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A Literature Review on First-Time Parents: Factors Associated with Coparenting in Infant Care and Implications for Counseling Practice

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A Literature Review on First-Time Parents: Factors Associated with Coparenting in Infant Care and Implications for Counseling Practice



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Abstract: The transition to first-time parenthood is a challenging developmental period that can potentially influence the quality of the coparenting relationship. This narrative literature review examines factors that impact coparenting among parents of their first child. The review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) guidelines, focusing on studies published between 2020 and 2025. An initial search identified 2020 articles, of which 10 studies met the inclusion criteria for detailed analysis. The criteria for this review include peer-reviewed scientific articles that discuss factors or determinants of coparenting among new parents during the transition to parenthood. Findings from this review identified various factors associated with coparenting across three main levels: individual, family, and extrafamilial. The review found that at the individual level, factors such as parental mental health, reflective function, gender role expectations, parenting beliefs, nurturing beliefs, childhood maltreatment history, parenting and coparenting styles from the family of origin, and infant characteristics were influential. At the family level, factors such as prenatal marital conflict, positive prenatal couple behaviour, destructive conflict, conflict management skills, maternal gate-closing behaviour, daily coparenting practices, and partner task allocation were significant. Finally, at the extrafamilial level, social crises related to health and social support, as well as work and financial conditions, are shaped by sociocultural factors. Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of a holistic understanding of coparenting influences to enrich theoretical knowledge and provide a strong foundation for developing more effective, family-specific interventions.

Key Words: Coparenting; Transition to parenthood; First-time parents; Parental mental health; Family dynamics

INTRODUCTION

Both fathers and mothers play important roles in every child's life, but the reality is that there is an imbalance in how these roles are distributed. Many children in Indonesia are raised in families without a father's presence and involvement (Krisna et al., 2025). This condition is partly caused by the patriarchal cultural view in Indonesia, where the mother is the primary caregiver while the father is the breadwinner (Simbolon et al., 2025). However, there is another condition in which around 11.5% to 12.73% of women eventually take over the role of head of the family, meaning that mothers not only play a dual role in caring for and earning for their families but also lead their families (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). Conditions like these cause an imbalance in the roles and involvement of parents in the

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family, but behind this difference or imbalance, cooperation between the two is needed, especially in raising children, a process known as coparenting.

Coparenting is a collaborative effort between fathers and mothers to coordinate and support each other in carrying out parenting responsibilities (Feinberg, 2003). Coparenting occurs when there is a child-rearing agreement, division of labour, support and undermining between partners, and coordination of family interactions (joint family management) (Feinberg, 2003). Coparenting is a behaviour that actively promotes a sense of togetherness and family integrity, openness about conflict between parents (conflict), attempts to conceal and avoid underestimating it so as to damage the credibility of the coparental couple (disparagement), and sets boundaries and discipline between parents (reprimand) (McHale, 1997). The understanding and use of the concept of coparenting in Indonesian parenting is predominantly in the post-divorce context (Sudirman & Parepare, 2023; Turnip et al., 2024). In fact, coparenting should be developed from the transition to parenthood, namely from pregnancy to the birth of the first child (Feinberg, 2002).

The transition to parenthood is a transition from one stage to another, namely from partner to parent (Oliveira et al., 2023). The transition to parenthood brings various positive experiences and increases happiness, relationship and life satisfaction, self-esteem, meaning, and provides hope for the future (Don et al., 2022; Grundström et al., 2025; Willms et al., 2023; Zahavi-Lupo et al., 2023). On the other hand, during the transition, many parents also struggle with feelings of discomfort, uncertainty, shifts in work-life balance, changes in sleep patterns and physical activity that can affect mental conditions such as stress, anxiety, depression, and even overall well-being (Asselmann et al., 2022; Hughes et al., 2020; Kracht et al., 2024; Refaeli et al., 2024). In facing these challenges, parents need to prepare and adapt so they can maintain mental health, maintain family functioning, enhance self-development, and foster a sense of competence during the transition (Feinberg et al., 2016; Leong et al., 2024; Taubman – Ben-Ari, 2022). This transition also impacts children's development, sleep patterns, affective disorders, and externalising and internalising behavioural problems (Feinberg et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2018). These studies demonstrate the importance of transition in the lives of new parents and children, as it alters individual and relational dynamics within a family unit (Lang et al., 2024). Therefore, preparation is necessary to face the transition, one of which is coparenting between parents.

Good coparenting between parents has numerous impacts on individuals, couples, and families. Supportive coparenting can protect individual parents from the negative impacts of their partner's stress. If one parent is highly stressed, the other parent can provide support, thus improving the quality of the couple's relationship (Durtschi et al., 2017). During transitions, parents experience various conflicts in their parenting and relationships, but when couples practice good co-parenting, they are better able to resolve these conflicts (Negrini, 2020). Coparenting has spillover effects, in which the dynamics of coparenting can influence other family subsystems, such as the parent-child relationship (Katz & Gottman, 1996). This is evident when conflict-ridden co-parenting interferes with the mother's ability to provide a nurturing environment that supports adolescent exploration during the period of autonomy development, thereby impacting adolescent adjustment (M. J. Martin et al., 2017). Another study successfully conducted cross-lagged analyses of within-family relationships, revealing that higher levels of coparenting conflict predicted decreases in interparental verbal aggression, reduced maternal withdrawal, and fewer child externalising problems (Zemp et al., 2018).

