

Relationship between Co-Parenting and Communication with Marital Satisfaction among Married Couples with Teenagers

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Abstract. *One of the reason couples get married are to start a family and have children. The presence of a child either brings happiness or can lead to a negative impact on the parent's relationship. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between co-parenting and communication, together and partially with marital satisfaction among married couples with teenagers. The subjects (N=67) were either husbands or wives who have one or more teenage child. Subject consists of 32,8% husbands and 67,2% wives. The data was collected using the adaptation scale from Cordova (2009), an adaptation scale from PREPARE / Enrich (Olson & Larson, 2008), and an adaptation scale from Kansas Marital Satisfaction (Grable & Britt, 2006). Results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between co-parenting and communication together with marital satisfaction ($R = 0.63$; $p < 0.05$). The results of partial correlation between co-parenting and marital satisfaction by controlling communication showed no correlation ($r = 0.09$; $p > 0.05$). Meanwhile, the results of the partial correlation between communication and marital satisfaction by controlling the co-parenting showed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.5$; $p < 0.05$). Based on these results, it could be concluded that co-parenting and communication indicates that there is a strong positive relationship with marital satisfaction among married couples with teenagers.*

Keyword: *co-parenting, communication, marital satisfaction*

Abstrak. *Salah satu tujuan pasangan menikah adalah untuk memulai sebuah keluarga dan memiliki anak. Kehadiran anak dapat membawa kebahagiaan atau dapat menyebabkan dampak negatif ke hubungan orangtuanya. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menguji hubungan antara co-parenting dan komunikasi secara bersama-sama dan parsial dengan kepuasan pernikahan pada pernikahan yang memiliki anak usia remaja. Subjek penelitian (N=67) adalah suami atau istri yang memiliki anak usia remaja. Subjek terdiri dari 32,8% suami dan 67,2% istri. Data dikumpulkan melalui skala adaptasi Cordova (2009), skala adaptasi PREPARE/ENRICH (Olson & Larson, 2008), dan skala adaptasi Kansas Marital Satisfaction (Grable & Britt, 2006). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif signifikan antara co-parenting dan komunikasi secara bersama-sama dengan kepuasan pernikahan ($R=0,63$; $p < 0,05$). Hasil uji korelasi parsial antara co-parenting dan kepuasan pernikahan dengan mengendalikan komunikasi menunjukkan tidak adanya hubungan ($r = 0,09$; $p > 0,05$). Sedangkan, hasil uji korelasi parsial antara komunikasi dan kepuasan pernikahan dengan mengendalikan co-parenting menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif signifikan ($r = 0,5$; $p < 0,05$). Berdasarkan hasil dapat disimpulkan bahwa co-parenting dan komunikasi bersama-sama menunjukkan hubungan positif yang kuat dengan kepuasan pernikahan pada pernikahan yang memiliki anak usia remaja.*

Kata kunci: *co-parenting, komunikasi, kepuasan pernikahan*

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In 2013, Indonesia has the highest divorce rate in the Asia-Pacific region (Badan Kependudukan dan Keluarga Berencana Nasional, 2013). One of the causes of divorce is couples who are not satisfied with their marriage. According to Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman (1993), marital satisfaction can make a long lasting marriage and reduce the possibility of divorce.

According to Bahr, Chappell, and Leigh (1983) marital satisfaction is a result of the individual's subjective and personal evaluation of where the needs, expectations, and desires are fulfilled in marriage. Marital satisfaction can be achieved if the couple is satisfied with the whole marriage, satisfied with husband and wife as a spouse, and satisfied with persons' marriage as an institution (Grable & Britt, 2006). Marital satisfaction can be achieved if the individual can go through the process of adjustment in his/her marriage. Adjustments can be measured by how couples can face differences in their marriage, anxiety or tension between husbands and wives, and in accord with one another on important matters in a marriage (Nawaz, Javeed, Haneef, Bakhtawar, & Khalid, 2014).

Couples who have a teenage child are still on the child rearing stage of their marriage. Williams et al. (2009) stated that during the child rearing stages, couples undergo many changes, such as decreasing frequency of intimacy, changing roles, bound with the task of raising children, and increasing stress on both partners. Married couples who have teenagers experience not only changes in interaction or intimacy, but also changes in parenting as a result of the adolescent's development. This changes would be a new challenges for parents in raising their teenagers and their marriage.

