Coparenting Research Year in Review

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Michael Saini, PhD, MSW, RSW
Associate Professor
Chair in Law and Social Work
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work,
University of Toronto, Canada

AFCC Webinar

Learning Objectives

• Describe the themes of the social science studies published in 2019 relevant to separation and divorce.

• Demonstrate knowledge of the current evidence as it relates to important and complex issues relevant to family law matters.

• Apply social science evidence to child custody disputes.

“The Library Crawl”
Search of Studies

- Conducted two searches:
  - Studies related to separation and divorce
  - Studies related to coparenting across family dynamics

- In both searches, limits included:
  - January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019
  - Peer reviewed publications
  - Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, meta-analysis, etc.)

Separation and Divorce

- 336 empirical studies published in 2019 about separation and divorce:
  - 249 studies related to humans (parents, children, grandparents, etc.)
  - 87 studies related to animals (rats, mice, birds, etc.)
  - 4 studies related to humans and animals (pets)

Top Themes of Studies (Humans)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic area</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test Construction, Psychometrics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Adult / College Student</td>
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<td>Family Conflict</td>
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<td>Parent Child Relations</td>
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<td>Childhood Adversity</td>
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<td>Child Abuse</td>
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<td>Fathers Child Relations</td>
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<td>Mother Child Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence / Intimate Partner Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Posttraumatic Stress Disorder / Trauma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorders</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Pets</td>
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Child Sleep Problems after Divorce

- Rudd et al., (2019) utilized the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing longitudinal dataset when children were ages 5 ($n = 3590$) and 9 ($n = 3062$).
- A parental relationship dissolution was related to poorer child sleep quality.
- Results suggest that children’s sleep quality may be an important factor to consider after children experience a parental separation.

Income Management Post Separation

- Leturcq & Panico (2019) tracked 18,000 children over the first decade of life by using a nationally UK sample.
- Measured the impact of parental separation on children's living conditions.
- Significant increase in income poverty after separation and strong financial constraints.
- Around time of separation, parents generally cut back on normative but costly activities such as holidays and outings.
- Parents tend to maintain day-to-day parenting and routines.

Child Support Post Separation

- Hakovirta et al., (2019) used Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) datasets to study the relationship between child support and poverty in Finland, the UK, and the U.S.
- Results show that characteristics of fathers paying support were generally similar across countries.
- More single mothers are drawn out of poverty by the receipt of child support in Finland than in the other countries, partly because the government guarantees child support.
- Child support is an anti-poverty policy in all countries.
Parenting Time and Quality

- O’Hara, et al., (2019) found conflict and parenting quality were associated with children’s mental health.

- Fathers’ parenting time was related to his parenting quality, which was then related to children’s being less anxious/depressed at the nine-month follow-up.

- The optimal number of fathers’ overnights was between 12-15 per month.

- As fathers’ overnights increase beyond 10 per month, mothers’ parenting quality became more negative.

Custody Arrangements

- Bastaits & Inge (2019) used the Belgian’s Divorce in Flanders data set (N = 623) to compare custody arrangements.

- Custodial arrangements impact parent–child relationships communication patterns and support.

- Joint physical custody provided a better framework to shape a postdivorce parent–child relationship with both parents in terms of open communications and support.

Adult Attachment and Adjustment

- Guzmán-González (2019) examined the mediating role of forgiveness of the former partner based on 1008 divorced or separated individuals from Chile.
  - Attachment anxiety was both directly and indirectly associated to adjustment through forgiveness.
  - Multigroup analysis revealed that this pattern of relationships was the same across gender.

- Results highlight the role that attachment and forgiveness play in the process of adjusting to a relationship dissolution.
Adult Attachment and Adjustment

- McNelis (2019) explored attachment styles of 413 adults from an online survey.
- Anxious and avoidant styles significantly predicted history of divorce and partnered relationship status.
- Dysfunctional communication was significantly and consistently associated with insecure attachment.
- Individual characteristics that generate a risk for divorce might also pose a barrier to repartnering after a divorce.

Parental Alienation

- Death et al., (2019) examined 357 judgements of the Family Court of Australia.
- Five themes emerged in the data, including:
  - use of the concept of parental alienation
  - coaching
  - mothers as manipulative
  - mothers as mentally ill
  - impact of the best interest of the child.

Divorce and Suicide

- Jamison et al., (2019) examined Colorado’s Violent Death Reporting System and matched with divorce decree (n = 381 or 14%).
- Time between divorce and death ranged from less than 1 year to more than 10 years.
- Intimate partner problems had significant effects on reducing the survival probability at 1 year and beyond.
- Study reminds us to be assessing for suicide post separation.
## Intimate Partner Violence

- Rossi et al., (2019) examined 382 mediating couples to test the application of prominent IPV typologies of separating couples.
- The results demonstrated 4 subtypes of IPV.
- Found differences across subtypes in men’s reported levels of antisociality and number of protective orders issued against them.
- Findings suggest that IPV typologies may be helpful to mediators in understanding the IPV dynamics among separating couples and in deciding if specific patterns of IPV are more or less conducive to the mediation process.

