

Predicting Parental Psychological Distress from Child Behavioral Problems and Parenting Burden: The Moderating Role of Coparenting Support

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E d i t o r	R e v i e w e r s
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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The Introduction paragraph beginning “Beyond children’s behavioral characteristics, the subjective burden of parenting represents a particularly important determinant of parental mental health” requires closer alignment with the actual measurement strategy. In the Methods, the manuscript states that “parenting burden was measured using the Parental Distress and Parent–Child Dysfunctional Interaction components of the Parenting Stress Index–Short Form (PSI-SF), with the overall parenting-stress score used as an indicator.” This creates a potentially serious construct-validity issue because the PSI-SF Total Stress score ordinarily incorporates multiple domains, while the text simultaneously refers to selected components and an “overall” score. The authors should specify exactly which PSI-SF items/subscales were analyzed, the scoring range of the derived variable, and why the construct is labeled “parenting burden” rather than “parenting stress.” If a modified composite was created, psychometric justification and scoring procedures are essential.

The theoretical discussion of moderation should be more explicitly grounded in a formal stress-buffering mechanism. The paragraph stating that “coparenting support may therefore function both as a direct protective factor and as a resource that modifies the psychological impact of parenting-related stressors” provides an appropriate starting point, but it remains descriptive. The authors should clarify why coparenting support is expected to moderate rather than mediate these relationships. In particular, the manuscript should articulate the proposed mechanism through which shared instrumental responsibility, emotional validation, coordinated discipline, and perceived parenting efficacy reduce the strength of the association between demands and distress. This would give the interaction hypotheses a stronger theoretical basis and prevent the moderation model from appearing statistically rather than conceptually motivated.

The Methods paragraph on participant recruitment states that “a total of 428 parents participated in the study” and that “a multistage convenience sampling procedure was used.” The term “multistage” appears inappropriate unless identifiable sampling stages involving systematic selection occurred. Contacting institutions and then recruiting volunteers through those institutions is more accurately described as institutional convenience recruitment, cluster-assisted convenience sampling, or another clearly defined nonprobability approach. The authors should describe the number of schools and family organizations approached, the number agreeing to participate, the geographic regions or autonomous communities represented, the number of individuals who accessed the questionnaire, the number excluded, and the final completion rate. Without this information, it is difficult to evaluate selection bias and the representativeness of the Spanish sample.

There is a notable psychometric issue in Table 1 because Cronbach’s α and McDonald’s ω are reported for “child behavioral problems” as a single construct based on the SDQ Total Difficulties score. The SDQ Total Difficulties score aggregates heterogeneous subdomains, and high internal consistency is not necessarily the most appropriate or sufficient psychometric criterion for such a composite. The authors should discuss whether a unidimensional reliability estimate is theoretically defensible and, ideally, supplement reliability reporting with confirmatory factor evidence or prior structural evidence supporting use of the total score in Spanish samples. This issue is especially important because the total score serves as a principal predictor in the regression and moderation models.

The Data Analysis subsection states that “demographic covariates that demonstrated theoretical or empirical relevance were entered in the initial step of the model,” but the Findings indicate that covariate inclusion was partly informed by preliminary significance testing. Covariate selection based on bivariate p values is generally discouraged because it can produce unstable adjustment sets and data-dependent modeling decisions. The authors should specify a priori which covariates were selected and why, preferably using substantive causal reasoning rather than statistical screening. Parent age, gender, employment status, relationship status, child age, child gender, socioeconomic position, and number of children should be considered on theoretical grounds. The final adjustment set should be justified consistently in the Methods rather than retrospectively from observed associations.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The statement in the Study Design and Participants subsection that participants were recruited from “several urban and suburban areas of Spain” is insufficiently precise for a geographically framed study. Spain is characterized by substantial regional differences in socioeconomic context, family policy, language, childcare arrangements, and cultural norms. The manuscript should report the autonomous communities, provinces, or municipalities from which participants were recruited and, if data were collected across multiple regions, provide the distribution of participants across these sites. If recruitment occurred primarily within one geographic region, the manuscript should avoid wording that might imply national representativeness.

The eligibility criterion stating that participants had to be “the biological, adoptive, or long-term legal parent” requires clarification in relation to the focal construct of coparenting support. The manuscript later states that “participants without an

active coparenting relationship were not included in moderation analyses.” This introduces uncertainty regarding the analytic sample. The authors must report exactly how many of the 428 participants had an eligible active coparenting relationship and whether all 428 were included in Tables 2–5. If participants without coparents were excluded from moderation analysis, the moderation sample should be smaller than $N = 428$, unless all recruited participants met this requirement. The sample definition, inclusion criteria, and reported N values should be fully reconciled.

The Methods section should include a transparent sample-size justification. The manuscript reports an exact sample of 428 but does not state whether this number was determined through a priori power analysis, logistical feasibility, or the number of complete responses obtained. This is particularly important because the primary hypotheses concern interaction effects, which generally require greater statistical power than main effects. The authors should report an a priori power calculation specifying the assumed interaction effect size, α level, desired statistical power, number of predictors/covariates, and minimum required sample. If no a priori analysis was conducted, a sensitivity analysis indicating the smallest interaction effect detectable with $N = 428$ would strengthen the methodological transparency.

The Data Collection Tools subsection requires more complete reporting of the versions and scoring of the standardized measures. For example, the text states that “parental psychological distress...was assessed using the 10-item Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)” and that validated Spanish-language versions were used. The authors should provide the original and Spanish validation citations for each instrument, the response anchors, scoring procedure, treatment of missing items, interpretation of higher scores, and evidence of validity in Spanish populations. The same level of detail should be supplied for the SDQ, PSI-SF, and Coparenting Relationship Scale. Reporting only internal consistency in the current sample is insufficient to establish measurement validity.

The operationalization of the Coparenting Relationship Scale requires particular attention. The Methods state that “coparenting support was assessed using the Coparenting Support dimension of the Coparenting Relationship Scale (CRS),” yet the descriptive table lists a possible range of 1–5 without specifying how many items were included or whether scores were calculated as sums or means. The authors should identify the exact items or subscale, number of items, response scale, scoring method, and Spanish psychometric source. In addition, because coparenting may include support, undermining, agreement, division of labor, and exposure to conflict, the authors should justify why the support dimension alone was selected as moderator rather than a broader coparenting-quality composite.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.