Predictors of triadic family interaction patterns at 13 months postpartum

Aya Shigeto, Sarah Mangelsdorf, Geoffrey Brown, & Maria Wong
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Sarah Schoppe-Sullivan
The Ohio State University
Margaret Szewczyk Sokolowski
Minneapolis, MN

Family Systems Theory

Wholeness (e.g., Cox & Paley, 1997; Minuchin, 1985, 1988)

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

Family Systems Theory

Interdependence (e.g., Cox & Paley, 1997; Minuchin, 1985, 1988)

Dyad and Triad

Considerable research on the association between marital and parent-child relationship qualities
- e.g., spillover effects (e.g., Cox, Paley, & Harter, 2001; Crockenberg & Langrock, 2001; Erel & Burman, 1995)

Not much research on the association between marital and triadic relationship qualities

Triadic Family Interaction

Studies on whole families are lacking
Most studies on triads are often with:
- Families with older children (e.g., Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1997)
- Clinical samples
  - Eating disorders
  - Mood disorders
  - Externalizing problems etc.
  (e.g., Dare & Eisler, 1997; Jones, Sellwood, & McGovern, 2005; Miklowitz, Goldstein, Nuechterlein, Snyder, & Mintz, 1988; Schwartz, Barnett, & Saba, 1983)

Triadic Family Interaction

We do know that family interaction patterns emerge early on. (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Corboz-Warnery, & Keren, 2004; McHale, 1995)

But not much known about
- HOW whole family interaction patterns emerge early in infancy
- HOW STABLE parental behaviors in a triadic context are during the first year of life
Key Questions

Explore the following three questions:

1. How is observed marital quality associated with later family interaction patterns?
2. How is parent-child interaction (in triadic context) associated with later family interaction patterns?
3. How stable are parental behaviors (in triadic context)?

Methods

- **Participants**
  - 65 families, all married
  - 82% Caucasian
  - >80% with college degree
- **Procedure**
  - 3.5 months, home observation
    - Triadic family interaction
    - Marital interaction
  - 13 months, lab observation
    - Triadic family interaction

Procedures: 3.5 months

- 3.5-month marital interaction
  - Talk about division of labor as a couple
    - How you think it is
    - How you would like it to be
- 3.5-month family interaction
  - Mother, father, and infant interact
    - Using an infant jungle gym
    - Changing the infant into a bodysuit

Procedures: 13 months

- 13-month family interaction
  - Rings
  - Shape sorter 10 mins
  - Blocks
  - A box of new toys – 5 mins
  - Cleaning up – 5 mins

Measures: 3.5 months

- **Marital Interaction (in the home)**
  - Coded on 7-pt. scales (Frosch & Mangelsdorf, 1998, 2001)
  - 2 composite variables
    - Positive marital quality
      - Enjoyment + M’s + F’s Positive Affect + Balance + Engagement
    - Negative marital quality
      - Irritation + M’s + F’s Negative Affect – Cooperation – Sensitivity – Conflict Resolution – Global rating

Measures: 3.5 months

- **Parent-child interaction in the triadic context (in the home)**
  - Mother, father coded separately on 5-pt. scales
  - 2 composite variables
    - Sensitivity
      - Sensitivity + responsiveness
    - Expressiveness
      - Positive Affect + Expressiveness + Vocalization
Measures: 13 months

- Triadic family interaction (in the lab)
  - Each parent coded on 7-pt. scales
  - 3 scales
    (YFICS; Paley, Cox, & Kanoy, 2000; SCIFF, Lindahl & Malik, 2000)
    - M's and F's Sensitivity
    - M's and F's Detachment
    - M's and F's Intrusiveness

Preliminary Results

Q1. How is observed marital quality associated with later family interaction patterns?

- Positive marital quality at 3.5 months
  - Higher Sensitive Engagement at 13 months, \( r = .37\) **
  - Higher Family Positive Affect at 13 months, \( r = .38\) **

- Negative marital quality at 3.5 months
  - No associations found

Q2. How is parent-child interaction (in triadic context) associated with later family interaction patterns?

- M's Sensitivity at 3.5 months
  - Higher Family Positive Affect at 13 months, \( r = .39\) **

- M's Expressiveness at 3.5 months
  - Higher Sensitive Engagement at 13 months, \( r = .53\) ***
  - Higher Family Positive Affect at 13 months, \( r = .38\) *

- F's Sensitivity & Expressiveness at 3.5 months
  - No associations found

Preliminary Results

Q3. How stable are parental behaviors (in triadic context)?

- M's Sensitivity at 3.5 months
  - No associations found

- M's Expressiveness at 3.5 months
  - M's higher Sensitivity at 13 months, \( r = .48\) **
  - M's lower Detachment at 13 months, \( r = -.60\) ***

- F's Sensitivity & Expressiveness at 3.5 months
  - No associations found

Conclusions

1. Positive marital quality was predictive of later family interaction.
   - Smaller variability in negative marital quality

2. Mothers’ early behaviors were predictive of later family interaction, but not fathers’.
   - Nature of the tasks?
Conclusions

3. Mothers’ behaviors were more stable than fathers’.
   - Nature of the tasks?
   - Socially scripted, clear roles for mothers, but not for fathers?

Future Directions

Explore the following:

1. Tasks that better highlight individual differences in paternal behaviors
2. Continuity/discontinuity of family interaction patterns beyond the first year
3. Implications of early family interaction patterns for child adjustment in the preschool years

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