

# The Effects of Parental Monitoring on Adolescent Well-Being

Sheri Jenkins Keenan, Ph.D.<sup>a</sup>  , Jane C. Daquin, Ph.D.<sup>b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> Department of Social Sciences, Alabama A & M University

<sup>b</sup> Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice, Sam Houston State University

## ABSTRACT

Parental monitoring remains a central protective factor against a range of adolescent risk behaviors, including substance use, mental health issues, and negative peer influence. It involves parental awareness and oversight of adolescents' friendships, activities, and digital behavior. Recent scholarship has further advanced this understanding by exploring moderating influences such as neighborhood context, peer relationships, and cognitive factors. Building on this foundation, the present study examines the impact of parental monitoring on adolescent well-being, with a specific focus on the moderating role of school connectedness. This study used the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to examine the effect of parental monitoring on adolescent well-being mediating for school connectedness. To achieve this, researchers conducted binary logistic regression analyses exploring four outcomes: poor mental health, suicidal ideation, hopelessness, and drug use. Across all models, higher parental monitoring was associated with significantly lower odds of negative outcomes. These findings underscore the dual importance of engaged parenting and supportive school environments in promoting adolescent resilience, while also pointing to the need for tailored supports for vulnerable subgroups. Implications, future research, policy, and practice are discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Adolescent Well-Being, Parental Monitoring, School Connectedness

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## INTRODUCTION

Today, youth are navigating developmental challenges in an environment marked by unprecedented social, digital, and institutional complexity. Rates of anxiety, depression, substance

use, and exposure to violence continue to raise concern among educators, parents, and policymakers alike; yet, many prevention efforts remain reactive rather than proactive. Against this backdrop, parental monitoring stands out as one of the most consistently supported protective factors in adolescent development, offering a powerful, but often underutilized, point of intervention (Barry & Kim,

2023; Bartolo et al., 2023; Dittus et al., 2023). Parental monitoring—commonly understood as parents’ awareness of their children’s activities, peer relationships, and online engagement—has repeatedly been shown to reduce involvement in risky behaviors while strengthening emotional and psychological well-being.

However, the relevance of parental monitoring today extends far beyond traditional notions of “keeping tabs” on adolescents. A robust and growing body of research demonstrates that effective monitoring is associated with lower rates of violence and substance use, decreased susceptibility to negative peer influence, and improved mental health outcomes, including stronger self-concept and reduced anxiety and depressive symptoms (Bartolo et al., 2023; Bo et al., 2023; Booth & Shaw, 2023; Dittus et al., 2023; Haruyama et al., 2023). These findings underscore an urgent reality: when parents are meaningfully connected to their adolescents’ lives, youth are safer, healthier, and more resilient.

Despite its well-documented benefits, parental monitoring is too often narrowly conceptualized as parental surveillance or control—an approach that is increasingly misaligned with adolescents’ developmental needs and contemporary social contexts. Seminal work by Stattin and Kerr (2000) challenged this control-based paradigm by reframing parental monitoring as a relational process, emphasizing adolescent disclosure—rather than parental enforcement—as the strongest predictor of parental knowledge. From this perspective, monitoring emerges not as something parents do to adolescents, but as something that develops with them through trust, emotional closeness, and open communication.

This reconceptualization carries important implications for both families and schools. If

adolescent disclosure is central to effective monitoring, then environments that foster trust, belonging, and connection become critical. Accordingly, contemporary models of parental monitoring now highlight adolescent agency, relational quality, and contextual influences including peer networks and school climates—as essential components of youth well-being. This shift demands a more creative and collaborative approach to monitoring, one that moves beyond rules and restrictions and instead leverages supportive relationships across home and school settings.

### **Purpose of the Present Study**

While parental monitoring remains one of the most robust protective factors against adolescent risk behavior across both offline and digital domains (Barry & Kim, 2023; Bartolo et al., 2023; Bo et al., 2023; Dittus et al., 2023), emerging research suggests that its effectiveness does not occur in isolation. Context matters. Recent scholarship has increasingly examined how neighborhood conditions, peer dynamics, and cognitive processes shape the impact of parental monitoring on adolescent outcomes; yet, the role of school connectedness remains underexplored, despite schools serving as one of the most influential social institutions in adolescents’ daily lives.

Building on this gap, the present study investigates the relationship between parental monitoring and adolescent well-being, with a specific focus on school connectedness as a moderating factor. By examining how feelings of belonging, support, and engagement within the school environment interact with parental monitoring, this study seeks to illuminate how families and schools can function as complementary systems of support. The central research question guiding this inquiry is:

What is the effect of parental monitoring on adolescent well-being when moderated by school connectedness?

In doing so, this study advances a call to action for parents, educators, and school leaders alike to rethink parental monitoring not as an isolated family practice, but as a shared, relational, and context-driven strategy; one that requires intentional collaboration and innovative approaches to supporting adolescents across the environments that matter most.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Parental Monitoring

Parental monitoring continues to be recognized as a foundational protective factor in reducing a wide array of adolescent risk behaviors, including substance use, mental health challenges, and susceptibility to negative peer influence. Defined as the extent to which parents are aware of and supervise their children's activities, friendships, whereabouts, and online behavior, parental monitoring serves as a form of indirect control that guides adolescent decision-making while supporting healthy development (Barry & Kim, 2023; Dittus et al., 2023; Elsaesser et al., 2017; Kuntsche et al., 2016).

A substantial body of peer-reviewed literature affirms the protective influence of parental monitoring. For instance, Elsaesser et al. (2017) found that parental monitoring significantly reduced the likelihood of adolescents engaging in violence and other forms of delinquency. Similarly, Dittus et al. (2023) highlighted the role of monitoring in deterring substance use, noting that consistent oversight from caregivers can delay initiation and reduce frequency of use. The protective effect

extends beyond behavior alone. Barry and Kim (2023) documented improvements in self-concept and mental health outcomes, including reductions in anxiety and depressive symptoms, when parental monitoring is high.

