

HOW PARENT-CHILD AND FAMILY RELATIONS INFLUENCE CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT



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- When students of child development think about family influences, they typically think in terms of parenting.
- And when they think in terms of parenting and the parent-child relationship, they most often think about mothers.
- Although all this is still true today, it is much less so than it once was.
- Indeed, it is no longer the case, as one distinguished developmental psychologist observed 30 years ago, that “fathers are the forgotten contributors to child development.”





- In addition to including fathers in the study of child development, developmental psychologists have also expanded their theoretical, conceptual and empirical horizons over the past three decades to take into account the relationship that exists between mother and father, a relationship that invariably predates the arrival of the child, namely, the “marriage.”
- In fact, students of child development often think in terms of the developing family system, appreciating the fact that marriage, parenting and child development are interrelated.
- Not only does parenting influence children (and vice versa), but marriages affect and are affected by parental roles and behaviour.

Today I would like to highlight the potential influence of parent-child and family relations upon child development by:



- examining data from a large scale, longitudinal study with which I am affiliated, that is following some 1,000 American children from birth through the teenage years in order to address issues related to marriage, parenting and child development.



- The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development was originally conceived as an investigation of the effects of non-maternal child care experiences on children's development.
- But because it has gathered so much data on so many facets of children's lives, the study is positioned to address a host of issues not having to do with non-maternal child care at all.

The data from this study that I will share today concerns



- The extent to which mothers and fathers in 829 two-parent households provided *warm, sensitive, stimulating parenting* when their children were infants, toddlers and preschoolers;
- The quality of the marriages across these same early-childhood years; and
- The socio-emotional and cognitive-linguistic functioning of the children in Year 1 of school.

- To measure parenting, mothers and fathers were videotaped (separately) while interacting with their child when 6, 15, 24, 36 and/or 54 months of age; ratings of warm-sensitive-stimulating parenting were averaged over time, separately for each parent (i.e., mother, father
- To measure marital quality, each parent reported on their feelings of closeness and intimacy toward their partner when the child was 1, 6, 14, 24, 36 and/or 54 months of age; scores for marital intimacy were averaged over time.
- To measure child development, teachers completed standardized questionnaires regarding child behaviour and children were tested on a standardized achievement test when in Year 1 of school



QUESTION #1A,B,C



**A. TO WHAT EXTENT ARE MOTHERING,
FATHERING AND MARITAL QUALITY
INTERRELATED?**

**B. DOES WARM-SENSITIVE-STIMULATING
MOTHERING AND FATHERING GO TOGETHER IN
A HOUSEHOLD?**

**C. DO HIGH LEVELS OF SUCH PARENTING AND
MARITAL INTIMACY GO TOGETHER WITHIN A
HOUSEHOLD?**

Intercorrelation of Parenting and Marriage



	<u>Mother</u>		<u>Father</u>	
	Parenting	Marital Intimacy	Parenting	Marital Intimacy
<u>Mother</u>				
Parenting	--	.09**	.39***	.06
Marital Intimacy			.07*	.45***
<u>Father</u>				
Parenting				.08*

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



QUESTION #2:

CAN DIFFERENT TYPES OF FAMILIES
BE IDENTIFIED ON THE BASIS OF THE
QUALITY OF MOTHERING, FATHERING
AND MARITAL INTIMACY?

Standardised Marriage and Parenting Scores by Family Type (n = 829)



Family Type

	I Consistently Supportive (n = 125)	II Consistently Moderate (n = 360)	III Consistently Risky (n = 135)	IV <i>Good Parenting Poor Marriage</i> (n = 155)	V <i>Poor Parenting Good Marriage</i> (n = 54)
M. Sensitivity	.48	.24	-.62	.50	-.51
F. Sensitivity	.58	.18	-.95	.33	-.99
M. Marriage	.86	.19	-.60	-.81	.81
F. Marriage	.99	.24	-.65	-1.09	.83



QUESTION #3:

DO CHILDREN GROWING UP IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH MORE EMOTIONALLY SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS (ACROSS THE BOARD) DEVELOP BETTER THAN THOSE LIVING IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH LESS SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS?

