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# Exploring a Relationship between Parental Supervision and Recidivism among Juvenile Offenders at a Juvenile Detention Facility

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Ruthie Williams is an adjunct professor of criminal justice at Columbia Southern University. Elsie Smalls is the assistant dean of the school of human services at Springfield College.

## **Exploring the Relationship between Parental Supervision and Recidivism among Juvenile offenders at a Juvenile Detention Facility**

Scholars from many fields, including criminology, psychology, and philosophy have long attempted to understand the factors that impact delinquency. To date, most scholars and theorists have focused their attention upon the risk factors that contribute to delinquency, such as poverty, illiteracy, and genetics, while mostly overlooking parental supervision as a factor that impacts the recidivism rate of juvenile offenders.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this article will present the findings of a research study conducted to explore the relationship between different levels of parental involvement and recidivism among juvenile offenders at a detention facility.

According to several theories that attempt to explain criminal behavior, parental involvement plays a prominent role in the development and self-control of children and empirical evidence demonstrates that family factors impact delinquency.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that family factors are recognized as a recurring element in many theories, it is still unclear whether the parenting process during the adolescent stage is a predictor of recidivism.

This research study explores parenting practices and their impact on juvenile recidivism. It aims to provide information for criminal justice practitioners, policy makers, and legislators in helping them identify potential solutions to reducing recidivism among juveniles by implementing supervisory-based community programs. It is the assumption of criminal justice practitioners in South Carolina that implementing new programs will cut down on recidivism. It is also the assumption that once juveniles

successfully complete a supervisory based-community program, they are less likely to be involved with future delinquent behaviors or to re-offend.<sup>3</sup> This study will help clarify what role family dynamics should play in future programs. The following sections of this article will present the literature review, research questions, research design, sample size, data and methodology, results, discussion, and concluding comments.

### Literature Review

Recidivism is a significant topic of concern surrounding the problem of juvenile crime and delinquency. Although the national crime rate has declined over the past decade, agencies are still implementing more community programs to reduce recidivism among juvenile offenders. For example, in South Carolina, of the 300 juveniles who were arrested for sex offenses in 2007, 43 percent were rearrested and reconvicted within three years; 22.3 percent were reconvicted and re-incarcerated during a time when there were no alternative programs in place.<sup>4</sup> Since the implementation of community-based programs that provide after school programs and parenting classes, along with probation and parole supervision the numbers have changed; of 3,819 juvenile offenders both in arbitration, probation/and or parole supervision during the 2011-2012 fiscal year, 85 percent did reoffend while under supervision.<sup>5</sup> The need to continue effective community-based alternatives and behavioral intervention programs – with a parental component – upon a juvenile’s release is critical to the reduction of recidivism rates.

The practical problem for legislators, policymakers, and criminal justice administrators is to determine how to measure factors that impact recidivism and how to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programs with juvenile recidivists. Doris

MacKenzie notes that programs that take the Multi-Systemic Theory approach will provide community based treatment to youth who are 'at risk' for high management group homes and to youth who have severe behavior problems.<sup>6</sup>

To examine various parenting dimensions, research published in 2008 utilized a meta-analysis study to explore the relationship between parenting and delinquency.<sup>7</sup> This research revealed that family factors were described in many other studies as the best predictor of recidivism when compared to other factors such as socio-economic status, personal distress, and intellectual functioning. However, one of the disadvantages of using the meta-analysis in this study was the focus on family as a single variable. The study did not focus differences within families, such as family size, income, or characteristics of parenting. According to Rolf Loeber, Jeffrey Burke, and Brooks Applegate, only one meta-analysis focused on parental involvement, parental absence and disruption in relation to delinquency. Findings from this study indicated that the best predictors of delinquency included a lack of parental supervision, and a lack of parental and parental/child involvement.<sup>8</sup>

According to James Alexander and Thomas Sexton, family disruption and poor parental supervision do impact juvenile recidivism. They found in their test of this theory that household crowding, family instability, and low socioeconomic status, influenced the informal social control of the family, resulting in delinquent behavior by adolescents. It was also found that 73 percent of risk factors that led to delinquency were mediated by factors of parental discipline and parental supervision. Conversely, the study showed that parental rejection, hostility toward adolescents, poor communication, and ineffective

supervision of children were found to be significant risk factors associated with delinquent behavior by adolescents.<sup>9</sup>

David Farrington and Brandon Welsh describe how juvenile delinquency is associated with social bonds such as those formed with family, peers, school and communities, and delinquency occurs when these bonds are weakened.<sup>10</sup> The theoretical basis for their theory proposes that internal and external factors explain delinquency and recidivism of juveniles. In researching the relationship between parental supervision and juvenile recidivism, questions about the family structure, style of discipline, consistent or inconsistent supervision, all became a part of the dynamics of investigating a juvenile's propensity to commit crimes.

