

# Marital tension between mom and dad can harm each parent's bond with child, study finds

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Children suffer consequences, too, when mom and dad argue or have tension in their relationship, experts warn.

Dads, in particular, let the [negative emotions](#) and tension from their marriage spill over and harm the bond they have with their child, says a new study's lead author, psychologist Chrystyna D. Kouros, Southern

Methodist University, Dallas.

The findings drive home the conclusion that the quality of a marriage is closely tied to each parent's bond with their child, Kouros said.

The findings are based on data provided by 203 families, where family members completed daily diary entries for 15 days. Moms and [dads](#) rated the quality of their marriage and their [relationship](#) with their child at the end of each day.

The authors found that when parents reported tension and conflict in their marriage, simultaneously that day's interactions with their child were peppered with tension and conflict.

Even so, distinct differences also were identified in [moms](#) and dads.

In situations where the quality of the marriage was low, moms appeared to compartmentalize the problems they were having in their marriage by the next day.

"In fact, in that situation, moms appeared to compensate for their marital tension," Kouros said. "Poor marital quality actually predicted an improvement in the relationship between the mom and the child. So, the first day's adverse spillover is short lived for moms."

That was not the case for dads, the researchers found.

"In families where the mom was showing signs of depression, dads on the other hand let the marital tension spill over, with the result being poorer interactions with their child, even on the next day," she said.

**Couple's marriage is a hub or anchor for the entire**

## family

Marriage quality, the authors concluded, affects the whole family, said Kouros, an assistant professor in SMU's Department of Psychology.

"We see from the findings that the [marriage](#) is a hub relationship for the family," she said. "The quality of that relationship spills over into each parent's interactions with the [child](#). So if mom and dad are fighting, it will show up initially—and in some cases on the second day—in a poorer quality relationship with their kids."

**More information:** The authors reported their findings in the scientific article "Spillover between marital quality and parent-child relationship quality: Parental depressive symptoms as moderators," published recently in the *Journal of Family Psychology*.

Provided by Southern Methodist University

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