

Shared Parenting: Listening to Children of Divorce, Doing the Science, and Making the Policy.

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INVITED PRESENTATION TO

NEW NORDIC 2020

PATERNITY LEAVE AND SHARED PARENTING.

THE DANISH PARLIAMENT, MARCH 24, 9.00 - 15.00 (CET / UTC+1)

Divorce is a Public Health Problem

Divorce results in many children having minimal parenting time with fathers.



Divorce results in poorer father-child relationships in 35% of children.



Damaged relationships translate into mental health problems and stress-related physical health problems in later life.



Three approaches:

The Child's Point of View

The Psychological Science

The Policy Science

The child's point of view

What do children *really* worry about?

Does mom love me? Does dad love me?

Do mom and dad love each other?

Emotional Security

“Will my parents be there
for me?”

1. Emotional Security with Each Parent

Children can be emotionally secure with
both,
only one, or
neither parent.

Same for infants
secure attachment or insecure
attachment with each parent

What does Emotional Security with parents feel like?

I Matter to Mom!
I Matter to Dad!

Emotional Insecurity with parents feels like:

Do I Matter to Mom?
Do I Matter to Dad?

2. Emotional Insecurity about Parent Conflict

Do mom and dad love each other?

For children, exposure to high parent conflict feels like Distress:

“When my parents argued ...

... I got scared.”

... I worried about what would happen to me.”

... I worried that one of them would get hurt.”

... I worried that they might get divorced.”

For young adults, it still feels like Distress, in the form of lingering, stressful thoughts such as

“I had a harder childhood than most.”

“A lot of my parents’ problems were because of me.”

“I worry about events where both parents will come.”

“I feel doomed to repeat my parents’ problems.”

Emotional Insecurity with Parents
(Doubts about Mattering),
and
Emotional Insecurity about Parent Conflict
(Distress):

Is one more harmful than the other?

No, they have similar effects on children's mental health and physical health.

1. Emotional insecurity causes physiological stress reactions involving the autonomic nervous system. This results in chronic release of stress hormones that affect many systems in the body, including the immune system.
2. Emotional insecurity also leads to defensive hostility and destructive anger.
3. Emotional insecurity also contributes to self-medication by substance abuse.



How can we protect the
emotional security of children
of divorce?

The Psychological Science → The Policy Science

Time spent together → “I Matter”

$$T = M$$

The psychological equation

Parenting Time → Mattering to father

$$PT = Mf$$

The policy equation

Fabricius, W. V., Braver, S. L., Diaz, P. & Velez, C. E. (2010). Custody and parenting time: Links to family relationships and well-being after divorce. In M. E. Lamb (Ed). *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (5th Ed) (pp. 201 – 240). New York: Wiley.

Stevenson, M. M., Fabricius, W. V., Cookston, J. T., Parke, R. D., Coltrane, S., Braver, S. L., & Saenz, D. S. (2014). Marital problems, maternal gatekeeping attitudes, and father–child relationships in adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 50(4), 1208-1218. doi: 10.1037/a0035327 **PMCID: PMC24364832**

$$T = Mf$$

Time spent with fathers in adolescence →
→ Lower stress hormones in young adulthood

Mattering to fathers in early adolescence →
→ better mental health in mid-adolescence

Ibrahim, M. H., Somers, J. A., Luecken, L. J., Fabricius, W. V. & Cookston, J.T. (2017). Father-adolescent engagement in shared activities: Effects on cortisol stress response in young adulthood. *Family Psychology*, 31, 485-494. doi.org/10.1037/fam0000259

Suh, G. W., Fabricius, W. V., Stevenson, M. W., Parke, R. D., Cookston, J. T., Braver, S. L., & Saenz, D. S. (2016). Effects of the inter-parental relationship on adolescents' emotional security and adjustment: The important role of fathers. *Developmental Psychology*, 52, 1666 – 1678. /dx.doi.org/10.1037/dev0000204. **PMCID:PMC5117829**

Divorce results in many children having minimal parenting time with fathers.

