child relationship. The BARS was developed for research with rural families in Iowa and has proven to be reliable and valid with diverse ethnic groups (Conger, et al., 2010). Warm parenting was reported at T1 and T2 by the child about the parent, and by the opposite parent (i.e., mothers reported about father warmth to the child, and fathers reported about mother warmth to the child). Responses ranged from 1 = ‘almost never or never’ to 4 = ‘almost always or always.’ Items included asking how often over the past 12 months the parent engaged in supportive behaviors, such as helping the target or being affectionate. (At T1: child report of father's warmth, $\alpha = .86$; child report of mother's warmth, $\alpha = .81$; mother report of father's warmth to child, $\alpha = .88$; father report of mother's warmth to child, $\alpha = .77$. At T2: child report of father's warmth, $\alpha = .87$; child report of mother's warmth, $\alpha = .88$; mother report of father's warmth to child, $\alpha = .91$; father report of mother's warmth to child, $\alpha = .85$). Items were matched across reporters (i.e. specific items reported by parents and children were placed together on the same indicators) and distributed into three parcels, providing three indicators of parental warmth.

Child social competence—Social competence was child reported at T1 and T3 using two scales that reflect positive functioning in school: *peer competence* and *attachment to school*. *Peer competence* was measured using the nine-item Coatsworth Competence Scale. Responses ranged from 1 = ‘not at all true’ to 4 = ‘very true.’ Sample items included “You help other kids in your class” (T1: $\alpha = .68$; T3: $\alpha = .70$). The 12-item *attachment to school* scale was developed for the project, and included items such as “You like to do well in school”. Responses ranged from 1 = ‘not at all true’ to 4 = ‘very true’ (T1: $\alpha = .76$; T3: $\alpha = .80$). The two scales were combined and randomly distributed into three parcels in order to construct a latent variable.

Covariates—The following mother reported covariates were included in the analyses: *child sex* (0 = female, 1 = male); *parental education in years* (mean for mothers = 9.16 years, $SD = 3.72$; mean for fathers = 9.08 years, $SD = 3.78$); *marital status*: 0 = two-parent household, 1 = single-mother household; and *household income*: 1 = \$0–25,000 (38% of sample), 2 = \$25,001 to \$45,000 (38% of sample), 3 = \$45,001 to \$65,000 (15% of sample), and 4 = \$65,001 and higher (9% of sample).

Analysis Strategy

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to evaluate predictions from the conceptual model (Figure 1). Statistical models were fit to the data using the Mplus program Version 7.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2013). To evaluate the fit of a structural model, we used the standard chi-square index of statistical fit that is routinely provided under maximum likelihood estimation of parameters, as well as several indices of practical fit, including the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973), and the comparative fit index (CFI, Bentler, 1990). The RMSEA is an absolute index of fit, with values under .05 indicating close fit to the data. The TLI and CFI should be greater than .90 and preferably greater than .95.

We used full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation given the presence of some missing data. FIML estimation involves the fitting of covariance structure models directly to the raw data from each participant rather than to covariances among manifest variables. This avoids deleting persons with missing data (i.e. such as in listwise deletion). FIML estimation has been found to be efficient and unbiased when data are missing completely at random or are missing at random and appears to be less biased than other approaches (Arbuckle, 1996). Statistical models were run separately for mothers and fathers given that fewer fathers than mothers participated in the study. However, marital status was included as a control variable for the mother model as both single and two-parent families were included. That is, by design all fathers in the study lived in 2-parent households but mothers could either be single-parents or living with the other parent of the child.

Results

Correlations among latent variables, as well as means and standard deviations are reported in Table 1, (mothers below the diagonal and fathers above), and were generally supportive of predicted relationships. For example, perceived social support at T1 was positively correlated with parental monitoring, parental warmth, and children’s social competence both

concurrently and across time for both mothers and fathers. Parental monitoring and warmth were significantly and positively associated with children's social competence concurrently and across time for both mothers and fathers. Overall, the correlations suggested support for our proposed statistical model.

We then specified a structural equation model (individually for mothers and fathers) that included 8 latent variables. Factor loadings of manifest indicators on latent variables were all statistically significant ($p < .01$) and relatively large (Table 2). Figures 1 and 2 provide the results for the structural equation model run separately for mothers and fathers. For mothers, the statistical index of fit was $\chi^2(319, N = 676) = 355.87, p < .05$, and practical fit indices suggested close fit of the model to data, with an RMSEA of .024, and CFI and TLI values of .986 and .983, respectively. For fathers, the statistical index of fit was $\chi^2(240, N = 430) = 316.41, p < .05$, and practical fit indices again implied close fit of the model to data, with an RMSEA of .027, and CFI and TLI values of .984 and .980, respectively.

