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Mothers' Social Contact as a Coping Strategy for Post-Disagreement Anger and Sadness

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Introduction

- Mothers tend to express different levels of emotion after disagreements with their partner (Melendez, Mayordomo, Sancho, & Tomas, 2012).
- Previous studies on emotions and behaviors post-marital disagreement, suggest that women may be more likely to seek social support and express emotions of anger and sadness (Liddon, Kinglerlee, & Barry, 2017).
- For married women, seeking this social contact is a highly effective buffer, or tertiary prevention, for marital disagreements (Mueller, 2006).
- In the current study, mother–father pairs were asked to engage in a discussion on marital conflict, reflect on their emotions post-discussion, and answer questions regarding their coping strategies for stressful situations.

Hypothesis: Mothers' post-disagreement anger and sadness would be positively correlated to their use of social contact as a coping strategy; however, fathers would not show the same correlations.

Method

Participants: Twenty-seven mother–father pairs participated in this study. Each pairing was married and majority of the participants were Caucasian.

Measures:

Post-disagreement anger and sadness.

Mother–father pairs indicated how angry and sad they felt during the discussions, utilizing a 6-point Likert scale rating from 0 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a whole lot*). Higher scores indicated more post-disagreement anger or sadness.

Social contact. To measure the use of social contact as a coping strategy, the social contact subscale of the Coping Strategies Inventory-Short Form (CSI-S; Tobin, 1984) was used. This subscale specifically includes items that refer to seeking emotional support from other people, one's family, and one's friends. Using a 5-point Likert scale rating from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*), mother–father pairs were asked how much they utilize particular coping strategies while under stress. Higher scores indicated more use of social contact.

Results

- Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationship between mothers' and fathers' post-disagreement emotions (anger and sadness) and their use of social contact.
- While mothers' anger ($r = .49, p < .05$) and sadness ($r = .45, p < .05$) were both significantly positively correlated with social contact as a coping strategy, fathers' emotions were uncorrelated their use of social contact.

	Mothers <i>M (SD)</i>	Fathers <i>M(SD)</i>
Anger	1.77 (.99)	1.59 (.84)
Sadness	1.73 (1.00)	1.48 (.85)
Social Contact	11.62 (4.88)	9.04 (3.57)

Discussion

Mothers were likely to use social contact as a coping strategy for post-disagreement anger and sadness, whereas fathers did not.

Strengths:

- The correlational results were promising and suggested a relationship between mothers' emotional responses to conflict and how they cope.
- Results were in line with previous research on gender differences within coping strategies during a disagreement between partners (Liddon et al., 2017).

Weaknesses:

- The present study lacked sufficient power to conduct linear regression analyses.
- Homogenous sample consisting of mainly Caucasian, married couples.

Future Implications:

- To investigate how mothers' emotions post-disagreement affect their mental health long-term.

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