

Couples that split childcare duties have higher quality relationships and sex lives

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Heterosexual couples that split childcare duties have higher quality relationships and sex lives than those who don't, according to new research that will be presented at the 110th Annual Meeting of the

American Sociological Association (ASA).

The study by Daniel L. Carlson, an assistant professor of sociology at Georgia State University (GSU), and GSU graduate students Sarah Hanson and Andrea Fitzroy, used data from 487 [heterosexual couples](#) in the 2006 Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS). The GSU researchers grouped the [couples](#), all of whom had children, into three [childcare](#) categories—relationships in which women did most or all (at least 60 percent) of the childcare, relationships in which [men](#) did most or all (at least 60 percent) of the childcare, and relationships in which men and women split the childcare (each partner did somewhere between 40 and 60 percent). They also looked at each couple's relationship quality—as indicated by relationship satisfaction and relationship conflict—sexual frequency, and quality of sex life.

Carlson, Hanson, and Fitzroy found that when women were responsible for most or all of the childcare, men and women reported lower quality relationships and sex lives compared to couples that split childcare responsibilities.

"One of the most important findings is that the only childcare arrangement that appears really problematic for the quality of both a couple's relationship and sex life is when the woman does most or all of the childcare," Carlson said.

Unlike mothers, fathers in a heterosexual relationship could take on most or all of the childcare responsibilities without negative effects on the quality of the couple's relationship. In addition, couples in which men did most or all of the childcare had just as much sex as couples with egalitarian arrangements, and were just as satisfied with the amount of sex they were having.

Interestingly, however, Carlson said that men who did most or all of the

childcare reported having the lowest quality sex lives of men in the study, but their female partners reported having the highest quality sex lives of women in the study.

According to Carlson, the research was limited in some respects, including the fact that no same-sex couples were studied. Although the researchers examined four different kinds of tasks across three dimensions of childcare, the measures of childcare were fairly narrow, Carlson said, especially when it came to physical childcare tasks.

The three dimensions of childcare were physical/emotional childcare, interactive childcare, and passive childcare, which includes supervising and monitoring. The four tasks that the researchers looked at were who was responsible for making the rules for the children, who enforced the rules or punished the children when they broke them, who praised the children for their accomplishments, and who played with the children.

"We only had one physical task, and that task revolved primarily around playing with the children, including sports and games, but nothing about who feeds or bathes them," Carlson said.

In future research, Carlson wants to learn more about the mechanisms behind why couples with more egalitarian childcare arrangements reported higher quality relationships and sex lives.

"We are trying to understand what is it about sharing that couples view so positively," he said.

More information: The paper, "The Division of Childcare, Sexual Intimacy, and Relationship Quality in Couples," will be presented on Sunday, Aug. 23, at 10:30 a.m. CDT in Chicago at the American Sociological Association's 110th Annual Meeting.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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