$$PT = Mf$$

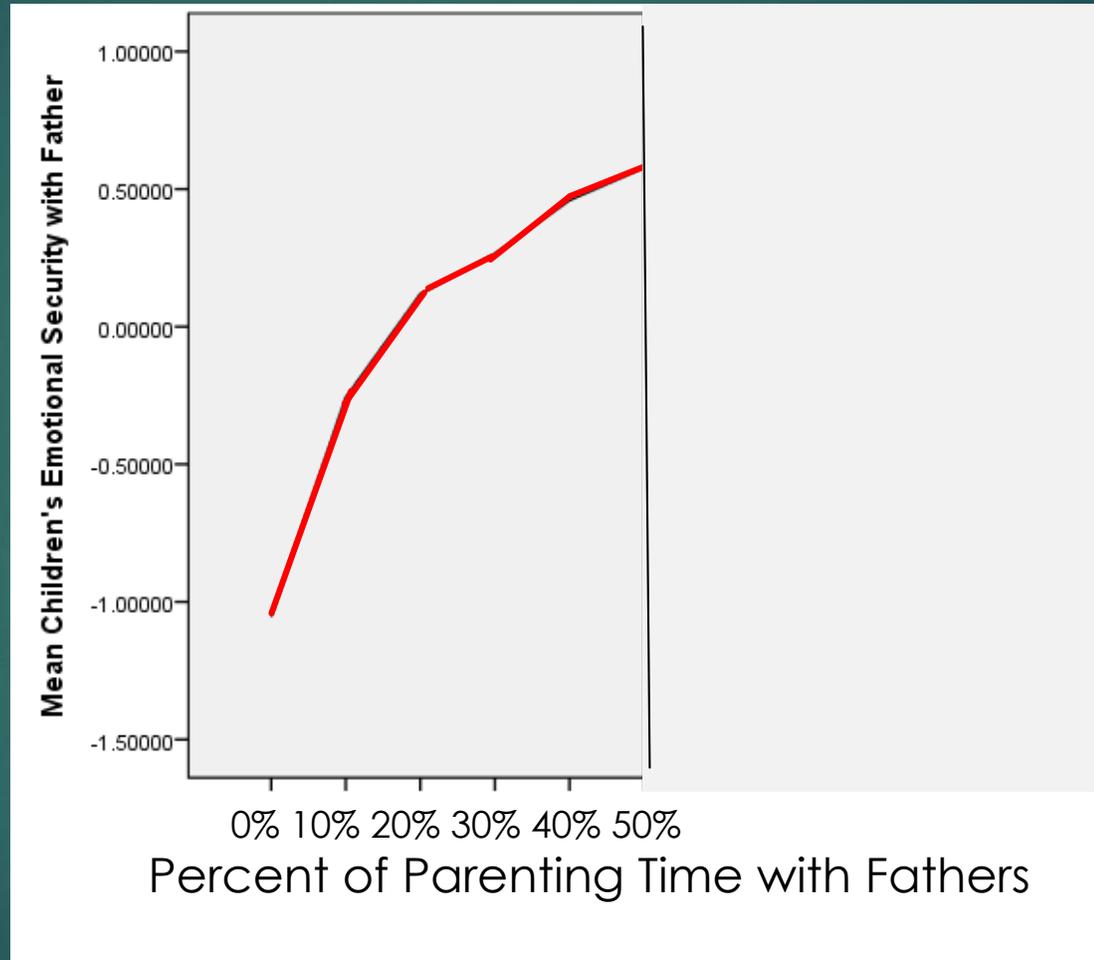

Divorce results in poorer father-child relationships in many children.



Damaged relationships translate into mental health problems and stress-related physical health problems in later life.

Findings from seven different research strategies to test $PT = Mf$.

