



Rewards and Concerns: Marital Role Quality and Child Mental Health Disorders

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Children's Mental Health and the Family

- Approximately 11% of children and adolescents in the United States are diagnosed with mental health disorders (Corrigan & Miller, 2004; Levine & Ligenza, 2002; Marsh & Johnson, 1997).
- Family members constitute the first system of care for children with mental health needs, providing both social and instrumental support (Rosenzweig & Kendall, in press).
- Mental health disorders have a profound and potentially demoralizing effect on the family as a whole as well as the individual members (Corrigan & Miller, 2004).
- Caring for a child with a mental health disorder results in subjective burden as well as objective burden (Marsh et al., 1996).

Children's Mental Health and Parenting Roles

- In addition to typical parenting activities, parents of children with mental health disorders frequently:
 - Arrange for and participate in their children's ongoing physical and mental health treatment,
 - Face significant obstacles in locating and sustaining adequate child care, and
 - Respond to frequent health or mental health crises, sometimes requiring hospitalization of the child.
- Parents of children with mental health disorders may be blamed for inadequate parenting (Corrigan & Miller, 2004).
- The unpredictable and disruptive nature of many mental health disorders often prevents normalization of parental responsibilities (Karp & Tanarugachock, 2000).

Research Question

What is the relationship between marital role quality, parental role quality, and job role quality among parents of children with mental health disorders?

Methods

- Self-identified parents of children with mental health disorders were recruited through contacts made with parent support networks in three Western states and at national conferences on children's mental health.
- Participants were eligible for the study if they were a primary caregiver of a minor currently living in the home who had a mental health disorder and were working at least 30 hours a week.
- The investigators and their research assistants conducted interviews with the participants by telephone.
- As part of an hour-long interview, parents were asked to report on their employment and family responsibilities, their children's mental health, and their marital, parental, and job role quality.

Participants

- $N = 62$ parents caring for a child with a mental health disorder; subsample for this study was composed of the 36 parents who were either married or in a committed relationship.
- 92% of participants were women.
- Average time living with partner was 13 years.
- The majority of respondents had some college education (61%).
- The majority of participants were either employed in technical/professional (47%) or executive/managersial (25%) positions.

Discussion

- To date, no major studies have explored the marital quality and continuity of couples who care for children with mental health disorders.
- The results suggest the complexity of the issues facing couples who are parents of children with mental health difficulties.
- Identifying the direct and interactive effects of a child's mental health disorder on marital quality and continuity will allow for more effective couple-based services.
- For example, if parents feel distress in their marriages or co-parenting partnerships, they need strategies that will guide them to respond with resilience.

Limited Research

- The literature provides a theoretical basis for exploring ways in which families of children with physical illnesses and developmental disabilities manage a chronic condition.
- However, fewer theoretical explanations are available for how families experience and manage a child's mental health disorder.
- This is, in part, due to a lack of societal acceptance of mental health disabilities as real disorders with complex etiologies (Rosenzweig and Kendall, in press).

Children's Mental Health and Employment Roles

- Caring for a child with a disability often reduces opportunities for employment and advancement (Benzie et al., 2004; Hauenstein, 1990; Heiman, 2002).
- Managing ongoing crisis can result in negative family-to-work spillover (Krouse & Afifi, 2007; Leiter & Durap, 1996).
- Lack of affordable daycare and extraordinary caregiving responsibilities can make working fixed hours difficult (Rosenzweig, Brennan, Malsch, Stewart, & Bradley, in press).
- Disclosure of a child's mental health disorder can lead to stigmatization and undue scrutiny in the workplace (Rosenzweig, Brennan, Malsch, Stewart, & Conley, 2007; Corrigan, Miller & Watson, 2006; Norvilitis, Scime, & Lee, 2002).

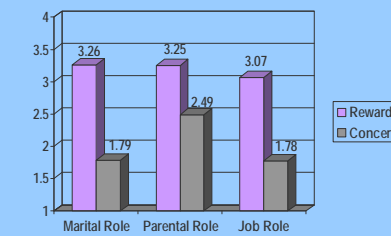
Measures

- Marital Role Quality Scale (Barnett et al., 1994).**
 - Measured on a 4-point scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Extremely."
 - 8 items measuring rewards ($\alpha = .93$)
 - e.g., "Having a partner who is a good friend."
 - 7 items measuring concerns ($\alpha = .89$)
 - e.g., "Poor communication."
 - Rewards – Concerns = Total Marital Role Quality Score.

- Parental Role Quality Scale (Barnett, Brennan, & Marshall, 1994).**
 - Measured on a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "extremely."
 - 21 items measuring rewards ($\alpha = .91$)
 - e.g., "The meaning and purpose they give your life."
 - 23 items measuring concerns ($\alpha = .90$)
 - e.g., "Feeling tied down because of the children."
 - Rewards – Concerns = Total Parental Role Quality Score.

- Job Role Quality Scale (short form) (Barnett & Brennan, 1995).**
 - Measured on a 4-point scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Extremely."
 - 13 items measuring rewards ($\alpha = .83$)
 - e.g., "Being able to set your own schedule."
 - 15 items measuring concerns ($\alpha = .82$)
 - e.g., "The job's not using your skills."
 - Rewards – Concerns = Total Job Role Quality Score.

Results: Mean Levels of Role Quality



Results

- Job concerns were significantly related to both parental concerns ($r = .42, p = .01$) and marital concerns ($r = .45, p = .005$)
- When job and parental concerns were entered simultaneously into a regression analysis as predictors of marital concerns a significant regression equation emerged, $F(2, 34) = 4.6, p < .05$, accounting for 21% of the variance in marital concerns
- Interestingly, no significant relationships were found between job, parental, and marital rewards

Future Research

- Not enough is known about the lived experience of the families with children who have mental health disorders, limiting the availability and applicability of services (Rosenzweig & Brennan, in press).
- Research agendas should aim to identify the experiences, needs, and services relevant to specific individual family members and family sub-systems (e.g., parenting couple).
- Further examination of relational quality in couples specific to those caring for children with mental health disorders is needed.
 - In addition to identifying systemic effects of both distress and adjustment, it is important to understand the social and communal ecology that influences the couple and how this context heightens and minimizes resilience.

Children's Mental Health and Marital Roles

- Studies on the effects of a child's general disability on marital quality and continuity have yielded conflicting results.
- Caring for a child with a mental health disorder often diverts time, energy, and resources away from other relationships (Karp & Tanarugachock, 2000).
- Findings of conflictual communication, lower marital satisfaction, and higher divorce rates among parents of children with mental health or chronic health disabilities have been reported (Hodapp and Krasner, 1995).
- In contrast, a lack of significant differences in marital satisfaction and marital continuity has also been reported (Cappelli, McGrath, Daniels, Manion, & Schillingler, 1994).
- Marital role quality can also be influenced by the caregivers' other roles, such as parenting and employment (Rosenzweig & Kendall, in press).

The Interdependence of Roles

- Role boundaries are permeable, with role quality in one area having the potential to effect other areas.
 - Benzie et al. (2004) found a reciprocal relationship between marital quality and parental coping styles among couples caring for children with disabilities.
 - Among mothers caring for children with chronic illnesses, rewarding employment may increase relational quality (Major, 2003).
 - Among fathers, reducing work-related responsibilities may increase marital quality (Voydynoff, 2004)
 - Kersh et al. (2006) found that, among mothers of children with developmental disabilities, those who reported greater marital quality also reported less parental stress and greater parental efficacy.

Key References

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