

# Involved fatherhood after divorce – fathers' perspectives on coparenting after parents' separation

Nordic Fathers on Paternity Leave Conference  
Helsinki 31.3.2022

Johanna Terävä, [johanna.terava@jyu.fi](mailto:johanna.terava@jyu.fi)

University of Jyväskylä





# Today:

- I The importance of fathers' involvement to fathers themselves and their children
- II Coparenting after divorce
  - Parents' narrated agency and positions



# Father involvement

- Accessibility, Engagement, Responsibility (Lamb, Pleck, Levine & Charnov 1987)
- Father-child relationship quality, positive fathering; closeness, emotionality, communication and time spent with the child (Palkovitz 2019)



Illustration: Laura Mykkänen

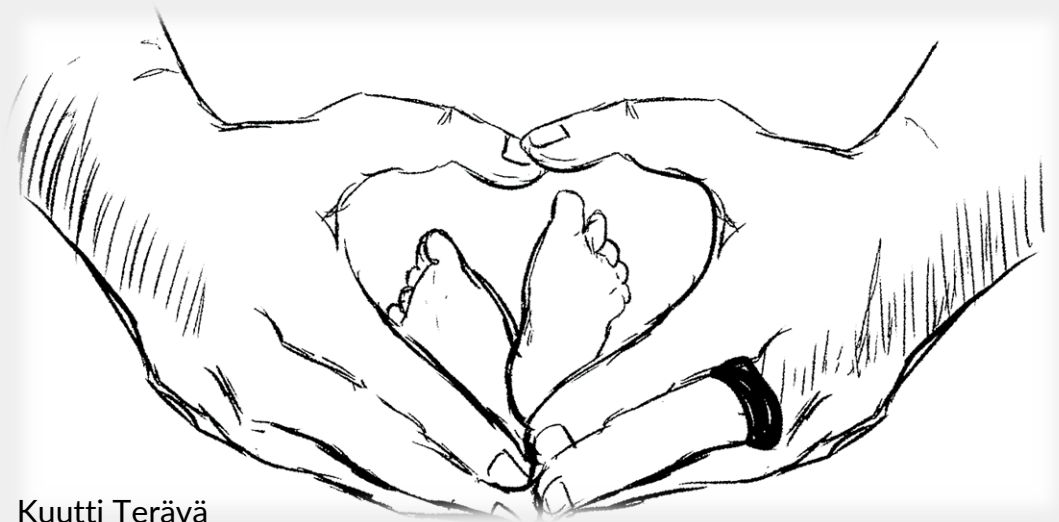


# Father involvement supports men's mental health

- Positive emotions (love, joy, happiness, satisfaction, gratitude, growth)
- Feelings of generativity and caretaking-behavior, psychosocial maturity
- Satisfaction, self-confidence and identity as a parent

Fatherhood can also increase negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, depression, and fear, and lower self-efficacy.

Baldwin et al 2018; Kotelchuck 2021, 70 ;  
Lamb & Lewis 2010; Moore & Abetz 2019;  
Nelson-Coffey et al 2019; Philpott et al  
2017; Preisner et al 2019; Torche & Rauf  
2020.



Kuutti Terävä  
@huitunkuutti



# Involved fatherhood supports men's social and physical health

- Supports shared parenthood, coparenting
- Strengthens social networks
- Contributes to men's capacity to be a better employee
- Leads to more physical exercise and to less binge drinking, smoking and substance use
- Fathers live longer than men without children

Fatherhood can also lead to weight gain, sleep deprivation and reduced contact with friends.

(Bottorff et al 2009; Ladge & Humberd 2021; Modig et al 2017; Nomaguchi & Milkie 2017; Reczek et al. 2014; Rözer et al 2017; Torche & Rauf 2020; Umberson et al 2010; Wolfe 2009)



Kuutti Terävä  
@huitunkuutti





# Children do better

when fathers are actively involved with their children, even when they do not live with their father

Children who have close relationships with father figures tend to

- avoid high-risk behaviors,
- have healthy & stable relationships,
- suffer from fewer psychological problems
- be less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior
- have a positive approach to learning (also long term),
- including math, engagement in reading and writing
- be more likely to get high-paying jobs

Involved, engaged  
fatherhood supports  
children's

- cognitive, social and emotional development,
- school achievement and
- physical health

(Baker 2018; Bushwell et al 2012; Cabrera et al 2018; DelPriore et al. 2017; Duursma 2014; Foster et al. 2016; Nettle 2008; Varghese et al 2016; O'Hara et al 2019; Marks & Palkovitz 2004; Palkovitz 2002).



