

Parenting and Adolescent Problem Behaviors: A Comparative Study of Sons and Daughters in Thailand

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Objective: Investigates parenting practices and the reported sexual and delinquent behaviors among Thai adolescents, by focusing on the difference between sons and daughters.

Material and Method: Data were derived from 420 families whose adolescents aged 13-14 were randomly selected from seven districts in Bangkok using the probability proportional to size (PPS) method. Interviews were conducted with one parent and one adolescent.

Results: Female adolescents reported higher levels of parental monitoring, parental rules, communication about sex, and parental disapproval of sex, as compared to males. There were no gender differences in the reported sexual and delinquent behaviors among the adolescents. For males, high levels of parental monitoring, greater perception of parent disapproval of sex, and being raised by authoritative parents were associated with less delinquent behaviors. Among females, parental monitoring and parental closeness served as protective factors against sexual and delinquent behaviors.

Conclusion: The findings from the present study point to the importance of promoting family institution and parents' childrearing. These findings should be useful for developing a body of knowledge and understanding on adolescent rearing among Thai parents.

Keywords: Parenting, Thai adolescents, Problem behavior, Risk behavior, Delinquency

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Sex is a natural determinant of physiological difference between "male" and "female" and brings about "gender", which influences how men and women are brought up and socialized. It is that process of socialization that accounts for the large part in the development of a set of social norms that guide appropriate behavior for each gender. Consequently, sex is a significant factor that affects childrearing behaviors of parents for sons or daughters.

Previous studies, mostly in the United States, reported findings consistent with this assertion. For example, it has been reported that parents were likely

to be much more strict and controlling in raising their daughters as opposed to sons⁽¹⁻⁶⁾. Sons are freer to express their needs, to engage in outdoor activities that are more exposed to deviant peers than daughters^(4,7). By contrast, daughters are more likely to be closer and more interactive with parents, as compared to sons⁽⁸⁻¹⁰⁾. Thus, some theorists indicated that juvenile delinquency was more common in male than female adolescents and attributed this to less parental monitoring of sons than daughters^(11,12).

Children and adolescents' drug use is associated with level of parental supervision and parenting styles. Adolescents who were less supervised or controlled by parents were more likely to have friends or join a peer group who used drugs^(13,14). In the case of the parents who were able to monitor and control their

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adolescents, these adolescents were less likely to use drugs and alcohol⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁷⁾. Moreover, findings on adolescent sexual behaviors were similar in that early sexual intercourse, no condom use, sexual transmitted disease, and unwanted pregnancy were all related with the level of parental monitoring^(18,19). Perceived parental disapproval of premarital sex is also found to be associated with decreased adolescents' likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behavior⁽²⁰⁾.

In Thailand, there are few studies on parenting behaviors. A recent study on parenting styles and female adolescents' sexual behaviors in congested communities in Bangkok shows that female adolescents who were raised under democratic parenting style had higher scores of perceived ability to say no and discuss sexual issues more frequently than those who were raised under over protected, permissive, and neglected parenting styles⁽²¹⁾. Other studies center on familial relationships, parental attachment and communication, and parental time spent with children. These factors have been analyzed to reveal significant negative association with drug use, delinquency, and sexual, aggressive, or illegal behaviors⁽²²⁻²⁵⁾. However, in Thailand, there is no research that is using systematic measurement of parenting behaviors in various dimensions, such as parenting style, parental monitoring and supervision, rules or regulation, or restriction of activities outside the home. To the authors' knowledge, this is the first study that uses objective behavioral measurement tools to assess the relationship between parenting and gender differences in adolescents' behavior. The present paper presents preliminary findings of parenting behaviors that appear to be different between sons and daughters, as well as investigates whether or not parenting behaviors have an influence on problematic behaviors in male and female adolescents.