However, research consistently shows that parental monitoring tends to decline as adolescents age, coinciding with their increasing desire for autonomy and their expanding social networks (Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Dittus et al., 2023). This developmental shift can create a gap in parental oversight at a time when youth may be most exposed to risky environments and peer pressure. Younger adolescents, in contrast, remain more susceptible to the influence of parental monitoring, especially in high-risk contexts such as communities with low social cohesion or high rates of deviant peer behavior (Booth & Shaw, 2023; Lippold et al., 2014).

Moreover, the effectiveness of parental monitoring appears to be moderated by both contextual and relational factors. For instance, research by Lippold et al. (2014) suggests that monitoring is most effective when it occurs within a warm and communicative parent-child relationship, where adolescents perceive rules and supervision as supportive rather than controlling. Conversely, overly rigid or psychologically controlling approaches may diminish adolescents' willingness to disclose information voluntarily—an important component of effective monitoring (Stattin & Kerr, 2000).

Taken together, the literature underscores both the importance and complexity of parental monitoring across adolescent development as a critical tool in the prevention of high-risk behaviors and the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship.

## **Adolescent Well-Being**

Adolescent well-being encompasses both behavioral outcomes—such as reduced substance use and fewer externalizing behaviors—and psychological health, including lower levels of anxiety and depression. A substantial body of research has consistently linked high levels of parental monitoring to improved adolescent well-being, including reductions in substance use, enhanced mental health, and fewer behavioral problems (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2010; Kuntsche et al., 2016; Roman et al., 2015;).

For instance, Booth and Shaw (2023) highlighted the protective role of parental monitoring, emphasizing its function as a buffer against antisocial peer influence. Their research further revealed that the effectiveness of monitoring is amplified in neighborhoods characterized by high collective efficacy, where strong community support enhances parental efforts. Expanding on this, Bartolo et al. (2023) introduced a cognitive perspective, showing that low levels of parental monitoring increase adolescents' susceptibility to peer pressure and foster positive alcohol expectancies—both of which contribute to a heightened risk of alcohol use.

Moreover, the mental health benefits of parental monitoring have been reinforced by Barry and Kim (2023), who found that it contributes to improved adolescent self-image and decreases symptoms of anxiety and depression. Together, these studies underscore that parental monitoring not only acts as a safeguard against risky behaviors but also supports emotional and psychological resilience, particularly when situated within supportive community or school environments.

Building on this foundation, Inguglia et al. (2020) examined the interplay between parental control, adolescents' coping strategies, and the emergence of problem behaviors. Their findings suggest that both perceived parental monitoring and psychological control, alongside individual coping mechanisms,

significantly influence behavioral outcomes. This highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that considers both parental influences and adolescents' internal coping resources when addressing behavioral concerns.

Finally, Moon et al. (2020) investigated the associations among parental monitoring, school academic engagement, substance use, and suicidal behaviors among U.S. adolescents. Their study found that higher levels of parental monitoring were inversely related to substance use and suicidal behaviors. Similarly, school academic engagement was negatively associated with these risk behaviors, while substance use was positively correlated with suicidal behavior. These findings emphasize the dual importance of parental involvement and school engagement in reducing adolescents' vulnerability to risky and potentially life-threatening outcomes.

## **Mental Health**

In today's increasingly digital world, parental monitoring has expanded beyond traditional oversight to include adolescents' online behavior. Barry and Kim (2023) demonstrated that active parental monitoring of digital activities—such as social media usage—is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and negative self-perception. These findings highlight the continued relevance of parental monitoring in modern adolescent life, affirming its protective influence in both physical and virtual spaces.

In addition to its benefits in digital contexts, recent research has increasingly emphasized the critical role of parental monitoring in mitigating suicidal ideation among adolescents. Notably, Kim et al. (2021) conducted a large-scale analysis of 14,272 adolescents (ages 12–17) to examine how parental monitoring interacts with depression and suicidal thoughts. Their findings revealed that parental

monitoring functions as a moderating factor—significantly reducing the influence of depressive symptoms on suicidal ideation. Adolescents who experienced higher levels of parental monitoring were less likely to exhibit suicidal thoughts, even in the presence of depression. The study also accounted for important control variables such as gender, race/ethnicity, and family structure, all of which shaped the relationship between monitoring and mental health outcomes. These findings underscore the need to consider contextual and demographic variables when assessing the role of parental involvement in adolescent psychological well-being.

Expanding upon these gender-related dynamics, Barry and Kim (2023) further observed that internalizing symptoms—such as depression and anxiety—were more prevalent among female adolescents. This reinforces the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in mental health intervention, particularly those that address the specific emotional experiences and help-seeking behaviors of adolescent girls. Their research lends support to the idea that mental health strategies must be tailored to reflect the nuanced ways gender influences emotional development and vulnerability.

Complementing these psychological and demographic insights, Lett et al. (2022) examined the intersection of suicidality, depression, and substance use in the broader context of economic hardship and interpersonal discrimination. Through latent class analysis (LCA), they identified distinct subgroups of adolescents characterized by unique patterns of self-reported substance use and depressive symptoms. Subsequent regression analyses revealed that these patterns, when combined with socio-structural variables, significantly predicted suicidality. Their findings indicated that the co-occurrence of substance use and depression—particularly among transgender youth—is closely tied to structural disadvantages such as economic deprivation and discrimination. This study illuminates the complex

and multifaceted nature of adolescent suicide risk and underscores the necessity for comprehensive, inclusive interventions that address both individual mental health needs and the broader social conditions that influence them.

### ***Substance Use***

Parental monitoring has been consistently linked to a lower likelihood of adolescent substance use. Numerous studies have demonstrated that adolescents who experience higher levels of monitoring are less likely to report intentions to engage in risky behaviors such as drinking alcohol, using marijuana, or misusing prescription drugs (Dittus et al., 2023; Kuntsche et al., 2016; Roman et al., 2015). Building on this foundational evidence, Pelham et al. (2024) proposed a comprehensive model illustrating the mechanisms through which parental monitoring discourages substance use. Their findings emphasized that parental engagement and the establishment of structured, consistent environments serve as central processes that help prevent adolescent involvement with drugs and alcohol.