Additionally, research showed that a lack of parental supervision may also serve a dual role in determining youth involvement in delinquent behavior and recidivism.<sup>11</sup> The dual role consists of family mismanagement practices and the negative impact it has on children. They referred to family mismanagement as “disrupters” to effective parenting skills that promoted negative behavior in children. According to David Huh, Jennifer Tristan, Emily Wade and Eric Stice, “disrupters” are factors that influence parental behaviors and traits that become susceptible to stressors such as marital conflict, divorce and unemployment.<sup>12</sup>

To examine the impact of poor family management practices among a known sample of parents with a history of antisocial parental behaviors, Jeffrey Johnson, Elizabeth Smailes, Patricia Cohen, Stephanie Kasen, and Judith Brook, conducted a study of parental behaviors. They found that parents who were identified as having a history of antisocial behavior were significantly more likely to engage in problematic parenting

behaviors.<sup>13</sup> The problematic parenting behaviors included inconsistent supervision of their children, a lack of enforcement of household rules, a lack of educational aspirations for their children, problems controlling their anger towards their children, little affection showed towards their children, limited communication with the children, and little family support for the children. In the study, it was found that problematic parenting was also associated with the use of aggression among their children as they transitioned to adulthood, even after problematic parenting behaviors were controlled.<sup>14</sup>

### Research Questions

Previous research reveals that parenting styles have consistently been linked to the psychosocial and functional development of children and adolescents.<sup>15</sup> In addition, a more recent study indicated that “80% of recidivists were from “disrupted” family situations.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the authors of this study assume that exploring a relationship between parental supervision and recidivism will identify the parenting styles that influence repeat offending.

The four research questions that guide this study are, 1) Is there a relationship between parental/monitoring involvement and recidivism among juvenile offenders in a juvenile detention facility; 2) Is there a relationship between positive parenting techniques and recidivism among juvenile offenders in a juvenile detention facility; 3) Is there a relationship between permissive supervision and recidivism among juvenile offenders in a juvenile detention facility; and 4) Is there a relationship between inconsistent discipline practices and recidivism among juvenile offenders in a juvenile detention facility?

It is expected that the results will suggest that children are more likely to reoffend when parents exhibit permissive/inconsistent supervision in their disciplinary practices than when they practice positive parenting techniques and parental/monitoring involvement.

### Data and Methodology

This study utilizes the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire. The developers of the Alabama Parental Questionnaire created the tool to act as a reliable method of measuring parental style.<sup>17</sup> Since then, over sixty research studies have utilized the Alabama Parental Questionnaire, demonstrating its reliability and validity as a research tool.<sup>18</sup> The APQ consists of five subscales that corresponds with the characteristics of parenting and reflects the risks for conduct problems such as, inconsistent punishment, poor parental supervision, positive parenting involvement and corporal punishment. In this study, the APQ was administered to 91 parents who had juveniles housed at a detention facility in South Carolina. The parent population represented both first-time offenders and repeat offenders whose ages ranged from 12 to 17 years old.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

The questionnaire contains 32 items, which measure parenting styles based on four constructs: parental/monitoring involvement, positive parenting techniques, permissive supervision, and inconsistent discipline practices. The research design is a correlational and multiple regression was used as the appropriate method for the data analysis from a non-parametric design to determine the relationship between the



dependent variable (recidivism =Y) and a set of (4) independent variables or potential predictor variables, parental/monitoring involvement, positive parenting techniques, permissive supervision, and inconsistent discipline practices ( $X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4$ ). A multiple regression equation for predicting Y was expressed similar to the following example:

$$Y' = A + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + B_3X_3 + B_4X_4$$

The responses from the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire and the Demographic Questionnaire were measured on the Likert scale: Level 5 = *Always*, Level 4 = *Often*, Level 3 = *Sometimes*, Level 2 = *Almost Never* and Level 1 = *Never*.

