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## Parental monitoring and the role of community norms and neighbourhood

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Running Head: PARENTAL MONITORING, NEIGHBOURHOOD AND NORMS

Parental Monitoring and the Role of Community Norms and Neighbourhood.

(Literature Review)

Parental Monitoring and the Role of Community Norms and Neighbourhood.

(Research Project)

Katrina Sims

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of Bachelor of  
Arts Honours, Faculty of Communication Studies, Education and Social Sciences, Edith  
Cowan University.

August 2005

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### Abstract

A recent paper by Stattin and Kerr (2000) questioned the validity of past monitoring literature claiming previous research has operationalised parental monitoring as 'what parents know about their child's activities' but defined monitoring as 'the act of tracking and surveying children's activities.' While the body of research in question has consistently found low levels of parental monitoring (parental knowledge) to be linked to adolescent problem behaviour, it tells us little about how parents monitor their children. More recent research has begun to answer this question. This paper reviews monitoring research conducted subsequent to the seminal work of Stattin and Kerr. Also reviewed is current literature on the impact of neighbourhoods' and community norms on parental monitoring. It is concluded that monitoring may be influenced by community norms providing an opportunity for psychologist to influence behaviour. The role of community norms in parenting requires further investigation.

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Submitted August 2005

### Parental Monitoring and the Role of Community Norms and Neighbourhood.

Parenting may be one of the most important influences on child development and socialization. The role of a parent is an ongoing process that requires responsiveness and adaptation to meet the changing needs of child (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Changes in today's society have in many ways increased environmental risk for children. In addition many parents feel that expectation of parents has increased (Sidebotham, 2001). A recent survey indicated 70 percent of Australian parents felt pressure from their community to be more effective as parents (Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2005). These results demonstrate the power community attitudes and expectations have to influence parenting. Psychologists and other social science researchers may play an important role in shaping community attitudes through the media and can influence current thought on issues such as child rearing (Kipnis, 1987). These opinions can then become embedded into what people believe is the norm in their community. Community norms can be defined as "a shared expectation of how people should behave within certain roles or situations" (Caughy, Brodsky, Campo & Aronson 2001, p. 682). Beliefs about the parenting strategies may be influenced by these norms. Psychologists and other professionals must therefore take care in providing well researched opinions to the public (Kipnis, 1987).

A large body of parental monitoring research has provided evidence that well monitored children are at lower risk of problem behaviour. (Cerkovich & Giordano, 1987; Frick, Christian & Wooton, 1999; Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Parental monitoring has been shown to reduce the risk of drug use (Barnes, Reifman, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2000; Dishion, Capaldi, Spracklen, & Li, 1995; Flannery, Vaszonyi, Torquati, & Fridrich, 1994), unsafe sexual activity (Metzler, Noell, Biglan, Ary, & Smolkowski,

1994) and association with deviant friends (Dishion et al., 1995). Based on this research parents have been implored to keep close tabs on their children.

However, a recent study by Stattin and Kerr (2000) has questioned the validity of past monitoring research. Stattin and Kerr point out that most parental monitoring research has defined or assumed monitoring as an active process requiring parents to keep track of children's activities. Dishion and McMahon (1998) define parental monitoring as a component of parenting practice that "includes both structuring the child's home, school and community environments and tracking the child's behaviour in those environments" (p.66). Most research however, has measured how much parents know about their child's activities, rather than how activities were monitored or knowledge was acquired. This puts into question the assumption that monitoring deters delinquency, because it is how much parents know about their child's activities and not the act of monitoring that is associated with lower levels of delinquency.

Current monitoring research has therefore taken a new direction. Past research has focused on the association between monitoring and its deterrent effects on adolescent delinquent behaviour. Stattin and Kerr's (2000) recent contention has meant researchers now are in search of the ways parents acquire their knowledge about children's activities and whereabouts. It is intended that this paper will review the current state of monitoring research. The paper will begin with an overview of the work of Stattin and Kerr and review subsequent literature that has followed this direction. The work of Stattin and Kerr will be used as a base to compare and contrast later research. The next part of the review will consider contextual factors including the impact of neighbourhood characteristics and community norms on parental monitoring. The paper will conclude with a discussion of future directions in research.

*Parental Monitoring*

Stattin and Kerr (2000) have argued that previous research has measured parental knowledge rather than parental monitoring. In their research they therefore tried to measure methods parents use to gain knowledge about children's activities and determine which methods predict knowledge. In addition they sought to determine if any of the methods of gaining knowledge better predict adolescent problem behaviour. Stattin and Kerr researched three methods of gaining knowledge: solicitation, parental control and child disclosure. Solicitation in this study was likened to what has previously been referred to as monitoring and is a measure of parent's direct efforts through questioning to obtain information from the child or child's friends. Parental control refers to parent efforts to control children through rules and curfews. Child disclosure refers to the willingness of the child to spontaneously disclose information about their daily activity to parents.

The study was based on questionnaires completed by 703 Swedish 14 year olds and one parent from each family. These authors --in agreement with the bulk of monitoring research-- found what has commonly been termed parental monitoring (parental knowledge) is related to delinquency. That is the more knowledgeable the parent is about their child's activities the less likelihood of child involvement in delinquent behaviour. While all three methods were found to predict parental knowledge, the strongest association was found for child disclosure, which was also the strongest indicator of low levels of delinquent behaviour. Based on their results Stattin and Kerr suggest that children's willingness to disclose information to parents accounts for more parental knowledge and predicts lower levels of problem behaviour than do the methods

of obtaining knowledge that are more closely aligned with the more traditional definition of monitoring.

Kerr and Stattin (2000) replicated the previous study with 1186 Swedish 14 year olds and their parents. This study was based on an urban rather than rural sample and used several measures of adjustment including internal and external adjustment, associations with deviant friends and relationship with parents, as opposed to the one measure, norm breaking, used in the previous study. Similar results were found, linking child disclosure to greater parental knowledge and to better adjustment for adolescents. In addition they found parental control was linked to feelings of being controlled which in turn were linked to poor adjustment. Furthermore, parental solicitation after controlling for child disclosure and parental control was found to be associated with greater, not lower levels of delinquent behaviour. However the association was relatively weak and because correlation does not imply causality it cannot be assumed that asking questions leads to delinquent behaviour. Parents may have attempted to gain more information when they suspected their child was involved with delinquent behaviour. The authors concluded that there is no evidence that parental solicitation or control explains the link between parental knowledge and adolescent adjustment. Kerr and Stattin question whether parents should be encouraged to actively monitor adolescents. Instead it is proposed that parents should consider changing their monitoring techniques and provide a warm and nurturing environment conducive to open communication.

