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ABSTRACT

The construct of parental support has been defined and measured from a variety of perspectives with little consistency across studies. The present study investigates the relationships among parents' self-reports, children's perceptions, and observers' ratings of parental support in order to assess the validity of each perspective. In addition, the relationships among parental support variables and children's empathy are examined to provide further validity of parental support constructs. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify dimensions of parental support. Sixty-six fourth and fifth grade boys and their parents participated in the study. The study determined that parents' self-reports related to children's perceived support. Mothers' self-reports related to actual behaviors during parent-child interactions, but fathers' self-reports and children's perceived support generally did not. Observed support related to children's empathy, but parents' and children's reports did not. Factor analysis across measures found dimensions of parental warmth; positive involvement; emotional support; autonomy; and satisfaction. Results support the validity of each perspective on parental support, but suggest that distinct aspects of support may be assessed depending on the gender of the parent and the method of assessment used. (Contains 8 tables and 11 references.) (Author/JDM)

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Multimethod Assessment of the Dimensions of Parental Support

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Abstract

The construct of parental support has been defined and measured from a variety of perspectives, with little consistency from one study to the next. In the present study, the relationships among parents' self-reports, children's perceptions, and observers' ratings of parental support were investigated in order to assess the validity of each perspective. Additionally, the relationships among parental support variables and children's empathy were examined to provide further validity of parental support constructs. Finally, exploratory factor analyses were conducted to identify dimensions of parental support. Sixty-six fourth and fifth grade boys and their parents participated. Boys completed a measure of perceived parental support separately for each parent, as well as a measure of empathy. Each parent completed a similar self-report measure of parental support and participated individually with their child in an observed dyadic interaction. The study found that parents' self-report related to children's perceived support. Mothers' self-report related to actual behaviors during parent-child interactions, but fathers' self-reports and children's perceived support generally did not. Additionally, observed support related to children's empathy, but parents' and children's reports did not. Finally, factor analyses across measures found dimensions of parental "Warmth," "Positive Involvement," "Emotional Support," "Autonomy," and "Satisfaction." These factors were slightly different for mothers and fathers. Results support the validity of each perspective on parental support, but suggest that distinct aspects of support may be assessed depending on the gender of the parent and the method of assessment used.

Poster presented at the 108th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, August 8, 2000, Washington, D.C.

Multimethod Assessment of the Dimensions of Parental Support

Andrew Robins, Ph.D. and Sandra Russ, Ph.D.

Introduction

There is a vast literature on the positive effects of parental warmth and support on children's development and adjustment. However, the construct of parental support is often vaguely and inconsistently defined (Barrera, 1986; Cobb, 1976; Procidano & Heller, 1983). It is understood that parental support includes a number of independent factors, but these dimensions have not been clearly delineated nor agreed upon in the research literature. Furthermore, the literature on parental support includes data gathered from a variety of sources, such as observers' ratings, parents' reports, and children's perceptions of support. While this multiple informant approach has helped to broaden the definition of support and demonstrate the strength of its effects, it has also contributed to the vague and inconsistent definitions of the construct.

The present study investigated the relationships among various methods of assessment of parental support. Parental support was assessed by parent report, child report, and direct observation of parent-child interactions. Parents' and children's perceptions of support were compared with each other and with samples of actual behavior in an effort to evaluate the validity of each perspective. Differences between mothers and fathers were also explored. Additionally, the relationships between the various parental support variables and children's empathy, an indicator of children's adjustment, were examined, to provide further validity of parental support constructs. Finally, exploratory factor analyses were conducted to identify the dimensions of parental support.

Method

Subjects

Fourth and fifth grade boys in a suburban, socioeconomically diverse suburb were asked to take home to their parents a letter and consent form explaining the study. A total of 66 boys (16.5%) and their parents participated. Boys ranged in age from 9-2 years (110 months) to 11-6 years (138 months), with a mean age of 10-3 years old. Whenever possible, both parents were included. A total of 63 mothers and 53 fathers participated. Consistent with demographics in the school district, 72% ($n = 48$) of the children were Caucasian and 28% ($n = 18$) were African-American. A range of socioeconomic levels was represented, with the majority of families falling around the middle to upper-middle SES.

