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The Influence of Family Instability on Mexican-Origin Adolescent Delinquency Through Parental Monitoring: Moderating Roles of Adolescent Family Obligation Values and Affiliation With Deviant Peers

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Unaddressed adolescent delinquency may contribute to negative adult outcomes, such as poor mental and physical health (Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013; J. Kim et al., 2020). Although family instability has been identified as a risk factor for adolescent delinquency (Vargas et al., 2013), the hypothesized underlying mechanism of parental monitoring remains relatively underexplored. This is especially the case for Mexican-origin families where parental monitoring is embedded within the cultural values of the family (e.g., family obligation values) and with the larger social context of youth (e.g., affiliation with deviant peers). The intersection of family, social, and cultural factors likely predicts variability in whether Mexican-origin youth engage in delinquent behaviors. Using longitudinal data (2013–2020) from 483 Mexican-origin families ($M_{\text{wave1 age}}$ = 12.36, $SD_{\text{wave1 age}}$ = 0.92, 54% females) from low-income families ($M_{\text{Wave 1 family income}}$ = \$20,001–\$30,000), the study found that parental-reported family instability was associated with lower adolescent-reported maternal monitoring, subsequently leading to higher adolescent-reported delinquency. Moreover, the promotive effect of parental monitoring in reducing delinquent behaviors was stronger among adolescents with higher levels of family obligation values or those who had more contact with deviant peers. These findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive interventions that strengthen parental monitoring to mitigate youth delinquent behaviors.

Public Significance Statement

This study shows that family instability contributes to adolescent delinquency among Mexican-origin youth through reduced parental monitoring. Parental monitoring was especially protective for adolescents with strong family obligation values or greater exposure to deviant peers. These findings highlight the importance of culturally informed, family-based interventions that strengthen parental supervision to reduce delinquent behaviors in at-risk youth.

Keywords: family instability, adolescent delinquency, deviant peers, parenting, family obligation values

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All data, analysis code, and research materials are available on the Open Science Framework and can be accessed at https://osf.io/m6ygd/?view_only=058d20b8bba14aeab0f7cb22a0f09f5a (Du, Stein, et al., 2025). All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. All study materials and procedures were approved by the institutional review board at the University of Texas at Austin (2015010006). Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. This article is not preregistered. The authors declare no competing interests.

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Yayu Du conceptualized the study, conducted statistical analyses, designed the model, interpreted the results, and drafted the article; Gabriela Livas provided supervision in model design and result interpretation and provided a critical review and edits of the article; Wen Wen participated in model revision, data reanalysis, and results interpretation and provided reviews of the article; Su Yeong Kim designed the larger project, collected data, provided supervision in

continued

Adolescent delinquency presents a critical public health concern due to its strong associations with long-term negative adult outcomes, including higher risks of physical and mental health problems (Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013; J. Kim et al., 2020). Given these far-reaching consequences, understanding the ecological factors that contribute to the development of delinquent behaviors during adolescence is essential. Among these factors, the family environment plays a central role. Specifically, family instability (i.e., change of residence or changes of primary caregiver) has been associated with greater adolescent delinquency (Lee & McLanahan, 2015; Magnuson & Berger, 2009; Schroeder et al., 2010), but the underlying mechanism remains less explored. The family stress model (Conger et al., 1990) suggests that the detrimental effect of family instability on adolescents may be explained by disruptions in parenting practices (e.g., parental monitoring).

While the family plays an important role in shaping adolescent behavior, it is equally important to recognize that the development of Mexican-origin[1] youth is embedded in their cultural milieu that is distinct from the larger U.S. mainstream (e.g., family obligation values; Smola & Fuligni, 2024). Moreover, for all youth, their familial environment also interacts with their social environment to predict outcomes (e.g., affiliation with deviant peers; Pokhrel et al., 2013). The integrative risk and resilience model (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018) hypothesizes that ecological factors (e.g., family, social, and cultural factors) interact with each other to impact immigrant-origin adolescent outcomes, including delinquency. To understand the multifaceted nature of Mexican-origin youth development and to inform prevention efforts, the present study examined how the impact of family instability on Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency through parental monitoring may vary across different levels of adolescent family obligation values and affiliation with deviant peers.

Family Instability and Mexican-Origin Adolescent Delinquency

Latinos represent the largest racial–ethnic minority group in the United States, contributing to 71% of the nation's population growth between 2022 and 2023 (United States Census Bureau, 2024). While extensive research has examined Latino adolescents as a whole, exploring specific subgroups is essential, as each group may have distinct socioeconomic backgrounds and developmental trajectories (Epstein et al., 2001). Individuals of Mexican descent represent the largest Latino subgroup, making them an essential population for identifying unique challenges and resilience factors that shape adolescent development. For example, the emphasis on strong family bonds and support systems in Mexican-origin families fosters resilience in youth, contributing to positive outcomes such as greater prosocial behavior and higher educational aspirations (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2019; Zhao et al., 2022). Despite the thriving of many Mexican-origin families, unfortunately, they may also face stressors, such as family economic stress or living in dangerous neighborhoods, where adolescents may face greater exposure to violence and a higher likelihood of behavioral problems (Martin et al., 2019; Rubens et al., 2018).

Adolescent delinquency refers to behaviors or criminal acts that violate social norms, laws, or rules, such as underage drinking, destroying property, stealing, and running away from home (Walters, 2022). Family as an essential ecological factor may influence adolescent delinquency concurrently and longitudinally (Fowler et al., 2015; Vogel et al., 2017). One key risk factor in the family system is family instability, defined as the cumulative number of changes experienced by the family (e.g., residential move, primary caregiver change, and parental job loss; Coe et al., 2020; Vargas et al., 2013). Previous literature has demonstrated that distinct forms of family instability are associated with Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency (Nikolova & Nikolaev, 2021; Vogel et al., 2017). For instance, a study on Mexican-origin families shows that family economic instability, like parental job loss, is associated with increased adolescent delinquent behavior (Delgado et al., 2013; Nikolova & Nikolaev, 2021). Similarly, frequent residential moves during childhood and early adolescence may also hinder the formation of prosocial peer relationships, thereby elevating the risk of Mexican-origin adolescent delinquent behaviors in later adolescence (Gold, 2020; Vogel et al., 2017).

In addition to economic instability, family instability also includes changes in family structure, such as shifts in primary caregivers or transitions in caregivers' intimate relationships (Forman & Davies, 2003). Although Mexican-origin families tend to have relatively stable marital relationships and are less likely to experience transitions in primary caregiver compared to other ethnic groups (Lehrer & Son, 2017), some youth may still experience family structure changes due to forced family separation or parental work afar (Roche et al., 2020). Such changes in family structure could increase adolescents' vulnerability to delinquent behaviors, as parents may become less emotionally available to provide support (Fowler et al., 2015). A longitudinal study of Latino adolescents also supports this idea by showing that youth who experience family separation due to the detention or deportation of family members are at greater risk for externalizing symptoms, including alcohol abuse and drug overdose (Roche et al., 2020). Although prior research has explored the effects of individual family instability events on Latino adolescent delinquency, few studies have considered these family stressors simultaneously (Roche et al., 2020; Vogel et al., 2017). Given that multiple stressors tend to have more detrimental influence than a singular risk factor (Evans et al., 2013), the examination

[1] Mexican-origin families refer to immigrant families that are originally from Mexico. In the present study, the terms Mexican-origin families and Mexican immigrant families are used interchangeably.

model design and result interpretation, and provided reviews of the article. All authors contributed to the review of the article and approved the final article.