Material and Method

Sample and procedures

Data used in the present study were collected as a part of a larger research study entitled "Thai Family Matters" and is a collaboration between the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University and the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. Data for these analyses were obtained in Bangkok between April and June 2007⁽²⁶⁾. The project was supported by the National Institutes of Health of the United States. Under the project, data on 420 families whose adolescents aged 13-14 were collected. At first stage of data collection, Bangkok

Metropolis was divided into three areas: inner, middle, and outer areas. The research teams selected seven districts from the 50 districts in the three areas using the probability proportional to size technique (PPS): Pathum Wan in the inner area, four districts-Bangkok Noi, Bangkorlam, Wang Thong Lang and Suan Loung in the middle area, and two districts- Saimai and Minburi in the outer area. From each district, 35 study blocks were randomly selected by the National Statistical Office using the PPS technique, resulting in 245 blocks. Approximately 30,471 households were identified across the seven districts. The identified households were then enumerated to select target households with 13 or 14 year-old adolescents. In total, 420 households with 13 or 14 year-old adolescents, 60 households per district, were randomly selected for interview and assessment. Data were collected by interviewing either the father or mother using structure interview questionnaire. Data from adolescents were collected using a self-administered questionnaire via Audio-Computer-Assisted Self-Interview (ACASI).

Measures

Two measures were used to assess the dependent variable of problematic behaviors in the Thai adolescents: sexual and delinquent behaviors. Six measures of parenting processes were employed as independent variables: parental monitoring, parental rules, parental closeness, parent-adolescent communication about sex, parental disapproval, and parenting styles.

Sexual behavior

One survey item was used to determine the sexual behavior. Teens were asked whether they have ever had sexual intercourse in their lifetime.

Delinquency

Delinquency was measured using questions modified from Elliot, Ageton, Huizinga, Knowles, and Canter⁽²⁷⁾. Teens were asked whether they had ever participated in any of six behaviors including participated in gang fights, gave drugs to friends, joined a gang at school, stopped by police and told to go home, taken to a police station and arrested, or ran away from home.

Parental monitoring

Two scales were created; one scale indicated parents' rule-setting behaviors while the other reflected parents' knowledge of their teen's whereabouts^(28,29).

For the former, youths completed four items asking about their parents' rule and limit-setting behaviors over the past 6 months, such as setting and enforcing curfews and restricting activities and companions. Responses ranged from "none of the time" to "all/almost all of the time" on a 4-point scale. Items were averaged to create the scale ($\alpha = 0.68$). For the latter scale, youths answered three items regarding their parents' knowledge of their whereabouts and activities when away from home over the past six months. As above, responses ranged from "none of the time" to "all/almost all of the time" on a four-point scale. Items were also averaged to create the scale ($\alpha = 0.66$).

Parental closeness

Parental closeness was measured using questions from the Add Health Study⁽³⁰⁾. Teens answered four questions, indicating both how close they felt to each parent, and how much they thought their parents cared for the teens themselves. The youths answered on a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much". The four items were averaged to create a closeness scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.66$).

Parental communication about sex

Parent-adolescent communication was assessed through nine items asking teens about their experiences in talking with parents related to issues of physical appearance, sexuality, condom use, HIV/AIDS, and other sexual transmitted infections, as well as adolescent pregnancy. Responses for each item varied from "1 = never" to "4 = a lot of time". Cronbach's α for the nine-item scale was 0.91. Higher scores indicate higher perceived levels of communication with parents.

Parental disapproval of sex

Teens responded to five-item that asked about their perception on parents' feeling and worrying with respect to themselves, sexual activity, and prohibition of sex. The five items were averaged to create a parental disapproval of sex scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$).

Parenting style

Parenting style was assessed using questions adapted from the *Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire*⁽³¹⁾. Parents answered how frequently they exhibited certain parenting behaviors, using a 4-point scale ranging from "never" to "most of the

time-almost daily". The 36 items measured three types of parenting style: *permissive*, *authoritarian*, and *authoritative parenting*. Permissive parenting style was measured in five items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$) that asked the parent to rate the frequency with which he/she exhibited each of the five behaviors within an indulgent dimension (for example "states punishments to the child and does not actually do them"). Three dimensions, physical coercion, verbal hostility, and non-reasoning/punitive, measured authoritarian parenting style ($\alpha = 0.82$), with four questions each. Authoritative parenting was also measured by a scale ($\alpha = 0.86$) reflecting three dimensions, connection, regulation, and autonomy, each with four questions. For example, "explains consequences of behavior to child", was a behavior measured in the regulation dimension.

Plan of analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS for Windows. Bivariate analysis, ANOVA (F-test) and χ^2 test were used to assess gender differences in parenting practices and outcome behaviors of adolescents. Multiple regression analysis was used separately to predict delinquent and sexual behaviors for male and female adolescents. An α of 0.05 was used to determine statistical significance unless otherwise noted.