# Men, fatherhood and separation

- ❖ Men's well-being tends to decline after separation
  - ❖ lower subjective well-being and life satisfaction
  - ❖ feelings of loneliness, anxiety and social isolation
  - ❖ increased mortality after divorce
- ❖ father involvement is higher in socio-economically advantaged families
- ❖ Dissatisfaction with custodial arrangements
  - fear of losing children

(Bastais et al 2015; Bauserman 2012; Dykstra and Fokkema 2007; Grätz 2017; Köppen, Kreyenfeld & Trappe, 2020; Kalmijn 2015; Leopold 2018; Leopold & Kalmijn 2016; Mandemakers & Kalmijn 2014; Metsä-Simola ym. 2020; Viry, 2014; Vogt Yuan 2014)





# Coparenting

= The ways parents (not only biological) are actively involved in their children's lives, work together as parents, and rely on mutual agreement on the taking of conjoint responsibility for their children's wellbeing.

The quality of the coparenting relationship has powerful implications for both family and individual well-being, including both adults and children.

(Choi & Becher 2018; Hock & Mooradian, 2013; Fagan 2014; Feinberg, 2003; Feinberg & Kan, 2008; Becher et al 2019; Pires & Martins 2021; Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004)







# Enablers and constraints on coparenting after separation

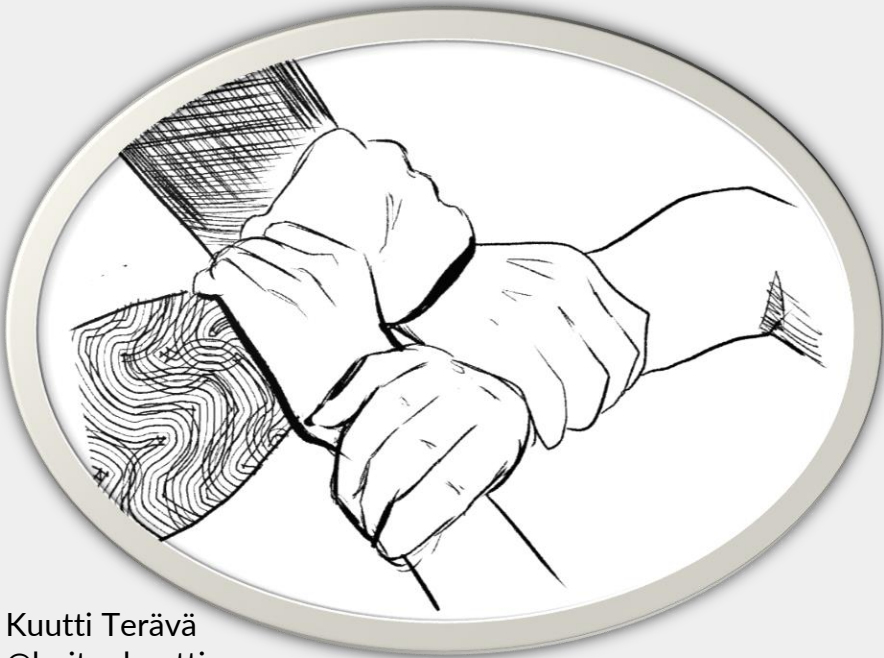
- **Post-divorce coparenting is shaped by, e.g.,**
  - socioeconomic status, sociocultural issues (such as values and attitudes),
  - children's age and temperament, parents' physical and mental health
  - custody arrangements; spatial distance between parents
    - two homes/ joint physical custody can benefit children's mental health
- **Positive parenting** predicts a good coparenting alliance
- **Continued conflict** and **loss of closeness** to a parent is associated with negative consequences for children's mental health and self-esteem



(Backemeyer et al. 2014; Becher et al 2019; Cronin et al. 2017; Demir-Dagdas 2021; Fagan et al 2014; Hjern et al 2021; Jevne & Andenaes 2017; Lamela ym. 2016; Lange, Visser & Scholte 2021; Ranieri ym. 2016; Stokkebekk et al 2021)



# What kinds of coparenting positions and agency emerge in interviews with parents? (Johanna Terävä & Marja Leena Bөөk)



Kuutti Terävä  
@huitunkuutti

Agency and the positions taken are not static but vary across and within individuals by how they are manifested, e.g., in their speech, and by the different stages of separation.