Measures

The Parental Support Questionnaire - Parent and Child Forms (PSQ) was completed by children and each parent. This 40 item Likert-type rating scale combined two frequently used measures (Parental Acceptance and Support Measure [Rabiner, Keane, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 1993] and the warmth/affection subscale of the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire [Rohner, 1984]) in order to tap a broad range of supportive parental behaviors. Children's, mothers', and fathers' forms of the questionnaire were comprised of the same items, but modified accordingly, in order to maximize comparability and minimize variance between the measures (Schaefer, 1965; Rohner, 1984). A total score for each questionnaire was used in the analyses.

The Empathy Measure for Children (Bryant, 1982) consists of 22 "yes/no" items assessing emotional empathy. A single total empathy score is derived from the sum of the items endorsed in the empathic direction, yielding a range of 0-22. This measure has demonstrated adequate reliability (4th graders $\alpha = .68$) and convergent and discriminative validity (Bryant, 1982).

The Global Coding System (GCS) developed by Patterson, Cohn, and Kao (1989) comprised one part of the coding of the videotaped parent-child interactions. This 15 item global measure yields three subscale scores for the amount of Involvement, Control, and Positive Affect that the parent displays in the interaction. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale. The authors report that items factor analyzed to dimensions of "warmth" and "control", with internal consistencies of .86 and .92, respectively (Patterson, et al., 1989).

Parent and Child Behavior Rating (PAC; Wagner & Phillips, 1992) items were adapted from a Q-sort to a Likert-type rating scale and used to complement the GCS in the coding of the videotaped interactions. The PAC included 31 items and yielded a total parental support score and four subscale scores: Warmth, Support/ Encouragement, Pressuring, and Directiveness. Wagner & Phillips (1992) reported reliability coefficients for the entire parent Q-sort to be .71, with alphas for the specific subscales ranging from .79 to .86.

Procedure

Participation involved a single 90-minute meeting at either the family's home or the public library, depending on their preference. Following parental consent and children's assent, boys completed a measure of perceived parental support separately for each parent, as well as a measure of empathy. Parents completed a similar self-report measure of parental support. Additionally, children participated with each parent in a two-part videotaped interaction. Adapted from work by Patterson and colleagues (1989), parent-child dyads worked first with an unstructured activity (Legos) and then a structured activity (jigsaw puzzle). Families were compensated \$15.00 for their participation.

Results

The study found that parents' self-report significantly correlated with children's perceived support (see Table 1). Mothers' self-report significantly correlated with mothers' actual behaviors during parent-child interactions, but fathers' self-report and children's perceived support generally did not (see Table 2). Additionally, observed parental support significantly correlated with children's empathy (see Table 3), but parents' and children's self-reports did not (see Table 4). Finally, exploratory factor analyses, using principal components analysis with orthogonal rotation, yielded factors of parental "Warmth," "Positive Involvement," "Emotional Support," "Autonomy," and "Satisfaction" across measures and respondents (see Tables 5-8). The items comprising these factors differed between mothers and fathers, and boys' factors were more consistent with fathers' factors than with mothers'.

Discussion

These findings support the validity of parents' self-reports, children's perceived support, and observer's ratings of parental behavior, but suggest that distinct aspects of support may be assessed depending on the gender of the parent and the method of assessment employed. While mothers' self-perceptions did relate to their actual behavior, fathers' and sons' perceptions of support, although related to each other, did not relate to their behavior observed in the laboratory. Clinically, the findings support the importance of parents' sensitive and responsive involvement in relation to children's perceived support and children's empathy. They also emphasize the important role that fathers play in their sons' development and suggest that greater intervention efforts be made to enhance father-son interactions (Coley, 1998). The factor analytic findings, although exploratory, support the multidimensionality of the parental support construct and suggest differences in the ways that mothers and fathers conceptualize and provide support.

Table 3. Correlations between mothers' and fathers' observed supportive behavior and children's empathy total scores.

