

ARTICLE

Parenting coordination – outcome measurement and prediction: Implications for research and practice

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Abstract

This paper presents a formative evaluation study of the parenting coordination pilot program launched in Israel in 2016 at the initiative of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs (At the time the program was launched, the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services) and JDC-Ashalim. Data was collected on 131 participating families (262 parents) through self-administered questionnaires filled out by the parents prior to the parenting coordination process ($N = 204$), telephone interviews with the parents following the process ($N = 142$), and reports by the parenting coordinators (PCs), submitted online at the conclusion of the process with each participating family ($N = 131$). Based on the logic model developed as a blueprint for the pilot program, the characteristics and needs of parents in high conflict were identified and desired outcome indicators were accordingly specified; quantitative and qualitative research tools were developed for the study, and the efficacy and outcomes of the parenting coordination pilot program were evaluated. Overall, the findings indicate a significant improvement in the desired outcome indicators. The implications of the findings for research and practice are discussed in the conclusion.

KEYWORDS

co-parenting, efficacy, high-conflict divorce, logic model, outcome indicators, outcome predictors, parenting coordination, parenting coordination success indicator, successful outcome predictors

Key points for the family court community

- Based on a large sample of families in high conflict who participated in the parenting coordination pilot program and matched PCs, this pioneering study offers fresh insights on the efficacy and outcomes of parenting coordination—so far addressed by rather limited research.
- Overall, parents in high conflict experienced a significant improvement in the desired outcome indicators following participation in the parenting coordination pilot program although most of them withdrew from the program ahead of schedule.
- Higher success rates were found among parents who refrained from reverting to litigation over their children in the course of the parenting coordination process.
- Lower intensity levels of the parental conflict prior to parenting coordination (along a continuum of high-intensity parental conflict: from moderate/high through intense to extreme), longer parenting coordination time ranges, including more sessions, up to the specified limit, and completion of the process as scheduled, without suspension due to reapplication to the court, were found to be successful outcome predictors.
- A significant reduction in both inter-parental and child-directed violence was found in this study, indicating the efficacy of the approach adopted and the intervention tools used in the pilot program in maintaining and safeguarding the well-being of the children entangled in the parental conflict.
- An improvement was also found in the various aspects of parents' ability to shield their children from the parental conflict, which was the overarching goal of the program.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting coordination is a unique child-focused, hybrid legal-psychological family dispute resolution model developed in view of the emerging evidence concerning the adverse effects of high-conflict parenting on the children entangled in the parental conflict (Kelly, 2014). In most cases, separated or divorced parents eventually come to terms with their emotions and learn to manage their conflict, with about 75%–80% achieving some measure of stability within 2–3 years (Cohen & Levite, 2012). However, a relatively small group of parents continue to engage in intense conflict and adversarial court proceedings for years, caught up with their children in a continuous crisis, defined in the literature as a

high-conflict divorce.¹ Moreover, the judicial process itself, fueled by the adversarial litigation culture, is liable to further intensify the parental conflict (Cronin et al., 2017), with far-reaching negative consequences for the short- and long-term adjustment, well-being, and self-perceived quality of life of the children involved in the conflict (Sorek, 2019, 2020).

While in recent years parenting coordination has become a common family dispute resolution practice in cases of high-conflict divorce, the research done so far on the efficacy and outcomes of parenting coordination programs across the world has been rather limited (Deutsch et al., 2018; McHale et al., 2020). Most of the past studies focused on the perspectives of parenting coordinators (PCs) and other professionals regarding the roles of PCs in the parenting coordination process (Beck et al., 2008; Fieldstone et al., 2011; Hayes, 2010; Hayes et al., 2012). At the same time, the perspectives of parents participating in parenting coordination have been mostly overlooked in past research and relatively few studies have dealt with the way parents experience the process. The factors contributing to successful outcomes as seen by either parents or PCs have been seldom discussed and the same is true for the impact of the process on the children entangled in the parental conflict (McHale et al., 2020).

Furthermore, as noted by McHale et al. (2020), “The few studies that have appeared in the literature are blemished by methodological limitations including small sample sizes, limited assessment, and absence of random assignment” (p. 212), resulting in limited generalizability.

Hence, more comprehensive empirical studies based on larger samples and on reports by both participating parents and matched PCs that would address the parenting coordination process and identify the factors contributing to successful outcomes are urgently needed (McHale et al., 2020). The pioneering study presented in this paper answers this need. The study was commissioned by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs and JDC-Ashalim and funded with their assistance. It was, conducted by a research team at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute from 2016 to 2019, examined the implementation and outcomes of the parenting coordination pilot program launched in Israel in 2016 based on pre- and post-parenting coordination accounts of a large sample of both participating parents and PCs, using a mixed methods research design.

Based on the concept of therapeutic jurisprudence (Marcus, 2019) and on the model developed by the Cooperative Parenting Institute, the parenting coordination pilot program was designed to offer families in crisis customized solutions for resolving their conflicts outside the court.² The program encompassed families from all walks of Israeli society, secular, religious, and ultra-Orthodox Jews as well as Arabs, referred by the court or by a social worker, or voluntarily applying for participation. Each participating family was matched with a pair of qualified PCs, who were trained in the use of intervention tools specifically developed for work with parents in ongoing high-conflict divorces. Exercising mediation and problem-solving skills, the PCs focused on promoting respectful co-parenting communication, reinvesting the parents with parenting responsibility, and prioritizing the needs of the children (Boyan & Termini, 2004).

This paper presents, for the first time, findings regarding a large sample of participating families ($N = 131$), which indicate a notable improvement in the desired outcome indicators: first and foremost, improvement in shielding the children from the parental conflict, specified as the overarching goal of the program; improvement in parents' ability to reach child-focused agreements in the course of the parenting coordination process and to establish co-parenting arrangements; improvement in co-parenting relationships and communication; reduction in parents' negative attitudes toward each other; improvement in parents' characterization of their inter-parental relationships; reduction in abusive parental conduct; reduction in parents' application to the state and religious courts for child-related dispute resolution; and consequently, reduction in the involvement of court-appointed social workers in the judicial process.

¹In high-conflict divorces, both parents may be high-conflict people or only one parent may be a high-conflict person, as argued by Bill Eddy in his work on high-conflict personalities. Since the distinction between the two types of divorces was not taken into account in the pilot program, it was not discussed in the present study.

²The parenting coordination pilot program was developed and launched in light of the recommendations of the policy oversight committee set up by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs to examine the Ministry policy on out-of-home placement of children at risk, custody, and visitation arrangements.