Research on coparenting during parental transitions is fundamental to family well-being and child development. Mchale & Rasmussen (1998) first demonstrated in their longitudinal study that problematic coparenting during infancy leads to later adjustment difficulties in children, resulting in externalisation and internalisation. Recent research has found that conflictive and competitive coparenting during a child's first two years of life leads to problematic externalising behaviours by age seven (Jacobvitz et al., 2022). Conversely, a meta-analysis by Zhao et al. (2022) demonstrated that cooperative and integrity-based coparenting can reduce externalising and internalising problems. Another impact of coparenting can be seen in children's daily lives, with positive sleep patterns and quality (McDaniel & Teti, 2012). Children from families with more supportive coparenting in early infancy tend to have secure attachments with their fathers at 13 months, but not with their mothers (Brown et al., 2010). This may be because fathers typically spend less time with their children than mothers do, making coparenting more strongly related to parent-child attachment (Brown et al., 2010).

Recent research shows that mothers' positive perceptions of coparenting increase their emotional availability, which ultimately strengthens the mother-child attachment (Kim et al., 2021).

Given the importance of coparenting, even during the transition to parenthood, research on coparenting among new parents is necessary. One theory explaining coparenting is proposed by Feinberg (2003) in an ecological model, in which various levels of influence—from individual characteristics of parents and children to the family and the extrafamilial context—simultaneously and interact to shape the quality of coparenting and its implications for overall family functioning. Feinberg (2003) individual-level model suggests that parents with higher levels of psychological distress may be less able to maintain effective coparenting coordination, and that a child's temperament can trigger increased stress and conflict in the coparenting relationship. Consistent with Feinberg's (2003) ecological framework of coparenting, research findings using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) indicate that individual characteristics of parents, particularly those with higher levels of depression, play a significant role in shaping coparenting dynamics, with a decline in coparenting quality over time (Bai et al., 2024). Furthermore, higher levels of parental and partner depression, as well as higher levels of infant negative affect, significantly predict poorer coparenting experiences (Bai et al., 2024). At the second level, family factors in Feinberg's (2003) ecological model examine the dynamics of family relationships—the overall relationship between parents at the dyadic level—which can influence coparenting. Other research has shown that couples who exhibit higher-quality marital interactions before the birth of their infant also exhibit more supportive coparenting behaviours afterwards (Schoppe-Sullivan & Mangelsdorf, 2013). At the extrafamilial level, factors outside the family, such as social support and environmental stress, play a role in shaping coparenting quality (Feinberg, 2003), as demonstrated by Schoppe-Sullivan and Mangelsdorf's (2013) finding that families with lower socioeconomic status tend to exhibit more undermining coparenting behaviours.

Factors at various levels not only have separate effects on coparenting but also interact to shape patterns of cooperation, role sharing, and parental solidarity in carrying out parenting functions, ultimately affecting child development (Feinberg, 2003). Therefore, coparenting can be viewed from various factors, such as in the study of Schoppe-Sullivan & Mangelsdorf (2013), which looked at the characteristics of both parents, namely parental negative emotions and perceptions of maternal acceptance in childhood, and maternal beliefs about the role of the father, combined with marital behaviour and family socioeconomic status as important determinants of coparenting behaviour. Another study examined the relationship between child temperament and the moderating role of marital quality on coparenting quality (Fan et al., 2020). The results of Fan et al.'s (2020) study showed that although marital quality did not moderate the relationship between child temperament and coparenting, child temperament and marital quality directly impacted the quality of parental coparenting. Another study by McDaniel et al. (2018) showed that fluctuations in daily coparenting were predicted by various risk factors, such as fluctuations in daily couple relationship quality, parental negative mood, parenting stress, and fathers' work hours. Furthermore, as daily risk factors accumulated, the quality of daily coparenting worsened, suggesting that the accumulation of daily stressors and difficulties may significantly impair parents' ability to collaborate and coordinate daily coparenting (McDaniel et al., 2018).

The explanations and studies above have demonstrated Feinberg (2003) ecological model related to coparenting factors. A review by Campbell (2023) showed that the characteristics of each parent, the state of the romantic relationship, the residential context, and the child's characteristics all influence how parents function in coparenting. However, this review used articles published between 2000 and 2019 on coparenting, with a sample focused on specific characteristics: heterosexual parents living in the same household in the United States, most of whom are their children's biological parents (Campbell, 2023). Another review examined the determinants of coparenting in intact heterosexual nuclear families, and the results showed that parental characteristics, child characteristics, marital relationships, and intervention programs were determinants of coparenting (Antawati et al., 2020). Interestingly, Campbell (2023) used Feinberg's (2003) ecological model to analyse articles in the review, and the most frequently used coparenting components in Antawati et al. (2020) were drawn from Feinberg (2003).

Despite the growing body of research on coparenting, significant gaps remain in the literature, underscoring the necessity of the present review. First, the majority of existing studies on coparenting

have been conducted in Western contexts, predominantly in the United States and Europe, with samples largely homogeneous in culture, socioeconomic status, and family structure (Antawati et al., 2020; Campbell, 2023). Furthermore, although the review was conducted by Indonesian authors, they have not yet managed to find studies that looked at coparenting factors conducted in Indonesia (Antawati et al., 2020). In Indonesia, research on coparenting will take different forms in cultures that emphasise collectivism and extended-family involvement, which can shape parent-grandparent coparenting relationships (Purwaningtyas et al., 2020; Saputra & Anggreiny, 2024). Traditional gender norms in patriarchal culture in Indonesia create the view that mothers take the main role in parenting and fathers play the role of the main breadwinner, where this dynamic has an impact on the coparenting that parents have (Agustina et al., 2025). In addition, research related to coparenting in Indonesia tends to be conducted on parents after divorce to discuss the care of their children after the separation of child custody (Gymnastia et al., 2025; Sudirman & Parepare, 2023). This geographic and cultural concentration limits the generalizability of findings to societies with distinct family systems, gender norms, and social support structures, such as Indonesia. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a review of the latest research on coparenting in Indonesia.

