Maternal Employment and the Mother-Child Relationship
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Introduction

- It has been suggested that a mother’s employment status affects the quality of emotional support she gives her children as well as the quantity of time she spends with them, factors which play a large role in children's development. (Spanier, Melick, Sure, & Spivey, 2006).
- Developmental theories and parenting research suggest a relationship exists between the level of emotional support provided in the home, and child behavior problems (McCarty, Zimmerman, Diguiseppe, & Christakis, 2005).

Research Questions

- Do children of stay-at-home mothers exhibit differences in mother-child relationship quality when compared to children of employed mothers?
- Do these differences exhibit by biological sex of the child?

Participants

- Participants were 252 dyads aged 8-12 (M = 9.6, SD = 1.4) who took part in the Twins, Adoptees, Peers and Siblings (TAPS) study (McGuire et al., 2010).
- The families were predominantly middle class, with 63% of European ancestry.
- Parents of children who experienced birth difficulties that may have affected behavioral development were excluded.

Measures

- The children completed multiple questionnaires as part of a three-hour home interview about their family relationships:
  - Maternal Warmth: children completed a measure of perceived maternal warmth (Schafer, 1965); α = .86
  - Maternal Conflict: children completed a measure of perceived maternal conflict (Crouter, Bumpus, Davis, & McIale, 2005); α = .87
  - Maternal Trust: children completed a measure of perceived maternal trust (Crouter, Bumpus, Davis, & McIale, 2005); α = .86
- Each mother reported her occupation:
  - Stay-at-Home mothers, retired mothers, or unemployed mothers were listed as “Homemakers” (91).
  - Mothers with part-time or full-time careers were listed as “Employed” (174).

Results

- Independent t-tests were used to compare mean scores of employed mothers to stay-at-home mothers for maternal warmth, t(212) = .646, ns, maternal conflict, t(252) = .060, ns, and maternal trust t(213) = .645, ns.
- There were no significant statistical differences between the groups in relationship quality.
- ANOVAs showed that maternal employment status and gender did not have a significant interaction with maternal warmth F(1, 250) = 1.372, ns, maternal conflict F(1, 250) = 2.813, ns, or maternal trust F(1, 250) = .742, ns, although the slight differences were favorable for daughters of stay-at-home mothers, and unfavorable for sons of stay-at-home mothers.

Mother-Child Relationship

- Maternal Warmth
- Maternal Conflict
- Maternal Trust

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Conclusions

- Results of this study suggest that in general, a mother’s employment status has little effect the relationship she has with her children.
- However, the slight gender differences in the children of employed compared to stay-at-home mothers suggest it is possible the time a mother spends with her sons or daughters is not necessarily equally necessary or beneficial. Further analyses are needed to better understand these differences.
- Possible future directions should include further investigation into the gender differences of behaviors of stay-at-home mothers, and investigation of the same relationships in children of stay-at-home fathers.
- Limitations to this design include: a small number of children of stay-at-home mothers, and a lack of information of time spent at home with children, and high rates of twins in samples which could change maternal responsibilities, stress levels and relationships with children.

Research References