

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Public Access Theses and Dissertations from the
College of Education and Human Sciences

Education and Human Sciences, College of (CEHS)

Summer 7-26-2015

The Impact of Marital Quality and Parent-Child Relationships on Peer Relationships at School: A Brazilian Study

Brandon P. Eddy

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, brandoneddy24@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsdiss>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Eddy, Brandon P., "The Impact of Marital Quality and Parent-Child Relationships on Peer Relationships at School: A Brazilian Study" (2015). *Public Access Theses and Dissertations from the College of Education and Human Sciences*. 241.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsdiss/241>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education and Human Sciences, College of (CEHS) at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Public Access Theses and Dissertations from the College of Education and Human Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Impact of Marital Quality and Parent-Child Relationships

On Peer Relationships at school: A Brazilian Study

by

Brandon Paul Eddy

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Science

Child, Youth, & Family Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Paul Springer

Lincoln, Nebraska

July 2015

The Impact of Marital Quality and Parent-Child Relationships

On Peer Relationships at School: A Brazilian Study

Brandon Paul Eddy, M.S.

University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: Paul R. Springer

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the impact that marital quality and parent-child relationships have on peer relationships at school in a Brazilian population. Despite the fact that Brazil is the fifth most populated country in the world, it is very underrepresented in the literature and little information is known about how marital quality and the parent-child bond impact children socially. Sixty-five mothers and their children participated in this study. Marital quality was assessed using the Portuguese version of the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The parent-child relationship was assessed using the Parental Bonding Instrument and peer relationships at school were assessed using both parent and child versions of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were used to measure the strength of the relationships and to control for different variables such as income, maternal age, mother's education level, and mother's relationship status. The findings suggest significant associations between marital quality and children's peer relationships at school and between the parent-child relationship and children's peer relationships at school. Findings also indicated that income and maternal age significantly influence children's peer relationships. Future studies could focus on how

the father-child relationship or factors such as parents' mental health impacts children's peer relationships.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to express gratitude for my committee chair, Paul Springer. Your guidance, support, and encouragement have been vital to my success as both a student and therapist. I would like to thank the other two members of my committee; Cody Hollist and Julia Torquati, for their ideas and feedback that helped to make my thesis better than I ever could have done on my own. I would also like to thank Grant Orley for aiding me in data analysis and Bruna Seibel for helping me organize and translate the data from Portuguese to English. I would like to thank my wife Lisa, for her love and support throughout my schooling. Without my wife I would never have achieved what I have. I would like to thank my Mother, for always believing in me and for being my number one fan. Last, I would like to express thanks to my Grandfather, Paul Eddy. I cannot remember a time where he did not stress the importance of obtaining an education. Your words did not fall on deaf ears.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Purpose and Research Questions.....	6
Literature Review.....	7
Marital Quality.....	7
Parent-Child Relationships.....	10
Peer Relationships and Friendships.....	15
Spillover Effect.....	18
Brazilian Studies.....	20
Hypothesis.....	22
Methods.....	23
Procedures.....	23
Design and Participants.....	24
Measures.....	25
Results.....	28
Discussion.....	38
Limitations.....	42
Conclusion.....	44

Implications.....44

References.....46

Introduction

Children's relationships with their peers have been a subject of vast research. Peer relationships often serve as a springboard for the development and attainment of social skills, as a model in forging new relationships, and as cognitive and emotional resources (Klima & Repetti 2008; Hartup & Moore 1989). The setting in which the great majority of child-child relationships take place is at school. According to UNICEF (2014), as of 2012, 91% of primary school-age children around the world were enrolled in school. With few exceptions, children from most every country can expect to attend school and interact with other children while doing so. Because the majority of children around the world are enrolled in school, one can see why researchers have been interested in researching the impact that peer relationships have in their life.

Peer relationships provide children with many different challenges and opportunities that are vital for children's social development and social competence (Kemple & Hartle, 1997; Katz & McClellan, 1991). There are however, many undesirable impacts that can come from negative interactions with peers at school. Klima & Repetti (2008) reported that children who were less accepted by their peers displayed more symptoms of maladjustment, higher rates of internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and suffered from worse psychological adjustment when compared to peers who felt more accepted. Childhood peer relationships have also been linked to a higher rate of disorders later in life, as well as increases in antisocial behaviors. Negative peer relationships have also been found to put children at an increased risk of aggression, poor academic performance, increased mental health problems, increased use of drugs and

alcohol, higher rates of criminal behaviors and delinquency, and an increased likelihood of conduct problems and disorders (Woodward & Fergusson 1999).

With research clearly identifying positive and negative outcomes from peer relationships, it is important to pinpoint factors that impact the development of children's social skills. Two variables that have been found to have a significant impact on children's peer relationships and social development are (1) marital quality and (2) qualities of parent-child relationships.

Low marital quality or marital discord has been linked to an increase in behavioral and emotional problems, lower rates of social competence, and higher levels of difficulty for children at school (Marks, Glaser, Glass, & Horne, 2001). Research has also shown there is a positive correlation between marital quality and children's self-esteem and well being (Hakvoort, Bos, Van Balen, & Hermanns, 2010) and a negative correlation between marital quality and children's externalizing behaviors (Vuchinich, Vechinich, & Wood, 1993).

Parent-child relationships have also been found to play a significant role in the development of peer relations. Research has shown negative correlations between early peer relationship problems at school and the quality of parent-child interactions (Woodward & Fergusson, 1999). Research has also shown that children with higher levels of positive interactions in their relationship with their mother, exhibit more prosocial behaviors with their peers, while children with higher levels of positive interactions in their relationship with their father, tend to be less aggressive and more prosocial in their peer interactions, (Lindsey, Cremeens, and Caldera, 2010).

Additionally, secure attachment with one or both parents is associated with positive social functioning at school (Bohlin, Hagekull, & Rydell, 2000).

Sroufe (2005) conducted a 30-year longitudinal study examining the impact that attachment plays in human development. The sample consisted of over 200 mothers who were seen as being at moderate risk for difficulties with parenting due to their socioeconomic status. Results of the study indicated that there were significant links between secure attachment and social competence. For example, the study found that securely attached children actively participated more frequently in peer groups, were less isolated, had higher observed measures of empathy, had more mutual relationships, and more close friendships.

Groh, Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Ijzendoorn, Steele, & Roisman (2014), found similar findings in their meta-analysis, reporting that children who had secure attachment showed higher levels of social competence with their peers than did those with insecure attachment. Some of the factors that defined social competence were: the ability to make friends, play behavior, interpersonal awareness, empathy, and intimacy. Mother-child secure attachment was also a stronger predictor of social competence with peers than father-child secure attachment. The researchers noted that other studies have shown father-child relationships to be a strong predictor of social competence, and that further research was needed to determine why it wasn't a significant predictor in their study.

Individuals with a family systems perspective would find no surprise in the results of these studies, as families are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals. According to Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978), in order to understand an

individual one must understand the context in which they are living, or the family of which they are a part, as one individual's behaviors impact other members of the family. Typically families are structured around subsystems based on gender, age, or function within the family (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). These subsystems, such as, the parental, the spousal, the parent-child, and sibling subsystems can have positive or negative internal and external dynamics that affect marital quality, parent-child relationships (attachment), as well as peer relationships (social competence).

Erel and Burman (1995) introduced the concept of the spillover perspective, which proposes that the emotions or behaviors of one subsystem can spill over into another. For example, if the marital subsystem is operating ineffectively or is in distress, it can decrease the functionality or quality of the parental subsystem or the parent-child subsystem. Hakvoort, Bos, van Balen, & Hermanns (2010) found associations between marital and parent-child relationships or subsystems, and between parent-child and sibling relationships or subsystems. The study found that a positive marital relationship was linked to parent-child relationships characterized as low in conflict and high in acceptance. Furthermore, they found that children who have a positive parent-child relationship are more likely to have positive relationships with their siblings. These and other findings provide support for the "spillover" effect.

In summary, children's peer relationships are important to their cognitive, social, and behavioral development (Woodward & Fergusson, 2000). Positive peer relationships often lead to more healthy outcomes, whereas negative peer relationships frequently lead to unhealthy consequences. Because families are interconnected systems, individuals and

subsystems within families can play a significant role in marital quality, children's social development and relationships outside the family.

