

Child behavior is worse when dads feel unsupported

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Credit: Robert Kraft/public domain

Children are more likely to display troublesome behaviour in families in which the father feels unsupported by his partner.

The findings by Doctoral Researcher Rachel Latham from the University of Sussex will be presented today, Thursday 7 May 2015, at the Annual Conference of the British Psychology Society being held in Liverpool.

The ways in which parents work together in their roles has been shown to be an important factor in relation to the [behaviour](#) of their [children](#). However, few studies have distinguished between [mothers'](#) and fathers' perceptions of the support they receive from their partners.

Supportive co-parenting is evidenced by parents' sharing [child](#) rearing values, expressing positive emotion with each other during interactions with their child and supporting their partner's parenting efforts.

The study examined the contribution of both parents' perceptions of co-parent support and undermining in association with preschool children's behaviour.

Mothers and fathers from 106 families completed questionnaires about parenting practices and telephone interviews relating to their relationship quality and co-parenting techniques. All families consisted of both biological parents who were married or living together.

Rachel Latham's analyses showed that for fathers, perceptions of poor support from their partner were negatively associated with their children's behaviour. This related to more reported incidents of a child acting defiantly or deliberately breaking toys.

For mothers, feeling unsupported by their partners did not relate to their child's behaviour.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of involving fathers as well as mothers in the study of family and children's wellbeing.

Although the study has only established a link rather than a cause, Rachel suggests that a number of reasons may account for the findings, such as maternal gatekeeping by which the mother limits the father's child rearing input.

They may also be connected to the societal expectations of fathers.

Rachel Latham said: "Compared to mothering, the fathering role may be less clearly socially defined and fathers may withdraw from it. Whereas mothers - and fathers - may see the mother's role as less discretionary than fathers. Or it could be simply that fathers don't feel as confident or competent in their role because, although it is changing, commonly they are still less likely to be the primary child carer."

She adds: "My results suggest that in the long term, family therapeutic interventions that aim to improve the co-parent relationship may be informed by paying particular attention to how much [fathers](#) feel supported by their co-parent."

More information: Poster presentation: Mothers' and fathers' perceptions of coparent support and undermining: associations with preschool children's behaviour, The British Psychological Society Annual Conference is from 5 - 7 May 2015 at the Arena and Convention Centre (ACC) Liverpool.

Provided by British Psychological Society

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