Results

Sample characteristics

All of the identified households agreed to participate in the present study. Participants were either the father or mother and their adolescents aged 13-14 from the 420 target families. Most of respondents (85%) were mothers (average age was 41 years old), about one-half (47%) were born in Bangkok. Of the 53% not born in Bangkok, one-fourth (25%) were from the Northeast and one-fifth (20%) moved from provinces in the Central Thailand; approximately 5.5% were from the north and south of Thailand.

Concerning parental education, half of the parents interviewed finished primary education (4 to 6 years). About one-third (37%) finished secondary education and high school. The rest attained a diploma or higher. The total family income of more than half of the respondents (52%) was less than 20,000 baht per month, 22% earn 20,000-40,000 baht per month, and the rest (26%) earn more than 40,000 baht per month. Among sampled households, the sex of adolescents was nearly equal in number (49% male, 51% female).

Table 1. Mean scores on parenting measures by child gender

Parenting	Mean (SD)		Possible range
	Sons (n = 205)	Daughters (n = 208)	
Parenting styles			
Permissive parents	2.03 (0.48)	2.08 (0.48)	0-4
Authoritarian parents	1.85 (0.41)	1.82 (0.44)	0-4
Authoritative parents	3.15 (0.45)	3.12 (0.47)	0-4
Parental behaviors			
Knowledge of whereabouts	2.95 (0.71)	3.16 (0.66)**	0-4
Parental rules	2.68 (0.63)	2.94 (0.64)***	0-4
Parental closeness	3.81 (0.38)	3.81 (0.39)	0-4
Communication about sex	1.86 (0.76)	2.14 (0.18)***	0-4
Perception on parents' disapproval of sex	3.32 (0.48)	3.53 (0.22)***	0-4

** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Parenting behaviors

As shown in Table 1, results from analyzing parenting behaviors in raising sons and daughters reveal no difference in three parenting styles—permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative among sons and daughters. Most parents use integrated styles and tend to be authoritative parenting, *i.e.* parents use reasons and allow sons and daughters to think and act at a certain level.

There are different patterns of childrearing among parents in different education and economic status. Educated parents (diploma or above) have a higher score in authoritative style than low educated parents. Parents earning more than 40,000 baht monthly, have higher score of permissive style than low-income parents (not shown in Table).

No significant differences between sons and daughters in terms of parental closeness and perception on parental concerns were found. There are significant differences in setting rules and a trend for knowledge of whereabouts. Specifically, daughters are more supervised and restricted than sons. The average score of parents monitoring and supervising behavior is higher among daughters than sons such as setting rules or restriction for some activities ($p < 0.001$), and knowledge of whereabouts ($p < 0.01$).

Concerning communication about sex, parents tend to talk to their adolescents to some extent but not often. This is probably related to Thai culture and values where parents are less likely to openly talk about sex with their adolescents. The present study reveals that both sons and daughters report that their parents will not permit them to have sex as indicated by

Table 2. Number, percentage and mean scores of child problem behaviors by child gender

Problem behaviors	Sons (n = 205)	Daughters (n = 208)
Having sex		
Never	196 (96%)	204 (98%)
Ever	9 (4%)	4 (2%)
Delinquent behaviors		
Never	141 (69%)	156 (75%)
Ever (1 or more behaviors)	64 (31%)	52 (25%)
Mean scores on delinquent behavior measure (scale range potential 0-6)	0.59	0.41

the average score in parental disapproval about sex is rather high (3.3-3.5) in the presented questionnaire. Comparing parental concerns about sexual behaviors between sons and daughters, it is evident that parents of daughters pay more attention to their adolescents' sexual behavior than parents of sons. The average score in parental communication about sex and prohibition of having sex is higher among daughters than sons ($p < 0.001$).

Adolescent problem behaviors

Table 2 compares children's problematic behaviors between sons and daughters. Although it is not statistically significant, sons seem to have more problematic behaviors than daughters in every kind of behaviors, although not in sexual experience or aggressive/delinquent behaviors. However, when measuring serious delinquency by total numbers of

aggressive/delinquent behaviors, it is found that the average number of serious delinquent events is fairly higher in sons than in daughters if constructing the 90% confidence interval.