TABLE 1 The logic model for the parenting coordination pilot program

Participation criteria	Parents' needs and characteristics	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes
Criteria for participation in the parenting coordination pilot program: 1. Parents of minors in ongoing high-conflict divorce 2. Parents with a court sanctioned co-parenting plan 3. Upon entering the parenting coordination process, no adversarial court proceedings were in progress between the parents and court-appointed social workers were no longer involved	Needs to be addressed in parenting coordination and characteristics to be measured in the study: • The intensity of the parental conflict • Parents' difficulty in maintaining respectful co-parenting communication • Parents' difficulty in maintaining supportive and low-conflict co-parenting relationships regardless of their inter-parental conflict • Parents with a history of intimate partner violence and use of abusive language • Lack of parental awareness of the children's needs and child-centered orientation • Involving children in the parental conflict • Parents' difficulty in implementing the court sanctioned co-parenting plan • Excessive use of adversarial litigation and the powers of court-appointed social workers in the parental conflict	1. Program manager working three-quarter time 2. Allocation of one PC position per family counseling center (20 PC positions in total) 3. Appointment of an external expert to conduct a 60-hour training program and 200 hours of guidance sessions 4. Provision of adequate conditions for parenting coordination in the family counseling centers (e.g., number of rooms, PC working hours, etc.) 5. Allocation of budget for research and a conference day	1. Referral of 131 families to parenting coordination in six family counseling centers 2. Twenty parenting coordination sessions per family—32 families in total per family counseling center annually Output quality: Optimal therapeutic alliance with the pair of PCs matched with each family Clients' satisfaction with the service provided Additional outputs per family: Psychological treatment for children, supportive psychological services, etc. Outputs on the organizational level: PC training and guidance: Before joining the program, • an intensive training course of 42 hours In the course of the program, • a year-long practicum of 36 hours • ongoing fortnightly guidance sessions of an hour and a half each at the family counseling centers • a 3- to 4-day seminar Two guidance courses of several hours each for the court-appointed social workers Building organizational interfaces with relevant entities—the family courts, court-appointed social workers, family counseling centers personnel, etc. Documentation and research	Interim outcome to be measured in the study: Reaching agreements on the day-to-day implementation of the court-sanctioned co-parenting plan and on related issues Final outcomes to be measured in the study: Improvement in the communication between parents in the co-parenting dyad, putting an end to negative, abusive interaction Improvement in parents' attitudes toward each other Improvement in parents' conduct, putting an end to parental child abuse and intimate partner violence Shielding the children from the parental conflict Coordinated application to the court and the court-appointed social worker

RESEARCH DESIGN

Development of the logic model, parent and pc questionnaires, and outcome indicators

Logic model

A logic model³ was developed as a blueprint for the parenting coordination pilot program at the preliminary planning stage in collaboration with the leaders of the pilot program and professionals in the field. (See Table 1 for details.) The logic model served as a basis for the formulation of the research, design, and the development of the research tools for the formative evaluation study of the pilot program. It was helpful in identifying the needs of parents to be addressed in the pilot program and in specifying the desired outcome indicators of the program. In addition, at the concluding stage of the study, the logic model was useful in evaluating the outcomes of the program in light of its goals.

Parent questionnaires

To evaluate the various aspects and characteristics of the parental conflict from the parents' perspective prior to, and following parenting coordination, two separate data collection research tools were developed: a preliminary, pre-intervention, self-administered parent questionnaire and a follow-up, post-intervention parent questionnaire, administered by telephone—both incorporating essential items taken from previously developed questionnaires (Boyan & Termini, 1999; Cohen, 1992; Goldsmith, 1980). (See Table 2 for details.)

PC questionnaire

To evaluate the success of the parenting coordination process from the PCs' perspective, a post-intervention PC questionnaire was developed based on the goals of the program, as specified in the logic model, which was filled out and submitted online at the conclusion of the process with each participating family (one questionnaire per family). (See Table 2 for details.)

Outcome indicators

Outcome indicators were developed based on the logic model for both the parent and PC questionnaires and related outcome items were specified as measures for each of the indicators.

The preliminary and follow-up parent questionnaires included identical outcome items designed to evaluate the parents' perceived change (*improvement; no change; a change for the worse*) in their co-parenting relationships and communication, in their attitudes and views regarding each other, and in their conduct with each other and with their children following parenting coordination.

The PC questionnaire included 18 outcome items designed to evaluate the parents' ability to reach child-focused agreements of various types (agreements on managing the children's daily routine, agreements on inter-parental communication and interaction, one-time agreements regarding specific events, and agreements on cardinal issues),⁴ to shield the children from the parental conflict, and to cooperate in the best interests of their children. (See Table 3 for details.)

³As a program planning tool, the logic model specifies the resources, inputs, outputs, and desired outcomes of the program in view of the characteristics of its target population.

⁴For details and examples, see Section III.

TABLE 2 Data collection—Research tools, schedule, and key topics

	Data collection #1 parent questionnaire #1	Data collection #2 PC questionnaire	Data collection #3 parent questionnaire #2
Research tool	Self-administered parent questionnaire, manually filled out by each of the parents participating in the study: Served as a basis for comparison with the follow-up parent questionnaire	Online PC questionnaire filled out by one of the PCs in each pair of matched PCs: Summarizing the intervention, its outputs, and outcomes	Follow-up parent questionnaire administered by telephone
Schedule	Upon joining the parenting coordination program	At the conclusion of the parenting coordination process with each participating family	About 6 months following completion of the parenting coordination process
Key topics	Indicators of co-parenting relationships and communication: parental involvement, characteristics of inter-parental relationships, cooperation between parents in the co-parenting dyad, parents' positive and negative attitudes toward each other, self-reported abusive conduct and reported abusive conduct on the part of the other parent, and parents' views regarding each other and their inter-parental relationships Implementation of the court sanctioned co-parenting plan Socio-demographic data	Parents' characteristics Parenting coordination outputs Parenting coordination outcomes Types of co-parenting agreements reached	Indicators of co-parenting relationships and communication: parental involvement, characteristics of inter-parental relationships, cooperation between parents in the co-parenting dyad, parents' positive and negative attitudes toward each other, self-reported abusive conduct and reported abusive conduct on the part of the other parent, and parents' views regarding each other and their inter-parental relationships; Implementation of the court sanctioned co-parenting plan Satisfaction with the co-parenting agreements reached and the court sanctioned co-parenting plan Involvement of court-appointed social workers in the judicial process Application to the court in the case of dispute

Sample population/participants

Parents

The sample population comprised all parents who passed the pilot program admission process and attended the first individual session with the pair of matched PCs and, at least one joint session with the other parent in the co-parenting dyad. The parents were informed of the formative evaluation study of the pilot program and were given an equal opportunity to participate in the study, subject to signing an informed consent form. Participation in the study was optional and had no implications for participation in the pilot program. Of the 262 parents who joined the parenting coordination pilot program, 204 parents were willing to take part in the study and manually fill out the preliminary, self-administered questionnaire (consent rate of 78%). The consent rate was even higher (93%) when calculated as the percentage of families who agreed to take part in the study: 122 out of 131 families.