Yayu Du played a lead role in conceptualization, formal analysis, methodology, visualization, writing–original draft, and writing–review and editing. Gabriela Livas played a supporting role in conceptualization, supervision, visualization, and writing–review and editing. Wen Wen played a supporting role in conceptualization, formal analysis, and methodology. Su Yeong Kim played a lead role in data curation, funding acquisition, and project administration and a supporting role in conceptualization, supervision, and writing–review and editing.

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of the influence of cumulative family instability events on Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency is needed.

Mediating Role of Parental Monitoring

To understand the interplay of family instability and parenting practices in the development of adolescent delinquency, it is important to closely examine parenting mechanisms. The family stress model (Conger et al., 1990) suggests that family stress (e.g., family instability) may undermine positive parenting practice (e.g., parental monitoring), which subsequently leads to higher negative adolescent developmental outcomes (e.g., delinquency). Experiencing family instability manifests in subsequent parental difficulties in supervising and supporting adolescents, placing adolescents at a higher risk of behavioral problems (Coe et al., 2020). Not surprisingly, previous studies have tested parenting as a mediator of the risk posed by family instability, but these studies tend to focus on parenting difficulties and supportive parenting, with few studies examining parental monitoring (Forman & Davies, 2003).

Parental monitoring, or parental awareness and supervision of their children's activities, is pivotal for positive Mexican-origin adolescent development (Rios et al., 2020). Parental monitoring plays a significant role in preventing adolescent delinquent behaviors concurrently and longitudinally (Clark et al., 2015; Rios et al., 2020). A cross-sectional study found that Latino adolescents who perceive higher levels of parental monitoring are less likely to engage in physical violence (Rios et al., 2020). Similarly, a longitudinal study of Mexican-origin families demonstrated that higher adolescent-reported parental monitoring in early adolescence is associated with fewer externalizing behaviors in late adolescence (Clark et al., 2015). This protective effect may occur because consistent parental monitoring allows parents to provide timely emotional support and guidance, as well as foster the development of prosocial coping skills, thereby reducing adolescents' propensity toward delinquent behavior. Given that parental monitoring is a critical protective factor in preventing adolescent delinquency (Keijsers, 2016; Pelham et al., 2023), investigating the mediational role of parental monitoring is an important next step to have a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of family instability in Mexican-origin families.

Mexican-origin mothers and fathers may display different patterns of parental monitoring due to different gender role expectations in traditional Mexican culture, potentially making unique contributions to adolescent delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2011; Van Heel et al., 2019). In the traditional culture, Mexican mothers may be more likely to assume primary caregiving responsibilities and spend time with children (Lam et al., 2012; Ovink, 2014). Conversely, Mexican-origin fathers may tend to fulfill the role of provider, engaging in employment outside the home to support the family financially. Subsequently, adolescents may have more communication and closer relationships with their mothers, while fathers may have less time to monitor and supervise their adolescents at home (Fosco et al., 2012). The frequent interactions with mothers enable them to have greater knowledge of their adolescents' daily activities compared to fathers, which contributes to a stronger maternal influence on adolescent delinquent behaviors (Killoren & Deutsch, 2014). In order to understand the potential diverse impact of parental monitoring from both mothers and fathers, the present study examined maternal and paternal monitoring separately.

Moderating Roles of Social and Cultural Factors: Family Obligation Values and Deviant Peer Affiliation

Immigrant-origin adolescent development is closely tied to cultural influences that exist within the family (i.e., family obligation values) or social environments (i.e., affiliation with deviant peers; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). For instance, Mexican-origin adolescents who are more acculturated to mainstream U.S. culture tend to have greater tolerance for deviant behaviors and more contact with deviant peers (Pokhrel et al., 2013). Likely, the association between family instability and adolescent delinquency may vary depending on the influence of multiple contextual factors that are tied to Mexican culture and experiences of Mexican-origin youth.

Family obligation values, referring to the psychological sense that one should help, support, and sacrifice for the family, constitute one of the fundamental aspects of Mexican cultural values (Cahill et al., 2021). Mexican-origin adolescents who strongly endorse family obligation values feel a strong sense of duty to maintain family cohesion and prioritize time with their families, making them more sensitive and responsive to familial dynamics and influences. Research on the impact of family obligation values on adolescent development has yielded mixed findings, suggesting that their effects depend on the broader family environment (Hernández et al., 2010). For instance, when Mexican-origin parents exhibit high levels of parental acceptance, adolescents with strong family obligation values were more likely to benefit from this support, leading to fewer internalizing symptoms. Parental acceptance may enhance communication and problem solving, and Mexican-origin adolescents who prioritize family obligations and engage more with their families may derive the greatest benefit from these supportive relationships. However, high adherence to family obligation values may also increase adolescents' vulnerability to family-related stressors, thereby negatively influencing developmental outcomes (Milan & Wortel, 2015). For instance, family obligation values exacerbated the detrimental influence of intrafamilial discord on Latino adolescent psychological distress (Hernández et al., 2010). Latino youth with strong family obligation values may internalize a sense of personal responsibility for maintaining family harmony and mitigating conflict. When this sense of duty is juxtaposed with experiences of family instability, these adolescents may perceive themselves as failing to fulfill expected familial roles, leading to heightened psychological distress. This emotional burden may further increase their vulnerability to maladaptive coping strategies, such as engagement in delinquent behaviors.

In addition, peers emerge as an increasingly important social tie throughout adolescence (Scholte et al., 2020), making affiliation with deviant peers a prominent social stressor for adolescents. Deviant peer activity tends to be higher in communities with lower income, leading to more exposure to delinquent peers (Goetz et al., 2025). Previous studies on Mexican-origin adolescents have demonstrated that high levels of affiliation with deviant peers are associated with higher adolescent delinquent behaviors (Roosa et al., 2011; Schofield et al., 2015). Furthermore, a study on Chinese adolescents further tested the moderating role of deviant peers, revealing that youth with higher affiliations with deviant peers tend to be more vulnerable to low parental monitoring and more likely to be involved in delinquent behaviors compared to adolescents with low affiliations with deviant peers (Lu et al., 2020). Although the interplay between parental monitoring and affiliation with deviant

peers has been studied among Chinese families, examining this relationship in Mexican-origin families is essential to account for their unique cultural values and national contexts, enabling the development of culturally sensitive insights and interventions.

The Present Study

While the influence of singular family instability events on adolescent delinquency has been widely studied (Nikolova & Nikolaev, 2021; Vogel et al., 2017), less is known about the effect of cumulative family instability events within Mexican-origin families. The cultural (i.e., family obligation values) and social (i.e., affiliation with deviant peers) factors of Mexican-origin immigrant families may uniquely influence the relation between family instability and adolescent delinquency. In order to better understand such association and inform culturally sensitive interventions, the present study drew from the family stress and integrative risk and resilience models (Conger et al., 1990; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). Specifically, the study investigated the indirect effect of family instability on Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency through parental monitoring and how such association may vary across adolescents' family obligation values or affiliation with deviant peers (Figure 1). Based on the literature review, the present study hypothesized that (a) concurrently and longitudinally, higher family instability is associated with lower parental monitoring, which contributes to higher Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency, and (b) adolescent family obligation values or affiliation with deviant peers moderates the association between parental monitoring and adolescent delinquency. Specifically, adolescents with higher family obligation values or affiliation with deviant peers are more likely to benefit from parental monitoring and exhibit lower levels of delinquency compared to those with lower family obligation values or affiliation with deviant peers. (c) Family obligation values or affiliation with deviant peers moderates the indirect effect of family instability on adolescent delinquency through parental monitoring. Specifically, the indirect association between family instability and adolescent delinquency is expected to be stronger when adolescents have higher levels of family obligation values or affiliation with deviant peers.

