

Marital satisfaction and child prosocial behavior: The intervening role of coparenting

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Introduction

Prosociality = voluntary actions that benefit others [1]; associated with academic performance, well-being and positive social relationships [2, 3, 4]

Marital satisfaction → Better perceived coparenting [5]

Better perceived coparenting → Child prosociality [6]

Few studies include fathers, even if research suggests that their behavior may be more sensitive to the quality of their marital relationship [7]

Objective

Examine the indirect association between both parents' marital satisfaction and child prosocial behavior via each parent's perception of the coparenting relationship with their spouse

Method

Samples

84 children (46 girls, 38 boys), both parents and teachers
98 % of mothers and 88 % of fathers: White
Age: mothers 32.3 yrs (SD=3.9); fathers 34.0 yrs (SD=5.1) at T1
Maternal education (years): 16.3 yrs (SD=1.8)
Paternal education (years): 16.1 yrs (SD=2.0)
86% had a familial income above \$60,000 CAN

Measures

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Sabourin et al., 2002) completed by both parents when the child was aged 6 years; $\alpha_{\text{mothers}} = .89$; $\alpha_{\text{fathers}} = .86$

Coparenting Questionnaire (Margolin et al., 2001) completed by both parents when the child was aged 7 years; $\alpha_{\text{mothers}} = .89$; $\alpha_{\text{fathers}} = .86$

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) completed by mothers and teachers ($r = .34$) when the child was aged 10 years; $\alpha_{\text{mothers}} = .68$; $\alpha_{\text{teachers}} = .84$. Average used in analyses

Results

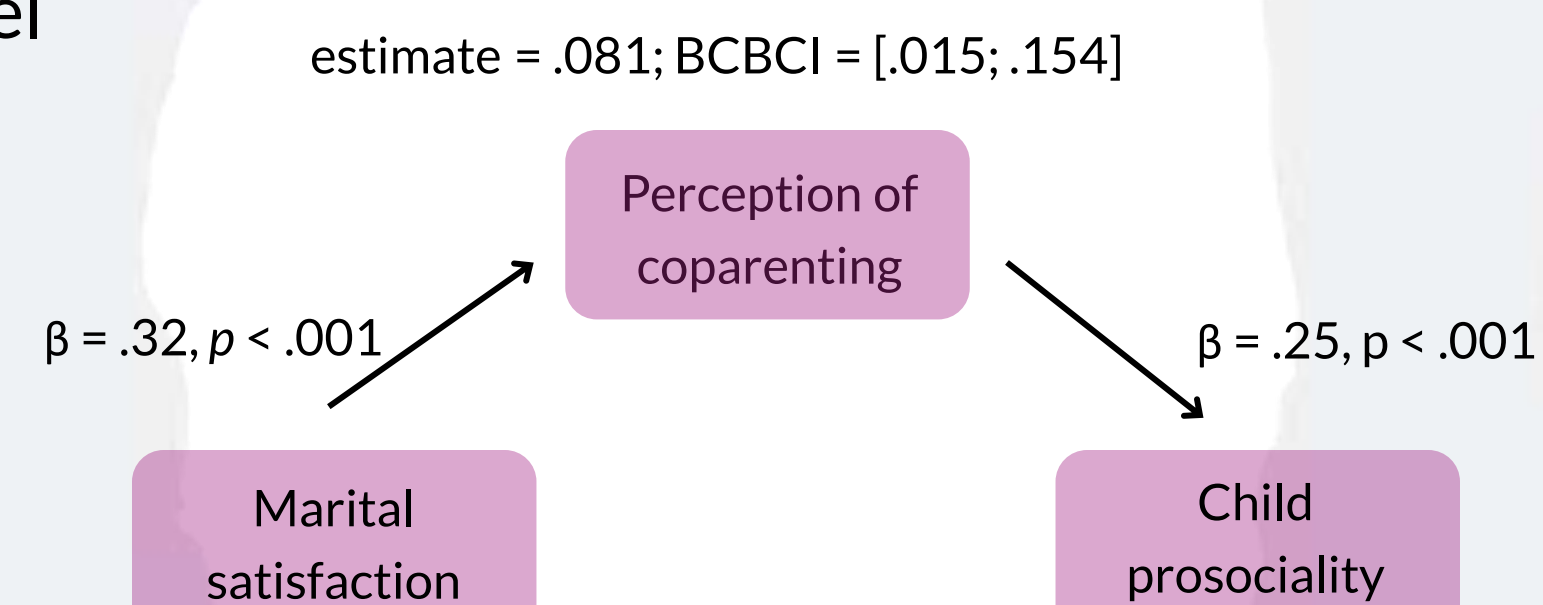
Table 1
Correlations among Key Variables

	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Mother's marital satisfaction	.49***	.47***	.29**	.17	.04	-.23*	.13
2. Father's marital satisfaction		.22*	.44***	.14	-.11	-.13	.12
3. Mother's perception of coparenting			.43***	.27*	.17	-.08	.30**
4. Father's perception of coparenting				-.13	-.04	-.18 ^t	.21 ^t
5. Child prosociality – mother report					.34**	.22*	-.04
6. Child prosociality – teacher report						.09	-.05
7. Child sex							-.06
8. Family SES							1

Note. Child sex is coded: 1 = boy; 2 = girl (biserial correlations). SES = socioeconomic status.

