

Caring for Toddlers: Parents' Experiences, Desires, and Satisfaction

Dr. Darcey N. Powell¹, Riker Lawence¹, & Dr. Katherine Karraker²

¹Roanoke College; ²West Virginia University

Introduction

- Mothers' and fathers' perceptions of who is doing which caregiving task often do not align, thus making division of labor (DoL) a source of conflict among parents (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Nicolson, 1990).
- There is limited research on postnatal discrepancy between parents' perceptions and their desires regarding the DoL for caregiving tasks.
- This study examined differences in mothers' and fathers' perceptions of the DoL for various domains of caregiving tasks, differences in parents' desires for distributing tasks within those domains, and how their perceptions and desires are associated with parents' satisfaction with their division.

Method

Participants

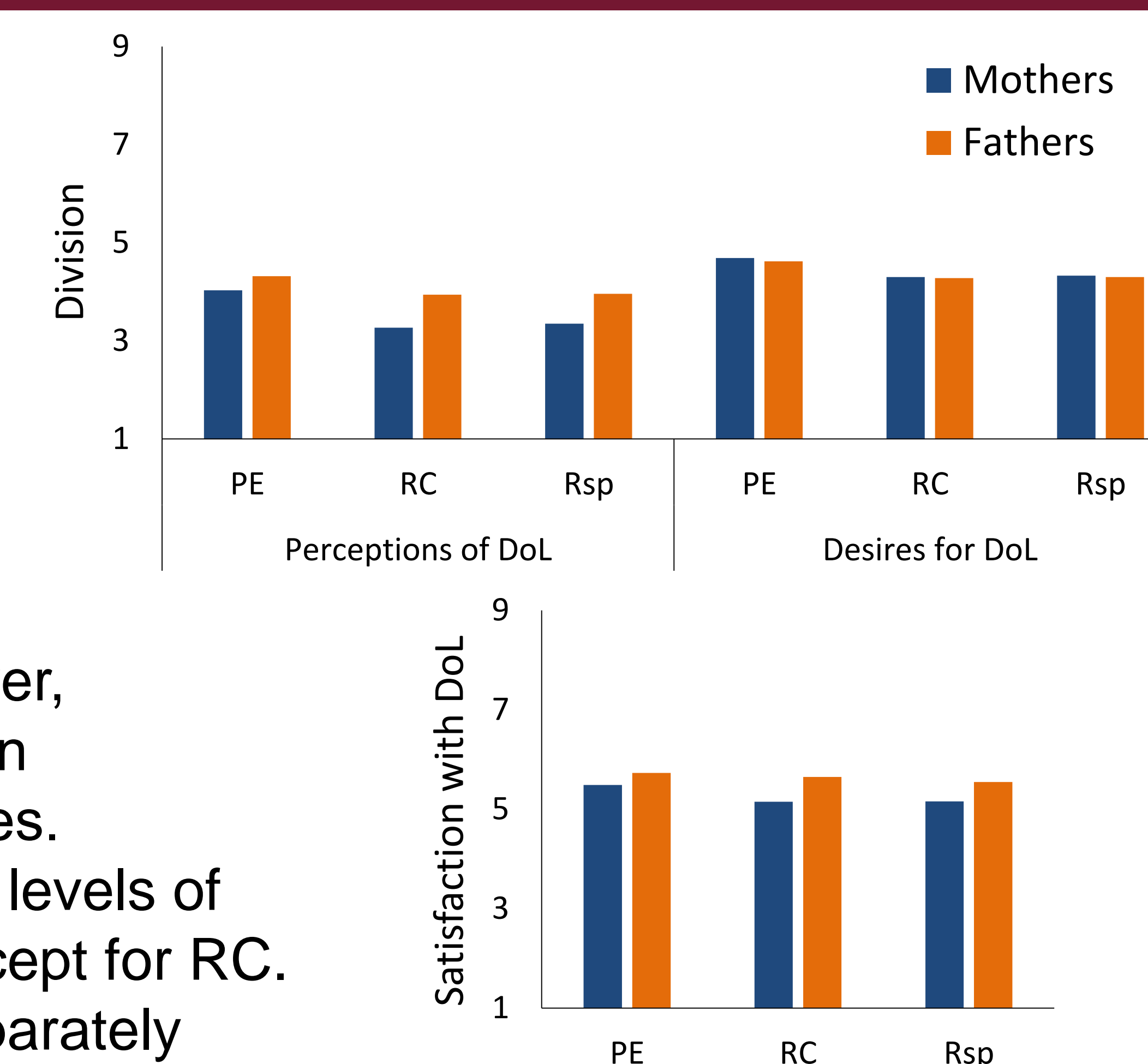
- Mothers ($N = 88$)
 - 45% first-time mothers
 - $M_{age} = 30.8$ years, $SD = 3.83$
 - 85% Caucasian
- Fathers ($N = 41$)
 - $M_{age} = 32.9$ years, $SD = 4.0$
 - 90% Caucasian
- Toddlers' $M_{age} = 22.9$ months, $SD = 2.82$