Cross-sectional findings

Our constructs of interest were highly concurrently correlated at T1 in both the mother and father models. Social support (self-reported by each parent), was positively related to warm parenting (as reported by the child and opposite parent), positively related to parent monitoring (self-reported by each parent), and positively related to children's social competence (child reported). Parenting measures were positively correlated and were also concurrently associated with children's social competence. Concurrent relations at T2 were not significant except for a positive correlation between maternal warmth and maternal monitoring.

Predictions Across Time

For both mother and father models warm parenting, parental monitoring, and perceived social support demonstrated significant stability across a two year period from T1 to T2. However, despite this high stability we found that perceived social support at T1 positively predicted mother's monitoring at T2 (controlling for prior levels), although this finding was non-significant for fathers. Unexpectedly, perceived social support at T1 did not significantly predict warm parenting at T2 for either parent, although this relation was approaching significance for fathers ($b = .09, SE = .06, p = .12$); however these variables were significantly associated in the zero-order correlations for both parents (see Table 1). Mother and father parenting behaviors had bidirectional relations across time (warm parenting at T1 positively predicted parental monitoring at T2, controlling for prior levels; and parental monitoring at T1 positively predicted parental warmth at T2, controlling for prior levels). In terms of child social competence, maternal monitoring at T2 positively predicted children's social competence at T3 (controlling for T1 social competence). Paternal warmth at T2 positively predicted children's social competence at T3 (controlling for T1 social competence). Lastly, there was an indirect effect from mothers' perceived social support at T1 to children's social competence at T3 via maternal monitoring at T2 using the model indirect test in Mplus ($b = .05, SE = .02, z = 2.04, p < .05$).

Covariates

Control variables (child sex, father's education, and income) were regressed on T1 variables. Significant maternal paths were: mother's education on maternal monitoring ($b = .26, SE = .04, p < .01$); mother's education on perceived social support ($b = .22, SE = .05, p < .01$), and household income on perceived social support ($b = .16, SE = .05, p < .01$). Significant paternal paths were: father's education on paternal monitoring ($b = .12, SE = .06, p < .05$); father's education on child social competence ($b = .15, SE = .06, p < .01$), and education on paternal warmth ($b = .15, SE = .05, p < .01$).

Discussion

We examined the relations between parents' perceived social support, their parenting behaviors, and in turn, children's social competence during early adolescence in Mexican-origin families. Our work builds on other empirical and theoretical work examining social support and parenting behaviors. Overall, we found that perceived social support was positively linked within time to parental warmth as well as to parental monitoring for Mexican-origin mothers and fathers, and predicted parental monitoring across time for mothers. These findings are consistent with studies of other ethnic groups that have demonstrated that parents with higher levels of social support engage in higher levels of positive parenting behaviors such as warmth and monitoring (i.e. Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002; Murry, et. al., 2001). The finding that mothers' perceived social support indirectly promoted children's social competence through its effect on maternal monitoring is also consistent with studies that have reported that parents' social support is beneficial to youth in addition to the parents themselves (Thompson, 2006). Similarly to Ghazarian and Roche (2010), who found that Latino mothers' social support at T1 positively predicted maternal engagement at T2, and in turn negatively predicted delinquency across adolescence, we also found that social support contributes to positive adjustment in Latino youth. However, we expanded this prior work to two other parenting constructs (parental monitoring and parental warmth) and also examined these relations with a sample of Mexican-origin fathers. These findings support the hypothesis that parents' support networks have important consequences, not only for the well-being of parents themselves, but also for youth and children through benefiting positive parenting behaviors (Thompson, 2006).

Our results may also suggest that mothers' and fathers' parenting behaviors differentially relate to children's social competence in Latino families, although additional work is needed. We found that maternal monitoring predicted changes in children's social competence, whereas for fathers, paternal warmth predicted children's social competence. It is unclear whether social support affected mothers and fathers differently in our sample, although researchers have found that females are more likely to seek out and utilize their social support networks than males (Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenwald, Gerung, & Updegraff, 2000; Turner & Brown, 2010). It is possible that Latino mothers may have more responsibility for facilitating their children's whereabouts and organizing their children's lives than Latino fathers, resulting in paternal warmth being more salient for children's social competence. Future research should focus on comparing parenting behaviors of mothers and fathers in two-parent families, as well as whether social support from a non-

resident co-parent benefits Latino single-parents. It is also likely that social support, as well as parenting behaviors, is linked to the quality of the mother-father relationship.