A limitation of this research is that it failed to consider parental involvement in children's activities. Presumably a parent who is present in the child's activities, spends more time with the child has no need to question what the child has been doing as they have direct access to that knowledge (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). A further limitation of this

research is that it does not take into consideration, nor provide information about the socio-economic status (SES) of the families in the study. Other research has identified that SES and neighbourhood characteristics may mediate differences in parenting strategies (Pinderhughes, Foster & Jones, 2001). This point that will be returned to in a later part of this paper.

In support of claims that warm and caring environments lead to child self disclosure, Kerns and Aspelmeiser (2001) suggest that children's *willingness to be monitored* is related to the quality of the parent-child attachment. A secure attachment between parent and child may facilitate parental monitoring through the willingness of the child to assist in the monitoring process. These results support those of Stattin and Kerr if the measure of child's willingness to aid in the monitoring process is considered similar to child disclosure.

Concerned that the claims of Stattin and Kerr (2000) may be interpreted to mean parental monitoring is not an effective method of deterring adolescents from delinquent behaviour, Fletcher, Steinberg and Williams-Wheeler (2004) reanalysed their previous research data, taking into consideration the three forms of parental knowledge identified by Stattin and Kerr (2000). The sample included 2568 American adolescents aged 14-18 years predominately from middle class families. The study was longitudinal and gathered data at three points between 1987 and 1989. This study investigated adolescent reported involvement in substance use and delinquency in relation to adolescent perception of parent warmth, control, monitoring and knowledge. Monitoring in this study was a measure of parent attempts to try to find out about children's whereabouts and activities as perceived by the adolescent. Consistent with the findings of Kerr and Stattin (2000) the results indicated that parent warmth was linked to greater parental knowledge. In

addition higher levels of substance use was associated with higher levels of monitoring, that is adolescents that were involved in substance use reported higher levels of parental monitoring. However in contrast to Kerr and Stattin (2000) parental control was found to be directly linked to lower levels of problem behaviour, and parental knowledge did not completely explain the deterrent effects on adolescent involvement in delinquent behaviour.

While these authors agree that a warm and caring environment is likely to foster good communication and increase the likelihood of child disclosure, they argue that parental control is also effective as a means of deterring adolescents from misbehaving. The results of this study are however, restricted by several limitations. Firstly, the data used in this research was intended for other purposes. Although the authors claim the measures used were very similar to those of Stattin and Kerr (2000), the data did not address measures of child disclosure. Child disclosure was therefore not directly measured but rather assumed to be reflected in a measure of parental warmth. In addition the data in question was collected some 17 years prior to the analysis. Current research has identified that today's parents face new issues and expectations of parents have changed (Sidebotham, 2001; Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2005). The data therefore may be invalid. Secondly, results were based solely on adolescent's self-reported perception of parenting, which has been shown elsewhere to be inconsistent with parent reports (Cottrell et al., 2003). However some have argued that adolescent reports about parenting may be more accurate than parent reports and indeed Fletcher et al. (2004) argue that the adolescent's perception of parental warmth is more important for this study than the parent's perception. While there are several limitations to this research, the authors raise

an important point: it may be premature and perhaps irresponsible to suggest that parents should not actively monitor children.

In support of this argument Waizenhofer and Jackson-Newsom (2004) found that active rather than passive methods of gaining knowledge were the best predictors of parental knowledge. These authors investigated the links between parental knowledge of adolescents' daily activities and the method of gaining knowledge with adolescent adjustment. Participants were 95 adolescents aged 10 -17 years and their biological parents. The sample was predominately from white, two parent affluent families. Participants were sourced from youth sport centres. Data was gathered through a series of five telephone interviews over a three week period assessing parental knowledge of children's activities and methods used to obtain knowledge. Methods of gaining knowledge in this study were active (through parent involvement and directly asking the child), passive-child (child self disclosure), passive-spouse (unsolicited information from spouse) and passive-other (unsolicited information from other parents, neighbours and teachers). The results of this study indicate that active parental supervision and asking the child directly are amongst the best predictors of knowledge. Parents who received knowledge from others, including other parents, teachers and friends also had high levels of knowledge about their child's activities. Child disclosure however did not predict knowledge once active and passive-other methods were taken into account. None of the methods of obtaining knowledge in this study were linked to adolescent adjustment. Parents who knew the most about their children's daily lives were those that appeared integrated into their child's life. These parents sought information directly from their child, talked to others who knew their child, knew their child's routines and attended



events with their child. This research demonstrates that active supervision can be a successful means of gathering information about children.

These results are in direct contrast with those of Kerr and Stattin (2000). As Waizenhofer and Jackson-Newsom (2004) explain the difference in results is likely attributable to the different samples. It is possible that there are cultural differences, between Swedish and American parenting. In addition Waizenhofer and Jackson-Newsom used affluent two-parent families sourced from sporting recreation centres. As the children in this study were all involved in organized sporting activity, the sample may represent parents who are unusually integrated in their child's life. Moreover the fact that the families from Waizenhofer and Jackson-Newsom's study were predominantly from high SES background suggests that economic status may influence monitoring strategies. In addition the fact that parents in this study acquired knowledge through others in their neighbourhood may be evidence of the presence of social capital, a phenomenon indicating the cohesiveness of neighbourhood residents (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997).

Socio-economic status was taken into consideration in the research of Crouter, Bumpus, Davis and McHale (2005). These authors used cluster analysis (as opposed to variable oriented approach used in the majority of monitoring research), to determine if distinct groups of parents could be defined by method of obtaining knowledge about children activities. The researchers also sought to determine if commonalities existed in SES, parents work hours, child and parent personal characteristics, and quality of parent/child and marital relationships within clusters. Data was drawn from a large six year longitudinal investigation and based on an interview conducted in the sixth year of that research. Mother and father reports from 179 dual-parent families with a child aged

16 were separately analysed. Three clusters of parent source of knowledge emerged for both fathers and mothers. Similar clusters emerged for mothers and fathers with one important difference. A group of fathers was found to rely on mothers for information, but no corresponding group was found for mothers. Clusters were labelled Relational, Relies on Spouse (fathers only), and Relies on Others and Questioners (mothers only).