Not all 148 families who were referred to the parenting coordination pilot program and entered the process during the period from November 2016 to August 2018 continued to participate in the program. Following the intake session with the pair of matched PCs, attended individually by each of the parents, 131 families (89%) proceeded to

TABLE 3 Outcome indicators measured by the PC questionnaire outcome items

Outcome indicator measured	PC questionnaire outcome items
Improvement in the communication between the parents in the parenting coordination sessions	• Parents' ability to listen to each other in the parenting coordination sessions • Parents' ability to respond positively to each other's statements in the parenting coordination sessions • Use of confrontational language in the interaction between the parents
Improvement in the conduct of the parents in the parenting coordination sessions	• Mutually respectful and accepting attitude in the parenting coordination sessions • Level of inter-parental aggressiveness in the parenting coordination sessions
Improvement in the relationships between the parents	• Level of inter-parental tension and hostility in the parenting coordination sessions • Parents' understanding and awareness of each other's needs • Parents' willingness to accommodate each other's needs regarding the co-parenting plan • Parents' ability to rely on each other and view each other as a competent and capable parent
Improvement in shielding the children from the parental conflict	• Parents' ability to maintain respectful, child-focused co-parenting relationships regardless of their inter-parental conflict • Shielding the children from the parental conflict • Parents' understanding of the importance for the children of maintaining a regular and stable relationship with each of them • Parents' understanding and awareness of their children's needs • Parents' ability to focus on, and prioritize the needs of their children • Parents' ability to maintain a child-centered dialogue
Cooperation between the parents in the best interests of their children	• Parents' willingness to update each other about their children • Parents' ability to cooperate in the best interests of their children • Parents' ability to reach co-parenting agreements on managing their children's daily routine

the next step and attended at least one joint session where both parents were present. The process was terminated for 15 families (10%) following the intake session due to the failure to organize a joint meeting between the parents, who were subsequently labeled as dropouts and whose data were not included in the study. Two families (1%) were still going through the process when the study concluded and hence, were not considered in the study. To qualify for participation in the parenting coordination pilot program, the parents had to meet the three criteria specified in the logic model: (1) parents of minors in ongoing high-conflict divorce; (2) parents with a court sanctioned co-parenting plan; (3) upon entering the parenting coordination process, no adversarial court proceedings were in progress between the parents and court-appointed social workers were no longer involved.

PCs

All the PCs who took part in the parenting coordination process submitted reports on the families in their care at the conclusion of the process with each participating family. Altogether, 53 PCs filled out questionnaires regarding 131 participating families.

Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure is described below according to the three data collection tools: the preliminary, pre-intervention, manually filled out parent questionnaires; the follow-up, post-intervention parent questionnaires, administered by telephone; and the post-intervention online PC questionnaires. (See Table 4 for details.)

TABLE 4 Absolute numbers of participants in the study, classified by the data collection tool type, respondent gender, and respondent/s on behalf of each family

	Fathers	Mothers	Family units		Total number of families	Total number of individuals
			Two parents	One parent		
Pre-intervention parent questionnaire	94	110	82	40	122	204
Post-intervention parent questionnaire	68	74	43	56	99	142
PC questionnaire					131	262

Pre-intervention parent questionnaires

Data collection at the preliminary, pre-intervention stage was conducted from November 2016 to August 2018, as each participating family joined the parenting coordination pilot program.

At the preliminary data collection stage, the parents were asked to give their explicit consent to take part in the study and, in addition to filling out the pre-intervention questionnaire, to be interviewed for the follow-up survey.

Post-intervention parent questionnaires

Data collection at the follow-up, post-intervention stage was conducted from September 2017 to July 2019, as each participating family completed the parenting coordination process, about 6 months following completion. Each of the parents who expressed consent to take part in the study and filled out the pre-intervention questionnaire were approached for a telephone interview, including parents who withdrew from the parenting coordination program before its scheduled completion. Of the 204 parents who filled out the preliminary, self-administered questionnaire, 142 parents responded to the telephone interview (consent rate of 70%).

Post-intervention PC questionnaires

At the conclusion of the parenting coordination process with each participating family, the PCs filled out an online questionnaire (one questionnaire per family). Data collection at this stage was conducted from January 2017 to September 2019. Altogether, 131 PC questionnaires were filled out, providing intervention information related to the 131 participating families (262 parents). Report submission rates by the PCs was 100% all through the study period.

Data analysis

The research tools used in the study were based on existing measurement tools and included a preliminary test conducted prior to the study, internal consistency tests, factor analysis, and evaluations by field personnel. The study's findings, obtained through the three types of data collection tools, were analyzed using SPSS, version 24. Descriptive statistical analyses and significant tests were conducted, using χ^2 tests and independent samples t-tests, to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the parents' reports in the preliminary and follow-up questionnaires, and to determine the direction of any statistically significant difference.

In addition, outcome indicators were developed for the various aspects of the parental conflict: the level of inter-parental communication; parents' positive attitudes toward each other; parents' negative attitudes toward each other; parents' exposure to threats by the other parent; intimate partner violence; and parental child abuse. The outcome indicators were measured by calculating the weighted averages of related questionnaire outcome items whose internal consistency was found to be high. A unique indicator designed to evaluate the intensity level of the parental conflict prior to parenting coordination was also developed.

An overall outcome indicator designed to evaluate the success of the parenting coordination process was developed based on the PC questionnaires. It was measured by calculating the weighted averages of all 18 PC questionnaire outcome items. To evaluate the intervention outcomes based on the parent questionnaires, improvement indicators designed to measure the differences between the parents' reports in the preliminary and follow-up questionnaires were developed based both on individual questionnaire outcome items and on indicators measured by related questionnaire outcome items whose internal consistency was found to be high.

Finally, a multivariate linear regression was used to develop a model for predicting the success of the parenting coordination process.

RESULTS

The study findings regarding the improvement in the various aspects of the parental conflict, as measured based on the parents' and PCs' reports, are presented below. The results for the interim outcome of the program, namely, the agreements reached by the parents during parenting coordination, are detailed first, followed by the results for the five desired final outcomes. The factors contributing to and predicting the success of the parenting coordination process are subsequently specified in view of the results for the overall parenting coordination success indicator.