## Intimate Partner Violence

- Francia et al., (2019) completed a qualitative study of mothers and fathers \( (N = 40) \) with histories of family violence about their experiences within the Australian family law system.
- Themes related to:
  - Gendered narratives
  - Parents’ concerns not been taken seriously
  - Perceived inadequacies in knowledge in relation to family violence
  - Coercion from some professionals within the family law system

## Male Filicides and Separation

- Leveillee & Doyon (2019) analyzed 50 male filicides committed in the province of Quebec between 1997 and 2012.
- Male filicides were mainly motivated by marital separation or fatal physical abuse (ill treatments causing death).
- Some characteristics help distinguish these men according to motivation including:
  - the victim's age
  - hospitalizations that occurred during the year preceding the crime
  - the presence of depressive and/or psychotic symptoms
  - the sentence rendered.
### Views of Mediation

- Wong et al., (2019) completed a qualitative study to examine the benefits to children in family mediation (40 parents and 10 children).

- Parents reported that mediation improved the efficacy of their parenting and alleviated their children’s stress about their divorce.

- Children felt they were powerless when involved in the mediation process and that they received limited support from the mediators.

### Social Connection and Adjustment

- Parise et al., (2019) focused on the role of volunteering and social ties for ex-partners’ well-being.

- Volunteers reported more frequent contacts with friends and higher levels of given and received social support to/from relatives and friends than nonvolunteers.

- Frequency of contacts with friends explained the link between volunteering and satisfaction with life and depressive symptoms.

### Summary of Studies

- College students continue to be the preferred target group for sampling.

- Studies point to the complexity of issues facing children and parents post separation and divorce.

- Focus on transforming bonds.

- Improvements for dispute resolution as vehicle for change.
Coparenting Relationship

• Co-parenting initially referred to postdivorce parenting but is now commonly used to describe how partners collaborate in the context of child-rearing (Pilkington, et al., 2019).

• Increase in both media and scholarly attention across diverse family dynamics:
  • Single / Never married
  • Married
  • Separated
  • Sexually and gender diverse
  • Adoptive or stepparent.

2019 Google Results

Year of the Coparenting Apps

• Our Family Wizard
• Coparenter
• 2houses
• AppClose
• Coparently
• Fayr
• Talking Parents
• SharedCare
• Co-Parent Central
Coparenting Scholarship

• In 2019, there were 2,007 articles on coparenting across 126 electronic databases (PsycInfo, ASSIA, ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, etc.).

• Of these, 323 empirical studies were published in peer reviewed journals.

Top Journals for Coparenting Scholarship

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<tr>
<th>Journal Name</th>
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<td>Journal of Family Psychology</td>
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<td>Journal of Child and Family Studies</td>
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<td>Family Relations</td>
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<td>Family Relations: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal of Divorce &amp; Remarriage</td>
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<td>Journal of Youth and Adolescence</td>
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<td>Family Process</td>
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<td>Journal of Family Violence</td>
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<td>Family Court Review</td>
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Top Producing Countries for Coparenting Scholarship

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<td>Finland</td>
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Coparenting Across Family Dynamics

- Married couples (n = 127)
- Separated / divorced (n = 125)
- Single-parent (n = 36)
- Same sex relationships (n = 35)
- Grandparents (n = 32)
- Adoptive parents (n = 31)
- Bended families (n = 17)
- Homelessness (n = 12)
- Never-married (n = 10)
- Incarcerated parents (n = 2)

New Coparenting Tool

- Saini, Pruett, Alschech and Sushchyk, (2019) tested CoPAFS, a newly constructed coparenting measure with a sample of parents with minor children still living in the home (N = 242).
- Psychometric properties of the 56-item CoPAFS scale and the 9 subscales composing the measure were calculated on the basis of the total sample.
- All domains were significant and ranged between .641 and .952.
- Good model fit was obtained across family structures.

Coparenting as a Mediator

- Camisasca et al., (2019) surveys a sample of 101 Italian father-mother dyads with school-aged children to explore marital satisfaction, co-parenting, parents’ empathic skills and children’s adjustment.
- Found that coparenting mediated the associations between mothers and fathers marital dissatisfaction and children’s behavioral problems.
- Results also showed that this effect was moderated by parent’s empathic skills.
Coparenting and Routines

- Ren & Xu (2019) surveyed 515 families with preschool-aged children from Shanghai to assess aspects of coparenting, child routines, and children’s social-emotional development were measured.
- The results showed that the consistency of child routines significantly mediated the effects of coparenting quality on children’s social-emotional outcomes.
- Coparenting was positively related to the consistency of child routines, which was in turn positively related to children’s initiative and self-control, as well as negatively related to children’s behavioral concerns.