Taking parents education and income into consideration, it is found that parents who have more income (more than 40,000 baht a month) have an average score of adolescents' serious delinquency higher than that of parents who have moderate income (20,000-40,000 baht), and low income parents (\leq 20,000 baht a month). This is consistent with analysis in parenting style, thus, it is found that more income parents have permissive style more than lower income parents. It can be said that parenting permissive style partly leads to serious delinquency.

Parental influence on problem behaviors of male and female adolescents

In order to dissect out factors affecting problematic behaviors, all six parenting behaviors *i.e.* monitoring and supervision, communication about sex, parent-child relationship, perception and awareness of parental disapproval about sex, as well as styles of childrearing were analyzed while controlling parent education and family income. To assess the influence of parenting behaviors on adolescents' problematic behaviors based on gender difference, analysis was done using separate models and factors affecting behaviors of sons and daughters.

Among sons, as shown in Table 3, their perception and awareness of parental concern about sexual behaviors and knowledge of whereabouts are protective factors for aggressive or delinquent behaviors with statistical significance. That is to say, male adolescents with more perception on parents' worrying about their sexual activities, perceived more parental monitoring are less likely to engage in delinquent behaviors. Concerning early sexual initiation among sons, the adolescents' perception of parental disapproval about sex is the only statistically significant protective factor.

Among daughters, also shown in Table 3, more perception on parental monitoring (knowledge of whereabouts) is protective factor against sexual risk behavior, whilst perceived more parental closeness predicts the lower level of delinquency.

Discussion

The results of the present study demonstrate the importance of understanding that parenting behaviors differentially affect the sons and daughters,

Table 3. Multiple regression for the relationship between parenting behaviors and sex, delinquent behaviors in sons and daughters

Variables	Sons		Daughters	
	Model 1		Model 2	
	Sexual experience	Delinquent behaviors	Sexual experience	Delinquent behaviors
	Standardized coefficient	p-value	Standardized coefficient	p-value
Parents' education	-0.007	0.925	0.010	0.889
Family income	0.120	0.115	0.034	0.639
Permissive parenting style	-0.054	0.528	-0.058	0.485
Authoritarian parenting style	-0.074	0.381	0.076	0.348
Authoritative parenting style	-0.069	0.354	-0.139	0.053
Knowledge of whereabouts	-0.130	0.091	-0.255	0.001
Parental rules	-0.020	0.782	-0.048	0.499
Communication about sex	-0.023	0.756	-0.035	0.620
Parental closeness	-0.092	0.223	-0.094	0.194
Perceived parents' disapproval of sex	-0.235	0.002	-0.206	0.004
			Standardized coefficient	p-value
			0.081	0.308
			0.039	0.619
			0.128	0.170
			0.058	0.519
			-0.026	0.740
			-0.135	0.084
			0.014	0.857
			-0.035	0.634
			-0.175	0.021
			0.009	0.905

particularly in urban Bangkok. Information gained from the present study is useful for developing further body of knowledge and designing intervention culturally appropriate to the Thai context. This is because a review of the literature on this subject indicates a lack of research studies focusing on different parenting behaviors toward son and daughter's behaviors in Thailand. The extent to which such exists, they have been conducted in foreign countries. These foreign-based studies have provided findings that sons were less likely to be monitored and supervised than daughters⁽¹⁻⁶⁾. More freedom and less supervision in sons could lead to more chance for them to engage in risky and problematic outside activities, and to be susceptible to greater peer than daughters^(4,7).

The authors' findings are consistent with the international studies indicating parental childrearing depending on the sex of the child- in that the authors also found that parents exhibit different behaviors in taking care of sons as opposed to daughters. In addition, our study indicates that parental behaviors may affect adolescents' delinquency. Specifically, monitoring, supervision and close contact and care in sons may be not sufficient for reducing risky sexual behavior or aggressive and delinquent behaviors. The present study also indicated that parents need to tell their sons about their concerns and worries, including their desire that their adolescents not engage in sexual and undesirable behaviors. Parents need assistance and training in communication skills in order to gain more understanding and practice, which will result in more effectively protecting their sons from problem behaviors. For daughters, as indicated in the present study, clear and consistent parental rules could be supportive factors to prevent daughters' increased participation in risky sexual behaviors.

Most parents in the present study use integrated parenting styles and tend to be democratic as is evidenced by the authoritative parenting style. The results of this analysis reveal that authoritative parenting style could be a considerable protective factor against delinquent behaviors for sons and sexual risk behaviors for daughters. However, the significance level of this relationship is only at 90 percent confidence interval ($p < 0.1$). Interpretation has to be made with caution. Further research is still needed to test for such relationships between parenting styles and adolescent risky behaviors.

