



REVIEW ARTICLE

Coparenting after marital dissolution and children's mental health: a systematic review^{☆,☆☆}



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Received 30 July 2015; accepted 30 August 2015

Available online 20 May 2016

KEYWORDS

Coparenting;
Mental health;
Divorce;
Marital dissolution;
Children;
Parenting

Abstract

Objective: Research has shown that coparenting is a vital family mechanism in predicting mental health in children and adolescents. Considering the increasing prevalence of marital dissolution in Western societies, the objective of this systematic review was to summarize the key results of empirical studies that tested the association between mental health of children and coparenting after marital dissolution.

Data source: The studies were obtained from three databases (PsycInfo, PubMed, and Web of Knowledge), published between January 2000 and October 2014. The titles, abstracts, and key words of the generated citations were independently reviewed by two investigators to consensually select the articles that met the inclusion criteria. Articles that used psychometrically valid tools to measure at least one mental health indicator and at least one dimension of coparenting in samples with divorced parents were included in the review.

Data synthesis: Of the 933 screened articles, 11 met the inclusion criteria. Significant positive associations were found between coparental conflict and behavioral problems and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and somatization. Significant positive associations were also found between other specific dimensions of coparenting (coparental support, cooperation, and agreement), overall mental health, self-esteem, and academic performance.

Conclusions: The integrated analysis of these studies suggests that coparenting is a key mechanism within the family system for the prediction of child mental health after marital dissolution,

[☆] Please cite this article as: Lamela D, Figueiredo B. Coparenting after marital dissolution and children's mental health: a systematic review. J Pediatr (Rio J). 2016;92:331–42.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Coparentalidade;
Saúde mental;
Divórcio;
Dissolução conjugal;
Crianças;
Parentalidade

and thus, it is recommended that pediatricians, psychologists, and other health professionals consider coparenting as a psychosocial variable for children's mental health assessment and diagnosis.

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Coparentalidade após a dissolução conjugal e saúde mental das crianças: uma revisão sistemática

Resumo

Objetivo: A investigação tem demonstrado a coparentalidade como um dos mecanismos familiares centrais na predição da saúde mental em crianças e adolescentes. Considerando o aumento da prevalência da dissolução conjugal nas sociedades ocidentais, o objetivo desta revisão sistemática foi sumarizar os resultados-chave de estudos empíricos que testaram a associação entre a saúde mental das crianças e a coparentalidade pós-dissolução conjugal.

Fontes dos dados: Foram triados estudos de três bases de dados (PsycInfo, Pubmed e Web of Knowledge), publicados entre janeiro de 2000 e outubro de 2014. Os títulos, resumos e palavras-chave das citações geradas foram independentemente analisados por dois investigadores para selecionar consensualmente os artigos que cumpriam os critérios de inclusão. Foram incluídos artigos que utilizassem instrumentos psicometricamente válidos para medir pelo menos um indicador de saúde mental e pelo menos uma dimensão da coparentalidade em amostras com pais divorciados.

Síntese dos dados: Dos 933 artigos triados, 11 cumpriram os critérios de inclusão. Foram encontradas associações significativamente positivas entre o conflito coparental e problemas de comportamento e sintomas de ansiedade, depressão e somatização. Foram também encontradas associações significativamente positivas entre outras dimensões específicas da coparentalidade (suporte, cooperação e acordo coparentais) saúde mental global, autoestima e rendimento acadêmico.

Conclusões: A análise integradora destes estudos sugeriu que a coparentalidade é um mecanismo-chave dentro do sistema familiar para a predição da saúde mental infantil pós-dissolução conjugal, sendo recomendado que pediatras, psicólogos e outros profissionais de saúde considerem a coparentalidade como uma variável psicossocial na avaliação e diagnóstico da saúde mental em crianças.

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Introduction

The impact of life events on the psychological functioning of human beings has aroused significant interest in psychology literature, as shown by the diversity of conceptual definitions and explanatory models developed over the past decades.^{1,2} In this context, given its high prevalence in Western countries, the impact of marital dissolution on psychological function has been the target of systematic cross-sectional and longitudinal research. The dissolution of the family's marital subsystem appears to have significant implications for psychological function, not only for the adults who experience it, but also for the children. Research has attempted to describe and understand the individual, family, social, and contextual variables that predict mental health after marital dissolution, either in adults or in the children whose parents ended their intimate relationship.

Marital dissolution, while a family life transition characterized by structural, processual, and socio-emotional reorganizations, appears to be empirically associated with

the adjustment levels of all family members. One of the most often studied topics in psychology literature about families with separated parents is the impact of marital dissolution on mental health indicators and children's psychological development. Although the association between marital dissolution and problems in the psychological function of children is not linear,³⁻⁶ cross-sectional and longitudinal results have shown that children of divorced parents are at increased risk for maladaptive outcomes.^{4,5}

However, some authors have stated that the psychological functioning of children after their parents' marital dissolution is not precisely associated with the end of the marital relationship itself, but with the family functioning after this transition.^{3,7,8} Although the investigation has traditionally focused on the study of how parenting and parents' mental health influence the mental health of children, a systematic body of research has also suggested that the quality of interaction between parents after marital dissolution – either while performing joint parental responsibilities, or as former couple – is a strong predictor of mental health

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