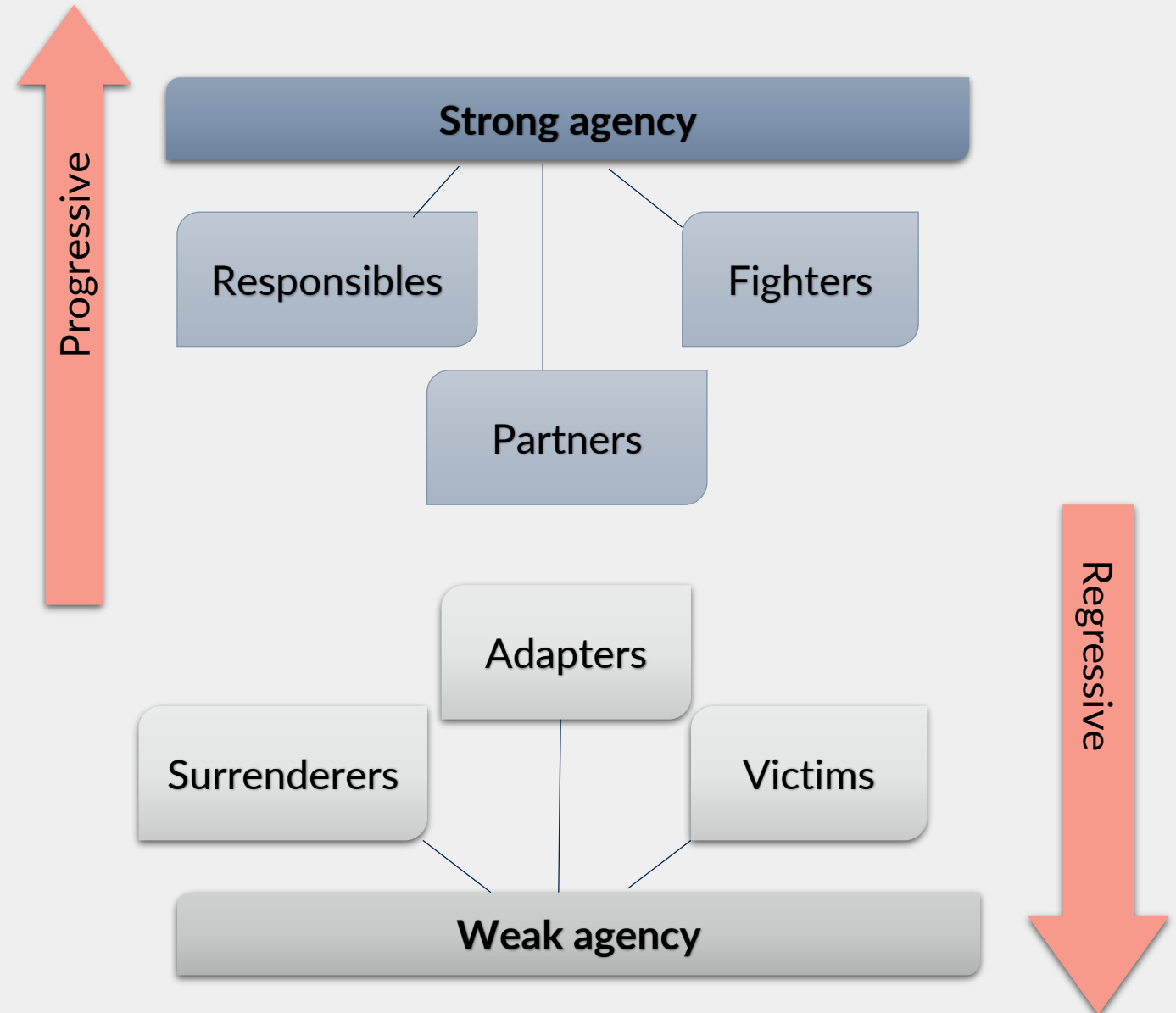
Several positions may be present in each individual's story. Here, we analysed the main/master position in each story, not all the positions taken.



