

Family structure associated with delinquency for adolescents

April 13 2022



Three people standing on a beach. Credit: Kylo, Unsplash, CC0 (creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/)

Adolescents living in single-father, single-mother, father-stepmother and mother-stepfather families report more delinquency than those living

with both their parents, according to a new study published this week in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Robert Svensson and Björn Johnson of Malmö University, Sweden.

Previous studies have found that not living with both parents is positively associated with delinquency, but family living arrangements have been highly simplified—only comparing living with both parents versus not living with both parents, for instance. In the new study, the researchers used data from four cross-sectional surveys carried out between 2016 and 2019 in southern Sweden. Self-reported information on nine delinquent behaviors—such as shoplifting, graffiti or robbing someone—as well as detailed family structure was available for 3,838 [adolescents](#) aged 14 and 15.

Among all participants, those living with both mother and father or living in a "symmetrical" arrangement—in which parents live separately and share custody but are both single or both have new partners—were involved in delinquency to a lesser extent than those with other family living structures. Compared to adolescents living with a mother and father, delinquent behavior was more common among those living with a single father (incident rate ratio [IRR] 1.898), a [single mother](#) (IRR 1.661), a father and stepmother (IRR 1.606) or a mother and stepfather (IRR 2.044). In addition, "asymmetrical" arrangements, in which only one parent had a new partner, was associated with more delinquency. Many of the associations between family structure and delinquency declined when adjusted for data on parental attachment and monitoring. The authors conclude that the use of more detailed categorization of [family](#) structure can shed light on the contributing factors of delinquency.

The authors add: "This study shows that it is important to move on to the use of more detailed categorizations of [family structure](#) in relation to [delinquency](#), and to increase our knowledge about the group of

adolescents that moves between [parents](#) and especially about the different constellations of asymmetrical and symmetrical living arrangements."

More information: Does it matter in what family constellations adolescents live? Reconsidering the relationship between family structure and delinquent behaviour, *PLoS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0265964](#)

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