The sources of parent information identified here have some similarities to those identified by Stattin and Kerr (2000). Parents in the Relational cluster relied on child self-disclosure, listening and observing to gain information. As would be expected based on Stattin and Kerr's research parents of self-disclosers were more knowledgeable than other groups about children's daily activities. Fathers in the relational group were found to be better educated, hold more prestigious jobs, were older than fathers in other groups, and had children who rated themselves as being more expressive. This finding provides further evidence that SES is linked to style of monitoring. Mothers that relied on questioning for information were found to be better educated than mothers in other groups. In contrast to Waizenhofer and Jackson-Newsom (2004) parents that relied on other sources such as family members, friends and teachers were found to have the lowest levels of knowledge and children who were more likely to be involved in risky behaviour. Fathers in this group described their relationship with their child as high in conflict and mothers described their children as less open to supervision. Parents with less positive parent child relationships seem to rely on sources other than their child for information. SES for this group was not clearly defined. Interestingly, families with fathers that gained information about their child from their spouse had youths that were less involved in risky behaviours. These fathers were found to work longer hours than fathers from other groups which may explain their reliance on partners for information,

but the fact that youths participated less in risky behaviour may be evidence of parents working together.

While monitoring has been generally considered as a prevention strategy employed by parents, the research cited here all indicate that monitoring is a bidirectional process influenced by characteristics and behaviour of both parent and child (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). For example it is conceivable that children who are involved in delinquent behaviours disclose less about their activities to parents. Conversely, parents who are aware of their child's behaviours may attempt to gain more information from their child or alternatively withdraw from monitoring. Problem behaviour has most commonly been associated with lower levels of parental knowledge suggesting that parents do not increase monitoring efforts once problem behaviour has been identified (Dishion & McMahon, 1998).

Laird, Pettit, Dodge and Bates (2003) further examined the link between child problem behaviour and parental monitoring in a longitudinal study spanning 4 years. Children were followed from 14 years to 17 years, with data collected at 5 points. No evidence was found to support the notion that parents increase monitoring after problem behaviour had been identified. In fact parental knowledge was found to decrease as problem behaviours increased. This suggests that parents either had difficulty gaining information from adolescents or withdrew from active monitoring. As this study did not measure how parents attempted to gain information, but only parental knowledge, it cannot be assumed parents did not attempt to monitor their children. It may however be taken as further support for Stattin and Kerr's (2000) argument that parents have less knowledge about their child's activities if children are not willing to tell them.

It seems the parent child relationship is an important determinant of monitoring, but emerging from the literature is the notion that SES and neighbourhood characteristics may impact on parent strategies. The remainder of the paper will consider how contextual factors can impact on parenting.

### *Contextual Factors*

Neighbourhood characteristics can be considered as part of an ecological model that influences family functioning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Individuals are influenced by a variety of contexts in which they live including the family, peers, and the neighbourhood. Parenting can therefore be seen as being embedded within a wider system and influenced not only by individual and family factors but by other contextual factors such as neighbourhood and family SES (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington & Bornstein, 2000).

In a recent review of impact of neighbourhood on US children and youth, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) concluded that: Poor neighbourhoods were characterised by residential instability and high concentrations of ethnic and racial minorities. Children from affluent neighbourhoods had higher levels of educational achievement and less problem behaviour than children from lower SES neighbourhoods.

Lower SES seems to add several risk factors for child adjustment, and parents from lower income families have been found to use different parenting strategies. In particular mothers from lower SES families tend to be more controlling, restrictive and disapproving toward their children compared to parents from higher SES. It has been suggested that to keep children from harm, parents in dangerous neighbourhoods tend to use more restrictive child-rearing practices (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000). The studies of parenting in different contexts illustrate that parents adjust parenting strategies

to meet environmental conditions. Parenting may therefore be adaptive to the context in which families live. This points to the importance of considering neighbourhood context when looking at parenting strategies. One type of parenting strategy may not be effective in all environments (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002).

Within neighbourhood and SES many factors may be in operation. For example neighbourhood may be confounded by culture and socio-economic status may encompass factors such as level of education, available resources and employment status (Coulton, Korbin & Su, 1996). Pinderhughes, Forster and Jones, (2001) attempted to unravel the combined effects of race, neighbourhood, poverty, and residential stability and danger on parental warmth and discipline. The study was based on 368 parents who were part of a larger longitudinal study. Families were drawn from four high risk areas and represented rural and urban neighbourhoods. While some differences were found in race, in general factors were found to affect parenting across race and neighbourhood in similar ways. That is racial differences in parental warmth and discipline disappeared when neighbourhood was taken into consideration. The authors suggest that within high risk communities' factors such as danger and parental education exert a similar influence across race and caution the reader not to mistake the effects of neighbourhood for cultural differences.

Beyers, Bates, Pettit and Dodge (2003) investigated the relationships between neighbourhood, parenting process and behaviour problems of 440 early adolescents aged 11 to 13. The participants were largely from white middle class backgrounds and drawn from 143 neighbourhoods with an average of 10 residents per neighbourhood. Parental permissiveness and monitoring were found to vary across neighbourhoods. Parents who lived in neighbourhoods characterised by high residential instability were found to be

more permissive and monitor their children less closely, while more affluent neighbourhoods were associated with higher levels of parental monitoring. Parental monitoring in this study was measured by how much parents knew about their child's activities. Therefore parental knowledge rather than monitoring seems to be associated with neighbourhood affluence (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Neighbourhood disadvantage was also found to be associated with more behaviour problems as was unsupervised time in the community. While this study demonstrates that neighbourhood and SES have an impact on parental knowledge it does little to identify the monitoring strategies parents use in different contexts. Furthermore the predominately middle class US sample means that results may not be generalisable to other areas.

Dishion and McMahon (1998) explain that motivation for parents to monitor and manage their child's behaviour arises from parent's belief system, which includes norms, values and parenting goals. The origin of the parent's belief system is not however discussed. Belsky, (1984) proposes that parent beliefs may arise from many factors including the parents own childhood, through a learning process or attachment as described by Bowlby (1980). Cultural and community attitudes, values, and practices, may also play an important role in the parent beliefs (Kotchik & Forehand, 2002).

Very little research has been conducted to investigate the role of community norms on parenting practice. Caughty, Brodsky, Campo and Aronson (2001) surveyed parents about perception of parenting strategies used by neighbourhood parents within low SES communities. The purpose of this study was to determine if a survey method could be used to identify neighbourhood norms and to discover if parenting norms differ between neighbourhoods. These researchers found that parenting norms could be identified using a neighbourhood survey. They also discovered that more than

one parenting norm can be found within a neighbourhood and suggest that it should not be assumed that residents of a particular neighbourhood are homogeneous. Individual differences however, were reduced when neighbourhood was taken into consideration, indicating differences in perceived parenting norms between neighbourhoods. How these norms influence parenting is not discussed. The study also showed differences in parenting perception based on economic factors. Parents with higher incomes and greater home values were perceived as having greater involvement in parenting.

