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SINGLE FATHERS, FAMILY STRUCTURE, AND ADOLESCENT MALE DELINQUENCY

Nate Juda



ABSTRACT

This follow-up study expands upon the work of Juda (2024) by further exploring the relationship between household structure and delinquent behavior in young adolescent males, with a specific focus on the absence of a biological father. Utilizing data from the Add Health Wave 1 dataset (n= 2,798), this research examines delinquent behavior across three household structures: traditional families (both biological parents present), single-father households (no resident maternal figure), and single-mother households (no resident paternal figure). The study aims to address the following hypotheses: (H₁) males living with a biological father will exhibit lower rates of delinquent behavior; (H₂) those in single-mother households will demonstrate higher rates of delinquency; and (H₃) there will be no significant difference in delinquency rates between males from traditional families and single-father households. The results indicate that males in traditional families exhibit significantly lower levels of delinquency compared to their peers in single-parent households. Supporting Hypothesis 1, the presence of a biological father is associated with reduced delinquency ($\beta_1 = -0.25, p < .05$). Hypothesis 2 is confirmed, as males in single-mother households show the highest delinquency rates ($\beta_3 = 0.38, p < .01$). Contrary to Hypothesis 3, males in single-father households also demonstrate higher delinquency compared to traditional families, although less so than those in single-mother households ($\beta_2 = 0.15, p < .05$). The findings will contribute to the existing literature on family dynamics and adolescent behavior, providing valuable insights into the influence of parental presence on youth outcomes.

Keywords: adolescent behavior, biological father absence, delinquency, household structure, single-parent families, youth outcomes Add Health.



INTRODUCTION

The structure of families plays a fundamental role in shaping the development and behavior of children and adolescents. Over the past few decades, there has been growing interest in how variations in family structure—particularly single-parent households—impact children's well-being. While a substantial body of research has focused on single-mother households (see Amato & Keith, 1991; Demo & Acock, 1988; Juda, 2024; McLanahan & Booth, 1989), the experience of children in single-father households remains comparatively understudied. As single-father families become increasingly prevalent in the United States, a gap in the literature persists, leaving much to be understood regarding the absence of a mother versus a father—or rather how the influence of a masculine authority figure/role model differentially affects children's development, particularly regarding delinquent behavior.

Single-father households represent one of the fastest-growing family structures in the United States (Shipe et al., 2022). In 1960, only 1% of households with minor children were headed by single fathers, but by 2020, this figure had surged to approximately 3.3 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). This increase, primarily fueled by the rise in single-parent families headed by divorced or previously married fathers, underscores the evolving dynamics of American family life. Nevertheless, children living with single fathers still constitute a significantly smaller segment compared to those residing with single mothers—about 3.05 million versus 15.09 million in (Pew Research Center, 2019). Furthermore, single fathers exhibit notable demographic differences compared to single mothers (Shipe et al., 2022). These variations could profoundly influence the developmental outcomes for children raised in these households, yet they remain underexplored in the existing literature.

Research consistently demonstrates that children raised by both biological parents fare better across several domains of well-being than those raised in single-parent or divorced families. This advantage is particularly pronounced in adolescent males, where the absence of a biological father is strongly associated with increased delinquency (Amato & Keith, 1991; Demuth & Brown, 2004; Juda, 2024). Fathers are often viewed as crucial figures in the family unit, providing discipline, guidance, and emotional support that may reduce the likelihood of delinquent behavior. Conversely, adolescents growing up in single-mother households have been found to exhibit higher rates of delinquency compared to those in traditional families or with resident stepfathers (Juda, 2024). However, the exact relationship between family structure and delinquency, particularly in single-father households, remains unclear due to the paucity of research focusing on this family type.

The present study aims to address this gap by investigating the impact of family structure on delinquent behavior among adolescent males, specifically focusing on four household structures: traditional two-parent families, stepfamilies, single-mother households, and single-father households. By exploring differences in delinquent behavior across these family types, this study seeks to offer new insights into how the presence or absence of a biological father or mother affects adolescent male behavior.

This study hypothesizes three potential outcomes: (1) adolescent males residing in households with a biological father present (traditional families and single-father households) will exhibit lower levels of delinquent behavior compared to their peers in single-mother households; (2) males in single-mother households will engage in higher levels of delinquency than those in single-father households; and (3) there will be no significant difference in delinquency rates between males living in traditional families and those in single-father



households, suggesting that the presence of a father—whether in a single-parent or dual-parent household—provides similar protective effects.

This study draws on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), a comprehensive dataset that allows for the exploration of family structure and adolescent outcomes across a diverse and representative sample. By focusing on the often-overlooked single-father household, this research contributes to a more complete understanding of the relationship between family structure and delinquent behavior, offering insights that could inform interventions aimed at supporting at-risk youth. The findings of this study have the potential to inform policies and programs designed to strengthen family environments, particularly for single-parent families, and reduce the incidence of delinquency among adolescents.

STUDY FOCUS

Purpose:

This study aims to explore the relationship between delinquent behavior in adolescent males and their household structure. Four household structures examined are:

- 1 **Traditional Family:** Both biological parents are present.
- 2 **Stepfamilies:** Resident biological mother and stepfather
- 3 **Single-Mother Households:** Only the biological mother is present, with no paternal figure in the household.
- 4 **Single-Father Households:** Only the biological father is present, with no maternal figure in the household.

