

TRAITS OF COPARENTAL ALLIANCES. IMPLICATIONS ON PARENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Abstract: *In recent years, the issue of co-parenting has become a particularly discussed topic in the educational environment, perhaps due to the increase in the number of disorganized, separated families, or changes, etc. He is currently talking about joint parental management (Feinberg, 2002). And about the impact it has on the child in all dimensions of his life. Using the method of narrative review of academic literature, the study aims to identify the characteristics of the coparenting process and the main concerns in the field of coparenting. The work also aims to emphasize the importance of knowing the characteristics of coparenting by teachers in order to support the education and prevention of problems related to the relations between parents and children. 34 relevant researches from the databases available on Scholar were evaluated. The results indicate a complicated dynamic of parental relations both in intact families and in separated families, single-parent families, etc.*

Key words: *coparenting, coparenting alliance, education, family, dissonance, shared parenting*

Introduction

Co-parenting, or the co-parental unit as the "executive subsystem" of the family (Minuchin, 1985) is an increasingly discussed concept in today's society that refers to the sharing of the responsibility of raising a child between parents, usually in the situation where the couple is separated (Eira et al., 2021); parenting is a complex activity that leads to the formation of the child, working both individually and together to influence the child's results (Baumrind, 1991). Mangelsdorf, Laxman, Jessee, (2011) believes that the most comprehensive and inclusive definition of co-parenting is provided by Talbot and McHale (2004): an enterprise built by two or more adults who work together to raise a child for whom they share responsibility. Other authors emphasize that coparenting means much more than this shared responsibility between the two parents:

It also happens in families where fathers are not effectively involved in raising the child (Khazan, et al., 2002) including where the father does not live with the mother and children (Maccoby, Depner and Mnookin, 1990), or in families where fathers do not exist (McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, Rao, 2004). Academic literature describes several patterns of coparenting: cooperative, conflictual, autonomous, mixed (Waller, 2012) and Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004), capture several particularities of coparenting that involve structure: who can be coparents?, when does coparenting begin? and where does it take place?

Van Egeren (2001) discussed five dimensions of coparenting:

- (a) perceptions of partner support;
- (b) self-reported coparenting strategies
- (c) observed coparenting behaviors;
- (d) differences in child-rearing philosophies;
- (e) sharing of childcare.

Co-parenting education is important for several reasons, with the aim of improving relationships between parents and creating a favorable environment for child development. Some reasons why education on this topic is necessary are the well-being of the child, prevention of conflicts, promotion of effective communication, well-being, high level of functionality.

- Educating parents on co-parenting equips them to handle challenges more effectively and prioritize the child's well-being, promoting healthy development (McHale & Lindahl, 2011).
- Co-parenting programs provide tools to manage and minimize conflict, helping parents communicate constructively and collaborate despite differences. Reduced conflict can lower risks of stress and anxiety for children (Mangelsdorf, Laxman & Jessee, 2011).
- After separation, co-parenting education guides parents in building a respectful, cooperative relationship, essential for effective parenting even without a partnership.

Education regarding co-parenting

Calasanti, Bailey (1991) observes that the differential involvement of the two partners in parenting may be due to the conventional benchmarks

about motherhood and fatherhood that have been constructed since primary socialization. He believes that, by virtue of some solid beliefs and convictions, some couples still manage to build equality through intense and constant negotiations, avoiding decisions based on pegen and making professional choices and arrangements for the benefit of the family (Ehrensaft, 1990). It has become a certainty that parental education is absolutely necessary for any social category of parents (Guryan, Hurst, Kearney, 2008), but current studies focus on what its content and structure should be (Pettersson, Pettersson, Håkansson, 2004). In general, researchers suggest that the implementation of parental education programs and the inclusion of a large mass of parents has a strong positive impact on solidarity in parental alliances (Fokkema, Ter Bekke, Dykstra, 2008; Galdiolo, Roskam, 2016; de Gaulle, 2016).

Purpose

We propose to identify in the specialized literature the essential features of coparental alliances

Method

The method used is the narrative review of the specialized literature that by applying search strategies, critical analysis, critical analysis and synthesis of the literature in an organized manner (Zoltowski, Costa, Teixeira and Koller, 2014). Thus, in order to achieve the objectives, five steps were outlined, namely: formulation of research questions, location and selection of studies, critical evaluation of studies:

