How can the differences between mother and father affect adolescent psychological well-being?

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INTRODUCTION

Parental style that is consistent in both parents is more effective and it is more desirable than an inconsistent style (Dwairy, 2010). The most positive outcomes for the adolescents appear when both parents are authoritative (McKinney & Renk, 2008; Simons & Conger, 2007; Steinberg, 2001). On the other hand, parental consistency does not seem to be as important during adolescence as having at least one authoritative parent (Fletcher, Steinberg, & Sellers, 1999; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Steinberg, 2001), as they can alleviate any harmful consequences that not having positive parents might have for adolescent adjustment (Simons & Conger, 2007; Steinberg, 2001). The worst results are obtained when both parents are negligent (Simons & Conger, 2007).

The aim of this study with two-parent families is to find out how mothers and fathers influence adolescent’s psychological well-being when there are high and low levels or combinations of high and low levels of the following family dimensions: care, promotion of autonomy, solicitation and disclosure.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

The current work takes its data from the results obtained during the 2006 edition of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study in Spain. The sample consisted of 12324 boys and girls aged 13 to 18 years from two-parent families.

Instrument

The HBSC questionnaire is a broad, self-assessment survey that reveals the adolescent health habits from a holistic and multidisciplinary perspective. For this poster the selected variables were:

- Family dimensions: parental care, parental promotion of autonomy, adolescent disclosure and parental solicitation. These family dimensions were transformed into categorical variables with four categories: low score mother and father, high score father-low score mother, low score father-high score mother, high score mother and father.
- Psychological well-being: health-related quality of life (KIDSCREEN 10-Index) and life satisfaction.

RESULTS

The model for health-related quality of life was significant, $F (12, 10361) = 148.14, p < .001$, and with a medium effect size ($R^2 = .146$). The most important dimensions were parental care, $F (3, 10361) = 191.40, p < .001$, $\eta^2_{parcial} = .053$, parental promotion of autonomy, $F (3, 10361) = 70.72, p < .001$, $\eta^2_{parcial} = .020$, and adolescent disclosure, $F (3, 10361) = 51.92, p < .001$, $\eta^2_{parcial} = .015$.

Adolescents whose parents were both very affectionate scored higher in quality of life than adolescents with unloving parents ($d = 1.04$), adolescents with a very affectionate father ($d = 0.83$) and adolescents with a very affectionate mother ($d = 0.58$). Moreover, the adolescents whose parents were both unloving had a worse quality of life than those who lacked care from just one of them (mothers with low scores: $d = 0.21$ and fathers with low scores: $d = 0.44$). The adolescents with unloving mothers and very affectionate fathers scored lower in quality of life than the adolescents whose circumstances were the contrary ($d = 0.24$).

Adolescents whose parents scored high in promotion of autonomy had a higher quality of life than adolescents whose parents scored low ($d = 0.55$), whose father scored high ($d = 0.43$) and whose mother scored high ($d = 0.35$). Also, adolescents whose mother was high in promotion of autonomy had a better quality of life than adolescents whose parents scored both low ($d = 0.20$).

Finally, adolescents who disclosed a lot of information to their parents scored higher in quality of life than adolescents who disclosed little information to both parents ($d = 0.49$). Adolescents who disclosed little to mother ($d = 0.34$) or little to father ($d = 0.48$).

The model for life satisfaction was significant, $F (12, 10645) = 102.45, p < .001$, and with medium effect size ($R^2 = .104$). The most important dimension was parental care, $F (3, 10645) = 169.60, p < .001$, $\eta^2_{parcial} = .046$.

Adolescents whose parents were both very affectionate had a greater life satisfaction than adolescents with two unloving parents ($d = 0.97$), adolescents with a very affectionate father ($d = 0.64$) and adolescents with a very affectionate mother ($d = 0.52$). Moreover, adolescents with at least one very affectionate parent (fathers with high scores: $d = 0.27$ and mothers with high scores: $d = 0.40$), had greater life satisfaction than the adolescents whose parents were both unloving.

CONCLUSIONS

Parental care was the most important family dimension for psychological well-being. The most positive results for health-related quality of life and life satisfaction were obtained by adolescents who perceived high levels of parental care. Besides, high scores of parental promotion of autonomy and adolescent disclosure to both parents were important for a good quality of life.

The worst results in health-related quality of life and life satisfaction were obtained by adolescents whose parents had low scores in parental care. Moreover, a poor quality of life was also found in adolescents whose parents had low levels of parental promotion of autonomy and adolescents who disclose little information to both parents.

REFERENCES