Interim outcome

Parents' ability to reach agreements during the parenting coordination process was specified in the logic model as an interim outcome constituting an essential milestone on the way to achieving the desired final outcomes. This aspect of the parental conflict was evaluated based on the reports submitted by the PCs at the conclusion of the process with each participating family. The analysis of the findings showed that 87% of the parents reached some kind of agreement during parenting coordination, while only 13% failed to reach any kind of agreement. Most of the parents reached agreements on inter-parental communication and interaction and on the management of the children's daily routine (64% and 72%, respectively). More than 50% of the parents reached one-time agreements regarding specific events, e.g., a summer vacation with the children or a birthday party for one of the children, and about 25% reached agreements on cardinal issues, e.g., choosing a school for the children or changing a place of residence. The analysis of multivariate linear regression models for the prediction of parental agreements, classified by agreement type, showed that the number of parenting coordination sessions consistently predicted parents' ability to reach some type of agreement. Hence, the greater the number of parenting coordination sessions, the greater the number of agreements reached by the parents, up to a limit, as detailed below.

Examination of the correlation trend, classified by agreement type, indicated differences between the types of agreements reached during the parenting coordination process:

- The number of one-time agreements regarding specific events consistently increased throughout the process.
- The number of agreements on inter-parental communication and interaction and on the management of the children's daily routine increased significantly from the first session to the tenth session. Subsequently, a moderate increase was indicated.

- An increase in the number of agreements on cardinal issues was indicated from the fifth session on and even more significantly, from the 15th session.

To examine the possible effect of the PCs' experience and expertise on the number of agreements reached by the parents, the type of agreements, and the length of the parenting coordination process, t-tests were performed on independent samples as part of the supplementary, follow-up analyses conducted at the conclusion of the pilot program.⁵ No significant effect was indicated.

Final outcomes

The five final outcome indicators measured in the study, as specified in the logic model, were:

1. Improvement in the communication between parents in the co-parenting dyad, putting an end to negative, abusive interaction.
2. Improvement in parents' attitudes toward each other.
3. Improvement in parents' conduct, putting an end to parental child abuse and intimate partner violence.
4. Shielding the children from the parental conflict.
5. Reduction in parents' application to the court and the court-appointed social workers.

The first three final outcome indicators specified in the logic model were measured based on both the pre- and post-parenting coordination parents' reports and PCs' post-intervention reports. The results are detailed in points 1–3 below. The measurement results for the other two final outcome indicators, the one measured based on the PCs' reports and the other, based on the parents' reports, are subsequently detailed in points 4 and 5, respectively.

Table 5 summarizes the average differences in the first three measured outcome indicators and related questionnaire outcome items between the pre- and post-parenting coordination parents' reports and specifies their statistical significance and the direction of any statistically significant difference for each of the indicators based on a paired samples t-test.

For the purpose of the comparative examination of the pre- and post-parenting coordination parents' reports, a difference indicator was developed for each item in the parent questionnaires, which was used to measure the difference between parents' reports prior to and following parenting coordination and to determine the statistical significance of the measured difference and the direction of any statistically significant difference. The difference indicators for the various outcome items were developed based on Cronbach's alpha reliability tests. (See Table 6 for details.)

It should be noted that the present study discussed the reports of individual parents with the focus on their subjective perspectives *before* and *after* the parenting coordination process. Given the small number of responses by both parents in the co-parenting dyad (*as actually provided*, as shown in Table 4), no analyses were conducted regarding the correspondence between the reports of parents in the same family unit. The results related to family units are reflected in the PCs' post-intervention reports, submitted at the conclusion of the parenting coordination process, with each participating family for each family separately. Yet, the remarkable agreement between the subjective reports of individual parents and the PCs' reports, which are related to family units, as detailed below, is worth noting.

⁵The Supplementary follow-up analyses, required by the clients, were not an integral part of the study and thus, were not discussed in this paper.

TABLE 5 Average differences in the outcome indicators and related questionnaire outcome items between pre- and post-parenting coordination parents' reports, statistical significance, and direction of statistically significant differences ($N = 142$)

Variable	Pre-parenting coordination		Post-parenting coordination		Difference
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>
Inter-parental communication					
Communication level	2.43	1.07	2.65	1.32	2.06*
Exposure to threats	2.58	0.92	1.89	0.86	8.38***
The other parent becomes loud and verbally violent	2.94	1.33	2.19	1.38	5.87***
Disputes between parents	2.13	1.16	2.85	1.56	3.70***
Parents' attitudes and views regarding each other and their inter-parental relationships					
Parents' attitudes toward each other					
Parents' negative attitudes toward each other—final indicator	3.14	0.71	2.58	1.03	6.85***
Parents' positive attitudes toward each other—final indicator	3.28	0.72	3.31	1.15	−0.30
Fears of violence on the part of the other parent					
The other parent becomes physically violent toward me	2.40	0.12	2.04	0.12	3.43**
Our children are at some risk when staying with the other parent	2.25	1.23	1.98	1.24	2.29*
The other parent is liable to commit child abduction	1.73	1.04	1.55	0.95	2.02*
Characteristics of inter-parental relationships					
Friendship	1.38	0.87	1.44	0.82	−0.68
Mutual respect	1.89	1.05	2.04	1.17	−1.48
Tension	3.96	1.24	3.29	1.46	4.53***
Anger	3.71	1.34	3.15	1.42	3.91***
Alienation	3.78	1.36	3.12	1.63	4.30***
Parents' harmful and violent behavior					
Reported harmful behavior on the part of the other parent					
Child-directed harmful behavior	2.41	0.83	1.78	0.72	9.55***
Inter-parental harmful behavior	2.53	0.83	1.70	0.80	11.72***
Reported violence on the part of the other parent					
The other parent becomes physically violent toward me					
Fathers	1.52	0.83	1.16	0.73	2.72**
Mothers	2.06	1.30	1.29	0.88	5.64***
The other parent becomes physically violent toward the children	1.75	1.06	1.34	0.90	4.55***

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Inter-Parental communication

This aspect of the parental conflict was evaluated in light of the extent of reduction in negative and aggressive interaction between parents in the co-parenting dyad following parenting coordination, and their ability to maintain respectful communication and conduct constructive dialogue with each other.