According to Santrock (2015) teenagers go through a physical, cognitive and

socioemotional changes. These factors change their physical build, the way they think and their mood as well. The changes will usually put the teenagers through an identity crisis stage, self-esteem, autonomy changes and others. Win & Kywe (2004) also mention that teenagers bravely protest and resist everything, anywhere and with anyone, especially with those who represent power as known as a pattern of "rebel without a cause".

According to Santrock (2015) the conflict is usually as a result of the transition from dependent on parents to becoming an autonomous individual. On the other hand, parents feel distressed and frustrated due to their teenager being rebellious. This is due to their discipline on their previous years as a pre-teenager that works well has dissipated. (American

Psychological Association, 2016). Bornstein (2002) also stated that challenges in parenting teenagers generally become the lowest point in terms of couple satisfaction in their life.

Another issue experienced by couples with teenagers is that some of them experience difficulties when entering the mid-life stage (Bornstein, 2002). Couples enter the mid-life stage when they are 40-65 years (Alwisol, 2004). In this stage, individuals hold big responsibilities related to their role of taking control in life (Alwisol, 2004). In this stage, they also experience psychological issues due to changes in the mid-life stage (Bornstein, 2002).

The complex issue between teenagers and parents requires both of the partners to cooperate and actively participate together in raising their teenager. The particular cooperation is known as co-parenting. According to Cordova (2009) co-parenting is a part of the marriage relationship associated with coordination in the sharing of responsibilities and a duty to raise their child together.

Co-parenting is also an important part of the process of parenting. This is caused by the increasing difficulty of parenting a teenage child, thus parents need to adapt the changes of attitude during their teenage years (Bornstein, 2002). Therefore, the cooperation of parents or co-parenting in teenage years is very important for couples to adjust to, and define new strategies in parenting (Riina & McHale, 2014). In addition, co-parenting has an important role in raising teenagers. Co-parenting will also have an effect with marital satisfaction. Senior (2014) states that if their teenage child is either aggressive, rebellious and shows bad attitude, it will influence negatively into their parents' marriage life.

In a marriage, the couples are also required be effective in their communication in order to create intimacy. Communication is one of the areas and important structure in a marriage (Olson, Olson-Sigg, Larson, 2008). Klinetob & Smith (1996) found that one source of trouble and stress in a marriage is the lack or absence of communication. Couples who have communication issues with one another will tend to blame one another when they encounter problems (Cordova, 2009).

According to Olson et al. (2008) communication is a dynamic process of each individual to convey meaning to others or partner. Communication has the power to make a couple more intimate or can set each other apart (Olson et al., 2008). It is caused by the capacity of communication that can convey anger or forgiveness, happiness or sadness, and love or attention (Olson et al., 2008). Therefore, the willingness and ability of couples to communicate contribute significantly to happiness and satisfaction in their marriage life.

Marital satisfaction with the presence of a teenage child can be achieved by having both the presence of co-parenting and

communication. When co-parenting and communication between the parents are great, it will create solidarity, understanding and support by the partner.

These factors will avoid the couples feeling left alone in facing their changing teenage child and this will also make both couples feel their needs and hopes are fulfilled in their marriage.

The aims of this study are to examine the relationship between co-parenting and communication together and partially with marital satisfaction within a couple who has a teenage child. Wherein, this research will be useful for couples in improving marital satisfaction by knowing the most dominant factor. This study is also useful for further research to expand the study about factors that influencing marital satisfaction.

Researchers raised this research context because of the rarity of studies linking co-parenting with marital satisfaction. Generally speaking, most researches done on co-parenting are on couples who are either separated or divorced. However, this study examines co-parenting in marriages, and also the findings related to the co-parenting for couples with teenagers. This study is also important because couples who have one or more teenage child may experience many challenges in parenting, communication and can influence their marital satisfaction. Bornstein (2002) stated that the development of adolescents provides new challenges for parents to take care of them. Therefore, this study is important and will be very helpful.

