

Influence of Single Parent Status and Number of Children on Parental Attitudes Towards Play During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic has resulted in an increased number of parents working full-time from home while simultaneously caring for one or more children. Coordinating these dual-role responsibilities may be particularly difficult for single parents. The current project examines the effects of single parent status and the number of children in a family on parental attitudes toward infant play during the COVID-19 pandemic. We explored the following research questions:

- 1) Do single parents report more negative attitudes toward infant play than married/cohabiting parents?;
- 2) Do parents with more children report more negative attitudes toward infant play than parents with fewer children?;
- and 3) Do single parents with multiple children report more negative attitudes toward play with children than married/cohabiting parents with fewer children?

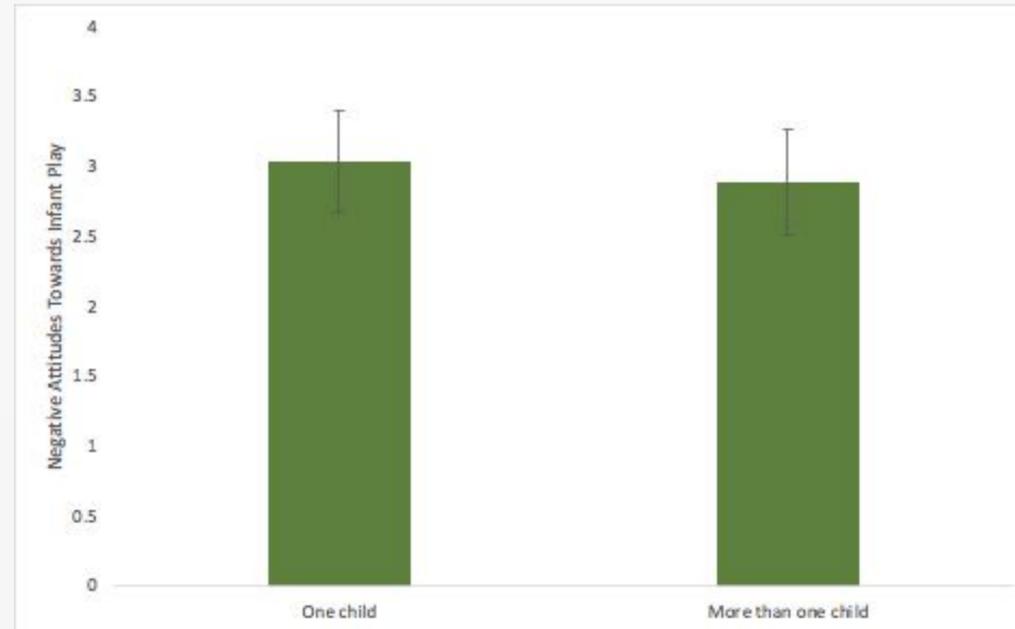
Method

150 parents of children between the ages of birth to 3 years old completed an online survey advertised using Amazon's M*Turk platform. As part of a larger study, parents completed the Parent Play Questionnaire (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2020) which measures parental report of three aspects of parental-child interaction: frequency of parent-child play, frequency of child digital media use, and parental attitudes toward play.