Research Question:

What differences in delinquent behavior are observed among adolescent males based on household structure: traditional families (both biological parents), stepfamilies (biological mother and stepfather in the home), single-mother households (no resident paternal figure), and single-father households (no resident maternal figure)?

Hypotheses:

- **H₁:** Adolescent males living in households with a biological father present will be significantly less likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to those without a resident biological father.
- **H₂:** Adolescent males in single-mother households will be significantly more likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to those in single-father households.
- **H₃:** There will be no significant difference in delinquent behavior between adolescent males from traditional families and those from single-father households.



DATA AND METHODS

Data Source

This study utilizes data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Add Health is the largest and most comprehensive longitudinal survey of adolescents ever conducted, comprising multiple waves of data collection (Harris, 2019; Juda, 2024). Wave I (W1) was administered between September 1994 and April 1995, involving 20,745 nationally representative adolescents in grades 7 through 12 (ages 11-17). An in-school questionnaire was distributed to every student attending one of the 132 sampled U.S. schools, from which a random sample of approximately 200 adolescents per school was selected for in-home interviews (Harris, 2019; Juda, 2024). This analysis focuses on data from W1, with a mean participant age of 15.9 years (95% CI = 15.7 to 16.1) and a response rate of 79%.

The initial sampling frame included 26,666 schools, stratified by factors such as urbanization, school type, size, ethnicity, and census region. Participating schools were asked to identify feeder schools with a 7th grade, from which a minimum of five students were sent to each high school. The top feeder school for each high school was selected to participate in the study, with replacement schools chosen as necessary. This recruitment process resulted in 132 core study schools, including 80 high schools and 52 middle schools.

The primary objectives of Add Health were to gather comprehensive information on the health, family, social, and individual characteristics of U.S. adolescents and to explore various risk and protective factors (Harris, 2019; Juda, 2024). Given its in-depth focus on adolescent health and risk behaviors, Add Health is particularly suited for this research. Each wave includes detailed questions regarding involvement in delinquent behaviors. The longitudinal design allows for an examination of the long-term relationships between family structure and delinquent behavior, effectively accounting for baseline differences in empirical analyses. After excluding female respondents and cases with missing data, the final sample size consisted of 2,798 respondents.

Dependent Variable

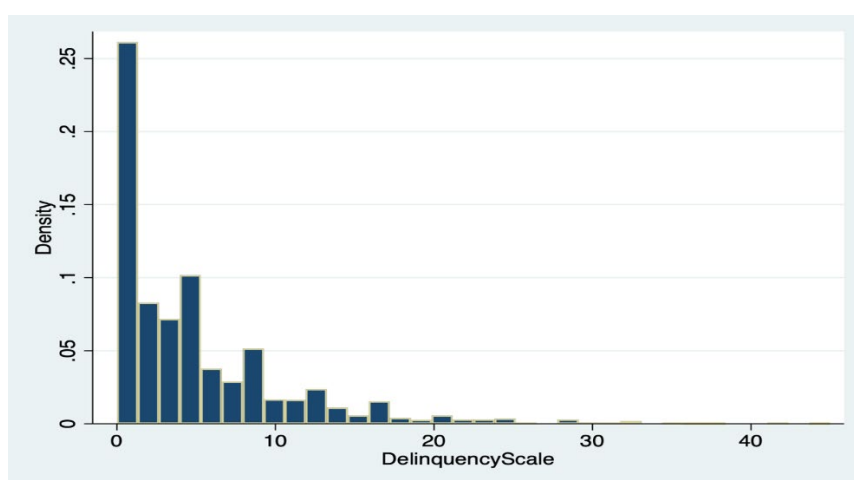
The dependent variable, *delinquency*, was derived from the Self-Report Delinquency (AHSRD) scale in W1 of Add Health. Following established methodologies (see Beaver, 2010; Pechorro et al., 2019), delinquency was assessed using AHSRD's 15-item scale that evaluates both aggressive and violent behaviors alongside non-violent delinquency. This scale combines 11 items of the nonviolent factor and four items of the violent factor, rated on a 4-point ordinal scale. Higher scores reflect greater levels of delinquency. The questions are consistent with those found in other research (see Pechorro et al., 2019; Sieving et al., 2001; Vazsonyi et al., 2006) and comply with the official definitions of "crime" used by government sources such as the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). This study focuses on five delinquent behaviors reported over the past 12 months categorized as follows: (1) property crime, (2) violent crime, (3) drug-related crime, (4) defiance of parental authority, and (5) unruly public behavior. These behaviors encompass a significant portion of delinquent actions undertaken by adolescents (Beaver, 2010).