We also found within-time relations between perceived social support (reported by parents) and children's social competence (reported by children). Although we are not able to determine why parents' social networks positively affect children's social competence, earlier research has found that parents with close friendships have children with higher levels of peer acceptance and social skills (see Thompson, 2006 for a review). The positive relations between social support and social competence could be the result of the effect of social support on parent's psychological well-being, or potentially could be the result of youth modeling parents' behaviors in their own social networks. Future work should examine how the social support networks of parents and their children are connected, and whether parent social support positively relates to children's perceptions of their own support.

The present study has a number of limitations that should be noted. First, we did not directly compare mother and father results given the large difference in sample size, and because we wanted to include single mother families in the analyses. Future studies should utilize two-group models in order to test for significant differences between mothers and fathers across the same constructs. Despite this limitation, an important strength of the present study was that we examined our variables of interest with both mothers and fathers. However, significantly more work examining what constitutes positive paternal parenting behaviors in Latino families is needed, particularly as most measures utilized have been with other ethnic groups (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). Moreover, further consideration of cultural factors such as immigration, discrimination, and cultural values is warranted for both Latino mothers and fathers.

In terms of interventions, our findings provide support for efforts that enhance the existing avenues of social support in addition to creating new ones for Latino families and their children. In particular, interventions that promote higher levels of parental monitoring may be particularly beneficial as youth transition into adolescence and confront many of the developmental risks of this period. However, our findings demonstrate that both paternal warmth and maternal monitoring have positive effects over time on children's social competence.

Another avenue for intervention is increasing levels of perceived social support for Latino parents. Social support may relieve some of the pressures and stressors relating to parenting and allow parents to remain more actively involved, or potentially social support networks could provide more tangible aid such as specific help with child care arrangements or financial supports. Thus, interventions that increase Latino parents' social support may indirectly benefit children's social competence through its effect on positive parenting behaviors. Also important may be to focus on increasing levels of perceived social support for Latino fathers. In our study mothers had significantly higher mean levels of social support than fathers, and it could be that increasing social support for fathers could lead them to parent more effectively across time (as was the case for mothers in our study).

It will be important for future research to investigate more specifically the mechanisms between how perceived social support relates to positive parenting behaviors, or whether different types of social support (i.e. support from friends versus support from family members or extended kin) relates to family functioning in different ways. The present study did not differentiate between social support from friends and extended kin; instead, we chose to focus on creating a latent variable representing support from outside the household. However, studies have found that family support is more important than non-kin support against depression for foreign-born Mexican Americans (Almeida, Subramanian, Karachi, & Molnar, 2011). Differentiating between the effects of friends versus extended family (as well as immediate family) could provide important distinctions useful for intervention efforts.

Also important to consider are how the characteristics of parents themselves may relate to their levels of perceived social support as well as to their parenting behaviors. Individuals who perceive as well as receive social support may differ in their personal characteristics and traits from persons who do not. For example, mothers who suffer from depressive symptoms may be more likely to report lower levels of social support (even if they have support available), and also report feeling less efficacious as parents. Similarly, parents with positive dispositions may both enlist more support from their networks and remain more fully engaged as parents despite challenges and stressors. Moreover, individual variations in when and how one utilizes ones' support system are likely to be present. For example, stress may lead to mobilizing support networks for certain individuals, whereas stress may lead to withdrawal from support networks for other persons. Identifying personal characteristics that account for these varying reactions to stress would be a fruitful avenue for research.

Lastly, the present study contributed to a small but growing literature examining processes that relate to positive parenting behaviors as well as positive child outcomes in Latino families (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). Identifying factors that relate positively to parenting behaviors and in turn to children's positive adjustment or resilience may have important developmental implications for Latino youths, particularly as they enter early adolescence.