Second, prior reviews, such as those by Antawati et al. (2020) and Campbell (2023), focused on coparenting across general family structures; none have specifically synthesised empirical evidence on the transition to first-time parenthood as a distinct and critical developmental window. This gap is consequential, as the earliest period of coparenting — from pregnancy through infancy — has been identified as particularly formative for establishing long-term patterns of parental cooperation and child developmental outcomes (Feinberg, 2002; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). Research consistently demonstrates that conflictual or unsupportive coparenting in the first two years of a child's life predicts externalising and internalising behavioural problems in children as they grow older (Jacobvitz et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Therefore, a review that specifically targets this transitional period and organises its findings within an established ecological framework is not only timely but theoretically necessary.

Lastly, the urgency of this research is further amplified by the contemporary context, parenting today is greatly influenced by technology and social media. Parents who are exposed to social media will experience its dualistic nature, which simultaneously serves as a source of empowerment and strain (Mertens et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). While digital exposure may raise individual awareness of parenting practices, it does not necessarily translate into improved coparenting quality (McDaniel et al., 2018; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016). It is therefore insufficient to rely on informal digital literacy as a substitute for evidence-based, couple-focused co-parenting interventions and policies (Mertens et al., 2024). Based on the explanation above, a review specifically conducted with new parents, especially those who are younger and use technology, is needed to understand the forms of coparenting they practice and how technology influences these practices.

Based on the explanation above, it's clear how important coparenting is for new parents during the transition period. The remaining research gaps and the urgency mentioned above underscore the importance of conducting a literature review on this topic. Therefore, this literature review aims to explore and synthesise previous research using Feinberg's (2003) ecological model to identify the dynamics of coparenting during the transition to parenthood. This literature review also seeks to answer the question of what factors influence coparenting in childcare for new parents. Furthermore, understanding these dynamics can inform the challenges and development of inclusive parenting interventions and policies that support new parents in raising their children. Therefore, another objective of this review is: What are the implications for counseling practice?

METHOD

Procedures

This research is a narrative literature review that aims to comprehensively summarise, synthesise, and interpret research findings without following the strict procedures of a systematic review (Snyder, 2019). This approach was chosen because it allowed the authors to explore concepts, trends, and

empirical findings related to coparenting during the transition to parenthood in depth and flexibility (Ferrari, 2015). After the articles were collected, the analysis was conducted through reading, thematic recording, and grouping the findings into key emerging issues (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). The results of the synthesis were then compiled to illustrate research developments, gaps in the literature, and theoretical and practical implications. The authors adapted the steps outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA), specifically refining the 2009 version (Page et al., 2021). The updated 2020 PRISMA guidelines are designed to significantly improve the accessibility, selection, rigorous evaluation, and systematic synthesis of studies used in meta-analyses and systematic literature reviews (Page et al., 2021).

Materials

This literature review applied a structured set of inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance, quality, and methodological appropriateness of the selected studies, as shown in Table 1. In terms of topic and focus, the included articles specifically addressed coparenting in the early stages of a child's life, including the factors, predictors, or correlates of coparenting quality during the transition to parenthood. Articles published between 2020 and 2025 were considered eligible, as this range reflects the most current empirical developments in the field of coparenting and parental transition. Concerning research methodology, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies were all eligible for inclusion, reflecting the diversity of empirical approaches to studying coparenting processes. The articles were scientific and had been peer-reviewed in international and national journals. Researchers searched for articles using the databases ProQuest, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, Scopus, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, and the Sinta platform from the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Article searches used keywords or phrases such as Title ("co-parenting" OR "coparenting") AND ("new parent" OR "transition to parenthood" OR "New Parenthood" OR "First Time Parents" OR "transition" OR "postpartum period"). The search keywords were carefully constructed to capture the full breadth of literature relevant to the review's focus. The primary terms "*coparenting*" and "*co-parenting*" were treated as synonymous, using the OR operator to account for inconsistent hyphenation of the concept across databases and publication conventions, ensuring that no relevant articles were inadvertently omitted due to spelling variations. These were combined using the AND operator with a second cluster of terms — "*new parent*," "*transition to parenthood*," "*New Parenthood*," "*First Time Parents*," "*transition*," and "*postpartum period*" — which collectively reflect the various ways researchers describe the period surrounding the birth of a first child. The deliberate inclusion of both broad terms, such as "*transition*", and more specific phrases, such as "*postpartum period*", was intended to balance sensitivity and specificity, maximising the retrieval of empirically relevant studies while remaining anchored to the developmental stage central to this review. Restricting the keyword search to article titles further ensured that only studies in which coparenting during parental transition constituted the core subject matter were retrieved, rather than studies in which these themes appeared only peripherally in the abstract or body text.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Topic/Focus	Articles that specifically discuss coparenting on new parents during the early stage of a child's life or infancy	Articles unrelated to coparenting on new parents during the early stage of a child's life or infancy

Relevance to Review Objectives	Articles that contribute to understanding factors associated with coparenting quality during the transition to parenthood	Articles that do not address the factors or determinants of coparenting during the transition to parenthood
Study Population	Heterosexual couples who are first-time parents or are in the transition to parenthood (prenatal to early infancy stage) with children showing normal developmental trajectories	Studies focusing on divorced, separated, or non-intact families; same-sex couples; adoptive parents; parents of children with developmental disorders or special needs; or parents who already have more than one child
Publication Period	Articles published between 2020 and 2025	Articles published before 2020 or after 2025
Language	Articles written in English or Indonesian	Articles written in languages other than English or Indonesian
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed scientific articles published in accredited national or international journals	Books, book chapters, conference proceedings, grey literature, theses/dissertations, or non-peer-reviewed publications
Research Methodology	Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies	Systematic reviews, meta-analyses, or theoretical or conceptual papers without empirical data
Database Source	Articles accessible through ProQuest, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, Scopus, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, and SINTA (Ministry of Education and Culture, Indonesia)	Articles not indexed in the designated databases or articles that require access beyond available institutional subscriptions and could not be retrieved