Specifically, participants were asked in the past 12 months, how often have they engaged in the following activities: (1) "paint graffiti or signs on someone else's property or in a public place?"; (2) "deliberately damage property that didn't belong to you?"; (3) "lie to your parents or



guardians about where you had been or whom you were with?"; (4) "take something from a store without paying for it?"; (5) "get into a serious physical fight?"; (6) "hurt someone badly enough to need bandages or care from a doctor or nurse?"; (7) "run away from home?"; (8) "drive a car without its owner's permission?"; (9) "steal something worth more than \$50?"; (10) "enter a house or building to steal something?"; (11) "use or threaten to use a weapon to get something from someone?"; (12) "sell marijuana or other drugs?"; (13) "steal something worth less than \$50?"; (14) "take part in a fight where a group of your friends was against another group?"; (15) "being loud, rowdy, or unruly in a public place?" Items were coded as 0 = never, 1 = one or two times, 2 = three or four times and, 3 = five or more times. The sum of these created the delinquency scale (mean = 4.875, SD = 5.790), which has a good level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .95$) and positively skewed data (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Delinquency Distribution



Source: National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health

Independent Variable

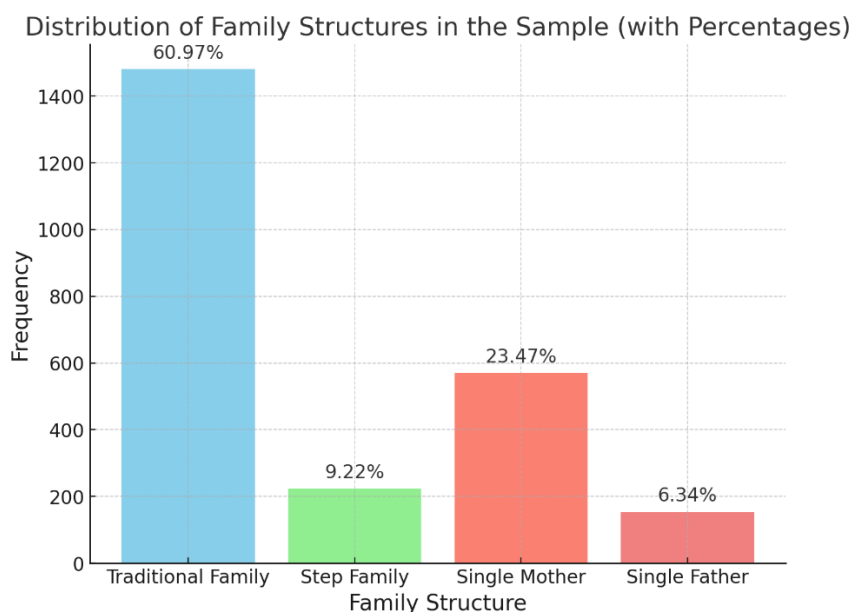
The independent variable comprises four distinct household structures: (1) traditional family household, (2) stepfamilies, (3) single-mother household, and (4) single-father household. Non-resident parental figures (male or female) were not considered nor were resident figures such as older siblings, aunts or uncles, or grandparents. This study restricts its estimation sample to male adolescents living with their biological mother or father in W_1 . The variation in family structure comes from the absence or presence of a resident biological mother or father or resident stepfather residing in the home during W_1 .

The analytic sample ($n = 2,798$) focuses on adolescent males who reported living in one of the following arrangements: (1) with both biological parents ($n = 1,481$), (2) with a biological mother and stepfather ($n = 224$), (3) with a single mother ($n = 570$), or (4) with a single father ($n = 154$).

Consistent with previous literature and data (Dahl & Moretti, 2008; Pew, 2019; US Census Bureau, 2020), figure 2 illustrates the prevalence of these family structures, indicating that roughly 60% of adolescents live in traditional families with both biological parents, nearly



10% with a biological mother and stepfather, and, approximately 25% live with a single mother, and 6% live with a single father (see Figure 2).



Control Variables

To ensure the validity of the results this study controlled for potential confounding variables, specifically demographic factors such as age, race, and socioeconomic status (SES)—with household income serving as the key indicator of SES. Previous research has shown that SES plays a critical role in mediating the effects of family structure on adolescent behavior and outcomes. Lower household income has been consistently linked to higher rates of delinquency in adolescents (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Flewelling & Bauman, 1990).