### Sample Size

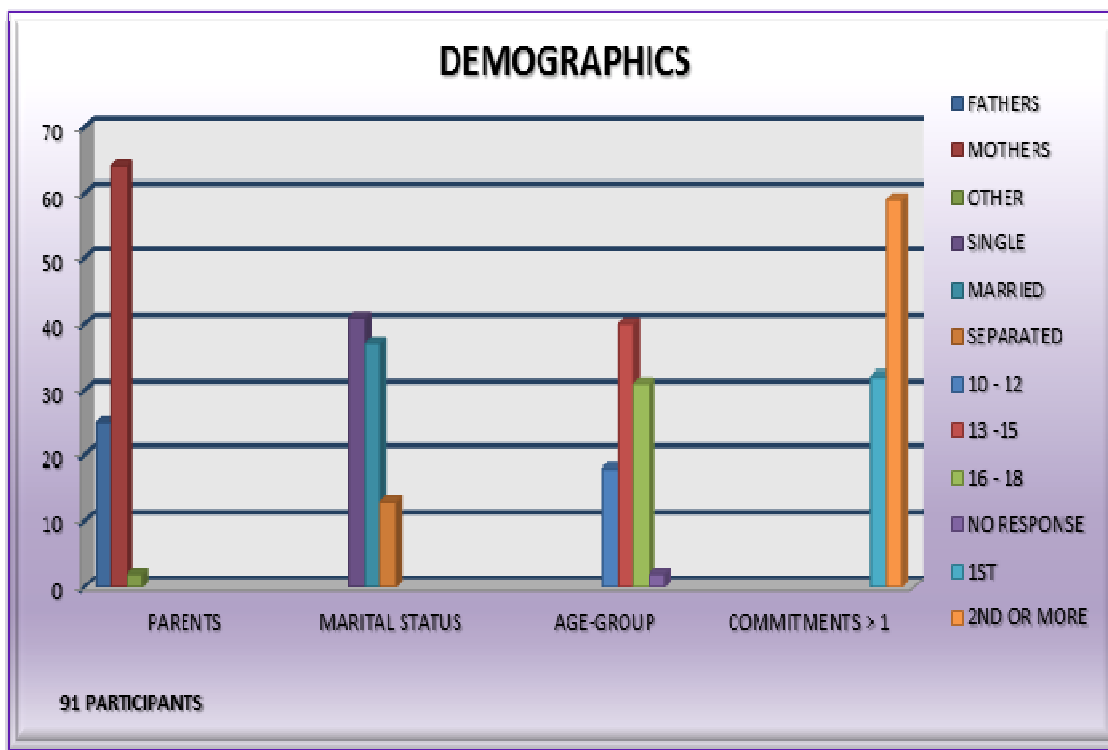
Although calculating G-Power analysis is statistically important in behavioral research, the rule of thumb tends to be to also utilize designs using multiple regression studies.<sup>19</sup> Barbara Tabachnick and Linda Fidell note that a rule of thumb for testing b coefficients is to have a sample size of  $N=104$ , or at least 20 times as many cases as independent variables. This study has four (4) independent variables,<sup>20</sup> thus the required minimum sample size is 80. In order to provide a significant Pearson product-moment correlation at a 0.05 level of significance, a power of 0.80, and a medium effect size, the proposed study had to support a sample size no less than 80.

According to Patricia Cohen, Jacob Cohen, Stephen West and Leona Aiken, the size of the sample is important when using multiple regression analysis, because the sample size determines whether there is a relationship between the dependent variable and the set of independent variables.<sup>21</sup>

## Results and Discussion

There were 91 parents who completed the demographic survey. Of those participants, ( $N = 91$ ): 25 (27 percent) indicated that they were fathers, 64 (71 percent) indicated they were mothers, and 2 (2 percent) indicated other. Forty-one participants (46 percent) indicated that they were single, 37 (41 percent) indicated that they were married, and 13 (13 percent) indicated that they were separated. Parents also responded to questions from the demographic survey regarding the age of their children and the number of times their children had been detained at a juvenile facility. Results indicate ( $N = 91$ ) that 18 (20 percent) of the parents' children were between the ages of 10-12, 40 (43 percent) were between the ages of 13-15, 31 (34 percent) were between the ages of 16-18, and 2 (2 percent) did not respond to age. Regarding the number of times detained, 32 (36 percent) of the children were first time offenders, 59 (64 percent) were committed for their second, third or fourth offense (as illustrated in Table 1).

**Table 1: Report of Demographics of Parents\***



\*2% of parents did not respond to age.