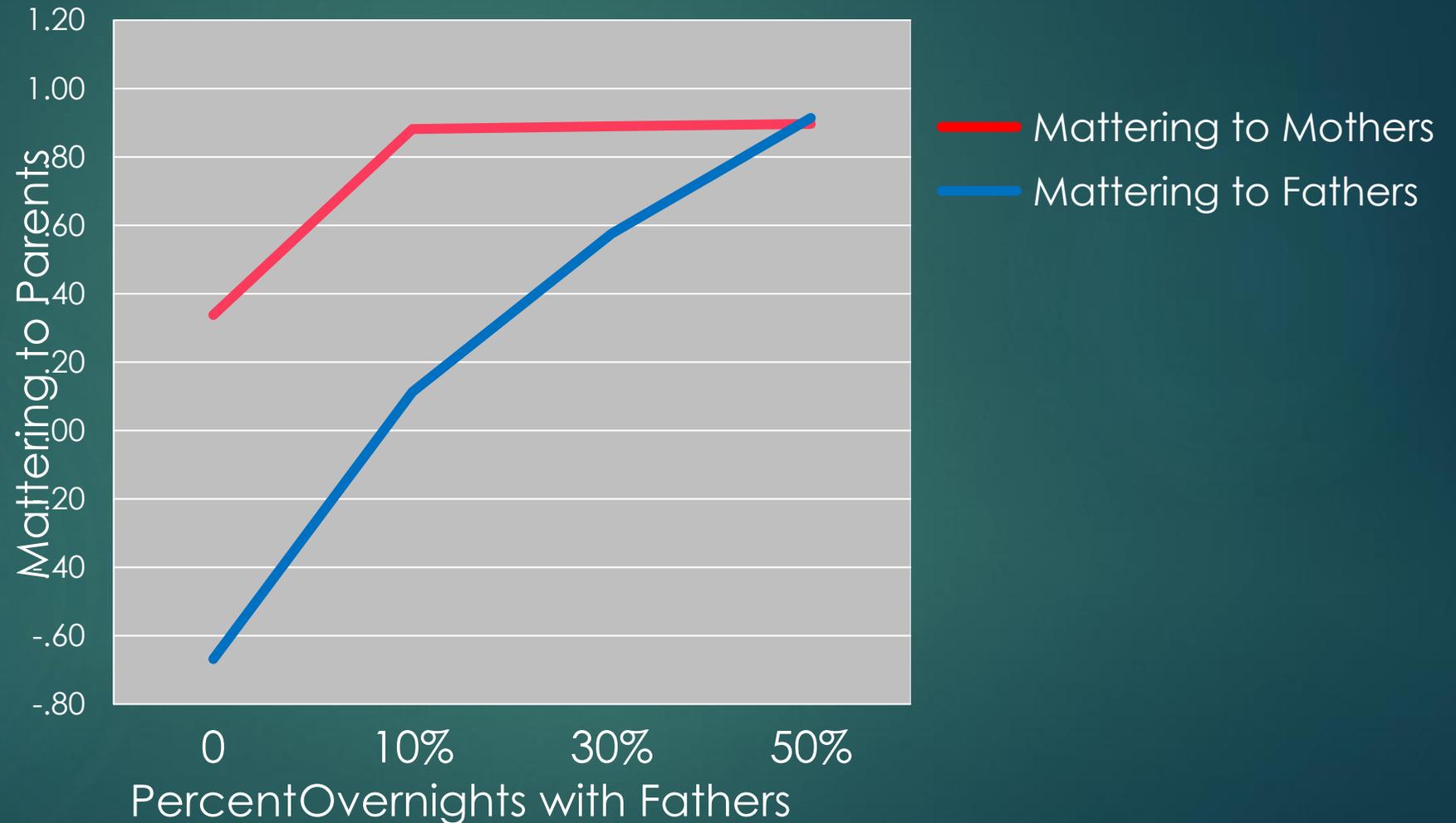
1. A linear relation between parenting time with fathers and mattering to fathers.