### *Limitations*

Several common limitations have occurred within parental monitoring in general and the studies reviewed in this paper. Most parental monitoring research other than the work of Stattin and Kerr conducted with a Swedish sample has been conducted with American samples. It is therefore not known whether the monitoring occurs in similar patterns in other cultures. The majority of research has been conducted with adolescent children; little research has looked at how parents monitor younger children or how levels of monitoring changes with age. In some instances the data has been drawn from larger ongoing research not intended to answer the specific research questions.

### *Conclusions*

There is no doubt that having knowledge about children's activities, whereabouts and friends is an important aspect of parenting that has strong links to lower levels of behaviour problems. Research has consistently identified the more parents know about children's activities the less likely the children are to be involved in problem behaviour. The processes involved are however less clearly defined. It appears that successful monitoring may be a function of good parent/child relationships facilitated by children's willingness to tell parents about their activities. The direction however of the

relationships is yet to be defined. It is not clearly understood whether parent monitoring shapes a child's behaviour or whether children that are well adjusted simply communicate well with parents and are children that don't get involved in problem behaviours. Does child involvement in problem behaviour stem from poor monitoring or does problem behaviour lead to a break down in parent/child relationships so that parent/child communication is ineffective. At this stage, the research has not firmly established which types of monitoring strategies reduce risk of adolescent problem behaviour. Enhanced monitoring is not likely to occur by simply advising parents to ask more questions about their adolescent's free time, and indeed this increased interrogation is more likely to hinder their monitoring (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). Suggesting that parents should abandon monitoring techniques in favour of trusting relationships also does not appear wise.

Social and contextual factors clearly play an important role in shaping the parenting process. Parenting is a dynamic process that is constantly evolving based on interactions between parents and children, and between families and their environment. Parenting must be considered in light of the setting in which children and families function (Collins, et.al, 2000). Families in low SES areas appear to be at greatest risk of poor parenting practice. Although parenting practices can be seen as adaptive to a particular environment and we should not assume that a certain set of parenting practices are best for both high-risk and low-risk parenting environments.

While links between SES and parenting have been identified the direct effects on monitoring require further investigation to determine if monitoring techniques differ with economic status. Research has begun to identify that norms within neighbourhoods may influence parenting behaviours. Further research is required to determine the ways in



which these effects work. How do parents perceive community norms and do these norms influence monitoring methods. Research should be carried out with diverse samples and children of different age groups. This is an important area of study because if norms can be shaped by psychological research, interventions can be implemented at the community level to improve parenting practice.

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Running Head: PARENTAL MONITORING, NEIGHBOURHOOD AND NORMS

Parental Monitoring and the Role of Community Norms and Neighbourhood.

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A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of Bachelor of

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I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

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Parental Monitoring and the Role of Community Norms and Neighbourhood.

Abstract

This study used a qualitative approach to explore parent perceptions of community norms for keeping track of children's activities, within a low socio-economic neighbourhood. Semi-structured interviews based on a questionnaire used by Kerr and Stattin (2000) were used to explore parent beliefs about three sources of parent information: solicitation, parental control and child disclosure. A sample of eight mothers of children aged nine to twelve from two low socio-economic neighbourhoods in Perth, Western Australia were interviewed. Thematic analysis revealed four themes: shared emotional connections, influence, control versus trust, and communication. Results indicated that parents used varied methods of monitoring children and differed in the way they were influenced by norms. Results have implications for parent education and monitoring research.

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### Parental Monitoring and the Role of Community Norms and Neighbourhood.

Parenting is one of the most important influences on child development and socialisation (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Change in society today has in many ways increased risk for children. Largely due to increased media portrayal, many parents fear risk of child abduction and the impact on children of terrorist attacks (Tucci, Mitchell & Goddard, 2005). In addition, many parents feel that society's expectation of parents has increased (Sidebotham, 2001). A recent survey indicated 70 percent of Australian parents felt pressure from their community to be more effective as parents (Tucci et al., 2005). In fact, new West Australian legislation (Parental Support and Responsibility Bill, 2005), in an effort to improve parent effectiveness, has provided the court the authority to compel parents to undertake parent guidance counseling and to exercise appropriate control over the behaviour of their children. Legislative decisions are not necessarily based on scientific research, but often reflect current community attitudes or the opinion of those in power (Massad, Sales and Sabatier, 1983). The community therefore has a great deal of power to influence parent attitudes, expectations and behaviours.

Parent attitudes and beliefs may be influenced by many other factors including parent and child characteristics, parents own childhood, and cultural values and practices (Kotchik & Forehand, 2002). Psychologists and other social science researchers play an important role in shaping community attitudes through the media and can influence current thought on issues such as child rearing (Kipnis, 1987). These opinions can then become embedded into community norms. Community norms can be defined as "a shared expectation of how people should behave within certain roles or situations" (Caughy, Brodsky, Campo & Aronson 2001, p, 682). Community norms for parenting



have been found to differ between communities and may influence parenting decisions (Caughy et al., 2001).

A large body of research conducted in the United States (US) has likely been influential in informing the belief that closely monitoring children leads to lower levels of delinquent behaviour (Cerkovich & Giordano, 1987; Frick, Christian & Wooton, 1999; Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Parental monitoring can be defined as “a component of parenting practice that includes both structuring the child’s home, school and community environments and tracking the child’s behaviour in those environments” (Dishion & McMahon, 1998, p.66). Parental monitoring has been linked to reduced risk of drug use (Barnes, Reifman, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2000; Dishion, Capaldi, Spracklen, & Li, 1995; Flannery, Vaszonyi, Torquati, & Fridrich, 1994), lower levels of teen pregnancy and unsafe sexual activity (Metzler, Noell, Biglan, Ary, & Smolkowski, 1994) and having fewer deviant friends (Dishion et al., 1995).

However, a recent study by Stattin and Kerr (2000) has questioned the validity of past monitoring research. Stattin and Kerr point out that most parental monitoring research has defined or assumed monitoring as an active process requiring parents to keep track of children’s activities. Most research however, has measured how much parents *know* about their child’s activities, rather than how activities were monitored or knowledge was acquired. This puts into question the assumption that monitoring deters delinquency, because it is how much parents know about their child’s activities and not any specific monitoring behaviours that has been shown to be associated with lower levels of delinquency.

