

# CIFA-MSF AFC 2022 Conference: Study on Co-Parenting Styles and Arrangements

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# 01

## BACKGROUND

- Research has found that, compared with children whose parents are still married, children who have experienced parental separation have a higher risk of experiencing negative outcomes. However, the negative impact from the marital dissolution may be mitigated if both divorced parents can co-parent well.
- The concept of co-parenting is based on the family systems theory, which treats the family as a system comprising parent-parent and parent-child as subsystems that both affect and are affected by individual family members, the subsystems themselves, and the family as a whole. Children thrive best when they have both parents who cooperate well and are actively involved in their lives to help them grow and develop.

# 02

## OBJECTIVES

- MSF, together with our consultant, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), embarked on a study to better understand the co-parenting styles of divorcees in Singapore with the following objectives:
  1. Chart the state of **co-parenting styles and arrangements** in Singapore;
  2. Examine the relationships between co-parenting styles and child outcomes

# 03

## METHODOLOGY



Face-to-face administered questionnaires; questionnaire developed with our consultants from AIFS



The sample (n=2,007) consists of divorces that:

- were granted (i.e. final judgment date) from 2011 to 2017, and
- involved at least one child aged 4-17 born of the marriage

Sample was selected based on there being **sufficient time** for co-parenting styles and arrangements to emerge, where parents have negotiated parenting arrangements, settled other matrimonial assets, and established a new household after divorce.

# Co-parenting styles assessed from 2 domains

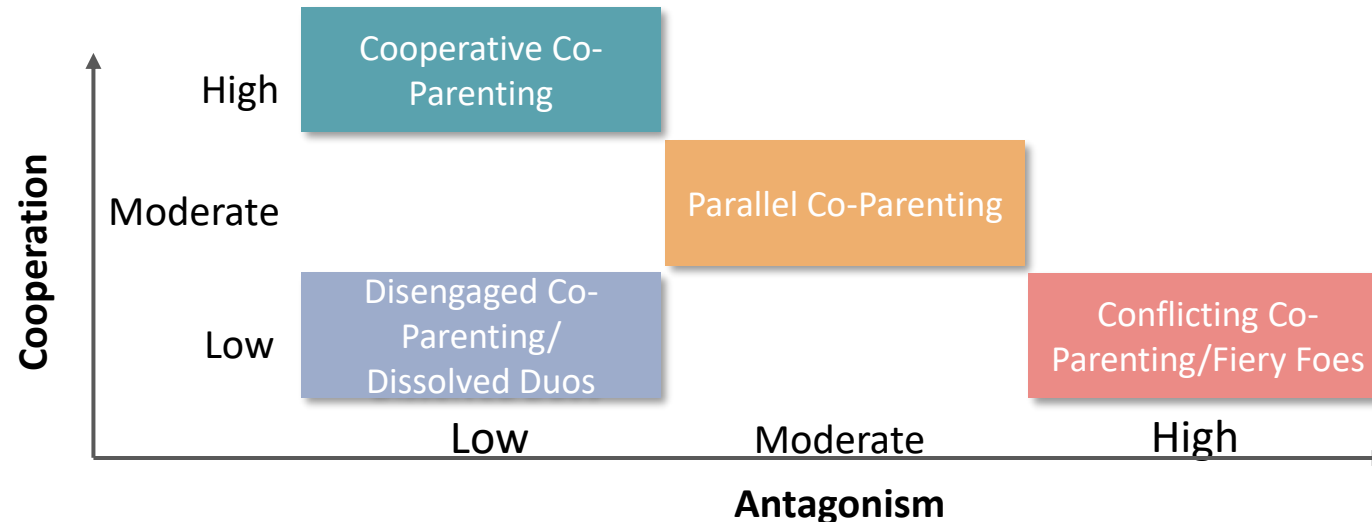
- Guided by AIFS and co-parenting literature, co-parenting styles are derived from:

**1 Co-parenting Arrangements** (e.g. frequency of contact between child and non-C&C parent, no. of overnight stays with non-C&C parent)

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**2 Inter-parental Relationship** (e.g. quality of inter-relationship, degree of antagonism, co-operation between divorcees)

- Common co-parenting styles highlighted in the literature:









# Developing our local co-parenting styles using *Cluster Analysis*<sup>1</sup> using variables from the 2 domains:

## Domain 1: Co-Parenting Arrangements

-  Frequency of contact between the child and the non-C&C parent
-  Whether the child had overnight stays with the non-C&C parent

## Domain 2: Inter-parental Relationship

-  Overall inter-parental relationship
-  Degree of antagonism
-  Degree of cooperation
-  Frequency of parental communication about their children
-  Frequency of parental communication about matters unrelated to their children
-  Number of areas concerning the child in which parents shared decision-making

Note:

1. Cluster analysis is a statistical method to group similar observations into small clusters with similar characteristics. Hierarchical method, two-step cluster analysis was then used to combine some of these clusters, with each of these larger clusters being broadly homogeneous while also having features that distinguish it from the others.