Co-parenting

Cordova (2009) discussed four main aspects of co-parenting:

a. Sense of we-ness

This is the aspect of a sense of togetherness perceived each partner in parenting. The sense of togetherness is

felt in parenting, including their sense of mutual support, mutually good partners, mutual respect, and also a sense of solidarity and high support among the couples.

b. *Feeling towards the other spouse/partner*

This aspect is the positive feeling of the individual to their spouse as a parent. Positive feelings include a sense of comfort, the agreement that exists in terms of the child, and a common understanding. Positive feelings towards spouses is when couples feel they are at the same level (on the same page) and the couple has a positive view toward the their spouse as a partner in parenting.

c. *Division of child care*

This aspect is about the distribution of care for the parents. Both partner finds justice in the distribution of tasks in parenting, so that both don't feel alone in parenting, and both have a vision and mission in making decisions about the child.

d. *Engagement*

This aspect is the relationship between parents in terms of partner engagement in parenting. Engagement in parenting include how involved couples feel in a conversation about the children, and participate in the life of a child in directing and caring for children towards positive and healthy things.

Cordova (2009) also found that the characteristics of effective co-parenting and healthy between spouses are:

a. *Solidarity and support*

Both couples feel they have a good partner, or a good team, and has split the unity and agreement in his role as a parent.

b. *Balance active involvement*

Both partners as a parent are equally active in the process of nurturing and both understand each other and understand each other in the task of parenting.

c. *Limit conflict about the children*

Both partners understand their role as a parent so that they can pass through a healthy process to accommodate the differences between children and parents.

d. *Graceful coordination*

Couples have good coordination between keeping and raising children. Coordination that exists including communication, and role of each partner as a parent. Good coordination make couple feel supported and appreciated by their partner in his/her role as a parent.

According to Olson et al. (2008) co-parenting requires couples to be able to help each other in showing care, attention and support in parenting. (Olson et al., 2008). Care, attention and support can increase marital satisfaction.

Communication

Communication in the marriage consists of communication skills and communication behaviour (Vangelisti, 2004). Communication skill is the ability to deliver the purpose or goal in interacting with a partner (Vangelisti, 2004). According to Burleston & Denton (in Vangelisti, 2004) also stated that communication behaviour is the behaviour of verbal and non-verbal actions when communicating. Verbal is about words that we use in communicate and non-verbal is about our body language when we communicate. Olson et al. (2008) divides communication skill into two abilities including the ability to share (speaking skill) and the ability to listen to the thoughts and feelings (listening skills). In

this study the understanding of communication in the marriage is a dynamic process that includes the ability to convey information and listen to their partner, along with behaviour in communication.

Olson (2000) discussed the characteristics of effective communication in the marriage involves :

- a. *Good Listening skills*
Couples can empathize and listen attentively to their partner.
- b. *Good Speaking skills*
Couples can speak on the opinion of themselves and for themselves.
- c. *Self-disclosure*
Couples can express their feelings and the feelings of the relationship with a partner or family.
- d. *Clarity*
Couples can express their feelings and aspirations to their partner or other family members with clear and easily understandable.
- e. *Continuity tracking*
Couples can talk with their partner and are able to stay in the topic.

Olson (2000) also states that when the couple can communicate effectively, it will bring mutual respect and regard from partner so couples can solve problems. Mutual respect and regard from each other can increase their marital satisfaction.

Hypotheses

Major:

There is a positive relationship between the co-parenting and communication with marital satisfaction with couples who has teenage children.

Minor:

1. There is a positive relationship between co-parenting and marital satisfaction by controlling communication with couples who has teenage children.
2. There is a positive relationship between communication and marital satisfaction by controlling co-parenting with couples who has teenage children.

METHOD

Participant

Subjects consist of 67 husbands or wives who have teenagers in Surabaya. This study use non-probability sampling which is accidental technique sampling. The reason why the researcher uses accidental sampling is because when the data is collected by the researcher, not all the members of the community was present. This is because the members are free to attend or not attend the community at that given time. Demographic data of participants can be seen in Table.1

Table. 1
Demographic characteristic of participants (N = 67)

Demographic Variable	N (%)	M (SD)
Husbands	22 (32.8)	
Wives	45 (67.2)	
Age (years)		46.39 (7.369)
Age of marriage (years)		20.62 (6.943)
Religion		
Moeslem	7 (10.4)	
Christian	49 (73.1)	
Catholic	11 (16.4)	
Employment status		
Full time job	19 (29.2)	
Part-time job	20 (30.8)	

Unemployed (housewives)	26 (40)
Number of children	
1	6 (9.8)
2	26 (42.6)
3 or more	29 (47.5)
Ethnicity	
Javanese	5 (7.5)
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Batak	15 (22.4)
Tionghoa	45 (67.2)
Others	2 (3)
Income	
Below 10 million Rupiah	31 (53.5)
Above 10 million Rupiah	27 (46.5)
Partner Income	
Below 10 million Rupiah	19 (35.3)
Above 10 million Rupiah	35 (64.7)

Instrument

The study instrument consists of a scale of co-parenting, communication and marital satisfaction. Co-parenting was measured using a scale adapted from the scale of Cordova (2009). Communication scale was adapted from the scale used by PREPARE / Enrich (Olson & Larson, 2008). Marital satisfaction was measured using a scale adapted from Kansas Marital Satisfaction scale (Grable & Britt, 2006).

