Marital Satisfaction and the Transition to Fatherhood

Brandon McDaniel
Sheila Lopez
Erin K. Holmes

The Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference showcases some of the best student research from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. The mentored learning program encourages undergraduate students to participate in hands-on and practical research under the direction of a faculty member. Students create these posters as an aide in presenting the results of their research to the public, faculty, and their peers.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
McDaniel, Brandon; Lopez, Sheila; and Holmes, Erin K., "Marital Satisfaction and the Transition to Fatherhood" (2010). FHSS Mentored Research Conference. 80.
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub/80

This is brought to you for free and open access by the Family, Home, and Social Sciences at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in FHSS Mentored Research Conference by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Marital Satisfaction: The Transition to Fatherhood

Brandon McDaniel, Sheila Lopez, & Erin Holmes

Family, Home and Social Sciences College

Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to briefly explore what creates a better adjustment for men during the transition to fatherhood, adding needed understanding of what specific factors have more prominent effects on fathers' marital quality. Thus, the study was conducted mainly for descriptive purposes; however, we also hypothesized that: (1) men who were very satisfied (M = 11.23, SD = 1.56) felt significantly more appreciation from their spouses than did those who were merely satisfied (M = 9.56, SD = 2.69) (F = 6.28, p < .01). We found that marital quality did not correlate highly with the birth of their child (r = .34, p > .05). In the past, we found that those who expected less marital quality before becoming parents (M = 3.47, SD = 1.19, r = .58) felt better able to meet the pressures of providing for their family (M = 3.50, p = .04).

Methods

Participants

Fifty-four fathers who had transitioned to parenthood within the last year responded to our survey. Participants ranged from age 22 to 31, with about 91% being between the age of 23 and 26, the mean age was 25. Most of the respondents were Caucasian (87%) with only their spouse living in the household (98%), and had a household income of less than $50,000 (94%). All respondents were in their first marriage and had graduated from college or were currently attending college.

Means

This study examined a range of self-reported factors and their possible relation to father's marital satisfaction. The survey's 37 questions were divided into 13 sections, representing each factor or sub-factor: (1) personal motivations, (2) religious attitudes, (3) marital satisfaction, (4) communication, (5) emotional congruence, (6) financial congruence, (7) expectations, (8) assessment of and actual division of household labor and child care tasks, (9) satisfaction with the division of tasks, (10) appreciation, (11) family support, (12) values/beliefs, and (13) personal attitude about transition. The scale used to rate respondents' level of agreement with each item was 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree. All responses were calculated using the mean scores across all groups. For example, in order to measure frequency of felt appreciation a scale ranging from not at all (1) to not at all (5). Each question was answered on a 5-point level scale with higher scores indicating stronger agreement. The survey concluded with an open-response question: 'What do you feel affects the quality of your relationship with your spouse' during your first year of parenthood? What do you feel affects the quality of your relationship with your spouse the most at the period of your life together? Most of the questions were rated on a 5-point level scale (ranging from not at all to not at all strongly agree), while some questions required more specific answers.

Results

Marital Satisfaction

Fathers who were very satisfied (M = 11.23, SD = 1.56) felt significantly more appreciation from their spouses than did those who were merely satisfied (M = 9.56, SD = 2.69) (F = 6.28, p < .01). We found that marital quality did not correlate highly with the birth of their child (r = .34, p > .05). In the past, we found that those who expected less marital quality before becoming parents (M = 3.47, SD = 1.19, r = .58) felt better able to meet the pressures of providing for their family (M = 3.50, p = .04).

Expectations

We examined the relationship between fathers' perceived satisfaction at the time of the baby's birth and their expectations before becoming parents (M = 3.50, SD = 1.19, r = .58). We found that these two variables were not significantly correlated (r = .34, p > .05). In the past, we found that those who expected less marital quality before becoming parents (M = 3.47, SD = 1.19, r = .58) felt better able to meet the pressures of providing for their family (M = 3.50, p = .04).

Personal Attitudes

On the survey's 37 questions, we found that those who felt strongly that they had changed their attitudes about transitions (r = .58, p < .01) had more appreciation from their spouses than those who strongly agreed that they had not (r = .58, p > .05). Among those who expected less marital quality before becoming parents (M = 3.47, SD = 1.19, r = .58) felt better able to meet the pressures of providing for their family (M = 3.50, p = .04).

References


What do you feel affects the quality of your relationship with your spouse the most at the period of your life together?

Category N %
Spend time together 23 58%
Communication 11 28%
Mentioned the baby specifically 7 18%
Busy schedules 7 18%
Work pressures 7 18%
Personal attitudes 7 18%
Assisting spouse with care tasks 5 13%
Sleep 4 10%
Physical Intimacy 3 8%
Faith 2 5%

*Responses coded into multiple categories (N=56)

Conclusion

Although we were unable to get a complete picture of fathers’ marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood, we believe our results do indicate that two factors did contribute to an overall aspect of fathers’ marital satisfaction: (1) communication, and (2) increased appreciation. With fathers’ satisfaction with the division of household labor and child care tasks, we are seeing significant associations with the birth of the child. This study suggests that fathers who contribute more financially to the family feel more appreciation from their spouses, and those who feel more appreciated have a higher marital satisfaction. Understanding their expectations were based on maternal motivations, religious attitudes, and marital satisfaction as well as factors like communication. The study was conducted mainly for descriptive purposes; however, we also hypothesized that: (1) men who were very satisfied (M = 11.23, SD = 1.56) felt significantly more appreciation from their spouses than did those who were merely satisfied (M = 9.56, SD = 2.69) (F = 6.28, p < .01). We found that marital quality did not correlate highly with the birth of their child (r = .34, p > .05). In the past, we found that those who expected less marital quality before becoming parents (M = 3.47, SD = 1.19, r = .58) felt better able to meet the pressures of providing for their family (M = 3.50, p = .04).

Hypotheses

The purpose of the current study was to briefly explore what creates a better adjustment for men during their transition to fatherhood, adding needed understanding of what specific factors have more prominent effects on fathers’ marital quality. Thus, the study was conducted mainly for descriptive purposes; however, we also hypothesized that: (1) men who were very satisfied (M = 11.23, SD = 1.56) felt significantly more appreciation from their spouses than did those who were merely satisfied (M = 9.56, SD = 2.69) (F = 6.28, p < .01). We found that marital quality did not correlate highly with the birth of their child (r = .34, p > .05). In the past, we found that those who expected less marital quality before becoming parents (M = 3.47, SD = 1.19, r = .58) felt better able to meet the pressures of providing for their family (M = 3.50, p = .04).

Divison of Housework

Factor Satisfied Mean Neutral Std Deviation

Mean Scores Across Satisfaction with the Division of Household Labor and Child Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td>6.92</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>11.22</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Pressure</td>
<td>8.81</td>
<td>9.01</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>9.41</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spend time together</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned the baby</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy schedules</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work pressures</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal attitudes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting spouse with</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Intimacy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses coded into multiple categories (N=56)