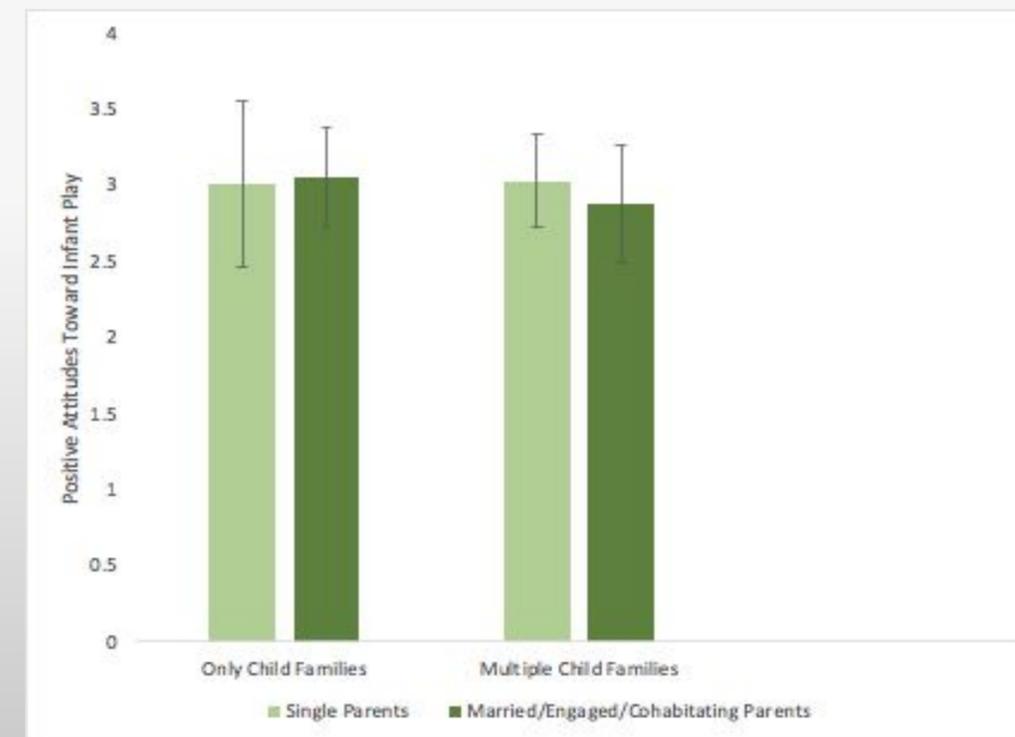
Example questions from Attitudes Towards Play:

1. I am too busy to play with my child when he/she wants to play with me (involvement)
2. When my child wants to play with me, I encourage him/her to play with toys alone so that I can do other jobs (involvement)
3. Some days go by without me having had any time to play with my child (involvement)

Results



Independent samples t-tests revealed a significant difference between one child and multiple child families on the PPQ Parental Attitudes Towards Play scale, $t(145)=2.44, p<.01$. Parents with more than one child reported more negative attitudes toward infant play ($M=2.89, SD=.38$) than parents with only one child ($M=3.04, SD=.36$). There were no significant differences between groups on the PPQ Parent Child Play and PPQ Digital Media Use scales.



A 2 (parental status) x 2 (single vs. multiple children) between groups factorial ANOVA revealed no significant interaction effects on any of the PPQ summary scores; however, there is a nonsignificant interaction that may be underpowered due to fewer single parents in our sample: Single parents report more positive attitudes toward infant play regardless of only child ($M=3.01, SD=.54$) or multiple child family status ($M=3.03, SD=.31$), while married/engaged/cohabiting parents report more positive attitudes toward play in only child families ($M=3.05, SD=.33$) vs. multiple child families ($M=2.88, SD=.38$).

Discussion

Our study compared parental attitudes towards play with infants in single parent and married/engaged/cohabiting parents as well as in only child and multiple child families. Our findings reveal that during the COVID-19 pandemic, parents with more than one child report more negative attitudes toward infant play when compared to parents with only one child. Because play contributes to so many aspects of an infant's development, especially cognition and socioemotional development (Ginsburg, 2007), pediatric providers should strategize with parents to find ways to interact more with their infants as the pandemic progresses.

References

- Ahmadzadeh, Y. I., Lester, K. J., Oliver, B. R., & McAdams, T. A. (2020). The Parent Play 361 Questionnaire: Development of a parent questionnaire to assess parent-child play and 362 digital media use. *Social Development, 29*(4), 945-963.
- Ginsburg, K. R. (2007). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics, 119*(1), 182-191. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-2697>