Although previous research regarding parent-child relationships and marital quality represent American and European nations, one cannot make the assumption that those findings are generalizable to all cultures and peoples. It is the aim of this study to fill a gap in the literature regarding the lack of information concerning Brazilian children's relationships with their peers. The aim of this study is to investigate how factors such as marital quality and parent-child relations influence Brazilian children's social development and peer relationships. This study will examine a population within a culture that is significantly underrepresented in the literature, despite being the fifth largest country in the world in terms of geography and population (Stutzman, Miller, Hollist, & Falceto, 2009). This study has the potential to aid researchers and clinicians alike in understanding the unique challenges that exist in the Brazilian culture.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that marital quality and parent-child relationships have on peer relationships at school.

Research questions:

- 1) How does marital quality impact peer relationships at school?
- 2) How do parent-child relationships impact peer relationships at school?
- 3) Are there gender differences in the influences of marital quality and parent-child relationships on peer relationships?

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine research on the impact that marital quality and parent-child relationships have on children's peer relationships at school. The research will specifically look at the negative consequences that result from marital distress and from unhealthy parent-child relationships.

Marital Quality

Research has demonstrated that marital quality can influence the social, cognitive, and behavioral development of children. McCoy, George, Cummings, & Davies (2013) investigated the links between constructive and destructive marital conflict and parenting to understand associations with children's social and school adjustment. Their goal was to address how certain aspects of parenting are affected by constructive and destructive behaviors of marital conflict, examine how different processes within the family influence children's adjustment and social skills at school, and investigate a possible link between the two concepts.

The researchers found that constructive marital conflict was associated positively with warm parenting for both mothers and fathers. The researchers also found in mothers that warm parenting was negatively related to children's poor social adjustment and that for fathers constructive marital conflict was linked with warm parenting longitudinally. The results of this study indicated that constructive marital conflict was related to higher levels of warm parenting for fathers and mothers alike. The results suggested links between marital conflict, parenting behaviors, and children's adjustment, as well as evidence for a possible spillover effect across different family subsystems. The results also indicated that constructive marital conflict might increase the effectiveness of

mothers and fathers co-parenting. Evidence also indicated that mother's parenting seems less impacted by marital conflict than that of fathers.

Marks, Glaser, Glass, & Horne (2001) examined the impact of severe marital discord on children between the ages of 4-6 years. The study specifically targeted behavioral problems, social competence, and if witnessing severe marital discord was linked to childhood psychological disorders. The results suggested that children who had witnessed severe marital discord had more behavioral problems and lower social competence when compared with those who did not. Overall, 38% of the children in the study scored in the clinical range for behavioral/emotional problems and 30% were in the clinical range for social competence. Almost half (48%) of the children were found to be experiencing school problems.

Hakvoort et al. (2010) conducted a study on the marital, parent-child, and sibling relationships to assess the impact they have on school-aged children's psychosocial adjustment. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between the mother's relational satisfaction and quality of father-child relationships, meaning that there is a link between mothers having lower levels of satisfaction with their partner, and children having increased conflict with their father. In fact, the father-child relationship was found to be a substantial predictor of a child's psychosocial adjustment with conflict leading to problem behaviors and a good father-child relationship leading to greater self-esteem. There was also a positive correlation between marital quality and children's self-esteem and well-being. They also found a positive association between the quality of the parent-child relationship and children's psychosocial adjustment and a negative association between parent-child conflict and greater levels of self-worth.

There were no statistical differences between girls and boys in the study. The results from this study also support the spillover perspective. Mother's relational satisfaction with her partner was not a significant predictor of her child's psychosocial adjustment. This finding is consistent with the previous research of McCoy et al. (2013), which reported that mothers' parenting abilities seem to be less impacted by their marital relationship than that of fathers.

Vuchinich, Vechinich, & Wood (1993) investigated the associations between interparental relationship quality and how well parents problem solved with their sons in the home environment. Family problem solving was assessed by videotaping interactions while trying to solve one of 49 different parent-child issues. The family was given the choice of which issue to address, but instructed to choose an option that had been a recent concern in their home. There were two sessions, each 10 minutes long, and were coded by 5 individuals, who had trained for about 100 hours for this study. Parents chose one topic and children chose another topic. After the problem solving session ended parents completed the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). Marital satisfaction was assessed by taking the mean scores from the fathers and mothers DAS questionnaire. The mean scores from the parents CBCL were used to analyze the parent's viewpoints on the children's behavior.

A negative association was found between family problem solving with their son and parental coalitions. It was also found that parental agreement was a consistent predictor of effective problem solving within the families studied. Bivariate correlations indicated that marital satisfaction was positively correlated to family problem solving and negatively correlated with children's externalizing behaviors.

Mann & Makenzie (1996) investigated marital and parental subsystems, marital dissatisfaction and overt marital conflict, to see if they were predictors of behavioral problems in school aged boys. For parenting, the variables assessed were rejection and inept discipline. The results from the study indicated that both marital dissatisfaction and overt marital conflict have an impact on the oppositional behavior of children. The findings also showed that the impact overt marital conflict had on oppositional problems in children was mediated by parenting behaviors, providing evidence that parents who show high levels of affection and are consistent in their parenting may be able to act as a protective factor against marital discord. Alternately, partner conflict that spills over into the parental subsystem may contribute to child behavioral problems as the findings indicated that mothers' and fathers' affective relations with their child seemed susceptible to marital conflict.

Parent-Child Relationship

Research has demonstrated impacts of parent-child relationships on children's cognitive, behavioral, and social development of children. For example, Bohlin, Hagekull, & Rydell (2000) conducted a longitudinal study regarding the impact that attachment relationships in infancy have on social functioning in school. Results showed that children who had been securely attached as infants had more favorable outcomes when compared to those who were not. Overall, secure or healthy attachment was associated with positive social functioning at school, suggesting that secure attachment significantly increases the probability of school-aged children becoming socially competent.

Another study conducted by Schneider, Atkinson, & Tardif (2001), was a meta-analysis on 63 studies around the world relating to correlations between a child's relationship with their peers and the child-parent attachment. Inclusion criteria for the meta-analysis stated that the study included must adequately describe the original data, include measures of attachment other than self-report, be collected before the child was 18, include quantitative measures of children's peer relationships other than self-report, contain assessment data on attachment security and children's peer relations before 18 years of age, include data on both insecure and securely attached participants in the sample, and be written in a language understood by the research team. The inter-rater reliability for coding and analyses was 98% for the meta-analysis study. Results showed that parent-child attachment was positively correlated with children's peer relationships and that secure attachment was linked with positive parenting practices. The study analyzed the effect size of the 63 studies and found that effect sizes were larger regarding peer relationships in middle childhood and teenage years than during the early childhood years. This might suggest that as children grow older, their attachment to and relationship with their parents becomes more important for the social functioning and relationship with peers.

In a recent study by Lindsey, Cromeens, and Caldera (2010) the role that parent-child interactions have in children's development of social competence was examined. The sample was comprised of 63 families, 32 boys and 31 girls, who had children of the toddler age. These families were part of a longitudinal multisite study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care. The majority of the sample chosen was white (85.9%), mother's average age was 27.2

years old ($SD = 5.5$), and all mothers were living with the child's biological father. Data from fathers was included starting in the second year of the study, with 78.6% of fathers participating. 73% of fathers and 68% of mothers had obtained a college degree with the average family income of \$39,219 ($SD = \$25,855$).

Data was collected during various times when children were between 6 months and 2 years old. During home visits mothers were asked to assess their child's temperament. 8 months later, mother-child and father-child dyads were assessed in laboratory settings during three interactive videotaped sessions.

At 2 years of age, the primary non-maternal caregiver of the child was asked to assess the child's peer behavior. Children were observed in their typical child-care setting and quality of the child-care was assessed using the Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE). Child Temperament was measured by parent report. At 24 months old the child's primary caregiver in their child care setting was asked to complete the Adaptive Social Behavior Inventory (ASBI), a 30 question instrument which measures behavior and social skills with peers and adults, as well as emotion, disruptive behavior, and self-control.

