



# Literature Review on Inter-Parental Relationship Quality and its Effects on Children: Overview

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We have reviewed national and international literature to better understand how inter-parental relationship quality (IPRQ) influences children's wellbeing and developmental outcomes. The aim is to inform policy and future New Zealand-based longitudinal research.

IPRQ relates to the full range of interactions between parents including those that are viewed as positive for children's development as well as inter-parental conflict or violence which are viewed as negative.

## **IPRQ influences children's outcomes but the level of effect is uncertain**

Evidence shows that the negative impact of inter-parental conflict and violence on children's outcomes has been established, although there is relatively little evidence relating to positive parental interactions.

The level of the effect on children varies across studies, potentially due to differences in level and type of IPRQ, the type of outcome and the developmental stages of the children

Multiple pathways between IPRQ and children's outcomes interconnect over time. The main pathways include parenting practices/style and quality; parent-child social-emotional attachments; children's emotional security in the inter-parental and family context; children's cognitions, appraisals and attributions; children's stress and trauma responses and neurophysiological developmental trajectories.

Contextual factors may mitigate or exacerbate outcomes. Resilience factors can influence outcomes after exposure to negative IPRQ. Multiple adversity increases the likelihood of negative outcomes. Social factors strongly influence the association between IPRQ and children's outcomes.

## **Implications for intervention and policy development are broad ranging**

The evidence indicates that:

- Primary prevention of negative IPRQ is needed as it has a direct effect on children's outcomes.
- Multiple potentially modifiable factors need to be considered in policy including:
  - parent-child relationships and type of attachment
  - parenting behaviours and style
  - children's exposure to positive social environments
  - addressing children's trauma responses when they have been exposed
  - social networks and support available to parents and children.

- Modifiable correlates influencing IPRQ also need to be addressed by:
  - reducing external sources of stress
  - creating safer more predictable better regulated and less stressful environments
  - developing responsive relationships
  - strengthening core life skills.
- Protective factors can influence outcomes after exposure to negative IPRQ. These include socio-ecological factors such as provision of positive learning and developmental environments for the children; social support for the children; parental social support (in some circumstances); connections with positive community and cultural supports.

### **There are opportunities for development of research in this field**

Areas include:

- Refining definitions of exposure and outcomes and identifying consequences of different types of exposure.
- Expanding the focus of exposure variables to include positive as well as negative IPRQ.
- Further investigating the influence of father-child relationships.
- Ascertaining why factors may be protective in some circumstances but not in others.