



معهد الدوحة الدولي للأسرة
Doha International Family Institute
البحوث لدعم السياسات الأسرية
Research to advance family policies

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Parental Conflict and Absence

#DIFI2018



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Parental Conflict and Absence

Session Chair:

Daryl Higgins, Director, Institute of Child Protection Services

Panelists:

Humoud Al-Qashan, Dean of Academic Affairs & Graduate Studies at Kuwait University

Sibnath Deb, Professor, Department of Applied Psychology, Pondicherry University

Mary Joseph Marret, Associate Professor, University of Malaya

Gordon Harold, Professor of Child & Adolescent Mental Health, University of Sussex

How the Inter-Parental Relationship Affects Children's Mental Health

Implications for Understanding the Impacts of Parental Divorce

Gordon Harold
Andrew and Virginia Rudd Professor of Psychology
School of Psychology
University of Sussex



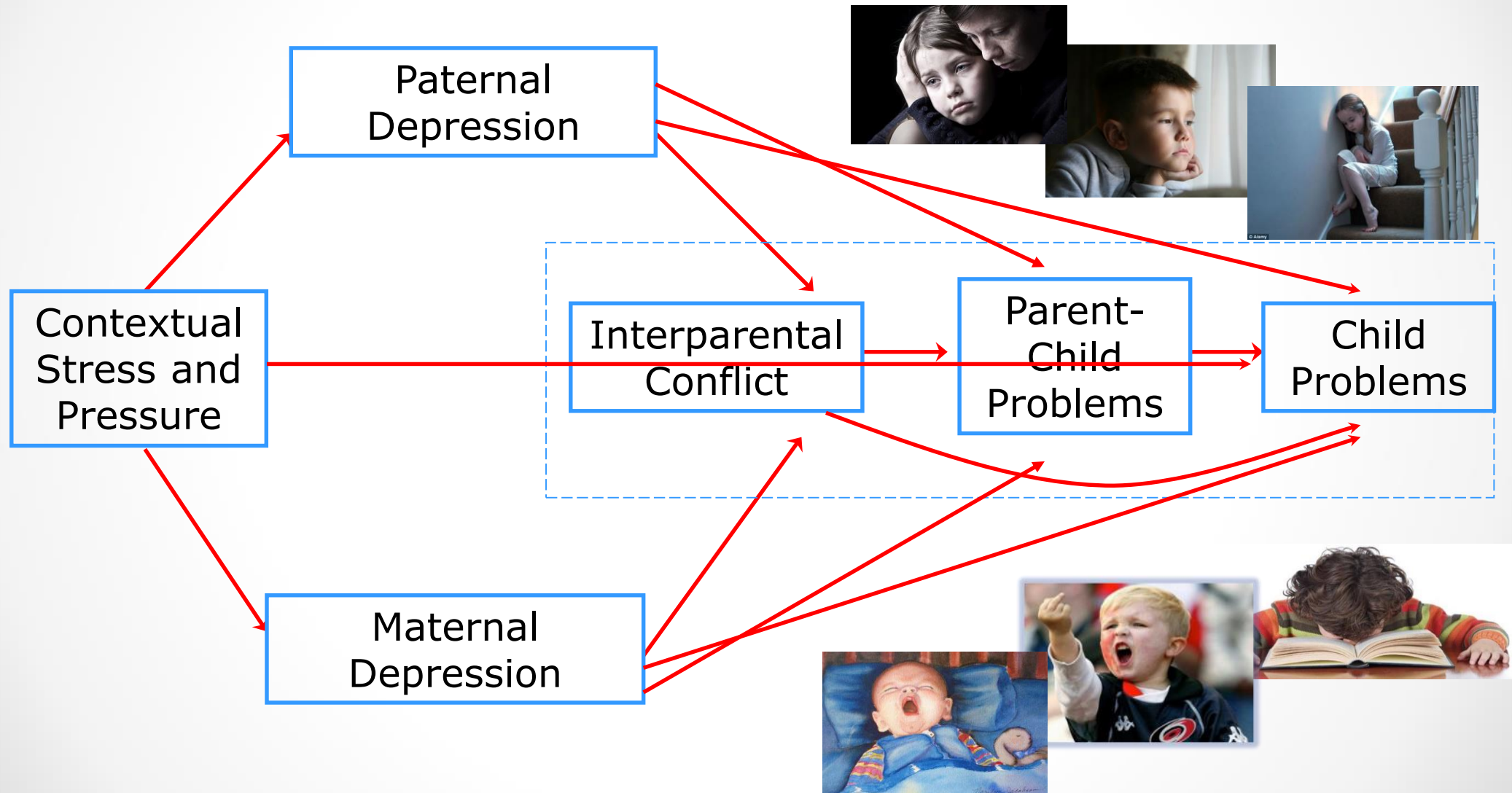
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Divorce and Children's Development