Results showed that father's expression of positive emotions towards their child was positively associated with their income level. Fathers with higher income showed more positive emotions to their child. Correlations in the study found that children with more difficult temperaments were less likely to share positive emotions with their father or mother during the videotaped play sessions. Correlations also found that children with a difficult temperament participated in lower levels of prosocial behaviors and were more aggressive in interactions with their peers. Children with higher levels of positive

interaction within the mother-child dyad exhibited more prosocial behaviors with their peers. Children with higher levels of positive interactions within the father-child dyad were less aggressive and more prosocial in their interactions with their peers. These results highlight the importance of positive shared emotions within parent-child relationship and the significant impact this relationship has on children's social competence.

Overbeek, Stattin, Vermulst, Ha, & Engels (2007) examined whether harmful childhood relationships with parents were associated with later relationship quality with one's partner and emotional adjustment as an adult. Hypotheses for the study were that low quality parent-child relationships would be linked to more conflict with parents, low quality partner relationships in the future, and eventually social-emotional maladjustment later in life. The sample consisted of 212 individuals (122 male, 90 female) living in Sweden. Children in the sample were born between 1955 and 1958 in Stockholm. The last follow up was in 1992 with 91% of the participants completing the study. Data was used from the participants childhood (4-10 years old), adolescence (15-17), young adulthood (25), and midlife (37). Results indicate that parent-child relationship quality during childhood is significantly negatively correlated to parent-adolescent conflict. Adolescents who reported more conflict with their parents during their teen years were more likely to report low relationship quality with their partner later in life and greater levels of anxiety and depression.

In a meta-analysis reviewing the association between attachment during childhood and social competence with peers during childhood Groh et al. (2014) examined 80 independent samples with a total of 4,441 children. The researchers

excluded any articles that reported on sibling relationships, interactions with adults, constructs regarding temperament or self-development, wide assessments of affect, peer interactions with would reflect externalizing behaviors or internalizing symptoms, and items related to social cognitions. Instruments that were completed by parents, teachers, caregivers, or the children themselves measured children's peer competence. Inclusion of articles was also based on their use of observational assessments. Meta-analysis was conducted using the Comprehensive Meta-Analysis program (CMA) on the relation between attachment security and social competence, between avoidance and social competence, between resistance and social competence, and between social competence and disorganization. The results indicated an association between secure attachment and social competence, with a significant effect size. Children with secure attachment had greater levels of social competence with their peers than children who had insecure attachment. The results also indicated that mother-child security was more strongly associated with social competence with peers than was father-child security. Overall, the findings of the study indicated that attachment early in life has modest impacts on children's competence with their peers. This study is consistent with previous research indicating the impact that parent-child relationships have on children's peer relationships.

In a research study investigating the mediating role that mother and son emotional reciprocity plays in the relationship between marital conflict and peer relationships, Lindsey, MacKinnon-Lewis, Campbell, Fraubtt, & Lamb (2002) examined 84 intact families who had sons from 7-9 years in age. Fifty-four of the mothers were European-American and 30 were African-American. Pearson correlations revealed that in families where husbands were physically and verbally aggressive towards their wife, mothers

exhibited more frequent negative emotions towards their sons during the videotaped sessions. Furthermore, mothers who exhibited elevated levels of physical and verbal aggression towards their husbands, had sons who exhibited positive emotions less frequently during the videotaped session. Mothers who exhibited more frequent positive emotions towards their sons were found to have sons who were less aggressive with their peers at school. Sons who reciprocated the positive emotions shown to them by their mother were better liked by their peers at school. A series of regression analyses showed that boys' peer aggression was associated with a low occurrence of positive affect from their mothers. Overall, the parent-child relationship had a significant impact on children's relationships with their peers at school.

Peer Relationships and Friendships

Research has provided strong support that the quality of children's peer relationships at school is important for future academic success, employment, and optimal behavioral, social, and cognitive development (Woodward & Fergusson, 2000). For example, Hymel, Rubin, Rowden, & LeMare (1990), reported a link between negative peer relationships and aggressive behavior as observed by both their peers and teachers. Children who were low in popularity exhibited more acting out behaviors such as aggression and hostility. During middle childhood these children also had more internalizing behaviors that led to social difficulties, social isolation, poor acceptance by their peers, and were perceived by others as being social incompetent. Ollendick, Weist, Borden, & Green (1992) reported that children who had negative peer interactions or were rejected by their peers were perceived by their teachers as having greater problems with attention, an increase in conduct problems, and more aggressive behaviors when

compared to their peers who had positive peer relationships. Parker and Asher (1987) report that children who are rejected by their peers exhibit an increase in disruptive behavior, have greater academic difficulties, report more feelings of loneliness, and are more aggressive than their peers who have positive relationships with one another.

Peer relationship problems are often good indicator of future problematic behaviors. Woodward & Fergusson (1999) report that children with higher rates of peer relationship problems are at an increased risk for substance abuse and have more problems with criminal behaviors. Further, they report that children who had scores which placed them in the most problematic 10% of their grade in peer relationship quality were between 1.7 to 8.8 times more likely than their peers to use nicotine, alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs, of being arrested and convicted for criminal or delinquent behaviors, and for displaying suicidal behaviors. Woodward & Fergusson (2000) reported the 10% of children with the most problematic peer relations were found to be at 5 times greater risk to be unemployed upon graduation.

Children with peer problems at school are often impacted in a variety of ways. Ladd (1990) reported that children with negative peer interactions were more likely to have negative attitudes about school, feel lonelier while at school, have higher levels of school avoidance, and have lower levels of academic performance. According to Ollendick et al. (1992) children with higher levels of negative peer interactions performed worse academically, failed school courses at a higher rate, were more likely to engage in criminal behaviors, and more likely to drop out of school. In fact, it was found that 17.5% of children who felt rejected by their peers dropped out of school by the end of the 9th grade.

Being rejected by one's peers can have a significant impact on the development of social skills. Dodge, Lansford, Burks, Bates, Pettit, Fontaine, & Price (2003), conducted a study examining the relation between social rejection and antisocial behaviors. Peer rejection predicted increased aggression in youth who are predisposed to aggression. They also found that girls and boys were similarly affected by peer rejection, as peer rejection is a stressor for both sexes. They also found support for the theory that peer rejection alters children's response to social cues and how they go about solving social problems.

While the focus of this proposal is centered on peer relationships, there is still value in exploring the research on friendships in school, as peer relationships are often the predecessor to friendships with peers at school. However, before examining the impact that friendships play in children's lives it is important to illustrate the difference between peer relationships and friendships. Peers relationships have the ability to provide companionship, a sense of inclusion or belonging, social support, and validation of one's self-worth (Klima & Repetti 2008; Furman and Robbins 1985). Friendships often go much deeper, illustrated by unique characteristics such as mutual liking, intimacy, affection for one another, nurturance, and higher levels of reciprocity of trust, even at very young ages (Rotenberg & Boulton 2013; Howes 1996; Parker and Gottman 1989; Furman & Robbins 1985). Although peer relationships and friendships have similarities, there is a distinction between the two and one is preceded by the other.

Friendships provide children with many benefits. Ladd & Price (1987) report that friendships may be an important protective factor during the first week of the school year as going to school can be difficult for young children, especially without close attachment

figures such as parents or siblings by their side. It is hypothesized that these friendships may help children more easily navigate a setting that is new to them emotionally, physically, and interpersonally. Much like parents provide a safe base from which to explore new surroundings, friends too may be able to act as this secure base. Howes (1988) conveyed similar findings, reporting that friendships in school can function as peer attachments that can help children to feel more safe and secure while in a new and stressful environment.

Ladd (1990) reports that steady friendships in school can be a vital source of support as children deal with the different types of strains that school can play on them. Additionally children who made numerous new friendships while at school had higher levels of academic performance as the school year progressed. Parker and Gottman (1989) report that early friendships may help children cope with daily frustrations they could encounter while at school. Knowing the impact that positive and negative peer interactions can have upon children and their future, it would be logical to investigate factors that can influence a child's interactions with their peers at school.

Spillover Effect

Spillover refers to the direct transfer of mood, affect, or behavior from one setting to another (Repetti 1987). Erel & Burman (1995) conducted a meta-analysis of 68 studies to investigate whether there was a link or spillover between marital quality and parent-child relationships and whether that link is positive or negative in nature. The researchers hypothesized that there would be a correlation between marital quality and the parent-child relationship. In other words, they hypothesized there would be a spillover effect from one family system to another.

