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Support Received from Ex-Partners (CARE) in the Context of Separation and Divorce: Psychometric Properties in the Chilean Population

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Abstract

Divorce involves a series of changes that may act as significant stressors. One of the most relevant changes concerns child-rearing, where limited involvement of one parent may constitute a major source of individual and parental stress. Coparenting implies the construction of new relational bonds focused on children's well-being. The aim of this study was to explore the psychometric properties of the CARE scale and to compare results according to sociodemographic characteristics in a Chilean population. A sample of 260 separated or divorced parents was considered. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted. The results showed adequate goodness-of-fit indices, supporting the validity of the instrument for application in the Chilean context, particularly in psychosocial and family intervention settings.

Keywords: separation; divorce; coparenting; child well-being; family intervention.

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Introduction

The family has traditionally been understood as a central social institution in which child care is organized and norms regulating relationships and emotions are established (Estupiñán-Aponte, 2020). From a legal perspective, it constitutes a juridical and patrimonial bond, historically associated with monogamous marriage as an archetypal family model regulating cohabitation, sexuality, and reproduction (Vial-Dumas, 2019; Jelin, 2006). Within this framework, a patriarchal organization of roles has frequently prevailed, positioning men as economic providers and women as primary caregivers (Binstock, 2018).

Contemporary social transformations, marked by increasing uncertainty, have reshaped social bonds, rendering them more fragile and shorter in duration (Illouz, 2020; Han, 2015; Sennet, 2006). This context demands continuous adaptation to new forms of interaction and communication, characterized by the liquidity and unpredictability of social relationships (Bauman, 2007). Family organization has not remained unaffected by these changes, as evidenced by the diversification of family forms, including consensual unions, later marriages, separations at different life stages, and post-separation re-partnering (Tay-Karapas, 2020; Pereira & Beatriz, 2023; Steinbach *et al.*, 2024).

Divorce is a global phenomenon that affects a significant proportion of the population (Yárnoz-Yaben, 2015). As a process, it entails the dissolution of shared life arrangements, role reorganization, structural changes in the family, and an adjustment period often accompanied by grief and emotional distress (Yárnoz-Yaben, 2017). This reflects broader processes of modernity, particularly the deinstitutionalization of marriage as a socially normative form of cohabitation (Kaufman *et al.*, 2025). In Chile, this trend is reflected in the high number of divorce petitions registered in 2023, nearly equaling the number of marriages recorded during the same year (INE, 2023; Poder Judicial de Chile, 2024).

Separation often involves intense emotional experiences, including anger, sadness, anxiety, and distress (Wery, 2022; Yárnoz-Yaben, 2010), and may compromise individual well-being (Sánchez, 2022). For children, parental separation has been associated with negative outcomes in health and development, particularly in contexts of disrupted caregiving and family reorganization (Jamison *et al.*, 2014; Perry *et al.*, 2022; River *et al.*, 2021; Stannard *et al.*, 2022). Research has documented effects on attachment relationships, cognitive and language development, self-regulation, aggressive behaviors, physical health, and sibling relationships (D'Rozario & Pilkington, 2021; McCurdy *et al.*, 2021; Chen, 2020; Goisis *et al.*, 2019; Buist *et al.*, 2017).

Nevertheless, evidence also indicates that in highly conflictive or violent relationships, separation may function as a protective factor, reducing domestic violence and improving child well-being (Pollak, 2004). Outcomes are strongly

conditioned by the level of interparental conflict, which has been identified as the primary predictor of diminished family well-being (Visser *et al.*, 2017).

Divorce also produces gender-differentiated effects. Women tend to experience more severe and prolonged consequences due to economic dependence, income loss, and increased caregiving responsibilities (Cohen & Levin, 2012; Basiglio, 2022; Killewald, 2016; Artemyeva, 2021). These factors intensify parental stress and may hinder effective coparenting, negatively affecting caregiving and child-rearing practices (Celis, 2016; Fernández-Rasines & Ajenjo, 2022).

Coparenting refers to the degree of collaboration between parents in child care, socialization, and the provision of coherent and supportive parenting practices (McHale *et al.*, 2012). It involves a horizontal relationship between parents, distinct from the vertical parent–child bond (Lamela *et al.*, 2012; Mollá *et al.*, 2020). Coparenting may take supportive or competitive forms, depending on whether parents recognize or undermine each other's competence (Feinberg, 2003), and may be overt or covert depending on parental presence in children's daily lives (Mollá *et al.*, 2020).