When examining specific substances, the protective role of parental monitoring becomes even more apparent. In relation to alcohol use, Bartolo et al. (2023) found that monitoring not only reduced direct consumption but also weakened adolescents' positive alcohol expectancies—making them less susceptible to peer pressure. Similarly, Bo et al. (2023) identified high parental involvement, including monitoring practices, as a moderator of peer influences on alcohol consumption. Their study also revealed important gender and racial/ethnic differences, suggesting that parental strategies do not function uniformly across demographic groups. Girls, in particular, were more responsive to positive parenting and exhibited greater reductions in alcohol use when parents were highly involved.

Expanding this line of inquiry, Schulte et al. (2024) investigated the long-term consequences of parental monitoring on adolescent alcohol use and alcohol-impaired driving in young adulthood. They found that perceived parental monitoring during adolescence was inversely related to impaired driving behavior later in life. Their models accounted for variables such as family socioeconomic status, family structure, adolescent mental health, and peer substance use, further affirming the robustness of monitoring as a preventive factor.

A unique perspective is provided by Lushin et al. (2017), who examined the link between adolescent dishonesty, parental monitoring, and underage drinking. Using a nationally representative sample of seventh- and eighth-grade students, their study found that adolescents who engaged in lying behaviors diminished their parents' awareness of their activities, thereby weakening parental monitoring. Importantly, dishonesty itself was also directly associated with higher levels of underage drinking. However, maternal warmth and adolescent satisfaction with the mother-child relationship were strongly correlated with reduced lying, which in turn facilitated more effective parental monitoring and lower alcohol use. Conversely, parental control—defined as more rigid rule enforcement—was not significantly associated with improved outcomes, suggesting that supportive relationships, rather than authoritarian parenting, are more effective in reducing risk behaviors.

The protective effects of parental monitoring also appear to be especially strong for racial and ethnic minority youth. Bo et al. (2023) found that Black and Hispanic adolescents were more likely to resist peer pressure related to alcohol use when experiencing high levels of parental monitoring. These findings are complemented by Booth and Shaw (2023), who argued for a deeper understanding of how

community structures and cultural contexts shape parenting strategies. Their research suggests that the effectiveness of monitoring may be enhanced or diminished based on the broader racial, ethnic, and social environments in which families are embedded.

Finally, the role of parental monitoring extends to cannabis use. Haruvama et al. (2023) found that higher levels of monitoring were associated with a lower likelihood of cannabis consumption among both male and female adolescents. This protective effect was particularly important for adolescents experiencing depressive symptoms, emphasizing the dual need to support youth mental health while strengthening parental engagement. The study concluded that interventions designed to enhance parental monitoring could serve as an effective strategy for reducing adolescent cannabis use, especially among emotionally vulnerable populations.

### **School Connectedness**

Although research directly linking parental monitoring and school connectedness remains limited, school connectedness itself is widely recognized as a crucial protective factor for adolescent well-being (CDC, 2022). Students who feel connected to their school—through positive, trusting relationships with peers and teachers, a sense of safety, and active engagement—tend to experience fewer behavioral problems and report better mental health outcomes. The existing literature suggests that parental monitoring and school connectedness may work synergistically, forming a multi-layered protective environment that fosters resilience in adolescents.

In exploring related themes, Booth and Shaw (2023) examined the role of neighborhoods in shaping adolescent outcomes, emphasizing the importance of

collective norms and shared responsibility. While their research focused on community-level dynamics rather than schools, the concepts they discussed closely align with the principles of school climate and connectedness. This overlap indicates that similar protective processes may operate in both community and school environments, where social cohesion at these levels can reinforce each other and enhance adolescent resilience.

## METHOD

### Data and Sample

The data for this study were drawn from the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), which surveys a nationally representative sample of high school students (grades 9–12) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The YRBS monitors health-related behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the U. S. These behaviors are categorized into several key areas, including behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence, sexual behaviors, alcohol and other drug use, tobacco use, unhealthy dietary behaviors, and inadequate physical activity.

The YRBS uses a self-administered, anonymous questionnaire to collect data on a wide range of risk behaviors. The survey is conducted in school classrooms, and participation is voluntary. The CDC ensures that all participants provide informed consent, and efforts are made to ensure confidentiality and minimize potential biases in responses. The YRBS is conducted biennially in both public and private schools across the United States. It employs a three-stage cluster sampling design to ensure that the results are representative of students in grades 9 through 12 at the national, state, and local levels. The 2021 sample consists of 17,232 students.

In the current study, the sample was restricted to only those who answered the survey question for the outcome of interest (see below for description), resulting in a sample size of 7,089 students in the 2021 national cohort.

### Data Limitations and Exclusion of 2023 Survey Data

The 2023 survey data were excluded from the mediation analysis due to a perfect prediction issue between the parental monitoring variable and the mediator, perceived closeness to others at school. Specifically, parental monitoring fully determined perceived closeness, resulting in a deterministic relationship where there was no variability to estimate the first path of the mediation model. This perfect prediction violates the assumptions of logistic regression and generalized structural equation modeling, which require variability in the outcome variable to properly estimate effects. The deterministic nature of the relationship also implies that the mediator does not function independently of the predictor in this dataset, undermining the conceptual basis of mediation analysis. As a result, the 2023 data could not be validly incorporated into the mediation models, and analyses were restricted to the 2021 data where variability was sufficient to permit proper estimation.

