



Dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction: A meta-analysis☆



Mariana K. Falconier^{a,*}, Jeffrey B. Jackson^a, Peter Hilpert^b, Guy Bodenmann^c

^a Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, United States

^b University of Washington, United States

^c University of Zurich, Switzerland

HIGHLIGHTS

- Meta-analysis of studies examining association between relationship satisfaction and dyadic coping
- Dyadic coping and its different dimensions predicted relationship satisfaction.
- No effect of gender, age, relationship length, education level, and nationality
- Positive forms of dyadic coping were a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction than negative forms.
- Dyadic coping by partner and by both partners were stronger predictors of relationship satisfaction.

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ABSTRACT

Meta-analytic methods were used to empirically determine the association between dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction. Dyadic coping is a systemic conceptualization of the processes partners use to cope with stressors, such as stress communication, individual strategies to assist the other partner cope with stress, and partners' strategies to cope together. A total of 72 independent samples from 57 reports with a combined sum of 17,856 participants were included. The aggregated standardized zero-order correlation (r) for total dyadic coping with relationship satisfaction was .45 ($p = .000$). Total dyadic coping strongly predicted relationship satisfaction regardless of gender, age, relationship length, education level, and nationality. Perceptions of overall dyadic coping by partner and by both partners together were stronger predictors of relationship satisfaction than perceptions of overall dyadic coping by self. Aggregated positive forms of dyadic coping were a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction than aggregated negative forms of dyadic coping. Comparisons among dyadic coping dimensions indicated that collaborative common coping, supportive coping, and hostile/ambivalent coping were stronger predictors of relationship satisfaction than stress communication, delegated coping, protective buffering coping, and overprotection coping. Clinical implications and recommendations for future research are provided.

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☆ Author Note: Mariana K. Falconier, Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; Jeffrey B. Jackson, Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; Peter Hilpert, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of Washington; Guy Bodenmann, Department of Psychology, University of Zurich.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Human Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 7054 Haycock Rd, Suite 202c, Falls Church, VA 22043, United States. E-mail address: marianak@vt.edu (M.K. Falconier).

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The concept of dyadic coping emerged in the early 1990s in an attempt to expand individually-oriented models of stress and coping to systemic couple interactions. Prior to the development of dyadic coping, conceptualizations of stress and coping, mostly guided by the transactional model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), focused primarily on individual cognitive and emotional processes associated with the experience of stress and coping responses. The transactional model posits that individuals (a) experience stress when they perceive that their available resources are insufficient to meet the demands of a particular situation and (b) cope with stress through emotion- or problem-focused responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Even though individually-oriented stress theories suggest that stress often originates in a social context and that individual coping responses might have an impact on their environment, theorists proposed an explicitly interactional view of stress and coping processes in the couple context that emphasizes partners' interdependent processes (Bodenmann, 1997). Within the interactional view of stress and coping, partners' stress is conceptualized as being reciprocal in nature: the stress experiences of both partners are interrelated because one partner's stress becomes the other partner's stress (Revenson & Lepore, 2012). Viewing stress and coping as interpersonal instead of intrapsychic phenomena shifts understanding coping as one partner's individual responsibility to viewing coping as an interdependent couple-level process in which cognitive appraisals, stress emotions,

and coping behaviors are shared between partners (Revenson, Kayser, & Bodenmann, 2005).

Although the various developed models of dyadic coping share the notion of coping as an interdependent process between partners (Berg & Upchurch, 2007; Bodenmann, 1997, 2005; Coyne & Smith, 1991; DeLongis & O'Brien, 1990; Kayser, Watson, & Andrade, 2007), they differ in terms of focal areas. The *Congruence Model* (Revenson, 1994) attends primarily to the congruence or fit between partners' individual coping styles (e.g., problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, emotional expression), whereas the rest of the dyadic coping models focus on what partners do to help each other cope with stress. The *Relationship-Focused Coping Model* (RFCM; Coyne & Smith, 1991; DeLongis & O'Brien, 1990) categorizes the types of partner responses (active engagement, empathic responding, overprotection, protective buffering) to the partner experiencing stress. The *Systemic-Transactional Model* (STM; Bodenmann, 1997) focuses on partners' mutual communication of stress, the negative and positive support that partners provide to each other, and conjoint strategies to cope with common stressors. The *Developmental-Contextual Coping Model* (DCCM; Berg & Upchurch, 2007) focuses on partners' efforts to deal with common stressors and the impact of both developmental (e.g., relationship length, life cycle stage) and contextual issues (e.g., cultural, socio-economic).

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