

Parental Attempts to Know and Actual Knowledge of Adolescent Behavior and Adjustment in a Chilean Sample

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Introduction

The concept of parental monitoring has been linked to a number of developmental outcomes and indicators of adolescent adjustment, including substance use and antisocial behavior (e.g., Dishion & MacMahon, 1998).

This general construct is associated with a number of parent-adolescent interpersonal processes including parent attempts to monitor (know) adolescent behavior and communication.

In this paper we present an analysis of the relative contribution of mother and father's attempts to know and actual knowledge of their adolescents behavior with three domains of adolescent adjustment: psychological symptoms, cigarette and alcohol use and antisocial behavior. Specifically:

- We compare the structure of mother and father's attempt to know and actual knowledge,

- We analyze the relative contribution of mother and father's knowledge on the prediction of adolescent adjustment, controlling for sex and age.
- Finally, we compare the relative contribution of mother's attempts to know and actual knowledge to the prediction of adolescent adjustment.

Method

Sample. Students from Santiago, Chile's capital, were recruited through public schools to participate in this study. Adolescent active assent and parents' passive consent was obtained. 446 Chilean youth completed surveys and were included in this study.

Protocol and instruments. Students completed surveys in group settings during school. The survey included a number of different scales. For the present study, we used as predictors questions about parental attempts to know and actual knowledge about a number of issues. Questions about 30-day symptoms and problem behavior were used as outcomes.

Parental Attempts to Know and Actual Knowledge

1. How much does each of your parents REALLY know about
2. How much does each of your parents TRY to know about:

The issues were:

- a. Who your friends are?
- b. Where you go at night?
- c. How you spend your money?
- d. What do you do in your free time?
- e. Where you are most afternoons after school?
- f. How well you're doing in school?

Adolescent Adjustment

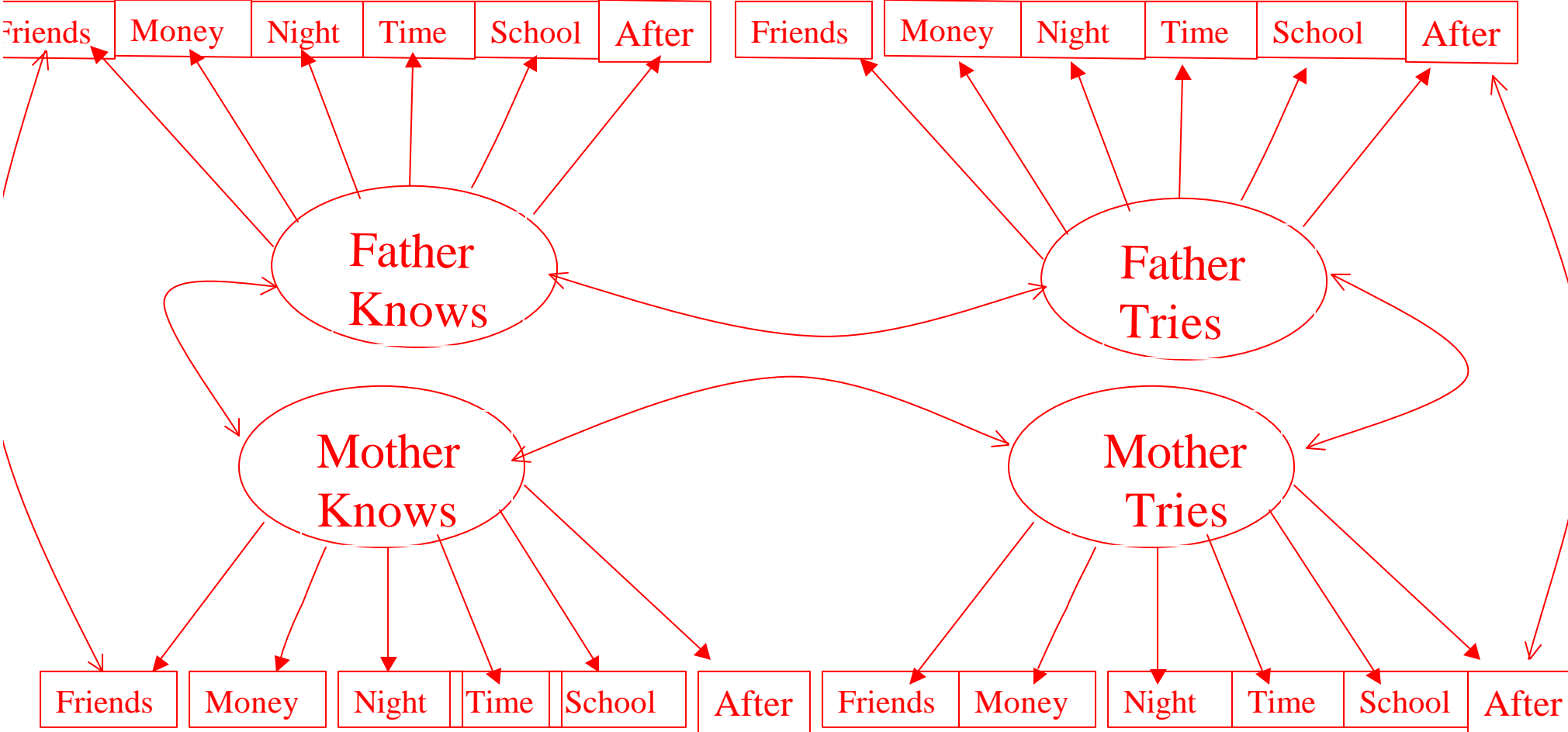
Over the last 30 days, how often have you