### Measures

Four binary (0 = no, 1 = yes) dependent variables were included in the subsequent analyses. Poor mental health measures whether students reported that their mental health was poor during the 30 days before the survey. Suicidal ideation is a composite binary measure (0 = none, 1 = yes to any) that captures whether students reported yes to any of the following: (1) considered suicide, (2) made a suicide plan, (3) attempted suicide. Hopelessness measures whether students reported feeling sad or hopeless for two weeks or more (0 = no, 1 = yes). Several measures were included to capture substance use (any drugs). Participants were asked to report

whether they had used a variety of substances in the past 30 days. The outcomes include alcohol use, marijuana use, synthetic marijuana use, and any illicit drugs. The any illicit drug variable measures whether youth reported using at least one of the following substances in the past 30 days: injected drugs, ecstasy, heroin, cocaine, prescription drugs, or methamphetamine.

### **Key Predictors**

**Parental Monitoring.** A key predictor of interest is homelessness, which is measured as whether students report usually sleeping away from their parents' home (0 = no, 1 = yes).

**School Connectedness.** The mediator variable of interest is feel close to people, which is the binary version of the variable provided in the data, which captures the percentage of students who strongly agree or agree that they are close to people at their school (0 = no, 1 = yes).

**Covariates.** Several sociodemographic measures were also included. Sex measures students' biological sex (0 = female, 1 = male). Grade captures which grade the students were in at the time of the survey (0 = 9th grade, 1 = 10th grade, 2 = 11th grade, 3 = 12th grade). Race/ethnicity of the students captures several categories include White (used as the reference category), Black, Hispanic, and all other races. Students also reported sexual identity, which was measured as 0 for heterosexual (used as reference category), 1 for gay or lesbian, 2 for bisexual, 3 for describe in other ways, and 4 for questioning sexual identity.

### **Analytical Procedure**

We conducted a mediation analysis to examine whether school connectedness mediated the

relationship between parental monitoring and several binary outcomes, including suicide ideation, hopelessness, current mental health status, and any illicit drug use. Mediation analysis test how much of the direct relationship between parental monitoring and the outcomes operates through school connectedness (indirect relationship). If the mediator is significant, it suggests that the mediator plays an important role in explaining the relationship between parental monitoring and school connectedness. Given the binary nature of the outcome variables, we employed survey-weighted binary logistic regression models using the survey package in R (Lumley, 2024).

To account for the complex survey design of the dataset, all models incorporated sampling weights and clustering by primary sampling unit (PSU), as specified in the survey design object. Each mediation model consisted of two components: (1) a mediator model regressing feeling of closeness on parental monitoring and covariates, and (2) an outcome model regressing the binary outcome on both parental monitoring and the mediator, controlling for the same covariates.

Indirect effects were estimated using the product-of-coefficients method (i.e.,  $a \times b$ ), where "a" represents the effect of parental monitoring on the mediator, and "b" represents the effect of the mediator on the outcome. To generate bootstrapped standard errors and confidence intervals for the indirect effects, we used nonparametric resampling with 1,000 bootstrap replications. This approach provides more accurate estimates under non-normal sampling distributions and is robust to violations of parametric assumptions.

While structural equation modeling (SEM) is a powerful framework for estimating mediation effects, it presents several limitations when applied

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents weighted percentages, unweighted sample sizes, and weighted standard errors for key demographic and adolescent well-being variables. The majority of students reported high levels of parental monitoring, with 88.55% indicating that their parents or guardians knew where they were or who they were with most of the time. Additionally, 63.02% reported feeling close to people at their school. Just over half of the respondents identified as male (50.83%). The sample was relatively evenly distributed across grade levels, with 24.09% in 9th grade, 24.99% in 10th grade, 26.30% in 11th grade, and 24.63% in 12th grade. In terms of racial/ethnic composition, 53.84% of respondents identified as White, 9.37% as Black, 24.50% as Hispanic, and 12.29% as another racial/ethnic group.

Regarding sexual identity, 75.59% identified as heterosexual, 3.17% as gay or lesbian, 12.40% as bisexual, 4.08% described their sexual identity in other ways, and 5.17% were questioning their sexual identity. Indicators of mental health and risk behaviors revealed that 29.05% of respondents reported experiencing poor mental health, 26.77% reported having suicidal thoughts, and 43.99% reported feelings of hopelessness. Additionally, 13.63% reported having used drugs.

to complex, nationally representative survey data. SEM typically assumes simple random sampling and often does not easily accommodate survey weights, clustering, and stratification without relying on specialized extensions (e.g., `lavaan.survey`), which are either unavailable or not compatible with current version of R.

To address these challenges and maintain fidelity to the survey design, we employ a regression-based mediation approach using survey-weighted generalized linear models `svyglm`` (Lumley, 2024). This method allows us to: (1) incorporate sampling weights, clustering, and design-based variance estimation, (2) provide population-representative estimates, and (3) evaluate indirect effects using the product of coefficients ( $a \times b$ ) method and the delta method for inference. This approach offers a robust alternative to SEM when working with complex survey data, ensuring that mediation effects are estimated in a statistically valid and interpretable way that respects the underlying sampling structure.

**Table 1. Summary Statistics**

	% <sup>a</sup>	n <sup>b</sup>	SE <sup>a</sup>
Parental Monitoring (1 = yes)	88.55%	<b>6,283</b>	0.005
Feeling Close to People (1 = yes)	63.02%	4,362	0.012
Sex (Male)	50.83%	3,670	0.010
Grade			
9th Grade	24.09%	1,659	0.006
10th Grade	24.99%	1,808	0.008
11th Grade	26.30%	1,849	0.007
12th Grade	24.63%	1,866	0.008
Race/Ethnicity			
White	53.84%	3,764	0.022
Black	9.37%	940	0.012
Hispanic	24.50%	1,535	0.020
All others	12.29%	943	0.022
Sexual Identity			
Heterosexual	75.59%	5,454	0.009
Gay or lesbian	3.17%	234	0.002
Bisexual	12.40%	849	0.006
Describe in other ways	0.04%	264	0.006
Questioning sexual identity	5.17%	381	0.004
Current Poor Mental Health (1 = yes)	29.05%	2,094	0.011
Suicide ideation (1 = yes)	26.77%	1,979	0.007
Hopelessness (1 = yes)	43.99%	3,166	0.010
Any Drugs (1 = yes)	13.63%	1,040	0.007

<sup>a</sup> = weighted percentage and 95% confidence interval, <sup>b</sup> = unweighted counts

## Multivariate Statistics

Table 2 presents the mediation analyses for the binary logistic regression predicting the four outcomes. The estimates for the indirect effects are included in the table. Figures 1 – 4 provide visualizations of the indirect paths.

