

PSIHOLOGIA DEZVOLTĂRII

THE IMPORTANCE OF COPARENTAL BEHAVIORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL SECURITY IMPORTANȚA COMPORTAMENTELOR COPARENTALE ÎN DEZVOLTAREA SECURITĂȚII EMOȚIONALE A COPIILOR

CZU: 159.942.5/.922.7.8:37.018.1=111

DOI: 10.46728/pspj.2024.v45.i2.p16-23

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of coparental behaviors on the development of children's emotional security by identifying the relationships between different types of coparental behaviors (positive and negative). The research sample included 150 children aged 8 to 15 years, and their parents.

Results analysis underscores the critical role of coparental behaviors and interparental dynamics in the development of children's emotional security. Children and adolescents assess their parents based on perceived emotional availability; an absence of such availability is associated with heightened emotional reactivity and anxiety. Destructive interparental conflicts undermine emotional security, generating negative emotional and behavioral reactions. Constructive conflict management provides positive problem-solving models, strengthening children's sense of stability and security.

Keywords: coparental behaviors, parental conflict, emotional security.

Rezumat

Scopul cercetării este de a investiga impactul comportamentelor coparentale asupra dezvoltării securității emoționale a copiilor prin identificarea relațiilor dintre diferitele tipuri de comportamente coparentale (pozitive și negative). Eșantionul de cercetare a inclus 150 de copii cu vârsta cuprinsă între 8 și 15 ani, împreună cu părinții lor.

Analiza rezultatelor a evidențiat importanța comportamentelor coparentale și a dinamicii interparentale în dezvoltarea securității emoționale a copiilor. Copiii și adolescenții își evaluează părinții pe baza disponibilității emoționale, iar lipsa acestora poate duce la creșterea reactivității emoționale și a anxietății. Conflictele interparentale distructive subminează securitatea emoțională, generând reacții emoționale și comportamentale negative. Managementul constructiv al conflictelor oferă modele pozitive de rezolvare a problemelor, întărind sentimentul de stabilitate și securitate al copiilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: comportamente coparentale, conflict parental, securitate emoțională.

Introduction Research indicates that coparental behaviors during childhood significantly shape young adults' sense of security. A. Sroufe and N. Weinfield emphasized the strong association between these early interactions and later feelings of security, while M. Cummings and T. Davies proposed that an emotionally unavailable parent leaves a child without essential support during stressful moments [12]. This unavailability profoundly affects the emotional security of children and adolescents, who assess their parents based on their availability [10, 4].

Children's assessments of their parents' availability are based on real past experiences. Negative experiences amplify children's reactivity to episodes of unavailability, a function of their evaluations and interpretations, closely linked to actual parental behavior [7]. These evaluations persist into adolescence influencing how young people approach new social contexts that demand flexibility and self-confidence.

Negative parental control can provoke fear and anxiety. Emotional distress during such interactions impairs children's ability to interpret and accept parental guidance, fostering negative emotions and even hostile perceptions. Both overcontrol or undercontrol can diminish children's sense of security, either through lack of protection or through the physical or emotional danger of harsh punishment. Research by T. Davies and colleagues demonstrates a clear correlation between parental psychological control and children's emotional security [9]. Similarly, attachment theory, as developed by J. Bowlby, emphasized the importance of protection, safety, and security in the hierarchy of human goals

[1]. The theory of emotional security, derived from this, proposes that a child's emotional security is influenced by the quality of family relationships [5].

Interparental anger, verbal antagonism, and physical aggression are unfortunately frequent in many families. These conflicts are more common in families undergoing divorce and post-divorce, where stress factors (poverty, unemployment, parental stress, relationship instability) contribute to increased conflicts and child maladjustment [2, 11].

The aim of the research is to analyze the influence of coparental behaviors on the development of children's emotional security by identifying the relationships between different types of coparental behaviors and their effects on children's emotional regulation. This research seeks aims to provide a framework for the development of therapeutic interventions that support children's emotional well-being in potentially conflictual family contexts.