## Coparenting positions and agency

32 Finnish parents:  
16 fathers, 16 mothers  
(29-57 years)

In co-operation with  
FMCHS  
(Federation of Mother and  
Child Homes and Shelters)





# STRONG AGENCY: Partners, Responsibles, Fighters

## 1. Partners

- “It’s pretty **safe**... We have very **close relations**. We also call each **other** and when the children are staying with the other parent then we call the child during the week and ask how they are. It’s like a kind of rhythm that we’ve found” (father).
- “We have a **shared understanding** that we have children in **common** that we take care of and care for. We kind of reach an agreement together and discuss it together” (mother).

Cooperation,  
‘we-talk’,  
confidence,  
trust,  
transparency,  
respect,  
flexibility



# STRONG AGENCY



Kuutti Terävä  
@huitunkuutti

## 2. Responsibles

"Naturally, I'm more responsible for everyday life, it was certainly so earlier because my ex had to travel a lot in his job ... I feel like I have a **stronger relationship with the children** than my ex, it's also nice to be able to **support him as a parent**" (mother).

Traditional roles;  
main responsible vs. helper

## 3. Fighters

"This state of war." (father)

"Then you really have to explain, with the **help of lawyers** and experts, that **this doesn't work**, and then there is lot of **nasty squabbling**" (father).

Fight against unfairness, defence of  
the right to be an active, engaged  
parent, ex as an opponent





# WEAK, PASSIVE AGENCY; Adapters, Surrenderers, Victims

## 1. Adapters

Well, I've been **hoping** ...that we could do more of it [cooperation]... I'm starting to find it rather agreeable, and I'm **learning to let go of it** [the coparenting ideal] (--)

And those kindergarden events, well now they are...the **child's mother wanted us not to be there** together, even though in the kindergarden they say that everyone is welcome and so on. But I have **respected her wish** (father).

- Prolonged conflict,
- troublesome cooperation,
- disappointment,
- incapability and dissatisfaction
- The other parent is seen difficult and/or dysfunctional

## 2. Surrenderers

"It is clear to both of us that **we're not up to it. I haven't been able to try it** (cooperation) for a long time. In a way, the effort caused me such emotional damage ... that I **decided** at some point that it's not really worth it ... I **feel I'm going to pieces** myself since nothing changes anyway" (mother).



### 3. Victims

“Constant pining makes me **weep every day**. Especially at nights, because you don’t have the courage to do it in the daytime. **I fall apart** more every day.” (father)

- “I’ve **never had any support**. ” (father)
- “Life is going to **waste**”. / “**All she wants is money**.” (father)

- Violations of trust,
- feelings of unfairness, misunderstanding, discrimination,
- the ex is seen as a winner or oppressor





# Concluding thoughts

## 1. Relationship between parent and child matters

- maximize quality and quantity

→ The primary duty of parents is to provide parenting

## 2. Coparenting matters

- Parents, separation processes and ways of cooperation are very diverse. Parents also vary in their agency, power and negotiating skills, abilities, willingness, and opportunities
- ...help parents to understand their own and the other parent's point of view and try to minimize conflict

→ If cooperation is not possible, **focus on supporting the relationship between the child and parent**, i.e., parallel parenting. (Nielsen 2017; Stokkebekk et al 2020)





A photograph of a calm lake surrounded by lush green trees. The water is still, reflecting the surrounding foliage and the clear blue sky. Numerous lily pads float on the surface of the water. The scene is framed by overhanging branches with vibrant green leaves in the foreground.

