



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

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

Dana Ronaghan (M.A.) & Jennifer Theule (Ph.D.)

Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba



Coparenting

- Coparenting refers to the way parents or caregivers:
 - relate to each other within their roles as parents.¹
 - demonstrate support and coordination within the childrearing context.
- It does not include romantic, sexual, compassionate, emotional, financial, or legal aspects of the couple relationship.
- High-quality coparenting is linked to fewer child behaviour problems and more secure child attachment.²⁻⁵

Family Systems Theory

- The family can be thought of as a system composed of subsystems.⁶
- Coparenting and couple relationships between parents are distinct, yet intimately connected, subsystems within the family involving the couple.

Marital Satisfaction & Coparenting

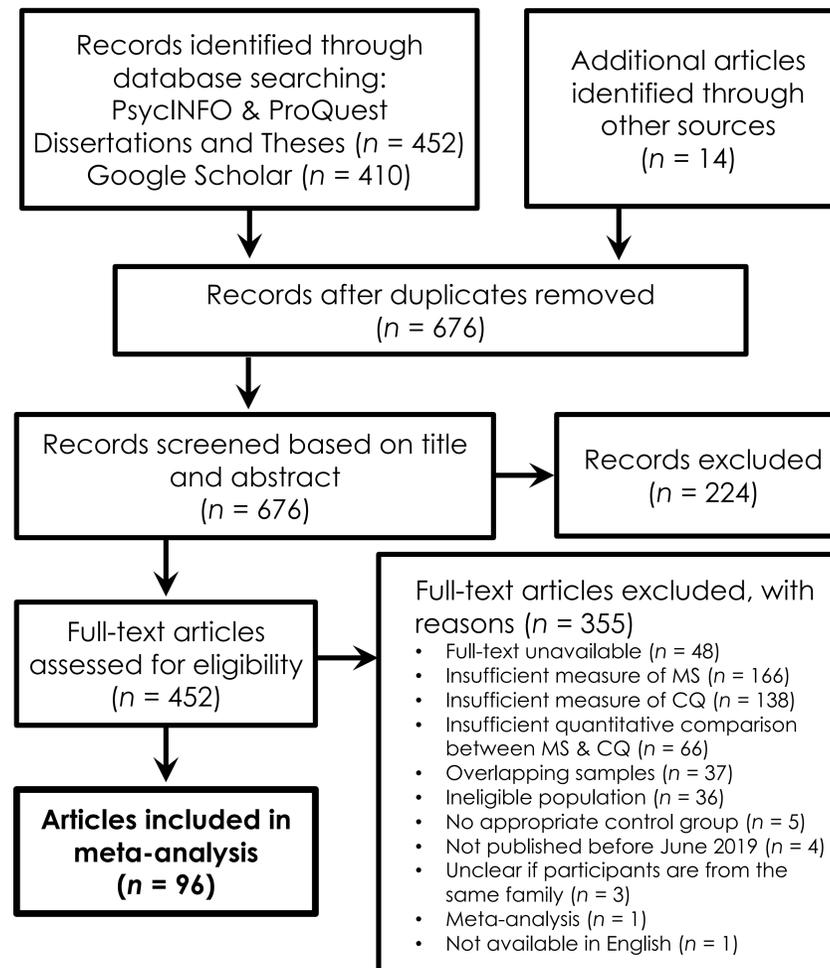
- Marital satisfaction (MS) between parents prior to the birth of a child predicts post-birth coparenting.^{7,8}
- After birth, parents in more satisfied relationships exhibit more supportive coparenting and less parenting conflict.^{7,9}
- Mothers and fathers have different roles within the family system and mothers continue to be the primary caregivers in most families.^{10,11}
- Higher MS is associated with more optimal coparenting in families with a challenging infant.⁸

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



- 96 articles (including 99 studies) met eligibility criteria
 - 76 published 23 unpublished records
 - Published from 1991 – 2019
- 35,712 participants across all studies
 - 12 studies included children from clinical populations
- Studies were coded using a coding manual.
- Data was entered and analyzed through the Comprehensive Meta-Analysis 3.0 program.¹²
- Meta-analysis was conducted on three datasets:
 - Couples, mothers, & fathers
- Moderation analyses: ANOVA & meta-regression