Interparental conflict is defined as any major or minor interaction between parents involving a difference of opinion. Conflictual forms include destructive conflict (verbal hostility, nonverbal anger, withdrawal), constructive conflict behaviors (problem-solving), and intimate forms (partner violence, including physical aggression and sexual coercion) [6]. Many children are victims of interparental conflicts. Repeated exposure to intense and emotionally charged conflicts threatens the child's emotional security, while positively resolved conflicts strengthen the sense of stability. Constructive conflict, characterized by support, affection, and problem-solving, is associated with the reduction of negative emotions [13].

The theory of emotional security suggests that exposure to negative coparental conflicts compromises the child's well-being. Children develop an internal working model by observing how their parents manage conflicts. Destructive problem management reduces the perception of emotional security and the child's functional adaptation capacity.

In families experiencing significant interparental discord, children may become preoccupied with concerns about their own safety and well-being. Frequent exposure to destructive relationships lowers the threshold for activating the emotional security preservation process, leading to increased emotional reactivity. This increased reactivity serves as a means of regulation helping children to regain a sense of emotional security.

Children's internal representations of interparental conflict are structured as a map or alarm, allowing proactive identification of threats. The child's regulation responses may be of the "fight or flight" type, manifested through involvement or avoidance, directing resources towards reducing exposure to threat and achieving an appearance of emotional security.

The theory of emotional security provides criteria for identifying destructive and constructive conflicts, essential for prevention programs of the psychotraumatizing effects of interparental conflicts on the child. M. Cummings posits that the effects of conflicts on the family are determined by the mode of expression, with some forms being negative and others positive. Children can infer the occurrence and outcomes of conflicts without directly observing them. Conflict is harmful if it threatens the child's security. Destructive

behaviors include physical and verbal aggression, withdrawal, and the use of insults, while constructive behaviors include calm discussions, support, problem-solving, and affection. Children's emotional reactions during conflict provide the basis for distinguishing their perception of the threat to emotional security [3].

The model of emotional security theory offers a framework for understanding family conflicts and their implications for child functioning, as well as for developing prevention and intervention approaches in coparenting. The theory maintains that the feeling of protection and safety in the interparental relationship is essential for the child's well-being and their capacity for emotional and behavioral adjustment.

The purpose of this research is to Investigate the impact of coparental behaviors on the development of children's emotional security by identifying the relationships between different types of coparental behaviors (positive and negative).

A child's emotional insecurity concerning their parents becomes a primary mechanism for explaining subsequent maladaptation, evaluated through their emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions. The generous model of emotional security theory allows for the development of psychological intervention programs in cases of conflictual divorce or abuse, providing an extensive working framework in the clinic.

Research methodology

The research sample included **150 children aged 8 to 15 years**, along with their parents. The inclusion criteria were: biparental families and willingness to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria

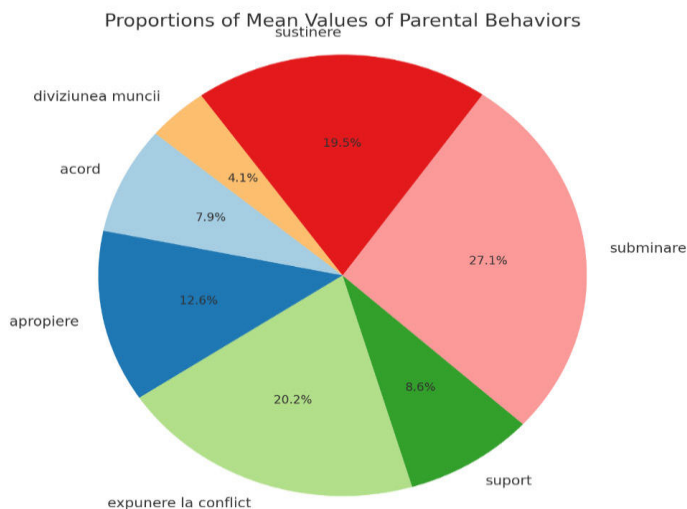


Figure 1. Diagram of the mean proportions of coparental behaviors

were: single-parent families and participants with major psychiatric diagnoses.

Research Hypothesis: Coparental behaviors have a significant effect on the development of children's emotional security: a) Coparental conflict is inversely proportional to children's emotional security; b) Children exposed to positive coparental behaviors exhibit a higher level of emotional security.