### Alabama Parenting Questionnaire Results

Parents responded to 32 questions on the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire, including such questions as: “Do you have a friendly talk with your child?” “Are you involved with your child’s activities?,” “Do you help your child with his/her homework?,” “Do you play games or do fun things with your child?”

In response to the questions that reflected Parental Monitoring Involvement, results showed a means range from 2.12 to 2.47, which represent relatively low means. The mean scores showed that parents were less engaged in parental monitoring involvement (as illustrated in Table 2).

Responses to statements that reflect positive parenting techniques such as “You let your child know when he/she is doing a good job,” “You reward your child,” “You compliment and praise your child,” show a means range from 2.42 to 2.51, which also represents relatively low means. Therefore, the mean scores showed that parents lacked participation in positive parenting techniques (as shown in Table 2). In response to the questions that reflect poor monitoring/permissive supervision, such as: “Your child fails to leave a note to let you know where he/she is going,” “Your child stays out past their curfew,” “Your child goes out without a set time to be home,” “Your child is home without adult supervision,” responses show a means range from 2.46 to 3.69, which also represents a moderately - high means. As a result, the mean scores showed that parents were more likely to exhibit poor parental monitoring/permissive supervision as (as illustrated in Table 2).

Finally, responses to statements related to the fourth construct - inconsistent discipline - such as: “You threaten to punish your child, but then you don’t,” “Your child talks you out of being punished,” “You feel getting your child to obey you is more trouble than it is worth,” and “The punishment you give your child depends on your mood,” show a means range from 2.49 to 2.5, which also represents relatively low means. The mean scores demonstrate that parents were less likely to exhibit consistency in their parenting practices as (as illustrated in Table 2).

#### Correlations of Research Questions #1, 2, 3, and 4

A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the four research questions and their outcomes.

### Parental/Monitoring Involvement and Recidivism

RQ#1: Is there a relationship between parental/monitoring involvement and recidivism among juvenile offenders at a detention facility?

The results indicate a mean score of 2.3, which present a low level of parental monitoring/involvement. The Pearson correlation shows a significant negative relationship ( $r = -.189$ ,  $p < .072$ ,  $n=91$ ) between parental monitoring involvement and the number of times a child may be committed. The results suggest that children are more likely to be committed to juvenile detention facilities more frequently when parents are less engaged in parental monitoring and involvement than when they are more engaged (as illustrated in Table 3).

### Positive Parenting Techniques and Recidivism

RQ#2: Is there a relationship between positive parenting techniques and recidivism among juvenile offenders at a detention facility?

The results indicate a mean score of 2.3, which presents a low level of positive parenting techniques. The Pearson correlation shows a significant negative relationship ( $r = -.213$ ,  $p < .042$ ,  $n=91$ ) between positive parenting techniques and the number of times a child may be committed to detention. The results suggest that children are more likely to be committed more times when parents are also less engaged in positive parenting techniques than when they are more engaged (as illustrated in Table 3).

### Poor Parental Monitoring/Permissive Supervision and Recidivism

RQ#3: Is there a relationship between permissive supervision and recidivism among juvenile offenders at a detention facility?

The results indicated a mean score of 3.0, which presents a moderately-high level of poor parental monitoring/permissive supervision. The Pearson correlation shows a significant positive relationship ( $r = .446$ ,  $p < .000$ ,  $n=91$ ) between permissive supervision and the number of times a child may be committed. The results suggest that children are more likely to be committed more times when parents exhibit permissive supervision and poor parental monitoring practices (as illustrated in Table 3).

#### Inconsistent Discipline and Recidivism

RQ#4: Is there a relationship between inconsistent discipline practices and recidivism among juvenile offenders at a detention facility?

The results indicate a mean score of 2.6, which presents a moderately-high level of inconsistent discipline practices. The Pearson correlation shows a significant positive relationship ( $r = .270$ ,  $p < .010$ ,  $n=91$ ) between inconsistent discipline and the number of times a child is sentenced to detention. The results suggest that children are more likely to be committed more times when parents exhibit inconsistency in their disciplinary practices than when they are more consistent (as illustrated in Table 3).

