Introduction

Healthy family life is multifaceted and includes both open communication and consistent routines. Family communication—the frequency and comfort family members perceive in sharing their feelings and thoughts with other family members—is an important factor linked to the well-being of a family. When communication is poor within families, children show more adolescent delinquent behaviors (Kaiser, Fijens, Branaj, & Meeus, 2009) while better parent-child communication is linked to healthier family social functioning (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004). Family communication patterns are likely fostered through family routines—planned and consistently shared expectations. Perhaps the routines are linked to healthier family relations (Kiser, Bennett, Heston, & Paavola, 2005). More consistent family routines and rituals are associated with better child adjustment and marital satisfaction (Fiese et al., 1995). Family rituals may alleviate stress in fast-paced families and protect adolescents from risky behaviors (Fulkerson et al., 2006). A consistent family routine may be a protective factor that helps families through difficult times.

One indicator for a family going through a difficult time is whether the child has been in counseling. Families with children who receive psychiatric treatment tend to have less consistent family routines. Family communication is linked to healthier family social functioning (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004). Family communication was negatively correlated with family routines for both samples ($r = .39, p = .002, N = 125$ and $r = .29, p = .021, N = 34$). However, in our study we found that counseling moderates how communication is associated with family routines. Counseling has been shown to benefit parenting and communication (Barnes & Olson, 1982) measured parent-child communication but this was especially the case when the child was in counseling. As compared to families who did not receive counseling ($r = .13, p = .007, N = 130$) the comparable link for families who did not receive counseling ($r = .09, p = .002, N = 60$ and $r = .29, p = .21, N = 21$) was not significant for the second sample given our limited power ($r = .21, p = .05$). Consistent family routines amidst busy schedules may be a way to provide the family with time and structure for healthy communication. Such consistency may be especially beneficial to families experiencing instability such as going through divorce.

Method

The current study supported previous findings that family communication is a predictor of family health outcomes. Counseling has been shown to benefit parenting and communication (Barnes & Olson, 1982) measured parent-child communication but this was especially the case when the child was in counseling. As compared to families who did not receive counseling ($r = .13, p = .007, N = 130$) the comparable link for families who did not receive counseling ($r = .09, p = .002, N = 60$ and $r = .29, p = .21, N = 21$) was not significant for the second sample given our limited power ($r = .21, p = .05$). Consistent family routines amidst busy schedules may be a way to provide the family with time and structure for healthy communication. Such consistency may be especially beneficial to families experiencing instability such as going through divorce.

Discussion

The current study supported previous findings that family communication is a predictor of family health outcomes. Counseling has been shown to benefit parenting and communication (Barnes & Olson, 1982) measured parent-child communication but this was especially the case when the child was in counseling. As compared to families who did not receive counseling ($r = .13, p = .007, N = 130$) the comparable link for families who did not receive counseling ($r = .09, p = .002, N = 60$ and $r = .29, p = .21, N = 21$) was not significant for the second sample given our limited power ($r = .21, p = .05$). Consistent family routines amidst busy schedules may be a way to provide the family with time and structure for healthy communication. Such consistency may be especially beneficial to families experiencing instability such as going through divorce.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the families who participated in these projects and also to the many members of the Family Interaction Research Lab for assisting with the collection and entry of these data which made this work possible. To learn more about our lab visit http://bss.sfsu.edu/devpsych/fair/.

To test the links among family communication, routines, and whether the child had a history of counseling, we examined data from two studies: one with 137 divorcing parents and the other with 34 non-divorcing divorced parents. We found evidence related to four key questions: 1) Families with better routine/routines had better communication; 2) Families who have received counseling no more or less likely to have better communication; 3) Families who had received counseling had better family routines; and 4) For the families receiving counseling, the link between routines and communication was stronger than for the families without counseling.

Hypothesis 1. Better family communication was associated with more consistent family routines in both samples ($S1 r = .56, p < .001, N = 137$ and $S2 r = .47, p < .005, N = 34$).

Hypothesis 2. Counseling was not found to be associated with better communication for both samples ($S1 r = .13, p = .007, N = 130$ and $S2 r = .2, p = .21, N = 34$).

Hypothesis 3. Counseling was negatively correlated with family routines for both samples ($S1 r = -.29, p = .021, N = 125$ and $S2 r = -.21, p = .05$).

Hypothesis 4. Moderation analysis showed that among families with children who have received counseling, better parent-child communication was stronger ($r = 1.64, p = 1.64, one tailed $p = 0.05$) and the increases were consistent across both samples (See Figure 1).