

Psychological and parental vulnerability among fathers

The role of adverse childhood experiences and of relation with the other parent

The need for this study

- A recent scoping review¹ of 58 articles suggests that there are two categories of markers of vulnerability in fathers: a vulnerability related to their personal characteristics and a vulnerability related to their parental characteristics.
- This review also suggests that the father's difficult childhood experiences and the difficulties experienced in the relationship with the child's mother are important factors that condition these markers of vulnerability among fathers.

Purposes of the study

- The purpose of this study is to better understand: 1) the markers of vulnerability among fathers, and 2) the role that adverse childhood experiences and difficulties in the relationship with the other parent may play in those markers of vulnerability.

Methods

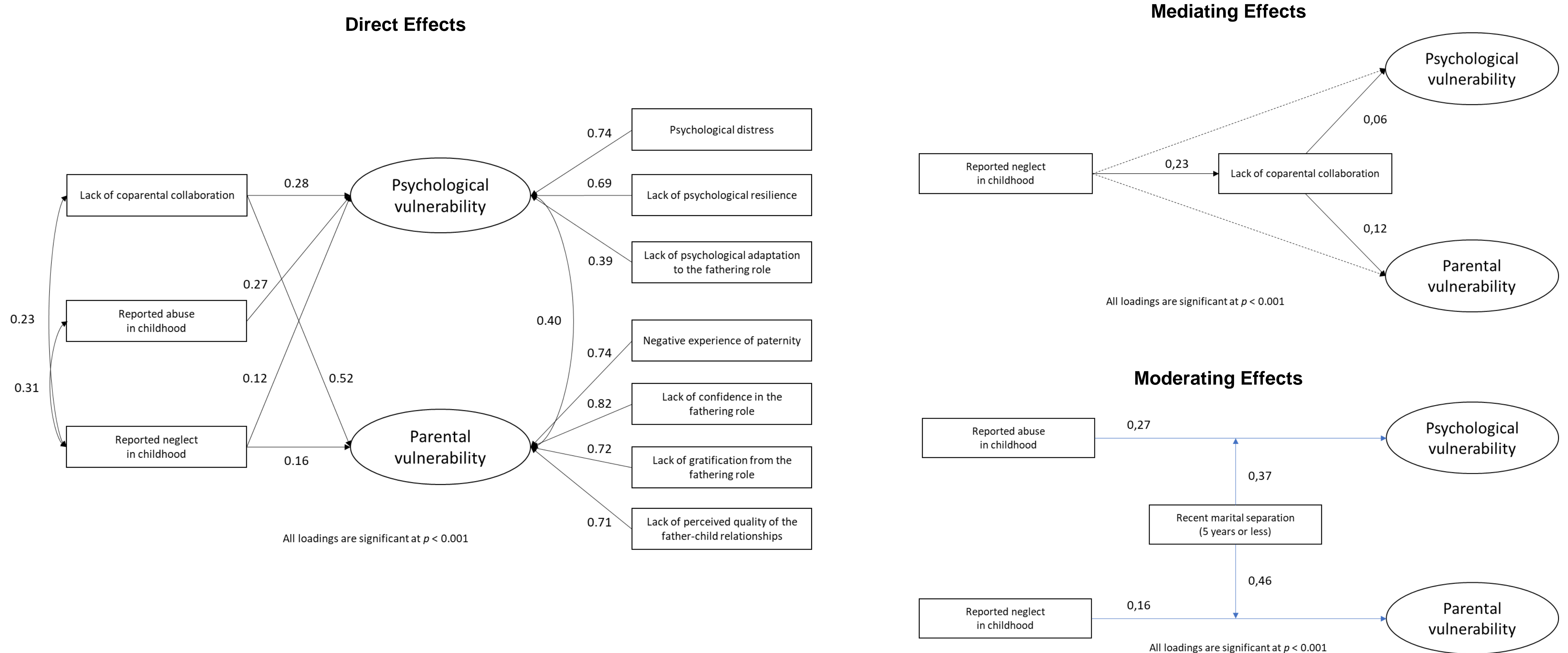
Design: Populational survey based on a panel sampling from the Province of Quebec, Canada; data were gathered in March 2022.

Participants: 2119 men living at least 40% of their weekly time with at least one child aged 17 years or younger. The data were weighted on the basis of the population of fathers of children under 18 years of age, controlling for linguistic groups (French or English), level of education, and regions of residence.

Data collection: An online questionnaire composed of 85 questions that includes the French and English versions of the *Kessler Psychological Distress Scale*², the *Brief Resiliency Scale*³, the *Quebec Scale of Coparental Collaboration*⁴ and items assessing several components of the fathering experience. It also includes items reporting the presence of various forms of abuse and the quality of parental attention in childhood (as a proxy for child neglect).

Analyses: Principal Component Analysis were conducted to define latent dependent variables: psychological and parental vulnerability; direct, mediating, and moderating effects analyses were conducted with the following independent variables: presence of abuse in childhood, lack of parental attention in childhood (a proxy for neglect), lack of coparental collaboration, and presence of marital separation with the child's mother.

Results



Conclusions

- The empirical results of this populational survey show that seven markers of vulnerability among fathers produce a two-dimensional model (psychological and parental vulnerability) confirming the conclusions of the scoping review. These two types of vulnerability are correlated, suggesting a moderate level of co-occurrence.
- Our results suggest distinctive direct effects of adverse childhood experiences (abuse and neglect) of fathers on each of these types of vulnerability. Direct effects are also observed with the lack of collaboration between fathers and the other parents.
- A closer look at these results shows that lack of coparental collaboration is a mediating factor between fathers' experiences of child neglect and both types of vulnerability, suggesting that having a hard time in communication, sharing of educational values and family tasks and mutual acknowledgement between both parents explains most of the link between adverse childhood experiences and manifestations of vulnerability.
- Finally, our results suggest that fathers that have experienced a recent marital separation (5 years or less) are more at risk to be affected by adverse childhood experiences in comparison to other groups of fathers (non-separated or separated for a longer period of time).
- Much public action to ensure the safety and development of children has focused on the vulnerability of and support for mothers. In this context, fathers are often seen as obstacles to public action. This study shows the relevance of considering fathers and their vulnerability as targets of public policies and support services for parents. It also suggests that specific avenues are to be considered in preventive interventions with fathers, namely their childhood experiences and their relationship with the other parent.

References

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