The parents' reports show that following parenting coordination, positive inter-parental communication (e.g., listening to each other and responding positively to each other) was enhanced, exposure to threats by the other

TABLE 6 Cronbach's alpha reliability of the measured parent questionnaire outcome indicators (N = 204)

Questionnaire indicator	Overall indicator development	Outcome item example	Range of scale values	Cronbach's alpha reliability
Parent questionnaires				
Communication level	Development of an overall indicator by calculating the weighted averages of 9 questionnaire outcome items related to inter-parental communication	To what extent do you communicate with your children's mother on issues that have to be addressed, e.g., problems at school/pre-school? Please rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5	1 (<i>not at all</i>) – 5 (<i>to a very large extent</i>)	$\alpha = 0.91$
Exposure to threats	Development of an overall indicator by calculating the weighted averages of 5 questionnaire outcome items related to reported threats on the part of the other parent	The children's father threatens to apply to the court. Please rate the frequency of threats on a scale of 1 to 5.	1 (<i>never</i>) – 5 (<i>always</i>)	$\alpha = 0.70$
Positive attitudes toward each other	Development of an overall indicator by calculating the weighted averages of 9 questionnaire outcome items related to positive attitudes toward each other	I believe that the mother of our children really cares about them. To what extent on a scale of 1 to 5 do you agree with this statement?	1 (<i>do not agree at all</i>)–5 (<i>agree to a very large extent</i>)	$\alpha = 0.81$
Negative attitudes toward each other	Development of an overall indicator by calculating the weighted averages of 11 questionnaire outcome items related to negative attitudes toward each other	I believe that the father of our children is extremely manipulative. To what extent on a scale of 1 to 5 do you agree with this statement?	1 (<i>do not agree at all</i>) – 5 (<i>agree to a very large extent</i>)	$\alpha = 0.81$
Reported child-directed harmful behavior on the part of the other parent	Development of an overall indicator by calculating the weighted averages of 5 questionnaire outcome items related to reported child-directed abusive conduct on the part of the other parent	The mother of our children violates agreements on visitation arrangements. Please rate the frequency of agreement violation on a scale of 1 to 5	1 (<i>never</i>) – 5 (<i>always</i>)	$\alpha = 0.70$
Reported inter-parental harmful behavior on the part of	Development of an overall indicator by calculating the weighted averages of 9 questionnaire outcome items related to reported	The father of our children becomes loud and verbally aggressive	1 (<i>never</i>) – 5 (<i>always</i>)	$\alpha = 0.81$

TABLE 6 (Continued)

Questionnaire indicator	Overall indicator development	Outcome item example	Range of scale values	Cronbach's alpha reliability
the other parent	inter-parental abusive conduct on the part of the other parent	Please rate the frequency of such conduct on a scale of 1 to 5		
High-intensity parental conflict	Development of an overall weighted indicator of 10 factors associated with observed variables related to high-intensity parental conflict. The factors were specified based on factor analysis (as detailed in the RESULTS section)		levels of high-intensity parental conflict—from moderate/high, through intense to extreme	$\alpha = 0.74$
PC questionnaire				
Parenting coordination success	Development of an overall indicator by calculating the weighted averages of 18 questionnaire outcome items related to the PCs' reports on improvement or deterioration in various aspects of the parents' conduct	Parents' ability to shield their children from the inter-parental conflict and to cooperate in the best interests of their children regardless of the inter-parental conflict	1 (<i>a significant change for the worse in the co-parenting relationships and communication</i>) — 5 (<i>a significant improvement in the co-parenting relationships and communication</i>)	$\alpha = 0.95$

parent was reduced, and loud and verbally aggressive exchanges were also reduced, while there was an increase in the disputes between the parents. Thus, the percentage of parents who reported an enhanced level of positive communication following parenting coordination was more than double the corresponding percentage prior to parenting coordination. Similarly, while prior to parenting coordination 95% of the parents reported exposure to a high or medium level of threats by the other parent, the corresponding percentage was reduced to 71% following parenting coordination. The percentage of parents who reported no exposure to threats following parenting coordination was almost six times higher than the corresponding percentage prior to parenting coordination. At the same time, a substantial increase in the frequency of disputes between the parents (*usually* or *always*) was reported. While prior to parenting coordination, 12% of the parents reported a high frequency of disputes between them, the corresponding percentage following parenting coordination tripled to 36%. The increase in reported disputes between the parents may be attributed to the fact that they were encouraged to communicate on a regular basis as part of the parenting coordination process and were thus given the opportunity to express hard feelings through verbal interaction, even though contentious, rather than by abusive conduct. It should be noted, however, that parenting coordination seeks to promote positive communication and reduce negative communication between the parents as much as possible.

Likewise, the PCs' reports indicate an improvement in inter-parental communication following parenting coordination. There was an improvement in the level of positive communication between the parents among 60% of the families, while there was almost no change among 37% of the families, and hardly any change for the worse was reported.

Parents' attitudes and views regarding each other and their inter-parental relationships

- Parents' attitudes toward each other:

The parents' reports show that following parenting coordination there was a significant reduction in parents' negative attitudes toward each other. At the same time, no significant change was found in parents' positive attitudes toward each other. Yet, the direction of change across the sample was found to be positive with regard to both the negative and positive parents' attitudes, as shown in Table 5. Fears of violence on the part of the other parent:

As for parents' fears of violence by the other parent, directed at them or at their children, the parents' reports indicate a significant reduction in parents' fears of violence by the other parent, whether inter-parental violence or child-directed violence, as reported by 28% and 40% of the parents respectively. At the same time, an increase in parents' fears of inter-parental or child-directed violence was reported by 14% and 21% of the parents respectively.

- Characteristics of inter-parental relationships:

The parents were asked to state to what extent—on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a very large extent*)—their relationships were characterized by friendship, mutual respect, tension, anger, or alienation. The parents' reports indicate a reduction in the negative characteristics of inter-parental relationships, with lower levels of tension, anger, and alienation reported following parenting coordination. At the same time, the parents' reports indicate no significant change in the positive characteristics of inter-parental relationships.

Likewise, the PCs' reports indicate a reduction in the negative characteristics of inter-parental relationships. A significant reduction in the level of inter-parental tension and hostility in the parenting coordination sessions was found among 55% of the families. An improvement was also found—among 40% of the families—in the more complex aspects of inter-parental relationships, including parents' ability to rely on each other and view each other as a competent and capable parent, and parents' awareness of and willingness to accommodate each other's needs. Almost no change for the worse was found in any aspect of the inter-parental relationships.