Method

Participants

Data were drawn from a three-wave longitudinal study (Wave 1: 2012–2015; Wave 2: 2013–2016; Wave 3: 2017–2020) of low-income Mexican-origin families ($M_{\text{Wave 1 family income}}$ = $20,001–$30,000) in Central Texas in the United States. A total of 604 families initially participated in Wave 1 data collection (M_{age} = 12.36, SD = 0.92, 54% females,[2] 75% U.S.-born), 483 families returned in Wave 2 (M_{age} = 13.19, SD = 0.93, 55% females, 74% U.S.-born), and 334 continued participating in the study in Wave 3 (M_{age} = 17.03, SD = 1.12, 56% females, 76% U.S.-born). The majority of participants' parents were born in Mexico (98.6% of fathers and 99.3% of mothers), with the average highest parental education level being middle or junior high school. Given that the present study focuses on family instability, which was first assessed at Wave 2, only participants who participated in Wave 2 were included (N = 483). Attrition analyses were conducted to identify whether adolescents who remained in the study and those who dropped out differed based on their demographic information (i.e., Wave 2 adolescent gender, age, nativity, and maternal education). Results showed that adolescents whose mothers had higher education levels at Wave 1 were more likely to stay in the study for Wave 2, $t(591) = -2.41$, $p < .05$. Furthermore, younger adolescents and those whose mothers had higher education at Wave 1, age: $t(602) = 3.49$, $p < .001$; maternal education: $t(591) = -3.45$, $p < .001$, and Wave 2, age: $t(480) = 3.20$, $p < .01$; maternal education: $t(476) = -3.39$, $p < .001$, were more likely to remain engaged in Wave 3. Therefore, Wave 2 adolescent age and maternal education were controlled as covariates in all analyses.

Procedure

Participants' families were initially recruited through school presentations, community recruitment, and public records. Families were eligible to participate if parents were of Mexican origin and their child used English and Spanish to translate for at least one of the parents (mother or father). Informed consent from parents and informed assent from adolescents were obtained. Participants were offered the English and Spanish versions of the questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered by bilingual research assistants, who verbally presented the questions to participants and recorded their responses on a laptop computer. Families that participated were compensated $60 at Wave 1, $90 at Wave 2, and $90 at Wave 3. All procedures were approved by The University of Texas at Austin.

Measures

Family Instability

Wave 2 and Wave 3 family parent-reported instability were assessed by the cumulative number of instability events that happened in the family between Wave 1 and Wave 2 and between Wave 2 and Wave 3, respectively. Parents reported on five instability events: (a) changes in residence, (b) changes in primary caregiver, (c) transitions in romantic relationships of the primary caregiver (e.g., dissolution), (d) parental job and income loss, and (e) death or serious illness of a close family member (Forman & Davies, 2003). Sample items included "Since the last time you completed a survey for this project, how many times have you moved?" and "Have you ever gotten divorced or separated since the last time you completed a survey for this project?" Each variable was dummy-coded as 1 for having experienced the change and 0 for not having experienced the change. Family instability was assessed by the number of changes families experienced, ranging from 0 (*have not experienced any of the listed changes*) to 5 (*have experienced 5 listed changes*). Higher numbers indicated a greater frequency of family instability events between waves. Previous research has demonstrated the construct validity of the measure by showing a positive association between family instability and children's negative internal representations of family relationships in a racially diverse sample (Latino/a, African American, and White; $\beta = .20$, $p < .05$; Coe et al., 2020).

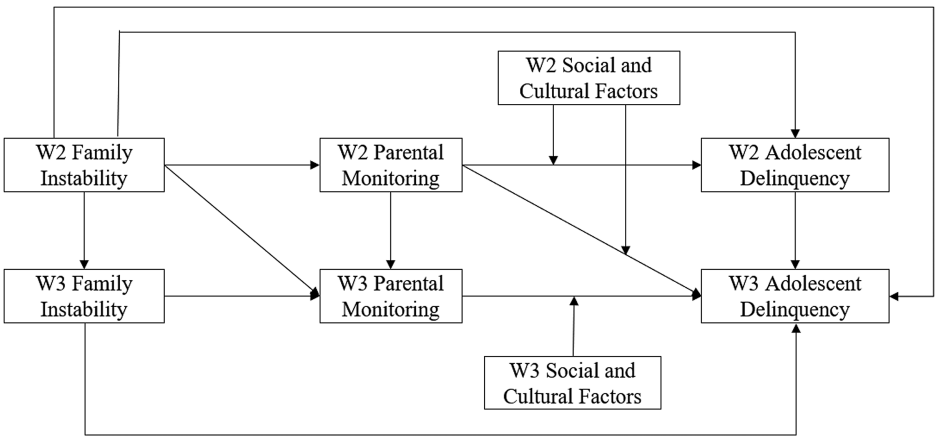
Parental Monitoring

Wave 2 and Wave 3 adolescent-reported parental monitoring was assessed using three items selected from a study of parenting from

[2] The present study used binary gender measurement.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model: Conditional Indirect Effect of Family Instability and Adolescent Delinquency as Moderated by Social and Cultural Factors



Note. Social factor included affiliation with deviant peers, and cultural factor included family obligation values. Covariates include W2 adolescent age, gender, nativity, and maternal education. W2 = Wave 2 (early adolescence); W3 = Wave 3 (late adolescence).

the Iowa Youth and Families Project (Conger et al., 1995; Ge et al., 1996). Adolescents reported their maternal and paternal monitoring ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Sample items included "During the day, does your mother/father know where you are and what you are doing?" and "Does your mother/father know who you are with when you are away from home?" Higher mean scores represented adolescents perceived a higher level of parental monitoring ($\alpha_{\text{wave 2 mother}} = .75$, $\alpha_{\text{wave 2 father}} = .87$, $\alpha_{\text{wave 3 mother}} = .79$, $\alpha_{\text{wave 3 father}} = .88$). Previous research has demonstrated the construct validity of the measure by showing a positive association between maternal monitoring and adolescent resilience in Mexican-origin families ($r = .19$, $p < .01$; Yan et al., 2022).

Family Obligation Values

Wave 2 and Wave 3 adolescents' endorsement of family obligation values was assessed using 13 items selected from an adolescent family obligation values and expectations scale (Fuligni et al., 1999). Adolescents reported their family obligation values ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). Sample items included "How important it is to you that you treat your parents with respect?" and "How important it is to you that you make sacrifices or give up something for your family?" Higher mean scores represent a higher level of adolescents' family obligation values ($\alpha_{\text{wave 2}} = .88$, $\alpha_{\text{wave 3}} = .86$). Previous research has demonstrated the construct validity of the measure by showing a positive association between family obligation values and maternal supportive parenting in Mexican-origin families ($\beta = .66$, $p < .01$; S. Y. Kim et al., 2024).