- a. Felt nervous or worried?
- b. Felt blue or depressed?
- c. Felt tense or irritable?
- d. Felt isolated or lonely?
- e. Smoked cigarettes?
- g. Drunk alcohol?
- h. Had 5 or more shots of alcohol?
- i. Damaged private property to have fun?
- k. Engaged in physical fights?

How well did we measure parental attempts and actual knowledge?

- **We run a latent variable measurement model that included:**
 - **Mother knowledge**
 - **Father knowledge**
 - **Mother attempts**
 - **Father attempts**
 - **Covariances among residuals corresponding to the same items measured for mothers and fathers were estimated.**
- **The model is presented in Figure 1.**

Figure 1.
Measurement Model for Parental Attempts to
Know and Actual Knowledge



Measurement Model for Parental Attempts to Know and Actual Knowledge

- **First model: all item loadings were significant**
 $\chi^2(222)=439.39, p < .05$
RMSEA=0.047
- **Constraining loadings to be equal for mothers and fathers**
 $\chi^2(227)=456.73, p < .05$ [$D\chi^2(5)=17.34, p<.05$]
- **The analysis by items suggested that the last item (how well you do in school?) contributed to the lack of fit.**
- **Constraining loadings to be equal for mothers and fathers, except for how well you do in school:**
 $\chi^2(226)=442.93, p < .05$ [$D\chi^2(4)=3.54, ns$]

How Well did we Measure Adolescent Adjustment?

