

Competing Models of Co-parenting Post-divorce: A Stress Process Approach

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Introduction

- Co-parenting refers to how parents relate to and interact with each other in the capacity of childrearing (Feinberg, 2003)
- Among the most common assessments of co-parenting are measures to tap constructs of *support* and *conflict* (e.g., Ahrons, 1981)
- Global forms of co-parenting conflict often are only tapping a general form of interpersonal conflict (Madden-Derdich et al., 2002)
- There has been a “call” for assessments specific to the co-parenting relationship that assess more nuance, such as covert conflict
- This study explored the added impact of two forms of covert co-parenting conflict, *internally-regulated covert conflict* and *externally-regulated covert conflict* in addition to dimensions of support and overt conflict
- Guided by a stress process framework (Pearlin et al., 1981) this study explored:
 - The utility of two competing models of co-parenting behaviors (the QCCS and the MCS-DR; see measures)
 - How chronic stressors in the form of co-parenting relationships are related to the mental health of individuals, and how personal resources in the form of self-efficacy may impact that relationship

Successful Co-parenting After Divorce

Data are from the *Successful Co-parenting After Divorce (SCAD)* study, an associated study accompanying the SCAD divorce education and family stabilization course. The study utilizes a repeated measures panel study design. Inclusion criteria for the study required participants to be divorced within the prior 18 months or divorcing currently, with a shared minor child with the partner from whom they are divorcing or divorced.

Methods

Sample

- 557 parents; primarily White (85%) middle-aged ($M = 36.06$, $SD = 7.95$) women (86%) with primary physical custody (72%)

Measures

- Quality of Coparental Communication Scale (QCCS; Ahrons, 1981)
 - Support ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.02$; $\alpha = .87$)
 - Conflict ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.08$; $\alpha = .93$)
- Multidimensional Co-parenting Scale for Dissolved Relationships (MCS-DR; Ferraro et al., 2016)
 - Support ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.33$; $\alpha = .91$)
 - Overt Conflict ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.35$; $\alpha = .91$)
 - Internally-Regulated Covert Conflict ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 0.86$; $\alpha = .74$)
 - Externally-Regulated Covert Conflict ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.18$; $\alpha = .82$)

Measures (continued)

- Self-efficacy (Sherer et al., 1982; $M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.64$; $\alpha = .89$)
- Adverse Mental Health Symptomatology (AMHS; Irwin et al., 1999; Osman et al., 1997; Weathers et al., 1993)
 - Depressive Symp. ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.72$; $\alpha = .89$)
 - Neuropsychological Symp. ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.93$; $\alpha = .93$)
 - Physiological Symp. ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.86$; $\alpha = .74$)
 - Post-traumatic Stress ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.03$; $\alpha = .96$)
- Covariates: gender and physical custody status
- Bivariate correlations & missing data analysis
- Fit measurement model
- Fit competing structural equation models
- f -tests to compare effect sizes across models

Analysis

Post-hoc Model Comparisons

Table 1
Post-hoc model comparison of effect sizes across models

Construct	df	Critical f	f
Self-Efficacy	4, 550	2.39	11.00
Depressive Symp.	7, 544	2.03	3.96
Neuropsych. Symp.	7, 544	2.03	2.78
Physiological Symp.	7, 544	2.03	0.87
Post-traumatic Stress	7, 544	2.03	2.95

Note: df = degrees of freedom of the numerator; degrees of freedom of the denominator

Discussion

- Added contributions of covert co-parenting conflict beyond that of overt conflict and support in explaining self-efficacy, as well as AMHS; utility of the MCS-DR
- Physiological aspects of anxiety may be more strongly tied to experiencing overt forms of co-parenting conflict
- Continued support for self-efficacy as a linking mechanism between chronic stressors and AMHS
- Implications
 - Indirect methods through which individuals themselves engage with their former partners (i.e., internally-regulated covert conflict) are more closely tied to their individual wellbeing than more direct forms of interactions (i.e., support; overt conflict)
 - Consideration of internally-regulated covert conflict as a potential leverage point for practitioners and educators regardless of power dynamics/custody status
- Future Directions
 - Longitudinal design to better understand the link of self-efficacy and interrelationships among co-parenting behaviors
 - Testing for cross-population generalizability for the MCS-DR

Results

Figure 1 QCCS model predicting AMHS

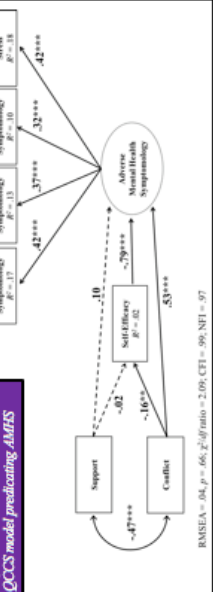


Figure 2 MCS-DR model predicting AMHS



- Adequate fit for the measurement model of the latent construct AMHS
- QCCS conflict was linked with both self-efficacy and AMHS (see Figure 1)
- Indirect effect from QCCS conflict to AMHS through self-efficacy (CI .11-.61)
- MCS-DR overt conflict was linked with AMHS; MCS-DR internally-regulated covert conflict was linked with self-efficacy (see Figure 2)
- Indirect effect from MCS-DR internally-regulated covert conflict to AMHS through self-efficacy (CI .76-1.46)
- The MCS-DR predicted a significantly greater proportion of the variance in self-efficacy, depressive symptomatology, neuropsychological symptomatology, and post-traumatic stress compared to the QCCS; physiological symptomatology did not vary significantly (see Table 1)

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