# Thank you!





# References

- Andreasson, Jesper & Johansson, Thomas. (2019) Becoming a half-time parent: Fatherhood after divorce, *Journal of Family Studies*, 25:1, 2-17.
- Baker, C. E., Kainz, K. L., and Reynolds, E. R. (2018). Family poverty, family processes and children's preschool achievement: understanding the unique role of fathers. *J. Child Fam. Stud.* 27, 1242–1251. doi: 10.1007/s10826-017-0947-6
- Baldwin, S, Malone et al 2018. Mental health and wellbeing during the transition to fatherhood: a systematic review.
- Bastait, K., Ponnet, K., Van Peer, C. and Mortelmans, D. (2015). The parenting styles of divorced fathers and their predictors. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 32, 557–579
- Beckmeyer, J. J., Coleman, M. & Ganong, L. H. 2014. Postdivorce coparenting typologies and children's adjustment. *Family Relations* 63, 4, 526 – 527.
- Becher, Emily H.; McGuire, Jenifer K.; McCann, Ellie M.; Powell, Sharon; Cronin, Sarah E. & Veronica Deenanath (2018) Extension-Based Divorce Education: A Quasi-Experimental Design Study of the Parents Forever Program, *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 59:8, 633-652.
- Becher Emily H.; Kim, Hyunjun; Cronin, Sarah E; Deenanath, Veronica; McGuire, Jenifer K.; McCann, Ellie M. and Powell, Sharon. 2019. Positive Parenting and Parental Conflict: Contributions to Resilient Coparenting During Divorce. *Family Relations* 68 (1), 150-164.
- Bauserman, R. (2012). A meta-analysis of parental satisfaction, adjustment, and conflict in joint custody and sole custody following divorce. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 53, 464–488. 10.1080/10502556.2012.682901
- Bottorff, J., Radsma, J., Kelly, M., & Oliffe, J. (2009). Fathers' narratives of reducing and quitting smoking. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 31(2), 185–200. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2008.01126.x>.
- Buswell, Lydia & Zabriskie, Ramon & Lundberg, Neil & Hawkins, Alan. (2012). The Relationship Between Father Involvement in Family Leisure and Family Functioning: The Importance of Daily Family Leisure. *Leisure Sciences - LEISURE SCI.* 34. 172-190. 10.1080/01490400.2012.652510.
- Cabrera, Natasha J.; Volling, Brenda L. & Barr, Rachel. 2018. Fathers Are Parents, Too! Widening the Lens on Parenting for Children's Development 12(3), 152-157.
- Cronin, S., Becher, E. H., McCann, E., McGuire, J., & Powell, S. (2017). Relational conflict and outcomes from an Online Divorce Education Program. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 62, 49–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2017.02.008>





- DelPriore, D. J., Schlomer, G. L., & Ellis, B. J. (2017). Impact of fathers on parental monitoring of daughters and their affiliation with sexually promiscuous peers: A genetically and environmentally controlled sibling study. *Developmental Psychology*, 53(7), 1330–1343. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000327>
- Demir-Dagdas T (2021). Parental divorce, parent–child ties, and health: explaining long-term age differences in vulnerability. *Marriage & Family Review*, 57(1), 24–42. doi:10.1080/01494929.2020.1754318
- Dykstra, P. A., & Fokkema, T. (2007). Social and emotional loneliness among divorced and married men and women: Comparing the deficit and cognitive perspectives. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 29, 1–12. 10.1080/01973530701330843
- Duursma, A. E. (2014). The effects of fathers' and mothers' reading to their children on language outcomes of children participating in early head start in the United States. *Fathering* 12, 283–302. doi: 10.3149/fth.1203.283
- Fagan, J. (2014). Adolescent parents' partner conflict and parenting alliance, fathers' prenatal involvement, and father's engagement with infants. *Journal of Family Issues*, 35, 1415–1439. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13491411>
- Fagan, J. & Barnett, M. 2003. The Relationship Between Maternal Gatekeeping, Paternal Competence. Mothers' Attitudes About the Father Role, and Father Involvement. *Journal of family Issues* 24, (8), 1020- 1043
- Fagan, J. 2008. Randomized study of a prebirth coparenting intervention with adolescent and young fathers. *Family Relations* 57 (3), 309–323.
- Feinberg, M. 2003. The internal structure and ecological context of coparenting: A framework for research and intervention. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 3: 95–131. Feinberg, M. E. & Kan, M. L. 2008. Establishing family foundations: intervention effects on coparenting, parent/infant well-being, and parent-child relations. *Journal of Family psychology*, 22 (2), 253–263
- Feinberg, M. E., Kan, M. L. & Goslin, M. C. 2009. Enhancing Coparenting, Parenting, and Child Self-Regulation: Effects of Family Foundations 1 Year after Birth. *Prevention Science* 10, 3, 276-285.
- Feinberg, Mark. E; Louis D. Brown & Marni L. Kan (2012) A Multi-Domain Self-Report Measure of Coparenting, *Parenting*, 12:1, 1-21.
- Foster, T. D., Froyen, L. C., Skibbe, L. E., Bowles, R. P., and Decker, K. B. (2016). Fathers' and mothers' home learning environments and children's early academic outcomes. *Read. Writing* 29, 1845–1863. doi: 10.1007/s11145-016-9655-7