### **Mental Health**

A binary logistic regression model predicting current poor mental health revealed several significant predictors. Parental monitoring was associated with significantly lower odds of poor mental health (OR = 0.62, 95% CI [0.48, 0.79],  $p < .001$ ), as was school connectedness (OR = 0.45, 95% CI [0.40, 0.51],  $p < .001$ ). Male students had lower odds of reporting poor mental health compared to males (OR = 0.41, 95% CI [0.35, 0.48],  $p < .001$ ). Black students (OR = 0.74, 95% CI [0.60, 0.92],  $p < .01$ ) and students of all other races (OR = 0.82, 95% CI [0.72, 0.94],  $p < .01$ ) also had significantly lower odds compared to White students. Students identifying as gay or lesbian (OR = 2.32, 95% CI [1.78, 3.04],  $p < .001$ ), bisexual (OR = 3.03, 95% CI [2.49, 3.68],  $p < .001$ ), describing their identity in other ways (OR = 3.11, 95% CI [2.35, 4.12],  $p < .001$ ), and those questioning their sexual identity (OR = 2.38, 95% CI [1.85, 3.06],  $p < .001$ ) all had significantly higher odds of reporting poor mental health compared to heterosexual youth.

The indirect effect indicates a one-unit increase in parental monitoring is associated with a significant reduction in the odds of poor mental health, through its positive effect on school connectedness. The confidence interval does not include zero, indicating statistically significant partial mediation.

**Suicidal Ideation.** In the model predicting suicidal ideation, parental monitoring was associated with reduced odds (OR = 0.42, 95% CI [0.34, 0.52],  $p < .001$ ), as was school connectedness (OR = 0.46, 95% CI [0.34, 0.52],  $p < .001$ ). Male students again had

significantly lower odds compared to males (OR = 0.62, 95% CI [0.56, 0.69],  $p < .001$ ). Youth identifying as gay or lesbian (OR = 3.34, 95% CI [2.40, 4.65],  $p < .001$ ), bisexual (OR = 4.84, 95% CI [3.99, 5.88],  $p < .001$ ), describe in other ways (OR = 3.84, 95% CI [2.64, 5.59],  $p < .001$ ), and questioning youth (OR = 2.45, 95% CI [1.85, 3.25],  $p < .001$ ) all showed significantly higher odds of suicidal ideation than their heterosexual peers.

There is a significant negative indirect effect of parental monitoring on suicidal ideation through school connectedness. That is, increased parental monitoring improves connectedness, which is in turn associated with lower odds of suicidal ideation.

**Hopelessness.** In the model for hopelessness, several predictors were significantly associated with the outcome. Parental monitoring (OR = 0.47, 95% CI [0.39, 0.56],  $p < .001$ ) and school connectedness (OR = 0.47, 95% CI [0.39, 0.57],  $p < .001$ ) were both protective. Male students had significantly lower odds of hopelessness (OR = 0.38, 95% CI [0.32, 0.45],  $p < .001$ ). Students in Grade 11 (OR = 1.27, 95% CI [1.04, 1.57],  $p < .05$ ) had significantly higher odds of hopelessness than 9th graders. Hispanic (OR = 1.24, 95% CI [1.05, 1.47],  $p < .01$ ) and other race/ethnicity (OR = 1.31, 95% CI [1.07, 1.61],  $p < .01$ ) students had higher odds of feeling hopeless compared to White students. Students identifying as gay or lesbian (OR = 2.55, 95% CI [1.77, 3.67],  $p < .001$ ), bisexual (OR = 3.41, 95% CI [2.69, 4.31],  $p < .001$ ), describe in other ways (OR = 3.31, 95% CI [2.45, 4.45],  $p < .001$ ), and questioning (OR = 2.04, 95% CI [1.48, 2.80],  $p < .001$ ) all had higher odds than heterosexual students. Parental monitoring reduces hopelessness indirectly via greater school connectedness, and the effect is statistically significant.

**Drug Use.** In the drug use model, parental monitoring (OR = 0.54, 95% CI [0.39, 0.73],  $p < .01$ ) and school connectedness (OR = 0.28, 95% CI [0.22, 0.35],  $p < .001$ ) were again associated with reduced

odds of the outcome. Male students had significantly lower odds of drug use than male students (OR = 0.77, 95% CI [0.69, 0.86],  $p < .001$ ). Sexual identity was also significantly related to drug use: students identifying as gay or lesbian (OR = 1.85, 95% CI [1.23, 2.80],  $p < .01$ ), bisexual (OR = 2.59, 95% CI [2.16, 3.11],  $p < .001$ ), describe in other ways (OR = 2.26, 95% CI [1.75, 2.93],  $p < .001$ ), and questioning (OR = 1.71, 95% CI [1.22, 2.40],  $p < .01$ ) were more likely to report any drug use compared to heterosexual youth. The indirect effects indicate that parental monitoring is associated with lower likelihood of drug use through the mediator of school connectedness, again with a significant indirect effect.

In all four models, school connectedness significantly mediates the relationship between parental monitoring and the outcome. The negative indirect effects suggest that parental monitoring indirectly protects youth from poor mental health, suicidal ideation, hopelessness, and drug use by improving their feelings of school connectedness.