Affiliation With Deviant Peers

Wave 2 and Wave 3 adolescents' affiliation with deviant peers was measured by seven items selected from a larger peer deviance scale developed in previous studies (Le & Stockdale, 2005; Wang et al., 2012). Adolescents reported their affiliations with deviant peers ranging from 1 (*almost none*) to 5 (*almost all*). Sample items included, "During the past 6 months, how many of your close friends have cheated on school tests?" and "During the past 6 months, how many of your close friends have purposely damaged or destroyed property that did not belong to them?" Higher mean scores represent more affiliation with deviant peers ($\alpha_{\text{wave 2}} = .86$, $\alpha_{\text{wave 3}} = .86$). Previous research has demonstrated the construct validity of the measure by showing a positive association between affiliation with deviant peers and social alcohol use expectancy in Mexican-origin families ($r = .11$, $p < .05$; Song et al., 2022).

Adolescent Delinquency

Wave 2 and Wave 3 adolescents' delinquency were assessed by using 13 items adapted from the Child Behavior Checklist by converting short phrases into full sentences and simplifying words for clarity (Achenbach, 2001). One item ("I feel guilty after doing something I shouldn't do") was excluded from the original scale because it reduced the overall reliability (Cronbach's α) of the measure. Adolescents reported their own delinquency ranging from 0 (*not true*) to 2 (*often true or very true*). Sample items included "I drink alcohol without my parents' approval," and "I cut classes or skip school without reason." Higher mean scores represent a higher level of adolescent delinquency ($\alpha_{\text{wave 2}} = .79$, $\alpha_{\text{wave 3}} = .72$). Previous research has demonstrated the construct validity of the measure by showing a positive association between adolescent delinquency and parent–child alienation in Mexican-origin families ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$; O'Gara et al., 2020).

Covariates

A set of demographic variables at Wave 2, including adolescents' binary sex (male = 0, female = 1), age, nativity (United States = 0, Mexico = 1), and maternal education level, were controlled as covariates for outcome variables (i.e., Wave 2 and 3 adolescent delinquency). Maternal education level was assessed by asking

"What is the highest level of education you have completed?" Responses range from 1 (*no formal schooling*) to 11 (*finished graduate degree*). Those variables were controlled because they are found to be significantly associated with adolescent delinquency. Specifically, males tend to engage in higher levels of delinquency than females, and Latino immigrants born in a foreign country are less likely to engage in delinquent behaviors than the U.S.-born (Powers et al., 2022; Rebellon et al., 2016). Adolescent age is also positively related to adolescent delinquency (Council & Medicine, 2001). Moreover, a higher maternal education level is associated with fewer adolescent delinquent behaviors (Liu et al., 2021).

Analysis Plan

Pearson correlation of studied variables was analyzed using R, Version 4.3.2 (R Core Team, 2020) with the package *bruceR* (Bao, 2024). Moderated mediation models were analyzed using structural equation modeling in Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Listwise deletion was first used to delete families who did not participate in Wave 2. Full information maximum likelihood was used to account for missing data. Maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors was used to account for the potential nonnormality of variables. First, two models (maternal and paternal monitoring) were estimated to examine the indirect influence of family instability on adolescent delinquency through parental monitoring (Figure 1). Second, eight models (Two Parents × Two Moderators × Two Waves) were estimated to investigate the moderating effects of adolescent family obligation values and affiliation with deviant peers on the association between parental monitoring and adolescent delinquency. Third, simple slope analyses (1 standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator) were estimated for the significant interaction effect (Aiken & West, 1991). Fourth, the moderating effects of family obligation values and affiliation with deviant peers on the indirect association between family instability and adolescent delinquency were estimated to assess the conditional indirect effect based on the eight models in the second step. Fifth, the Johnson–Neyman analysis was conducted to identify the region of significance of moderators in the models. Adolescent-reported maternal and paternal monitoring were estimated in separate models, and adolescent family obligation values and affiliation with deviant peers were estimated in separate models. Post hoc power analysis was conducted for the mediation model using Monte Carlo simulations with 1,000 replications in Mplus 8.3. The study's current sample size was sufficient to detect small (.14) effect sizes for the paths in the mediation model with a power of .80.

Transparency and Openness

We reported how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study, and we followed Journal Article Reporting Standards (Appelbaum et al., 2018). All data, analysis code, and research materials are available on the Open Science Framework and can be accessed at https://osf.io/m6ygd/?view_only=058d20b8bba14aeab0f7cb22a0f09f5a (Du, Stein, et al., 2025). Data were analyzed using Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) and R, Version 4.3.2 (R Core Team, 2020), with the package *bruceR* (Bao, 2024). This study's design and its analysis were not preregistered.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables are shown in Table 1.[3] During early adolescence (Wave 2), 94.6% (n = 457) of Mexican-origin families experienced at least one type of family change, and this proportion increased to 96.8% (n = 304) in late adolescence (Wave 3). The two most frequently experienced changes among our sample are parental loss of job (94.5%) and change of residence (10.6%). Moreover, adolescents reported experiencing slightly higher levels of parental monitoring ($M_{\text{W2 mother}}$ = 4.15, $M_{\text{W3 mother}}$ = 3.98; $M_{\text{W2 father}}$ = 3.67, $M_{\text{W3 father}}$ = 3.34) and lower levels of delinquency (M_{W2} = 0.26, M_{W3} = 0.31) in early adolescence (Wave 2) than in late adolescence (Wave 3). The correlation analysis demonstrated that Wave 2 family instability was negatively associated with Wave 2 and 3 maternal monitoring, and Wave 3 family instability was negatively associated with Wave 3 paternal monitoring. Higher Wave 2 and 3 adolescent delinquency were associated with Wave 2 and 3 lower parental monitoring and adolescent family obligation values and greater affiliation with deviant peers.

Indirect Effects of Family Instability on Adolescent Delinquency

The model first tested concurrent and longitudinal indirect effects of family instability on adolescent delinquency through parental monitoring (Figure 2). The structural models with maternal parenting (root-mean-square error of approximation = 0.021, 90% confidence interval, CI [.000, .062], comparative fit index = 0.994, standardized root-mean-square residual = 0.020) and paternal parenting (root-mean-square error of approximation = 0.045, 90% CI [.019, .068], comparative fit index = 0.933, standardized root-mean-square residual = 0.035) fit the data well (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Concurrently, Wave 2 family instability was indirectly associated with higher Wave 2 adolescent delinquency through lower levels of Wave 2 maternal monitoring (b_{indirect} = .022, SE = .010, p = .025). Similarly, Wave 3 family instability was indirectly associated with lower Wave 3 paternal monitoring, which subsequently contributed to higher Wave 3 adolescent delinquency (b_{indirect} = .020, SE = .008, p = .017). Longitudinally, higher Wave 2 family instability was indirectly associated with greater Wave 3 adolescent delinquency through lower Wave 2 maternal monitoring to higher Wave 2 adolescent delinquency (b_{indirect} = .008, SE = .004, p = .039).

Moderating Effect of Adolescent Family Obligation Values and Affiliation With Deviant Peers

Next, the study examined the moderating effects of Wave 2 and Wave 3 adolescent family obligation values and adolescent affiliation with deviant peers on the association between parental monitoring and adolescent delinquency. Results reveal that neither Wave 2 adolescent family obligation values nor affiliation with deviant peers interacted with parental monitoring to influence adolescent delinquency. However, Wave 3 adolescent family obligation values significantly moderated the association between Wave 3 maternal monitoring and Wave 3 adolescent delinquency (b = −.078, SE = .026, p = .002). Specifically, the simple slopes (Figure 3) show that

[3] Due to the complexity of the model, the present study only reports significant findings.

