UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À TROIS-RIVIÈRES

PROFILS PARENTAUX DANS LA MÉDIATION FAMILIALE : CONSIDÉRATIONS RELATIVES À LA SÉCURITÉ, À L'ADAPTATION PSYCHOLOGIQUE ET AUX CONFLITS ENTRE LES PARENTS

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UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À TROIS-RIVIÈRES

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Résumé substantiel en français

Introduction

Au Québec, plus de la moitié des parents québécois qui se séparent utilisent les services de médiation familiale dans les deux années suivant leur séparation (Poitras et al., 2023). Chaque année, entre 17 000 et 20 000 parents québécois en font usage (Ministère de la Justice du Québec, 2017-2023). Le service de médiation familiale favoriserait des ententes mutuellement satisfaisantes (Ministère de la justice du Québec, 2025) et présenterait des avantages par rapport à la judiciarisation, tels qu'une plus grande satisfaction à l'égard du processus ainsi qu'une plus grande satisfaction quant aux résultats (Shaw, 2010).

La séparation parentale constitue une période de transition marquée par de multiples défis d'adaptation pour les familles, par exemple des enjeux de toxicomanie, une augmentation des problèmes de santé mentale chez les adultes et des difficultés financières (Amato, 2010; Lee et al., 2021), lesquels sont souvent cumulés et interreliés (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986; McIntosh et Ralfs, 2012). Les enjeux de santé mentale (p.ex. Gibb et al., 2011; Hewitt et al., 2012), de consommation de substances (p. ex. Baum, 2004; Braver et al., 2006) et de conflits parentaux (p. ex. Amato, 2010; Ferraro et al., 2025) sont des risques associés à l'expérience de la séparation, mais n'ont pas été spécifiquement étudiés dans un contexte de médiation familiale. Au contraire, la violence conjugale est un facteur de risque psychosocial qui a été à la fois étudié dans le contexte de séparation et de la médiation familiale (p.ex. Huot, 2019; Jiang et al., 2023). Bien que

certains défis liés à l'adaptation et à la sécurité puissent être transitoires et évoluer différemment selon les individus (Ding et al., 2021; Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2024), leur prise en compte demeure essentielle, car ils sont susceptibles d'influencer le déroulement du service de médiation familiale. La violence conjugale en constitue un exemple, puisqu'elle compromet les principes fondamentaux de ce service, soit la sécurité et l'équité (p. ex. Huot, 2019; Jiang et al., 2023). Enfin, s'il a été démontré que la violence conjugale compromet la possibilité d'obtenir des ententes en médiation familiale (p. ex., Beck et al., 2010), d'autres enjeux d'adaptation à la séparation pourraient également influencer la capacité des parents à parvenir à des ententes ou les conduire à recourir à la judiciarisation.

La littérature tend à examiner ces facteurs de manière isolée et souvent à partir d'échantillons partiels ou non représentatifs, ce qui limite la compréhension de la manière dont ces difficultés coexistent et peuvent influencer la médiation familiale. Ainsi, le portrait incomplet de la diversité des parents et des problématiques auxquelles ils sont confrontés contribue à la difficulté d'obtenir des services optimaux adaptés à la clientèle. Cela justifie le recours à des approches centrées sur la personne pour mieux comprendre l'hétérogénéité des profils de parents qui ont recours à la médiation familiale.

Objectifs

La présente étude vise à examiner la diversité des profils des parents québécois ayant recours à la médiation familiale, eu égard aux enjeux liés à la sécurité et au bien-être (santé

mentale, consommation de substances, conflits coparentaux, violence conjugale et adaptation à la séparation). Elle vise également à analyser les liens entre ces profils et les caractéristiques sociodémographiques et familiales des parents, ainsi qu'à examiner les liens entre ces profils et leurs modes de règlement des conséquences de leur séparation, en parallèle à la médiation.

Méthodologie

Les données de cette étude proviennent de l'Enquête longitudinale auprès des parents séparés et recomposés du Québec [l'ELPSRQ] (Saint-Jacques et al., 2020). Pour faire partie de l'enquête, les parents devaient être séparés depuis moins de 24 mois en date du 1er juin 2018, avoir au moins un enfant de moins de 14 ans issu de leur union et avoir vécu avec l'autre parent durant au moins la grossesse. Parmi les 1 551 répondants de l'ELPSRQ au premier temps de mesure (environ deux ans après la séparation), 808 parents (385 pères et 423 mères ; M = 38,94 ans) ayant eu recours à la médiation familiale ou étant en attente de ce service, ont été analysés dans la présente étude. Les pères et les mères ont été échantillonnés indépendamment. Les deux parents d'un même enfant peuvent être inclus dans l'échantillon, mais chaque parent ne peut apparaître qu'une seule fois, même s'il y a plus d'un enfant.