Table 2. Results of the Binary Logistic Regression Mediation Models

Predictor	Current Poor Mental Health		Suicidal Ideation		Hopelessness		Any Drugs	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
(Intercept)	1.04	[0.77, 1.39]	0.96	[0.67, 1.36]	2.54***	[1.93, 3.34]	0.54***	[0.39, 0.73]
Parental Monitoring	0.62***	[0.48, 0.79]	0.42***	[0.34, 0.52]	0.47***	[0.39, 0.56]	0.28***	[0.22, 0.35]
School Connectedness	0.45***	[0.40, 0.51]	0.46***	[0.40, 0.53]	0.47***	[0.39, 0.57]	0.60***	[0.51, 0.71]
Female	0.41***	[0.35, 0.48]	0.62***	[0.56, 0.69]	0.38***	[0.32, 0.45]	0.77***	[0.69, 0.86]
Grade <sup>1</sup>								
Grade 10	1.16	[0.90, 1.50]	1.08	[0.82, 1.41]	1.15	[0.93, 1.43]	0.89	[0.74, 1.06]
Grade 11	1.18	[0.95, 1.45]	1.11	[0.87, 1.42]	1.27*	[1.04, 1.57]	0.92	[0.72, 1.17]
Grade 12	1.21*	[1.01, 1.45]	0.96	[0.73, 1.27]	1.16	[0.99, 1.36]	1.00	[0.80, 1.26]
Race/Ethnicity <sup>2</sup>								
Black	0.74**	[0.60, 0.92]	1.01	[0.69, 1.48]	0.86	[0.70, 1.05]	1.08	[0.77, 1.52]
Hispanic	0.92	[0.77, 1.11]	1.03	[0.82, 1.21]	1.24*	[1.05, 1.47]	1.18	[0.90, 1.54]
All others	0.82**	[0.72, 0.94]	1.00	[0.83, 1.21]	0.98	[0.80, 1.20]	1.05	[0.86, 1.29]
Sexual Identity <sup>3</sup>								
Gay or Lesbian	2.32***	[1.78, 3.04]	3.34***	[2.40, 4.65]	2.55***	[1.77, 3.67]	1.85**	[1.23, 2.80]
Bisexual	3.03***	[2.49, 3.68]	4.84***	[3.99, 5.88]	3.41***	[2.69, 4.31]	2.59***	[2.16, 3.11]
Describe in other ways	3.11***	[2.35, 4.12]	3.84***	[2.64, 5.59]	3.31***	[2.45, 4.45]	2.26***	[1.75, 2.93]
Questioning identity	2.38***	[1.85, 3.06]	2.45***	[1.85, 3.25]	2.04***	[1.48, 2.80]	1.71**	[1.22, 2.40]
<b>Indirect Effects</b>								
	<b>Est.</b>	<b>C.I.</b>	<b>Est.</b>	<b>C.I.</b>	<b>Est.</b>	<b>C.I.</b>	<b>Est.</b>	<b>C.I.</b>
Parental Monitoring --> Connectedness	-0.073***	[-0.101, -0.046]	-0.071***	[-0.098, -0.044]	-0.070***	[-0.096, -0.044]	-0.047***	[-0.068, -0.025]

Note. \*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01, \* p < .05, OR = Odds Ratio, CI = Confidence Interval

1 = reference category is 9<sup>th</sup> grade

2 = reference category is White

3 = reference category is Heterosexual

Figure 1. Indirect effect of parental monitoring on poor mental health through school connectedness.

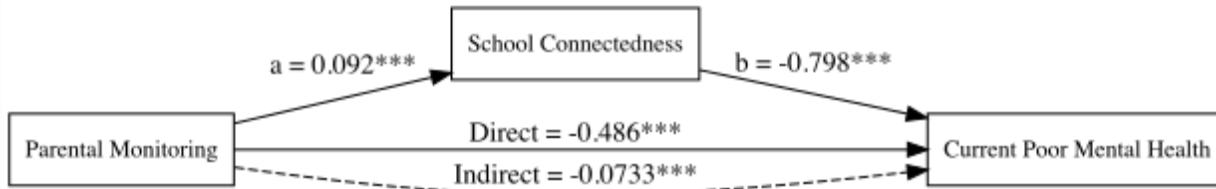


Figure 2. Indirect effect of parental monitoring on suicidal ideation through school connectedness.

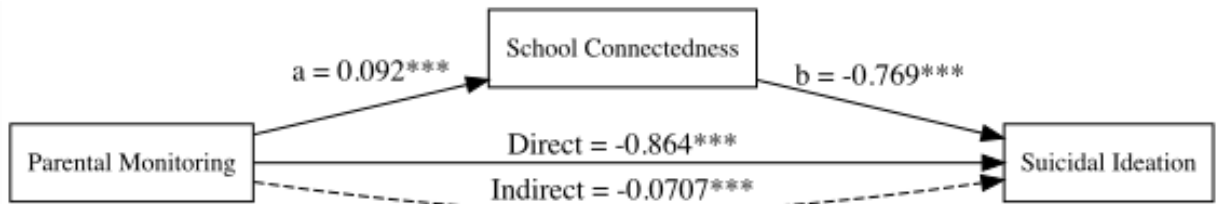


Figure 3. Indirect effect of parental monitoring on hopelessness through school connectedness.