- Grätz, Michael. 2017. Does Separation Really Lead Fathers and Mothers to be Less Involved in their Children's Lives?, *European Sociological Review*, Volume 33, Issue 4, August 2017, Pages 551–562, <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcx058>
- Hjern, A.; Urhoj, S.; Fransson, E.; Bergström, M. Mental Health in Schoolchildren in Joint Physical Custody: A Longitudinal Study. *Children* 2021, 8, 473.
- Hock, R. M & Moraadian, J. K. 2013. Defining coparenting for social work practice: A critical interpretive synthesis. *Journal of Family Social Work* 16, 414-331.
- Jevne, K. S. & Andenaes, A. 2017. Parents in high-conflict custodial cases: negotiating shared care across households. *Child and Family Social Work* 22, 296 – 305.
- Kalmijn, M. (2015a). Father-child relations after divorce in four European countries: patterns and determinants. *Comparative Population Studies*, 40, 251–276.
- Kotelchuck, M. 2021. The Importance of Fatherhood for Men's Health and Development over the Life Course. In: Grau-Grau M, las Heras M, Bowles HR (eds) *Engaged fatherhood for men, families and gender equality*. Springer, Cham.)
- Kotelchuck M (2021) The impact of father's health on reproductive and infant health and development. In: Grau-Grau M, las Heras M, Bowles HR (eds) *Engaged fatherhood for men, families and gender equality*. Springer, Cham, pp 31–61.
- Köppen, K., Kreyenfeld, M., & Trappe, H. (2018). Loose ties? Determinants of father-child contact after separation in Germany. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80(5), 1163–1175. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12504>
- Ladge, JJ. & Humberd, BK. 2021. Impossible standard and unlikely trade-offs..In: Grau-Grau.. (ks. Kotelchuck 2022)
- Lamela, D., Figueiredo, B., Bastos, A. & Feinberg, M. 2016. Typologies of Post-divorce Coparenting and Parental Well-Being, Parenting Quality and Children's Psychological Adjustment. *Child Psychiatry Hum Dev* 47, 716–728.
- Lamb, M. E., & Lewis, C. (2010). The development and significance of father-child relationships in two-parent families. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (5th ed.; pp. 94–153). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Lamb, M. E., Pleck, J. H., Charnov, E. L., and Levine, J. A. (1987). "A biosocial perspective on paternal behavior and involvement," in *Parenting Across the Lifespan: Biosocial Dimensions*, eds J. B. Lancaster, J. Altman, A. S. Rossi, and L. R. Sherrod (New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter), 111–142.
- Lange A M C, Visser M M, Scholte, R H J ym. (2021) Parental conflicts and posttraumatic stress of children in high-conflict divorce families. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00410-9>.
- Leopold, T., & Kalmijn, M. (2016). Is divorce more painful when couples have children? Evidence from long-term panel data on multiple domains of well-being. *Demography*, 53, 1717–1742.
- Leopold, T. 2018. Gender Differences in the Consequences of Divorce: A Study of Multiple Outcomes. *Demography* 1 June 2018; 55 (3): 769–797. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-018-0667-6>