D'abord, les mesures suivantes : le motif à la base de la séparation; les violences post-séparation et l'usage des services de protection; la détresse psychologique (K6; Kessler et al., 2003); l'adaptation à la séparation; la fréquence de consommation; la qualité de la

relation coparentale (adaptation du CPS; Feinberg, Brown, & Kan, 2012) et la fréquence des désaccords désagréables, ont été sélectionnées. Une analyse factorielle exploratoire a été réalisée pour réduire l'ensemble des variables catégorielles et continues en facteurs. Ensuite, une analyse de profils latents a été réalisée à partir des scores factoriels pondérés de chacune des dimensions extraites de l'analyse factorielle exploratoire. L'analyse de profils latents a permis d'identifier des sous-groupes de parents séparés ayant des caractéristiques similaires. Ensuite, ces profils ont été comparés avec les caractéristiques sociodémographiques et liées à la séparation ainsi que le mode de règlement des conséquences de la séparation à l'aide de tests du chi-carré et d'ANOVAs.

Résultats

L'analyse factorielle a permis de faire ressortir une solution optimale à trois facteurs. Les dimensions retenues ont été nommées de la façon suivante (1) enjeux de sécurité; (2) climat conflictuel; (3) détresse psychologique et difficultés d'adaptation. Ensuite, l'analyse de profils latents a permis de retenir deux solutions pertinentes, soit un modèle à quatre profils et un modèle à cinq profils. Le choix final s'est arrêté sur la solution à cinq profils puisqu'elle permet d'identifier un groupe de parents ayant des enjeux sur chacune des trois dimensions, ce que la solution à quatre profils ne permettait pas.

Chacun des profils est différencié principalement par le niveau de présence ou d'absence d'enjeux de sécurité, de climat conflictuel et de détresse psychologique. Le profil 1, « Bon accord parental et bonne adaptation », regroupe 37,3 % (n = 298); le profil

2, « Conflits et enjeux de sécurité / bonne adaptation », représente 24 % (n = 194); le profil 3, « Conflits / bonne adaptation », représente 22,4 % (n = 181); le profil 4, « Bon accord parental / adaptation très difficile », représente 8,4 % (n = 68); le profil 5, « Conflits et enjeux de sécurité marqués / adaptation très difficile », représente 8,2 % (n = 67). Les analyses ont mis en évidence que les différents profils de parents utilisant la médiation familiale se distinguent par des caractéristiques allant au-delà de celles sociodémographiques.

Parmi les différents profils, 37,3 % des parents ont un bon accord parental et une bonne adaptation et sont ceux qui utilisent le plus souvent uniquement la médiation familiale comme mode de règlement des conséquences de la séparation (91 %). Par ailleurs, 32 % des parents de l'échantillon présentent des enjeux de sécurité tandis que 16,6 % ont une détresse psychologique et une adaptation très difficile. Au total, près des deux tiers des parents présentent différents facteurs de risque comme les enjeux de sécurité, de santé mentale, d'adaptation et de conflits à des degrés variables d'intensité. Finalement, les profils conflictuels sont ceux qui recourent davantage à la judiciarisation comme méthode de résolution des conséquences de la séparation.

En somme, ces résultats permettent de décrire la diversité des profils de parents qui utilisent les services de médiation familiale au Québec sous l'angle des défis particuliers auxquels ils font face, soit les conflits coparentaux, les enjeux de santé mentale et d'adaptation ainsi que des enjeux de sécurité. Cela permet de différencier ces profils, d'en

établir les particularités et ainsi brosser un portrait représentatif de la pratique en médiation familiale. Ainsi, cette étude a pour effet d'ajouter aux réflexions quant aux meilleures pratiques professionnelles, aux défis présents dans le domaine de la médiation familiale et au possible système de triage pouvant optimiser le service à ces parents. La perspective d'analyse centrée sur la personne, différente de celles présentent dans la littérature, ouvre la voie à de nouvelles recherches complémentaires (p.ex., une étude employant des mesures plus précises concernant certaines problématiques comme la consommation).

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Article scientifique

Parental Profiles in Family Mediation: Consideration of Security, Psychological Adjustment, and Coparental Conflict

Parental Profiles in Family Mediation: Consideration of Security, Psychological Adjustment, and Coparental Conflict

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Summary

Research context: Family mediation is a growing practice that is used by over half of recently separated parents in the province of Québec (Canada). Despite the advantages, certain risks such as psychological adjustment issues, conflicts, and the presence of violence can affect or contraindicate the mediation process. Moreover, the incomplete picture of the diversity of parents who use family mediation complicates the provision of tailored services.

Objectives: This study aimed to examine the profiles of parents who use family mediation in terms of risks to safety and wellbeing, sociodemographic characteristics, and methods of resolving the consequences of separation in parallel with mediation.

Methodology: Using data from the Longitudinal Study of Separated Parents and Stepfamilies in Québec [LSSPSQ], latent profile analysis (LPA) was conducted in a sample of 808 parents (385 fathers, 423 mothers) who had used family mediation or were waiting to use it.