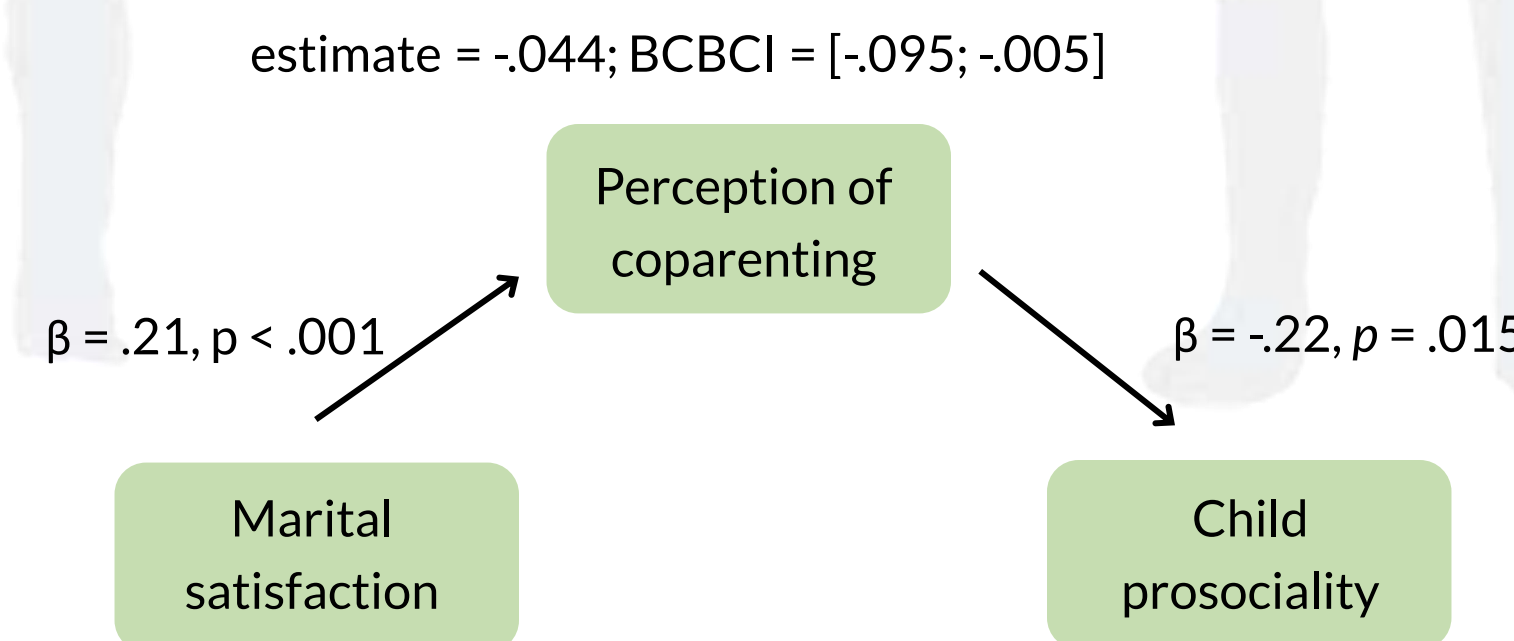
^t $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1
Maternal model



Note. Covariates: paternal marital satisfaction as well as perception of coparenting, family SES and child sex.

Figure 2
Paternal model



Note. Covariates: maternal marital satisfaction as well as perception of coparenting, family SES and child sex.

Discussion

Maternal marital satisfaction is positively associated with child prosocial behaviors via mothers' perception of coparenting

However, fathers' perceptions of coparenting act as a negative mediator of paternal marital satisfaction and child prosocial behaviors

Because the study of fatherhood lags behind that of motherhood, most methods are based on studies of mothers, which may lead to less adequate assessment of some constructs among fathers [8]

Strengths

- Longitudinal design
- Multi-informant design (fathers, mothers, teachers)

Limits

- Mostly well-educated French-Canadian White families
- Correlational design
- All variables measured by questionnaires

Future studies

- Observational measures of coparenting
- Moderation effect of child sex or coparenting perception

References

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