

# Parenting Behavior in Two Distinct Juvenile Populations

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Research comparing adolescents with illegal sexual behavior (AISB) and adolescents with general delinquent behavior (AGDB) finds the two distinct populations to differ in many ways while also sharing some unique features (Seto & Lalumière, 2010). In particular, the groups share similarities in relationships with family and attachment styles, whereas the AISB group often scored higher on childhood victimization (Seto & Lalumière, 2010). It is important for clinicians working with this population to understand the family relationships and attachment styles of the youth client (ATSA, 2017). Caregiver attachment mediates the relationships between childhood victimization and later self-disclosure of illegal sexual behavior, highlighting the importance that childhood victimization may play in one’s ability to trust and engage in the treatment process (Harrelson et al., 2017). Vulnerability is a critical element in a young offender’s life, sometimes resulting from poor attachment bonds between the child and parents and leading to low self-esteem, poor social skills, or lack of empathy for others (Marshall, 2010). Thus, evidence suggests attachment problems, intimacy deficits, and loneliness are significant features of justice-involved youth, particularly AISB. Given how attachment deficits may interfere with the treatment process, the purpose of the current study was to investigate differences in parenting behaviors in a sample of detained youth.

Archival data were used from a high-security residential facility serving male adolescents (n = 48) adjudicated for serious delinquent behavior, like homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, and kidnapping. A series of one-way ANOVAs were used to analyze the relationship. The group variable was the type of offense, general delinquent behavior vs. illegal sexual behavior (AISB; n = 28 and AGDB; n = 20). The outcome variables were parenting behaviors measured by the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Frick, 1991). The APQ is a well-validated self-report scale of parenting behaviors across five key domains: positive parenting, corporal punishment, inconsistent discipline, parental involvement, and supervision/monitoring (Zlomke, 2015). Results indicated the groups differed significantly on poor

monitoring,  $F(1, 46) = 8.53, p = .005$ , while inconsistent discipline was approaching significance,  $F(1, 47) = 3.34, p = .075$ . The overall group means poor monitoring was 27.70 (SD = 6.64). As seen in Figure 1, the AGDB group scored higher than the overall group mean and the AISB group.

These results suggest the need for ongoing parental involvement for youth in residential treatment settings. These youth may often return to homes characterized by poor monitoring and inconsistent discipline at a critical time post-treatment when the youth need more support than ever. Just as youth have learned new skills for life improvement, clinicians working with these youth may also want to ensure caregivers have improved skills. This would align with prior research indicating a link between certain parenting behaviors, such as caregiver consistency, and risk for later reoffending (Henggeler et al., 2009; Seto & Lalumiere, 2010). This is a challenge for clinicians working in residential settings, where contact with caregivers may not always be easy.

Significant Parenting Behavior

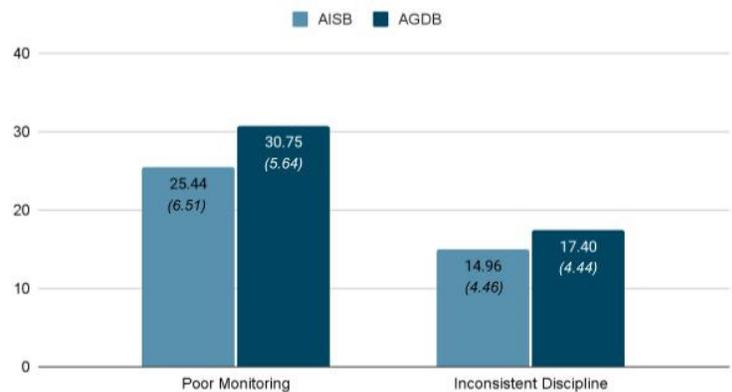


Figure 1. Means & Standard Deviations of Main Study Variables.

Note: AISB = Adolescents with Illegal Sexual Behavior; AGDB = Adolescents with General Delinquent Behavior.

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## Statement of Research Advisor

Elise first started this research question as a directed readings course credit project with the Juvenile Delinquency Lab in Spring 2022. She stayed with the project and first presented the data at the 41st Annual Research Conference for the Association of the Treatment of Sexual Abusers in Los Angeles, CA, in Fall 2022. She continues to see this project through publication as she looks toward graduate school.

- Dr. Kelli Thompson, College of Liberal Arts

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### Journal Paper

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### Journal Paper

## Authors Biography



Elise M. Reach is a graduating senior pursuing a B.A. degree in Psychology at Auburn University. She has played key research roles in parenting behavior and juvenile delinquent behavior. Elise is planning on continuing her education to Master and Ph.D. She has applied for different psychology/counseling master's programs around the United States. She has a real passion for understanding the mind and why people do the actions they do.



Kelli R. Thompson is an Assistant Research Professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences. Her lab is supported by a more than a 20-year public-public partnership with the Alabama Department of Youth Services. Her research interests include the assessment and treatment of adolescents with illegal sexual behavior. She teaches a comprehensive healthy sexuality group at the Mt. Meigs facility. Undergraduate research mentoring remains a personal and professional focus.