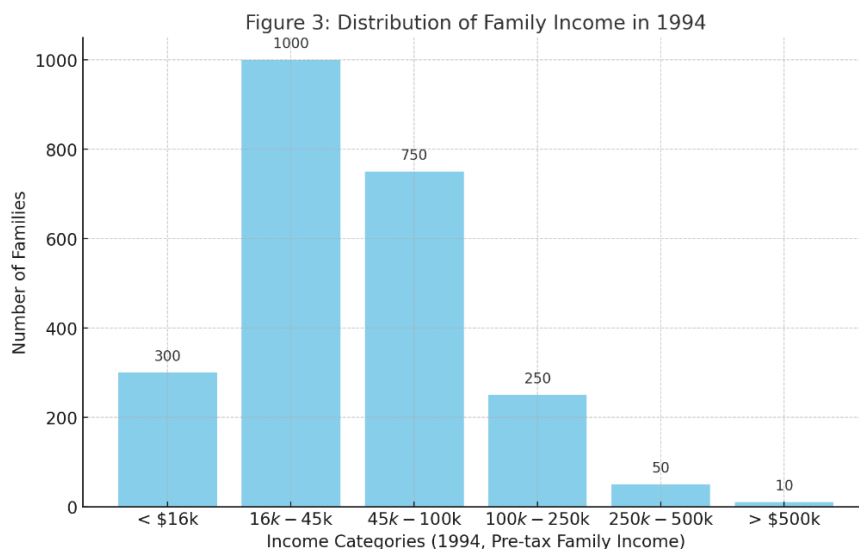
Age was measured in years at W₁ ($M = 15.59$, $SD = 1.78$). *Race* was constructed based on responses to six questions regarding the adolescent's racial origin (i.e., White, Black, Latino, American Indian, Asian, or other). This information was then used to create a dummy variable comparing White ($n = 1,635$; $M = .584$) versus non-white ($n = 1,163$; $M = .416$) respondents.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a well-documented correlate of juvenile delinquency (Rekker et al., 2017), with evidence indicating that adolescents from low-SES households are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to those from higher-SES backgrounds (Archambault et al., 2017; Beyers et al., 2001; Rekker et al., 2017). Variations in SES create disparities in access to resources (Galobardes et al., 2007; Myers, 2009) and factors such as privilege, power, and social capital are often assessed through a combination of education, occupation (or job title), and income (Walder, 1995; Woehr, 2018). However, in this study, *SES* is measured solely by household income, as it has a direct impact on access to resources, privilege, and power—more so than education level or job title. Income influences critical factors such as neighborhood quality, school systems, and peer networks, which in turn shape adolescent development and behavior (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Income data were based on parental reports of total pre-tax family income in 1994 (in \$1,000 increments, top-coded at \$999,000) ($n = 2,360$). Income included all sources, such as



public assistance, and was rounded to the nearest thousand dollars, resulting in a six-category variable for analysis. The income categories were: families earning less than \$16,000 (coded 0, roughly the federal poverty threshold in 1994-1995); \$16,000-\$45,000 (coded 1, lower middle-class); \$45,000-\$100,000 (coded 2, middle-class); \$100,000-\$250,000 (coded 3, upper middle-class); \$250,000-\$500,000 (coded 4, upper class); and >\$500,000 (coded 5, wealthy). The mean income among respondents was \$47.7k, with a median income of \$40k, reflecting a positively skewed distribution ($SD = .821$) (see Figure 3).



Analytic Strategy

To analyze the extensive and complex data from the Add Health study effectively, the analyses were conducted using STATA statistical software. This software facilitates the use of estimation commands that can incorporate large volumes of intricate survey data while accounting for sample design characteristics, thus ensuring unbiased parameter estimates and standard errors.

Initial analyses included frequency distributions to describe response distributions within the sample. T-tests and correlation matrices were employed to assess relationships at the bivariate level. Given the nature of the dependent variable—characterized by positive skewness, over-dispersion, a significant number of zero values, and $\sigma^2 > \mu$ (see Figure 1)—negative binomial regression was initially considered as a modeling technique.

However, to further explore the relationships between delinquency and family structure, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean delinquency scores across the four family types: traditional family (0), stepfamily (1), single-mother (2), and single-father (3). The ANOVA results indicated significant differences among the family structures.

To follow up on these findings, Tukey's pairwise comparison test was performed to determine which specific family structure groups differed from each other. This analysis provided insight into the nature of these differences in delinquency rates among the family types.



In addition to these analyses, a series of negative binomial regression models were estimated to examine the relationships between delinquency and household structure, while controlling for the relevant variables. Each of the four family types was entered into the models. The final model assessed whether age, race, or SES accounted for variations in delinquency associated with household structure. As this study focuses exclusively on adolescent males, sex was coded as M=0 and F=1, with all data equal to 1 excluded. Additionally, cases with missing information were eliminated through listwise deletion.

RESULTS

The aim of this study is to investigate the differences in delinquent behavior among adolescent males from four distinct household structures: (1) traditional families (with both biological parents present), (2) stepfamilies with a resident biological mother and stepfather, (3) single-mother households (with only the biological mother present), and (4) single-father households (with only the biological father present). Hypothesis 1 (H1) posits that young males residing in households with a biological father will be significantly less likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to their peers living without a biological father. Hypothesis 2 (H2) suggests that young males in single-mother households will exhibit higher levels of delinquent behavior than those in single-father households. Hypothesis 3 (H3) states there will be no significant difference in delinquent behavior between adolescent males living in traditional families from those in single-father households.

Table 1 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics for the study's key variables. The sample consists of male adolescents aged 11 to 21, with an average age of 15.59 years. The racial composition shows that 58% of the participants are white, while 42% belong to various other racial and ethnic groups. In terms of household structure, approximately 53% of the adolescents come from traditional families with both biological parents present. Around 8% of the sample is from stepfamilies, where the biological mother lives with a stepfather. Notably, 20% of the adolescents are from single-mother households, and 6% are from single-father households. These statistics indicate a diverse set of family structures, which provide a foundation for exploring how household composition impacts delinquent behavior. Additionally, the socioeconomic status (SES) of the sample shows variability, with a mean score of 1.28 (\$47.7k) and a range between 0 (< \$16k) and 5 (> \$500k), which captures a broad spectrum of backgrounds across the sample.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Min Value	Max Value
<i>Dependent Variables</i>				
DelinquencyScale	4.87	5.79	0	45
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
Traditional Family	0.53	-	0	1
Stepfamily	0.08	-	0	1
Single Mother	0.20	-	0	1



