



Parenting Stress, Family Conflict, and Motherhood during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Rachel DeMello, Matthew Ogan, J. Kale Monk, &
Jeremy Kanter

Literature Review

- The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic caused a global lockdown.
 - Consequently, individuals are experiencing significant stress (American Psychological Association, 2020).
- Using data from Singapore, women and mothers in particular report more moderate or poor work-family balance levels than men and fathers, and poor work-family balance was associated with higher levels parenting stress (Chung et al., 2020).
- Carlson et al. (2020) reported that although the pandemic created a more equal division of labor in homes, mothers' load of labor was increased as they provided equal or more childcare than fathers.
- Increased stress can result in increased conflict between partners (Monk et al., 2021).
- Are mothers experiencing stress and conflict during the pandemic differently than non-mothers?

Method

- Using data collected from **117 U.S. women** in May of 2020, 47% of whom were mothers, we examined the association between stress (parenting status, parenting stress, and perceived stress) and conflict with partners.
 - **Race:** 82.1% White, 8.5% Multi Ethnic/Multi Racial, 4.3% Hispanic or Latina, 2.6% Asian, .9% African American or Black, 1.7% identified as other
 - **Education:** 48.7% Four Year University, 35.9% Graduate or Professional Degree, 6.8% Partial College (Not enrolled), 5.1% Partial College (Currently enrolled), 1.7% High School Graduate, .9% Junior High School, .9% Trade School
 - **Relationship Status:** 65% Legally Married, 25.6% Casually or Exclusively Dating, 6% Engaged, 3.4% Domestic Partnership or Civil Union
- H1: Mothers will have higher levels of conflict and perceived stress, in comparison to the women who were not mothers.
- H2: Parenting stress and perceived stress are positively associated with increased conflict.

Results

- Preliminary analyses showed positive correlations between parenting stress and interpersonal conflict ($r = .32, p < .05$), parenting stress and perceived stress ($r = .60, p < .001$), and perceived stress and interpersonal conflict ($r = .31, p < .01$).
- In line with my hypothesis, t -tests revealed there were significant differences between mothers and non-mothers in conflict with mothers reporting higher levels of conflict, $t(115) = -1.99, p = .05$, but not stress, $t(115) = 1.13, p = .26$.
- Parental status was not a significant predictor of conflict, however it approached significance ($b = .52, p = .055$)
 - Perceived stress was the only significant predictor of relationship conflict ($b = .71, p = .001$)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.593	.650		3.986	.000
	Do you have any children?	.522	.269	.226	1.941	.055
	Relationship Length	-.012	.017	-.076	-.686	.494
	Which of the following best captures your current romantic relationship status?	.060	.094	.068	.635	.527
	What is your current individual monthly income?	.041	.050	.074	.834	.406
	'Perceived Stress Scale Mean Wave 1'	.714	.200	.321	3.578	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Conflict

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Discussion

- Our first hypothesis was partially supported.
 - The data showed that mothers had higher levels of conflict, but not stress.
- Our second hypothesis that parenting stress and perceived stress would be positively associated with increased conflict was supported.
- Our regression model found that stress predicted conflict, with parenting status approaching significance.

Discussion & Future Directions

- Given the pandemic is creating significant change for many people, it is likely that non-mothers are also experiencing high levels of stress during the onset of the pandemic.
- However, stress disparities may increase over the course of the pandemic as non-parents adjust more quickly to pandemic-related life changes.
- In future research, scholars should collect longitudinal data from participants in order to understand this variability in experiences over time.