Father Involvement and Maternal Parenting Stress: The Role of Relationship Status

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Background

- The increase in variation in the mother-father relationship context has led to debates over its consequences for father involvement and the well-being of children.
- Missing in this debate: What are the consequences of father involvement in parenting for the well-being of mothers across various relationship contexts?

Research Questions

1. How is father involvement related to maternal parenting stress?
2. Does the association vary by mother-father relationship context?

Conceptual Framework

- Parenting stress refers to the extent to which parents perceive difficulties in fulfilling the requirements and expectations of the parenting role because of demands of parenting exceeding the parents’ resources (Abidin, 1992; Connell & Lack, 2002).
- Father involvement in parenting is a resource that may reduce mothers’ burden of parenting.

Data and Method

- Samples: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS), Waves 2, 3, and 4 (ages 1, 3, and 5).
- Relationship Status: Divorced/Broken up, Cohabiting, Dating, Married, Repartnered.
- Father Involvement: Cooperative coparenting, Engagement (a) You and the father talk about problems that come up with raising the child.
- Maternal Parenting Stress: (1) I often feel tired, worn out, exhausted from raising a family.
- Maternal Parenting Stress (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree)

Multivariate Results

- Maternal parenting stress (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree)
  - (a) “Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be.”
  - (b) “I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent.”
  - (c) “I find that taking care of my children is much more work than pleasure.”
  - (d) “I often feel tired, worn out, exhausted from raising a family.”

- Father involvement
  - Spending time (1 = never to 5 = nearly every day)
  - “In the past month, how often did the father spend one or more hours a day with the child?”

Summary of Findings

- Fathers’ spending time with children, engagement, and cooperative parenting were related to less parenting stress for mothers who were married to, cohabiting with, or dating the father (Figures 5, 6, & 7).
- Lack of positive father involvement was related to more parenting stress for mothers who were married to, cohabiting with, or dating the father for mothers who were no longer romantically involved with him (Figures 5, 6, & 7).
- For re-partnered mothers, ex-partner’s positive involvement was related to more parenting stress (Figures 5, 6, & 7).

Conclusion

- Romantic relationships and the existence of a social factor moderate the link between father involvement and maternal parenting stress.