Single Father	0.06	-	0	1
Control Variables				
Age	15.59	1.78	11	21
Race (White)	0.58	-	0	1
SES	1.28	0.82	0	5

Source: National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health

Table 2 presents the results of a correlation matrix that examines the relationships between family structure, control variables (age, race, and SES), and delinquent behavior in adolescent males. The findings indicate that living in a *traditional family* with both biological parents is significantly and negatively associated with delinquent behavior ($r = -0.07, p < 0.05$). This suggests that adolescents from traditional families are less likely to engage in delinquent activities, supporting the hypothesis that family stability and the presence of both biological parents contribute to lower delinquency rates.

In contrast, living in a *stepfamily* (biological mother and stepfather) shows a weak, negative correlation with delinquent behavior ($r = -0.02$); however, this relationship is not statistically significant. This implies that being in a stepfamily does not have a strong or consistent association with delinquency within this sample.

Adolescents from *single-mother households* show a positive and statistically significant correlation with delinquent behavior ($r = 0.07, p < 0.05$), reinforcing the idea that the absence of a resident father figure is linked to higher rates of delinquency. This supports the hypothesis that adolescent males in single-mother households are more prone to engaging in delinquent behaviors.

Similarly, there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between *single-father households* and delinquent behavior ($r = 0.05, p < 0.05$). Although the relationship is weaker than that of single-mother households, it suggests that the absence of a maternal figure also contributes to increased delinquency, but to a lesser extent compared to the absence of a father.

None of the control variables—*age*, *race*, nor *socioeconomic status (SES)*—show significant correlations with delinquency. The small negative correlations for *SES* ($r = -0.03$) and *race* ($r = -0.03$) indicate that while adolescents from higher SES backgrounds or those identifying as white may exhibit slightly lower delinquency rates, these associations are not statistically significant.

**Table 2.** Bivariate Correlations for Study Variables (N = 2,798)

Variables	Delinquency	TradFamily	StepFamily	SingleMother	SingleFather	Race (White)	Age	SES
Delinquency	1.00							
TradFamily	-0.07*	1.00						
StepFamily	-0.02	-0.31*	1.00					
SingleMother	0.07*	-0.54*	-0.15*	1.00				
SingleFather	0.05*	-0.26*	-0.07*	-0.12*	1.00			
Race (White)	-0.03	0.18*	0.00	-0.15*	0.03	1.00		
Age	0.01	-0.05*	-0.02	-0.02	0.05*	0.01	1.00	
SES	-0.03	0.33*	-0.01	-0.28*	-0.01	0.21*	0.02	1.00

*p<0.05. **p<0.01. ***p<0.001

Table 3 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA conducted to assess the differences in delinquent behavior among adolescent males across four family structures: traditional families, stepfamilies, single-mother, and single-father households. The Between Groups sum of squares (SS) is 846.61, with 3 degrees of freedom (df), indicating the extent to which delinquency scores differ between the various family structures. The Within Groups SS is 80,847.97, with 2,425 df, capturing the variation in delinquency scores within each family structure group. The Total SS is 81,694.58, representing the overall variation in delinquency across all participants and family structures combined. The Mean Square (MS) for the between-groups variation is 282.20, while the MS for the within-groups variation is 33.34. The resulting F-ratio of 8.46 shows that the differences in delinquency rates across the different family structures are statistically significant. With a p-value of 0.00 ($p < 0.001$), the analysis confirms that family structure has a significant impact on delinquent behavior among adolescent males. This analysis suggests that delinquency rates vary based on whether an adolescent male is from a traditional family, stepfamily, single-mother household, or single-father household, warranting further investigation into specific group differences through post-hoc comparisons.

**Table 3.** One-Way ANOVA for Delinquency by Family Structure

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	p-value
Between Groups	846.61	3	282.20	8.46	0.00
Within Groups	80,847.97	2,425	33.34		
Total	81,694.58	2,428			

Table 4 presents the results of Tukey's pairwise comparison test, which examines differences in delinquency rates across various family structures. The analysis reveals no significant difference in delinquency rates between adolescent males from stepfamilies (biological mother and stepfather) and traditional families (both biological parents). This suggests that residing in a stepfamily does not significantly impact delinquent behavior compared to living with both biological parents. Adolescents from single-mother households, however, show significantly higher delinquency rates compared to those from traditional families, with a mean difference of 1.16 ($p < 0.05$). This finding supports the hypothesis that the absence of a resident father is linked to increased delinquent behavior. Similarly, adolescents from single-father households also exhibit significantly higher delinquency rates compared to traditional family counterparts, with a mean difference of 1.71 ($p < 0.05$). No significant difference is observed between adolescents from single-mother households and those from stepfamilies, suggesting that both groups exhibit similar levels of delinquent behavior, despite differing family compositions. Adolescents from single-father households, on the other hand, show significantly higher delinquency rates compared to those from stepfamilies, with a mean difference of 1.60 ($p < 0.05$). Finally, there is no significant difference in delinquency rates between adolescents from single-father and single-mother households, with a mean difference of 0.55 ($p = 0.76$). This indicates that the absence of either a mother or father similarly influences delinquent behavior. Overall, the results demonstrate significant differences in delinquency based on family structure. Adolescents from both single-mother and single-father households are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to those from traditional families. However, no significant differences are found between stepfamilies and traditional families, nor between single-mother and single-father households, suggesting that family composition plays a nuanced role in adolescent delinquency.