Data Analysis

Figure 1 illustrates the initial selection of articles from selected databases. The review process began with 220 references taken from electronic databases. After removing duplicate references ($n = 17$) at the identification stage, the first screening excluded articles ($n = 170$) that were inaccessible or did not meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria. After that, an in-depth review was carried out on the collected articles and articles were found to be irrelevant ($n = 23$), so they would not be used in the review. The results showed that 10 met the eligibility criteria for inclusion in this literature review. These selected articles focused specifically on coparenting during parental transition, exploring contributing factors and influencing variables. Thematic synthesis was then used to analyse the final set of articles at three levels of coparenting factors: the individual, family, and extrafamilial levels (Feinberg, 2003).

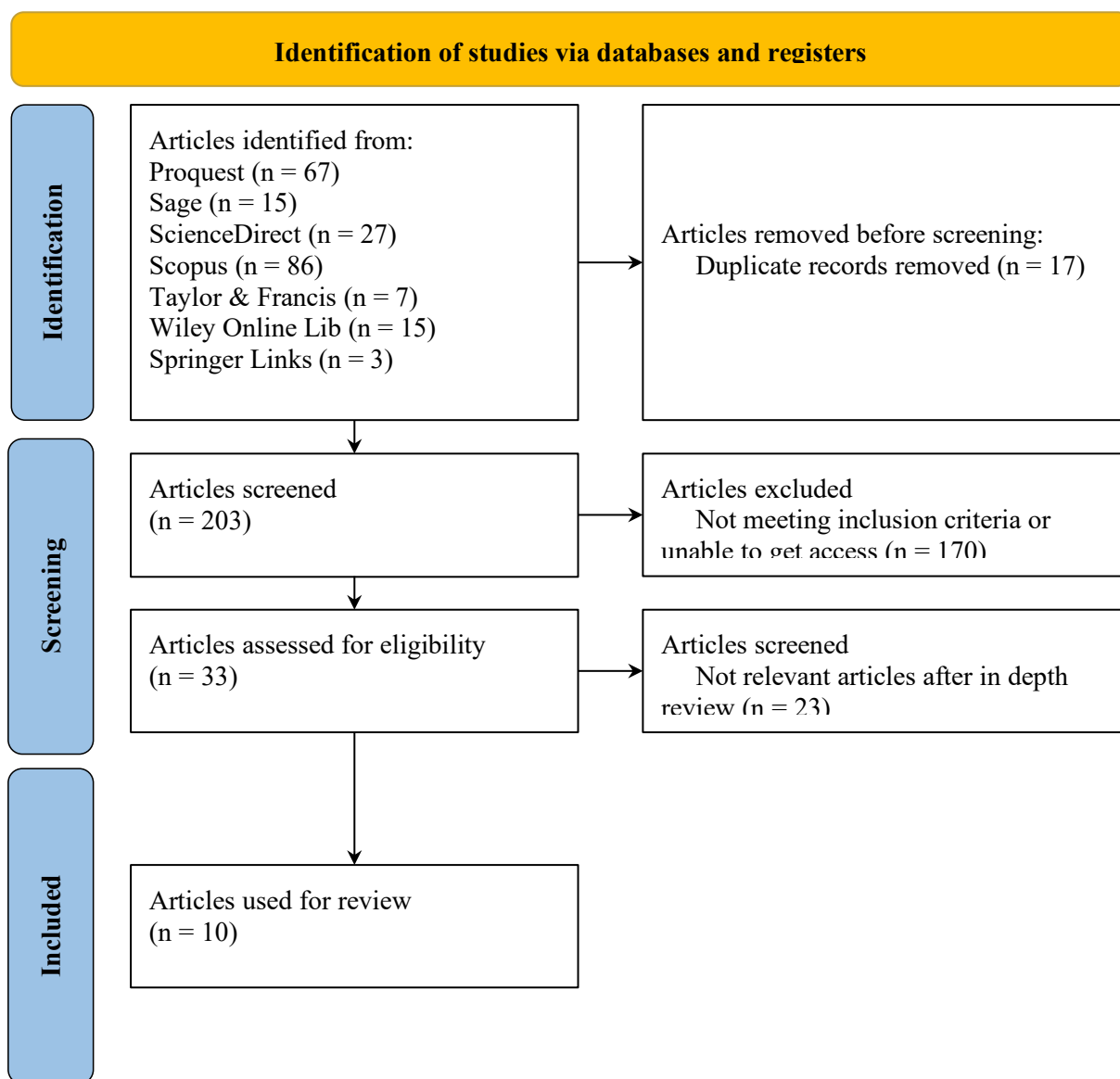


Figure 1. Flowchart PRISMA in Article Selection

RESULTS

Table 2 presents a general overview or summary of the 10 final articles reviewed and synthesised in this study. The 10 articles varied significantly in scope, methods, and type of research. Based on the review, eight of the studies were conducted longitudinally, providing an opportunity to explore the dynamics of coparenting change, its predictors, and consequences (Borelli et al., 2020; Curran et al., 2021; Lindroos et al., 2024; L. N. Martin et al., 2025; Pérez Cortés et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2021; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021, 2022). The other two articles collected data from a single point in time (De Palma et al., 2023; E. Martin et al., 2024). Not only in the duration of data collection, but the articles were also collected using various methods, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative methods were found in six articles (Curran et al., 2021; De Palma et al., 2023; Lindroos et al., 2024; L. N. Martin et al., 2025; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021, 2022), qualitative methods in two articles (Pérez Cortés et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2021), and mixed methods in two articles (Borelli et al., 2020; E. Martin et al., 2024). This article review refers to Feinberg's (2003) ecological model, which

explains that coparenting is influenced by three levels: the individual, family, and extrafamilial levels. Details of the coparenting factor level categorisation are discussed in the discussion section.