Co-parenting

The scale consists of 10 items. Scale developed by Cordova (2009) measured several aspects: sense of „we-ness“, feeling towards other parents, child care division responsibility, and engagement. Each item was rated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Reliability test

results showed Cronbach's Alpha $\alpha = 0.782$.

Communication

The scale consists of 10 items. Validity test results showed 9 items that can be declared as valid item. Each item was rated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Reliability test results showed Cronbach's Alpha $\alpha = 0,818$.

Marital Satisfaction

The scale consists of 3 items. Scale developed by Grable & Britt (2006) measured: satisfaction with the whole marriage, satisfaction with their partner and satisfaction as individuals. Each item was rated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly dissatisfied to 5 = strongly satisfied. Reliability test results showed Cronbach's Alpha $\alpha = 0,974$.

Analysis Data

In this study, hypotheses tested using multiple correlation and partial correlation. Data analysis was performed with the help of statistical program SPSS. In the following Table 2 will show the mean and standard deviation scale of co-parenting, communication and marital satisfaction.

Table 2
Mean & Standard Deviation of Co-parenting, Communication, and Marital Satisfaction.

Variable	Mean (<i>M</i>)	Standard Deviation (<i>SD</i>)
Co-parenting	3.94	0.58
Communication	3.66	0.76
Marital Satisfaction	4.32	0.75

RESULT

Hypothesis test results are presented in the following Table.3.

Table 3
Hypotheses Result

Hypothesis	R	R ²	Conclusion
H1	R= 0.63*	0.391	H0 is rejected
H2	r= 0.09	-	H0 is accepted
H3	r= 0.5*	-	H0 is rejected

R correlation score ; * $\rho < 0.05$, R² R square

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis test in this study (H1) shows a positive relationship between co-parenting and communication together with marital satisfaction in married couples with teenagers. The results showed a correlation value of $R = 0.63$; $\rho < 0.05$. The strength of the relationship can be categorized as strong. The effective contribution of co-parenting and communication together with marital satisfaction is 39.1% ($R^2 = 0.391$). Thus, the better the co-parenting and the quality of communication, the higher the individual's marital satisfaction. Conversely, if both co-parenting and communication deteriorates, then the lower individual's marital satisfaction.

Co-parenting and communication requires both of the parents' involvement of feeling and emotion in raising their children. Communication becomes a bridge for a couple to understand each other and to support in parenting. Together with communication, co-parenting not only have coordination and involvement in child rearing but also makes the couples feel understood.

Feeling of being understood makes couples feel valued and fair. When couples feel valued and fair, hopes and expectations are fulfilled. This increases intimacy and make the couple feel satisfied. Olson, Olson-Sigg, & Larson (2008) also stated that, if there is no communication, the relationship of husband and wife in parenting will often experience conflict.

Hypothesis 2

The results of the second hypothesis test showed partial correlation value of $r = 0.09$; $\rho > 0.05$, thus the second hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is no relationship between co-parenting and marital satisfaction by controlling communication with married couples with teenagers. These results indicate that the absence of co-parenting partner does not have a significant effect toward the individual's marital satisfaction.

The first factor that is of causing no correlation between co-parenting and marital satisfaction is the dominant subject of this study was taken by wives of Chinese ethnic. Generally speaking, in Chinese tradition, the wife is responsible for housework and childrearing duties, where as the father is the person who earns money to support the family and generally take care of external issues outside of the family (Hu, 2011). In Chinese culture, wives are expected to take care of their children and be loyal in order to create a harmonious family. Therefore, wives are expected to be competent at their parenting skills and it is also their duty and obligation (Ngai et al., 2010). Based on theory of Chinese tradition, it can be concluded that the division of husband and wife in Chinese culture is already in order.

