The Association Between Marital Satisfaction and Coparenting Quality: A Meta-Analysis

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Coping and Coparenting

- Refers to the way parents or caregivers:
  - relate to each other within their roles as parents.1
  - demonstrate support and coordination in child rearing.
  - Does not include romantic, sexual, compassionate, emotional, financial, or legal aspects of couple relationship.
  - High-quality coparenting is linked to fewer child behavior problems and more secure child attachment.2,5

Family Systems Theory

- The family as a system composed of subsystems.6
- Coparenting and couple relationships:
  - involve the parents
  - Distinct subsystems
  - Intimately connected

Marital Satisfaction & Coparenting

- Marital satisfaction (MS) prior to the birth of a child predicts post-birth coparenting.2,7
- After birth, parents with higher MS exhibit more supportive coparenting and less parenting conflict.5
- Mothers and fathers have different roles within the family and coparenting and less parenting conflict.7
- After birth, parents with higher MS exhibit more supportive coparenting and less parenting conflict.
- Marital satisfaction (MS) prior to the birth of a child predicts problems and more secure child attachment.
- High MS is associated with more optimal coparenting in families with a challenging infant.7

Objective & Research Questions

To summarize and analyze research on the association between MS and coparenting quality (CQ):
1. How large is the association between MS and CQ?
2. Does this association differ in strength between mothers and fathers?
3. Do parent, child, family, or study factors moderate the association between MS and CQ?

Methods

- Records identified through database searching: PsychINFO & ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (n = 452)
- Google Scholar (n = 410)
- Additional articles identified through other sources (n = 14)
- Records after duplicates removed (n = 676)
- Records screened based on title and abstract (n = 676)
- Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 452)
- Articles included in meta-analysis (n = 96)

96 articles (including 99 studies) met eligibility criteria
- 76 published 23 unpublished records
- 35,712 participants across all studies
- 12 studies included children from clinical populations
- Studies were coded using a coding manual
- 100% reliability was ensured by having 2 coders reach consensus for all research articles.

Data was entered and analyzed through the Comprehensive Meta-Analysis 3.0 program.
- Meta-analysis was conducted on three datasets:
  - Couples, mothers, & fathers
  - Moderation analyses: ANOVA & meta-regression
  - Data collection & analysis was conducted on three datasets:
    - Social science databases
    - Google Scholar
    - Full-text articles assessed for eligibility

Results

- Medium positive association between MS and CQ in samples of couples (r = .40; 95% CI [.36, .43], p < .001).
- Larger effects were found for:
  - mothers (r = .47) than fathers (r = .41; p = .038, k = 143).
  - parents in longer relationships (p = .019, k = 46).
  - families with more children (p = .021, k = 38).
- Significant moderators: country, person reporting on CQ, MS measure, CQ measure, and publication type.

Discussion

- Support for conceptualization of marital and parenting subsystems as distinct, yet intimately connected.
- Differences between mothers and fathers:
  - gendered nature of coparenting and differing roles,10,11
  - Couples with longer relationships or more children:
    - formed relational patterns influence coparenting.
- Publication type was not significant after one study with a particularly discrepant effect size (r = .40) was removed.
- Directions for future research:
  - measurement of CQ
  - parents from clinical populations
  - same-sex parents.
- Clinical implications: identifying couples who may benefit from increased support around the birth of a child.

References


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