# 3 Co-parenting Styles Emerged based on Cluster Analysis

01

## COOPERATIVE CO-PARENTING

Divorced parents who:

- have high level of **cooperation**
- have **friendly/cooperative** inter-parental relationship
  
- **communicate frequently**
- **make decisions** regarding their children's matters together

Children typically **spend overnights** with the non-C&C parent

02

## PARALLEL CO-PARENTING

Divorced parents who:

- have high degree of **animosity**
- have **distant** inter-parental relationship
  
- **do not communicate** with each other
- seldom make decisions regarding their children's matters together, even though both parents are involved in children's lives

Only a few of the children spend overnights with the non-C&C parent

03

## SINGLE PARENTING

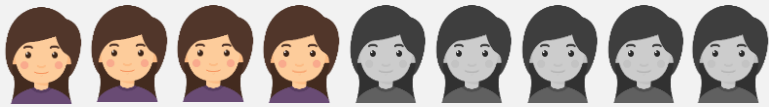
Divorced parents who:

- are **remarried** and are of **lower income**
- have high degree of **animosity, distant** inter-parental relationship
  
- **do not communicate** with each other
- **only one parent is heavily involved in their children's lives**

Children **do not spend overnights** with the non-C&C parent



**5 in 10** fathers are remarried



**4 in 10** mothers are remarried

**9.5** years of marriage

**4 in 10** earned less than \$2,000

## PROFILES OF SINGLE PARENTING

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- higher proportion of remarried parents
- had the shortest marriage duration
- higher proportion of lower-income earners

as compared to the 2 other groups

Note:

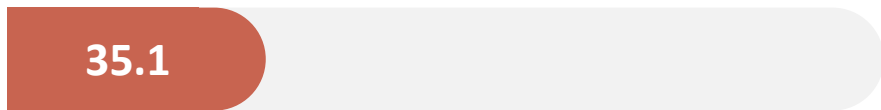
1. The differences were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).



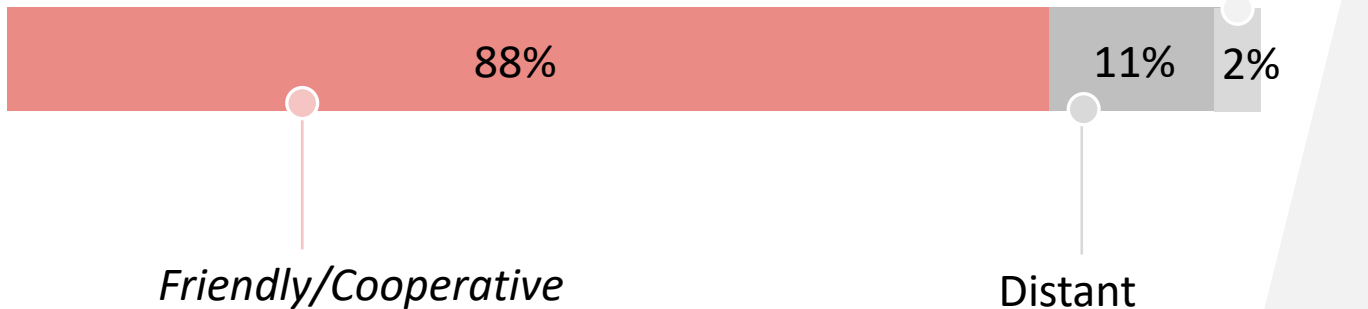
### Inter-parental Cooperation (Mean Score)