Parents' harmful and violent behavior

- Reported harmful behavior on the part of the other parent:

The non-physical aspects of parents' harmful and verbally violent behavior, whether inter-parental or child directed, were evaluated in light of the extent of reduction in reports on inter-parental and child-directed harmful and verbally violent behavior, e.g., loud arguments or violation of agreements on visitation arrangements. **The parents' reports** indicate a significant reduction in various, non-physical aspects of both inter-parental and child-directed harmful and verbally violent behavior following parenting coordination. Thus, a reduction in parental harmful and verbally violent behavior targeting the children was reported by about 50% of the parents, while no change in this respect was reported by 45% of the parents. A change for the worse in parental harmful and verbally violent behavior targeting the children was reported by 4% of the parents. The reduction in inter-parental harmful and verbally violent behavior was not as significant. A reduction in inter-parental harmful and verbally violent behavior was reported by 38% of the parents, while a change for the worse in this respect was reported by about 9% of the parents.

- Reported violence on the part of the other parent:

The study also sought to examine to what extent parents and children were exposed to violence prior to and following parenting coordination. Each of the parents in the co-parenting dyad was asked to report whether the other

parent became physically violent toward him and whether the other parent became violent toward the children (without stating the type of violence). **The parents' reports** indicate a significant reduction in both parents' exposure to physical violence on the part of the other parent and children's exposure to violence on the part of the other parent following parenting coordination. Thus, prior to parenting coordination, about 50% of the mothers and about a third of the fathers reported exposure to interparental physical violence, while 40% of the parents reported that their children were exposed to physical violence on the part of the other parent. Following parenting coordination, a significant reduction was indicated in parents' reports on physical violence—a reduction of 77% in fathers' reports on inter-parental violence; a reduction of 71% in mothers' reports on inter-parental violence; and, most important, a reduction of 60% in parents' reports on child-directed violence on the part of the other parent. These findings are most significant and of special interest. While parenting coordination programs across the world are focused on family dispute resolution in cases of high-conflict divorce and do not commonly deal with the issue, the reduction of violence was one of the desired final outcomes of the pilot program conducted in Israel (as specified in Table 1) and the findings show a significant reduction in exposure to all aspects of inter-parental and child-directed violence. (See Table 5 for details.) It thus appears that the approach adopted and the intervention tools used in the pilot program are highly valuable in reducing domestic violence, specifically child-directed violence, and thereby contribute to the well-being of the children in high-conflict families.

Likewise, **the PCs' reports** indicate an improvement in parents' conduct following parenting coordination. Among 55% of the families, there was some improvement or significant improvement in parents' ability to maintain respectful and accommodating co-parenting relationships. No change in this respect was found among 43% of the families, while a change for the worse was found among 2% of the families.

Shielding the children from the parental conflict

This aspect of the parental conflict was evaluated in light of the extent of improvement in parents' understanding of the impact of the conflict on their children, awareness of their children's needs, and ability to maintain child-focused co-parenting relationships regardless of their inter-parental conflict. The improvement in this aspect of the parental conflict was measured based exclusively on the PCs' post-intervention reports and in the absence of a corresponding pre-intervention measurement, the improvement could not be tested for statistical significance. The PCs' reports indicated an improvement in the various aspects of parents' ability to shield their children from the parental conflict among 52% to 69% of the families. Thus, among 69% of the families, there was an improvement in parents' understanding and awareness of their children's needs; among 65% of the families, there was an improvement in parents' ability to focus on and prioritize the needs of their children; among 62% of the families, there was an improvement in parents' ability to cooperate in the best interests of their children; and among 52% of the families, there was an improvement in parents' ability to deal with the co-parenting conflict, apart from and irrespective of the inter-parental conflict. No change for the better or worse was found in parents' ability to shield their children from the parental conflict among about a third to a half of the families.

While the overarching goal of the program, i.e., shielding the children from the parental conflict, may have not been fully achieved, the program was successful in preventing further deterioration of the situation, as is often the case in the absence of intervention. Furthermore, although no court powers were exercised during the parenting coordination process, in line with the preconditions of participation in the program, and thus, no restraining orders were enforced, the parental conflict was kept under control with virtually no adverse implications for any aspect of shielding the children from the parental conflict. This outcome is all the more remarkable considering the highly challenging population targeted by the program.⁶

⁶The issue is further discussed in Section IV.

Parents' use of adversarial litigation and court-appointed social workers in the parental conflict

- Parents' recurrent application to the court:

The parents' reports indicate that there was a significant reduction, of close to 50%, in the rate of parents' application to the court following parenting coordination, compared with the corresponding rate prior to parenting coordination, which was 93% or even higher. It should be noted in this context that participation in the parenting coordination program was contingent upon parental consent to end any adversarial court proceedings and refrain from application to the court while the parenting coordination process was going on. Reapplication to the court in that case entailed the suspension of the process pending the conclusion of the legal proceedings.

- Parents' application to the court-appointed social workers:

The parents' reports indicate that following parenting coordination, there was a significant reduction of 60% in parents' application to the court-appointed social workers. It is further indicated that already in the process of admission to the parenting coordination program, the involvement of court-appointed social workers was significantly reduced. It should be noted in this context that one of the preconditions for participation in the program was parental consent to end the involvement of court-appointed social workers in the conflict.

Parenting coordination success indicator and successful outcome predictors

To identify the factors contributing to successful outcomes of the parenting coordination program, an overall outcome indicator—a parenting coordination success indicator—was developed based on the PC questionnaires. The parenting coordination success indicator was measured by calculating the weighted averages of the 18 PC questionnaire outcome items related to the extent of improvement or deterioration in various aspects of the parents' conduct, e.g., communication between the parents, cooperation between the parents, relationships between the parents, parents' conduct and attitudes toward each other, and the extent to which the children were involved in the parental conflict. Measured on a scale of 1 (*a significant change for the worse noted in co-parenting*) to 5 (*a significant improvement noted in co-parenting*), the average of the parenting coordination success indicator over the entire sample stood at 3.68 ($SD = 0.58$), while an average of 3 denotes no change in co-parenting relationships.

A multivariate linear regression was used to develop a model for predicting the success of the parenting coordination program. At the first stage of the three-stage model development process, a model based on socio-demographic and economic characteristics was evaluated. The characteristics considered included: gender; age; level of religiosity; level of education (12 years of schooling or less, high school education with diploma, post-secondary vocational training, academic education—the latter, the category for comparison); and economic status (far below average income, below average income, average and above income). At the second stage, the characteristics of the parenting coordination process were also considered, including the pre-parenting coordination admission process, the number of parenting coordination sessions attended by both parents, the regularity of the sessions, and the completion of the parenting coordination process as scheduled (as detailed below). At the third stage, the variable of 'pre-parenting coordination high-intensity conflict' was added to the model. Table 7 presents the findings of the multivariate linear regression.

The findings show that at the first stage, the model for predicting the success of the parenting coordination process, based on the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the participating parents, explains only 8% of the variance in the success of parenting coordination. Hence, the success of parenting coordination cannot be predicted by the parents' personal, socio-demographic and economic characteristics.