Criteria for the study included that they study could be located at specific libraries in Southern California, the studies be large enough to calculate effect sizes, the study would not report results only in favor of the hypothesis, and the study must be categorized to variables decided upon by the team of researchers. The sample included 68 studies, 15 of which were dissertations. 75% of the children in the study came from intact families. 2% from families not intact, and 23% were unknown and Inter-rater agreement was 96% for the coding of the studies.

The results showed associations between marital and parent-child relationships with effect sizes from -0.52 to 2.30 in range with a mean effect size of 0.46. The findings indicated a positive relationship between marital and parent-child relationships thereby supporting the spillover hypothesis.

Buehler, Benson, & Gerard (2006) investigated of how parenting helps to mediate the association between inter-parental hostility and adolescent problem behaviors. 6th graders from 13 middle schools in the southeast United States were chosen for the sample. Additionally the sample was reduced to include only those children whose parents were married and had no stepchildren in or out of the home. In total there were 416 families included in the study with 91% identifying as European American and 3% as African-American. The findings of the study showed that inter-parental hostility was distinctively associated with mothers and father's compromised parenting. Furthermore, every association between interparental hostility and parenting was statistically significant when assessing fathers. Findings showed that the impact on sons and daughters were very similar with no statistically significant differences. An association was found between interparental hostility and adolescent problem behaviors. These

findings from the above-mentioned study support the theory that both positive and negative spillover can occur from one family system into another. Consistent with previous literature, fathers were found to be more susceptible to negative effects from spillover.

In order to discover how different family systems impact one another, Fauchier & Margolin (2004) conducted a study investigating affection and conflict in marital and parent-child relationships. Both children and parents assessed marital affection. Children were administered the Child's View instrument, which has 65 measures of parent-child and other family relations. Parents were administered the brief Dyadic Family Assessment Measure (FAM), a 14-item questionnaire which examines relationships within the family. Both children and parents also completed measures of marital conflict.

The findings showed an inverse relationship between parent-child affection and parent-child conflict and between marital affection and parent-child conflict. Using regression analyses the researchers found that marital affection was a significant predictor of parent-child affection. The analysis also showed that father's marital affection had a significant impact on their parent-child affection. In the children's reports marital affection was a significant predictor of parent-child affection. Father's marital conflict was not a significant predictor of father's parent-child affection. The findings of this study are consistent with the spillover perspective suggesting that interactions in family subsystem often spill into another.

Brazilian Studies

Despite the wealth of information about the impact that marital quality and parent-child relationships have on children in America and in European countries, there is

little research done on Latino cultures. One study conducted by Stutzman, Miller, Hollist, & Falceto (2009) was done using earlier waves of data from the same longitudinal study been used by the researcher.

The results of their study indicated that positive marital exchanges between partners were not associated with child behavioral outcomes. This finding was similar to previous research stating that satisfaction in marriage is not heavily associated to developmental outcomes of children (Katz & Gottman, 1993). However findings from the study did indicate a negative relationship between marital conflict and child outcomes.

With the limited literature available and the language barrier of not being literate in Portuguese, it proved difficult to find adequate research on the relationship that marital quality and the parent-child relationship have on Brazilian Children's peer relationships at school. I believe there is a gap in the literature the study proposed will expand the knowledge about Brazilian families. Brazil is a country with a unique culture and distinct challenges. Finally, Brazil is a country that is very underrepresented in the literature. I have an interest in studying underserved populations and feel that this study will provide valuable information to a country historically underrepresented in the literature.

Hypothesis

Specific hypothesis for this study are as follows:

H1: There will be a relationship between marital quality and children's relationships with their peers at school.

H2: There will be a relationship between qualities of parent-child relationships and the children's relationships with their peers at school.

H3: Boys peer relationships will be negatively impacted by marital quality and the parent-child relationship more significantly than girls peer relationships.

Methods

Procedures

The data for this study were part of a larger longitudinal study of the development of Brazilian families. Collection of the data involved collaboration of a university medical school in Southern Brazil, the hospital organization *Grupo Hospitalar Conceição*, and the Family Therapy Institute in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The sample was collected from Porto Alegre, which uses a medical system whereby medical care is divided into geographic regions that are serviced by hospitals and clinics. Each region has several districts, each having its own health clinic that provides primary care services. The hospital group responsible for the region of Porto Alegre is *Grupo Hospitalar Conceição*. The study was conducted in connection with three medical clinics that serve approximately 18,000 people.

In Brazil, the local government registers the birth of the child and the information is sent to the medical region and district where the family lives (Hollist, Miller, & Falceto, 2007). All children living in the region of the three clinics and born between March, 1999 and May, 2000 were selected for the study. Researchers from the project were given the contact information of newborn children and their families. All participants in the study received informed consent forms. Two family therapists scheduled and performed family interviews with all those who consented to the study, and those interviews were video recorded.

There were 228 infant births reported during the first waves of data collection. For medical and/or ethical reasons, 13 infants and their families were excluded from the study. Overall, there were 215 families that met criteria for the study. Of the 215

families, 208 consented to participation in the study. Sixty-two families did not finish all of the initial questionnaires due to time constraints. Overall, the sample contains a 68% participation rate. Although a number of participants dropped out, 97% of the respondents provided completed demographic data. In order to compare demographics of those who dropped out with those still involved in the study, t-tests were run. The t-tests indicated no ethnic, income, or age related differences between the groups. Consequently, there were no apparent effects of selection bias (Miller & Wright, 1995).

Two years later, a second wave of data was collected from these families. One hundred and twenty-five families participated in the second wave, indicating an 18% loss from wave 1 to wave 2. Most of the families not included in the second wave could not be reached due to relocating. Furthermore, data were not collected from the fathers due to financial constraints. T-tests were run to identify possible attrition bias after the second wave of data collection, with no significant demographic differences identified.

Two years later, a third wave of data was collected. The children averaged 4 years and 3 months old in age. Data were collected from mothers, children, and available fathers at the third wave. All 125 participants responded and had their data collected in wave 3. Attempts were not made to collect data from those who failed to respond in wave 2. Finally, wave four of the data set was collected two years later. A total of 114 families participated in this wave.

Design and Participants

The data from wave four will be used for these analyses. Wave four included 114 families. However, for the purpose of this study only 65 mothers and their children were analyzed, because we were interested in only using data from mothers who had partners

and were identified as the primary caregiver for their child. Primary caregiver is defined as the parent who most often is in charge for the care of their child. Fathers were also excluded from this sample due to low number of respondents in this wave. The average age of the mothers was 37 years ($SD= 8.7$) and the average age of their spouses was 40 ($SD=9.3$). Forty-eight mothers reported that their spouse was their child's biological father, 12 reported that their spouse wasn't their child's biological father, and 5 are unknown due to some mothers being uncomfortable with disclosing that information or not participating with the data collection. On average each mother had 7.9 years of education ($SD= 2.9$) and her spouse reported 7.6 years of education ($SD=3.2$). Mean family income was about 1457 Reals per month ($SD= 769$), which equals to about \$450 dollars per month in US dollars ($SD= \$236$). Of the 65 children in the study, 36 are female and 29 are male.

Measures

Marital Quality

The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) developed by Busby, Crane, Larson, & Christensen (1995) is widely used as an indicator of marital quality. The instrument is comprised of 14 questions, which measure three components of marriage: Consensus, Cohesion, and Satisfaction. The RDAS uses a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (always disagree) to 5 (always agree).

The RDAS has recently been translated into Portuguese and was found to be a culturally valid instrument with no significant differences between the psychometric properties based on age, ethnicity, or income (Hollist, Felceto, Ferreira, Miller, Springer,

Fernandes, & Nunes, 2012). This measure will be used to assess the marital quality for each mother in the study.

Parent-Child Relationship

The Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) Parker, Tupling, & Brown (1979) is a scale widely used to measure parent and child bonding. It consists of two scales, Care and Overprotection, which divide parents into four categories: high care-high control, high care-low control, low care-high control, and low care-low control. The measure is a Likert-like scale consisting of 25 questions to which the child may choose the options of “very like”, “moderately like”, “Moderately unlike” or “very unlike” when describing the attitudes and behaviors of their parent. The 25 questions consist of 13 items regarding “overprotection” or “control” and 12 items related to “care”. Parker et al. (1979) reported the PBI to have a .88 for reliability for the “care” scale and .74 for the “protection” or “control” scale.

