

The Association between Household Chaos and Parental Feeding Practices

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Introduction

Research has shown that chaos in the house may have an adverse influence on children's and adolescents' functioning (Fulkerson, 2019).

Parents utilize more controlling feeding practices in chaotic home environments and when under stress (Berge et al., 2017).

- Parental controlling feeding behaviors, like pressure to eat and restriction, can compromise a child's healthy eating behaviors and energy regulation (Berge et al., 2017).
- Higher levels of chaos are correlated with emotional overeating and food responsiveness in children, especially for children whose parents engage in lower levels of emotional responsiveness (Saltzman et al, 2019).

The Current Study

This study examined the connection between parent-reported measures of household chaos and coded parental feeding behaviors, including coercive control, autonomy support, and structure.

- Hypothesis: Family chaos will be related to more coercive control and less autonomy support and structure-related feeding practices.

Methods

Participants

LENA recordings from 4 families taken across breakfast, lunch, and dinner were translated from Spanish to English. Transcripts were coded for current study.

- 2 boys, 2 girls.
- Ages between 50 - 71 months ($M = 59.25$).
- 100% Hispanic.
- Parental income between \$2,000 - \$120,000 ($M = \$66,000$).

Measures

Level of Chaos

Confusion, Hubbub, and Order Scale (CHAOS; Matheny et al., 1995).

- 15 items: 4-point scale; e.g. "There is often a fuss going on at our home."

Parental Feeding Practices

- Coded ten-minute transcripts from mealtime observations via LENA recordings using rating of parenting qualities. Coding manual developed from previous coding manual (Holub, unpublished) and theoretical depiction of food parenting dimensions (Vaughn et al., 2016).

- Two raters coded all transcripts and differences were resolved through discussion.

Coercive Control

- "Parent's pressure, intrusiveness, and dominance in relation to children's feelings and thoughts, as well as their behaviors in the food domain" (Vaughn et al., 2016).
- Parental comment regarding restriction, pressure to eat, threats and bribes, and using food to help control a child's negative emotion.

Autonomy Support

- "Strengthening a child's independence and autonomy in making healthy choices about food and eating" (Vaughn et al., 2016).
- Parental comment that teaches about nutrition education, involves the child in meal preparation, or uses praise, negotiation, and reasoning to facilitate children's eating competence.

Structure

- "Parental organization of their children's environment to facilitate the child's competence" (Di Pasquale & Rivolta, 2018; Vaughn et al., 2016).
- Developmentally appropriate support that facilitates the mealtime and children's eating behavior, which is intended to control or teach.