**Table 2: Alabama Questionnaire Results on Parenting Styles**

<i>Parental Involvement</i>	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	N of Items
	23.30	46.055	6.786	10
<i>Positive Parenting</i>	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	N of Items
	14.4	17.590	4.194	6
<i>Permissive Parenting</i>	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	N of Items
	36.00	98.667	9.933	12
<i>Inconsistent Discipline</i>	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	N of Items
	10.04	8.043	2.836	4

**Table 3: Correlation between Parenting Styles and the Likelihood of Recidivism**

	Mean	Correlation	Results Suggest
<i>Parental Involvement</i>	2.3	( $r = -.189$ , $p < .072$ , $n=91$ )	Low level of <i>Parental Involvement</i>
<i>Positive Parenting</i>	2.3	( $r = -.213$ , $p < .042$ , $n=91$ )	Low level of <i>Positive Parenting Techniques</i>
Permissive Parenting	3.0	( $r = .446$ , $p < .000$ , $n=91$ )	Mod/High Level of <i>Permissive Parenting Practices</i>
<i>Inconsistent Discipline</i>	2.6	( $r = .270$ , $p < .010$ , $n=91$ )	Mod/High Level of <i>Inconsistent Discipline Practices</i>

### Summary of Results

Parents responded to 32 questions from the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire and 6 questions from the Demographic Survey. The parents' first responses included identification of their race, marital status, employment status, gender and age of their child. Results showed that the majority of the parents who participated in this study were mothers 64 (71 percent). In addition, results showed that (64 percent) of juveniles at the detention facility were committed for their second, third or fourth offense.

Results from the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire also showed that among the four constructs (parental monitoring/involvement, positive parenting techniques, poor monitoring/permissive supervision, and inconsistent discipline), the majority of parents scored higher in poor parental monitoring/permissive supervision and inconsistent disciplinary practices. Parents responded to level 4 = *often*, that their children stayed out late with friends they did not know; failed to leave a note of their whereabouts; were out after dark without adult supervision and the children *sometimes* were not punished; let out of punishment early; and were able to talk their parents out of punishing them.

On the other hand, to the statements measuring parental involvement and positive parenting techniques, parents responded to level 2- *almost never*. They are almost never engaged in their children's activities such as boy/girl scouts, t-ball games, or church youth groups. In regards to *positive parenting techniques*, parents indicated that they *almost never* reward or give something extra, offer praise to their child for doing a good job, or hug or kiss their child. Thus, the importance of parenting involvement is understood in this study.

### Concluding Comments

This paper reports the results of a study aiming to examine whether a relationship exists between parental supervision/involvement and recidivism among juvenile offenders at a South Carolina detention facility. Questionnaire responses from the parents show that their parenting practices did impact juvenile recidivism. In light of these results, an extension of this study is recommended to examine other parental factors that may impact recidivism such as: conducting a correlation of the parents' age, race, employment, and educational status. For example, in many cases, intake officers place youth on community detention because their parents do not meet the strict guidelines for electronic monitoring; lack appropriate housing and lack the knowledge to follow the procedures of 'house arrest.' Therefore, many children are placed in alternative placements, such as group homes, independent living residencies, or detention facilities.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, this research study suggests further investigation of parenting styles and juvenile recidivism by measuring the following variables: parenting practice of males versus that of females, parenting practices of single parents (male or female) and the number of hours worked and time spent with children, and parenting practices of married



couples versus that of single parent homes. To build upon the findings of this study, it is suggested that both the Parenting Questionnaire and the Juvenile Assessment Survey be administered to determine whether or not the results will be similar or different. Utilizing the Juvenile Assessment Survey will provide information pertaining to the juveniles' assessment and perception of their parents' parenting styles.

Hopefully, this study will benefit parents by helping them develop a better understanding of the effects of their reactions and attitudes toward their children and might encourage them to attend a parent training program. Parenting training programs would give parents the opportunity to learn how to deal with different family conflicts and develop effective parenting skills through the use of discussion groups, pertinent literature and training sessions. Moreover, this research study should be replicated at other similar juvenile detention centers across the United States. This study may prove to be valuable in implementing new methods to reducing crime and recidivism among juvenile offenders.

Replicating this study in South Carolina and other regions of the country may provide additional data to convince community leaders, law-makers and criminal justice practitioners that there is greater value and long term benefits in the development of community-based alternatives, and family -based intervention programs. Subsequently, these positive alternatives may reduce the number of repeated and/or escalated offenses among juveniles. The long-term positive implication for reduced juvenile recidivism is the increase in good productive citizens, stronger family structures, and communities that will begin to thrive versus continual deterioration of the socio-economic structures.

