

Relations Among Paternal Parenting Stress, Marital Satisfaction, Depression, and Children's Anxiety/Depression



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Abstract

The relations among paternal parenting stress, marital satisfaction, depression, and their children's anxiety/depression were examined. A total of 1,599 families were included. The main results showed that among the fathers, greater parenting stress predicted lower marital satisfaction, this lower marital satisfaction subsequently predicted higher paternal depression, and finally this higher paternal depression subsequently predicted higher children's anxiety/depression. This study highlights the importance of fathers' psychological well-being in terms of children's adjustment.

Introduction

- **The Family Systems Theory** (Bowen, 1974) views the family at two levels: (a) as a whole, in terms of its organizational patterns and structure, and (b) as a set of individuals, in terms of how family members interact with one another (Parke & Buriel, 2006). **The Family Projection Process** describes the primary way that parents transmit their psychological problems to their children. This process can increase the children's vulnerability to clinical symptoms (Bowen, 1974).
- **Parenting stress** has been shown to affect both spouses' perceived marital quality and psychological well-being, and both paternal and maternal **depressive symptoms** influenced **children's behavior problems** (Cummings, Cheung, Koss, & Davies, 2014).
- **Paternal parenting stress** was negatively correlated with their **marital satisfaction** (Kwan, Kwok, & Ling, 2015) and **psychological well-being** (Lavee, Sharlin, & Katz, 1996).
- When parents were dissatisfied with their **marital relationships**, their negative emotions and behaviors transferred to their children (Erel & Burman, 1995).
- The majority of studies on these topics have focused on **mothers**, but little research has examined **fathers' parenting stress, marital satisfaction, and depression**; and how those aspects might influence children's adjustment (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006).
- **The present study** aims to investigate the relations among **paternal parenting stress, marital satisfaction, depression, and children's anxiety/depression, among Korean families.**

Method

Participants and Procedure

- This study analyzed 2012 data from a longitudinal research project, **The Panel Study on Korean Children**. A total of 1,599 families with a four-year old (*M* age = 4 years, 3 months) child were interviewed or answered four questionnaires.

Measures

- **Paternal Parenting Stress.** *The Parenting Stress* scale (Kim & Kang, 1997) was used. Fathers evaluated 11 items using a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflect higher fathers' parenting stress. Cronbach's alpha was .86.
- **Paternal Marital Satisfaction.** *The Revised Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (RKMS)* (Jung, 2004) was used. Fathers completed four items using a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflect higher fathers' marital satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha was .92.
- **Paternal Depression.** *The Kessler's Psychological Distress scale (The K6)* (Kessler et al., 2002) was used. Fathers completed six items using a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflect higher levels of fathers' depression. Cronbach's alpha was .91.
- **Children's Anxiety/Depression.** *The Korean Child Behavior Checklist (K-CBCL)* (Oh & Kim, 2009) was used. This subscale consists of eight items of anxiety/depression using a 3-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflect higher levels of children's anxiety/depression. Cronbach's alpha was .72.

Table

Table. Standardized Indirect Effects from the Decomposition Paths

Paths *(P): Paternal, (C): Children's	Indirect Effect	95% CI
(P) Parenting stress → (P) Marital satisfaction → (C) Anxiety/Depression	-0.006	[-0.026, 0.014]
(P) Parenting stress → (P) Marital satisfaction → (P) Depression	0.055	[0.035, 0.075]
(P) Parenting stress → (P) Depression → (C) Anxiety/Depression	0.029	[0.006, 0.049]
(P) Marital satisfaction → (P) Depression → (C) Anxiety/Depression	-0.011	[-0.020, -0.003]
(P) Parenting stress → (P) Marital satisfaction → (P) Depression → (C) Anxiety/Depression	0.004	[0.001, 0.007]

Key Findings and Conclusions

- **Path analysis** within Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized, using *Mplus*.
- The indirect paths from paternal parenting stress to children's anxiety/depression, which was **mediated by** paternal depression only, as well as by both paternal marital satisfaction and depression, were significant.
- In other words, **greater parenting stress predicted lower marital satisfaction among fathers, this lower marital satisfaction subsequently predicted higher levels of paternal depression, and finally this higher paternal depression predicted higher levels of children's anxiety/depression.**
- This emphasizes **the importance of paternal psychological well-being** in families, which plays a role in **children's psychological well-being.**
- Investigating whether children's gender, family income, or parents' educational level affects children's mental health could improve future studies.

Figure

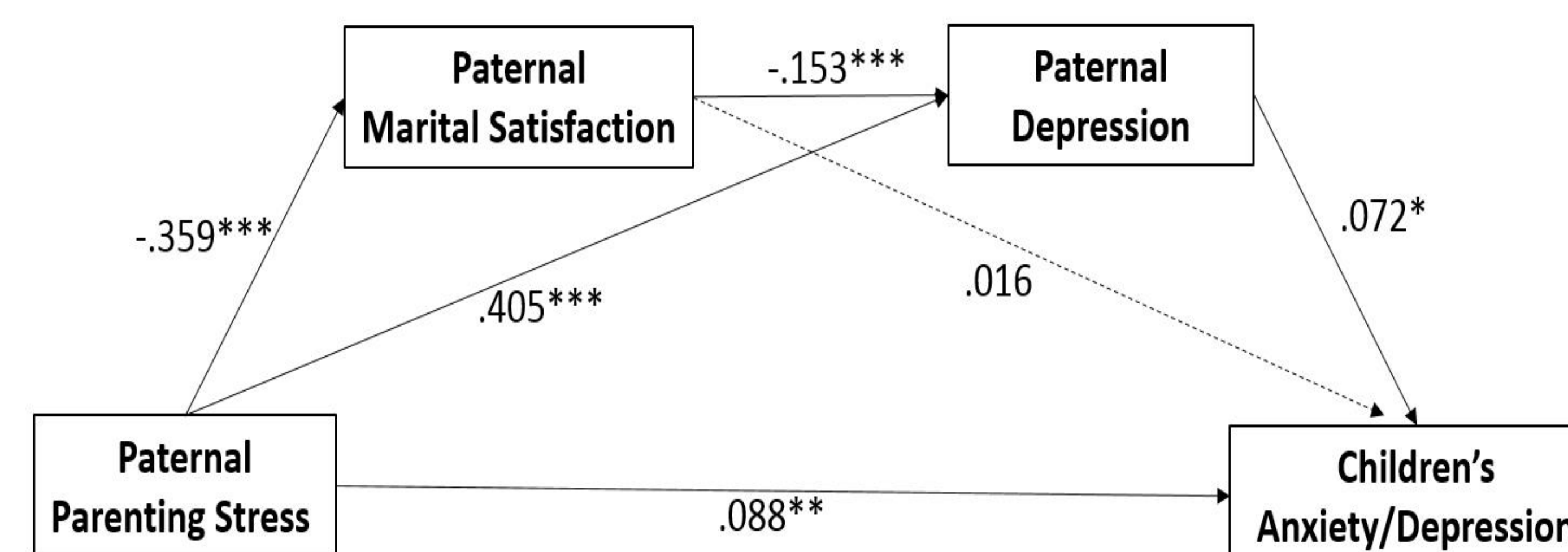


Figure. Relations among paternal parenting stress, marital satisfaction, depression, and children's anxiety/depression. All paths are reported in standardized path coefficients. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

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