### Inter-parental Antagonism (Mean Score)



### Inter-parental relationship



# INTER-PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP

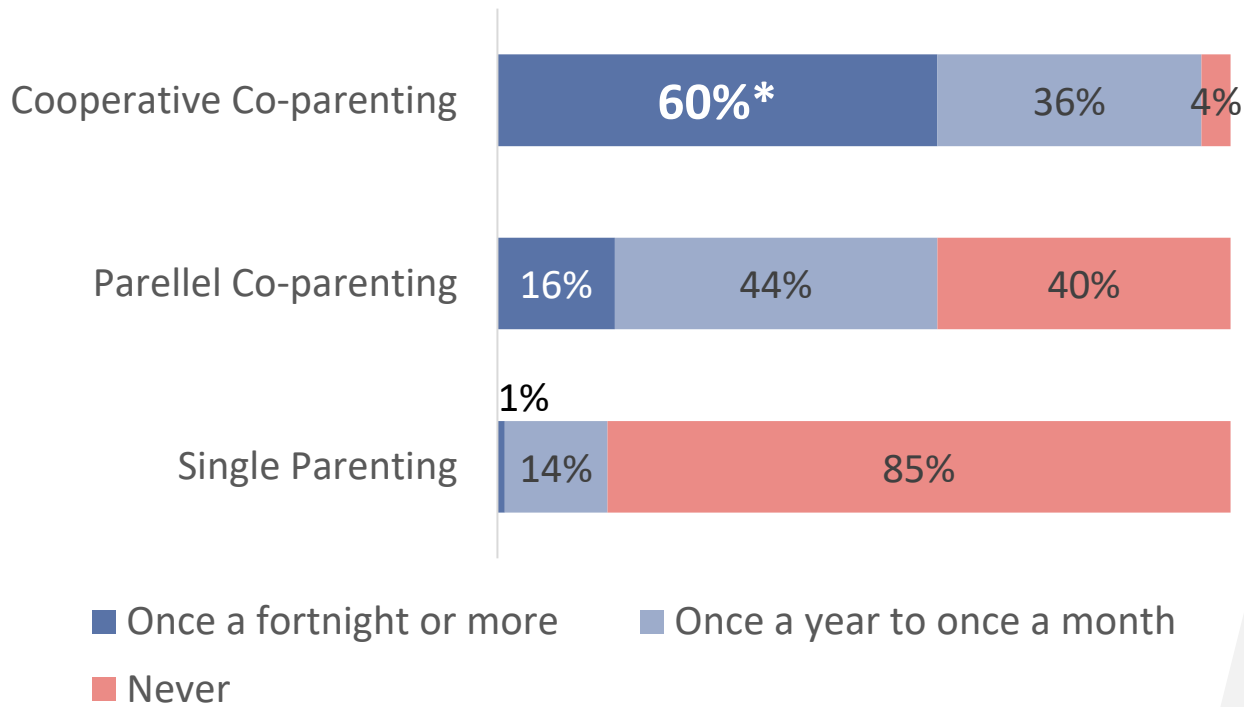
Of the 3 groups, parents in the Cooperative group reported **lowest** inter-parental antagonism and the **highest** inter-parental cooperation scores

Majority of them also reported their inter-parental relationship as friendly/cooperative

Note:

1. \*The differences among the 3 groups were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ )
2. ^The difference between that group and the Cooperative parenting group was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ )

## Frequency of Communication with Ex-spouse in the Last 12 Months About Children



## FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION WITH EX-SPOUSE

Higher proportion of divorcees have regular communications with ex-spouse about matters relating to their children