Instruments Used in the Research:

The Security in the Interparental Subsystem Scale (SSSI) developed by Davies et al. was used to measure children's perception of security in the interparental relationship [8]; the Coparental Relationship Scale (CRS) [10].

The analysis was conducted using Python (a programming language used for data analysis) and the available statistical and visualization libraries, particularly statsmodels, matplotlib, and seaborn.

Results and discussions An analysis of the mean proportions of various parental behaviors in the dataset was con-

ducted. Each segment of the chart in Figure 1 represents the mean of a specific variable (agreement, closeness, exposure to conflict, support, undermining, encouragement, division of labor), providing a visualization of the contribution of each behavior in the overall context.

Interpretation: The Undermining and Closeness scales appear to have significant proportions, suggesting that these behaviors are more prominent in the data. The Support and Division of Labor scales seem to have smaller proportions, indicating that these behaviors are less frequent or less pronounced.

For the correlation analysis, we used the Pearson correlation coefficient to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. The coefficient ranges from -1 to 1, where 1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, 0 indicates a weak or nonexistent correlation, and -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation. Values close to 1 or -1 indicate a strong correlation (positive or negative).

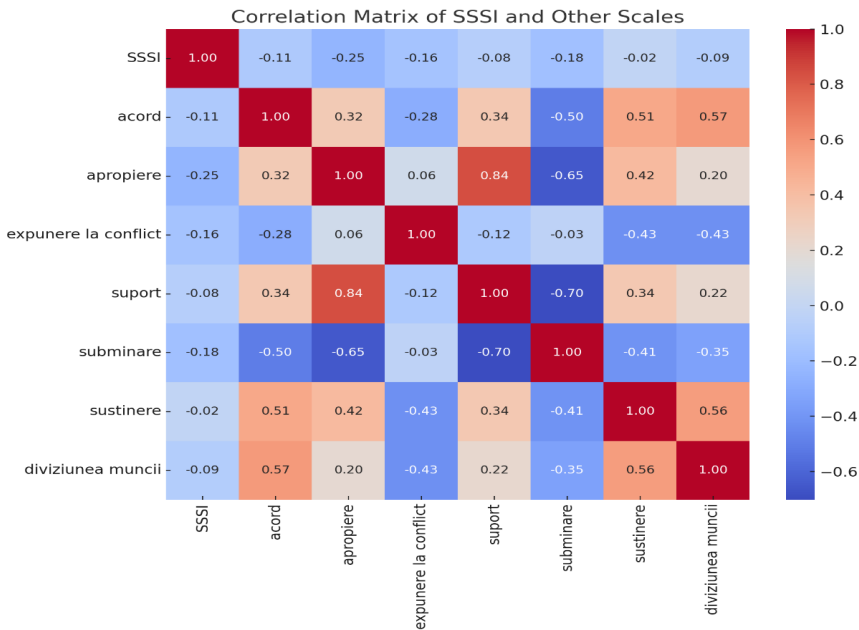


Figure 2. Correlation Matrix - Heatmap

Values close to 0 indicate a weak or non-existent correlation.

We used a heatmap, presented in Figure 2, which provides an overview of the relationships between the child's emotional insecurity and various parental behaviors. This is a graphical representation of the data where the correlation coefficients are represented by colors. The details of the visualization include: 1. The axes of the heatmap display the analyzed variables; 2. Colors indicating the magnitude and direction of the correlation (Shades of red: negative correlation, Shades of blue: positive correlation, Shades of white or light colors: weak or nonexistent correlation). The values of the correlation coefficients are annotated directly on the map to facilitate interpretation.

