



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MSc (University of Victoria, 2013)

BA (University of Manitoba, 2009)

“Family dynamics during the transition to parenthood: A longitudinal study of the influences of co-parenting alliance, parenting efficacy, parenting, and infant temperament on child adjustment”

Department of Psychology

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

10:00 A.M.

Clearihue Building

Room B007

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Erica Woodin, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Catherine Costigan, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)

Dr. Karen MacKinnon, School of Nursing, UVic (Outside Member)

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Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Julio Navarro, Department of Physics and Astronomy, UVic

Abstract

This longitudinal study investigated how parent, child, and family characteristics influence each other during the transition to parenthood. Participants were 98 cohabiting couples who were expecting their first child. Couples participated in data collection during the third trimester of pregnancy and again when their children were one and two years old. This study aimed to understand how family dynamics and individual characteristics of parents and children influence child adjustment during the first years after the transition to parenthood, to explore the relationship between mothers' and fathers' parenting, and to clarify how mothers' and fathers' perceptions of important family constructs are related during this important time. Key constructs are introduced including co-parenting alliance, parenting efficacy, temperament, ineffective parenting, and child adjustment. A review of literature aims to provide conceptual clarity among these interrelated constructs that are instrumental in early family life. Drawing from the literature review, a conceptual model grounded in family systems theory is introduced in which co-parenting, parenting competence, and child temperament predict parenting practices, which in turn interact with child temperament to predict child adjustment. Child adjustment was measured in terms of internalizing and externalizing behaviours as rated by parents. Ineffective parenting was measured in terms of self-reported lax and over-reactive parenting strategies. To investigate the relationships among mothers' and fathers' perceptions of these variables, confirmatory factor analyses were used to test whether parents' individual ratings on measures were indicators of a broader couple level construct. To explore the impact of parenting on child outcomes, models were tested looking at lax parenting, over-reactive parenting, and 'see-saw parenting', which occurs when parents use both lax and over-reactive strategies. Temperament was tested as a moderator of the effects of each of these parenting styles on child outcomes. Regarding significant findings, low parenting efficacy, difficult temperament, and over-reactive parenting were found to be the most important predictors of later behaviour problems for children, with some differences in predictors of internalizing and externalizing behaviours and some different risk factors for mothers and fathers. Ineffective parenting occurred more often for parents who perceived their infants to have difficult temperaments and for parents who felt less confident about their parenting skills. Some results were inconsistent with previous research findings. These discrepant findings are discussed. Additional exploratory analyses found that parenting efficacy mediated the relationship between difficult temperament and over-reactive parenting. Implications for research and clinical applications are discussed.