Table 1
Descriptive Information and Correlation of Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. W2 family instability	1.07	0.4	—															
2. W3 family instability	1.25	0.5	.20***	—														
3. W2 maternal monitoring	4.15	0.8	−.10*	−.09	—													
4. W3 maternal monitoring	3.98	0.8	−.14*	−.10	.37***	—												
5. W2 paternal monitoring	3.67	1.1	−.03	−.09	.56***	.16**	—											
6. W3 paternal monitoring	3.34	1.1	−.09	−.21***	.20***	.57***	.44***	—										
7. W2 adolescent delinquency	0.26	0.2	−.02	.03	−.36***	−.19***	−.36***	−.16**	—									
8. W3 adolescent delinquency	0.31	0.2	.05	.07	−.23***	−.39***	−.20***	−.31***	.41***	—								
9. W2 affiliation with deviant peers	1.59	0.7	−.04	.05	−.26***	−.14*	−.26***	−.12*	.60***	.31***	—							
10. W3 affiliation with deviant peers	1.73	0.7	.04	.05	−.18**	−.28***	−.19**	−.19**	.31***	.55***	.39***	—						
11. W2 adolescent family obligation values	4.21	0.6	−.03	−.03	.46***	.21***	.44***	.18**	−.41***	−.14*	−.19***	−.15**	—					
12. W3 adolescent family obligation values	4.13	0.5	−.03	−.08	.23***	.45***	.18**	.41***	−.14*	−.17**	.03	−.05	.36***	—				
13. W2 adolescent nativity	1.26		.07	.02	−.03	.06	.04	.10	.03	.05	.02	.12*	−.00	.06	—			
14. W2 adolescent binary gender	1.56		.09	.11*	.18***	.21***	.04	.05	−.08	−.16**	−.06	−.18**	.06	.12*	−.06	—		
15. W2 adolescent age	13.2	1	−.11*	−.05	.00	−.07	−.00	−.06	.15***	.03	.12**	.01	−.05	.09	.16***	−.03	—	
16. W2 maternal education	4.94	2.1	.01	−.10	.03	.09	−.04	.10	.01	.05	−.02	.07	.01	−.00	.05	−.02	−.08	—

Note. Adolescent binary gender and nativity are dummy-coded. For gender, 0 represents male, and 1 represents female. For nativity, 0 represents born in the United States, and 1 represents born in Mexico. W2 = Wave 2; W3 = Wave 3.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

adolescents with higher levels of adolescent family obligation values ($b = -.146$, $SE = .024$, $p < .001$) were more likely to benefit from higher levels of maternal monitoring and displayed less delinquency relative to those with lower levels of adolescent family obligation values that showed a smaller effect ($b = -.066$, $SE = .023$, $p = .004$). Furthermore, Wave 3 adolescent affiliation with deviant peers moderated the association between Wave 3 paternal monitoring and Wave 3 adolescent delinquency ($b = -.032$, $SE = .014$, $p = .020$). Specifically, the simple slope (Figure 4) shows that when adolescents had medium ($b = -.039$, $SE = .010$, $p < .001$) and high ($b = -.062$, $SE = .015$, $p < .001$) levels of affiliation with deviant peers, higher Wave 3 paternal monitoring was associated with lower Wave 3 adolescent delinquency. However, when adolescents had low levels of affiliation with deviant peers ($b = -.016$, $SE = .013$, $p = .197$), paternal monitoring had no influence on adolescent delinquency.

Conditional Indirect Effect of Family Obligation Values and Affiliation With Deviant Peers on the Pathway From Family Instability to Parental Monitoring to Adolescent Delinquency

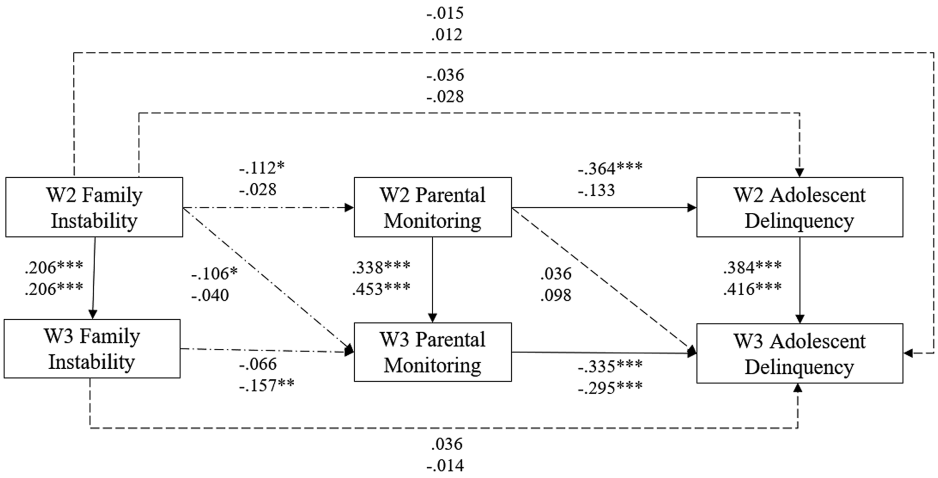
Given that the moderating effects of Wave 2 family obligation values and Wave 2 affiliation with deviant peers were not significant, only the moderating effects of Wave 3 family obligation values and Wave 3 affiliation with deviant peers on the indirect pathway from family instability to adolescent delinquency through parental monitoring were examined. Results demonstrate that Wave 3 adolescent family obligation values moderated the longitudinal indirect pathway from Wave 2 family instability to Wave 3 maternal monitoring to Wave 3 adolescent delinquency. The Johnson–Neyman plot (Figure 5) suggests that the indirect pathway from Wave 2 family instability to Wave 3 adolescent delinquency through Wave 3 maternal monitoring was only significant when adolescents had medium ($b = .030$, $SE = .014$, $p = .029$) and high ($b = .042$, $SE = .019$, $p = .026$) levels of family obligation values. In addition, Wave 3 adolescent affiliation with deviant peers moderated the concurrent indirect pathway from Wave 3 family instability to Wave 3 paternal monitoring to Wave 3 adolescent delinquency. Specifically, the Johnson–Neyman plot shows that Wave 3 family instability only concurrently influences Wave 3 adolescent delinquency through Wave 3 paternal monitoring when adolescents had medium ($b = .013$, $SE = .006$, $p = .016$) or high ($b = .021$, $SE = .009$, $p = .014$) levels of affiliation with deviant peers (Figure 6). Similarly, Wave 3 adolescent affiliation with deviant peers moderated the longitudinal indirect pathway from Wave 2 family instability to Wave 3 family instability to Wave 3 paternal monitoring to Wave 3 adolescent delinquency only when adolescents had high levels of affiliation with deviant peers ($b = .005$, $SE = .003$, $p = .043$; Figure 7).