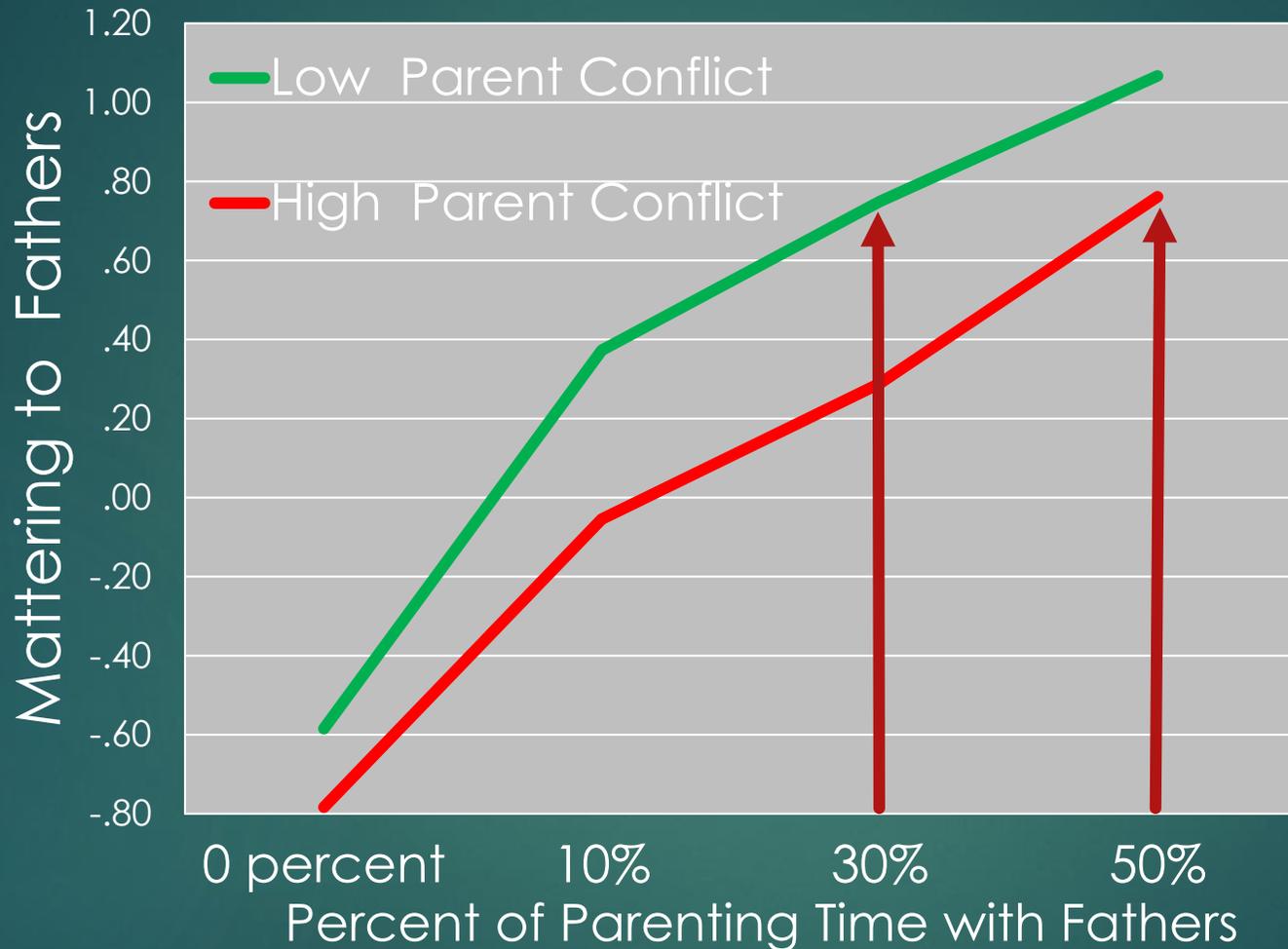
Fabricius, W. V., Sokol, K. R., Diaz, P., & Braver, S. L. (2012). Parenting time, parent conflict, parent-child relationships, and children's physical health. In K. Kuehnle & L. Drozd (Eds.) *Parenting Plan Evaluations: Applied Research for the Family Court* (pp. 188 – 213). New York: Oxford University Press.