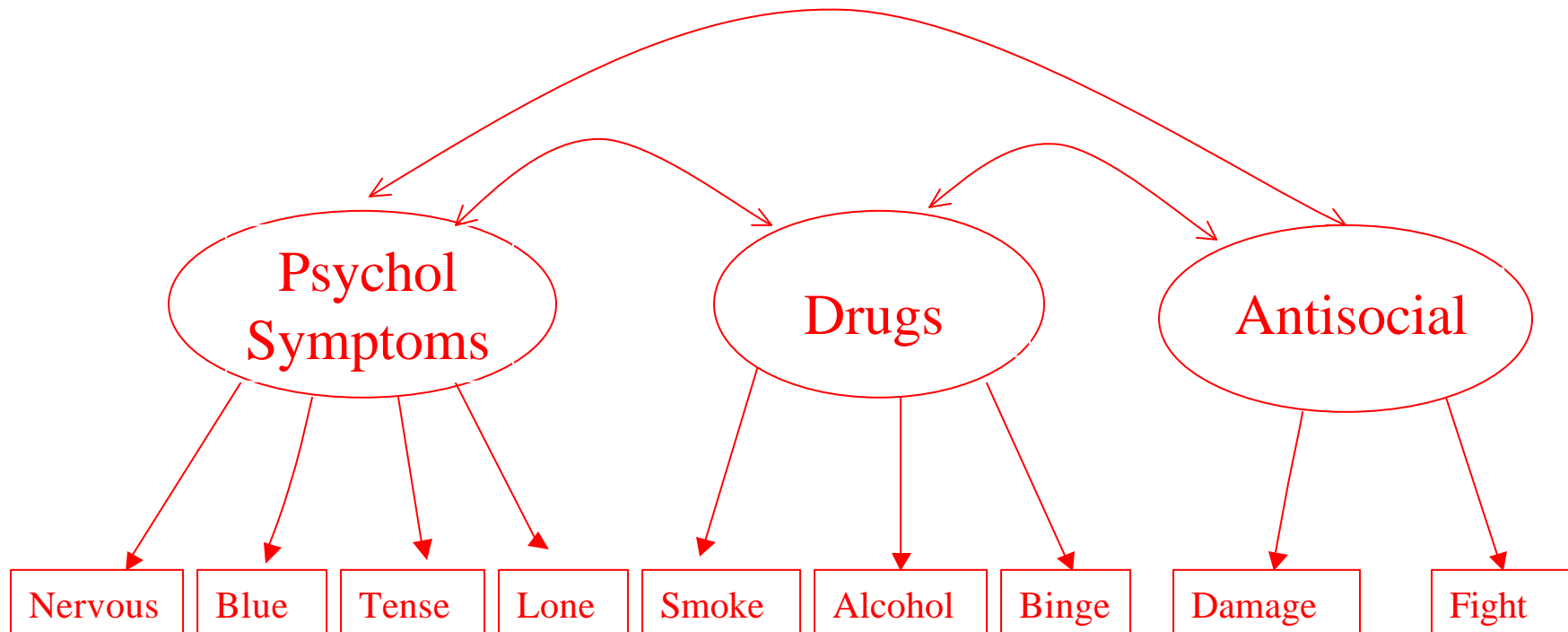
- **We run a latent variable measurement model that included**
 - **Psychological Symptoms**
 - **Cigarette and alcohol use**
 - **Problem behavior**