Discussion

The present study investigated the relation between family instability and delinquency in Mexican-origin adolescents by examining a potential underlying process (i.e., parental monitoring) that may contribute to such a relation. Specifically, the study revealed that family instability concurrently and longitudinally predicted lower parental monitoring, which subsequently was associated with higher adolescent delinquency. Study results also expand the empirical

Figure 2

Standardized Coefficients of the Direct and Indirect Paths From Family Instability to Adolescent Delinquency Through Parental Monitoring

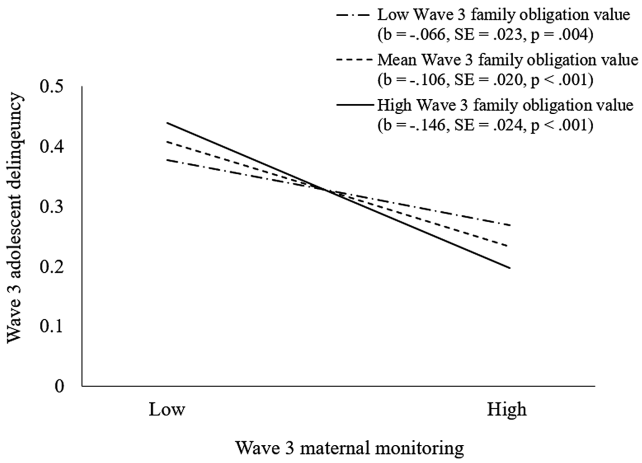


Note. Maternal and paternal monitoring were analyzed in separate models. Top coefficients represent the model with maternal monitoring; bottom coefficients represent the model with paternal monitoring. Solid lines indicate significance in both models, dash-dot lines indicate significance in one model, and dashed lines indicate nonsignificance in both. Covariates include W2 adolescent age, gender, nativity, and maternal education. W2 = Wave 2 (early adolescence); W3 = Wave 3 (late adolescence).
$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

literature on the detrimental impact of family instability on Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency by identifying critical factors that may mitigate these negative associations within Mexican-origin families. Results demonstrated that maternal monitoring was associated with fewer delinquent behaviors when adolescents endorsed higher levels of family obligation values. Similarly, adolescents were more likely to benefit from paternal monitoring and engage in less delinquency when adolescents had more contact with deviant peers.

Figure 3

Moderating Effect of Wave 3 Adolescent Family Obligation Values on the Association Between Wave 3 Maternal Monitoring and Wave 3 Adolescent Delinquency



Note. Wave 3 maternal monitoring and Wave 3 adolescent family obligation values were centered around the means. The association between Wave 3 maternal monitoring and Wave 3 adolescent delinquency was probed at low (1 standard deviation below the mean), mean, and high (1 standard deviation above the mean) levels of Wave 3 adolescent family obligation values. *SE* = standard error.

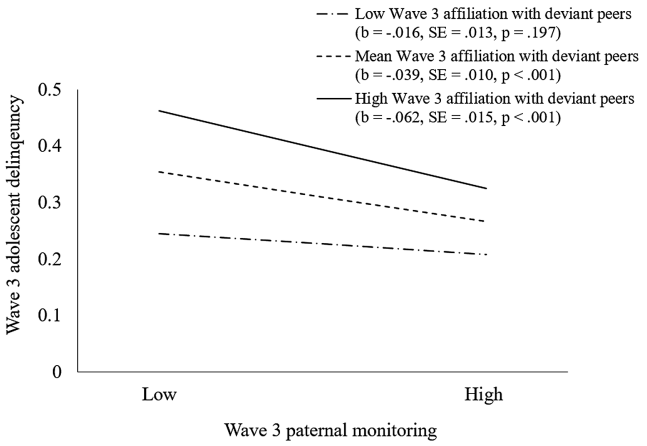
Indirect Effect of Family Instability on Adolescent Delinquency

Study findings indicated that parental monitoring explains the concurrent influence of family instability on Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency. These results align with the family stress model, which posits that the stress from family instability may impair parents' ability to supervise their children, which in turn increases adolescent risk for delinquency. Notably, family instability influenced Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency through maternal monitoring in early adolescence (Wave 2), whereas the pathway operated through paternal monitoring in late adolescence (Wave 3). This pattern may be due to developmental shifts in adolescent autonomy and culturally specific parenting roles. In early adolescence, Mexican-origin youth may be closely connected to their mothers, who tend to serve as the primary caregivers, making the influence of maternal monitoring especially salient (White et al., 2009, 2018). As adolescents seek greater independence and increased contact with peers at a later age, fathers may take on a more prominent role in guiding socialization and peer interactions (Scholte et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2013). Consequently, adolescents in late adolescence may become more responsive to paternal monitoring.

In addition, the results also demonstrate that family instability longitudinally influences Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency through maternal monitoring. Specifically, Wave 2 family instability during early adolescence is associated with Wave 2 lower maternal monitoring, subsequently contributing to higher Wave 2

Figure 4

Moderating Effect of Wave 3 Adolescent Affiliation With Deviant Peers on the Association Between Wave 3 Paternal Monitoring and Wave 3 Adolescent Delinquency



Note. Wave 3 paternal monitoring and Wave 3 adolescent affiliation with deviant peers were centered around the means. The association between Wave 3 paternal monitoring and Wave 3 adolescent delinquency was probed at low (1 standard deviation below the mean), mean, and high (1 standard deviation above the mean) levels of Wave 3 adolescent affiliation with deviant peers. *SE* = standard error.

youth delinquency, persisting into late adolescence as higher Wave 3 youth delinquency. These findings suggest that unaddressed behavioral problems emerging in early adolescence can escalate into late adolescence, underscoring the critical need for early identification and timely family-based interventions to strengthen parental monitoring and reduce the long-term risk of delinquency. However, no significant longitudinal pathway was found from early family instability to later adolescent delinquency through paternal monitoring. This pattern may reflect differential parental susceptibility to family stressors, especially within the context of traditional gender roles in Mexican-origin families (White et al., 2018). Mexican-origin mothers tend to assume the role of primary caregivers, responsible for daily caregiving tasks and emotional regulation within the household (White et al., 2009). Their continuous involvement in the daily rhythms of family life may increase mothers' exposure to ongoing family stressors, which, over time, may deplete their emotional resources and compromise their capacity for consistent adolescent monitoring. In contrast, Mexican-origin fathers typically engage in caregiving in a more episodic and event-driven manner, stepping in primarily in response to specific stressors or significant family events rather than participating in the day-to-day caregiving routine (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004; Zhao & White, 2022). This role distinction may provide fathers with greater psychological distance from the routine emotional demands of family life, rendering their involvement more situationally triggered by acute stressors that call for immediate action. While the present study observed different mediating influences of maternal and paternal monitoring, it did not formally test for statistical differences between mothers and fathers due to the complexity of the proposed model. Future research may want to incorporate comparative tests of parental effects to directly examine whether maternal and paternal responses to family instability significantly differ.