The PBI has been translated into several languages including Portuguese, and has been found to be a reliable and valid instrument in this language. In this data set I will be using the “overprotection” and “care” scales in this model as those scales were the only ones available to me in the data set.

Children’s peer relationships

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a behavioral screening instrument used to assess the strengths and difficulties of children ranging from ages 4-16 Goodman (1997). The SDQ consists of 25 questions and has 5 scales made up of 5 questions each. The 5 subscales are: Hyperactivity Scale, Emotional Symptoms Scale,

Conduct Problems Scale, Peer Problems Scale, and Pro-social Scale. There are versions for both the child and the child's parent or teacher.

For this study the researcher proposes to use 3 of the scales to assess each child's relationship with their peers. The scales that will be used are the Peer Problems Scale, the Pro-social Scale, and overall difficulties scale. The questions in the Peer Problems Scale consists of: "rather solitary, prefers to play alone", "has at least one good friend", "generally liked by other children", "picked on or bullied by other children", and "gets along better with adults than with other children". The questions for the Pro-social Scale are: "considerate of other people's feelings", "shares readily with other children, for example toys, treats, pencils", "helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill", "kind to younger children", and "often offers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)". The SDQ has been translated into many languages, including Portuguese and has been found to have good clinical utility in many different Brazilian studies Cury & Golfeto (2003), Fleitlich, Cortazar, & Goodman (2000), Fleitlich-Bilyk (2004).

Analyses

The researcher used Pearson correlation analysis to measure the strength of the relationship between marital quality and the parent-child relationship to children's peer relations. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine how multiple independent variables were related to children's peer relationships. All multiple regression analyses controlled for mother's income, total family income, mother's education level, mother's age, and mother's relationship status, as well as the variables of marital quality and the parent-child relationship. To avoid repetitiveness the variables of mother's income, total family income, mother's education level, mother's age, and

mother's relationship status will be referred to as IV's. Prosocial behaviors, peer problems, and overall total difficulties are the dependent variables (DV's) for regression analyses.

Results

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how marital quality and the parent-child relationship impact peer relationships at school, and to determine if there is a difference in how boys and girls are impacted. The following results will be presented in conjunction with the hypothesis which they are associated with. The results will also be separated into male, female, and combined categories as to better determine which sex, if either, was impacted more in the analyses.

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant correlation between marital quality and children's relationships with their peers at school.

In order to determine if there was a correlation between the marital quality and children's relationships with their peers at school, a Pearson Correlation test was completed. Table 1 is the mother's perspective of their child's strengths and difficulties. The correlations are found in Tables 1-4. Tables 1 & 2 will present the combined data and Tables 3 & 4 will present the data split into categories of male and female.

<u>Table 1</u>		
<u>Correlation Scores for RDAS and Mother's version of SDQ</u>		
<u>RDAS</u>		<u>Correlation</u>
<u>Combined Scores</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 63)	-.094
Peer problems	(N = 63)	-.285*
Total Difficulties	(N = 63)	-.308*

*. Correlation significant at the 0.05 level.

The results from Table 1 show two correlations between marital quality and peer relationships. The first correlation showed a significant negative correlation between marital quality and peer problems. The scores suggest that as scores on marital quality increased, scores for peer problem decreased. The second correlation found showed a significant negative correlation between marital quality and overall total difficulties for the child. The scores suggest that as scores on marital quality increased, scores for overall total difficulties decreased.

Table 2
Correlation Scores for RDAS and Child's version of SDQ

<u>RDAS</u>		<u>Correlation</u>
<u>Combined Scores</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 63)	-.242
Peer problems	(N = 63)	-.016
Total Difficulties	(N = 63)	-.057

*. Correlation significant at the 0.05 level.

The results from Table 2 indicate that there were no correlations found between marital quality and peer relationships when using the Child version of the SDQ.

Table 3
Correlation Scores for RDAS and Mother's version of SDQ

<u>RDAS</u>		<u>Correlation</u>
<u>Daughters</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 36)	-.266
Peer problems	(N = 36)	-.276
Total Difficulties	(N = 36)	-.241
<u>Sons</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 28)	.137
Peer problems	(N = 28)	-.419*
Total Difficulties	(N = 28)	-.441*

*. Correlation significant at the 0.05 level.

The results from Table 3 show two correlations between marital quality and peer relationships, both for male children. The first correlation found showed a significant negative correlation between marital quality and peer problems at school for sons. The scores suggest that as scores for marital quality increased, scores for peer problems at school decreased.

The second correlation found showed a significant negative correlation between marital quality and the child's overall difficulties at school. This correlation would suggest that as marital quality increases, their sons's overall difficulties at school decrease. There were no significant correlations between marital quality and peer relationships for girls within this study.

<u>RDAS</u>		<u>Correlation</u>
<u>Daughters</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(<i>N</i> = 36)	-.333
Peer problems	(<i>N</i> = 36)	.016
Total Difficulties	(<i>N</i> = 36)	.004
<u>Sons</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(<i>N</i> = 28)	-.245
Peer problems	(<i>N</i> = 28)	.070
Total Difficulties	(<i>N</i> = 28)	.123

The results from Table 4 indicated that there were no correlations found between marital quality and peer relationships when using the Child version of the SDQ.

First Regression: The first set of multiple regressions examined the relationship between the child's prosocial behaviors, peer problems, and overall total difficulties as measured in the mother's version of the SDQ (DV's), with marital quality and the IV's. The multiple regression model for prosocial behaviors produced $R^2 = .29$,

$F(7,41) = 2.48$, $p = .32$, with no significant relationship found. The model for peer problems produced $R^2 = .22$, $F(7,41) = 1.64$, $p = .15$, with no significant results. The model for total difficulties produced $R^2 = .35$, $F(7,41) = 3.08$, $p = .011$, with two significant predictors. The first was that marital quality significantly predicted total difficulties, $\beta = -.29$, $p = .038$. This would indicate that as marital quality increases, total difficulties at school for the child decreases. The second finding was that total income significantly predicted total difficulties, $\beta = -.34$, $p = .04$. This would indicate that as total income increases, total difficulties at school decrease.

Second Regression: The second set of multiple regressions examined the relationship between the child's prosocial behaviors, peer problems, and overall total difficulties as measured in the child's version of the SDQ, with marital quality and the IV's. The multiple regression model for prosocial behaviors produced $R^2 = .115$, $F(7,40) = .74$, $p = .64$, with no significant results. The model for total difficulties produced $R^2 = .19$, $F(7,40) = 1.34$, $p = .25$, with no significant results. The model for peer problems produced $R^2 = .29$, $F(7,40) = 2.31$, $p = .045$, with two significant findings. The first finding was that total income significantly predicted peer problems, $\beta = -.36$, $p = .04$. This would indicate that as total income increases, peer problems decrease. The second finding was that the mother's age significantly predicted peer problems, $\beta = -.52$, $p = <.001$. This would indicate that the older the age of the mother, the lower amount of peer problems her child had.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a significant correlation between the parent-child relationship and children's relationships with their peers at school.

In order to determine if there was a significant correlation between the parent-child relationship and children's relationships with their peers at school, a Pearson Correlation test was completed. The correlations are found in Tables 5-8. Tables 5 & 6 will present the combined data and Tables 7 & 8 will present the data split into categories of male and female.

<u>Table 5</u>		
<u>Correlation Scores for PBI and Mother's version of the SDQ</u>		
<u>PBI</u>		<u>Correlation</u>
<u>Overprotection</u>		
<u>Combined Scores</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 65)	-.239
Peer problems	(N = 65)	.168
Total Difficulties	(N = 65)	.142
<u>Caring</u>		
<u>Combined Scores</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 65)	-.033
Peer problems	(N = 65)	-.098
Total Difficulties	(N = 65)	-.290*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The results from Table 5 show one correlation between the parent-child relationship and total difficulties. The correlation indicated that there is a significant negative correlation between a parent-child relationship characterized as "caring" and the total difficulties of the child. The scores suggest that as scores for caring in the parent-child relationship increased, scores for total difficulties the child had decreased.