The results obtained from the correlation matrix were:

a) Main correlations: 1. SSSI and Agreement - correlation coefficient: -0.11:

There is a weak negative correlation between the child's emotional insecurity and parental agreement. This suggests that a higher level of agreement between parents is associated with slightly lower emotional insecurity in children. However, the low value of the correlation indicates that parental agreement does not have a major impact on the child's emotional insecurity. 2. SSSI and Closeness - correlation coefficient: -0.25: There is a moderate negative correlation between the child's emotional insecurity and parental closeness. Children who have a closer relationship with their parents tend to have lower emotional insecurity. 3. SSSI and Exposure to Conflict - correlation coefficient: -0.16: The moderate negative correlation indicates that exposure to conflicts between parents is associated with higher emotional insecurity in children. 4. SSSI and Support - correlation coefficient: -0.08: There is a very weak negative correlation

on between interparental support and the child's emotional insecurity. This suggests that interparental support does not have a significant impact on the child's emotional insecurity. 5. SSSI and Undermining - correlation coefficient: -0.18: There is a moderate negative correlation between interparental undermining and the child's emotional insecurity. Parental undermining behaviors are associated with higher emotional insecurity. 6. SSSI and Encouragement - correlation coefficient: -0.02: The very weak negative correlation suggests that parental encouragement does not have a significant impact on the child's emotional insecurity. 7. SSSI and Division of Labor - correlation coefficient: -0.09: There is a very weak negative correlation between the division of labor between parents and the child's emotional insecurity, indicating that a fair distribution of tasks does not have a major impact on the child's emotional insecurity.

b) Other notable correlations between the Scales of Coparental Behaviors: 1. Agreement and Closeness - correlation coefficient: 0.32: There is a moderate

positive correlation, suggesting that parents who agree with each other tend to be closer to their children. 2. Closeness and Support - correlation coefficient: 0.84: The very strong positive correlation indicates that parents who are close to their children also provide significant support. 3. Undermining and Support - correlation coefficient: -0.70: The strong negative correlation indicates that parents who undermine each other also provide very low support. 4. Division of Labor and Agreement - correlation coefficient: 0.57: The moderate positive correlation suggests that parents who share tasks equitably also agree with each other in decision-making.

Figure 3 illustrates the coefficients of a regression model, where the dependent variable is the Child Emotional Security Scale, and the independent variables are the scales of coparental behaviors (agreement, closeness, exposure to conflict, support, undermining, encouragement, and division of labor). The results are as follows: 1. Agreement - negative coefficient, approximately -0.35; 2. Closeness - negative coefficient, approximately



Figure 3. Regression Coefficients of Coparental Behaviors

-0.55; 3. Exposure to Conflict - negative coefficient, approximately -0.8; 4. Support - nearly neutral coefficient, approximately 0.05; 5. Undermining - negative coefficient, approximately -0.9; 6. Encouragement - positive coefficient, approximately 0.1; 7. Division of Labor - negative coefficient, approximately -0.45.

The chart illustrates that most coparental behaviors have a significant effect on children's emotional insecurity. Agreement, closeness, exposure to conflict, undermining, and division of labor show negative coefficients, indicating that improving these parental behaviors can reduce children's emotional insecurity. On the other hand, interparental support has a very limited effect, and coparental encouragement has a slightly positive coefficient, suggesting complex effects that warrant further analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

The study highlights the importance of coparental behaviors and interparental dynamics in the development of children's emotional security. Children and adolescents assess their parents based on emotional availability, and the lack of it can lead to increased emotional reactivity and anxiety. Destructive interparental conflicts undermine emotional security, generating negative emotional and behav-

ioral reactions. In contrast, constructive conflict management provides positive problem-solving models, strengthening children's sense of stability and security.

The theory of emotional security offers a robust framework for developing psychological prevention and intervention programs aimed at protecting and enhancing children's emotional well-being in tense family contexts. Therapeutic approaches based on this theory enable more effective interventions, contributing to creating a healthy and secure family environment essential for children's harmonious and balanced development.

Based on this analysis, we can identify certain limitations, such as the use of a cross-sectional design that involved collecting data at a single point in time, making it difficult to establish causal relationships between coparental behaviors and children's emotional security. Data were collected through self-reporting by parents and children, a procedure that may introduce subjective bias. Individual perceptions may vary and affect the accuracy of the results. There may be additional factors influencing children's emotional security, such as cultural, economic, educational, and health factors, which were not considered in this study. These aspects pave the way for further studies of greater complexity.

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Primit la redacție 10.09.2024

Aprobat spre publicare: 15.11.2024