Coparenting and Family Social Support Across Different Family Forms

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Abstract

- 40% of children in the United States are born to unmarried parents, compared to 30% in 1990.
- There has been a rise in out of wedlock births.
- Understanding how coparenting works across different family types (e.g., married, cohabiting, non-residential) is increasingly important.
- Coparenting support is linked to healthy development and fewer behavioral problems.
- Primary aim: study how family support is related to coparenting conflict and support across family structure for low-income mothers and fathers experiencing the transition to parenthood.

Research Questions

**Question #1:** Do the mean levels of coparenting conflict and support differ between married, cohabiting, and single-parent families?

**Question #2:** How does family support modify the relationship between family structure and coparenting for mothers and fathers?

Methods

**Procedure**
- Interviews conducted during mothers’ return to work (approx. 4 months postpartum) (T1) and one-year postpartum (T2).

**Measures**
- Family Support: Perceived social support from family (T1 and T2)
- Coparenting Conflict: Disrespect and disagreement toward other parent’s childrearing (T1 and T2)
- Coparenting Support: Positive affirmation toward other parent’s childrearing ability (T1 and T2)

**Participants**
- 270 mothers and fathers from low-income families experiencing the transition to parenthood (25-28 years old)
- Family Structure: 20% married, 50% cohabiting, 30% single
- Race/Ethnicity: 38% White, 35% Latina, 20% African American, 6% Multiracial, 1% Asian.
- Median Income: $35,000

Results & Discussion

**Figure 1. Differences in Maternal Coparenting Support by Family Structure**

**Figure 2. Differences in Paternal Coparenting Conflict by Family Structure**

**Figure 3. Differences in Paternal Coparenting Support by Family Structure**

**Figure 4. Paternal Family Structure x Family Support Interaction on Coparenting Conflict**

**#1:** Coparenting conflict was marginally higher for cohabiting mothers (Msupport = 4.14) compared to single mothers (Msupport = 3.69) one-year postpartum (F(2, 106) = 2.76, p = .07).

**#1:** Married fathers (Msupport = 19.76) experienced more coparenting support than cohabiting fathers (Msupport = 16.79) after mothers’ return to work (F(1, 69) = 4.42, p = .04).

**#2:** Family support modified the relationship between family structure and coparenting conflict (B = .07, t(69) = 4.42, p < .001). Under conditions of high family support, married fathers have less coparenting conflict than cohabiting fathers. Under conditions of low family support, married fathers have more coparenting conflict than cohabiting fathers.