Stattin and Kerr (2000) investigated three distinct methods of gaining knowledge (a) parental efforts to solicit information about their children (solicitation), (b) parental

efforts to control children (parental control), and (c) children's spontaneous disclosure of information about their activities (child disclosure). While all three methods were found to predict parental knowledge, the strongest association was found for child disclosure, which was also the strongest indicator of low levels of delinquent behaviour. In subsequent research, Kerr and Stattin (2000) replicated previous results and in addition, found high levels of parent control linked with feelings of being controlled, which in turn linked to poor adolescent adjustment. Furthermore, parental solicitation after controlling for child disclosure and parental control was found to be associated with greater, not lower levels of delinquent behaviour. Results of this study imply that the traditional notion of monitoring children may not be effective in deterring delinquency and may even be detrimental.

How parents monitor children may be particularly important in areas lower in socioeconomic status (SES), as growing up in a low SES community is a risk factor for behaviour problems in children. Beyers, Bates, Pettit and Dodge (2003) found neighbourhood disadvantage in three US cities to be associated with more adolescent behaviour problems and unsupervised time in the community. These researchers found parents from lower income areas to be more permissive and monitor their children less closely, while neighbourhoods that are more affluent were associated with higher levels of parental monitoring. Residing in a low SES neighbourhood (again in the US) has been associated with higher rates of adolescent criminal and delinquent behaviour (Simons, Johnson, Beaman, Conger & Whitebeck, 1996), and an increased risk of teen pregnancy (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993).

Several limitations exist in parental monitoring research. Most parental monitoring research, other than the work of Stattin and Kerr (2000) conducted with a

Swedish sample, has relied on US samples. It is therefore not known whether monitoring occurs in similar patterns in Australia or other cultures. In addition, the majority of monitoring research has been conducted with adolescent children, little research has looked at how parents monitor younger children. In middle childhood, children typically become more independent and spend more time in activities outside the home, or with peers. As children explore their new found freedom parents face the task of monitoring children's behaviour while they are not under their direct supervision. (Crouter, Helms-Erikson & McHale, 1999). Parental monitoring is therefore important in middle childhood.

While community attitudes, values, and practices play an important role in shaping parenting (Kotchik & Forehand, 2002), little research has investigated the role of community norms on parenting. In addition previous research has relied on quantitative data. A qualitative approach is needed to provide insight into how parents perceive community norms, and whether parents own beliefs are, or are not, aligned with norms. Further research is needed to begin to assess the extent parent beliefs about community norms influence parent efforts to monitor their child's activities.

The focus of the current study is to examine how parents of children aged nine to twelve, residing in low SES neighbourhoods, perceive community norms regarding expectations of keeping track of children's activities. It also aims to examine how perceived community norms influence parental monitoring beliefs. This research aims to provide insight into how parents understand their own parenting and its adaptiveness for their social context, or in other words, to what extent parents relate to what they feel is expected of them within their community.

Specifically the research questions are:

1. How do parents in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods monitor children nine to twelve years of age
2. How do parents in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods perceive norms for monitoring children aged nine to twelve.
3. In what ways do perceived community norms affect parents own beliefs about monitoring children?

## Method

### *Research Design*

This research used a qualitative approach to gain descriptive insight into parent beliefs and attitudes about community norms and parental monitoring. The research follows a constructivist philosophy that assumes people construct meaning and understanding from their experience within their social context (Creswell, 2003). Participants in this research shared their experience of both norms and expectations and their experience with their own children, their upbringing and demands they face as a parent. Meanings are subjective, varied and multiple, therefore many individual realities are possible (Nagy & Viney, 1994). A qualitative approach was adopted to explore participants subjective perception and experience of parental monitoring norms.

Participants were each interviewed using a semi-structured schedule adapted from Stattin and Kerr (2000). A semi-structured interview technique was chosen to give the participants opportunity to provide detailed responses. This approach allowed the researcher to gain insight into the way parents monitor their children within the context of the neighbourhood in which they live.

### *Participants*

The eight participants in this study were recruited from two areas on the outskirts of Perth Western Australia, both with low socioeconomic status identified from the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics population and housing census data (ABS, 2001). Suburb 'A' had an average weekly household income of between \$600 and \$699, 19% one-parent families, an unemployment rate of 12%. While suburb 'B' had an average weekly household income of between \$500 and \$599, 24% one-parent families, and 12% unemployment. In comparison to averages for the state of Western Australia in the same

year, average weekly family income was \$800-999, 15% one-parent families, and a 7.5% unemployment rate.

Participants were all mothers aged between 35 and 42 with a child aged between 9 and 12 years. Five of the children were male and three female. All but one of the mothers was married and all lived with a partner. The number of children in the family ranged from two to four. Two of the families had two children, three families had three children and the remaining three families had four children. All of the mothers in this study were employed, four full-time and four part time. Years of education ranged between 10 and 15 years.. Five participants were born in Australia; the other three being from England, Wales and New Zealand. There were no Indigenous Australians or non English-speaking participants in this sample. Years of residence in suburb 'A' ranged from 1- 14 years, with an average of six years and in suburb 'B' years of residence ranged from 3-12 years with an average of nine years.

#### *Procedure*

Approval for this research was obtained from the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia. Principals of two schools were approached and information about the study was placed in the schools newsletter distributed to parents. Participants contacted the researcher by phone; others were recruited through a snowballing technique with new contacts obtained through enlisted participants and contacts of the researcher.

Interviews were conducted at a place chosen by the participant, most often the participants home, although two were conducted in the researcher's home and one in a public library. Prior to the commencement of the interview, the purpose of the research

and the procedure was explained to the participant and informed consent was obtained. Participants were assured of confidentiality and were informed they were free to withdraw at any point. Participants were then asked to complete a short demographic Questionnaire (see appendix A). Interviews then commenced. The interview schedule can be viewed as appendix B. Interviews took on average 40 minutes to complete and were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim, with any identifying information removed.

### *Analysis*

The transcripts were analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis involves emergence of common themes through the reduction of data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Each transcript was read thoroughly with the intention of understanding how parents made sense of community norms for monitoring children within the context of their neighbourhood. The transcripts were then coded for themes and patterns. The data and codes were then transferred to a question ordered matrix, allowing comparisons between neighbourhoods and individuals and the emergence of common themes.

To ensure validity the themes generated from the data were checked against the original transcripts. Rigour was maintained throughout the study through careful note taking and documentation of each step of the process, in a research journal providing a comprehensive audit trail (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

### Findings and Interpretations

Emerging from the data were four recurrent themes related to parents' beliefs about monitoring norms: shared emotional connections, influence, control versus trust, and communication. Within these themes several sub-themes were identified. Neighbourhood safety and social capital, were identified within the shared emotional connections theme. Family of origin and media, were found within the influence theme. Solicitation and child self-disclosure were identified as sub-themes of the communication theme.

