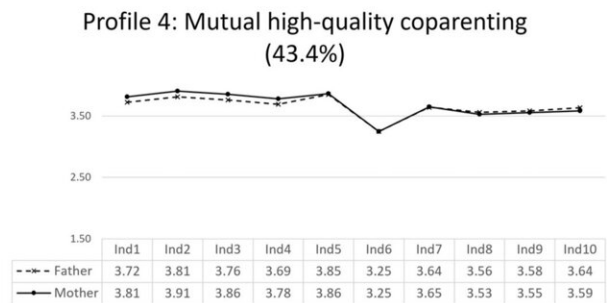
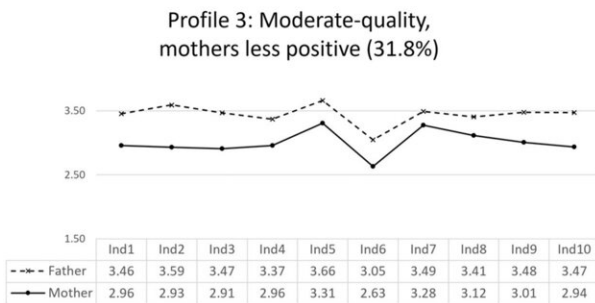
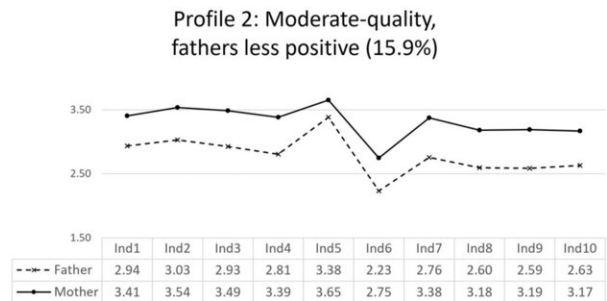
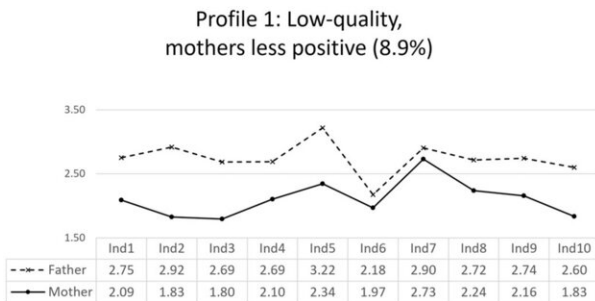


How moms and dads view each other as co-parents affects kids, suggests study

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Mean Scores for Coparenting Quality Indicators of the Four Profiles. *Note.* Ind1: and I work out a good solution together; Ind2: acts like the kind of parent I want for my child(ren); Ind3: I can turn to for support and advice; Ind4: When I have to make rules for the child(ren), backs me up; Ind5: The spouse takes his/her responsibilities for the children seriously; Ind6: Setting rules for or disciplining the child(ren); Ind7: The activities that the child(ren) participate in; Ind8: How money is spent on the child(ren); Ind9: Who does childcare tasks; Ind10: The amount of time each of you spend with the children. Credit: *Child Development* (2023). DOI: 10.1111/cdev.13904

How mothers and fathers see each other as co-parents of their children plays a key role in how well-adjusted their kids become, a new study suggests.

Researchers found that, in a sample of low-income couples, [children](#) have the best outcomes when both parents saw their co-parenting relationship as highly positive and worst when both parents viewed their relationship as poor.

However, child outcomes diverged when couples saw their co-parenting relationship as moderately good, but [mothers](#) and fathers had different views on each other as co-parents, said Sarah Schoppe-Sullivan, lead author of the study, professor of psychology at The Ohio State University, and the president of the board of the Council on Contemporary Families.

"The best outcome for children was when both parents saw their co-parenting relationship as positive. But children were almost as well-adjusted when the relationship quality was moderate and mothers were less positive about co-parenting relative to fathers," Schoppe-Sullivan said.

Child outcomes suffered, though, when it was fathers who were less positive about co-parenting, the study revealed.

The study was published online recently in the journal *Child Development*.

Previous studies have shown that parents with better co-parenting relationships are more effective as parents and their children are more well-adjusted—for example, they have fewer behavior problems and better [social relationships](#) with others. But most of the previous research has been done in middle-class white families and relied solely on

mothers' perspectives on the co-parenting relationship.

The participants in this new study were 2,915 low-income couples in seven U.S. states who took part in the Supporting Healthy Marriages program. All couples had a child under 5 years old.

Participants were asked about their co-parenting relationship with their partner—in other words, how they related to each other as parents.

"Co-parents with high-quality relationships provide emotional support to one another and back up each other's parenting decisions," Schoppe-Sullivan said.

Eighteen months after couples reported on their co-parenting relationship, they were asked to report on their child's social competence and behavioral adjustment.

Based on the reports from mothers and fathers about their co-parenting relationship, the researchers identified four co-parenting groups. The largest—43% of the sample—were the parents who both saw their co-parenting relationship as highly positive.

The next largest group (32%) were parents who both saw their relationship as moderately positive, but mothers were less positive about fathers' co-parenting.

"Their children were nearly as well-adjusted as parents who were both positive about their co-parenting relationship," Schoppe-Sullivan said.

The fact that these two groups made up the majority of the sample was a significant finding, Schoppe-Sullivan said.

"Low-income couples often face a variety of challenges that can make

parenting more difficult than it is for middle-class couples, so it is encouraging that three-quarters of them had co-parenting relationships that led to good outcomes for their children," she said.

The next largest group (16%) were those who reported a moderate-quality co-parenting relationship, but the fathers were less positive than the mothers. The fourth group (9%) consisted of couples who reported low-quality co-parenting relationships, with the mothers especially critical of the fathers.

These two groups had children who were less well-adjusted than kids in the other groups.

One question the study raises is why children are less well-adjusted when fathers are less positive than mothers about their co-parenting relationship.

The data from the study can't answer that conclusively, Schoppe-Sullivan said. But the study did show that psychologically distressed dads were more likely to be in the "fathers less positive" group than in other groups.

Distressed dads may prompt mothers to push them away from parenting duties, which may lead fathers to develop further psychological problems and be less happy about their co-parenting role.

"That may lead to more conflict between the parents, more disagreement on parenting decisions, and less positive engagement between fathers and their children," Schoppe-Sullivan said.

"All that may play a role in their children's poorer adjustment."

When mothers are less positive than fathers, that may indicate that

mothers feel that fathers are not contributing enough to parenting, she said. Given that it is common for mothers to feel that way, it may not lead to as much conflict between the parents as when fathers are less positive, which may be why the children are relatively well-adjusted.

Overall, the results suggest that practitioners who work with [parents](#) may want to pay special attention when [fathers](#) are less positive than mothers about their co-parenting [relationship](#), she said.

More information: Sarah J. Schoppe-Sullivan et al, Patterns of coparenting and young children's social–emotional adjustment in low-income families, *Child Development* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/cdev.13904](#)

Provided by The Ohio State University

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