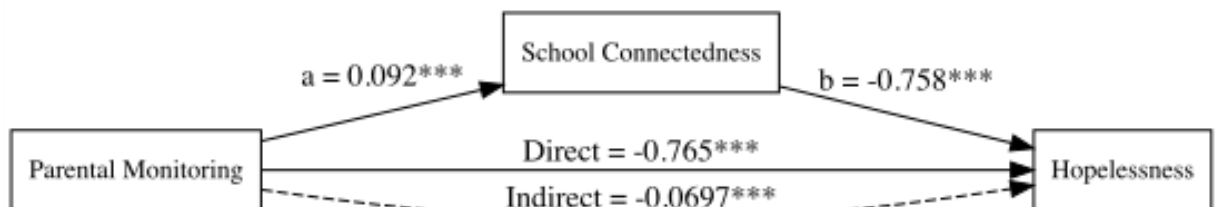
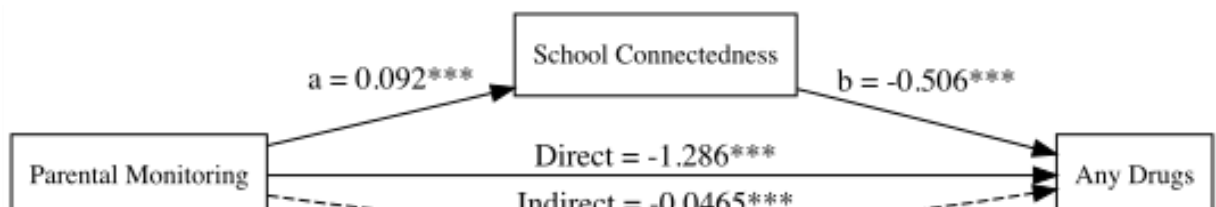


Figure 4. Indirect effect of parental monitoring on any illicit drug use through school connectedness.



## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the critical role that parental monitoring and school connectedness play in promoting adolescent well-being and protecting against a range of mental health challenges and risk behaviors. Consistent with prior literature, the majority of students reported experiencing high levels of parental monitoring and feeling connected to their school community—two constructs that emerged as robust protective factors across all models analyzed.

As shown in Table 1, nearly 89% of respondents indicated that their parents or guardians usually knew their whereabouts or social circles, and 63% reported feeling close to people at school. These high rates of perceived monitoring and connectedness provide a valuable backdrop for interpreting the regression results. Importantly, the sample reflects demographic diversity in grade level, race/ethnicity, and sexual identity, allowing for nuanced analysis of differential experiences and risks.

Across all four outcome domains—poor mental health, suicidal ideation, hopelessness, and drug use—higher levels of parental monitoring were associated with significantly lower odds of negative outcomes. This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the value of parental involvement and supervision in buffering youth from harmful behaviors and emotional distress. Moreover, the indirect effects suggest that this relationship operates in part through school connectedness. In other words, parental monitoring may enhance adolescents' sense of belonging and support at school, which in turn decreases the likelihood of negative outcomes.

Hopelessness is commonly conceptualized as a cognitive–emotional state characterized by persistent negative expectations about the future and a perceived lack of agency to influence life outcomes. Within the psychological and criminological

literatures, hopelessness reflects beliefs that desired goals are unattainable, that personal efforts will not lead to positive change, and that future circumstances are unlikely to improve (Beck et al., 1974; Abramson et al., 1989). Among adolescents, hopelessness often manifests as emotional disengagement, diminished motivation, and withdrawal from conventional coping strategies, and has been linked to a range of adverse outcomes including depression, substance use, risk-taking behaviors, and suicidality (Bolland et al., 2007; Chang et al., 2019).

Importantly, hopelessness—an individual trait—is also shaped by social and structural contexts. For adolescents, exposure to chronic stressors, such as family conflict, economic hardship, discrimination, or limited access to supportive resources. In this study, hopelessness may therefore capture respondents' broader perceptions of constrained opportunity and limited control over their life trajectories, rather than transient mood states. Within survey-based research, hopelessness is typically operationalized through items assessing negative future expectations, feelings of futility, or beliefs that current problems are unlikely to improve. For adolescents, these perceptions may manifest behaviorally as disengagement from school, reduced responsiveness to parental guidance, or increased vulnerability to mental health challenges and maladaptive coping strategies (Huen et al., 2015; Miranda et al., 2012). As such, hopelessness in the present study should be interpreted as a meaningful indicator of adolescents' broader cognitive appraisals of their future, with important implications for understanding risk and resilience processes.

School connectedness, as highlighted in the literature, has repeatedly been linked to a host of beneficial outcomes, including reduced risk for depression, suicidal thoughts, substance use, and disengagement from school. The current study extends this body of research by demonstrating that

school connectedness serves as a significant mediator between parental monitoring and all four outcomes examined. These results support the idea that parental monitoring acts as a buffer against adolescent risk behaviors, and that school connectedness partially mediates this relationship—particularly in regard to depressive symptoms—thereby amplifying the protective effects of parental monitoring. Together, these findings underscore the synergistic role of parental involvement and school attachment in promoting adolescent well-being across both behavioral and emotional domains.

Finally, sexual minority youth in the sample—those identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning, or other—reported significantly higher odds of poor mental health, suicidal ideation, hopelessness, and drug use compared to their heterosexual peers. While parental monitoring and school connectedness were protective across the board, these factors may not fully mitigate the elevated risks faced by sexual minority adolescents, highlighting the need for tailored interventions. Racial/ethnic differences also emerged. Black and other-race youth had lower odds of reporting poor mental health relative to White students, while Hispanic and other-race students had higher odds of hopelessness. These patterns may reflect complex interactions between cultural norms, coping mechanisms, stigma, and access to mental health resources. Finally, gender differences were consistently observed, with male students reporting significantly lower odds of poor mental health, suicidal ideation, hopelessness, and drug use than their female counterparts. Gendered expectations and culturally shaped responses to structural risk help explain why parental monitoring may function as a protective strategy for some youth while operating differently across racial/ethnic groups and justice-involved populations (Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Roche et al., 2014; Terrell et al., 2025). For instance,

research shows that girls are more likely to experience higher levels of monitoring and stricter behavioral expectations than boys (Svensson et al., 2019; Ybarra et al., 2021). In some context, this may be interpreted as protective, whereas in other contexts it is experienced as restrictive. Racial and ethnic differences in monitoring practices are similarly shaped by culturally informed parenting norms and broader structural conditions, including exposure to neighborhood risk, discrimination, and differential access to mental health and supportive resources (Caldwell et al., 2018; Roche et al., 2019). In these contexts, heightened parental monitoring may represent an adaptive response to environmental stressors rather than an indicator of mistrust, though its effectiveness may be moderated by chronic stress and structural inequality (Assari et al., 2020). Together, these findings underscore that parental monitoring is not a uniform practice and that its association with youth outcomes is contingent on gendered expectations, cultural context, and broader social conditions rather than operating identically across all adolescents.