*PRISMA Flow Diagram¹³

Correspondence

ronaghad@myumanitoba.ca or Jen.Theule@umanitoba.ca

Results

- The association between MS and CQ in samples of couples was medium ($r = .40$; 95% CI [.36, .43], $p < .001$).
- Larger effects were found:
 - in mothers ($r = .47$) than fathers ($r = .41$; $p = .038$, $k = 143$).
 - when parents had been in a relationship for longer ($p = .019$, $k = 46$).
 - in families with more children ($p = .021$, $k = 38$).
- Country, person reporting on CQ, MS measure, CQ measure, and publication type were significant moderators.

Discussion

- Results support the conceptualization of the marital and parenting subsystems as distinct, yet intimately connected.
- Differences between mothers and fathers reflect the gendered nature of coparenting and differing roles.^{10,11}
- Couples in longer relationships may have more firmly formed relational patterns that influence coparenting.
- Publication type was not significant after one study¹⁴ with a particularly discrepant effect size ($r = -.40$) was removed.
- Future research should focus on measurement of CQ and include parents from clinical populations and same-sex parents.
- Awareness of the connection between MS and CQ may help clinicians in identifying couples who may benefit from increased support around the birth of a child.

References

1. Feinberg, M. (2003). The Internal Structure and Ecological Context of Coparenting: A Framework for Research and Intervention. *Parenting*, 3, 95-131.
2. Brown, G. L., Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., & Neff, C. (2010). Observed and reported coparenting as predictors of infant-mother and infant-father attachment security. *Early Child Development and Care*, 180, 121-137. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004430903415015>
3. McHale, J. P., & Rasmussen, J. L. (1998). Coparental and family group-level dynamics during infancy: Early family precursors of child and family functioning during preschool. *Development and Psychopathology*, 10, 39-59. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0954579498001527>
4. Schoppe, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., & Frosch, C. A. (2001). Coparenting, family process, and family structure: Implications for preschoolers' externalizing behavior problems. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 526-545. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.15.3.526>
5. Teubert, D., & Pinquart, M. (2010). The association between coparenting and child adjustment: A meta-analysis. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 10, 286-307.
6. Minuchin, P. (1985). Families and individual development: Provocations from the field of family therapy. *Child Development*, 56, 289-302.
7. Le, Y., McDaniel, B. T., Leovitt, C. E., & Feinberg, M. E. (2016). Longitudinal associations between relationship quality and coparenting across the transition to parenthood: A dyadic perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30, 918-926. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/fam0000217>
8. Van Egeren, L. A. (2004). The development of the coparenting relationship over the transition to parenthood. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 25, 453-477. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/imhj.20019>
9. Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., Frosch, C. A., & McHale, J. L. (2004). Associations between coparenting and marital behavior from infancy to the preschool years. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18, 194-207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.18.1.194>
10. Hays, S. (1998). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
11. Kofia, L., Schoppe-Sullivan, S., & Kamp Dush, C. (2013). Time in parenting activities in dual-earner families at the transition to parenthood. *Family Relations*, 62, 795-807. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12037>
12. Borenstein, M., Hedges, L., Higgins, J., & Rothstein, H. (2014). *Comprehensive Meta-Analysis Version 3.0*. Englewood, NJ: Biostat.
13. Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D. G. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA Statement. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 151(4), 264-269.
14. Tissot, H., Lavanchy, S. C., Favez, N., & Frascarolo, F. (n.d.). The Family Alliance Assessment Scales (FAAS): A tool to assess family interactions [Poster]. https://servat.unil.ch/resource/servat:BIB_68469C3A87FA.P001/REF

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the members of the Family and Developmental Psychopathology Lab. This research was funded by the Government of Manitoba, the Mark Lewis Nozick Memorial Scholarship, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the University of Manitoba Faculty of Graduate Studies and Department of Psychology.