Coparenting and Conflict

- Kopystynska et al., (2019) used data from the Building Strong Families project to examine intrafamily relations ($N = 2,784$ couples/parents).
  - Destructive interparental conflict was related to lower levels of coparenting alliance.
  - For fathers only, conflict related to harsh parenting.
- Zvara et al., (2019) examined the moderating role of the coparenting relationship in the associations between neuroticism and harsh intrusive parenting for mothers and fathers.
  - greater undermining coparenting behavior was positively associated with harsh intrusive behavior.

Same-Sex Coparenting

- Farr, et al., (2019) examined the longitudinal associations between coparenting and child adjustment among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parent families.
  - No differences emerged as a function of parental sexual orientation in observations or self-reports of coparenting.
  - Parents and teachers described children as well-adjusted overall across family dynamics.
  - After controlling covariates, including couple relationship adjustment, more supportive coparenting in early childhood predicted fewer parent-reported child internalizing and externalizing problems in middle childhood.
Gay Fathers by Surrogacy

- Green et al., (2019) focused on behavioral functioning of children conceived via gestational surrogacy and raised by gay fathers (68 families with children aged 3–10 years).

- Fathers who reported less authoritarian or permissive parenting, more positive coparenting, and more social support from friends had children with fewer behavior problems.

- Gay fathers’ reports of family members receiving higher levels of antigay microaggressions were associated with parents’ greater stigma consciousness, more anger/aggression from spouse/partner, and less positive parenting and coparenting.

Parent-Grandparent Coparenting

- Li & Liu (2019) examined the influences of parent-grandparent coparenting relationship dyads (N = 317) on young children’s social competence.

- Results showed that child outcomes efficacy mediated the relationship between parent-grandparent coparenting relationship and children’s social competence.

- These findings highlight the contribution of the harmonious parent-grandparent coparenting relationship and maternal parenting self-efficacy to young children’s socialization.

Coparenting and Father Engagement

- Fagan & Palkovitz (2019) examined a sample of 3,464 low-income couples from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to longitudinally study both mothers’ and fathers’ perceptions of coparental support and paternal engagement across Years 1 to 5 after the birth of a child.

- Results provided partial evidence for bidirectional effects among coparenting support and father engagement during the first 5 years after the birth of a child.

- There was a consistent pattern of maternal and paternal perception of coparenting support predicting father engagement throughout early childhood.
Coparenting and Incarceration

- McLeod et al., (2019) explored the relationship of coparenting and child outcomes of children’s whose father was incarcerated.
- Fathers tended to assess the co-parenting relationships slightly stronger than did mothers.
- Coparenting relationship did not have a significant direct influence on sons’ educational outcomes across waves.
- Coparenting did decrease the effect of incarceration on sons’ outcomes.

Coparenting Interventions

- Pilkington et al., (2019) identified 16 randomized controlled trials that evaluated 14 coparenting interventions (9 perinatal period; 5 parents of children).
- Of the 12 trials that examined coparenting outcomes, eight reported an effect on at least one measure of paternal coparenting behaviour.
- Success was moderate

Coparenting Intervention

- Doss et al., (2019) randomly assigned 213 coparents to receive the web-based Our Relationship program or wait-list.
- Couples in the intervention experienced a significant decrease in coparenting conflict during the intervention (Cohen’s $d = -0.27$).
- Parent-reported children’s externalizing (WG $d = -0.40$) and internalizing (WG $d = -0.27$) symptoms significantly decreased from baseline to the 1-year follow-up.
Coparenting Intervention

- Results indicated that parents report benefit from completing the program and perceive a significant improvement in regard to their ability to co-parent successfully.
- There were significant positive correlation between parents’ self-assessment of their skill level and their group leaders' evaluation of their skill.

2019 Year in Review

- The resurgence of the importance of coparenting.
- Coparenting as a central focus point for improving parent-child relationships.
- The expansion of coparenting across family dynamics.
- Influence of coparenting on parenting quality, time and future adjustment of children.

Coparenting Intervention

- Coparenting is an ideal target for interventions because it is:
  - Modifiable
  - Nonstigmatizing
  - Important for both mothers and fathers
  - Associated with positive parent and child outcomes.
Application to Custody Disputes

- Coparenting supports a family systems approach.
- Rather than dissolving bonds, we need to focus on transforming them.
- Must consider the gap between legal and clinical definitions of joint, shared, and coparenting.
- Need to move away from vindication to civility so to assist with a smoother transition to the coparenting relationship.

For Further Information

Michael Saini, Ph.D., M.S.W., R.S.W.
Associate Professor
Factor-Inwentash Chair of Law and Social Work
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto
246 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1A1
Tel: 416-946-5027 Fax: 416-946-8846
Email: michael.saini@utoronto.ca