- extraction of essential data
- data analysis and presentation

Search strategy

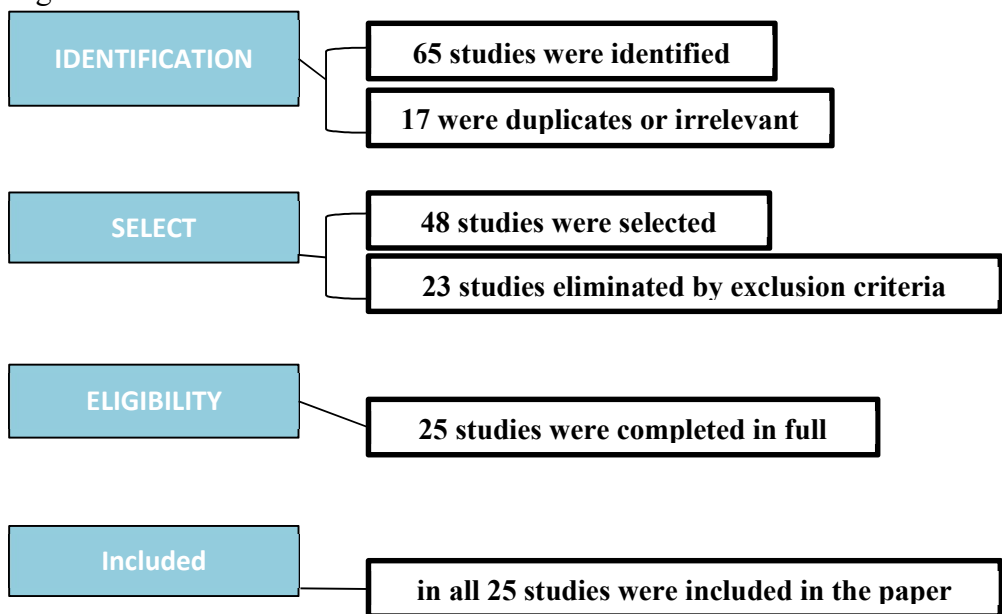
The study was carried out by accessing the databases PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar to identify the international specialized literature that researches co-parenting. The selection of articles was limited to articles published in English. The search terms used were *co-parenting*, *parenting*, *family*, *parental couple*.

Regarding the selection process of relevant scientific articles, 65 were initially identified, 17 of which were irrelevant or far removed from the scope of this study. 48 studies were selected, of which 23 were eliminated by exclusion criteria (relevance to the topic, etc.). The result was a number of 25 works that were included in the present study.

Below is a graphic representation of the PRISMA flow chart (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), which is

frequently used in systematic reviews.

Figure 1. Flowchart for identification of selected articles.



Findings

The literature has explored various aspects of coparenting, highlighting a wide range of meanings for this concept. In this regard, we present a narrative approach that provides a comprehensive perspective of the topic. Of course, within this particular methodological approach, the selection process tends to be subjective. However, the present study has significant value by clarifying the concept of coparenting and the areas it impacts. This recognition underscores the need for a nuanced understanding and interpretation of the data collected, ensuring an analysis that captures the complexity of coparenting dynamics.

Essential features of coparental alliances

The degree of solidarity and support between co-parenting partners

Solidarity is the key ingredient in effective coparenting and is in itself a characteristic of coparenting that highlights the affective and enduring quality of growing together as parents and the formation of a unified executive subsystem. Supportive alliances between coparental adults based on unity and solidarity are the premise for a high level of children's adaptability (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004), and not only that; the harmonious development, their mental health, the representations about life and relationships are shaped according to the model of the alliance of the two parents. A huge share of researchers in this field focuses on

the evaluation and identification of indicators of solidarity in the parental alliance (McHale, Khazan, et. al., 2002; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch and McHale, 2004; Stright and Neitzel, 2003).

Several methods can be used to assess coparenting solidarity. McHale (1995) believes that expressions of warmth and positive emotion between partners during interaction with or about the child are an important indicator of solidarity; Frank, Jacobson, and Avery (1988) suggest that it is evident in partners' reports of "growing up together" or "closeness" as a result of co-parenting. In another work, McHale (1997) sees solidarity in parental efforts to promote the feeling of a strong coparental dyad in the absence of the partner by speaking positively about him in front of the child; or parents' reports of sharing child-rearing values with their partner. Belsky et al., (1995) is of the opinion that these distinctive measures represent in part elements of the sense of unity that underlies a functional coparenting relationship. It can also be defined as a set of strategies and actions that support and expand the partner's efforts to achieve certain goals in raising the child (Westerman & Massoff, 2001). Within the triadic interaction, coparenting support can generate a progressive series of inventive and cooperative interactions as each parent relies on the other's cues. Alternatively, coparenting support can simply take the form of helping the other parent play with the child. However, co-parenting support takes some effort; passivity without intervening while the partner interacts with the child or makes decisions regarding the child's upbringing does not constitute coparenting support.

Grandparents' intervention in taking care of their grandchildren, or taking over the parental role when the parents cannot assume it, constitutes a reality of our days (Giarrusso et al., 1996). Solidarity in this context manifests itself in a different sense, but it involves the same mechanism of training resources, effort and decision-making. The subject of solidarity in coparenting brings with it the problem of the ideal parent. According to Darling (1999), these traits include warmth and responsiveness, clear expectations, open communication, consistent discipline, adaptability, unconditional love. McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, Rao, (2004) analyze the effects of solidarity and cohesion in parental couples on children's psychological development; Feinberg, (2003) discusses the importance of a strong and stable parental alliance for children's emotional health. Solidarity has also been studied in terms of

its role in building family cohesion (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, 2013) or in the development of children's socio-emotional competence (Van Egeren, Hawkins, 2004), this article highlights the importance of solidarity and clarifying roles in parental alliances (McConnell, Kerig, 2002).