Establishing cooperative coparenting after separation is one of the most challenging post-divorce tasks, particularly given the high levels of parental stress associated with caregiving demands (Bastiaansen *et al.*, 2021; Camisasca *et al.*, 2019; Visser *et al.*, 2017). Elevated parental stress and burnout have been linked to emotional distancing, negligent practices, aggressive behaviors, and impaired sibling relationships (Mikolajczak *et al.*, 2019; Roskam *et al.*, 2017; Thompson-Walsh *et al.*, 2018). Conversely, greater flexibility, empathy, and shared parenting practices are associated with lower stress, reduced post-separation violence, and better cognitive, emotional, and relational outcomes for children (Camisasca *et al.*, 2019; Carlson & Magnuson, 2011; D'Rozario & Pilkington, 2021; Riser, 2025; Weinberg *et al.*, 2019).

Social support networks play a critical role in post-separation adjustment, with ex-partner support emerging as a key factor in reducing parental stress (Kennedy *et al.*, 2015; Thullen & Bonsall, 2017). Given the impact of coparental support on both parental well-being and child development, it is essential to assess these dynamics using validated instruments appropriate to the target population (Mollá *et al.*, 2020).

In Chile, validated instruments assessing coparenting remain limited, particularly in contexts of separation and divorce. Existing measures primarily focus on intact couples or parental stress rather than post-separation coparental support (Abidin, 1995; Contreras-Farah *et al.*, 2023). The Ex-Partner Support Scale developed by Yárnoz-Yaben (2010) specifically addresses this gap by assessing parental involvement and support following separation. Although the scale has demonstrated robust psychometric properties in Spain and Mexico (Sánchez-Aragón & Calleja, 2021), evidence from other Latin American contexts is scarce.

Accordingly, the present study aims to explore the psychometric properties of the Ex-Partner Support Scale in the Chilean population.

Methodology

Participants

The study adopted a non-experimental, cross-sectional design with a quantitative approach (Cea, 1996). The sample was selected using a non-probabilistic convenience sampling strategy. Inclusion criteria were: being a heterosexual man or woman, legally separated or divorced for at least one year and no more than ten years, having minor children in common, and residing in northern, central, or southern Chile. The final sample consisted of 260 participants. The mean age was 38.18 years (SD = 7.96), with ages ranging from 22 to 63 years. Participants reported an average of 2.49 children (SD = 0.59), with a mode of two children and a range between one and four children.

Instruments

Ex-Partner Support Questionnaire (CARE). The CARE scale was developed by Yárnoz-Yaben (2010) and originally applied to divorced parents in Spain. The instrument has a unidimensional structure comprising eight items, rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). According to the original validation study, exploratory factor analysis yielded a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) index of .83 (p < .0001), with the single-factor solution explaining 41.76% of the total variance.

Ethical considerations

The study received ethical approval from the University of La Frontera (FONDECYT Regular Act No. 1211291, File No. 006/21, April 21, 2021). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

Procedure

The information was collected between 2021 and 2023 through a questionnaire that included sociodemographic background information and the CARE scale. To access the target population, professional, academic, and institutional networks from northern, central, and southern Chile were contacted in order to account for potential cultural differences. Eligible participants were informed about the objectives of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. Those who agreed to participate signed an informed consent form, in accordance with the study protocol and with approval from the University Ethics Committee.

Data Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using FACTOR v.10 (Lorenzo & Lorenzo, 2006), applying robust unweighted least squares (ULS) extraction for categorical data. The number of factors was determined through parallel analysis, and promin rotation was used (Ferrando & Anguiano-Carrasco, 2010; Ferrando & Lorenzo-Seva, 2014).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using Mplus v.8.10, employing the MLMV estimation method. Model fit was assessed using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). CFI and TLI values above .95 were considered indicative of good model fit, while values above .90 were considered acceptable (Hair *et al.*, 2006). RMSEA values below .05 indicated good fit, and values up to .08 were considered acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh *et al.*, 2005).

Unlike EFA, CFA was conducted based on the theoretical structure of the instrument, testing the fit of observed variables within the specified latent factor. This approach is particularly appropriate when prior information about item behavior is available and when a parsimonious and interpretable model is proposed (van Zyl & ten Klooster, 2022).

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using McDonald's omega coefficient, with values above .70 considered acceptable (McDonald, 1999). Convergent validity was evaluated through statistically significant standardized factor loadings greater than .50 and an average variance extracted (AVE) greater than .50 (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

To examine group differences, one-way ANOVA was conducted with perceived ex-partner support as the dependent variable and years since divorce, current relationship status, educational level, and age as independent variables. Differences by sex were analyzed using Student's t-test. Bonferroni post hoc tests were applied to assess pairwise differences between groups (Martínez *et al.*, 2014). All statistical analyses were performed using JASP v.0.17.1.