Parent-Child Interaction Variables	Mothers' Behavior & Children's Empathy	Fathers' Behavior & Children's Empathy
GCS Involvement	.25*	.39**
GCS Control	-.18	-.04
GCS Positive Affect	.29*	.12
GCS Dyadic Involvement	.25*	.20
GCS Harmony / Comfort	.29*	.18
PAC Total	.23*	.04
PAC Warmth	.16	.11
PAC Support	.14	.07
PAC Pressuring	.19	-.18
PAC Directive	.12	.10

Note: Mother n = 61, Father n = 44. GCS = Global Coding System, PAC = Parent and Child Behavior Rating. All interaction variables, except GCS Control, are scored in the positive, supportive direction.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Table 4. Correlations between Parental Support Questionnaire (PSQ) total scores and children's empathy total scores.

	Children's Empathy Total Score
PSQ Mother Self-Report	-.06
PSQ Father Self-Report	-.05
PSQ Child Ratings of Mother	-.01
PSQ Child Ratings of Father	.07

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Table 5. Factor analysis of mothers' self-reports on the PSQ (principle components analysis with varimax rotation).

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
Factor 1: Warmth/Positive Affect. Initial Eigenvalue = 13.75, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 12.83%						
28. I tell my child how proud I am of him when he is good.	.87					
29. I make my child feel that what he does is important.	.84					
25. I make my child feel proud when he does well.	.69					
30. I try to help my child when he is scared or upset.	.65					
27. I make my child feel wanted and needed.	.54					
24. I say nice things to my child when he deserves them.	.52					
20. I am really interested in what my child does.	.50					
40. I notice when my child is sad or angry, and I try to understand why..	.46					
Factor 2: Companionship/Interest. Initial Eigenvalue = 3.08, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 12.54%						
37. I enjoy having my child around me.		.77				
39. I like to spend time with my child.		.68				
38. I pay a lot of attention to my child.		.62				
4. I think other kids' mothers like their children more than I like my child.		-.62				
34. I let my child know that I love him.		.59				
33. I am interested in the things my child does.		.58				
18. I encourage my child to bring friends home, and I try to make things pleasant for them.		.45				
Factor 3: Involvement/Closeness. Initial Eigenvalue = 2.38, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 12.29%						
3. I think that what my child says about what is happening in the family is important.			.72			
11. I think that my child is good at helping to figure out problems in the family.			.68			
5. I like many of the same things that my child likes.			.64			
17. I talk to my child about our plans and I listen to what he has to say.			.62			
2. I like hearing what my child thinks about things.			.59			
26. I try to understand the way my child sees things.			.53			
32. I care about what my child thinks and I like to talk about it with him.			.51			
23. I talk to my child in a warm and loving way.			.48			
19. I make it easy for my child to tell me things that are important to him.			.48			
Factor 4: Guidance/Support. Initial Eigenvalue = 1.95, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 10.33%						
7. I help my child work out his problems.				.74		
15. I give my child good ideas about how to do or make things.				.71		
1. I help my child do the right thing.				.68		
9. I ask my child to do things with me.				.65		
12. I help my child feel better when he is sad or hurt.				.55		
16. I say nice things about my child.				.46		
Factor 5: Understanding/Empathy. Initial Eigenvalue = 1.91, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 8.18%						
31. I almost always know exactly what my child means.					.72	
21. I understand the way my child feels about most things.					.70	
6. My child and I can always tell each other what we think about things.				.48	.63	
36. I do not listen to my child.					-.61	
13. My child does not share his feelings with me.					-.60	
Factor 6: Comfort/Self-Evaluation. Initial Eigenvalue = 1.67, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 5.68%						
10. My child does not feel as good around me as other children feel around their mothers.						-.66
14. I wish I were much different as a mother.						-.65
8. Sometimes I don't like to hear the things that my child tells me about himself.						.50

Table 6. Factor analysis of fathers' self-reports on the PSQ (principle components analysis with varimax rotation).