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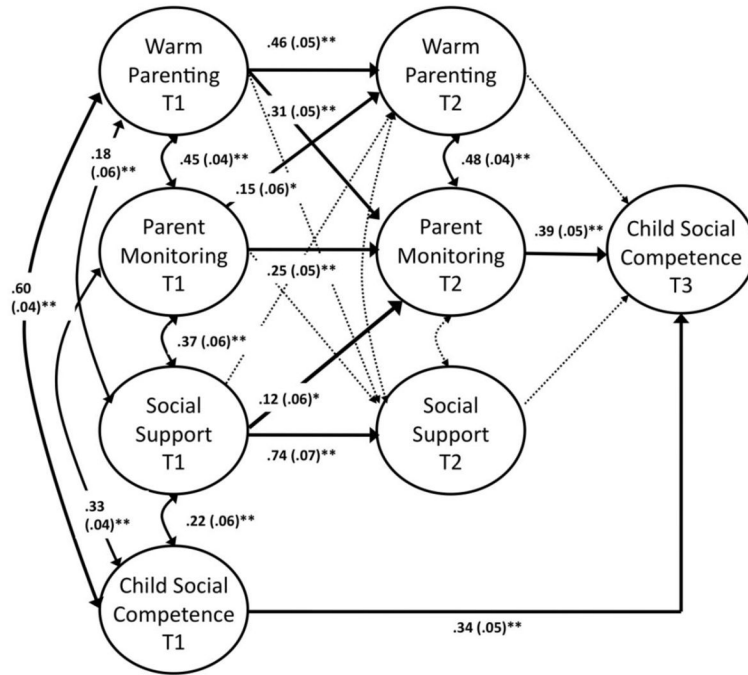


Figure 1.

Results for the statistical model, for mothers $N = 674$

Note: Standardized results with standard errors shown in parentheses. T1 = time 1 (5th grade), T2 = time 2 (7th grade), T3 = time 3 (8th grade). ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, (two-tailed test). $\chi^2(319, N = 676) = 355.87, p < .05$; CFI = .986; TLI = .983; RMSEA = .024. Dotted lines are non-significant paths. Control variables (child sex, mother’s education, marital status, and income) were regressed on T1 variables. Significant paths were: mother’s education on parent monitoring ($b = .26, SE = .04, p < .01$); mother’s education on social support ($b = .22, SE = .05, p < .01$), and household income on social support ($b = .16, SE = .05, p < .01$).

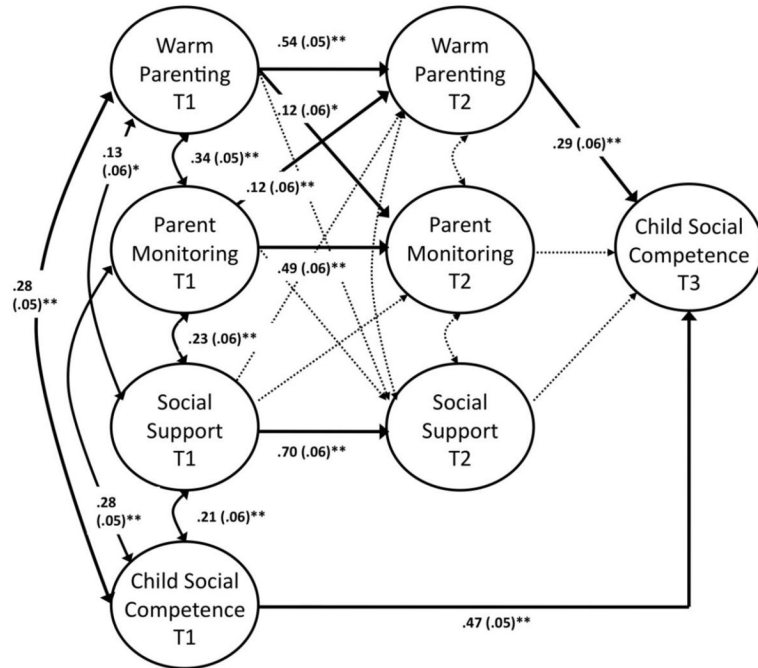


Figure 2.

Results for the statistical model, for fathers $N = 430$

Note: Standardized results with standard errors shown in parentheses. T1 = time 1 (5th grade), T2 = time 2 (7th grade), T3 = time 3 (8th grade).. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, (two-tailed test). $\chi^2 (240, N = 430) = 316.41, p < .05$; CFI = .984; TLI = .980; RMSEA = .027. Dotted lines are non-significant paths. Control variables (child sex, father's education, and income) were regressed on T1 variables. Significant paths were: father's education on parent monitoring ($b = .12, SE = .06, p < .05$); father's education on child social competence ($b = .15, SE = .06, p < .01$), and education on parental warmth ($b = .15, SE = .05, p < .01$).