Moderating Effects of Social and Cultural Factors

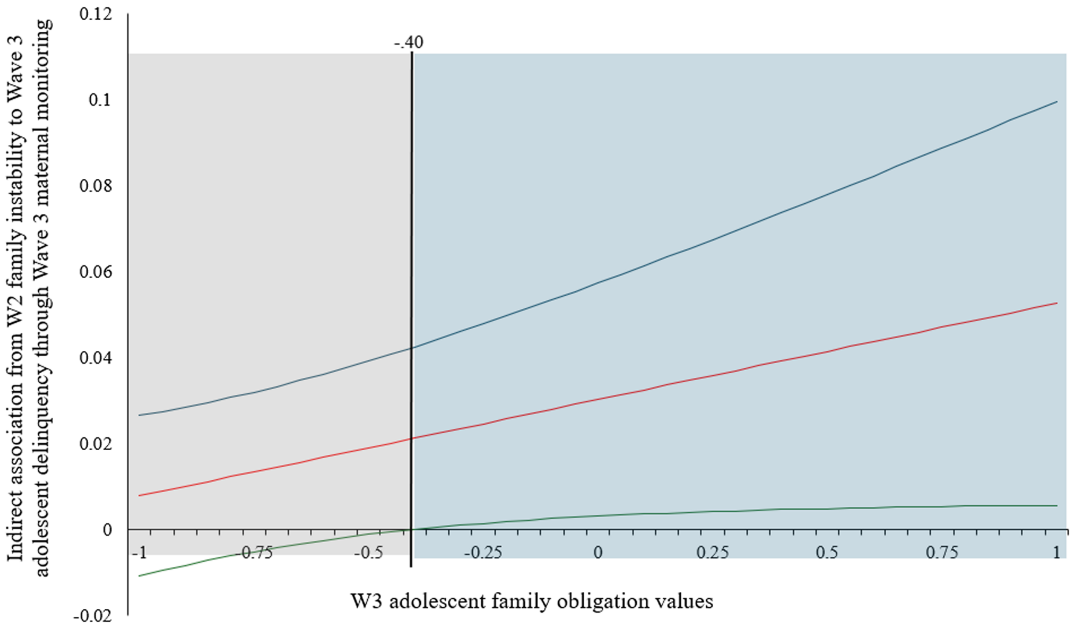
The present study extends previous research to consider the interplay between family (i.e., parental monitoring), social (i.e., affiliation with deviant peers), and cultural (i.e., family obligation values) factors on Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency. Building on previous work on the promotive role of family obligation values for Mexican-origin adolescents (Cahill et al., 2021), the present study shows that maternal monitoring has a stronger influence on adolescent delinquency for those who have higher family obligation values. In other words, Mexican-origin adolescents who endorsed higher levels of family obligation were more likely to benefit from higher maternal monitoring, showing lower delinquent behavior. This effect can be attributed to the stronger family bonds and close relationships typically observed in adolescents with high family obligation values (Knight et al., 2010; Lac et al., 2011). Within this context, maternal monitoring was more likely to be perceived as genuine care and concern rather than as control, making adolescents more receptive to maternal guidance, which in turn reduced adolescent behavioral problems. Moreover, adolescents with strong family obligation values tended to feel a sense of responsibility for maintaining a harmonious family environment (Gonzales et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2010). This sense of duty may also enhance their responsiveness to maternal monitoring and willingness to inform their mothers about their activities.

Although family obligation values could be promotive in families with higher parental monitoring, the present study suggests that such values may not always serve as a protective function in families experiencing instability. Specifically, Mexican-origin adolescents with strong commitments to family obligation values were more vulnerable to the adverse effects of family instability, which in turn increased their risk for delinquent behavior via lower maternal monitoring. In contrast, adolescents with lower levels of family obligation values did not exhibit the same vulnerability to family instability. These results align with White et al. (2018) adapting cultural systems framework, which posits that cultural values such as family obligation may be beneficial in certain contexts but potentially maladaptive in others. Applied to the present study, Mexican-origin adolescents who prioritize the responsibility of maintaining family harmony and spending time with family may benefit from maternal monitoring but may also experience a mismatch between these cultural expectations and the realities of a disrupted family environment (Hernández et al., 2010). This incongruence could heighten psychological distress and behavioral dysregulation. While family obligation values may inadvertently exacerbate the risk of family instability, other cultural values (e.g., familial support) may serve as protective factors and warrant further exploration in future research.

Moreover, results illustrated that paternal monitoring had a stronger influence in preventing Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency when adolescents reported higher affiliation with deviant peers. This suggests that paternal monitoring can support adolescents in making more positive behavioral choices, particularly when interacting with deviant peers, because such monitoring improves the tracking and structuring of youths' activities, allowing for more

Figure 5

Johnson–Neyman Region of Significance for the Conditional Relation of Family Obligation Values on the Longitudinal Indirect Association From Family Instability to Adolescent Delinquency



Note. The green and blue lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The vertical line represents the threshold of significance. The right side of the vertical line (i.e., blue region), where centered W3 family obligation values are above −0.40, indicates a significant association between W2 family instability and W3 adolescent delinquency. In this region, the confidence bands are above 0, indicating that higher W2 family instability is related to increased W3 adolescent delinquency for those with higher levels of family obligation values. In the gray region, the confidence bands include 0, indicating a nonsignificant association between W2 family instability and W3 adolescent delinquency. The values of W3 adolescent family obligation at −0.515 (1 standard deviation below the mean), 0 (the mean), and 0.515 (1 standard deviation above the mean) interact with the effect of W2 family instability on W3 adolescent delinquency. Overall, the plot suggests that the association between W2 family instability and W3 adolescent delinquency is only significant when adolescents have higher levels of family obligation values. W2 = Wave 2; W3 = Wave 3. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

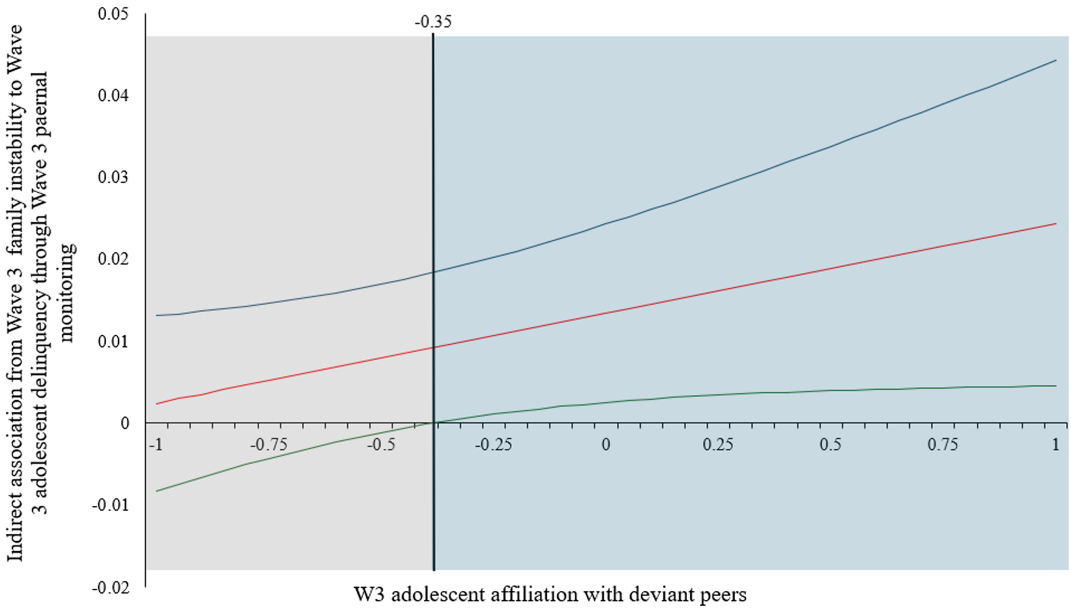
prompt support and guidance (Fosco et al., 2012). However, when adolescents had less contact with deviant peers, paternal monitoring was not associated with adolescent delinquency. Because affiliation with deviant peers is one of the most prominent risk factors for delinquency (Assink et al., 2015), adolescents with limited deviant peer interactions may not benefit from paternal monitoring as a form of behavioral control given their lower risk context. This idea is supported by data showing that Mexican-origin adolescents with lower affiliation with deviant peers exhibit consistently lower levels of delinquency ($M < 0.30$) compared to the overall mean delinquency level ($M = 0.32$) observed in this study. Given that adolescents in this sample experience higher levels of risk due to their socioeconomic status and neighborhood contexts (Du, Wen, et al., 2025), our findings suggest that fathers can help support positive development by providing supervision and knowing about their youth's whereabouts and friendships, especially when their peers are themselves involved in delinquent behaviors. Paternal monitoring is more prevalent in families with close couple relationships, strong parent–child connections, and open communication (Slesnick et al., 2012). Therefore, interventions aimed at strengthening family relationships and enhancing communication skills may be particularly beneficial for supporting at-risk adolescents.