Results

Exploratory analysis of the data

Table 1 presents the univariate behavior of the scale items. A moderate level of dispersion can be observed, with a tendency toward the central values of the scale, except for Item 8. This pattern is consistent with the reported shape measures—skewness and kurtosis—which indicate a slight tendency for the data to cluster toward the right side of the distribution curve.

Table 1.Descriptive statistics

Item CARE	Valid	Missing	Mean	Median	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Item 1. In general, I feel that my ex-partner understands and supports my needs as a parent (whether or not I have custody of our children).	260	0	2.81	3	1.494	.130	-1.434
Item 2. When I have needed to make a change to the visitation arrangements, my ex-partner has been flexible so that I could better adjust.	260	0	3.23	3	1.527	-.211	-1.416
Item 3. Since the separation, my ex-partner has fulfilled their responsibilities regarding child-rearing and the financial support of our children.	260	0	3.38	3	1.485	-.318	-1.311
Item 4. I approve of the activities my children do and the care they receive when they are with my ex-partner.	260	0	3.54	4	1.437	-.538	-1.075
Item 5. My children are satisfied with the custody arrangements (e.g., they can see or talk to the other parent as much as they wish).	260	0	3.92	5	1.449	-.986	-.524
Item 6. Since the separation, my ex-partner and I agree on most household decisions.	260	0	2.97	3	1.508	-.023	-1.397
Item 7. My ex-partner is helpful to me in raising our children.	260	0	3.04	3	1.617	-.046	-1.597
Item 8. When I need help regarding my children, I ask their father/mother for it.	260	0	2.68	2	1.621	.314	-1.513

Source: Developed by the authors

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis

The results of the exploratory factor analysis showed adequate indices supporting dimensional reduction and indicating a unidimensional factor structure. This single-factor solution explained 75% of the total variance in the data (KMO = .92; p < .00001).

Table 2.Communalitiesforthe unidimensional solution

| Item	Comunality
Item 1. In general, I feel that my ex-partner understands and supports my needs as a parent (whether or not I have custody of our children).	.792
Item 2. When I have needed to make a change to the visitation arrangements, my ex-partner has been flexible so that I could better adjust.	.715
Item 3. Since the separation, my ex-partner has fulfilled their responsibilities regarding child-rearing and the financial support of our children.	.713
Item 4. I approve of the activities my children do and the care they receive when they are with my ex-partner.	.596
Item 5. My children are satisfied with the custody arrangements (e.g., they can see or talk to the other parent as much as they wish).	.739
Item 6. Since the separation, my ex-partner and I agree on most household decisions.	.865
Item 7. My ex-partner is helpful to me in raising our children.	.980
Item 8. When I need help regarding my children, I ask their father/ mother for it.	.695

Source: Developed by the authors
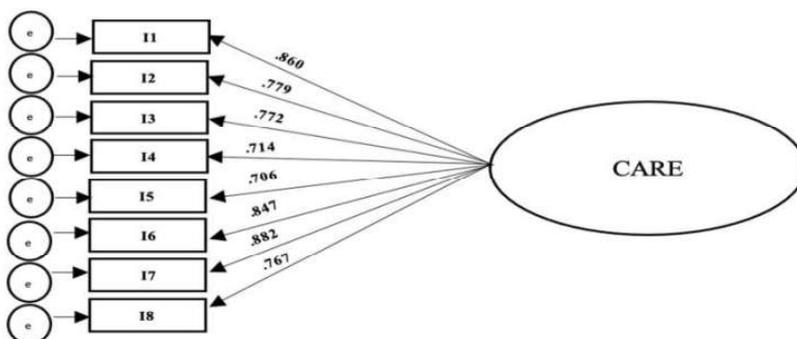
Figure 1.CARE factor loadings

Source: Developed by the authors

Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Group Comparisons

Regarding the confirmatory factor analysis, adequate goodness-of-fit indices were observed (RMSEA = .080; TLI = .955; CFI = .968; SRMR = .030). The internal consistency of the instrument was confirmed using McDonald's omega coefficient (ω = .931), indicating high internal reliability. Convergent validity was supported by statistically significant standardized factor loadings greater than .50 and an average variance extracted (AVE) of .629 (see Figure 1).

Variance Comparisons

First, the distribution of the dependent variable was examined to assess data normality. The results showed a skewness of −.143 and a kurtosis of −1.246, supporting univariate normality for the ex-partner support variable. Regarding comparisons by sex, Levene's test indicated homogeneity of variances (p = .521). A statistically significant difference was found between men (M = 3.54, SD = 1.19) and women (M = 2.92, SD = 1.22), t = 4.135, p < .0001.

One-way ANOVA results indicated statistically significant differences according to years since divorce (p = .016, F = 4.206), participant age (p = .020, F = 3.978), and educational level (p = .041, F = 3.235). No statistically significant differences were observed according to current relationship status (p = .197, F = 1.480).