The Policy Science

2. No decrease in mattering to mothers.
3. The same linear relation for overnights during infancy.



4. The same linear relation in high parent conflict.

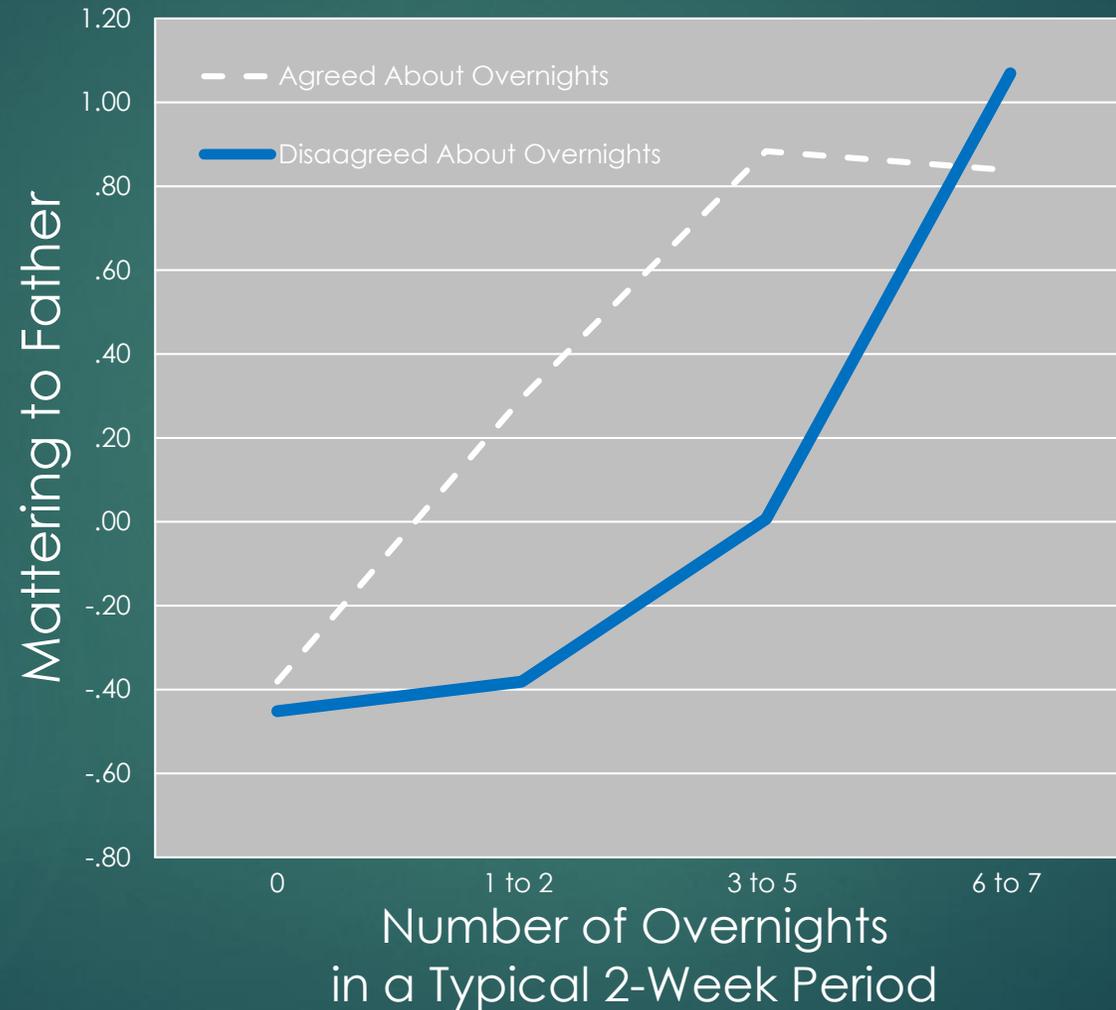


The level of Mattering to Father obtained at 30% parenting time in low conflict families, requires 50% parenting time in high conflict families.

Fabricius, W.V., & Luecken, L.J. (2007). Post-divorce living arrangements, parent conflict, and long-term physical health correlates for children of divorce. *Journal of Family Psychology, 21*, 195 – 205.

Fabricius, W. V. & Suh, G. W. (2017). Should infants and toddlers not have overnight parenting time with fathers? The policy debate and new data. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 23*, 68 – 84. doi.org/10.1037/law0000108

5. The same linear relation when parents disagree, and courts impose shared parenting time.



The Policy Science 6. Negative outcomes when relocations separate fathers and children and reduce parenting time.

Relocation before age 12 was linked in late adolescence to

- reduced perceived mattering to all three parents (fathers, mothers, and stepfathers)
- anxiety and depression
- serious behavior problems

Stevenson, M. M., Fabricius, W. V., Braver, S. L., & Cookston, J. T. (2018). Parental relocation following separation in childhood predicts maladjustment in adolescence and young adulthood. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 24, 365-378.