Limitations

Despite the key findings and implications of the present study, there are limitations in the study to acknowledge. First, the present study includes cross-sectional paths within the longitudinal mediation model. This decision arises from the structure of the available data, as family instability was only assessed in Waves 2 and 3 of a three-wave data set. As a result, when testing longitudinal indirect effects that involve three variables, at least one cross-sectional path is necessarily included in the indirect pathway. Although this approach provides valuable insights into potential mechanisms, the results may not fully capture the nature of the longitudinal influence of family instability on adolescent delinquency. Future studies may want to incorporate additional repeated measures of family instability across more time points, which would allow researchers to better disentangle concurrent from longitudinal processes and more precisely test developmental pathways. Second, the present study relied solely on adolescents' perceptions of parental

Figure 6

Johnson–Neyman Region of Significance for the Conditional Relation of Affiliation With Deviant Peers on the Concurrent Indirect Association From Family Instability to Adolescent Delinquency



Note. The green and blue lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The vertical line represents the threshold of significance. The right side of the vertical line (i.e., blue region), where centered W3 affiliation with deviant peers is above −0.35, indicates a significant association between W3 family instability and W3 adolescent delinquency. In this region, the confidence bands are above 0, indicating that higher W3 family instability is related to increased W3 adolescent delinquency for those with higher levels of affiliation with deviant peers. In the gray region, the confidence bands include 0, indicating a nonsignificant association between W3 family instability and W3 adolescent delinquency. The values of W3 adolescent affiliation with deviant peers at −0.704 (1 standard deviation below the mean), 0 (the mean), and 0.704 (1 standard deviation above the mean) interact with the effect of W3 family instability on W3 adolescent delinquency. Overall, the plot suggests that the association between W3 family instability and W3 adolescent delinquency is only significant when adolescents have higher levels of affiliation with deviant peers. W3 = Wave 3. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

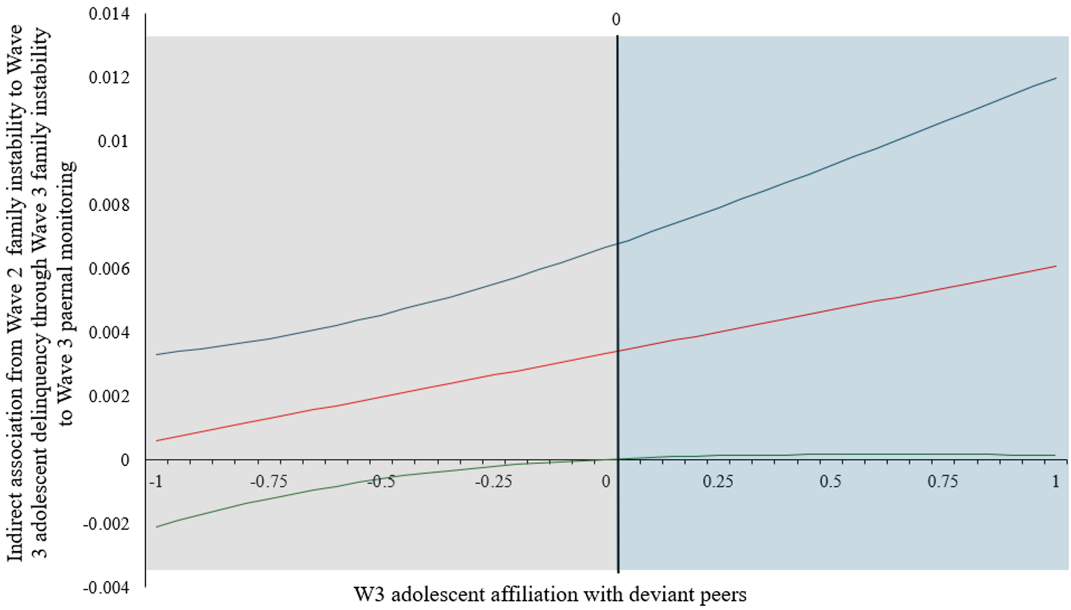
monitoring. Although adolescent-reported parental monitoring has been shown to be more predictive of delinquency compared to parent-reported monitoring (Cottrell et al., 2003), incorporating both perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of parental monitoring among Mexican-origin families. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine potential discrepancies between adolescent and parent reports and explore how such differences may influence adolescent delinquency. Third, the measure of parental monitoring encompasses both parental knowledge of their children's activities and the actions parents take to gain this knowledge and exert control. However, it has been demonstrated that these two components are distinct: Parental knowledge primarily reflects children's voluntary disclosure of their activities, while parental monitoring actions represent deliberate efforts by parents to supervise and manage their children's behavior (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Therefore, future studies should aim to differentiate these constructs to more precisely assess parental monitoring and its effects. Fourth, although the present study examined five dimensions of family instability, most participants predominantly experienced economic instability (e.g., job loss or residential changes) rather than changes in family structure (e.g., changes in primary caregivers). As a result, the findings of this study may not be fully generalized to populations experiencing other types of family relationship instability. Finally, while this study considered the cumulative risk of multiple family instability events, it did not account for other contextual stressors faced by Mexican-origin families (e.g., detention or deportation of family members; Roche et al., 2020) due to the unavailability of relevant data. Future research should incorporate these and other relevant stressors to assess the addictive effects of multiple contextual risks on Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency to better address the stressors that are specific to Mexican-origin communities.

Conclusion

This study adopts a developmental perspective to examine the interplay of various contextual factors (i.e., family, social, and cultural factors) on Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency. Maternal monitoring plays a vital mediating role in explaining the longitudinal influence of family instability on Mexican-origin adolescent delinquency. Moreover, maternal monitoring is more beneficial to adolescents who endorse stronger family obligation values, while paternal monitoring is more protective to those with higher levels of exposure to deviant peers. These findings underscore the importance of considering multiple contextual

Figure 7

Johnson–Neyman Region of Significance for the Conditional Relation of Affiliation With Deviant Peers on the Longitudinal Indirect Association From Family Instability to Adolescent Delinquency



Note. The green and blue lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The vertical line represents the threshold of significance. The right side of the vertical line (i.e., blue region), where centered W3 affiliation with deviant peers is above 0, indicates a significant association between W2 family instability and W3 adolescent delinquency. In this region, the confidence bands are above 0, indicating that higher W2 family instability is related to increased W3 adolescent delinquency for those with higher levels of affiliation with deviant peers. In the gray region, the confidence bands include 0, indicating a nonsignificant association between W2 family instability and W3 adolescent delinquency. The values of W3 adolescent affiliation with deviant peers at −0.704 (1 standard deviation below the mean), 0 (the mean), and 0.704 (1 standard deviation above the mean) interact with the effect of W2 family instability on W3 adolescent delinquency. Overall, the plot suggests that the association between W2 family instability and W3 adolescent delinquency is only significant when adolescents have higher levels of affiliation with deviant peers. W2 = Wave 2; W3 = Wave 3. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

factors when addressing adolescent delinquency, suggesting that interventions focused on strengthening parental monitoring may be effective in mitigating delinquent behaviors in at-risk youth.

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