Table 2. Summary of articles included in the literature review

Author(s)	Method	Sampel	Research Purposes	Research findings	Correlation with Current Study
(Borelli et al., 2020)	Mixed method, Longitudinal	107 heterosexual couples living together and expecting their first child.	To determine longitudinally how partner reflective functioning (RF) is associated with several theoretical constructs, namely attachment style, relationship satisfaction, parental reflective functioning (PRF), and coparenting behavior.	Positive relationships were found between mothers' and fathers' Partner RF and between mothers' Partner RF and their parental RF. Mixed results were also found relating RF Partners to other constructs.	Higher levels of maternal Partner RF predicted greater declines in coparenting during the transition to parenthood.
(Curran et al., 2021)	Quantitative Longitudinal Two-Wave, Cross-Lagged Analysis	Building Strong Families (BSF; Hershey et al., 2013) data, low-income, unmarried couples expecting their first child together. Data from W1 (4,424 couples with a 15 month old child) and W2 (4,247 couples with a 36 month old child)	Testing the direction of the relationship between financial hardship, depressive symptoms, destructive interparental conflict, and coparenting for mothers and fathers longitudinally when children were 15 and 36 months old.	Destructive conflict at 15 months predicted lower coparenting at 36 months for both parents. Fathers' depressive symptoms at 15 months predicted later destructive conflict for themselves and their partners. Financial hardship did not predict depressive symptoms; instead, the opposite was found, with mothers with higher depressive symptoms at 15 months predicting higher financial hardship at 36 months.	A unidirectional relationship from higher destructive conflict at W1 to lower coparenting at W2, for both fathers and mothers.

(De Palma et al., 2023)	Quantitative Cross-sectional	350 parents (175 women, 175 men), children aged 0-3 years 11 months	To examine how parental mental health, parental reflective functioning (PRF), and coparenting are jointly related to the social-emotional (SE) development of children aged 0–3 years.	In general, research demonstrates the important role of reflective functioning in children's development and well-being as well as parents' mental health and relationships between parents.	Coparenting can be influenced by mental health (depression and anxiety) as well as parents' RF (subscale of certainty).
(Lindroos et al., 2024)	Quantitative Longitudinal, Intensive Repeated Measures (IRM)	144 couples first child aged 4-6 months.	To deepen understanding of the daily processes of coparenting in families during the transition to parenthood.	Confirming that coparenting is dynamic, mutually influencing each partner, rather than a static process. Supporting family systems theory, which posits that the quality of daily interactions can form recurring patterns (loops), the two dimensions (cooperation and tension) are considered cause and effect, thus contributing to each other over time. There are three types of within-family processes in everyday coparenting: continuity, spread, and shift.	The two dimensions of everyday coparenting (cooperative and tense) appear to operate differently in everyday life, as cooperative coparenting is slightly more often both cause and effect in everyday coparenting processes.

(E. Martin et al., 2024)	Mixed method	198 new parents.	Explores parents' allocation of tasks (childcare, household, financial tasks) differs from their perceived distribution, and whether these differences are related to the quality of the coparenting relationship.	how desired tasks) more financially. When women reported doing more housework and childcare than they wanted, the quality of coparenting was lower.	All parents felt that mothers did more housework and childcare, while fathers contributed more financially. When women reported doing more housework and childcare than they wanted, the quality of coparenting was lower.	Differences between couples' reported division of labor also undermine coparenting, particularly for mothers, highlighting the persistence of traditional gender expectations.
(L. N. Martin et al., 2025)	Quantitative Longitudinal	398 heterosexual couples having their first child.	Exploring the relationship between maternal and paternal history of childhood maltreatment and adjustment to parenthood for new parents, particularly regarding relationship quality and coparenting.	the Paternal maltreatment history predicted poorer relationship quality (10–12 months and 2 years) and poorer coparenting quality at 2 years of age, as reported by mothers. Furthermore, mothers with a history of maltreatment reported lower relationship satisfaction and poorer coparenting quality when their partners also had a history. This suggests that a shared history of maltreatment may exacerbate the challenges faced by new parents.	Parental history of childhood maltreatment influences the quality of coparenting.	

(Pérez Cortés et al., 2023)	Qualitative, Longitudinal	12 heterosexual couples of newly married parents living together.	Identifying the impact of the social and health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on the construction of coparenting in couples who have just become parents for the first time.	Co-residence caused by the pandemic creates new opportunities for equitable sharing, encouraging negotiations for childcare and employment. While the loss of external support increases the burden, shared isolation disrupts traditional power geometries, encouraging more responsible coparenting when the pressures of survival ease.	The COVID-19 socio-health crisis has impacted the quality and practices of coparenting among new parents. The presence of fathers at home during the pandemic generally facilitates the development of coparenting differently than in other settings.
(Schmidt et al., 2021)	Qualitative, Longitudinal, Multiple Case Study	12 new parent couples.	Investigating coparenting agreement/disagreement and support/undermining as defined by Feinberg's model, in a sample of Southern Brazilian families during the transition to parenthood.	This study uses a deductive method to understand coparenting, drawing on Feinberg's (2003) model of coparenting. The results show that agreement remains relatively stable throughout the first year, while disagreements over discipline require more parental negotiation as the infant moves into toddlerhood. Support and undermining coexist within the same family, although mothers and fathers exhibit different undermining behaviors.	Brazilian sociocultural aspects related to parenting patterns in the family of origin, gender role expectations, labor and financial spheres, conflict management abilities, and childcare arrangements, may have shaped coparenting dynamics.

(Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021)	Quantitative Longitudinal	182 mixed gender, dual-income parent couples.	Investigating the relationship between fathers' personal resources (adherence to masculine norms and father nurturing role beliefs) and interpersonal resources (mothers' gate closing behavior), with the quality of fathers' parenting and coparenting behavior.	Fathers with strong nurturing role beliefs demonstrated more positive parenting behaviors and fewer undermining coparenting behaviors. Fathers with higher masculine agency also demonstrated more positive parenting behaviors. More reserved maternal behaviors were associated with less positive parenting and less collaborative coparenting by fathers. More positive partner behaviors observed prenatally were also associated with better parenting and coparenting by fathers.	More positive partner behavior observed prenatally, mothers' gate closing behavior, and nurturing role beliefs were significantly associated with coparenting in this study.
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(Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2022)	Quantitative Longitudinal	182 dual-income new parent couples.	To examine patterns of change in new parents' perceptions of conflictual coparenting (exposure to conflict and undermining coparenting), examining differences between mothers and fathers, and examining predictors of coparenting.	For both new mothers and fathers, perceptions of undermining, but not exposure to conflict, increased similarly from 3 to 9 months postpartum. Although fathers perceived higher levels of initial undermining than mothers, there were no gender differences in perceptions of exposure to conflict.	Prenatal marital conflict, individual parental characteristics (conflictual coparenting in the family of origin, and parenting role beliefs), and infant characteristics (negative affectivity and gender) can be predictors of coparenting, particularly in the dimensions of exposure to conflict and undermining coparenting.
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DISCUSSION

This literature review draws on Feinberg's (2003) ecological model, which posits that coparenting is influenced by three levels: the individual, family, and extrafamilial levels. The articles reviewed were categorised into Feinberg's (2003) three levels of the ecological model, with a single research article falling into more than one category. At the individual level, several factors were found, namely, reflective functioning (Borelli et al., 2020; De Palma et al., 2023), parental mental health (De Palma et al., 2023), gender role expectations (Schmidt et al., 2021), parenting beliefs (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2022), nurturing beliefs (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021), childhood maltreatment history (L. N. Martin et al., 2025), parenting patterns of the family of origin (Schmidt et al., 2021), conflictual coparenting of the family of origin (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2022), and infant characteristics (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2022). At the family level, these factors include prenatal marital conflict (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2022), prenatal positive couple behaviour (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021), destructive conflict (Curran et al., 2021), conflict management abilities (Schmidt et al., 2021), maternal gate-closing behaviour (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021), daily coparenting (Lindroos et al., 2024), and task allocation (E. Martin et al., 2024). Finally, at the extrafamilial level, these factors include social health crises (Pérez Cortés et al., 2023), social support, and work and financial conditions, which are shaped by sociocultural aspects (Schmidt et al., 2021).

Individual Level Factors

At the individual level, much of the literature highlights the role of parents' psychological capacities and belief systems in shaping the quality of early coparenting. Reflective functioning (RF) has emerged as an important predictor of coparenting. Borelli et al. (2020) found that high RF in mothers was associated with lower coparenting satisfaction. For new mothers, understanding their partner's or their own situation regarding the challenges of the transition to parenthood may have consequences, leading to lower satisfaction and loneliness in both the relationship and parenting (Kerr et al., 2021). Conversely, De Palma et al. (2023) showed that parents with higher RF tend to understand their own and their partner's mental states more accurately, thereby supporting empathetic communication and a more adaptive co-parenting partnership. RF can act as a protective factor during the transition to parenthood, which is often characterised by conflict and stress. Having a greater ability to understand the emotional experiences underlying their own and their partner's behaviour helps protect the relationship between partners and the developing coparenting relationship (Jessee et al., 2012, 2018; Holtzinger, 2021). In addition to RF, De Palma et al. (2023) found that mental health symptoms of depression and anxiety in new parents were associated with decreased coparenting quality. The results of this review align with previous research suggesting that parental depression and anxiety negatively impact the coparenting relationship (Metz et al., 2018; Tissot et al., 2016; Tissot et al., 2017; Williams, 2018; Turney & Hardie, 2021).

Individual belief systems regarding roles and parenting also play a central role. More traditional gender role expectations have been associated with less flexible role allocation and potential coparenting conflict, particularly when these expectations do not align with the realities of everyday parenting (Schmidt et al., 2021). Like Brazil, Indonesia is a society that still adheres to traditional gender norms in a patriarchal culture, where mothers are often expected to take the primary role in caregiving, while fathers serve as the primary breadwinners (Agustina et al., 2025). These expectations can create an imbalance in the division of caregiving tasks and affect satisfaction with the coparenting relationship, particularly for mothers who may feel burdened or for fathers who may feel marginalised in their caregiving roles (Schmidt et al., 2019). Parenting and nurturing beliefs that are more egalitarian and oriented toward emotional involvement are associated with more collaborative and collaborative coparenting (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021, 2022). Parents who believe in positive, flexible, responsive, and child-centred parenting tend to be more cooperative and able to create a warm and supportive coparenting environment (Doyle et al., 2014; Reader et al., 2017). Thus, beliefs about gender roles and parenting influence how parents assess their partner's contributions and their willingness to share parenting responsibilities.