Fabricius, W.V., & Braver, S. L. (2006). Relocation, parent conflict, and domestic violence: Independent risk factors for children of divorce. *Journal of Child Custody*, 3, 7 – 28.

Braver, S.L., Ellman, I.M., & Fabricius, W.V. (2003). Relocation of children after divorce and children's best interests: New evidence and legal considerations. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 17, 206 - 219.

The Policy Science 7. Longitudinal evidence that increased parenting time with fathers *causes* increased mattering to fathers.

We can't do randomized experiments on parenting time.

So we have to worry about the Alternate Hypothesis:

Maybe “good fathers” get more parenting time.

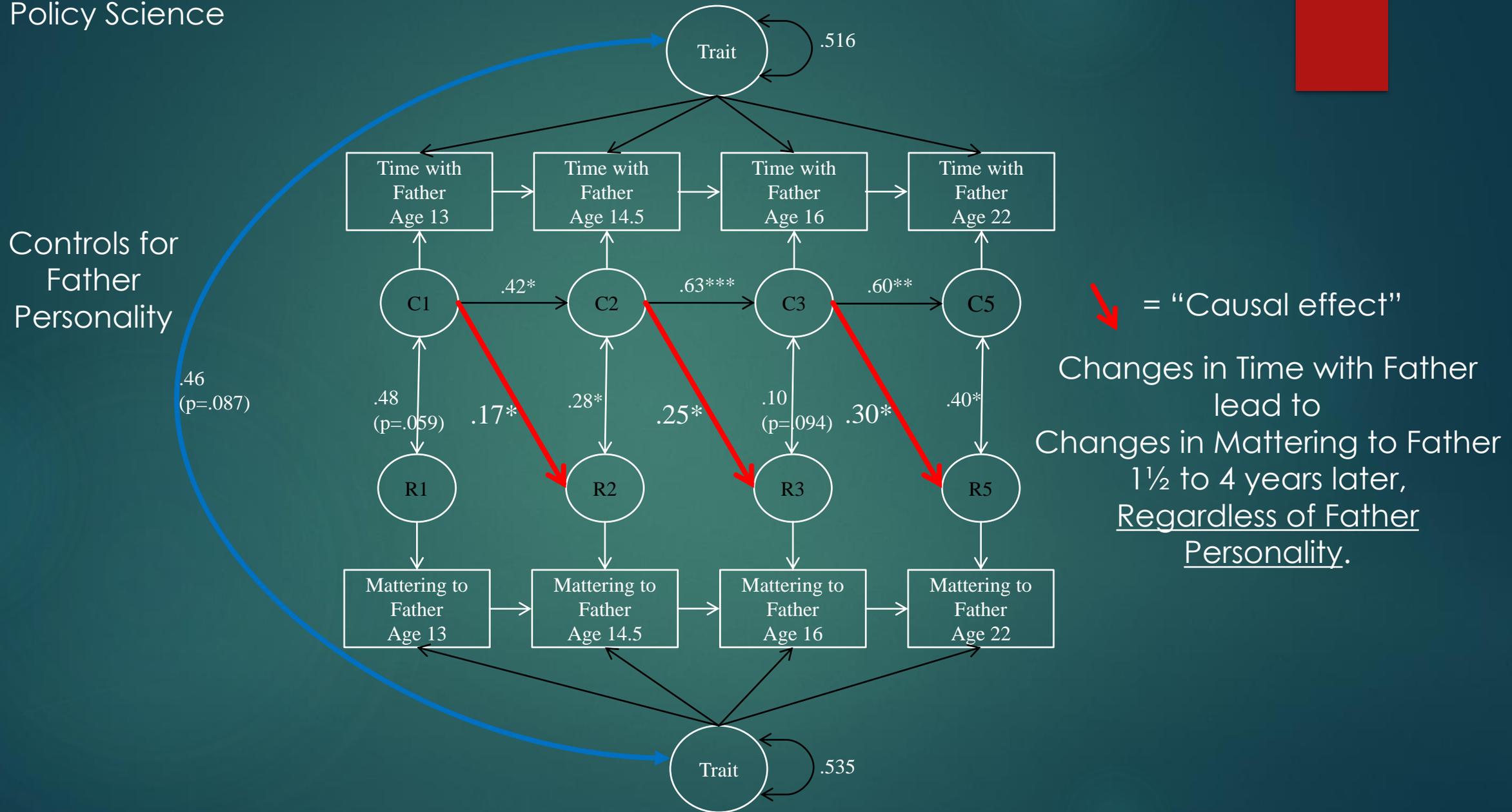
Maybe “bad fathers” get less parenting time.

