FATHERS’ AND MOTHERS’ LIFE SATISFACTION, PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES: A DYADIC ANALYSIS

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Background and aims: Family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997) posits that families are composed of subsystems such as husband-wife, mother-child and father-child dyads and these subsystems within families are in constant interaction with each other. Taking the interdependent nature of these systems into account is therefore crucial when testing family relationships in developmental context. In this study, using dyadic data from mothers, fathers, and children in families residing in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) that participated in UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), we aim to examine how maternal and paternal life satisfaction may influence children’s early development through parental involvement.

Method: Using data from 7 countries that participated in MICS round 5 and completed the questionnaires for women, men and children under five, we have tested mediation using a dyadic actor-partner interdependence model where fathers and mothers served as distinguishable dyad members. We used UNICEF-recommended indicators for literacy-numeracy development. Mother and father involvement were measured via number of caregiving activities involving child and parent. Mothers and fathers who engaged in at least 1 of the six activities in the last three days were included. Mother’s and father’s life satisfaction were measured with items on various domains such as satisfaction with health, current residence and social relationships.

Results: Preliminary analyses reveal that fathers’ life satisfaction indirectly links to their 3- and-4-year-old children’s literacy and numeracy skills through mothers’ involvement in activities supporting cognitive development such as reading books, telling stories, counting, naming, and drawing.

Conclusions: Results of the mediation model provide epidemiological evidence on the importance of parent life satisfaction for early childhood development in LMIC. The partner effect of fathers on mothers’ parental engagement is discussed in light of the family systems theory.