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Factor 1: Warmth. Initial Eigenvalue = 14.85, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 20.63%					
40. I notice when my child is sad or angry, and I try to understand why.	.77				
1. I help my child do the right thing.	.76				
26. I try to understand the way my child sees things.	.72				
30. I try to help my child when he is scared or upset.	.71				
23. I talk to my child in a warm and loving way.	.69				
29. I make my child feel that what he does is important.	.67				
34. I let my child know that I love him.	.67		.52		
35. I treat my child gently and with kindness.	.66				
12. I help my child feel better when he is sad or hurt.	.63				
7. I help my child work out his problems.	.62				
27. I make my child feel wanted and needed.	.62		.46		
9. I ask my child to do things with me.	.57			.55	
24. I say nice things to my child when he deserves them.	.54				
25. I make my child feel proud when he does well.	.54		.49		
19. I make it easy for my child to tell me things that are important to him.	.51				
38. I pay a lot of attention to my child.	.50				
Factor 2: Interest/Companionship. Initial Eigenvalue = 3.14, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 14.28%					
2. I like hearing what my child thinks about things.		.74			
39. I like to spend time with my child.		.72			
33. I am interested in the things my child does.		.72			
20. I am really interested in what my child does.		.71			
32. I care about what my child thinks and I like to talk about it with him.		.69			
3. I think that what my child says about what is happening in the family is important.		.59			
37. I enjoy having my child around me.		.56	.55		
5. I like many of the same things that my child likes.		.55			
Factor 3: Positive Affect. Initial Eigenvalue = 2.60, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 10.68%					
4. I think other kids' fathers like their children more than I like my child.			-.73		
28. I tell my child how proud I am of him when he is good.	.60		.64		
22. I praise my child to others.			.59		
16. I say nice things about my child.			.58	.45	
10. My child does not feel as good around me as other children feel around their fathers.			-.49		
Factor 4: Communication/Closeness. Initial Eigenvalue = 2.06, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 10.64%					
11. I think that my child is good at helping to figure out problems in the family.				.74	
6. My child and I can always tell each other what we think about things.				.66	
13. My child does not share his feelings with me.				-.66	
36. I do not listen to my child.				-.61	
21. I understand the way my child feels about most things.				.47	
Factor 5: Comfort/Self-Evaluation. Initial Eigenvalue = 1.65, Percent of Variance after Rotation = 4.48%					
14. I wish I were much different as a father.					.74
8. Sometimes I don't like to hear the things that my child tells me about himself.					.61

Table 7. Factor analysis of mothers' observed support by GCS and PAC (principle components analysis with varimax rotation).

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Factor 1: Warmth/Pleasure. Eigenvalue = 15.15, Percent of variance after rotation = 23.34%					
C2. Nonverbal expression of positive feeling.	.88				
24. Derives pleasure from being with child.	.88				
6. Parent has fun with tasks.	.86				
26. Laughs, uses humor.	.85				
E2. Positive overall mood of the interaction.	.79				
A4. Intensity of responsiveness.	.78				
18. Enthusiastic about child's performance.	.77				
A1. Amount/frequency of verbal involvement.	.72				
25. Warm, loving relationship with child.	.69				
C5. Naturalness of verbal and nonverbal behavior.	.69				
A3. Frequency of responsiveness to child's behavior.	.66				
C1. Verbal expression of positive feeling.	.64				
12. Directly praises child's abilities and/or intelligence.	.62			.50	
28. Reserved in expression with child.	-.62				
29. Parent genuinely interested and absorbed in tasks.	.60				
11. Supportive, encouraging, praises effort.	.59				
A5. Sensitivity of involvement re: child's desires & feelings.	.56				
27. Parent seems awkward with child.	-.56				
A2. Amount/frequency of nonverbal involvement.	.54				
C4. Nonverbal expression of negative feeling.	-.53	.53			
D2. Verbal reciprocity, shared conversation.	.53				
Factor 2: Hostile/Critical. Eigenvalue = 7.68, Percent of variance after rotation = 13.51%					
C3. Verbal expression of negative feeling.		.84			
14. Parent is hostile, ignores child, looks disgusted, disdainful.		.79			
15. Parent is impatient with child, irritable, tense.		.74			
13. Parent criticizes child.		.72			
2. Parent competes with child.		.68			
16. Parent teases, makes fun of child.		.58			
4. Parent is aware of time pressure.		.46			
Factor 3: Pressuring. Eigenvalue = 4.18, Percent of variance after rotation = 13.14%					
31. When obstacles, parent pushes child to try harder.			.90		
3. Parent pushes child to keep trying.			.82		
5. Parent is preoccupied with correctness.			.71		
1. Parent reacts quickly to perceived error.			.68		
23. Emphasizes strategies in completing tasks.			.63		
8. Parent is optimistic that the task is manageable.			.62		
B1. Frequency of verbal directions.			.61		
7. Parent is unconcerned about finishing tasks.		-.47	-.55		
19. Parent is intolerant of seemingly poor performance.			.54		
20. Parent uses question to teach child.			.51		
Factor 4: Control/Autonomy. Eigenvalue = 2.36, Percent of variance after rotation = 8.82%					
B3. Frequency of nonverbal control.				-.77	
21. Parent gives in, child dominates.				.70	
22. Parent offers unsolicited feedback.				-.66	
9. Parent is hesitant or reluctant to help child.				.59	
B4. Intensity of nonverbal control.			-.46	-.46.	-.46
Factor 5: Mutual/Harmonious Involvement. Eigenvalue = 1.76, Percent of variance after rotation = 7.40%					
B2. Intensity of verbal directions.					-.68
E3. Mutual, shared, compatible goals for the interaction.					.60
E1. Smooth, nonconflictual interaction		-.51			.57
17. Contradicts or opposes child's attempted solutions.					-.45