The themes 'shared emotional connections' and 'influence' relate to two components of McMillan and Chavis's (1986) sense of community framework. The themes 'control versus trust' and 'communication' relate to the three methods of obtaining knowledge suggested by Stattin and Kerr (2000).

Participants names have been changed to protect confidentiality. To reflect the suburb in which participants reside those from suburb 'A' have been assigned names beginning with the letter 'A' and participants from suburb 'B' assigned names beginning with the letter 'B'.

#### *Shared Emotional Connections*

McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest that in order to identify with a community its members will have a shared emotional connection, and a belief that members will spend time together and share experiences. This was evident in suburb 'B' shown in the following responses: "I have got to know a lot of people, so I would say it's a good close community" (Beth). "I think we have quite a close neighbour hood ... [its] got quite a good community feel about it...I feel fairly safe in it" (Bree).

It's not just an area it's a close community, like we have... the local community



hall down the road has Friday night drinks for everyone to go to, and talk, get to know each other and we play bowls... So it's a tight knit community I think.

(Brooke)

Emotional connection appeared absent among the participants residing in suburb 'A' demonstrated in the following : "I couldn't care less about the neighbours really... I would rather not know them" (Amanda). "We don't sort of really have much interaction with the community itself.... We don't go to the church around there or we don't go to the community house that they have up the road....we don't really mix with the neighbours" (Anita). "In general I keep to myself (Ann). McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest that honour and humiliation impact on attractiveness. Although the participants themselves generally defended the neighbourhood they identified it as having a poor reputation demonstrated in the following "it's got a bad name, high crime rate, drug problems that sort of thing (Alison). "It's a bit of a scummy area" (Amanda). "Lots of people come out and go, you know [suburb 'A'] is a crap suburb, it's horrible, you know, but, it's pretty good" (Ann). It is possible that because the participants believe the suburb has a poor reputation that they did not identify themselves with the neighbourhood or believe that it would meet their needs. It was interesting that while the suburbs were similar demographically the level of social interaction described by the participants was distinctly different.

### *Neighbourhood Safety*

Neighbourhood 'B' seemed to experience a community network or 'sense of community' defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9).

The community bond seemed to be linked to feelings of safety and trust in the neighbourhood described in the following:

I trust my neighbourhood I trust who's living around .... Then as a sort of response to that they get more trust put in them to actually go out in the environment ... I think if I lived somewhere that I didn't feel comfortable going out and going for a walk in the middle of the day or the middle of the night or whatever the whole situation would probably be a hell of a lot different... So it all comes down to feeling comfortable where you are, so I feel safe- they feel safe (Bronwyn).

This trust in the community was not apparent in neighbourhood 'A' however parents from this neighbourhood felt their children were safe in the community when they were with friends that the parents knew held similar values to their own.

#### *Social Capital*

The shared connections between residents in suburb 'B' also appeared to facilitate social capital. According to Coleman (1988) trust and reciprocity amongst community members enables access to human and cultural resources that already exist in the community. Social capital was evident in the following responses: "I call them the clan mothers, I'll sometimes go and get advice from the Clan mothers, you know, how they would handle a situation or you know if that's normal behaviour, what he's doing (Bree) and " we sort of stick together and do things for each other. Everyone looks out for each other (Brooke). One parent explained how her social network assisted in monitoring her children.

I already know what they have been up to before they get even home, I mean if they do set foot out of line, which is a really good thing... I have a great spy

network...the phone messaging service works really really well around here  
(Bronwyn).

Evidence of social capital was not found in suburb 'A'

### *Influence*

Influence was the second theme to emerge from the data. McMillan and Chavis (1984) suggest that influence in communities is bidirectional, communities influence members and people are attracted to communities in which they will have some influence. Pressure on a group's members to conform is a way of validating the groups membership and creating group norms. Therefore conformity is not just the community acting on individuals but a non-conforming member's way of influencing the community.

Some of the participants experienced pressure from the community to conform to community norms. One parent who was unable to be at home with her children because of work commitments was told by a neighbour "You should be at home looking after the kids, the kids need their mum you know" (Ann). On another occasion the same parent described a situation where her son was warned by staff in the local shopping centre "they basically said well you know you are not allowed back in here without the parent, without adult supervision" (Ann). Another parent felt pressure to allow her children more freedom "you are made out that you are some kind of bad mother because you wont let them do this that or the other but you know I mean I think my kids are pretty well adjusted" (Bree).

Parents in this study differed in the way they felt they were influenced by norms. Some parents felt secure in their own beliefs "I bring my kids up the way that I think is right and that's just it, regardless of what they are doing, I don't care" (Amanda) and "he

is the only one out of the year 6s and 7s that goes to after school care. Like most of his friends go home to an empty home and they have got keys and so yeah we are not really influenced by any one we do our own thing” (Brooke). The parents who were not influenced by community norms were parents who felt they were strict with their children, and believed they were protecting their children.

Another parent explained how she had seen extremes in how parents monitor children and made a decision not to be like either.

Unfortunately I have sort of seen both extremes so I sort of go “God I don’t want to be like that! And I don’t want to be like that either,” I’ll just sort of try and be somewhere in the middle, so I give them a bit of leeway but still be holding onto that leash ...so watching what other parents do has a real effect on how much I let them do and what I let them get away with and what they are not allowed to get away with (Bronwyn)

Most of the parents gave examples of things they had seen other parents do, which they would not do themselves. Parents appeared to distance themselves from extremes.

Only one parent believed she gave her children more freedom than the most, but still considered herself to be similar to other parents.

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But I think in general I give my kids a bit more of a leash... I think I give them too much of a leash if you know what I mean ...I don’t consider really that I am much different as a parent (Ann).

Parents often believed that what they did was the norm even though many considered themselves to be stricter than most. This appeared to be because the participants used their friends as a reference group and their friends held similar beliefs

and values to their own. For example, “Well I am basing my comments on my friends who to me are my community and they do similar things (Bree).

Parents in this study generally felt that other children in their neighbourhood had more freedom than their own as shown in the following examples: “other people might have more freedom, like some of his friends are always ringing him up asking if he can go out, probably more so that I would want him to (Alison).

I am a lot stricter yeah cos I am probably a bit more of a worry wort. Other people are more laid back and off you go, and come back at such and such a time ... some of them have the same attitude as me, and some of them the kids just go everywhere up the shop. I think the majority of them probably have more freedom than my kids (Amanda).

To a certain extent I think a lot of parents in our neighbourhood give their children too much freedom...and seeing the way their kids behave and what they are allowed to do influences me in that I don't want my kids doing that (Bree).

