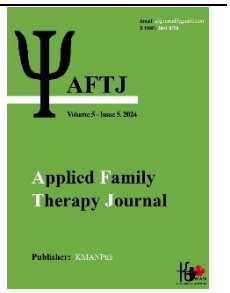
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Lived Experiences of Co-Parenting After Divorce: Challenges, Negotiations, and Adaptive Strategies

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The Introduction paragraph stating, “Co-parenting can broadly be understood as the ways in which two parental figures coordinate, support, undermine, divide, and negotiate their responsibilities toward a shared child,” would benefit from a stronger theoretical foundation. Although the definition is clear, the manuscript currently lacks an explicit conceptual or theoretical framework guiding the qualitative inquiry. The authors should consider situating the study within a recognized co-parenting framework, family systems theory, boundary ambiguity theory, or a post-divorce family adaptation model. Such a framework would provide an analytic rationale for the emphasis on communication, conflict, parental legitimacy, household boundaries, and adaptation. Importantly, the framework should not be imposed deductively on the data, but it could be presented as a sensitizing perspective that informs the research question and later helps interpret the emergent themes.

In the paragraph beginning, “Shared physical custody and other forms of substantial involvement by both parents have become increasingly visible in policy and family practice,” the literature review appears to place substantial emphasis on joint physical custody, whereas the empirical study includes participants with shared custody, primary-residence arrangements, and flexible individualized schedules. The authors should explicitly explain why the shared-custody literature is central to a study encompassing multiple custody configurations. Without this clarification, there is a risk that the introduction overidentifies post-divorce co-parenting with joint physical custody. I recommend adding literature on co-parenting across different

residential arrangements and explicitly stating that the study focuses on relational processes occurring across heterogeneous custody structures rather than evaluating shared custody itself.

The exclusion criterion stating that parents were excluded "when an active legal proceeding made participation potentially disruptive to an unresolved child-protection investigation" requires clearer ethical and methodological justification. The criterion appears narrower than the broader safeguarding issues relevant to post-divorce research. The authors should report whether participants were screened for intimate partner violence, coercive control, restraining orders, or safety-related restrictions on contact, particularly because later recommendations include direct communication, flexibility, and child-focused negotiation. These practices may be inappropriate or unsafe in coercive or abusive relationships. The manuscript should therefore clearly delimit the population to which its findings and practical recommendations apply.

In the Data Collection Tools section, the sentence "The interview guide was reviewed by two family psychologists and one family mediator familiar with post-divorce parent work and was pilot-tested with two divorced parents" is useful but insufficiently detailed for methodological appraisal. The authors should describe how expert review changed the interview protocol and what modifications followed pilot testing. In addition, because the study concerns lived experience, it would be useful to provide examples of opening, descriptive, and reflective questions that demonstrate that interviews encouraged narrative elaboration rather than directing participants toward predefined categories such as conflict, boundaries, or flexibility. An appendix containing the complete interview guide would considerably improve transparency and replicability.

The Data Analysis section states, "Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis informed by phenomenological sensitivity to participants' lived meanings," yet later reports that "a second qualitative researcher independently reviewed 10 transcripts and the preliminary codebook." This combination requires clarification because reflexive thematic analysis generally emphasizes researcher subjectivity and interpretive engagement rather than coding reliability or quasi-independent validation. The authors appropriately state that disagreements were not resolved through mechanical calculation of agreement, but the role of the second researcher remains ambiguous. Please explain whether this process functioned as critical dialogue, analytic auditing, reflexive challenge, or consensus coding, and ensure that terminology remains epistemologically consistent throughout the section.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The paragraph beginning, "The consequences of continuing interparental conflict are particularly important in post-divorce families," identifies conflict as a major explanatory factor, but the review would be stronger if it differentiated types and levels of conflict. Chronic hostility, ordinary disagreement, coercive control, legal conflict, and child-related negotiation difficulties should not be treated as conceptually equivalent. This distinction becomes especially important because the sample excludes active child-protection investigations while still including parents reporting substantial conflict. The authors should clarify whether the study is concerned with normative post-divorce disagreement, persistent high conflict, or a continuum of conflict intensity. Greater precision would also prevent the practical recommendations regarding communication and flexibility from being inadvertently generalized to circumstances involving coercion, intimidation, or abuse.

In the Introduction paragraph stating, "Many separated parents develop functional arrangements through gradual negotiation, clearer boundaries, emotional distancing, and practical problem-solving," the manuscript introduces several mechanisms that later emerge almost identically as findings. This creates a potential concern that the interview guide and interpretation may have been influenced by a priori expectations derived from the literature. The authors should clarify in the Methods whether these concepts were used only as background knowledge or whether they informed the interview schedule and coding framework. If the analysis was genuinely inductive, the manuscript should explain how researchers bracketed or reflexively managed prior theoretical assumptions about boundaries, flexibility, communication, and emotional detachment.

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The final portion of the Introduction states, “This issue is especially relevant in contemporary Spain, where changing family forms, shared parental responsibilities, and diverse post-separation living arrangements have increased the importance of understanding how co-parenting functions beyond formal legal agreements.” This Spain-specific justification is presently asserted rather than sufficiently developed. Because the empirical contribution is explicitly contextualized in Spain, the authors should provide concise information about the Spanish legal and sociocultural context of post-divorce parenting, including relevant custody practices, shared parental responsibility, regional variation where applicable, and the social relevance of Madrid and Valencia as recruitment sites. This contextualization would substantially strengthen the rationale for conducting the study in Spain rather than presenting the setting as merely geographical.

In the Methods paragraph beginning, “The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore how divorced parents experienced, interpreted, and adapted to the continuing demands of co-parenting after marital dissolution,” the specific phenomenological tradition is unclear. The manuscript refers to “phenomenological sensitivity” but subsequently describes reflexive thematic analysis rather than a conventional descriptive phenomenological, interpretative phenomenological analysis, or hermeneutic phenomenological procedure. The authors should clarify whether phenomenology constitutes the methodological design, the epistemological orientation, or simply the substantive focus on lived experience. If reflexive thematic analysis is the primary analytic methodology, it may be more accurate to describe the study as a qualitative study informed by phenomenological principles rather than as a phenomenological study unless the authors can demonstrate methodological consistency with a specific phenomenological tradition.

The sampling paragraph reports that “Recruitment continued until the research team judged that later interviews were elaborating established patterns without generating substantively new dimensions of experience.” This statement requires methodological refinement because the concept resembles saturation, whereas reflexive thematic analysis does not necessarily conceptualize saturation as an endpoint in the same way as grounded theory or some codebook approaches. The authors should explain the informational adequacy rationale for the final sample of 28 participants and specify how sample size was judged sufficient in relation to study aim, sample heterogeneity, depth of interviews, and analytic scope. The term “saturation” should either be carefully justified or replaced by terminology more compatible with the stated reflexive thematic analytic approach.

The participant description includes “16 mothers and 12 fathers” and multiple custody configurations but does not indicate whether any participants represented both members of the same former couple. This information is essential because inclusion of ex-partners from the same dyad would affect assumptions about independence of narratives and could create confidentiality complexities. The authors should explicitly state whether the sample consisted entirely of unrelated parental cases or included matched former couples. If dyads were included, the analytical treatment of paired accounts should be described, particularly because conflicting narratives of the same events could constitute analytically valuable data rather than simply divergent individual perspectives.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.
Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.

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