

Identifying the Determinants of Effective Coparenting Among Dual-Earner Couples: A Qualitative Inquiry

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the participant eligibility paragraph, the manuscript states that couples were eligible if “both partners were actively involved in childcare and parenting-related decisions.” This inclusion criterion may introduce an important selection bias because it potentially excludes precisely those dual-earner couples experiencing weak or highly asymmetrical coparenting. If the objective is to identify determinants of effective coparenting, excluding partners with limited parenting involvement may artificially narrow the variation in coparenting quality and strengthen favorable themes such as shared responsibility and joint ownership. The authors should either justify this criterion conceptually or broaden it to include dual-earner couples regardless of current level of involvement, provided that both partners have an identifiable parenting role. At minimum, the Discussion should acknowledge that this criterion may have reduced the representation of dysfunctional, disengaged, or highly conflictual coparenting arrangements.

The Methods section states that participants were recruited “through purposive sampling with maximum variation,” yet the manuscript does not sufficiently explain the recruitment pathway. The authors should specify where and how participants were identified, such as workplaces, community organizations, parenting networks, childcare centers, social media, or snowball

referrals. They should also indicate which variables were intentionally used to achieve maximum variation and whether recruitment decisions changed during data collection in response to emerging categories. For qualitative rigor, it is not enough to state that maximum variation was sought; the manuscript should demonstrate how variation in age, occupation, education, children's ages, schedule type, socioeconomic position, and access to extended-family support informed sampling decisions and ultimately contributed to the conceptual breadth of the findings.

In the first Findings paragraph, the manuscript reports precise numerical characteristics such as “participants ranged in age from 29 to 46 years, with a mean age of approximately 36.8 years,” as well as counts for work arrangements and extended-family assistance. These descriptive data improve contextualization, but the authors should ensure that they are based on systematically collected demographic information rather than reconstructed estimates. Because the user-facing Methods did not describe a sociodemographic questionnaire, a brief statement should be added to Data Collection Tools indicating that demographic and family information was collected before the interviews. The authors should also consider reporting relevant socioeconomic characteristics such as household income band or occupational level if collected, because economic resources may strongly affect access to childcare, schedule autonomy, outsourcing of domestic work, and therefore coparenting experiences.

Table 1 is conceptually clear, but the manuscript should strengthen the empirical grounding of the themes by incorporating representative verbatim quotations in the Findings. At present, the paragraph following Table 1 makes statements such as “participants repeatedly distinguished between a spouse who ‘helped’ with parenting and a spouse who considered parenting to be his or her own responsibility,” yet no participant quotation is provided to substantiate this interpretation. High-quality qualitative reporting normally requires direct excerpts demonstrating how the analytic claims arise from participants' language. The authors should include carefully selected quotations from both mothers and fathers for each major theme, accompanied by anonymized identifiers such as M4/Female, age, or Couple 4–Mother, while avoiding excessive demographic detail that could threaten confidentiality.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the Data Collection Tools section, the manuscript states that “The interview guide was developed following a review of the conceptual literature on coparenting, work-family interaction, marital relationships, division of parental labor, parenting coordination, and the experiences of dual-earner families.” Because the study claims to use conventional inductive content analysis, the authors should clarify how they prevented the literature-informed interview guide from imposing predetermined conceptual categories on the data. Several final themes—communication, fairness, work-family boundaries, and division of labor—closely correspond to domains explicitly built into the interview guide. The manuscript should explain how open-ended questioning, probing, reflexivity, and analytic procedures allowed unanticipated findings to emerge, and it should distinguish between sensitizing concepts used to structure interviews and categories generated inductively during analysis.

The sentence “Individual interviews were conducted separately with each spouse rather than interviewing couples jointly” is an important methodological decision, but its implications require more discussion. Separate interviews may reduce conformity and allow disclosure of conflict, resentment, or perceived inequity, yet the use of matched partners also creates dyadic data. The manuscript currently analyzes participants largely as 24 independent individuals. The authors should clarify whether and how partner accounts were compared within couples, whether convergent and divergent accounts were systematically examined, and whether themes were developed at the participant level, couple level, or both. Because coparenting is intrinsically relational, neglecting the dyadic structure risks losing analytically important discrepancies, such as one partner perceiving the division of labor as fair while the other perceives it as inequitable.

In the interview procedure paragraph, the authors state that interviews were conducted “either face-to-face in a private location or through a secure online video-conferencing platform.” The manuscript should report how many interviews were

conducted in each mode and whether interview mode appeared to influence duration, disclosure, rapport, or depth of responses. Mixed interview modes can be methodologically acceptable, but qualitative studies should address potential mode effects. The authors should also clarify whether both spouses from the same couple were interviewed using the same mode and whether interviews were scheduled sufficiently separately to minimize discussion of interview questions between partners before both interviews were completed.

The manuscript reports that interviews lasted “approximately 50 to 75 minutes,” but additional contextual detail is needed regarding the interviewer. The authors should report who conducted the interviews, the interviewer's academic or professional background, gender where relevant to interactional dynamics, qualitative research training, prior relationship with participants, and assumptions or expectations concerning dual-earner parenting. These details are important under accepted qualitative reporting standards because researcher characteristics can influence questioning, disclosure, interpretation, and theme development. A reflexivity statement should be added explaining how the research team monitored potential assumptions regarding gender equality, maternal responsibility, father involvement, and the normative meaning of “effective” coparenting.

The Data Analysis section states that “Analysis began immediately after the first interviews and proceeded concurrently with further data collection.” This is methodologically appropriate, but the analytic sequence should be documented more precisely. The authors should specify how the reported 276 initial codes were reduced to 18 subcategories and six major themes, including whether codes were semantic or interpretive, whether a formal codebook was created, how categories were defined, and what criteria were used to merge or separate codes. The manuscript should provide at least one worked example showing the progression from an interview meaning unit to condensed meaning unit, code, subcategory, and final theme. Such an example would substantially improve auditability and demonstrate that the thematic structure was grounded in participant data rather than retrospectively constructed to fit a predetermined model.

The statement that “a subset of transcripts was independently reviewed and coded by a second researcher” is too vague for a manuscript claiming enhanced dependability through secondary coding. The authors should report the exact number or proportion of transcripts independently coded, the selection strategy for those transcripts, the second researcher's qualifications, and the process used to reconcile divergent interpretations. The phrase “until conceptual agreement was reached” should also be elaborated. If no formal intercoder reliability coefficient was calculated—which is entirely acceptable in many qualitative traditions—the manuscript should explicitly state that the purpose of independent coding was interpretive dialogue and analytic challenge rather than statistical reliability. This would prevent the trustworthiness procedure from appearing methodologically ambiguous.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.