Parents' early developmental experiences also shape coparenting patterns. A history of childhood maltreatment has been shown to be associated with an increased risk of more conflictual and less supportive coparenting in early parenthood (L. N. Martin et al., 2025). A history of parental maltreatment can impact the well-being of future generations (Bosquet Enlow et al., 2018). Understanding the role of maltreatment in predicting coparenting relationships may help explain the negative intergenerational effects found in families with a history of parental maltreatment (Plant et al., 2018). Similarly, parenting styles from the family of origin and conflictual co-parenting experiences in previous generations contribute to the internalisation of parenting relationship models, which are then replicated in adult co-parenting (Schmidt et al., 2021; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2022). Consistent with the findings of Conger et al. (2012), individuals who are abused by their parents tend to imitate these behaviours in their children. However, coparenting with a partner who exhibits a warm and supportive parenting style can disrupt intergenerational continuity. Other research has found the opposite: when mothers of preschool children perceived coparenting in their families of origin as more supportive, their coparenting interactions with fathers and children were also rated as more supportive (Stright & Bales, 2003). Consistent with this research, new fathers who perceived more positive coparenting experiences in their families of origin also perceived their own coparenting relationships as more positive (Van Egeren, 2003). In other words, there is intergenerational transmission in coparenting dynamics, with new parents likely emulating their parents' behaviours as they form their own coparenting relationships. Thus, conflictual coparenting in the family of origin may predict conflictual coparenting during the transition to parenthood.

In addition to parental characteristics, the literature indicates that infant characteristics, as individuals, play a role in shaping coparenting dynamics during the transition to new parenthood. Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2022) found a relationship between infant negative affectivity and parental coparenting, with negative affectivity impacting mothers and fathers differently. Mothers tended to perceive increasing levels of perceived undermining and conflict exposure, while fathers perceived increased conflict exposure over time, but not undermining. Another study by Fan et al. (2020) showed that children's negative affectivity was negatively related to mothers perceived coparenting support (i.e., fathers' contributions to coparenting). Conversely, in the study by Lindsey et al. (2005), mothers of children with difficult temperaments reported that their fathers exhibited more disruptive coparenting behaviours. This finding could be interpreted as fathers having less contact with their children and therefore being less tolerant of their children's behaviours, or as fathers' attempts to aid mothers in childcare, but these efforts were less skilful and therefore appeared disruptive. From a father's perspective, coparenting experiences are better when the baby is perceived to have an easier temperament (Davis et al., 2009; Van Egeren., 2004). When faced with a fussy baby, fathers may find themselves needing to comfort and care for the baby more than they expected. Because fathers often feel less effective at caring for their newborns than mothers do, they may feel overwhelmed.

Family Level Factors

At the family level, the quality of the couple's relationship before and after birth has been shown to be a key determinant of coparenting. Prenatal marital conflict consistently predicts more problematic coparenting after birth, including increased conflict and decreased parenting cooperation (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2022). High levels of conflict during the prenatal period can create negative interaction patterns, leading to parents experiencing a lack of mutual support and difficulties coordinating parenting (Christopher et al., 2015). Conversely, positive prenatal couple behaviours, such as emotional support and constructive communication, play a protective role in the quality of coparenting during the early transition period (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021). These results align with previous research, which found that positive coparenting behaviours during pregnancy help parents develop patterns of coordination that will serve as the foundation for their postpartum coparenting (Altenburger et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the nature of conflict within a couple's relationship is also relevant. Destructive conflict interferes with a couple's ability to collaborate in parenting (Curran et al., 2021). Research by Schoppe-Sullivan & Mangelsdorf (2013) shows that low levels of destructive conflict indicate high-quality marital interactions, where high-quality interactions indicate more supportive coparenting behaviours. Conversely, better conflict management skills enable couples to manage differences

constructively, thus supporting coordination and solidarity in parenting (Schmidt et al., 2021). Conflict is a normal part of a couple's relationship, especially during challenging transitions such as becoming a new parent. A crucial point is whether couples have the skills to manage conflict constructively, enabling them to coparent effectively for the well-being of their children.

Specific behaviours within the parenting context also influence coparenting. Mothers' gate-closing behaviour, which refers to mothers' tendency to limit fathers' involvement, has been linked to decreased coparenting quality (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021). Mothers' gate-closing behavior can create a negative cycle in which fathers feel less competent or neglected and unmotivated to engage, which in turn reinforces mothers' perceptions of needing to control parenting, thus exacerbating coparenting imbalances (Schoppe-Sullivan & Altenburger, 2019). Another study highlighted the importance of daily coparenting dynamics, which, in daily fluctuations in support and conflict, can cumulatively affect the overall quality of the coparenting relationship (Lindroos et al., 2024). Effective coparenting in everyday contexts requires flexibility in managing emotional experiences and consistency in prioritizing personal values and children's needs over conflict or differences between parents (Beck et al., 2025). Furthermore, clarity and fairness in the allocation of parenting and domestic tasks also contribute to more harmonious coparenting (E. Martin et al., 2024). Conversely, an imbalance in task division, especially when one party feels overburdened, can be a source of tension and conflict in co-parenting (Khazan et al., 2008).

Extrafamilial Level Factors

At the extrafamilial level, although the number of studies is more limited, findings suggest that the broader social context continues to significantly influence coparenting (Pérez Cortés et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2021). Social and health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, create unique challenges that can exacerbate existing stressors during the transition to new parenthood and impact the quality of coparenting. On the other hand, some couples may experience more time together and greater opportunities to share caregiving duties more equally, which can positively impact coparenting (Pérez Cortés et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has led to fluctuations in coparenting among parents, with more positive changes in coparenting patterns associated with better parent and family adjustment (Conway et al., 2024).