According to Kwok, Cheng, Chow, & Ling (2013) co-parenting involves co-operation, deep understanding between spouses, sharing experiences, feelings, engagement, and sharing the responsibility

of upbringing of the child. However, in Chinese culture, the wives are the ones who need to raise the child by themselves, without the need for a father's participation in it. In turn, the father gives their wife full responsibility in raising their child. Traditionally the head of the family (the dad) is not allowed to do the house chores because that is the job of the wife. Therefore, marital satisfaction is owned by the mother may not affect co-parenting because the father does not have an obligation to take care of their children.

Second factor that may contribute is social status in this study. On average the subjects earn 5 to 20 million Rupiah per month. In addition, there are subjects who earn more than 20 million Rupiah per month. It can be concluded that most of the subjects are in middle to upper middle class. According to Zinn et al. (2011) women in the middle class is defined as homemakers and caretakers rather than as workers. Coontz (in Zinn et al., 2011) also stated that, in middle class the husband was the family's economic motor and the wife is sentimental core. Sentimental core is the focus on the feelings and moral contribution to the life of her family.

Third factors that may contribute to the lack of relationship between co-parenting and marital satisfaction is due to the co-parenting in this study is co-parenting with teenagers. Twenge, Campbell, & Foster (2003) stated that the role of parents in parenting teenagers were reduced because they (teenagers) spend more time in school. This leads to a lack of parental conflict on the parenting role. Fincham & Hall (2005) also found that co-parenting have stronger association with parenting and child adjustment compared to the marriage relationship. Pedro et al. (2012) also found that co-parenting doesn't have any direct relationship with marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis test (H3) results show the value of partial correlation of $r = 0.5$; $p < 0.05$. The third hypothesis is declared accepted, which means there is a relationship between communication and marital satisfaction by controlling co-parenting on marriages that have a teenage child. The better the communication quality of the individual, the higher the level of satisfaction of his/her marriage. Conversely, the lower the communication quality of the individual, the lower level of satisfaction of their marriage.

Communication in marriage is the link for every aspect of the marriage because communication generates discussions and makes decisions about a lot of things in marriage such as finance, child, career, religion, and the disclosure of which would produce a feeling of unity or divorce in that relationship (Olson et al., 2008). The availability and the ability of couples to communicate contribute substantially in a healthy and happy relationship (Olson et al., 2008).

According to Olson et al. (2008) Communication is a vital tool in a marriage relationship because communication will produce high-intimate relationship between the two couples. Intimate relationships are formed when couples feel good within their ability to communicate, the ability to understand people, the ability to express feelings with knowing that there will be heard and not criticized. When it happens, couples will have a safe emotional environment (Olson et al., 2008). Safe emotional environment that is felt by the individual can increase intimacy with their partner as a result of their freedom to be themselves (Olson et al., 2008).

The strength of the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction in this study can be quite high. According to Olson et al. (2008) communication is one

of five main keys to achieving intimacy between couples. Intimacy makes the couple feel satisfied and happy toward their marriage (Olson et al., 2008). In addition, unhealthy communication between spouses was found to predict the pressures of marriage, divorce, domestic violence and health problems (Cordova, 2009). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between communication and marital satisfaction even without co-parenting in it. This is because the communication can lead to intimacy between couples.

LIMITATION & SUGGESTION

This study has some limitations. First of all, the sampling method in this study gives a result where it cannot be generalised in other population. Second of all, the subjects of this study are very limited and based from 4 different communities therefore the results are not as representative.

If further research was to be made its better to have a wider sample so that the results were more representative. Also, further research would need to be expanded on co-parenting and communication with marital satisfaction with a teenage child. With the research done by Davies & Lindsay (2004) they found out that there are relationship issues between parents depending on what gender their teenage child is.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the survey shows that there is a positive correlation between Co-parenting and communication with marital satisfaction. Co-parenting and communication both gives the couple, solidarity, fairness, and intimate in a family with a teenage child. With communication, couples tend to understand each other better on facing and child rearing their teenager.

Co-parenting and marital satisfaction does not have a correlation by controlling communication. Without communication, couples tend to not be able to discuss well about their child let alone other aspects of family matters. Other factors believed to be influencing the results including; the Chinese tradition where the both couples already have a specific job around the house. Other factor influencing this result is that the subjects are mostly middle and middle upper class.

Communication and marital satisfaction has a significant and positive correlation by controlling co-parenting. Communication is one of the key factor increasing intimacy between couples. The availability and the ability of couples to communicate contribute substantially in a healthy and happy relationship (Olson et al., 2008). Therefore, without co-parenting there is still a connection between communication and marital satisfaction.

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