The degree of dissonance and antagonism between coparental partners

Dissonance in the coparenting alliance refers to the conflicts, disagreements, or lack of harmony between parents regarding the upbringing and education of their children. The coparenting alliance generally describes how parents work together to fulfill parenting roles and provide an emotional and educational support structure for the child. A healthy coparenting alliance is characterized by mutual support, cooperation, and agreement on values and rules for the child. When there is dissonance in the coparenting alliance, parents may have different views and methods of dealing with issues related to the child, which can lead to tension and conflict. This can negatively affect the child, who may feel confused, insecure, or even caught between the parents in conflicts beyond their understanding. Dissonance between co-parenting partners can be the expression of the lack of solidarity between the two and can have a strong impact on the children (McHale, Fivaz-Depeursinge 2010).

Dissonance consists of strategies and actions that hinder the partner's attempts to achieve childrearing goals, or criticism and disrespect for the partner's childrearing decisions (Belsky et al., 1995). During interaction, as with coparenting support, coparenting undermining cannot occur through passive means. Studies show that dissonance in coparenting deeply affects children (Thullen, Bonsall, 2017). They can develop emotional (anxiety, stress, insecurity) and behavioral (adjustment difficulties, aggression, isolation) problems (Choi, et al., 2013). Conflict between parents sends children conflicting messages and can make them feel caught between their parents' preferences. Research shows that in families with strong coparental dissonance, children are more likely to develop behavioral disorders and emotional regulation difficulties.

Undermining actions can be overt and hostile, such as criticism or insults, but are more likely to be subtle and harmless, such as one parent interrupting the other to say something to the child (Westerman & Massoff, 2001). Undermining actions can also occur when the partner is

absent, such as when the parent makes an offensive remark about the child's partner or excludes the child from a desired activity (McHale, 1997). Parents identify undermining strategies, including criticizing, giving advice, and intervening in child matters in their own way, as well as feelings of humiliation when child-rearing decisions are ignored (Van Egeren, 2003). The relevant issue is partner interference. We address the parent's experiences of partner undermining rather than his or her contributions to undermining actions or feelings. The effect of parental dissonance on children's well-being has been studied (Grych, Fincham, 1990; Feinberg, 2002). and the important impact on the child's emotional state was discovered (Cummings, Davies, 2010), on the relationship of the marital and parental couple (Cowan, Cowan, 2012; Katz, Gottman, 1996).

Shared parenting

Shared parenting is the broadest of these dimensions and, among other things, is an attempt to move the division of labor from a separate space to a more concrete and accessible model. In addition to the sharing of care work, which is typically assessed by asking parents to identify the percentage of time they and/or their partner spend on care tasks, shared parenting is characterized by the degree to which one or the other the parent is responsible for setting boundaries and for each partner's sense of the fairness of how responsibilities are shared. During interaction, shared parenting can be assessed in at least two ways. Balance of involvement describes the degree to which each partner is involved with the child relative to the other partner (McHale, 1995); this can be represented by a differential score in the involvement of each parent with the child and is the exception to the rule that states that co-parenting elements must refer explicitly to the partner. Mutual involvement is the extent to which both partners are simultaneously involved with the child. Family arrangements, the understandings of the parental couple about their roles in raising the child were addressed in the works of Margolin, Gordis, John (2001) who emphasize their impact on family stability or the studies of Belsky (1984), Feinberg, Kan, (2008) and McHale, (1995) which focuses on how structured coparenting influences family relationships and children's development. A representative work for the field is that of (Minuchin, 1985) which emphasizes the importance of well-organized co-parenting.

Conclusions

Solidarity between parents is an essential pillar in parenting, providing the child with an example of cooperation and stability. When parents show their solidarity, the child benefits from a stable, predictable and supportive environment, fundamental elements for his emotional and social development. This parental consensus contributes to the formation of a climate of emotional security, where the child feels supported and understood. Parenting programs could emphasize the importance of solidarity in coparenting by providing parents with strategies to cultivate mutual support and harmony in child-rearing decisions. At the same time, dissonance in coparenting can have destabilizing effects, generating confusion and stress for both the child and the parents. Training programs can include dissonance management techniques and methods of negotiating differences, supporting parents in building a unified approach.

Shared co-parenting encourages equal involvement of both parents and promotes equitable collaboration in educational decisions and daily support for the child. These fundamental characteristics of coparenting, each having a direct impact on parenting and child development, can form the building blocks of parenting, providing a valuable platform for strengthening solidarity, managing dissonance, and promoting balanced involvement.

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