$\chi^2(24)=72.94, p < .05$

RMSEA=0.068

- **The model is presented in Figure 2.**

Figure 2.
Measurement Model for Adolescent Adjustment



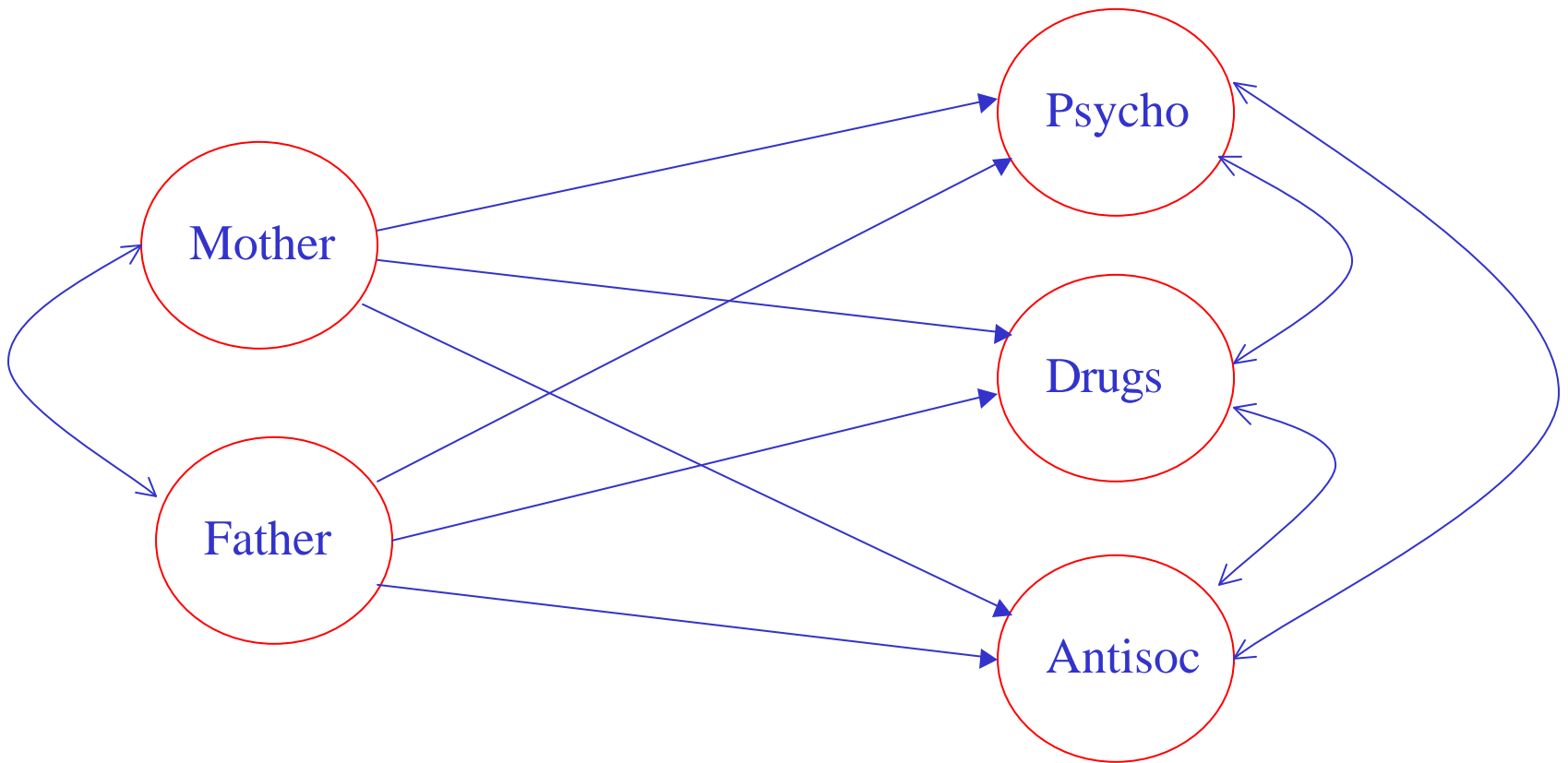
How do parental knowledge and attempts to know relate to adolescent adjustment?

- **We run a latent variable structural model that related**
 - **Mother knowledge and**
 - **Father knowledge**
 - **To adolescent adjustment**
 - **Sex and age were introduced as covariates**
- **The model is presented in Figure 3.**

$\chi^2(210)=375.43, p < .05$

RMSEA=0.042

Figure 3.
Structural Model for Mother and Father Knowledge
and Adolescent Adjustment



Regression Coefficients for Mother and Father Knowledge, Controlling for Sex and Age

	Mother	Father	Sex	Age	R ²
Psychological symptoms	-0.20**	-0.01	-0.27**	0.04	0.15
Drug use	-0.73**	-0.02	0.08*	0.09*	0.20
Antisocial behavior	-0.47**	0.08	0.16**	-0.01	0.17