Results

Parental Feeding Practices Observed in Transcripts

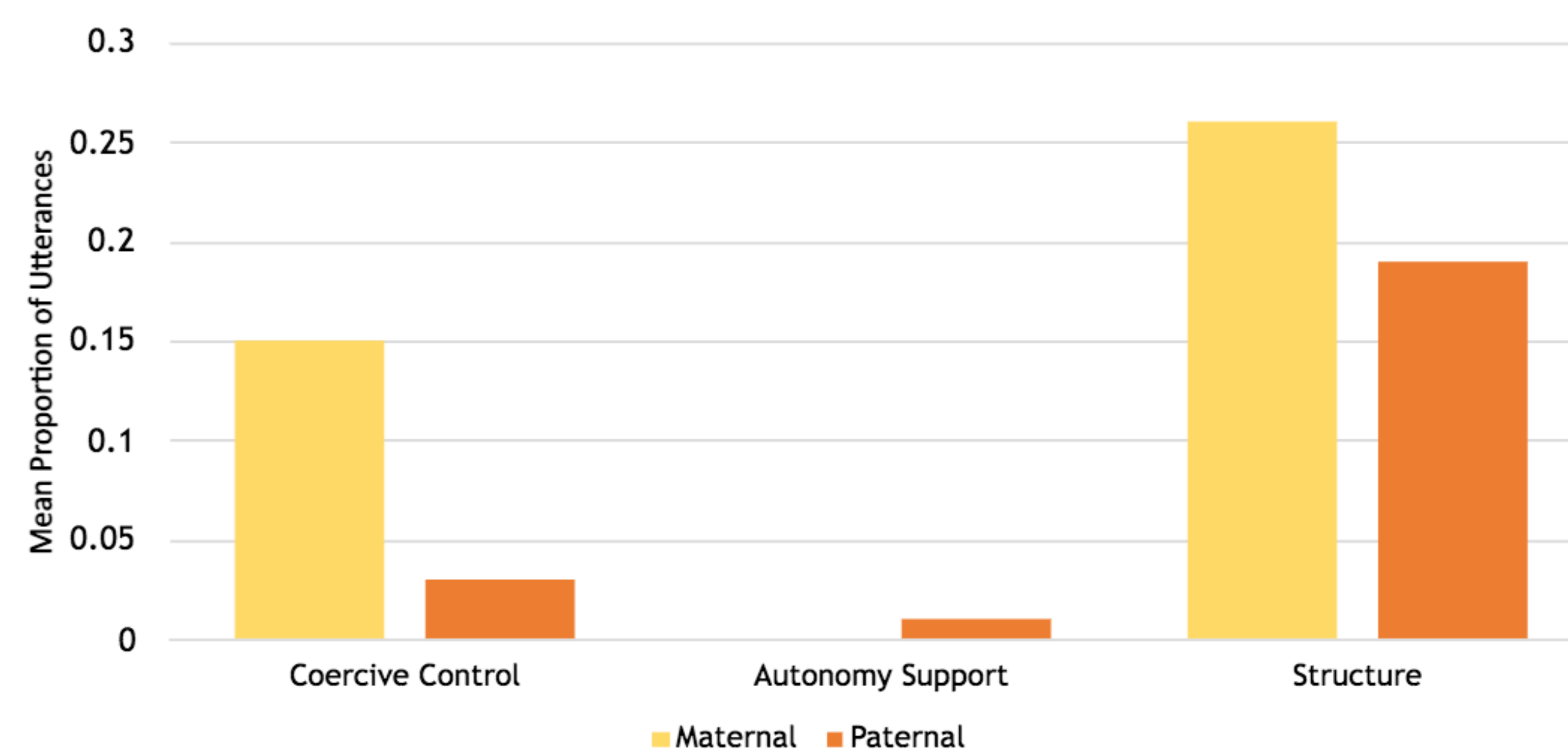


Table 1. Correlations Among Key Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Chaos	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Maternal Coercive Control	0.75	--	--	--	--	--
3. Maternal Autonomy Support	.	.	--	--	--	--
4. Maternal Structure	0.84	0.27	--	--	--	--
5. Paternal Coercive Control	-0.11	0.12	--	-0.27	--	--
6. Paternal Autonomy Support	-0.84	-.96*	--	-0.43	0.13	--
7. Paternal Structure	0.69	0.19	--	0.85	0.26	-0.22

* $p < .05$

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Discussion

Parental reports of higher chaos were related to mothers engaging in more coercive control of child's feeding behaviors.

- Past research has shown that coercive style negatively impacts child autonomy, and consequently, hinders internalization of parental norms and values (Di Pasquale & Rivolta, 2018).
- Coercive control during feeding is related to eating in the absence of hunger and childhood obesity (Vaughn et al., 2016).
- Future directions could look to examine the potential byproduct of different types of parental coercive control on a child's relationship with food and their body image.

In homes with more chaos, fathers used less autonomy support.

- Past research has shown that parental initiatives to socialize with children about healthy eating might be undermined by absent or insufficient parental involvement (Di Pasquale & Rivolta, 2018).
- This feeding practice was seldom used. Future research can further build upon the understanding of what parental and child factors best predict this food parenting practice, which can further lead to interventions to be tailored to target specific behaviors.

Limitations and Future Direction

- This study used a small sample as well as only Spanish-speaking participants; therefore, it may not be generalized to the overall population.
- Future research could be done to look at the long-term effects of parental feeding behaviors, especially pertaining to implicit weight-related outcomes for a child.
- Future research could also be done to look at the long-term health implications, such as obesity and eating disorders in children who grew up in more chaotic environments.

Overall, further assessing the impact that chaos has on parental behavior in relation to child feeding practices is one of the first steps in providing every child with a healthy home food environment.

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