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Endnotes

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>16</sup> Justine Fowler, Rebecca Anderson, Linda Bender, and Tom Green, *The Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Recidivism Report, Juveniles with a 2007 Case Closure*, 2013, [www.jcjc.state.pa.us](http://www.jcjc.state.pa.us), (accessed February 8, 2013).

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## APPENDIX A.

From *Alabama Parenting Questionnaire Scale*, by P.J. Frick, 1991. Copyright 1991 by P.J. Frick, New Orleans, LA: University of New Orleans.

**The University of New Orleans  
Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ)  
(Parent Form)**

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Completing Form(Circle one): Mother    Father    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** The following are a number of statements about your family. Please rate each item as to how often it TYPICALLY occurs in your home. The possible answers are Never (1), Almost Never (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), Always (5). PLEASE ANSWER ALL ITEMS.

	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. You have a friendly talk with your child.	1	2	3	4	5
2. You let your child know when he/she is doing a good job with something.	1	2	3	4	5
3. You threaten to punish your child and then do not actually punish him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
4. You volunteer to help with special activities that your child is involved in (such as sports, boy/girl scouts, church youth groups).	1	2	3	4	5
5. You reward or give something extra to your child for obeying you or behaving well.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Your child fails to leave a note or to let you know where he/she is going.	1	2	3	4	5
7. You play games or do other fun things with your child.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Your child talks you out of being punished after he/she has done something wrong.	1	2	3	4	5

	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
9. You ask your child about his/her day in school.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Your child stays out in the evening past the time he/she is supposed to be home.	1	2	3	4	5
11. You help your child with his/her homework.	1	2	3	4	5
12. You feel that getting your child to obey you is more trouble than it's worth.	1	2	3	4	5
13. You compliment your child when he/she does something well.	1	2	3	4	5
14. You ask your child what his/her plans are for the coming day.	1	2	3	4	5
15. You drive your child to a special activity.	1	2	3	4	5
16. You praise your child if he/she behaves well.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Your child is out with friends you don't know.	1	2	3	4	5
18. You hug or kiss your child when he/she has done something well.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Your child goes out without a set time to be home.	1	2	3	4	5
20. You talk to your child about his/her friends.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Your child is out after dark without an adult with him/her.	1	2	3	4	5

	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
22. You let your child out of a punishment early (like lift restrictions earlier than you originally said).	1	2	3	4	5
23. Your child helps plan family activities.	1	2	3	4	5
24. You get so busy that you forget where your child is and what he/she is doing.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Your child is not punished when he/she has done something wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
26. You attend PTA meetings, parent/teacher conferences, or other meetings at your child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
27. You tell your child that you like it when he/she helps out around the house.	1	2	3	4	5
28. You don't check that your child comes home at the time she/he was supposed to.	1	2	3	4	5
29. You don't tell your child where you are going.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Your child comes home from school more than an hour past the time you expect him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
31. The punishment you give your child depends on your mood.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Your child is at home without adult supervision.	1	2	3	4	5

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	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
33. You spank your child with your hand when he/she has done something wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
34. You ignore your child when he/she is misbehaving.	1	2	3	4	5
35. You slap your child when he/she has done something wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
36. You take away privileges or money from your child as a punishment.	1	2	3	4	5
37. You send your child to his/her room as a punishment.	1	2	3	4	5
38. You hit your child with a belt, switch, or other object when he/she has done something wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
39. You yell or scream at your child when he/she has done something wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
40. You calmly explain to your child why his/her behavior was wrong when he/she misbehaves.	1	2	3	4	5
41. You use time out (make him/her sit or stand in a corner) as a punishment.	1	2	3	4	5
42. You give your child extra chores as a punishment.	1	2	3	4	5

**APPENDIX B.**

**DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE**

**YOUR ACCURATE AND HONEST ANSWERS WILL AID IN THE SUCCESS OF THIS RESEARCH. RESPONSES ARE CONFIDENTIAL**

**\*\*ATTENTION: Parents, please complete the questions below:**

**How many times has your child been committed for an offense? (1) \_\_\_\_ (2 or more)\_\_\_\_**

**Child's Age: \_\_\_\_**

.....  
**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION: Please select the answer that applies to you.**

**Race:** Caucasian\_\_ African American\_\_ Hispanic\_\_ Other\_\_

**Relationship to child:** Mother \_\_ Father \_\_ Other \_\_\_\_

**Marital Status:** Married\_\_ Single\_\_ Divorced\_\_ Separated\_\_

**Employment Status:** Employed\_\_ Unemployed\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*