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

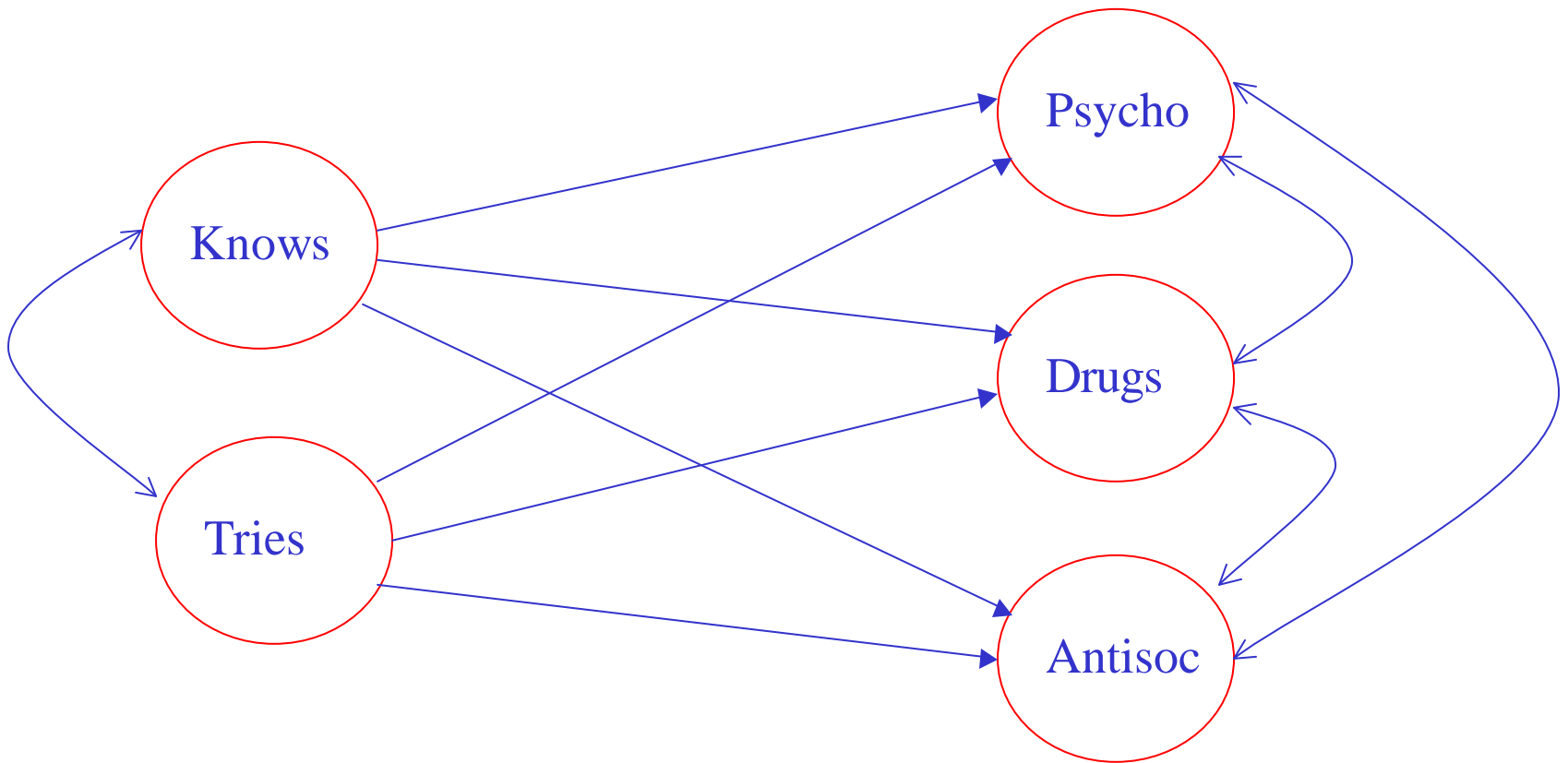
How do mother's knowledge and attempts to know relate to adolescent adjustment?

- **We run a latent variable structural model that related**
 - **Mother attempts to know and**
 - **Mother knowledge**
 - **To adolescent adjustment**
 - **Sex and age were introduced as covariates**
- **The model is presented in Figure 4.**

$\chi^2(205)=374.01, p < .05$

RMSEA=0.043

Figure 4.
Structural Model for Mother Attempts to Know and Actual
Knowledge and Adolescent Adjustment



Regression Coefficients for Mother Attempts to Know and Actual Knowledge, Controlling for Sex and Age

	TRIES	KNOWS	Sex	Age	R ²
Psychological symptoms	-0.31*	0.13	-0.54**	0.01	0.16
Drug use	-0.84**	0.12	0.17*	0.02*	0.20
Antisocial behavior	-0.45*	0.06	0.33**	-0.01	0.16

* p < .05

** p < .01

Discussion

- Our results suggest:
 - A relative equivalence of mother and father's structure of attempts to know and actual knowledge. Except for the item related to how adolescents are doing at school, there was invariance of the factor loadings.
 - The importance of mother's knowledge of adolescent behavior. This was predictive of adjustment in adolescence, above and beyond the contributions of sex and age. Father's knowledge was not predictive of adjustment.

– Mother's attempt to know were more directly related to adolescent adjustment than actual knowledge. This might be indicative of a underlying process, that might be related to parenting style (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Holmbeck, Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1995).

- Limitations

- Self-report data.
- Cross-sectional nature of the data.