TABLE 7 Multivariate linear regression model for predicting the success of parenting coordination, based on socio-demographic/economic characteristics, parenting coordination characteristics, and conflict intensity level

Outcome predictors	Stage 1 socio-demographic/economic characteristics Coefficients (SD)	Stage 2 socio-demographic/economic characteristics and parenting coordination characteristics Coefficients (SD)	Stage 3 socio-demographic/economic characteristics, parenting coordination characteristics, and conflict intensity level Coefficients (SD)
Gender (Fathers)	.223 (.111)**	.046 (.085)	-.002 (.087)
Age	-.001 (.008)	.000 (.006)	.002 (.006)
Education level			
12 years of schooling or less ^a	-.170 (.181)	.137 (.141)	.190 (.141)
High school education with diploma ^a	-.477 (.190)**	-.290 (.144)**	-.271 (.143)*
Post-secondary vocational training ^a	-.079 (.134)	-.083 (.101)	-.038 (.102)
Economic status			
Average and above income ^b	-.223 (.112)**	-.132 (.086)	-.096 (.087)
Parenting coordination characteristics			
Pre-parenting coordination admission process		-.002 (.038)	-.004 (.038)
Number of parenting coordination sessions attended by both parents,		.024 (.008)***	.024 (.008)***
Regularity of the parenting coordination sessions		-.050 (.088)	-.046 (.087)
Completion of the parenting coordination process as scheduled		.667 (.123)***	.650 (.122)***
Pre-parenting coordination high-intensity conflict			-.167 (.080)**
Parenting coordination success (constant)	3.798 (.347)	3.443 (.281)	3.865 (.344)
R ² (explained variance)	.081	.500****	.518****

^aCategory for comparison—academic education.

^bCategories for comparison—below average and far below average income.

* $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; **** $p < .001$.

The explained variance is significantly increased (a statistically significant increase) when the characteristics of the parenting coordination process are added to the model, so that at the second stage, the model explains 50% of the variance in the success of parenting coordination.

With the addition of the variable of 'pre-parenting coordination high-intensity conflict' at the third stage, the model explains 52% of the variance in the success of parenting coordination. Analysis of the fully developed regression model shows that with the exception of parents with high school education, whose prospects of success in parenting coordination are relatively low compared with academically educated parents, the parents' personal, socio-demographic and economic characteristics do not predict the extent of success in the parenting coordination process.

To sum up, based on the study findings, the factors that predict the successful outcomes of parenting coordination were identified, as detailed below:

1. The number of parenting coordination sessions attended by both parents: The model shows that the number of parenting coordination sessions attended by both parents explains and predicts the success of parenting

coordination, so that the higher the number of sessions, up to a specified limit, the higher the prospects of success in the parenting coordination process. The logic model recommends about 20 parenting coordination sessions for optimal outcomes. It was found, however, that the correlation between the number of parenting coordination sessions and the success of the process has a curvilinear pattern, with the positive direction⁷ maintained up to the 14th session while from the 15th session, the positive direction becomes gradually less pronounced. Based on the experience gained during the pilot program, the professionals involved in running the program evaluate that this is about the number of sessions required to cool the flames and provide the parents with child-focused communication and conflict management tools. It should be noted, however, that confrontational language is a major defense mechanism used by parents in high-conflict divorce and that they may thus find it difficult to maintain a respectful dialogue and a civil co-parenting relationship for an extended period of time. In fact, as noted by the professionals, following the 14th session, the parents tend to revert to the confrontational language as a means of regulating their inter-parental relationship.

2. Completion of the parenting coordination process as scheduled: The model shows that the completion of the parenting coordination process as scheduled explains and predicts the success of parenting coordination. Under the guidelines specified for the program, the process is completed as scheduled when: (1) the parents manage to communicate without external intervention, and (2) the parents manage to reach co-parenting agreements. It should be noted though that the factor of 'completion as scheduled'—as reported by the PCs at the conclusion of the parenting coordination process with each participating family—was variously perceived and subjectively interpreted by the PCs.
3. The intensity level of the parental conflict: To evaluate the effect of the intensity level of the parental conflict prior to parenting coordination, a 'pre-parenting coordination high-intensity conflict' indicator was developed along a continuum of intensity levels of the parental conflict—from moderate/high through intense to extreme. Factor analysis was used to develop a unified scale of the conflict intensity levels for the high-intensity conflict indicator, which enabled the identification of correlations between observed variables and their classification by their associated, latent factors. The variable of 'pre-parenting coordination high-intensity conflict' was then inserted into the regression model for predicting the success of parenting coordination. The model showed a statistically significant negative correlation between the intensity level of the parental conflict and the success of the parenting coordination process. Hence, the higher the intensity level of the parental conflict prior to parenting coordination the lower the improvement in the parenting coordination success indicator, and vice versa.
4. Adherence to the parenting coordination schedule without suspension due to reapplication to the court: An independent sample t-test was used to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference between families who reverted to litigation during parenting coordination, thus suspending the process, and families for whom the process was not suspended. It was found that families for whom the process was not suspended achieved statistically significant⁸ better outcomes in the parenting coordination success indicator compared with families for whom the process was suspended. In addition, an independent sample t-test was used to examine whether there was a statistically significant difference between families who resumed the parenting coordination process following suspension and families who did not resume the process following suspension. It was found that families who resumed the parenting coordination process following suspension achieved better outcomes in the parenting coordination success indicator compared with families who did not resume the process following suspension.⁹

The study findings thus indicate that lower intensity levels of the parental conflict prior to parenting coordination, longer parenting coordination time ranges, including more sessions, up to the specified limit, and completion of

⁷ $p < .001$; $r_p = .595$

⁸ $p < 0.05$ $t = 2.50$

⁹Given the relatively small sample size, the confidence level is 91% ($p < 0.09$) and thus, the outcome is not statistically significant.

the process as scheduled, without suspension due to reapplication to the court, increase parents' prospects of achieving success in the desired outcome indicators.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The need for comprehensive and empirical efficacy and outcome research of parenting coordination programs has been discussed across the literature, and the methodological limitations of the relatively few studies addressing the issue, resulting in limited generalizability, have been noted in various reports and reviews (Coates et al., 2004; Deutsch et al., 2018; Henry et al., 2011; McHale et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2010). This pioneering study answers the need for more extensive research. Based on a large sample of families in high-conflict divorce who participated in a parenting coordination pilot program and matched PCs who managed the process, this study offers fresh insights on the efficacy and outcomes of parenting coordination.