- Parental Divorce (UK, US, NZ other countries)
 - > 1:2 marriages end in divorce (% children)
 - UK – Divorce rates dropping
 - Fewer adults marrying
 - Cohabitation (> rates of breakdown)
- Children and Divorce
 - >10 million children (under age 18 years) experience parental divorce in Europe annually
 - Multiple poor outcomes
 - Depression, anxiety, conduct problems, school failure, substance misuse, self-harm, criminality, suicidality, poor physical health
- Divorce as “Cause”??
 - Adjustment period (approx. 2 years)
 - Transition factors that explain variation in adjustment/adaptation (Amato & Keith (1991))
 - Role of inter-parental conflict
 - Levels of conflict that precede, occur during or follow on from parental divorce explain adjustment (Harold & Murch, 2005)
 - DSM-5 (CAPRD; Bernet et al., 2016)
 - Not just divorce (intact, cohabiting)
 - ○ Process, not just the event of divorce

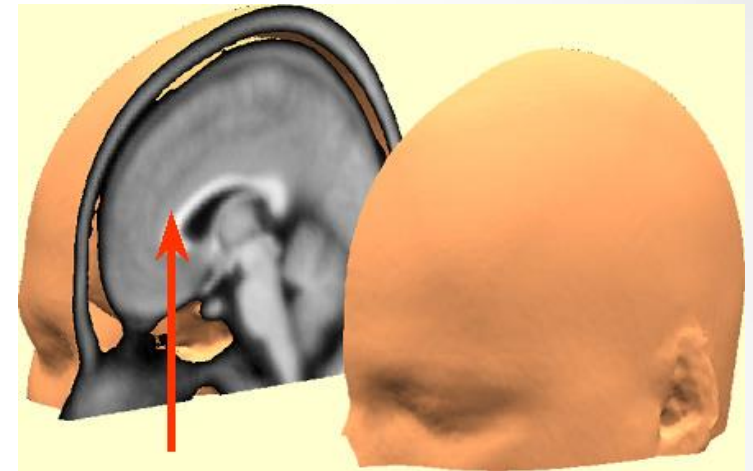


A Process Model of Family Relationship Influences on Child Mental Health



Inter-Parental Conflict Effects on Children

- Brain development
 - Neurobiological deficits
 - Chronic stress effects (neural pruning)
- Physiological development
 - Elevated heart rate, vagal tone
- Emotional development
 - Anger, fear, shame, guilt, worry
- Cognitive development
 - Attributions of self and others, expectations of conflict
- Social and Behavioural development
 - Aggressiveness, interpretation of intent, expectations of others, peer/romantic relations
- Conflict across the spectrum
 - Silence to violence
 - Intergenerational transmission



An Evidence Update (2018)

- Challenges to past research
 - The 'Nature' of 'Nurture'
 - Genetic factors explain parental effects on children (rGE)??
 - Recent studies (novel research designs UK, US)
 - IPC affects children whether parents are living together or not, or whether parents are genetically related or not
- The importance of mothers AND fathers
 - Inter-parental conflict leads to a 'spillover' of emotion to maternal and paternal parenting (co-parenting practices), child outcomes
 - Association STRONGER for fathers compared to mothers
 - Mothers > hostility to sons; fathers > withdrawal from daughters (aggression versus depression)
- Importance of early intervention
 - Early identification of destructive IPC (evidence-led assessment)
 - Frequent, Intense, Poorly Resolved – Improved outcomes
 - Silence to violence – IGT (prevention)

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Annual Research Review: Interparental conflict and youth psychopathology: an evidence review and practice focused update

Gordon T. Harold, and Ruth Sellers
University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

The quality of the interparental relationship is recognized as an important influence on child and adolescent psychopathology. Historically, clinically oriented research on this topic has focused on the impacts of parental divorce and domestic violence as primary interparental relationship influences on child outcomes, to the relative neglect of dimensional or qualitative features of the couple/interparental relationship for youth (child and adolescent) psychopathology. Recent research has highlighted that children are affected by attributes of interparental conflict, specifically how parents express and manage conflicts in their relationship, across a continuum of expressed severity and negativity - ranging from silence to violence. Furthermore, new evidence highlights that children's emotional, behavioral, social, academic outcomes, and future interpersonal relationships are adversely affected by conflict between parents/careers whether adults are living together or not (i.e. married or separated), or where children are or are not genetically related to their rearing parents (e.g. adoption). We review evidence and present an integrated theoretical model, highlighting how children are affected by interparental conflict and what this evidence base means for effective intervention and prevention program development, as well as the development of possible cost-benefit models. Additionally, we review policy implications of this research and highlight some very recent examples of UK-based policy focusing on addressing the interparental relationship and its impact on youth psychopathology. **Keywords:** interparental conflict; parent-child interaction; child development; mental health; intervention.



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