Social support, along with work and financial conditions shaped by sociocultural factors, also influences coparenting among new parents (Schmidt et al., 2021). Schmidt et al. (2021) found that the availability of social support from extended family, friends, and the community can serve as a buffer against the stress of the transition to new parenthood and facilitate more effective coparenting. In cultures that emphasise collectivism and extended family involvement, such as Indonesia, coparenting may involve more actors and be influenced by broader family expectations and norms (Kurrien et al., 2004). Work environment conditions also have important implications for coparenting (Schmidt et al., 2021). Workplace policies that support work-family balance, such as adequate parental leave, flexible work schedules, and support for working parents, can facilitate both parents' involvement in parenting (Perry et al., 2017), thereby providing an opportunity for them to develop a positive coparenting relationship. Family financial situation is also an important factor influencing coparenting (Schmidt et al., 2021). Higher financial stress is associated with poorer coparenting relationship quality among both mothers and fathers (Stolz et al., 2025), but external support from friends and family can mitigate its impact (Stanford et al., 2022). Overall, sociocultural factors such as the availability of social support, work flexibility, and economic stability can facilitate coparenting collaboration, whereas limitations in these areas increase the risk of conflict and tension in coparenting.

Implication for Counseling Practice

Given the importance of coparenting in the lives of new parents during the transition period, and having identified the factors, it is also necessary to study which interventions should be implemented to minimise negative factors and maximise positive ones that influence coparenting. Integrative behavioural couple therapy has been shown to improve coparenting by strengthening the parent-child relationship, thereby fostering safe communication and strong family bonds (Khair, 2020). Coparenting interventions to support new parents can be implemented as early as possible. One such intervention is

Family Foundations (FF; Feinberg & Kan, 2008), a psychosocial program implemented before birth aimed at improving the coparenting relationship, parental mental health, parent-child relationships, and the infant's emotional and physiological regulation. Interventions can also be tailored to the subject and context, such as Focused Coparenting Consultation (FCC; McHale et al., 2022), a prenatal intervention designed to promote healthy coparenting relationships within families in Black communities across America, particularly low-income, unmarried families expecting their first child together. Another intervention, The Fathers Offering Children Unfailing Support (FOCUS; Nievar et al., 2020), attempts a holistic approach by providing financial assistance to fathers to improve parenting skills, parenting self-efficacy, and coparenting skills. Coparenting interventions can leverage technological advances, including the DUET mobile app (Widhigdo et al., 2024) and the Cloud-Based Coparenting Strengthening System (Engel et al., 2021), which can help parents implement effective coparenting and increase children's achievement motivation. The interventions mentioned above demonstrate that improving the quality of coparenting can be implemented in various ways.

Overall, this literature review confirms that coparenting during the transition to new parenthood results from a dynamic interaction among individual, family, and extrafamilial factors. Feinberg (2003) ecological model provides a useful framework for understanding this complex interaction. Individual factors provide the basic psychological and cognitive framework, family factors form the proximal relational context, and extrafamilial factors create structural conditions that can strengthen or weaken coparenting. The findings of this review provide implications that underscore the importance of a multidimensional approach to understanding and researching coparenting, particularly for new parents during transition. With a deeper understanding of the coparenting factors, counsellors can implement tailored interventions by integrating and considering various levels of coparenting factors during the transition period for new parents, which is crucial for long-term family functioning and children's development.

Limitations

Despite this literature review's success in providing information on coparenting factors among transitional new parents, it has several limitations. First, the review only considered articles published between 2020 and 2025. This was done to ensure the studies were relevant, but may have overlooked earlier studies that provide important information on coparenting factors in transitional new parents. As a result, historical perspectives and long-term trends in coparenting in parenting may not have been fully captured. Second, there is a lack of diversity in backgrounds, particularly across cultures, as most research is still conducted in Western countries. Third, the limited timeframe of the articles in this review and the specific population of the articles, namely heterosexual couples who are first-time parents, mean that the number of articles reviewed is insufficient. Future research could consider expanding the timeframe of the published articles and using a larger population. The review also failed to find research with an Indonesian background; this is due to the specific criteria, namely, new parents in transition. Further research can also examine coparenting factors among newly transitioning parents within widely used theories and in accordance with the family system in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an up-to-date overview of the transitional coparenting experience for new parents with their infants. Overall, this literature review confirms that transitional coparenting is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, significantly influenced by a variety of individual, family, and extrafamilial factors. The review revealed that at the individual level, factors such as parental mental health, reflective function, gender role expectations, parenting beliefs, nurturing beliefs, childhood maltreatment history, parenting and coparenting styles from the family of origin, and infant characteristics were also affected. At the family level, factors such as prenatal marital conflict, prenatal positive couple behaviour, destructive conflict, conflict management abilities, maternal gate-closing behaviour, daily coparenting practices, and partner task allocation were also affected. Third, at the

extrafamilial level, social crises of health and social support, as well as work and financial conditions, are created by sociocultural factors.

A comprehensive understanding of these factors not only enriches theoretical knowledge about coparenting but also provides a strong foundation for developing more effective interventions that are responsive to the unique needs of each family. Counsellors can consider implementing intervention programs specifically designed to meet the needs of parents adjusting to their new roles. With a holistic, preventive, and evidence-based approach, interventions can help more families develop cooperative, supportive, and effective coparenting, which ultimately provides a strong foundation for their children's optimal development. Furthermore, improving the quality of coparenting among new parents requires government support through comprehensive social policies, including family economic protection, strengthening social support systems, and work regulations that are sensitive to the needs of early childcare.

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