

Measures of Father-Child Relationship Quality for Fatherhood Programs

Rebecca Kaufman, MSW | Justin Dyer, PhD | Jay Fagan, PhD | Jessica Pearson, PhD

Overview

Positive, high-quality father involvement is beneficial to children. High-quality involvement is characterized by warm and responsive behavior, sensitive interaction, and appropriate control (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007). Nevertheless, most research with fathers enrolled in fatherhood programs is limited to measuring the amount of father involvement with children. One reason for this is that there are few existing measures of the quality of involvement or the father-child relationship that have been rigorously tested for use with low-income, nonresident fathers. Recently, the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network (FRPN) developed and tested several measures of involvement, including fathers' engagement in child-related activities, fathers' decision making responsibility, and amount of father-child contact. These measures address the amount of fathers' involvement with children, but do not address the quality of fathers' involvement.

In the present study, we examined two existing self-report measures of fathers' conflict and closeness with their children to determine if they are appropriate

for use as measures of relationship quality in fatherhood programs. The measures are: the short version of The Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS-SF) (Driscoll & Pianata, 2011) and Stattin and Kerr's (2000) Parent-Child Relationship Scale (PCRS). To date, neither scale has been tested with low-income, nonresident fathers who are primarily unmarried.

We focused on father-child closeness and conflict because attachment theory emphasizes the father's sensitivity to the child's emotional development as an indicator of father-child relationship quality. More to the point, some alternative measures of parenting skill such as supporting children's literacy, might be impractical for many non-resident fathers to achieve since they have limited contact with their children. To contrast, the parenting behaviors associated with father-child attachment relationships are based on fathers' attitudes toward their children which are possible to measure even among fathers who have limited contact with their children. This includes fathers' knowledge of the importance of being emotionally available and responsive to their children,

and helping fathers respond to their children in an attentive, consistent, and supportive manner.

According to attachment theory, parent–child conflict is attributable to the unmet attachment needs of both children and parents and to the resulting problematic patterns of interaction between parents and children (Kindsvatter & Desmond, 2013). Parent-child closeness is typically conceptualized as strong emotional ties characterized by engagement in a warm and responsive manner (Parke, 1981).

Sample Characteristics

A convenience sample of 624 low-income, nonresident fathers was recruited from seven U.S. cities. Recruitment took place across 14 different fatherhood programs (*n* = 213 fathers) and various other sites in high-poverty neighborhoods (*n* = 373 fathers) between January 2015 and June 2015. Fathers who resided with their target children and fathers whose target children were infants were not included in this study. The final study sample included 420 nonresidential fathers with children between the ages of 2 and 18 years of age.

Table 1 provides an overview of sample characteristics. All 420 participants were biological fathers and ranged in ages from 18 to 72 years with a median age of 41.02 (*see Table 1*). Slightly more than three-fourths of the sample reported their marital status as single and never married. Slightly fewer than three quarters of the sample were non-Hispanic African American men (68.9%), 13.1% were non-Hispanic white, and 13.1% of the sample were Hispanic.

Quality of Father-Child Relationship Measures

Two relationship quality measures were tested. The first scale, the CPRS-SF, is a self-report measure that assesses parents' perceptions of their relationship with their child (Pianta, 1992). This measure was originally designed for use with children between 2.5 years to 12 years old, but pilot data suggested that this measure could be used with children between 2 to 18 years old. The second scale, the PCRS, was originally developed to obtain children's perceptions of their relationships

Table 1. Participant characteristics (N = 420).