Table 4. Tukey's Pairwise Comparison Test for Family Structure and Delinquency

Comparison	MD	SE	95% CI	p-value
Stepfamily vs Traditional Family	0.10	0.41	-0.97 – 1.16	Not Significant $p = 0.99$
Single Mother vs Traditional Family	1.16	0.28	0.42 – 1.89	Significant ($p < 0.05$) $p = 0.00$
Single Father vs Traditional Family	1.71	0.49	0.45 – 2.97	Significant ($p < 0.05$) $p = 0.00$



Single Mother vs Stepfamily	1.06	0.46	-0.11 – 2.23	Not Significant p = 0.19
Single Father vs Stepfamily	1.60	0.60	0.06 – 3.17	Significant (p < 0.05) p = 0.04
Single Father vs Single Mother	0.55	0.52	-0.79 to 1.90	Not Significant p = 0.76

Note: MD = Mean Difference (contrast)

Table 5 presents the results of a negative binomial regression model investigating the relationship between delinquent behavior and household structure, using the traditional family (both biological parents) as the baseline comparison group. The findings are consistent with those seen in the correlation matrix (Table 2), one-way ANOVA (Table 3), and Tukey's pairwise comparison test (Table 4). The model also includes *race* (white), *age*, and *socioeconomic status* (SES) as control variables.

The results reveal that adolescents from *single-mother households* have a coefficient of 0.24, with a standard error (SE) of 0.06, a z-value of 3.84, and a p-value of 0.00. The 95% confidence interval (CI) ranges from 0.12 to 0.36, indicating that this finding is statistically significant. This means that adolescent males in single-mother households show a 24% higher rate of delinquent behavior compared to those in traditional families. This supports the hypothesis that the absence of a resident father is associated with increased delinquency.

Similarly, adolescents from *single-father households* have a coefficient of 0.32 (SE = 0.11), with a z-value of 2.88 and a p-value of 0.00, which is also statistically significant. The 95% CI ranges from 0.10 to 0.53, showing that adolescents from single-father households exhibit a 32% higher rate of delinquency compared to their counterparts from traditional families. This suggests that the absence of a maternal figure also contributes to an increase in delinquent behavior, and the effect appears slightly stronger than in *single-mother households*.

Race, specifically being white, has a coefficient of -0.07, with an SE of 0.05, a z-value of -1.31, and a p-value of 0.19, indicating that this relationship is not statistically significant. The 95% CI of -0.17 to 0.03 confirms that race does not have a meaningful impact on delinquency in this model. Similarly, *age* has a coefficient of 0.00 (SE = 0.01), with a z-value of 0.04 and a p-value of 0.97, suggesting no significant relationship between age and delinquency. The 95% CI of -0.03 to 0.03 further indicates that age does not meaningfully influence delinquent behavior in this sample.

SES, with a coefficient of -0.00 (SE = 0.03), a z-value of -0.02, and a p-value of 0.99, shows no statistically significant relationship with delinquency. The 95% CI of -0.06 to 0.06 indicates that SES does not have a discernible effect on delinquent behavior in this dataset.

This model suggests that household structure (particularly single-parent households) has a significant effect on delinquency, while *race*, *age*, and *SES* are not statistically significant predictors in this model.



Table 5: Negative Binomial Regression Models Investigating the Relationship between Delinquent Behavior and Household Structure (with Traditional Family as the baseline):

Variable	Coefficient	SE	Z	p-value	95% CI
Single Mother	0.24	0.06	3.84	0.00	0.12 - 0.36
Single Father	0.32	0.11	2.88	0.00	0.10 - 0.53
Race (White)	-0.07	0.05	-1.31	0.19	-0.17 - 0.03
Age	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.97	-0.03 - 0.029
SES	-0.00	0.03	-0.02	0.99	-0.06 - 0.06
Constant	1.55	0.23	6.69	0.00	1.09 - 2.00
In(alpha)	0.16	0.04	-	-	0.09 - 0.24
Alpha	1.18	0.04	-	-	1.10 - 1.26

Notes: LR $\chi^2(5)$: 25.74; Prob > χ^2 : 0.0001; Log Likelihood: -6306.92; Pseudo R-squared: 0.0020

Hypothesis 1 (H₁):

Adolescent males living in households with a biological father present will be significantly less likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to those without a resident biological father.

The results show that adolescents from single-mother households are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to those from traditional families (with both biological parents present) and single-father households. The coefficient for Single Mother is 0.24 ($p = 0.00$), indicating a significant increase in delinquency. This supports the hypothesis that the absence of a resident father increases the likelihood of delinquency in adolescent males. Therefore, we must reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 (H₂):

Adolescent males in single-mother households will be significantly more likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to those in single-father households.