Continuum or Support vs. Risk

Developmental Sequelae	Consistently supportive (n = 125)	Consistently Moderate (n = 360)	Consistently Risky (n = 135)
T-C Conflict	9.53	10.27	11.66
T – C Closeness			
TRF Internalising			
TRF Externalising	47.64	49.32	52.54
Social Skills Total	107.7	105.6	100.1
Language Skill	3.56	3.41	3.17
Math Skill	3.41	3.27	3.05
Cognitive Assessment	.396	.147	-.463

QUESTION #4:



**WHEN ONLY MARRIAGE OR
PARENTING APPEAR SUPPORTIVE
OF CHILD WELL BEING, DO
CHILDREN DEVELOP BETTER IF IT
IS PARENTING OR MARRIAGE?**

Differential Benefit of Parenting vs. Marriage

Developmental Sequelae	Good Parenting Poor Marriage (n = 155)	Poor Parenting Good Marriage (n = 54)
T – C Conflict		
T – C Closeness		
TRF Internalising		
TRF Externalising		
Social Skills Total		
Language Skill	3.70	3.20
Math Skill	3.44	3.04
Cognitive Assessment	.440	-.346

QUESTION #5:



DOES BEING EXPOSED TO BOTH DEVELOPMENTALLY SUPPORTIVE PARENT-CHILD AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS ADD (DEVELOPMENTAL) BENEFIT TO EXPOSURE TO JUST ONE SUCH SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP?

THAT IS, DOES BEING EXPOSED TO TWO SUPPORTIVE FAMILY SUBSYSTEMS (I.E., PARENTING, MARRIAGE) FOSTER BETTER DEVELOPMENT THAN EXPOSURE TO ONLY ONE?

Value Added Comparison #1



Developmental Sequelae	Consistently Supportive (n = 125)	Good Parenting Poor Marriage (n = 155)
T – C Conflict		
T – C Closeness		
TRF Internalising		
TRF Externalising	47.64	49.83
Social Skills Total	107.7	104.2
Language Skill		
Math Skill		
Cognitive Assessment		

Value Added Comparison #2



Developmental Sequelae	Consistently Supportive (n = 125)	Poor Parenting Good Marriage (n = 54)
T – C Conflict		
T – C Closeness		
TRF Internalising		
TRF Externalising		
Social Skills Total	107.7	102.0
Language Skill	3.56	3.20
Math Skill	3.41	3.04
Cognitive Assessment	.396	-.346

QUESTION #6:



**DOES BEING EXPOSED TO
DEVELOPMENTALLY SUPPORTIVE PARENT-
CHILD OR MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS
PROTECT AGAINST THE RISK ASSOCIATED
WITH EXPOSURE TO UNSUPPORTIVE
PARENT-CHILD AND MARITAL
RELATIONSHIPS?**



Protective-Buffering Comparison #1

Developmental Sequelae	Good Parenting Poor Marriage (n = 155)	Consistently Risky (n = 135)
T – C Conflict		
T – C Closeness		
TRF Internalising		
TRF Externalising	49.83	52.54
Social Skills Total	104.2	100.1
Language Skill	3.70	3.17
Math Skill	3.44	3.05
Cognitive Assessment	.440	-.463

Protective-Buffering Comparison #2



Developmental Sequelae	Poor Parenting Good Marriage (n = 54)	Consistently Risky (n = 135)
T – C Conflict		
T – C Closeness		
TRF Internalising		
TRF Externalising		
Social Skills Total		
Language Skill		
Math Skill		
Cognitive Assessment		

CONCLUSIONS



All good things go together, but only to some extent, meaning only in **some** families.

That is, marriage and parenting are positively related to each other, with good marriage and parenting going together and poor marriage and parenting going together, though this was not the case in roughly 25% of the families studied.

Rather consistently, but not surprisingly, children develop best when mothers and fathers provide warm, sensitive, stimulating parenting *and* have a close, intimate relationship with each other.

When only parenting *or* the marital relationship functions in a seemingly developmentally supportive manner, children generally fare better when it is parenting that is positive rather than marriage.