Parental monitoring encompasses multiple practices ranging from knowledge-based and disclosure-driven involvement, which are typically protective, to intrusive or identity-policing behaviors that may undermine well-being, particularly among marginalized youth (Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Ryan et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2010). Parental monitoring is most protective when it (1) encompasses trust, support, and warmth (Hoeve et al., 2009; Steinberg, 2001) and, (2) is based on open communication (Kerr et al., 2010). However, parental monitoring for marginalized youth (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth) may be experienced as policing rather than care or may co-occur with rejection or conditional acceptance (Ryan et al., 2009, Ryan et al., 2010).

## Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations inherent in the use of secondary data from the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). First, as the dataset was not originally designed for this specific analysis, there is limited control over the quality and framing of survey items. Second, the dataset contains missing or incomplete responses, particularly on sensitive topics such as mental health and substance use. Third, measurement limitations arise from the operationalization of key constructs; for example, school connectedness and parental monitoring are captured through single or limited items, which may not fully reflect the complexity of these variables. Fourth, the data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period that likely introduced atypical stressors and altered school and family dynamics, thereby affecting the generalizability of findings to other time periods. Fifth, as the survey relies on self-reported data from adolescents, it is subject to both recall bias and social desirability bias, which may influence the accuracy of responses regarding risk behaviors and protective factors.

## Future Policy, Practice, and Research

Future policy and practice should prioritize inclusive, culturally responsive approaches that amplify protective factors while addressing systemic inequities. School-based mental health supports, LGBTQ+ affirming practices, and family-centered programming are essential components of a holistic strategy to support adolescent well-being. For instance, inclusive school climate (e.g., use of affirmed names and pronouns, gender-inclusive policies, visible signals of safety and inclusion) and identity recognition can help to reduce identity-based stigma and increase feelings of belonging at school.

Future research would benefit from the use of mixed methods and qualitative approaches to better capture

the nuanced ways parental monitoring is experienced and interpreted by adolescents and their families. While quantitative analyses identify broad patterns and associations, qualitative methods—such as in-depth interviews or focus groups—can illuminate how monitoring practices are shaped by cultural norms, gendered expectations, and structural constraints, as well as how youth perceive these practices as supportive, intrusive, or identity-policing. Mixed methods designs may be particularly valuable for informing policy and practice by linking population-level trends with lived experiences, thereby supporting the development of family- and youth-centered interventions that are responsive to diverse social contexts.

In sum, the findings suggest that interventions aimed at strengthening parental engagement and promoting school connectedness may be powerful levers for improving adolescent mental health and reducing risk behaviors. However, they also highlight the persistence of disparities along lines of sexual identity, gender, and race/ethnicity.

Finally, future research should explore these dynamics further to better understand how cultural and structural factors influence youth outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

This study underscores the powerful protective role of both parental monitoring and school connectedness in adolescent mental health and risk behavior outcomes. The mediation analyses revealed that parental monitoring not only directly reduces the odds of poor mental health, suicidal ideation, hopelessness, and drug use but also exerts a significant indirect effect through its enhancement of school connectedness. These findings reinforce the importance of fostering strong family supervision and supportive school environments as dual

strategies for improving youth well-being. However, the elevated risks faced by sexual minority youth, along with nuanced racial/ethnic and gender differences, suggest that while these protective factors are broadly effective, they are not uniformly sufficient. This highlights the need for more tailored, inclusive interventions that address the unique vulnerabilities of specific subgroups. Future research should continue exploring these dynamics using updated datasets and more granular measures to inform policy and practice that promote resilience and equity among all adolescents.

For youth justice system stakeholders, it is important to note that the risks reduced by school connectedness and parental monitoring closely align with behaviors commonly associated with juvenile system involvement. Prior research demonstrates that low school connectedness is linked to truancy, school disengagement, substance use, aggression, and delinquent peer affiliation—key pathways into formal system contact. Similarly, effective parental monitoring has been associated with lower involvement in substance use, weapon carrying, property offenses, and other externalizing behaviors that frequently precipitate arrest, probation, or court referral. In this context, the current findings suggest that school connectedness and parental monitoring may function as upstream protective factors by mitigating well-established precursors to delinquency and justice involvement. While the present study does not directly measure offending or system contact, these results underscore the relevance of family and school-based protective processes for prevention-oriented juvenile justice policy and practice.

## DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to report.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Jane C. Daquin, Ph.D.**

*Jane C. Daquin, Ph.D.*, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology at Sam Houston State University. Her research focuses on carceral experiences, in particular prison adaptation, prison victimization, and special populations in prison. Additionally, her work focuses on the effects of the prison experiences on reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals. Her most recent work has appeared in the *Journal of Criminal Justice, Corrections: Policy, Practice, and Research, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, Criminal Justice & Behavior, and Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health.*

**Sheri Jenkins Keenan, Ph.D.**

*Sheri Jenkins Keenan, Ph.D.* is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice and Director of MPA Program in the Department of Social Science at Alabama A&M University. Her research interests focus on policing special populations with an emphasis on juveniles: delinquency, mental illness, school safety, school-to-prison pipeline, gangs/threat groups, Racial, Ethnic Diversity (RE/D) (formally known as Disproportional Minority Contact, (DMC)), Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs), and juvenile justice program evaluation. Her most recent work has appeared in *American Journal of Criminal Justice, Children and Youth Services, The Journal of Foster Care, Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, Journal of Applied Juvenile Justice, and Justice Policy Journal.*

Corresponding Author: Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sheri Jenkins Keenan, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, Department of Social Sciences, College of Business & Public Affairs, Alabama A & M University, Normal, Alabama 35762. Email: [sheri.jenkinskee@aamu.edu](mailto:sheri.jenkinskee@aamu.edu).

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