Both family structures (single-mother and single-father households) are associated with increased delinquency, but the coefficient for Single Father is 0.32 ($p = 0.00$), while for Single Mother it is 0.24 ($p = 0.00$). Although single-father households exhibit slightly higher levels of delinquency (both coefficients are statistically significant), the difference between delinquency levels in single-mother and single-father households is not statistically significant ($p = 0.76$). Therefore, we must fail to reject the null hypothesis.



Hypothesis 3 (H₃):

There will be no significant difference in delinquent behavior between adolescent males from traditional families and those from single-father households.

The coefficient for Single Father is 0.32 ($p = 0.00$), indicating that adolescents from single-father households are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior compared to those from traditional families. This result does not support the hypothesis, as the difference is statistically significant. Therefore, we must fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Summary of Findings:

Adolescent males from both single-mother and single-father households exhibit higher levels of delinquency compared to those from traditional families. While this supports the general idea that the absence of a parent increases delinquent behavior, it also reveals nuances. Specifically, the higher delinquency among adolescents from single-mother households supports Hypothesis 1, which suggests that the absence of a biological father leads to more delinquent behavior.

However, adolescents from single-father households also show significantly higher delinquency compared to those from traditional families. This contradicts Hypothesis 1, as it indicates that the presence of a biological father in single-father households does not sufficiently reduce delinquency. Instead, the absence of a maternal figure in these households also contributes to delinquent behavior, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent than in single-mother households.

Hypothesis 3, which predicted no significant differences between single-father and traditional families, is not supported by the findings, as single-father households do show significantly higher delinquency.

Overall, the results underscore that family structure plays a crucial role in adolescent delinquency. Adolescents in single-parent households, whether headed by a mother or father, are at a significantly higher risk of engaging in delinquent behavior. In contrast, control variables such as *race*, *age*, and *socioeconomic status (SES)* do not significantly predict delinquency in this model, further highlighting that the absence of a parent has a more critical influence on delinquency than other demographic factors. These findings emphasize the importance of traditional, two parent families, as the absence of either parent is linked to a higher likelihood of delinquent behavior.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide important insights into the role of family structure in shaping delinquent behavior among adolescent males. Specifically, the results indicate that family dynamics—particularly the absence of a biological father—play a critical role in determining delinquency levels, corroborating prior research that links paternal absence to increased behavioral issues (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Juda, 2024). However, these findings underscore the continued relevance of traditional family structures, wherein the presence of both parents contributes to better behavioral outcomes for children.

Adolescents in both single-mother and single-father households exhibit higher levels of delinquent behavior compared to those in traditional supporting Hypothesis 1, which posits that



the absence of a biological father is a significant predictor of increased delinquent behavior. The influence of fathers has been widely documented, particularly in their roles of providing discipline, structure, and supervision. Without a father's presence, adolescents may lack the behavioral boundaries that mitigate risk-taking tendencies, especially among males. This observation aligns with theoretical frameworks emphasizing the importance of paternal involvement in preventing delinquency (Amato & Keith, 1991). Moreover, it raises questions about the significance of traditional gender roles—where fathers embody discipline and mothers provide emotional nurturing—in fostering well-adjusted adolescents. This notion is echoed by researchers like Jordan Peterson and Warren Farrell (The Dr. Jordan Peterson Podcast, EP 187, August 16, 2021), suggesting that these traditional roles may still hold relevance in shaping positive child outcomes.

Interestingly, the results for adolescents in single-father households present a more complex picture. Although these adolescents exhibited higher levels of delinquency than those in traditional families, the increase was less pronounced than that observed in single-mother households. This partially supports Hypothesis 3, which suggested that delinquency rates in single-father households would not differ significantly from those in traditional families. While single fathers may not fully replicate the dual-parent dynamic, their presence appears to offer some protective benefits, albeit less robust than those provided by intact families. This finding invites further exploration into the specific roles that single fathers play and how these roles may differ from those of mothers, particularly in terms of emotional support and supervision.

Contrary to Hypothesis 2, which anticipated a stark contrast in delinquency rates between single-mother and single-father households, the differences were not as dramatic as expected. Both family types were associated with elevated risks of delinquent behavior, indicating that the absence of either parental figure adversely affects adolescent outcomes. This finding challenges the assumption that single-father households are inherently more stable or protective against delinquency compared to their single-mother counterparts. Instead, the absence of either a maternal or paternal figure seems to disrupt the balance of emotional and disciplinary nurturing essential for healthy adolescent development.

The lack of significant effects from control variables such as race, age, and socioeconomic status (SES) emphasizes the overwhelming influence of family structure on delinquent behavior in this sample. This suggests that while factors like poverty or ethnicity often correlate with negative outcomes, the dynamics within the household—specifically the presence or absence of a parental figure—are more critical in determining delinquency levels among young males. These insights have significant implications for interventions, indicating that efforts to reduce delinquency should prioritize strengthening family dynamics, particularly in single-parent households.