Table 6
Correlation Scores for PBI and Child's version of the SDQ

<u>PBI</u>		<u>Correlation</u>
<u>Overprotection</u>		
<u>Combined Scores</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 65)	-.201
Peer problems	(N = 65)	.233
Total Difficulties	(N = 65)	.361**
<u>Caring</u>		
<u>Combined Scores</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 65)	.123
Peer problems	(N = 65)	.038
Total Difficulties	(N = 65)	-.201
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level		
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level		

The results from Table 6 show one correlation between the parent-child relationship and total difficulties. The correlation indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between overprotection and total difficulties. The scores suggest that as scores for overprotection in the parent-child relationship increased, scores for total difficulties the child had increased.

Table 7
Correlation Scores for PBI and Mother's version of the SDQ

<u>PBI</u>		<u>Correlation</u>
<u>Overprotection</u>		
<u>Daughters</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 36)	-.401*
Peer problems	(N = 36)	.211
Total Difficulties	(N = 36)	.127
<u>Sons</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 28)	.144
Peer problems	(N = 28)	.146
Total Difficulties	(N = 28)	.173
<u>Caring</u>		
<u>Daughters</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 36)	-.107
Peer problems	(N = 36)	-.231
Total Difficulties	(N = 36)	-.486**
<u>Sons</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 28)	.126
Peer problems	(N = 28)	.275
Total Difficulties	(N = 28)	.032
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level		
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level		

The results from Table 7 show two correlations between the parent-child relationship and children's peer relationships for female children. The first correlation indicated a significant negative correlation between an overprotective relationship and prosocial behaviors. The scores suggest that as scores for overprotective parenting in the parent-child relationship increased, scores for daughter's prosocial behaviors decreased. The second correlation indicated a significant negative correlation between caring relationship and the child's total difficulties. The scores suggest that as caring in the

parent-child relationship increased, scores for daughters overall total difficulties decreased.

<u>Table 8</u>		
<u>Correlation Scores for PBI and Child's version of the SDQ</u>		
<u>PBI</u>		<u>Correlation</u>
<u>Overprotection</u>		
<u>Daughters</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 36)	-.198
Peer problems	(N = 36)	.332
Total Difficulties	(N = 36)	.450**
<u>Sons</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 28)	-.158
Peer problems	(N = 28)	.016
Total Difficulties	(N = 28)	.213
<u>Caring</u>		
<u>Daughters</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 36)	.174
Peer problems	(N = 36)	-.174
Total Difficulties	(N = 36)	-.176
<u>Sons</u>		
Prosocial behaviors	(N = 28)	.279
Peer problems	(N = 28)	.146
Total Difficulties	(N = 28)	-.329
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level		

The results from Table 8 show one significant correlation between qualities of parent-child relationships and children's peer relationships. The correlation indicated a significant positive association between overprotection and the female children's overall difficulties. The scores suggest that as scores for overprotection increased, scores for their daughter's total difficulties at school increased. There were no significant

correlations between qualities of parent-child relationships and peer relationships at school for boys.

Third Regression: The third set of multiple regressions examined the relationship between children's prosocial behaviors, peer problems, and overall total difficulties as measured in the mother's version of the SDQ, with the overprotection scale from the PBI and controlling for the IV's. The multiple regression model for peer problems produced $R^2 = .23$, $F(7,40) = 1.67$, $p = .14$. The model for prosocial behaviors produced $R^2 = .26$, $F(7,40) = 2.03$, $p = .074$. The model for total difficulties produced $R^2 = .26$, $F(7,40) = 2.04$, $p = .07$. None of the regression models produced any significant findings.

Fourth Regression: The fourth set of multiple regressions examined the relationship between children's prosocial behaviors, peer problems, and overall total difficulties as measured in the child's version of the SDQ, with the overprotection scale from the PBI and controlling for the IV's. The regression model for prosocial behaviors produced $R^2 = .157$, $F(7,39) = 1.04$, $p = .42$. The model for peer problems produced $R^2 = .33$, $F(7,39) = 2.68$, $p = .023$, with one significant finding. The finding was that the mother's age predicted peer problems, $\beta = -.49$, $p = .002$. This would suggest that the older the mother, peer problems for the child decrease. The model for total difficulties produced $R^2 = .31$, $F(7,39) = 2.53$, $p = .03$, with one significant finding. The finding was that overprotective parenting predicted total difficulties, $\beta = .38$, $p = .012$. This would suggest that as overprotective parenting increases, total difficulties for the child increase as well.

Fifth Regression: A fifth set of multiple regressions examined the relationship between children's prosocial behaviors, peer problems, and overall total difficulties as measured in the mother's version of the SDQ, with the care scale from the PBI and controlling for the IV's. The regression model for peer problems produced $R^2 = .28$, $F(7,40) = 2.25$, $p = .05$, with no significant findings. The model for prosocial behaviors produced $R^2 = .20$, $F(7,40) = 1.45$, $p = .212$, with no significant findings. The model for total difficulties produced $R^2 = .34$, $F(7,40) = 3.00$, $p = .012$, with one significant finding. The finding was that care predicted total difficulties, $\beta = -.31$, $p = .027$. This would suggest that as caring in the parent-child relationship increases, the child's total difficulties decrease.

Sixth Regression: The sixth set of multiple regressions examined the relationship between children's prosocial behaviors, peer problems, and overall total difficulties as measured in the child's version of the SDQ, with the care scale from the PBI and controlling for the IV's. The regression from the peer problems produced $R^2 = .28$, $F(7,39) = 2.18$, $p = .057$. The regression from prosocial behaviors produced $R^2 = .14$, $F(7,39) = .93$, $p = .493$. The regression from total difficulties produced $R^2 = .21$, $F(7,39) = 1.54$, $p = .182$. There were no significant findings in these regressions. Overall, there were several significant findings that came from the multiple regression analyses.

Hypothesis 3: Overall, boys' peer relationships will be more negatively impacted by marital quality and qualities of parent-child relationships more significantly than girls' peer relationships.

This hypothesis was partially confirmed. Correlations in this study show that boys were more negatively impacted by low marital quality. This is evidenced by the findings in Table 3 that illustrate as scores for marital quality increased, scores for peer problems and total difficulties decreased for boys. Girls in the study were more impacted by a negative parent-child relationship. This is evidenced by the findings in Tables 7 & 8, which showed that as scores for overprotective parenting increased, scores for prosocial behaviors decreased and scores for total difficulties for the child increased. It was also found that as scores for caring in the parent-child relationship increased, scores for overall total difficulties decreased.

One possible explanation for this finding is that boys exhibited more externalizing behaviors in the form of peer problems, and that girls exhibit more internalizing behaviors in the form of less prosocial behaviors or social withdrawal. This is line with Hadley (2003), who reported that aggression is much more common with boys and internalizing is much more common with girls.

This hypothesis could also not be tested, as the sample size in this study was too low. The power to effectively determine the significance of a finding is reliant upon having a large enough sample size for the study.

Discussion

Some evidence was found supporting the aims of the study, suggesting that marital quality and the parent-child relationship do effect a child's peer relationships. Although the third hypothesis was only partially true, evidence was still found supporting how genders are impacted differently by marital quality and the parent-child relationship.

Marital Quality

There were four correlations found that showed a relationship between marital quality and children's relationships with their peers at school. Two of the findings were significant overall and two of these findings were significant for boys only. Overall, the study found that as marital quality increased, peer problems and total difficulties decreased. When separated into categories of boys and girls, these findings were also significant for boys, but not for girls. The multiple regression analysis also suggested that as marital quality increases, total difficulties for the children decrease.

These findings are somewhat different from the findings of Marks et al. (2001) who reported that children who witnessed severe marital discord had more behavioral problems and lower social competence than their peers who do not. Other researchers (Mann & Makenzie, 1996) have reported that marital dissatisfaction and overt marital conflict have an impact on the oppositional behavior of children; while Vuchinich et al. (1993) found a negative correlation between marital quality and children's externalizing behaviors. In these previous studies both children were impacted by low marital quality. However, in this Brazilian study only the boys were impacted significantly. This could be due to the tendency for boys to externalize problems and girls to internalize them. It is possible that boys in this study exhibited aggression to cope with the stress of their parent's low marital quality and that girls turned to their peers for support. If that were the case then boys would seem to have an increase in peer problems and overall difficulties or for their parents to perceive that they do.

