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Exploring Co-Parenting After Separation Among Children of Divorce Aged 8–12 Years: A Qualitative Systematic Review

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the paragraph discussing the family systems perspective, the manuscript states that “children’s adjustment following divorce is closely related to the quality of interactions within the post-divorce family system.” However, the review does not explain how the included studies conceptualized or measured “adjustment.” Because child adjustment may include emotional, behavioral, academic, or relational domains, the manuscript should explicitly define this construct and explain how it was interpreted during thematic synthesis.

The Data Analysis section explains that thematic synthesis was used, yet the manuscript does not identify which specific framework guided thematic synthesis (e.g., Thomas & Harden, Braun & Clarke, meta-ethnography adaptation). The analytical approach therefore appears somewhat generic. The authors should clarify the epistemological orientation and specify whether themes were generated inductively, deductively, or through a hybrid analytical process.

The statement “coding and thematic development were conducted independently by two researchers” is methodologically important, but the manuscript does not report any inter-coder reliability indices or agreement procedures. Even in qualitative

research, reporting coding concordance enhances analytical credibility. Including details regarding coding comparison procedures and theme refinement stages would improve trustworthiness.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The literature review presents extensive empirical support for cooperative co-parenting, yet there is limited discussion of contradictory or mixed findings in the literature. For example, some studies indicate that shared parenting arrangements may increase stress for children in high-conflict families. The manuscript briefly acknowledges this issue in the sentence "when conflict remains unresolved, shared custody may expose children to ongoing tension," but this point requires deeper analytical engagement rather than a brief acknowledgment.

In the Introduction, the authors appropriately discuss triangulation and interparental conflict, but the manuscript does not sufficiently distinguish between overt conflict and covert conflict. Emotional withdrawal, silent hostility, and passive-aggressive communication may also affect children profoundly, particularly during middle childhood. The review would be strengthened by discussing whether the included studies differentiated among conflict types and whether different forms of conflict produced distinct developmental consequences.

The Methods section indicates that the review followed PRISMA guidelines; however, the manuscript does not include a PRISMA flow diagram or registration information for the review protocol. Since transparency and reproducibility are central requirements for systematic reviews, the absence of a registration number (e.g., PROSPERO) and flowchart limits methodological rigor. The authors should include a detailed PRISMA flow figure documenting identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion processes.

In the paragraph beginning with "The statistical population of the study consisted of all qualitative and mixed-method research articles…," the search strategy is described generally but lacks reproducibility. Specifically, the exact Boolean combinations, database-specific syntax, search dates, and language restrictions are not fully reported. To improve methodological transparency, the manuscript should provide a supplementary appendix containing complete search strings for each database.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria require greater conceptual precision. The manuscript excludes "studies involving severe psychiatric or abuse-related contexts unrelated to routine post-divorce parenting," yet it does not explain how the reviewers operationalized "unrelated." Because abuse and severe psychopathology are frequently intertwined with divorce and co-parenting conflict, excluding such studies may introduce sampling bias and potentially oversimplify the reviewed phenomenon.

The manuscript reports that "97 qualitative and mixed-method studies" were included, but no detailed table of individual study characteristics is provided. A systematic review of this scale requires a comprehensive study matrix including author names, country, sample size, participant type, methodology, and key findings. The absence of such a table reduces the reader's ability to evaluate the depth and heterogeneity of the included evidence base.

In the Measures section, the authors refer to a "researcher-developed data extraction form," but there is no information regarding pilot testing, inter-rater agreement, or procedural validation of this form. Since qualitative synthesis depends heavily on coding reliability, the manuscript should report how consistency was evaluated during extraction and whether coding disagreements were quantified prior to consensus discussions.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.

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Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.

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