The study findings show that most of the parents reached some kind of agreement during parenting coordination. Most of them reached agreements on inter-parental communication and interaction and the management of the children's daily routine; more than 50% of the parents reached one-time agreements regarding specific events; and about 25% reached agreements on cardinal issues. It was also found that the higher the number of parenting coordination sessions, up to a specified limit (as detailed in Section III, Chapter A), the higher the number of agreements of various types reached by the parents and hence, the higher the prospects of success in the parenting coordination process.

Five desired final outcome indicators were specified for the program. The study findings show that on the whole, parents in high conflict experienced a significant improvement in the desired outcome indicators following participation in the parenting coordination pilot program. Given that most of the participants in the parenting coordination pilot program finished their participation in the program ahead of schedule, these findings are especially noteworthy.

An unexpected finding of the present study is the significant reduction in the exposure to both inter-parental and child-directed parental violence. This is particularly notable given that parenting coordination programs do not purport to focus on this aspect of the parental conflict and the reduction of domestic violence is not commonly specified as a program goal. The significant reduction in both inter-parental and child-directed violence found in this study points to the efficacy of the approach adopted and the intervention tools used in the pilot program in Israel in maintaining and safeguarding the well-being of the children entangled in the parental conflict.

Likewise, an improvement was found in the various aspects of parents' ability to shield their children from the parental conflict, which was the ultimate goal of the program.¹⁰

It should be noted in this context that while parenting coordination programs initially sought to reduce the intensity of the parental conflict and promote a more cooperative relationship between the parents in the best interests of their children, it became clear following several years of practice that parenting coordination failed to resolve the intractable inter-parental conflict although it succeeded in containing the conflict and preventing further deterioration (Demby, 2016). The findings of the present study, which indicate the success of the pilot program in keeping the conflict under control and maintaining the status quo (as reflected in the percentage of families where no change for the better or worse was indicated in parents' ability to shield their children from the parental conflict), and in preventing further deterioration (as reflected in the minimal percentage of families where a change for the worse was indicated) are consistent with the revised goal of parenting coordination and its current focus on containing and managing the parental conflict. These findings are all the more significant given the highly challenging target population, the fact that no court powers were exercised and hence, no restraining orders enforced during the parenting coordination process.

¹⁰As noted, since this aspect of the parental conflict was evaluated exclusively in light of the post-intervention PCs' reports, in the absence of a corresponding pre-intervention measurement, the improvement in this respect could not be tested for statistical significance.

The findings of the present study are also consistent with other findings of the few efficacy and outcome studies of parenting coordination programs conducted so far. Other findings of this study are related to issues that have not been addressed in previous research or, for that matter, in other parenting coordination programs.

The effect of parenting coordination on inter-parental communication and the intensity of the parental conflict, extensively discussed in the present study, was addressed, *inter alia*, by McHale et al. (2020), yielding similar findings. In both studies, reduction in inter-parental tension and hostility and improvement in inter-parental communication and co-parenting relationships were reported by the participating parents and PCs alike. However, while the findings of the present study are statistically significant, statistical significance could not be established in the study of McHale et al. (2020) due to the small sample size used.

The efficacy of parenting coordination programs in reducing the burden on the judicial system is another issue examined in both the present study and past research. A statistically significant correlation was found in both this and previous studies between participation in parenting coordination programs and the consequent reduction of burden on the family courts and diminished resource inputs in the judicial process (Brewster et al., 2011; D'Abate et al., 2019; Henry et al., 2009; Scott et al., 2010). This is a highly important finding considering that about 10% of the families in high-conflict divorce take up about 90% of the court's time (Haddad et al., 2016). The findings of the present study show a significant reduction of 50% to 60% in parents' application to the court and the court-appointed social workers both during the parenting coordination process and up to six months following its completion (the date the post-intervention survey was conducted). This represents a huge saving in terms of resources and personnel, relieving the burden on the already overburdened judicial system in Israel.

The present study offers some novel findings regarding the efficacy and outcomes of parenting coordination. Thus, the study identified four key variables as successful outcome predictors: Lower intensity levels of the parental conflict (along a continuum of high-intensity parental conflict: from moderate/high through intense to extreme); the number of parenting coordination sessions attended by both parents; the completion of the parenting coordination process as scheduled; and adherence to the schedule without suspension due to reapplication to the court during the parenting coordination process. Another original finding of the present study, with implications for further research and future practice, indicates that parenting coordination tailored to specific levels of conflict intensity is likely to be particularly successful.

At the same time, the study has some limitations:

- Only 70% of the parents who expressed consent to take part in the study responded to the post-parenting coordination follow-up telephone interview. This may be attributed to the fact that the follow-up telephone interview was conducted 4–6 months following parenting coordination rather than immediately after the conclusion of the process. Months later, the parents may have been reluctant to open the wounds and, once again, deal with the distressing issue of their inter-parental and co-parenting relationships. The rate of response to the follow-up questionnaire may have been influenced by other factors as well; for instance, the problematic, non-cooperative nature of the target population.
- While the sample of parents in this study was relatively large compared with the samples reported in the research literature on parenting coordination programs, it was too small to enable the examination of statistical correlations between certain variables (e.g., the reports of parents in the same co-parenting dyad).
- The parent and PC questionnaires were not identical, and thus, could not enable comparison between parents' and PCs' perspectives regarding specific issues.

Further research based on larger sample sizes and data collection strategies tailored to the specific needs and circumstances will hopefully address these issues.

As a final word of hope, we would like to note that the present study was highly valuable in developing a parenting coordination model tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of a highly challenging target population of

families in high-conflict divorce. Based on this study, the leaders of the pilot program further developed a short-range model of parenting coordination in response to the needs of parents who find it difficult to persist in the process (supported by the study findings that indicate the rather limited effectiveness of the program after the 14th session). In addition, effective mechanisms were developed to prevent program dropouts. Also, the questionnaires developed as part of the study were useful in building tools for preliminary diagnosis of the intensity level of the parental conflict and thereby, the adaptation of the parenting coordination process to specific levels of conflict intensity. Last but not least, an evidence-based practice was developed in Israel in light of the study findings, which allows the professionals involved to evaluate the process outcomes based on the desired outcome indicators, and thus take further steps in the best interests of the children.

We had the honor and privilege of conducting a formative evaluation of a pioneering parenting coordination pilot program, which for the first time in Israel, offered a solution in response to the pressing needs of a highly challenging population in distress. The decision to expand the program across Israel in view of the study findings speaks for itself.

We hope and believe that the study and the evidence-based practice developed in light of its findings will significantly contribute to shielding the children entangled in the parental conflict and safeguarding their well-being.

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