

Constellations of Stepfamily Relationship Quality: A Factor Mixture Model



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Background

- Stepfamilies are an increasingly common family form in the United States.
- Research has linked the quality of various dyadic relationships in stepfamilies to family functioning and individual well-being.
- Few studies examine stepfamily relationships holistically, rendering uncertain the presence of heterogeneous constellations of stepfamily relationship quality.

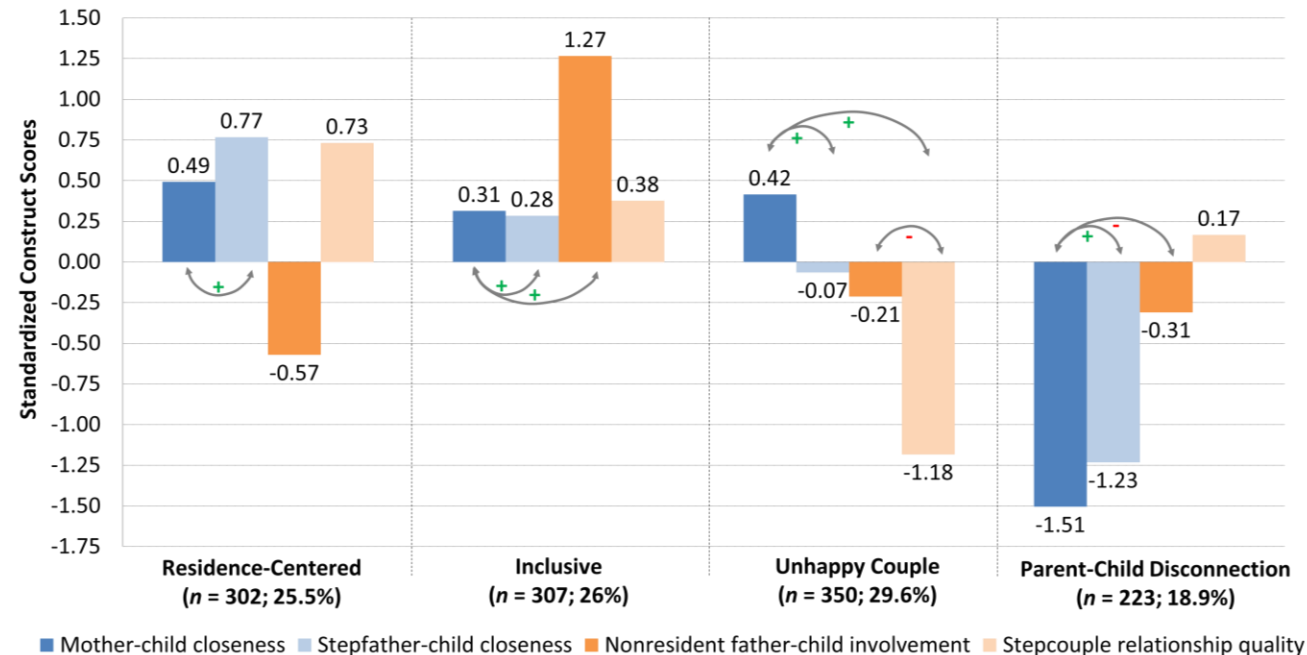
Study Aims

- **AIM 1: Identify latent constellations of mother-child, stepfather-child, nonresident father-child, and stepcouple relationship quality.**
- **AIM 2: Identify constellation-specific patterns of interdependence across dyadic relationships.**
- **AIM 3: Validate latent patterns with respect to stepcouple stability and youth adjustment.**

Methods

- **Data:** National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, Wave I.
- **Sample:** 1,182 adolescents in mother-stepfather families with living nonresident fathers; mean age: 15.64 years; 53% female; 62% non-Hispanic White.
- **Analysis:** Factor Mixture Modeling with three-step approach for validation analyses; Mplus 7.4.
- **Stepfamily Relationship Constructs:** Mother-child closeness (5 items); Stepfather-child closeness (5 items); Nonresident father-child involvement (3 items); Stepcouple relationship quality (2 items)
- **Validation Covariates:** Depression (9-item scale; $\alpha = .80$); Delinquency (8-item scale; $\alpha = .74$); Self-Esteem (6-item scale; $\alpha = .85$); Couple stability

Results



Note: The values shown are standardized scores for each relationship-quality construct; the full-sample mean for each standardized construct is equal to 0 with a standard deviation of 1. Estimates were derived from weighted data. Bi-directional arrows and signs indicate presence and direction of correlations between relationships.

Latent-Profile Differences

- **Residence-Centered** pattern: Depression (Z) = **-.28**; Delinquency (Z) = **-.27**; Self-Esteem (Z) = **.37**; Couple stability = **96%**
- **Inclusive** pattern: Depression (Z) = **-.26**; Delinquency (Z) = **-.10**; Self-Esteem (Z) = **.16**; Couple stability = **88%**
- **Unhappy Couple** pattern: Depression (Z) = **-.18**; Delinquency (Z) = **.26**; Self-Esteem (Z) = **.15**; Couple stability = **63%**
- **Parent-Child Disconnection** pattern: Depression (Z) = **.83**; Delinquency (Z) = **-.07**; Self-Esteem (Z) = **-.91**; Couple stability = **83%**

Practical Implications

Family life educators and practitioners should:

- Be mindful of complex constellations of stepfamily relationship quality; promoting gains in one dyadic relationship might cause strain in another.
- Engage in thorough assessment and attend to stepfamily relationships that resemble the Unhappy Couple and Parent-Child Disconnection patterns.
- Attain knowledge and skills necessary to work effectively with stepfamilies (Papernow, 2017).