Parent-Child Relationship

There were five correlations found between the parent-child relationship and children's relationships with their peers at school. Overall, the study found that total difficulties decrease as a caring parent-child relationship increases, and total difficulties increase as an overprotective parent-child relationship increases. The findings were also significant for girls, but not for boys. One correlation suggested that as the mother is more overprotective, her daughter's prosocial behaviors decrease. Another suggested that the more caring the parent-child relationship is, the less total difficulties her daughter has at school. The last correlation suggests that as a parent is more overprotective, her daughter's total difficulties at school increases. It is interesting that girls were significantly impacted by the parent-child relationship and boys were not. A possible reason for this could be that overprotective parenting causes girls to isolate more than boys while in social situations, which is then perceived as being less prosocial and having more total difficulties.

The multiple regression analyses also suggested that the more overprotective the parent-child relationship, the more total difficulties the child has. The regression also indicated that as the parent-child relationship has higher levels of care, the children's total difficulties decrease.

These findings are consistent with that of Schneider et al. (2001), who found that as children grow older their relationship with their parents becomes more important for social functioning and relationships with their peers. Woodward & Fergusson (1999), also found links between peer relationship problems at school and parent-child interactions. Finally, Lindsey et al. (2010) reported that children with higher levels of

positive interactions in the mother-child relationship have been found to exhibit more prosocial behaviors with their peers. Again, the findings of this study seem to be consistent with previous studies.

Other findings not related to the hypotheses of the study indicated that total family income, as well as age of the mother, was statistically significant variables that play a role in social functioning of both boys and girls. There is literature available that would seem to support these findings. Hurtig et al. (2007) reported that children in low SES families are at greater risk for child behavioral problems and externalizing symptoms. Fryers, Melzer, & Jenkins (2003) report that there are links between higher rates of psychopathology in adults and lower levels of SES. Furthermore, Yates, Obradovic, & Egeland (2010) report that two factors related to behavioral difficulties in children are parents who suffer from depression or are under increased levels of stress. It is possible that in this study, parents with lower levels of SES suffer from higher levels of stress and depression, which in turn impacts their relationship with their children and their child's social functioning. These findings are important as they could provide answers of how to help families at risk. Families from lower SES backgrounds may be in need of resources that could help in lowering tension and stress in the home, thereby promoting a healthier atmosphere for children.

There is research on the age of the mother that could provide possible answers. Hall & Hal (2007) reported that younger mothers usually have fewer financial resources than older mothers. Sutcliffe, Barnes, Belsky, Gardiner, & Melhuish (2012) report that there is a possibility that increasing maternal age leads to more effective parenting, citing in their study that children who were born to older mothers were found

to have better health and developmental outcomes. Again, this research is valuable because it informs professionals on how they can provide help for at risk families. Younger mothers may simply be in need of psychoeducation about effective parenting practices or how they can increase marital quality with their spouse. It could be that older mothers have more knowledge, resources, or life experience which gives them an advantage that younger mothers do not typically have. Future studies on the parent-child relationship could focus on mother's age.

Limitations

While this study provides important information regarding marital quality, parent-child relationships, and how they impact peer relationships of school age kids among a highly underserved and under researched population, it is not without limitations. In this section I will discuss these limitations, as well as the impact that they may have on the results of this study.

Self-report. One limitation of this study is that it is entirely based on self-report. As a result, these findings only include what respondents are willing to share. It is possible that social desirability influenced participant's response to the question, or that the parent's fondness for their child may have skewed the results. Many parents tend to have a favorable view of their child, which can make them not entirely objective when assessing their child's social behaviors. Further, parents experiencing low marital quality or a lack of closeness with their child may be prone to exaggerating problems that their child may be experiencing when assessed.

Sample size. Generally, a larger sample size is desirable. The sample size in this study was smaller than anticipated, including 65 mothers and children. This was a result of the inclusion criteria for this study in which we could only select mothers who were the child's primary care giver. As a result, the sample size was significantly decreased. A larger sample size would have also provided the researcher with the opportunity to examine whether certain variables could be protective factors against other variables, such as a positive parent-child relationship being a protective factor against low marital quality. Future studies would benefit from recruiting and a larger sample that could utilize more rigorous statistical measure.

No data from fathers. Due to a low number of responses from fathers in the data, fathers were excluded from this study. Data from fathers would have provided another perspective of the quality of their marriage, their relationship with their child, and their child's peer relationships. Had there been more data on fathers, the study would have a more complete assessment of factors influencing peer relationships.

No measures from teachers. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to assess children's prosocial behaviors and peer problems. The parent and child versions were both used for this study. There is also a version of the SDQ created for teachers' assessment. Had the teachers completed this assessment, a more objective view of the child's prosocial behaviors and peer problems might have been found. It is the researchers opinion that future studies could benefit from having the child's teacher complete the teacher version of the SDQ.

Conclusion

In general, the results suggest that marital quality and the parent-child relationship do have some impact on children's peer relationships at school. From the results, it would seem that both boys and girls are impacted, although in different ways. Males in this study seem to be more impacted by marital quality and females were more impacted by the parent-child relationship. Again, this could be because boys tend to externalize behaviors and girls tend to internalize them. Both males and females were impacted by the age of the mother and the total income of the family.

Implications for Future Research

Future studies that include data from fathers and assessments by the student's teachers could provide a more complete picture of all the different factors that influence a child's relationship with their peers.

There were multiple significant findings that indicated the age of the mother was an important factor in their children's social development. Future studies could investigate the reason why this was a benefit to children in this study.

There were also multiple significant findings regarding parenting style found within this study. Overprotective parenting was associated with negative social outcomes for children and a parent-child relationship with high levels of caring was found to be associated with positive social outcomes. Future studies could examine the role culture, socioeconomic status, and other variables play in parenting styles in Brazil.

Findings of this study indicated that socioeconomic status (SES) played a role in children's peer relationships. This would indicate that there is a certain point where SES

becomes a significant risk factor. Future studies could be done to determine where that point is. Additionally, researcher has shown that SES can play a significant factor in depression in parents. A future study investigating how a parent's mental health impacts their relationship with their child and their children's peer relationships could be done and provide valuable information for professionals.

Future directions for research might include examining if certain variables are protective factors against other variables. As mentioned previously, a larger sample size could provide sufficient data to test this hypothesis.

References

- Bohlin, G., Hagekull, B., & Rydell, A. (2000). Attachment and social functioning: A longitudinal study from infancy to middle childhood. *Social Development, 9*(1), 24-39.
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New York: Jason Aronson
- Busby, D. M., Crane, D. R., Larson, J. H., & Christensen, C. (1995). A revision of the dyadic adjustment scale for use with distressed and nondistressed couples: Construct hierarchy and multidimensional scales. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 21*, 289–308.
- Buehler, C., Benson, M. J., & Gerard, J. M. (2006). Interparental hostility and early adolescent problem behavior: The mediating role of specific aspects of parenting. *Journal of Research On Adolescence (Wiley-Blackwell), 16*(2), 265-292. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2006.00132.x
- Cappella, E., Kim, H., Neal, J., & Jackson, D. (2013). Classroom peer relationships and behavioral engagement in elementary school: The role of social network equity. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 52*(3/4), 367-379.
doi:10.1007/s10464-013-9603-5
- Cury CR, Golfeto JH (2003) Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ): a study of school children in Ribeirão Preto. *Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatr 25*:139–145 6.
- Dodge, K. A., Lansford, J. E., Burks, V. S., Bates, J. E., Pettit, G. S., Fontaine, R., & Price, J. M. (2003). Peer rejection and social information-processing factors in the

development of aggressive behavior problems in children. *Child Development*, 74(2), 374-393. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.7402004

Erel, O., & Burman, B. (1995). Interrelatedness of marital relations and parent-child relations: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 108-132.

Elliott, A. C., Woodward, W. A. (2007). *Statistical analysis: Quick reference guidebook with spss examples* (pp 77-112). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Fauchier, A., & Margolin, G. (2004). Affection and conflict in marital and parent-child relationships. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy*, 30(2), 197-211.

Fleitlich-Bilyk, B., & Goodman, R. (2004). Prevalence of child and adolescent psychiatric disorders in southern Brazil. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 43(6), 727-734.
doi:10.1097/01.chi.0000120021.14101.ca

Fleitlich B, Cortazar PG, Goodman R (2000) Questionário de capacidades e dificuldades (SDQ). *Infanto* 8:44-50

Fryers, T., Melzer, D., & Jenkins, R. (2003). Social inequalities and the common mental disorders: a systematic review of the evidence. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 38, 229-237.