Table 8. Factor analysis of fathers' observed support by GCS and PAC (principle components analysis with varimax rotation).

	F1	F2	F3	F4
<u>Factor 1: Warmth/Pleasure. Eigenvalue = 12.24, Percent of variance after rotation = 21.28%</u>				
24. Parent derives pleasure from being with child.	.91			
C2. Nonverbal expression of positive feeling.	.88			
6. Parent has fun with tasks.	.86			
26. Parent laughs, uses humor.	.86			
E2. Positive overall mood of the interaction.	.81			
25. Warm, loving relationship with child.	.77			
28. Parent is reserved in expression with child.	-.74			
A4. Intensity of responsiveness.	.73			
18. Parent is enthusiastic about child's performance.	.70			
C1. Verbal expression of positive feeling.	.69			.47
11. Supportive, encouraging, praises effort.	.61			.50
27. Parent seems awkward with child.	-.55			
A3. Frequency of responsiveness to child's behavior.	.52	-.45		
E3. Mutual, shared, compatible goals for the interaction.	.50			
<u>Factor 2: Pressuring/Critical. Eigenvalue = 9.22, Percent of variance after rotation = 16.49%</u>				
7. Parent is unconcerned about finishing tasks.		-.85		
4. Parent is aware of time pressure.		.73		
15. Parent is impatient with child, irritable, tense.		.69	.49	
5. Parent is preoccupied with correctness.		.69		
13. Parent criticizes child.		.66		
C3. Verbal expression of negative feeling.		.66		
3. Parent pushes child to keep trying.		.63		-.56
17. Parent contradicts or opposes child's attempted solutions.		.61		
19. Parent is intolerant of seemingly poor performance.		.58		
2. Parent competes with child.		.52	.51	
E1. Smooth, nonconflictual interaction.		-.50		
C4. Nonverbal expression of negative feeling.		.47		
23. Parent emphasizes strategies in completing tasks.		.46		-.46
<u>Factor 3: Control/Autonomy. Eigenvalue = 3.44, Percent of variance after rotation = 16.46%</u>				
B1. Frequency of verbal directions.			.87	
22. Parent offers unsolicited feedback.			.80	
B2. Intensity of verbal directions.			.75	
21. Parent gives in, child dominates.			-.74	
B3. Frequency of nonverbal control.			.70	
B4. Intensity of nonverbal control.			.68	
1. Parent reacts quickly to perceived error.			.68	
9. Parent is hesitant or reluctant to help the child.			-.53	.50
14. Parent is hostile, ignores child, looks disgusted, disdainful.			.46	
<u>Factor 4: Positive Involvement. Eigenvalue = 2.25, Percent of variance after rotation = 10.43%</u>				
31. When obstacles, parent pushes child to try harder.		.59		-.64
A2. Amount/frequency of nonverbal involvement				.63
8. Parent is optimistic that the task is manageable.				.62
A5. Sensitivity of involvement re: the child's desires and feelings.				.57
12. Directly praises child's abilities and/or intelligence.				.54
A1. Amount/frequency of verbal involvement.	.46			.52



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