Taken together it appears that parents in this study perceive that it is the norm for children to have a lot of freedom within their neighbourhood. This finding is consistent with the findings of Beyers et al. (2003) that parents from low SES neighbourhoods were more permissive and monitor their children less closely. Less parental monitoring was also found to be associated with more unsupervised time in the community. Interestingly five of the eight participants considered themselves to stricter or gave their children less freedom than others or the ‘norm’, possibly indicating a factor common to the parents that agreed to take part in the research.

*Family of Origin*

The parents in the study often suggested the way they had been brought up influenced what they did with their own children. Some parents did similar things to their own parents while others tried to improve on what their own parents had done. Several parents noted that things had changed since they were children, children today had less freedom to explore, and parents kept a closer watch on them.

*Media*

One parent suggested this was a result of media influence.

its obviously, because of all the problems of crimes, you know child abuse, kidnapping and that sort of thing... I don't know that there is more of its obviously publicised more so I don't know. It has obviously always gone on but now it's bought to your attention all the time (Alison)

Several parents identified the media as an influence on their parenting and described how current television programs, the news and parenting magazines put pressure on parents or induced fear in parents.

*Parent Control versus Trust*

Parental control versus trust was the third theme identified from the data. Parental control was one of the three methods of monitoring used in Stattin and Kerr (2000). All of the parents interviewed had rules and boundaries used as behavioural control but the amount freedom given to children and the level of control varied greatly between families. Parents either seemed to monitor children very closely, or trusted them to behave in the parents' absence. Three of the parents indicated that they closely monitored children at all times "I know exactly what they are doing if they are around me. I know what they are doing all the time. Because they don't go anywhere unless I am going, I

don't let them go anywhere without me" (Amanda), and "we will let him ride there, then we will go and check on him, then we'll let him ride home. So he's never out of our sight" (Brooke).

The differences in amount of freedom given to the child was not consistent with neighbourhood or gender of child, within this sample, but a pattern did appear to emerge. Parents who gave their children greater freedom appeared to trust their child, that the child was safe with their child's friends or trusted the child's environment. One parent explained:

I like them to have a lot of freedom... I am starting to give her a little more freedom. And so I tend not to worry about her so much she is very ...She has proven that I can trust her in numerous ways (Bronwyn).

Trust was shown in the following: "I don't feel they are up to mischief or they go out elsewhere...you know they do stay home until I get home" (Anita), "I don't suspect that he is walking the streets at night, I do suspect he is being a good kid, yeah I mean once again it comes from the circle of friends that the kids associate with (Ann).

Conversely, parents that strictly controlled their child's whereabouts expressed fear of what could happen to their child. This fear seemed not of their immediate neighbourhood but more a distrust of strangers or society in general.

I just don't think that people should be so trusting. Don't they watch the news? You know the stuff, what happens on the news... You know kids being bloomin molested and abducted and dragged into the car and just strangers and stranger danger and that sort of thing (Amanda).

Another parent described how although she felt safe in her neighbourhood, she still wouldn't trust other people.

Yeah, I think it is unsafe everywhere. I mean I say this is safe, I feel safe here, it's a nice area. I mean I know practically the whole suburb, But I wouldn't trust anyone. I wouldn't go as far to say it's that its safe for [son] to go out riding by himself and go out for an afternoon with his mates. Not yet (Brooke)

This parent used fear induction to control her child in an attempt to protect him from the dangers she felt were present in society, she explained:

I often tell [son] and I make it *really gruesome too*, so he is a bit scared now. I tell them everything. Like at nighttime I tell them, like "You don't know who is in this sand dune up here and soon as you walk out of this house and down the street someone could be behind the bush watching! They could grab you down the road!" So I don't know, for now I have control but when he gets to 14 its going to be a different story (Brooke).

A distinct difference between psychological control and behavioural control is noted in literature on parent control. Behavioural control is a means to manage children's behaviour using rules and regulations, while psychological control uses manipulation of the child's thought processes or emotions (Barber, 1996). High levels of psychological control have been found to predict internalising problems such as anxiety and depression as well as externalising problems (Petit, Laird, Dodge, Bates & Criss, 2001). Two of the three parents in this study that identified themselves as using strict control also described their children as having angry outbursts. Although not investigated in this study it is possible that these behavioural issues are related to the type of control these used.

Behavioural control on the other hand is important in the socialisation of the child in the form of guidance and supervision. Lack of behavioural control has been found to predict behaviour problems (Fletcher, Steinberg & Williams-Wheeler, 2004). The



research indicates too much and too little control is problematic. For parents the challenge appears to be to find the right balance of control and learning to trust ones child. One parent described the difficulty in finding such a balance.

I don't think she quite realises how nasty it can be but I don't want to disillusion her so early, but I want to protect her at the same time, so stranger danger warnings and that sort of thing its really, its hard to do a balance between the two (Bronwyn).

### *Communication*

Communication was the final theme emerging from the parent interviews. How children communicated with their parent, or how much information children provided to parent was often related to the relationship between the parent and child or characteristic of the child. Communication is discussed in the final two methods of gaining knowledge, solicitation, and child self-disclosure, put forward by Stattin and Kerr (2000)

### *Solicitation*

All the parents in this study asked their children questions about their children's daily lives. There appeared to be a distinction though, in the purpose of the questioning identified by one of the parents:

I wouldn't say question. Like I am more interested in what she is doing more as a nice thing, not as a what have you been up too? Or, I am not really happy with you, not that bad sort of side. More as a nice thing so I know she is happy and secure in her life not a bad sort of thing. Like what have you been up to? Have you been naughty? Do I need to punish you sort of thing? It's a good side more than a bad side sort of thing so (Bronwyn).

Similarly Dishion and McMahon (1998) explain that questioning not only informs parents but communicates to the child that their parent is interested and concerned, which may serve to promote better parent/child relationships.

The parents in this study indicated that questioning to gain information was often unsuccessful

[I ask] "How was your day? What did you do today?" The younger one is "nothing!" Didn't do nothing! Saw no one! Didn't talk to anyone. I'm like *just give me one thing? One thing that happened?* I do the same to my husband as well [laughs] and I make them, the little one comes up with something stupid eventually, but had nothing exciting for the day (Amanda)

One parent described how the questioning angered her son:

So if its anything to do with him getting into trouble or he's done something wrong that he shouldn't have done then yeah, I can't get it out of him without going through the procedure of like throwing things around the room, then he will start crying, slam the door he will get angry and yeah then he will calm down and we will talk and its not the same day, it might take us a week to get to that so we can argue for a few days about it (Brooke).

Most of the parents indicated that this type of questioning is unsuccessful. Which supports Stattin and Kerr's (2000) finding that questioning provides less knowledge when children are not willing to disclose information.