If so, it could be the father's personality, not the parenting time, that affects mattering.

If this Alternate Hypothesis is true, then if we gave “bad fathers” more parenting time, it wouldn't lead to increased mattering.

We have new, state-of-the-art methods to control for father's personality.

The Policy Science



We have an actual test case.

In 2010, Arizona ordered courts to consider parenting time in children's best interests.

ARS 25-103. Purposes of title; application of title

B. It also is the declared public policy of this state and the general purpose of this title that absent evidence to the contrary, it is in a child's best interest:

1. To have substantial, frequent, meaningful and continuing parenting time with both parents.
2. To have both parents participate in decision-making about the child.

C. A court shall apply the provisions of this title in a manner that is consistent with this section.

In 2013 Arizona adopted language intended to be a presumption for equal parenting time.

ARS 25-403.02. Parenting plans

A. If the child's parents cannot agree on a plan for legal decision-making or parenting time, each parent must submit a proposed parenting plan.

B. Consistent with the child's best interests in section 25-403 and sections 25-403.03, 25-403.04 and 25-403.05, the court shall adopt a parenting plan that provides for both parents to share legal decision-making regarding their child and that maximizes their respective parenting time.

In 2018, Kentucky adopted an explicit presumption for equal parenting time.

KY ST 403.270

(2) The court shall determine custody in accordance with the best interests of the child and equal consideration shall be given to each parent and to any de facto custodian. Subject to Section 5 of this Act, there shall be a presumption, rebuttable by a preponderance of evidence, that joint custody and equally shared parenting time is in the best interest of the child. If a deviation from equal parenting time is warranted, the court shall construct a parenting time schedule which maximizes the time each parent or de facto custodian has with the child and is consistent with ensuring the child's welfare.

We have conducted an evaluation of the Arizona law by surveying the state family law professionals 4 years after implementation.