Furman, W., & Robbins, P. (1985). What's the point? Issues in the selection of treatment objectives. In B. H. Schneider, K. H. Rubin, & J. E. Ledingham (Eds.), *Children's peer relations: Issues in assessment and intervention* (pp. 41-54). New York: Springer-Verlag.

- Goodman, R. (1997). The strengths and difficulties questionnaire: A research note. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry & Allied Disciplines*, 38(5), 581-586. doi:10.1111/1469-7610.ep9709033852
- Groh, A. M., Fearon, R. P., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Steele, R. D., & Roisman, G. I. (2014). The significance of attachment security for children's social competence with peers: a meta-analytic study. *Attachment & Human Development*, 16(2), 103-136. doi:10.1080/14616734.2014.883636
- Hadley, M. (2003). Relational, Indirect, Adaptive, or Just Mean. *Studies in Gender & Sexuality*, 4(4), 367-394.
- Hakvoort, E. M., Bos, H. W., van Balen, F., & Hermanns, J. A. (2010). Family relationships and the psychosocial adjustment of school-aged children in intact families. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 171(2), 182-201.
- Hall, D., & Hall, S. (2007). The family-nurse partnership: Developing an instrument for identification, assessment and recruitment of clients. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.
- Hartup, W. W., & Moore, S. G. (1990). Early peer relations: developmental significance and prognostic implications. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 5(1), 1-17
- Hollist, C. S., Falceto, O. G., Ferreira, L. M., Miller, R. B., Springer, P. R., Fernandes, C. C., & Nunes, N. A. (2012). Portuguese translation and validation of the revised dyadic adjustment scale. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy*, 38(Supp S1), 348-358. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2012.00296.x

- Howes, C. (1996). The earliest friendships. In W. M. Bukowski, A. F. Newcomb, & W. W. Hartup (Eds.), *The company they keep: Friendship in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 158–185). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Howes, C. (1988). Peer interaction of young children. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 53(1, Serial No.217).
- Hurtig, T., Ebeling, H., Taanila, A., Miettunen, J., Smalley, S., McGough, J., et al. (2007). ADHD and comorbid disorders in relation to family environment and symptom severity. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 16, 362–369.
- Hymel, S., Rubin, K. H., Rowden, L., & LeMare, L. (1990). Children's peer relationships: Longitudinal prediction of internalizing and externalizing problems from middle to late childhood. *Child Development*, 61(6), 2004.
doi:10.1111/1467-8624.ep9103040656
- Katz, L. F., & Gottman, J. M. (1993). Patterns of marital conflict predict children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. *Developmental Psychology*, 29(6), 940.
- Katz, L. G., & McClellan, D. E. (1991). *The teacher's role in the social development of young children*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.
- Kemple, K. M., & Hartle, L. (1997). Getting along: how teachers can support children's peer relationships. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 24(3), 139-146.
- Kendler KS. Parenting: a genetic epidemiological perspective. *Am J Psychiatry* 1996; 153:11-20.

- Klima, T., & Repetti, R. L. (2008). Children's peer relations and their psychological adjustment: Differences between close friendships and the larger peer group. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 54*(2), 151-178.
- Ladd, G. W., & Price, J. M. (1987). Predicting children's social and school adjustment following the transition from preschool to kindergarten. *Child Development, 58*, 1168-1189.
- Ladd, G. W. (1990). Having friends, keeping friends, making friends, and being liked by peers in the classroom: Predictors of children's early school adjustment? *Child Development, 61*(4), 1081-1100. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.ep9102040965
- Lindsey, E. W., Campbell, J., MacKinnon-Lewis, C., Frabutt, J. M., & Lamb, M. E. (2002). Marital conflict and boy's peer relationships: The mediating role of mother-son emotional reciprocity. *Journal of Family Psychology, 16*(4), 466-477. doi:10.1037//0893-3200.16.4.466
- Lindsey, E. W., Cremeens, P. R., & Caldera, Y. M. (2010). Mother-child and father-child mutuality in two contexts: Consequences for young children's peer relationships. *Infant & Child Development, 19*(2), 142-160.
- Mann, B. J., & MacKenzie, E. P. (1996). Pathways among marital functioning, parental behaviors, and child behavior problems in school. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 25*(2), 183.
- Marks, C. R., Glaser, B. A., Glass, J. B., & Horne, A. M. (2001). Effects of witnessing severe marital discord on children's social competence and behavioral problems. *Family Journal, 9*(2), 94-101.

- McCoy, K. P., George, M. W., Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. T. (2013). Constructive and destructive marital conflict, parenting, and children's school and social adjustment. *Social Development, 22*(4), 641-662. doi:10.1111/sode.12015
- Minuchin, S., & Fishman, H. C. (1981). *Family therapy techniques*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ollendick, T. H., Weist, M. D., Borden, M. C., & Greene, R. W. (1992). Sociometric status and academic, behavioral, and psychological adjustment: a five-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 60*(1), 80-87
- Overbeek, G., Stattin, H., Vermulst, A., Thao, H., & Engels, R. E. (2007). Parent-child relationships, partner relationships, and emotional adjustment: A birth-to-maturity prospective study. *Developmental Psychology, 43*(2), 429-437. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.43.2.429
- Parker, J. G., & Asher, S. R. (1987). Peer relations and later personal adjustment: Are low-accepted children at risk? *Psychological Bulletin, 102*(3), 357-389. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.102.3.357
- Parker, J. G., & Gottman, J. M. (1989). Social and emotional development in a relational context: friendship interaction from early childhood to adolescence. In T. J. Berndt & G. W. Ladd (Eds), *Peer relationships in child development* (pp.95-131). New York: Wiley
- Parker G, Tupling H, Brown LB. A parental bonding instrument. *Br J Med Psychol 1979*; 52:1_10.

- Repetti, R. L. (1987). Links between work and family role. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *Family processes and problems: Social psychological aspects* (pp. 98-127). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Rotenberg, K. J., & Boulton, M. (2013). Interpersonal trust consistency and the quality of peer relationships during childhood. *Social Development, 22*(2), 225-241.
doi:10.1111/sode.12005
- Schneider, B. H., Tardif, C., Barry H., S., & Christine, T. (2001). Child-parent attachment and children's peer relations: A quantitative review. *Developmental Psychology, 37*(1), 86.
- Sroufe, L. A. (2005). Attachment and development: A prospective, longitudinal study from birth to adulthood. *Attachment & Human Development, 7*(4), 349-367.
doi:10.1080/14616730500365928
- Stutzman, S. V., Miller, R. B., Hollist, C. S., & Falceto, O. G. (2009). Effects of marital quality on children in Brazilian families. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 40*(3), 475-492.
- Sutcliffe, A. C., Barnes, J., Belsky, J., Gardiner, J., & Melhuish, E. (2012). The health and development of children born to older mothers in the United Kingdom. *British Medical Journal, 345*, e5116. doi:10.1136/bmj.e5116
- Terra, L., Hauck, S., Schestatsky, S., Fillipon, A. P., Sanchez, P., Hirakata, V., & Ceitlin, L. H. (2009). Confirmatory factor analysis of the parental bonding instrument in a Brazilian female population. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 43*(4), 348-354. doi:10.1080/00048670902721053

Vuchinich, S., & Vuchinich, R. (1993). The interparental relationship and family problem solving with preadolescent males. *Child Development, 64*(5), 1389-1400.

doi:10.1111/1467-8624.ep9402220350

Woodward, L. J., & Fergusson, D. M. (2000). Childhood peer relationship problems and later risks of educational under-achievement and unemployment. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry & Allied Disciplines, 41*(2), 191.

Woodward, L. J., & Fergusson, D. M. (1999). Childhood peer relationship problems and psychosocial adjustment in late adolescence. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 27*(1), 87-104.

Yates, T. M., Obradovic, & Egeland, B. (2010). Transactional relations across contextual strain, parenting quality, and early childhood regulation and adaptation in a high-risk sample. *Development and Psychopathology, 22*, 539–555.

<http://data.unicef.org/education/primary>