#### *Child self disclosure*

Although the parents often articulated that questioning their child was unsuccessful they continued to use this approach, except for one parent

I have worked out with [son] if I don't ask he will tell me... when its bedtime and I lay in bed with him and just say goodnight and we chat he will tell me. So if I don't ask I will find out, if I ask forget it (Brooke).

The parents generally indicated that their children would self-disclose exciting or interesting events and this tended to be equated with a good parent/child relationship or the characteristics of the child. For example one parent said, "Yeah she does [self disclose] you know all topics all subject she a good communicator" (Anita). It also appears that parent responsiveness and availability may be important for children to disclose information.

He normally gets in the car and you tell he is beaming or you can tell he is upset and you go "bad day?" and he goes "yeah" or he goes [excitedly] "oh yeah!, yeah this happened and oh it was great". So you know it doesn't take much to get him going. So he is a good talker if he has had fun he will tell you and if he has had no fun he will tell you that too (Ann).

However as seen earlier when information was sought about the child's misbehaviour most parents found their child was not forthcoming. Several of the parents in this study had tried to teach their child to self-disclose. One parent used evening meal times to encourage her children to discuss their day

Every weeknight we sit around the table and have dinner and everyone has a turn talking about their day. So no one is allowed to interrupt, and that's *their* time. So yeah, he tells me about what he has done school work wise and also what he has done at recess and lunch, things like that, not always if he's been in trouble with the teacher but sometimes, so sometimes tells the bad as well as the good (Bree)

While two parent used more of a control technique whereby children were punished if they did not provide information about misbehaviour.

If you tell me, straight away we can sort something out, we can work through it, it's a problem we can do together. If you don't tell me and something worse happens as a consequence of you not telling me then you get in more trouble (Bronwyn).

While Stattin and Kerr (2000) demonstrated that child self-disclosure is the strongest predictor of parental knowledge. Results of this study would suggest child disclosure only provides information about interesting events, but were unlikely to disclose information about misbehaviour.

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### Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the way parents from low SES neighbourhoods perceive community norms for monitoring children and how perceived norms affect parents own beliefs about monitoring children. Interesting differences were found in the social connections of parents in the two neighbourhoods. Shared emotional connections experienced in one neighbourhood appeared to promote feelings of neighbourhood safety and social capital. The differences in parental monitoring beliefs did not however appear to be specific to neighbourhood. Parents who used strict control appeared less influenced by community norms, and held strongly to their beliefs. These parents seemed to be motivated by fear and desire to protect their child from perceived dangers not necessarily tied to their neighbourhood. While parents who allowed their child more freedom seemed to have greater trust in their child or the environment. Although the parents in both neighbourhoods indicated that it was the norm in their community to give children a lot of freedom, parents in this study generally perceived themselves to be stricter and allow their children less freedom. Parents indicated several influences on the way they parent including, community norms, their own parents, and the media.

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Parents in this study used a mix of methods to monitor their children. Solicitation appeared to have different purposes, it could be used to show interest in the child's daily life or as an investigation with the direct purpose of obtaining information. Parents recognised that the latter strategy was not usually successful and in some instances frustrated the child, but parents continued to use this method. Child disclosure seemed to be linked to a good parent/child relationship. All parents had rules and boundaries but varied in the amount the type of control used. A difference was noted in psychological

and behavioural control. These results suggest that parents may benefit from learning better communication skills, how to develop trusting relationships and alternative monitoring strategies. Researchers and practitioners must be careful to distinguish between behavioural control and psychological control.

### *Limitations*

A limitation of this research was that it did not take into consideration the possibility that parents may monitor male and female children differently. Future studies may benefit by using a sample of children of the same gender. Similarly, birth order of the child may influence how parents monitor children. First-born children may be monitored more closely than succeeding children, future studies may also benefit by taking birth order of child into consideration.

The sample did not include any fathers, single parents, Indigenous Australia's or people from other cultures other than white English speaking nations. Although mothers are generally responsible for the role of monitoring children and people of different cultures have been found to experience neighbourhood effects in a similar way (Caughy et al., 2001), this research does not reflect the diversity found in neighbourhoods.

Although several of the participants were approached and asked to join the study the sample used in this research may represent a conservative group of parents. Future studies may benefit from a more diverse sample.

The results of this study have implications for parental monitoring research and practitioners working with families. Researchers and practitioners alike should be aware of the differences in behavioural and psychological control and the role that the community and media have in influencing communities members, and the specific needs of parents residing in low SES area. However, it should be remembered that low SES

areas are not necessarily homogenous and nor are the individuals that reside in them.

Further studies are required to discover how monitoring norms and beliefs operate in neighbourhoods that are more affluent. More study is required to find what leads children to be open about their daily problems so information can be provided to parents. If parents are to be compelled by courts to monitor children more closely research is required to investigate if increased control does reduce delinquent behaviour in Australian children.

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# Appendix A

## Demographic Questionnaire

Gender (Circle):     Male     Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status (Circle):   Married     Divorced     Separated     Never married

Number of children living in household \_\_\_\_\_

Age of child \_\_\_\_\_     Gender of child (M/F) \_\_\_\_\_

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Education level achieved:   number of years at high school \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years in tertiary studies:   Tafe:     \_\_\_\_\_

University \_\_\_\_\_

Other:     \_\_\_\_\_

Your employment status (circle):   Full time outside home

Part time/casual \_\_\_\_\_

Full time inside home

Self

Suburb you live in \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years lived in Suburb \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

### **GUIDE QUESTIONS**

**Can you describe what you consider to be your neighbourhood?**

**What are the people in your neighbourhood like?**

**Do you know many other parents that live around you?**

**Do you think other people's views on parenting affect the way that you parent your children?**

**Can you tell me a little about your child? (Any particular concerns?)**

Questions adapted from Stattin and Kerr (2000)

#### **Monitoring**

**How much do you know about what your child does in his/her free time?**

**Do you know where your child goes when they are out with friends?**

**Do you normally know what your child does or goes after school?**

**In the past month have you ever had no idea where your children are?**

#### **Child Disclosure**

**What sort of things does your child tell you without you asking? (Prompts, about different subjects at school? How child is getting on with teachers)**

**If your child is away from you does he/she tell you what they have been doing?**

#### **Parent Solicitation**

**Do you talk to the parents of your Child's friends about what your children do?**

**Do you talk with your children's friends when they come to your home? (About thoughts, feelings, activities?)**

**Do you often ask your child about what they have been doing?  
(about free time, school, who their friends are)**

#### **Parental Control**

**Can you tell me about what arrangements you have with your child for doing things outside the home with friends after school and on weekends?**