Table 1

Correlations among latent variables

| Latent variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----|--------|-------------|------------|
| 1. Soc. Sup. T1 | .. | .15** | .24** | .23** | .70** | .20** | .20** | .18** | – | –.09 | .09 | –.09 |
| 2. Warm Par. T1 | .24** | .. | .34** | .47* | .14* | .60** | .30** | .41** | – | –.01 | .13* | –.06 |
| 3. Par. Mon. T1 | .45** | .47** | .. | .30** | .17** | .33** | .55** | .25** | – | –.05 | .11 | –.03 |
| 4. Soc. Comp. T1 | .28** | .59** | .35** | .. | .17* | .31** | .22** | .54** | – | –.30** | .16** | .11* |
| 5. Soc. Sup. T2 | .72** | .22** | .37** | .22** | .. | .16** | .22** | .15* | – | –.06 | .06 | –.06 |
| 6. Warm Par. T2 | .16* | .53** | .36** | .32** | .19** | .. | .29** | .45** | – | –.01 | .09 | –.03 |
| 7. Par. Mon. T2 | .32** | .46** | .45** | .30** | .31** | .61** | .. | .23** | – | –.03 | .08 | –.00 |
| 8. Soc. Comp. T3 | .25** | .39** | .31** | .47** | .24** | .36** | .51** | .. | – | .01 | .11 | .04 |
| 9. Mar. Stat. T1 | .02 | –.02 | .01 | .19** | .01 | .00 | –.00 | .06 | .. | – | – | – |
| 10. Child Sex | .04 | –.03 | .02 | .06 | .03 | .01 | .00 | .02 | .51 | .. | .00 | .00 |
| 11. Education T1 | .33** | .17** | .28** | .15** | .24** | .11* | .16** | .13* | .08 | .03 | .. | .24** |
| 12. Income T1 | .26** | .08 | .14* | .14* | .18** | .05 | .09 | .09 | .07 | .10 | .28** | .. |
| Mean (mothers) Standard Deviation | 2.77 (.68) | 3.25 (.29) | 3.49 (.32) | 3.50 (.31) | 2.87 (.66) | 3.19 (.50) | 3.48 (.39) | 3.50 (.33) | .. | .. | 9.08 (3.78) | 1.96 (.95) |
| Mean (fathers) Standard Deviation | 2.46 (.65) | 3.25 (.45) | 3.43 (.47) | 3.51 (.30) | 2.67 (.68) | 3.13 (.52) | 3.48 (.50) | 3.48 (.37) | .. | .. | 9.32 (3.74) | 2.13 (.97) |

Note: mother correlations are below the diagonal; father correlations are above the diagonal. N = 674 for mothers; N = 430 for fathers. T1 = time 1 (5th grade); T2 = time 2 (7th grade); T3 = time 3 (8th grade). Soc. Sup. = social support, Par. = parenting, Mon. = monitoring, Soc. Comp = social competence, Mar. Stat = marital status.

Table 2

Factor loadings for latent variables; N = 674 for mothers; N = 430 for fathers

| Measures | Mothers standardized λ (SE) | Fathers standardized λ (SE) | Mothers standardized λ (SE) | Fathers standardized λ (SE) |
|---------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Social Support | T1 | T1 | T2 | T2 |
| Friends | .52 (.04) | .63 (.05) | .61 (.04) | .62 (.05) |
| Extended kin | .69 (.05) | .78 (.05) | .74 (.05) | .85 (.06) |
| Parental Monitoring | T1 | T1 | T2 | T2 |
| Indicator 1 | .87 (.02) | .89 (.02) | .91 (.01) | .95 (.02) |
| Indicator 2 | .79 (.02) | .80 (.03) | .93 (.01) | .71 (.03) |
| Indicator 3 | .84 (.02) | .81 (.03) | .90 (.01) | .75 (.03) |
| Warm Parenting | T1 | T1 | T2 | T2 |
| Indicator 1 | .79 (.03) | .82 (.02) | .84 (.02) | .90 (.01) |
| Indicator 2 | .76 (.03) | .86 (.02) | .86 (.02) | .92 (.01) |
| Indicator 3 | .84 (.02) | .89 (.02) | .87 (.01) | .91 (.01) |
| Child Competence | T1 | T1 | T3 | T3 |
| Indicator 1 | .80 (.02) | .80 (.03) | .87 (.02) | .87 (.02) |
| Indicator 2 | .82 (.02) | .82 (.02) | .84 (.02) | .85 (.02) |
| Indicator 3 | .71 (.03) | .74 (.03) | .80 (.02) | .82 (.02) |

Note: T1 = time 1 (5th grade); T2 = time 2 (7th grade); T3 = 8th grade; SE = standard error; Mon = monitoring; Par. = parenting.