- Mandemakers, J. and Kalmijn, M. (2014). Do mother's and father's education condition the impact of parental divorce on child well-being? *Social Science Research*, 44, 187–199.
- Marks, L., & Palkovitz, R. (2004). American fatherhood types: The good, the bad, and the uninterested. *A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers*, 2, 113–129.
- Markham, M.S., Ganong, L. H. & Coleman, M. 2007. Coparental identity and mothers', cooperation in coparental relationships. *Family Relations* 56, 4, 369-377.
- Metsä-Simola N, Moustgaard H, Martikainen P. 2020. Time patterns of external and alcohol-related mortality after marital and non-marital separation: the contribution of psychiatric morbidity *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 74, 510-518.
- Modig, Talbäck, M., Torssander, J. & Ahlbom, A. 2017. Payback time? Influence of having children on mortality in old age. *J Epidemiology & Community Health* 71 (5), 424-430.
- Nelson-Coffey, S. K., Killingsworth, M., Layous, K., Cole, S. W., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2019). Parenthood is associated with greater well-being for fathers than mothers. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 45, 1378–1390. doi:10.1177/0146167219829174
- Nettle, Daniel. (2008). Why do some dads get more involved than others? Evidence from a large British cohort. *Evolution and Human Behavior*. 29. 10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2008.06.002.
- Nielsen, Linda. 2017. Re-examining the Research on Parental Conflict, Coparenting, and Custody Arrangements. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 23, 2, 211–231.
- Nomaguchi, K., & Milkie, M. (2017). Sociological perspectives on parenting stress: How social structure and culture shape parental strain and the well-being of parents and children. In K. Deater-Deckard & R. Panneton (Eds.), *Parental stress and early child development* (pp. 47–73). Berlin, Germany: Springer.
- O'Hara, Karey L. ; Irwin N. Sandler, Sharlene A. Wolchik, Jenn-Yun Tein and C. Aubrey Rhodes. 2019. Parenting time, parenting quality, interparental conflict, and mental health problems of children in high-conflict divorce" *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2019[Sep], Vol 33[6], 690-703).
- Palkovitz, R. (2002). Involved fathering and child development: Advancing our understanding of good fathering. In C. S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement* (pp. 33–64). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Palkovitz, R. 2019. Expanding Our Focus From Father Involvement to Father–Child Relationship Quality 11(4), Pages 576-591.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12352C>
- Philpott, L-F ..et al 2017. Stress in fathers in the perinatal period: a systematic review. *Midwifery* 55, 113-127.
- Philpott, L-F. 2019 Anxiety in fathers in the perinatal per: aiod systematic review. *Midwifery* 76, 54-101.



- Pires M, Martins M. Parenting Styles, Coparenting, and Early Child Adjustment in Separated Families with Child Physical Custody Processes Ongoing in Family Court. *Children* (Basel). 2021 Jul 24;8(8):629. doi: 10.3390/children8080629. PMID: 34438520; PMCID: PMC8394593.
- Poortman, A. R. (2018). Postdivorce parent–child contact and child well-being: The importance of predivorce parental involvement. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80(3), 671-683.
- Ranier, S., Molgora, S., Tamanza, G. & Emery, R. 2016. Promoting coparenting after divorce: a relational perspective on child custody evaluations in Italy. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 37 (5), 361-373.
- Rollè Luca, Gullotta Giulia, Trombetta Tommaso, Curti Lorenzo, Gerino Eva, Brustia Piera, Caldarera Angela M. 2019. Father Involvement and Cognitive Development in Early and Middle Childhood: A Systematic Frontiers in Psychology 10. DOI=10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02405
- Reczek, C., Thomeer, M. B., Lodge, A., Umberson, D., & Underhill, M. (2014). Diet and exercise in parenthood: A social control perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(5), 1047–1062. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12135>.
- Rözer, J., Poortman, A., & Mollenhorst, G. (2017). The timing of parenthood and its effect on social contact and support. *Demographic Research*, 36(1), 1889–1916.
- Stokkebekk J, Iversen A, Hollekim R ym. (2021). “The troublesome other and I”: parallel stories of separated parents in prolonged conflicts. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 47, 52–68. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12474>
- Torche, Florencia & Rauf, Tamkinat. 2020. The Transition to Fatherhood and the Health of Men. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 83(2), 446-465.
- Umberson, D., Pudrovska, T., & Reczek, C. (2010). Parenthood, childlessness, and well-being: A life course perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 612–629. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00721.x>.
- Westphal, S. K., Poortman, A., & Van Der Lippe, T. (2014). Non-resident father–child contact across divorce cohorts: The role of father involvement during marriage. *European Sociological Review*, 30, 444–456.
- Van Egeren, L. A. & Hawkins, D.P. 2004. Coming to terms with co-parenting: Implications of definition and measurement. *Journal of Adult Development* 11 (3), 165- 178
- Varghese, C., and Wachen, J. (2016). The determinants of father involvement and connection to children's literacy and language outcomes: a review of literature. *Marriage Fam. Rev* 52, 331–359. doi: 10.1080/01494929.2015.1099587
- Viry Gil (2014) Coparenting and Children’s Adjustment to Divorce: The Role of Geographical Distance from Fathers, *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 55:7, 503-526, DOI: 10.1080/10502556.2014.950900
- Vogt Yuan, A. S. (2014). Father-child relationships and nonresident fathers’ psychological distress: What helps and what hurts?. *Journal of Family Issues*, 37, 603–621. 10.1177/0192513X14526394
- Wolfe, J. (2009). Age at first birth and alcohol use. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 50(4), 395–409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002214650905000402>.