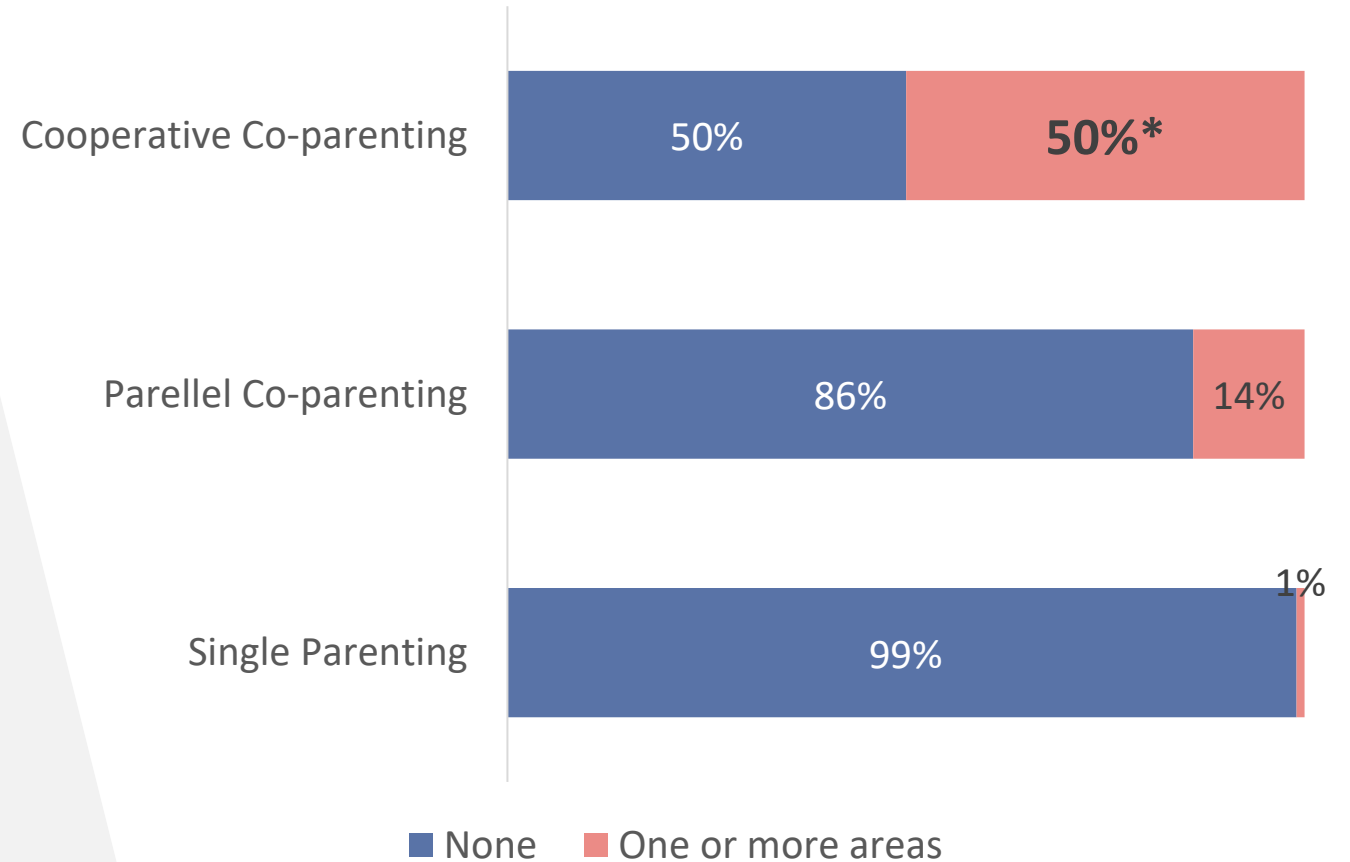
**Note:**

1. \*The differences among the 3 groups were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

# MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

(in areas like education, health)

Higher proportion of divorcees make major decisions about their children **together**