Boys raised in intact families benefit from the presence of both male and female role models, which provides a balanced approach to their development. Juda (2024) emphasized that many contemporary challenges faced by boys likely stem from the lack of strong, positive male figures. While this assertion is valid, it is equally important to recognize the vital role that mothers play in a child's upbringing. Mothers excel at identifying their children's strengths, fostering emotional intelligence and self-preservation/aversion to danger (Kofler-Westergren et al., 2010). Conversely, fathers typically focus on boundary-setting and discipline, instilling skills such as delayed gratification that are crucial for developing a strong work ethic, self-control (Demuth & Brown, 2004; Vanassche et al., 2014), grit and anti-fragility (CITE). This



complementary dynamic between mothers and fathers enriches boys' lives by imparting a variety of essential life skills, ultimately leading to the developmental advantages associated with dual parental involvement. The interplay of these roles highlights the importance of both nurturing and structure in boys' healthy development, suggesting that the absence of either can hinder their ability to thrive socially and emotionally.

Theoretical Implications

These findings raise important questions about the roles of gender and traditional parental dynamics in adolescent development. The notion that a masculine father and a feminine mother provide distinct yet complementary roles in shaping child behavior remains relevant. Fathers, traditionally viewed as providers of discipline, may play a critical role in moderating delinquent tendencies, while mothers may offer emotional support that fosters well-being and stability. The imbalance created by the absence of one parent could lead to adverse outcomes, especially in adolescence when boys may require a stronger disciplinary presence. Future research should explore the psychological and emotional mechanisms behind these gendered roles to determine their contemporary relevance.

There is significant room for investigation into the magnitude these roles hold in non-traditional two-parent family structures, such as same-sex parenting, where the distribution of discipline and emotional support may differ from traditional norms. This exploration could provide valuable insight into the adaptability of parental roles and their effect on delinquency and other well-being outcomes in children.

Practical Implications and Future Directions

The study's findings underscore the need for targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by adolescents in single-parent households. Both single mothers and single fathers may struggle to provide the balanced supervision and emotional support that dual-parent households typically offer. Support systems—such as parenting programs, mentoring initiatives, and community resources—should be designed to empower single parents, equipping them with strategies to manage their children's behavior effectively and foster healthy development.

Additionally, future research should delve deeper into the specific aspects of parental involvement that mitigate delinquency. Understanding how different styles of supervision, emotional availability, and discipline vary between single mothers and fathers could illuminate protective factors that can be leveraged in both family types. Investigating the contributions of non-residential parents, such as fathers who maintain involvement despite living apart, would also add nuance to the discussion. These insights could inform the development of targeted interventions aimed at reducing delinquency and promoting well-being among adolescent males.

Lastly, the ongoing increase in single-father households presents a timely opportunity for further research. Gaining a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and advantages faced by single fathers could lead to more effective support mechanisms for this growing family type. The findings of this study suggest that while single fathers can mitigate delinquency to some extent, they may still encounter barriers that prevent them from providing the same level of stability as traditional families.



Policy Implications

Exploring policy reforms to discourage divorce and single parenting could center on fostering family stability. One key strategy involves enhancing marriage support programs, such as subsidized counseling, mediation services, and pre-marital education. These initiatives can equip couples with the tools to manage conflicts and strengthen long-term commitment, ultimately reinforcing the stability that is beneficial for child development.

Reforming alimony and child support policies is another potential avenue. Eliminating child support and alimony would remove financial incentives tied to divorce or having children out of wedlock. The underlying idea is that without these supports, individuals would be more deliberate in their relationship and family planning choices, fostering stronger, more committed partnerships. By reducing the economic appeal of single parenting or divorce, these reforms could promote the formation and preservation of two-parent households—structures that research consistently shows benefit children's emotional and social development.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that may affect the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. First, using cross-sectional data from Add Health Wave 1 provides only a snapshot in time, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships between family structure and delinquency. Additionally, while race, age, and socioeconomic status (SES) are controlled for, other confounding variables, such as neighborhood context, peer influence, and parental involvement, may also impact delinquency but are not accounted for in the analysis.

Another concern is the simplification of family structures into four categories, which may overlook the complexities within each group. For instance, stepfamilies can vary significantly in terms of the biological father's involvement, and single-parent households may include varying levels of support from extended family or co-parenting arrangements. Lastly, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases related to social desirability or recall inaccuracies.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the evolving landscape of family structures in the United States, particularly focusing on single-father households and their influence on delinquency among young adolescent males. As single-father families continue to grow, accounting for an increasing proportion of households with minor children, it becomes essential to understand the unique dynamics and challenges they face compared to single-mother families and traditional family units.

The findings indicate that while single fathers may provide distinct advantages in terms of involvement and support, the absence of a biological father can still correlate with elevated rates of delinquent behavior in adolescents. This underscores the critical role that parental involvement plays in shaping behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, the demographic differences observed between single-father and single-mother households—such as socioeconomic status, education levels, and family background—serve as essential factors that merit further exploration in the literature.

Given the implications of these findings, future research should prioritize a deeper investigation into the specific characteristics of single-father households and how these may



influence the development of adolescents. Additionally, policymakers and practitioners must consider the unique needs of single fathers and their children to develop targeted interventions that promote positive outcomes.

As family structures continue to diversify, it is vital to broaden our understanding of how these changes impact the development and behavior of children. By addressing the complexities of single-father households, we can contribute to a more nuanced perspective on family dynamics and their implications for adolescent well-being.

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