

# Children's experiences with participation in research on interparental conflicts

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It's fun to be a child, but rather boring when the parents argue. It's nice that you go around asking children how they are doing.

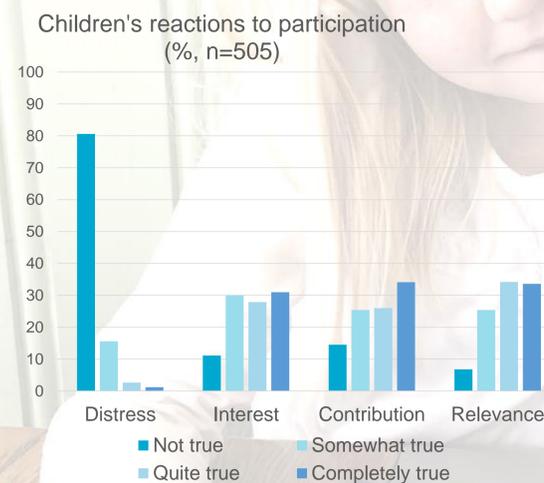
## Background and aim

To identify the most harmful aspects of interparental conflict on child adjustment, family relationships should be investigated from children's own perspective. Research with children raise ethical and methodical concerns that require specific consideration, especially when they are asked about sensitive topics. The aim of this poster is to increase the knowledge-base on how children can be involved in research in ways that are methodologically and ethically justified, by investigating how children respond to participation in research on interparental conflicts.

## Methods

Data were collected from the first 505 children attending the ongoing Dynamics of Family Conflict-study. These families were recruited from family welfare centers across Norway. Children both from families with parents living apart and together are interviewed by trained interviewers (7-11 years) or answer electronic questionnaires (12-15 years) about family relationships and wellbeing with a particular focus on interparental conflicts. By the end of the interviews and questionnaires, the children report to how they experienced the participation in regard to distress; relevance; contribution and relevance. Answers are investigated in relation to child age, depression symptoms, child perceived intensity of interparental conflicts (by regression analyses), and family structure (One way ANOVA).

## Results



The figure shows that 80% of children did not experience participation as distressing and less than 4% said that it was quite true or completely true for them that they felt distressed. About 60% of children reported it to be quite true or certainly true that the questions were interesting and that they contributed to helping other children by answering them. Nearly 70% replied in this way when asked whether the questions felt relevant to their situation.

**Distress:** "The questions made me feel angry, sad or distressed"  
**Interest:** "The questions were interesting/exciting"  
**Contribution:** "The questions made me feel important and that I contributed to helping others"  
**Relevance:** "The questions felt relevant to my situation"

The table shows that younger children were somewhat more likely to feel distressed, but also experienced more interest, sense of contribution and relevance of participation. Higher levels of depressive symptoms and more intensity of interparental conflicts were related to more distress in relation to participation and less interest, sense of contribution and relevance in the bivariate analyses. Only the association between distress and depressive symptoms was still significant in the multivariate analyses. No significant differences were found between children in dissolved or intact families in their experiences with participation.

	Age		Depression symptoms		Conflict intensity	
	r	β	r	β	r	β
<b>Distress</b>	-.053	-.109*	.290**	.296**	.142**	.077
<b>Interest</b>	-.298**	-.299**	-.119**	-.064	.017	.021
<b>Contribution</b>	-.278	-.294	-.113**	-.072	-.024	-.033
<b>Relevance</b>	-.341**	-.325**	-.116**	-.061	.074	.069
<b>Mean (stdv)</b>	10.69 (.2.51)		.39 (.375)		.86 (.673)	
<b>n</b>	498		500		456	

Bivariate (r) and multivariate (β) associations between child experiences with participation and age, depression symptoms and intensity of interparental conflicts. \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01. Depression symptoms was measured with Short Mood and Feeling Questionnaire (SMFQ); Conflict intensity was measured with the short version of the intensity scale from the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict scale (CPIC).

## Discussion and conclusions

Overall, most children saw participation as a positive experience. Few children perceived distress in relation to participation and a majority of the children experienced participation as interesting and meaningful. Younger children were more likely to perceive participation as meaningful and interesting. This may be due to research methods, as the younger children were interviewed face to face by trained interviewers. This did however not seem to prevent the younger children from distress associated with participation, as they were somewhat more likely than the older children to report distress. Importantly, high intensity of interparental was initially associated with more distressing participation, but not when age and depression were adjusted for. This indicates that a stressful family situation may not be a contra indication of child participation in research on sensitive topics.

## Involvement of children in the Dynamics of Family Conflict Study

- Children are involved throughout the research process, through pilot studies, feedbacks during the data collection and through communications of results to participants and other children
- Informed consent is stressed, also from the children themselves and they are explicitly told that they can skip questions that they don't want to answer
- Interviewers are trained, both methodologically and to be able to handle situations where children have unmet needs for help.
- All answers are visualized to increase reliability and help children keep focus
- Feedback from children are used to develop interviews and questionnaires in future waves of data collection



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Thank you for all the questions. This helped me. Thanks again <3

I got tired, couldn't bear to answer all questions. It was sad, hard and fun

I think it's a good thing that you have asked me, and that it can help you with the research

The questionnaire was a bit too long, but otherwise it was very nice.

The questions made me think about how I'm really doing