Materials

- Parents completed a modified version of the Who Does What Questionnaire (Cowan, Cowan, Coie, & Coie, 1978).
 - Each task was followed by questions about their perceptions of the DoL, their desired DoL, and their satisfaction with the DoL that they have with their partner. Scaling was 1 "mother does it all," 5 "we share this equally," and 9 "father does it all."
 - Task grouping were guided by Kotila and colleagues' (2013) description of caregiving domains: Positive Engagement (PE; 6 items), Routine Childcare (RC; 5 items), Responsibility (Rsp; 10 items).
 - Cronbach's alphas were acceptable (.63 - .92) for the division, desire, and satisfaction subscales of each caregiving domain.

Results

- Mothers believed that they engaged in a significantly greater proportion of RC and Rsp tasks whereas fathers perceived a more egalitarian DoL.
- Both mothers and fathers desired a 60/40 DoL within the domains.
- Mothers and fathers both desired that fathers be more involved than fathers were perceived to be. However, mothers' unmet desires were larger in magnitude than fathers' unmet desires.
- Mothers and fathers reported similar levels of satisfaction with the current DoL, except for RC.
- Regression analyses, conducted separately for mothers and fathers, indicated that the addition of desires better explained mothers' satisfaction with the DoL for RC and Rsp tasks than only including perceptions. For fathers, perceptions and desires only explained their satisfaction with DoL for PE tasks.



DoL Domain	t	Mothers				t	Fathers			
		B	F	df	adj. R ²		B	F	df	adj. R ²
Positive Engagement										
Step 1:			.54	1, 85	.00			6.80**	1, 38	.13
Perceptions	.74	.08				2.61*	.52			
Step 2:			2.45	2, 84	.03			8.29**	2, 37	.27
Perceptions	1.88	.26				3.94***	.87			
Desires	-2.08*	-.37				-2.91**	-.63			
Routine Childcare										
Step 1:			1.22	1, 85	.00			.06	1, 39	-.02
Perceptions	1.10	.11				.24	.04			
Step 2:			8.60***	2, 84	.15			.03	2, 38	-.05
Perceptions	3.52**	.41				.19	.04			
Desires	-3.97***	-.54				-.01	.00			
Responsibility										
Step 1:			.71	1, 85	.00			.22	1, 39	-.02
Perceptions	.84	.12				.47	.09			
Step 2:			4.48*	2, 84	.08			.98	2, 38	.00
Perceptions	2.49*	.42				1.20	.30			
Desires	-2.93**	-.50				-1.31	-.29			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

- These findings support the idea that while mothers are more involved in the caregiving tasks for their toddler than are fathers, mothers and fathers perceive their engagement in the caregiving tasks differently.
- Fathers desired to be more involved in the caregiving of their toddlers and mothers desired increased father involvement. Future research should explore whether parents have discussed the similarity in their desires and how other family context factors influence the family's division of labor.
- The combination of parents' perceptions of DoL and their desire for DoL better explained their satisfaction with the DoL than only including perceptions of DoL. However, the amount of variance accounted for in parents' satisfaction based on perceptions and desires was relatively small. Thus, future research should examine other factors that may influence parents' satisfaction with the DoL for caregiving tasks.