Post hoc Bonferroni analyses revealed a statistically significant difference (p = .035) between participants with 1–2 years since separation (M = 3.356, SD = 1.255) and those with 3–6 years since separation (M = 2.825, SD = 1.268). No significant differences were found between participants with 1–2 years and more than 6 years since separation, nor between those with 3–6 years and more than 6 years (M = 2.959, SD = 1.142).

With respect to age, a statistically significant difference (p = .023) was observed between participants aged 30–45 years (M = 3.342, SD = 1.231) and those older than 45 years (M = 2.816, SD = 1.200). No significant differences were found between participants aged 22–29 years and those older than 45 years, nor between participants aged 22–29 years (M = 3.038, SD = 1.220) and those aged 30–45 years.

Finally, a statistically significant difference (p = .044) was found between participants with secondary education (M = 2.852, SD = 1.333) and those with higher education (M = 3.302, SD = 1.198). No significant differences were observed between participants with primary and secondary education, nor between those with primary education (M = 2.625, SD = 2.121) and higher education.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore the psychometric properties of the Ex-Partner Support Scale (CARE) in a Chilean population. The findings indicate that the instrument adequately measures perceived ex-partner support in relation to coparental responsibility among separated parents in Chile.

Contemporary social transformations have reshaped the ways in which individuals establish and understand social relationships (Illouz, 2020). These changes have also affected family structures, leading to transformations in family composition and relational dynamics, as well as significant life transitions following separation or divorce (Tay-Karapas, 2020; Yárnoz-Yaben, 2017).

Divorce may have multiple consequences for both former partners and children (Perry *et al.*, 2022). The literature highlights several outcomes, including adaptation to a new life situation, grief associated with relational loss (Yárnoz-Yaben, 2017), emotional reactions such as anger, rejection, sadness, anxiety, or panic (Wery, 2022; Yárnoz-Yaben, 2010), and increased stress related to parental role demands (Chen, 2020). Women tend to be particularly affected, especially in contexts where men have traditionally been the main economic providers (Artemyeva, 2021; Basiglio, 2022; Binstock, 2018; Killewald, 2016). For children, parental separation may negatively affect attachment formation, cognitive and language development, emotional regulation skills (Carlson & Magnuson, 2011; McCurdy *et al.*, 2021; D'Rozario & Pilkington, 2021), aggressive behaviors (Chen, 2020; Thompson-Walsh *et al.*, 2018), and sibling violence (Buist *et al.*, 2017).

Conversely, evidence suggests that in contexts of high conflict or violence, separation may have positive effects, such as reducing domestic violence and improving children's well-being (Pollak, 2004). Supportive coparenting arrangements (Mollá *et al.*, 2020), in which children's well-being is prioritized over interparental conflict, are associated with greater flexibility, empathy, and lower stress levels during post-separation adjustment (Camisasca *et al.*, 2019; Visser *et al.*, 2017). These dynamics also contribute to improved attachment relationships and emotional involvement between parents and children (D'Rozario & Pilkington, 2021).

Overall, this study contributes to the validation of an instrument that assesses ex-partner support in post-separation and parental responsibility contexts in Chile. The results demonstrate adequate model fit, internal consistency, and convergent validity, supporting its applicability in the adult Chilean population. Further research should continue exploring factors associated with levels of parental support and involvement, incorporating the CARE scale alongside other theoretical constructs, with particular attention to gender relations. As previous research has shown, the consequences of separation tend to disproportionately affect women (Artemyeva, 2021; Basiglio, 2022; Binstock, 2018; Cohen & Levin, 2012; Killewald, 2016).

Conclusion

The Ex-Partner Support Scale (CARE) represents a valuable tool for assessing coparenting in contexts of separation and divorce in Chile. The instrument addresses an important gap in research on post-divorce family relationships, particularly in light of rising separation rates and their impact on children's well-being and parental stress.

The validation of this scale provides researchers and professionals with a reliable means of assessing support and collaboration between former partners in child-rearing contexts. This is crucial for identifying patterns of parental involvement and potential risk situations that may affect child development. Beyond its academic contribution, the CARE scale also has practical implications for family interventions and public policies aimed at improving the well-being of families undergoing separation or divorce.

Finally, it should be noted that this study contributes to Social Work by providing a validated instrument for the Chilean context, suitable for assessing coparental support in separated and/or divorced families. The CARE scale constitutes a technical tool that strengthens diagnostic, intervention, and evaluation processes in the family field, enabling the identification of gender inequalities, risk factors, and protective resources associated with psychosocial well-being. Its results support the incorporation of collaborative coparenting as a strategic axis of social intervention, with implications for the design of programs and policies aimed at protecting the well-being of children and caregivers in contexts of family reorganization.

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