

Marriage Satisfaction and Children's Emotional and Behavioural Problems: The Mediating Role of Father-Child Rough-and-Tumble Play

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Abstract

Marital satisfaction plays a critical role in the emotional and behavioral development of children aged 3 to 6. However, existing research on marital satisfaction has predominantly focused on maternal perspectives, with limited attention to fathers' experiences. Father-child rough-and-tumble play (RTP), a unique form of physical and affective interaction, may serve as a potential mechanism linking marital satisfaction to children's emotional and behavioral outcomes. Within the sociocultural context of China—characterized by collectivist values and authoritarian parenting styles—the nature and implications of father-child RTP warrant further exploration. This study investigates the association between marital satisfaction and children's emotional and behavioral problems from the perspective of fathers. Specifically, it examines the mediating role of father-child in this relationship. Participants included 228 fathers of children aged 3 to 6 years (56.6% boys) from Eastern China. Fathers completed a set of self-report measures, including demographic information, the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale, the Parental Play and Care Questionnaire (PPCQ) to assess RTP, and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to evaluate children's emotional and behavioral functioning. The SDQ comprises three difficulty dimensions (emotional symptoms, conduct problems, and hyperactivity) and one prosocial behavior dimension. The findings indicated a relatively low prevalence of rough-and-tumble play in father-child interactions and identified notable differences in children's hyperactivity scores across paternal age groups. Specifically, children of fathers under the age of 35 exhibited higher hyperactivity scores than those of fathers over 35. However, the analysis revealed no significant differences in father-child rough-and-tumble play based on variables such as child gender, father's educational level, paternal age, father's weekly working hours, or family monthly income. Marital satisfaction significantly predicted children's emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and prosocial behavior. Interestingly, father-child rough-and-tumble play only mediated the relationship between marital satisfaction and hyperactivity. These findings underscore the importance of considering paternal perspectives in family research and suggest that interventions aimed at promoting children's emotional and behavioral development may benefit from enhancing marital satisfaction and encouraging father-child rough-and-tumble play, particularly in reducing hyperactivity.

Keywords

Marriage Satisfaction, Children's Emotional and Behavioral Problems, Father-child Rough-and-tumble Play, Family Socioeconomic Status