	<i>n</i>	% or <i>M (SD)</i>
Father in fatherhood program	186	44.3
Father's Education		
Less than high school	74	17.6
High school/GED	213	50.7
Some college	89	21.2
2-year college degree	18	4.3
4-year college degree	21	5.0
Graduate degree	5	1.2
Marital Status		
Single, never married	302	71.8
Married	38	9.0
Separated/divorced	76	18.1
Widowed	3	.1
Missing	1	0
Employment ^a		
Working in a steady job	131	31.2
Working in a non-steady job	31	7.4
Unemployed	180	42.8
In school	101	24.0
Children		
Number of biological children (<i>M</i>)		2.37 (1.54)
Age of target child		9.92 (4.81)
Median yearly income		\$7,500

^a Fathers could select more than one response option.

with their parents (Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin, & Kerr, 2000). We modified the language of this scale to obtain fathers' perceptions of their relationships with their children. Each measure contains two constructs: items related to parent-child relationship closeness and items related to parent-child relationship conflict.

Results

For this measurement validation process we tested both convergent and predictive validity of the quality measures, both of which are related to the generalizability, or the reliability of measurement tools. Convergent validity refers to the relationships between related concepts. In the current study, we examined

whether the closeness and conflict measures are associated with three related concepts: fathers' face-to-face contact with the child, frequency of nights spent with the child, and fathers' support. Predictive validity refers to capacity of the measures to predict outcomes. We tested whether the closeness and conflict measures predict child behavior problems, fathers' self-efficacy, and fathers' satisfaction with parenting.

Our results indicate that the CPRS-SF closeness scale shows excellent reliability as well as convergent and predictive validity.¹ This measure is highly recommended for use with nonresident fathers across all child ages. However, it is not related to the child behavior problems in later years (over 12 years of age). It is possible that since adolescence is a time that is often characterized by independence, parents and children may naturally experience a sense of separation that does not correspond to children's behavior problems.

With respect to measuring relationship conflict, the results are more complex. Both measures of conflict showed good reliability and validity (particularly with older children). However, these measures appeared to function differently. The focus of each scale may account for this difference. The PCRS conflict items focus primarily on how the father feels about the child: the father feeling disappointed, angry, or wishing the child was different. In contrast, the CPRS-SF conflict items focus primarily on the child's actions towards the father: the child's feelings being "unpredictable", the child remaining angry, or the child being sneaky and manipulative. Our results indicate that the PCRS measure of conflict may be of most use for fathers' of younger children,² while for older children, the CPRS-SF measure of conflict may be best.³

Implications for Programs and Researchers

The CPRS-SF measure of closeness is highly recommended for use with non-resident fathers with children between 2 and 18 years of age.

The CPRS-SF measure of conflict is recommended if the focus of evaluation is on the fatherhood role (e.g., satisfaction with parenting, parenting self-efficacy) or child behavior problems, particularly among older children.

The PCRS measure of conflict is recommended if the focus of evaluation is on father-child contact.

References

- Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' influence on their children's cognitive and emotional development: From toddlers to pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science, 11*(4), 208-213.
- Driscoll, K., & Pianta, R. C. (2011). Mothers' and fathers' perceptions of conflict and closeness in parent-child relationships during early childhood. *Journal of Early Childhood and Infant Psychology, 7*, 71-24.
- Kerr, M., & Stattin, H. (2000). What parents know, how they know it, and several forms of adolescent adjustment: Further support for a reinterpretation of monitoring. *Developmental Psychology, 36*, 366-380.
- Stattin, H., & Kerr, M. (2000). Parental monitoring: A reinterpretation. *Child Development, 71*, 1072-1085.

¹For example, the CPRS-SF measure of closeness is significantly related to parenting satisfaction among fathers with preschoolers ($\beta = .56, p < .001$), school age children ($\beta = .57, p < .001$), and adolescents ($\beta = .52, p < .001$). The CPRS-SF measure of closeness is related to children's behavior problems among preschoolers ($\beta = .46, p < .05$).

²The PCRS measure of conflict is significantly related to children's behavioral problems among fathers with preschoolers ($\beta = .44, p < .05$) and school aged children ($\beta = .45, p < .001$).

³The CPRS-SF measure of conflict is significantly related to self-efficacy for fathers with preschoolers ($\beta = -.28, p < .01$), school-age children ($\beta = -.17, p < .05$), and adolescents ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$).