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Role of marital relationship quality on different domains of sibling conflict

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Marital relationship quality influences sibling relationship quality (Cox & Paley, 2003; Yu & Gamble, 2008). However, there is little research exploring the impact of marital relationship quality on the different types of sibling conflict. Sibling conflict during adolescence has been previously found to engage two distinct content domains: Invasion of the Personal (IP) and Equality and Fairness (EF; Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2010). The present study examines the association between marital relationship quality and these two domains of sibling conflict. We predicted that positive marital relationships would be protective against sibling conflicts, particularly for IP conflicts as they are more impactful to the quality of the sibling relationship and adolescent adjustment (Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2010). The primarily White and middle-class sample consists of 123 families with multiple children (first-borns: 13-19 years; second-borns: 10-18 years). The Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) was completed by mothers and fathers to assess marital positivity ($\alpha_{\text{mothers}} = .97$, $\alpha_{\text{fathers}} = .95$). The Sibling Issues Checklist (Campione-Barr & Smetana, 2010) was completed by adolescents to assess sibling conflict (IP, $\alpha = .77-.89$; and EF, $\alpha = .59-.83$). Sibling gender composition, age, and conflict at Time 1 were controlled for in hierarchical regression analyses. Higher mother-reported NRI positivity marginally predicted higher IP conflict frequency ($\beta = .31$, $p < .10$), and significantly predicted more intense IP conflict ($\beta = .37$, $p < .05$). In contrast, higher father-reported NRI positivity marginally predicted less intense IP sibling conflicts ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .10$). The results suggest that marital positivity has a greater impact on IP sibling conflict intensity than all other types of sibling conflict, but that this differs by parent and direction. This information could aid parents and family practitioners to understand how the family sub-systems impact one another, for better or for worse.