Family court judges

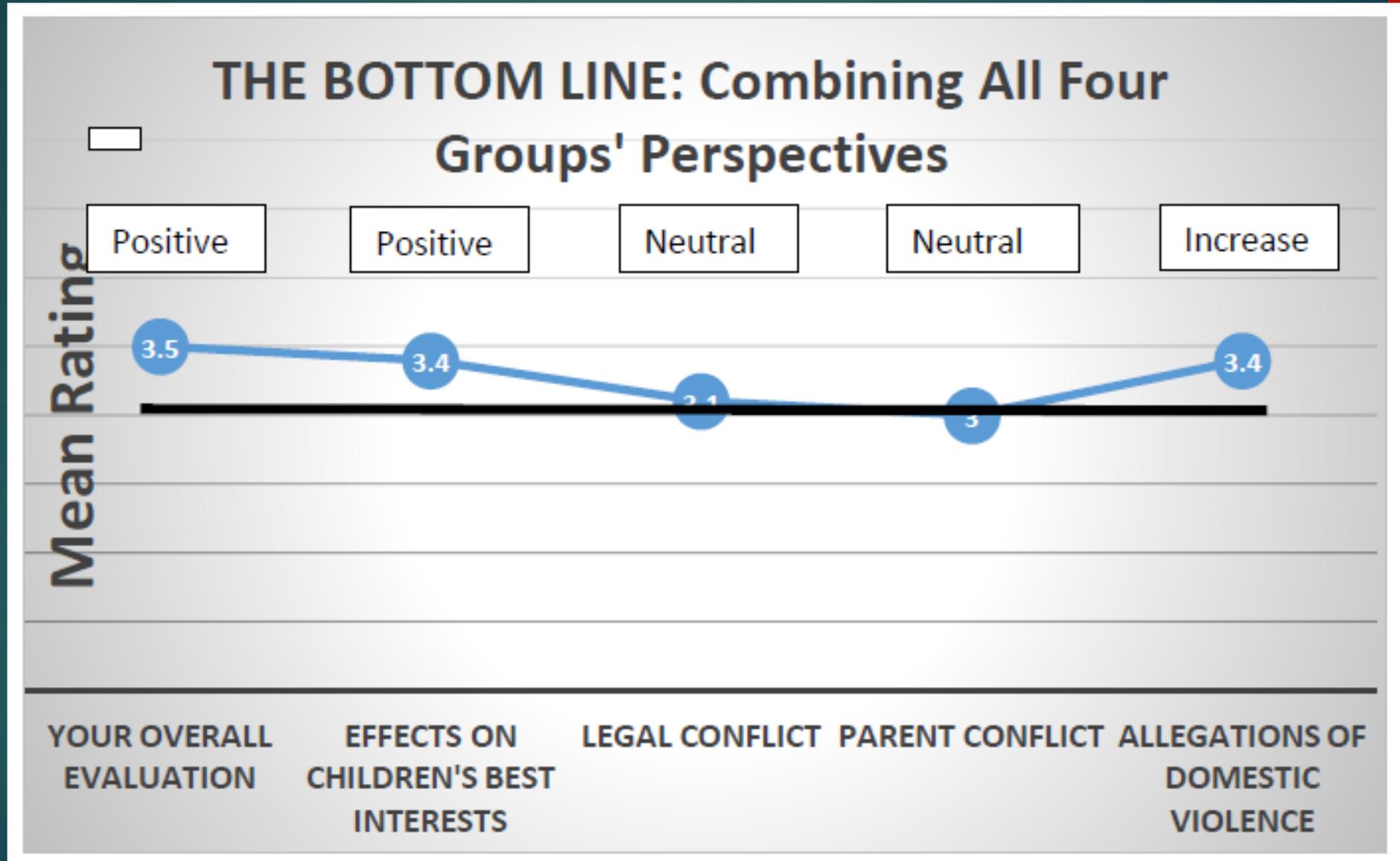
Family law attorneys

Staff of the County Conciliation Courts

Mental health providers (custody evaluators, parenting coordinators)

All agree that the law is functioning as a presumption of equal parenting time.

Each group has its own perspective stemming from the types of clients they see and the range of issues they deal with. On the next slide are the average ratings of all four groups.



Summary

We find much evidence that lower levels of parenting time with fathers threaten the long-term emotional security of the father-child relationship. With less parenting time, children can worry about how much the father wants to be with them, and they are especially susceptible to feeling that they matter less to their fathers.

We also find much evidence that policies to encourage equal parenting time will be accepted by the public, will be perceived to work well, and will likely make a substantial impact on reducing the unnecessary public health costs associated with disrupted father-child relationships.

Two new studies

“When fathers take **paternal leave**, they **spend more time with, and do more activities** with their 1-year-olds.”

“When fathers **spend more time with, and do more activities** with children from ages 5 to 9, the children have reduced problematic behaviors during adolescence.”

“It is fathers’ direct involvement [**time and activities**] that shields adolescents from engaging in problem behaviors.”

“This strongly suggests that the government should ensure that **shared custody should be the default** for both married and unmarried parents.”

Pilkaukas, N. V., and Schneider, W. J. (2020). Father involvement among nonresident dads: Does paternity leave matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family*. DOI:10.1111/jomf.12677

Gold, S. , Edin, K. J., and Nelson, T. J. (2020). Does time with dad in childhood pay off in adolescence? *Journal of Marriage and Family*. DOI:10.1111/jomf.12676

Looking Back and Looking Forward

Listening to the Children of Divorce

Doing the Science

Sandy Braver
Scott Coltrane
Jeff Cookston
Priscilla Diaz
Ira Ellman
Mariam Ibrahim
Linda Luecken
Ross Parke
Karina Sokol
Matt Stevenson
Go Woon Suh
Fanita Tyrell
Clorinda Velez
Ashley Votruba

Sharing the Science

Arizona Chapter
of the Association
of Family and
Conciliation
Courts

Making the Policy

Staff and Members
Domestic Relations
Committee
of the Arizona State
Legislature

Evaluating the Policy

Michael Aaron
Faren Akins
Jack Assini
Tracy McElroy
Steve West
Maricopa County
Superior Court

Please feel free to contact me with inquiries or requests for the bibliography of the research cited here.

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Thank you.