Does Attachment to Parents Mediate the Relationship between Marital Conflict and Child Self-Regulation

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Does Attachment to Parents Mediate the Negative Relationship Between Parental Conflict and Children’s Self-Regulation?

Lisa Tensmeyer Hansen, B.S. * James M. Harper, Ph.D. * Jeremy Yorgason, Ph.D.

This longitudinal study considers the effect of parent-child attachment on the self-regulation of children. Four hundred and forty-eight families from the Northwestern U.S. were surveyed as part of Brigham Young University’s Flourishing Families Project. Each family studied included a child between the ages of 11 and 13. **Couple conflict** and the child’s attachment to parents were assessed at time 1 and the child’s self-regulation was assessed each year thereafter for three years.

**RESULTS**

Higher couple conflict predicted lower attachment to father and to mother at time 1 with a greater negative effect for fathers. Higher scores on attachment to father predicted greater initial levels of child self-regulation (at time 2) but not slopes of child self-regulation (Table 2).

Attachment to mother did not predict initial levels or slope of self-regulation.

**EFFECT OF COUPLE CONFLICT ON CHILD ATTACHMENT (STANDARDIZED)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment to</th>
<th>Change Estimate</th>
<th>S. E.</th>
<th>Two-tailed P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>-0.351</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>-0.256</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

**EFFECT OF ATTACHMENT SCORES ON CHILD SELF-REGULATION (STANDARDIZED)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment to</th>
<th>Estimate of Change in Self-Regulation</th>
<th>S. E.</th>
<th>Two-tailed P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>0.542</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>0.160</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>N Sig.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Model results suggest that father attachment mediates the link between couple conflict and initial levels of self-regulation. Bootstrapping was used to obtain corrected standard errors, which indicated the significant indirect effect of couple conflict (with father attachment) on self-regulation. Sobel’s test confirmed the mediation at -3.967 p < .001.

This model accounted for 40% of the variation in child self-regulation measured at one year.

**CONCLUSION**

Attachment to father may be an important mechanism in the relationship between couple conflict and child self-regulation. Further research should examine whether father attachment also moderates this relationship.