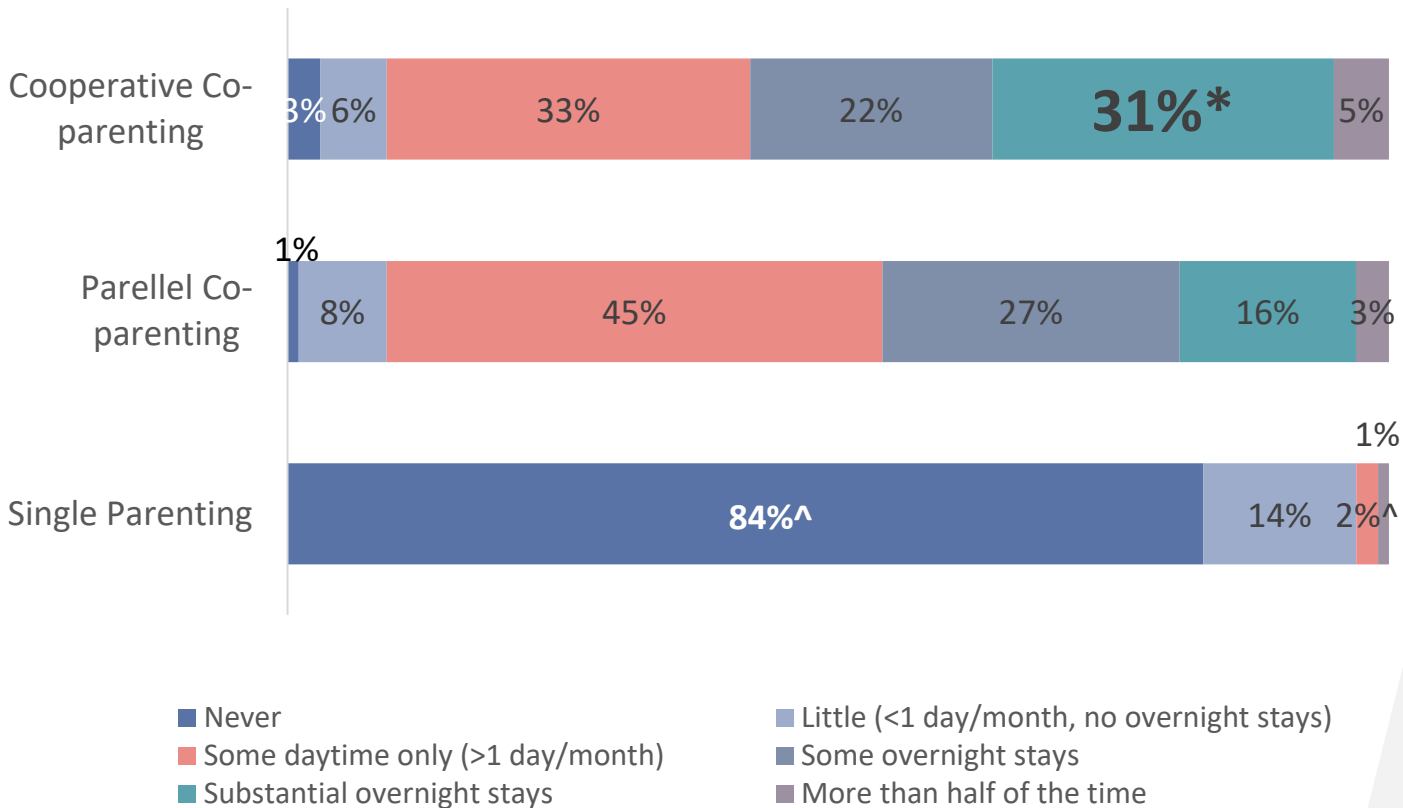


Note:

1. \*The differences among the 3 groups were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

## FREQUENCY OF TIME SPENT WITH NON-C&C PARENT

Children whose parents are in the Cooperative group spent a substantial number of overnight stays with non-C&C parent



### Notes:

- \*The differences among the 3 groups were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ )
- ^The differences between that group and the (i) Cooperative, (ii) Parallel group were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ )
- Some overnight stays refer to 4 to 47 overnight stays per year. ^Substantial number of nights refer to at least 1 overnight stay per week (at least 51 overnight stays per year).

Multi-variate regression analysis conducted to find out if the co-parenting styles are significant in influencing child outcomes. Findings showed that the cooperative co-parenting style is significantly associated with fewer child behavioural and emotional problems compared to Parallel co-parenting and Single parenting, and better school learning behaviour compared to Single parenting.



(Cooperative Coparenting, reference group)

Parallel Coparenting

Single Parenting

|  | Emotional & Behavioural Problems<br><i>(out of 40 points)</i> | School Learning Behaviour<br><i>(out of 100 points)</i> |
|--|---|---|
| (Cooperative Coparenting, reference group) |   |   |
| Parallel Coparenting                       | Worse<br>(coefficient of OLS regression: 0.998*)              |   |
| Single Parenting                           | Worse (0.946*)  | Worse (-2.224*)   |

- Compared to those in cooperative co-parenting, the SDQ (Emotional and Behavioural Problems) scores increased by 0.998 and 0.946 for children in Parallel co-parenting and Single parenting respectively.
- Compared to those in cooperative co-parenting, the School Learning Behaviour score decreased by 2.224 for children in Single parenting. *(A lower score reflects a poorer school learning behaviour)*

Notes:

1. Child's age and gender, the responding parent's educational attainment, income, employment status, repartnering status, and the type of divorce were controlled for.
2. \*statistically significant

- Findings on the co-parenting style were used as information resource on Family Assist portal, an online portal which provides information, services and support to couples facing challenges in their marriage.
- MSF has enhanced the Mandatory Parenting Programme (MPP)\* by introducing self-assessment tools and customised consultation to help parents better understand their co-parenting styles and improve co-parenting outcome. MPP will be renamed Mandatory Co-Parenting Programme (CPP) to reinforce the importance of Co-Parenting after divorce.
- During the MPP (to be renamed to CPP) consultation session, counsellors at the Social Service Agencies (SSAs) will encourage parents to practice cooperative co-parenting, provide tips and resources and nudge the parents to take up relevant services.
- MSF will also share key message on various platforms (where relevant) to encourage divorced parents to co-parent cooperatively

Note:

1. Parents with children below 21 years old are required to attend the programme before filing for divorce if they are unable to reach an agreement with their spouse on both the grounds for divorce and/or all ancillary matters)

## Usage of Findings

**THANK YOU**