Although other studies found parent-adolescent communication about sex to be a significant factor for preventing or reducing risky sexual behavior

among adolescents⁽³²⁻³⁵⁾, in the present study the authors found no statistical significance in that regard. However, findings from the present study did show a low level of communication about sex between parents and adolescents at this age (average of 1.9 in sons and 2.1 in daughters from maximum score of 4). This reflects that Thai parents still do not perceive the importance and needs to communicate with children at this age about sex, as well as calls into question the degree to which parents have the pre-requisite skills to talk with their adolescents about sex. Therefore, many feel that they dare not talk about sex with their adolescents. They might feel that talking about sex could pave the way for initiating adolescent's interest in sex, or that 13-14 years old adolescents are too young to discuss about sex.

The findings from the present study point to the importance of promoting family institution and parents' childrearing. Although there are differences in parental childrearing by sex of the adolescents, the potential problem behaviors of sons and daughters are not to be underestimated in their magnitudes. Specifically, parents should start to pay more and closer attention to their adolescents without consideration of the gender of adolescents. Giving more freedom including freedom about sex to sons than daughters may push the sons to become sexually risky and delinquent. At present, urban families prefer having one or two children. Therefore, parents have difficulty in comparing or differentiating child-rearing between son and daughter within their families. However, the present study should serve to remind parents that childrearing should not rely on "sex" and "gender" in determining child-rearing strategy. Regardless of son or daughter, without adequate and appropriate care and attention of the parents, adolescents have equal chances to engage in all sorts of problematic behaviors.

Author note

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การเลี้ยงดูบุตรและพฤติกรรมที่เป็นปัญหาของวัยรุ่น: การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบระหว่างลูกชายและลูกสาวในประเทศไทย

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งานศึกษาเรื่องนี้ ศึกษาเรื่องการเลี้ยงดูของพ่อแม่ และพฤติกรรมที่เป็นปัญหาของวัยรุ่น โดยให้ความสำคัญกับความแตกต่างทางเพศของลูก ข้อมูลที่ใช้ศึกษาได้มาจากกลุ่มตัวอย่างครอบครัวที่มีลูกอายุ 13 ถึง 14 ปี จำนวน 420 ครอบครัว จากพื้นที่ 7 เขต ในกรุงเทพมหานคร โดยใช้วิธีการสุ่มเลือกตัวอย่างแบบความน่าจะเป็นที่เป็นสัดส่วนต่อขนาดของประชากร (probability proportional to size หรือ PPS) การเก็บข้อมูลในแต่ละครอบครัว ใช้วิธีการสัมภาษณ์พ่อหรือแม่คนใดคนหนึ่ง และลูกวัยรุ่น 1 คน ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ลูกสาวรายงานระดับพฤติกรรม การเลี้ยงดูของพ่อแม่ในเรื่องของการติดตามและควบคุม การสื่อสารเรื่องเพศ และการไม่อนุญาตให้มีเพศสัมพันธ์ สูงกว่าในลูกชาย แต่ไม่พบความแตกต่างในเรื่องของพฤติกรรมก้าวร้าวเกร และพฤติกรรมทางเพศระหว่างลูกสาว และลูกชาย ในลูกชายพบว่า การควบคุมติดตามของพ่อแม่ การรับรู้ และตระหนักว่าพ่อแม่ไม่ต้องการให้มีเพศสัมพันธ์ และการเลี้ยงดูโดยใช้เหตุและผล เป็นปัจจัยส่งเสริมที่ช่วยลดพฤติกรรมก้าวร้าวเกรในลูกชายวัยรุ่นได้ ในขณะที่ การติดตามควบคุม และความสัมพันธ์ใกล้ชิดระหว่างพ่อแม่-ลูก เป็นปัจจัยที่ช่วยป้องกันทั้งพฤติกรรมก้าวร้าวเกร และพฤติกรรมทางเพศในลูกสาว ข้อค้นพบดังกล่าวน่าจะเป็นประโยชน์ต่อการพัฒนาองค์ความรู้ และการเสริมสร้างความเข้าใจในเรื่องการเลี้ยงดูวัยรุ่นของพ่อแม่ไทยได้เป็นอย่างดี