Results: Results show that parental profiles differed according to characteristics beyond sociodemographics. Moreover, 37.3% of parents had good parental agreement and adjustment, and of these, 91% resolved the consequences of their separation solely through family mediation. However, 32% of parents reported safety issues and 16.6% reported psychological distress and significant adjustment problems.

Contributions: This study describes the diversity of parental profiles and their specific characteristics. The results enrich the discussion on best professional practices and challenges in family mediation. This fresh perspective opens the way to further research, for example, using tailored scales to target specific issues.

Keywords: family mediation, separation, Québec, parents, profile

Introduction

Parental separation is a period of transition marked by numerous adjustment challenges for the whole family (Amato, 2010; Lee et al., 2021). These challenges can accumulate and influence each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986; McIntosh & Ralfs, 2012). To deal with them, parents may resort to litigation or alternative methods, such as family mediation, a psycho-legal service aimed at promoting mutually satisfactory agreements (Ministère de la justice du Québec, 2025). The regulation of mediation and mediators is an emerging international trend (O'Shea & Conneely, 2023), and family mediation is a growing practice, with several associations around the world (e.g., Association of Family and Conciliation Courts [AFCC], 2025; Comité des organismes accréditeurs en médiation familiale [COAMF], 2016). The advantages over litigation include greater satisfaction (i.e., lower acrimony) with the process and outcomes (Shaw, 2010). Family mediation is widespread in Québec, where over half of parents use it within two years of separation (Poitras et al., 2023), and from 17,000 to 20,000 parents use it each year (Ministère de la Justice du Québec, 2017–2023). This context makes Québec a strategic location for deepening our understanding of the issues involved.

On the one hand, separated parents are subjected to various problems, including domestic violence, psychological distress, substance abuse, and severe conflicts (Amato, 2010; Raley & Sweeney, 2020). On the other hand, some of these problems, notably domestic violence, can affect the family mediation process (e.g., Beck et al., 2010; Huot, 2019; Jiang et al., 2023). A few studies have considered the combined effect of risk factors in separated parents, but without specifically examining family mediation (e.g., Whisman, 2001), and even fewer have done so in the context of family mediation (McIntosh et al., 2016).

Studies on family mediation tend to focus on a specific risk, namely domestic violence, due to related safety issues (e.g., Ballard et al., 2011a; Beck et al., 2010; Huber Gifford et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2023). However, few studies have analyzed these factors at the population level. Instead, they have used nonrepresentative samples (e.g., Ballard et al., 2011a) or focused on a single risk factor at a time (Beck et al., 2013). Furthermore, studies based on person-centered analyses are scarce. Exceptionally, Ferraro and colleagues (2025) described the heterogeneity of parents attending a divorce education program and identified profiles to allow adapting the intervention to meet specific needs. Similar studies are needed to account for the diversity of problems experienced by separated parents who use family mediation. The present study aims to address the lack of person-centered studies by describing different profiles of parents who used family mediation services.

Parental separation

The separation process is a particularly stressful time for families, often accompanied by the emergence or worsening of several risk factors, including domestic violence (Brownridge et al., 2008; Brown & Mazuy, 2022), mental health issues (Gibb et al., 2011; Hewitt et al., 2012), substance use (Baum, 2004; Braver et al., 2006), and severe parental conflict (Amato, 2010; Ferraro et al., 2025; McIntosh et al., 2011). Furthermore, some studies that compared separated individuals to those in relationships or single individuals reported poorer mental health and lower overall health scores in separated individuals (Hewitt et al., 2012; Kalmijn, 2017; Leopold, 2018; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Researchers have identified a wide variety of post-separation adjustment profiles, which change over time. The emotional consequences are most pronounced in the short term (Ding et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2024), while the majority adjust in the medium term (up to 5 years) and a minority remain vulnerable (Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015).

As in many Western countries, parental separation is a common reality in Québec. For example, almost 40% of Québec children born in the late 1990s experienced a separation by their parents before the age of 18 (Desrosiers & Tétreault, 2018). In 2019, the Canadian Health Survey of Children and Youth reported that 23% of Québec children aged 1 to 17 had experienced the separation or divorce of their parents during their childhood compared to the Canadian average of 18% (Statistics Canada, 2022). Québec also differs from many Western countries in having a high prevalence of births outside marriage (65.5%) (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2024).

Family mediation

Family mediation is an alternative dispute resolution method that is facilitated by an impartial third party. The aim is to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement between consenting parents who wish to end their relationship. The basic principles of this service include respect, fairness, safety, impartiality, and trust (COAMF, 2016).

In Québec, family mediation is a voluntary and free service. Since 2012, the Québec Ministry of Justice has offered parents with dependent children five hours of free mediation, with an additional two and a half hours for reviewing agreements or judgments (Ministère de la justice du Québec, 2025). Of family mediation users, 81% said they were satisfied (SOM, 2017). Similarly, high levels of satisfaction have been reported internationally. For example, in Australia, 73,2% of 704 parents with at least one child who participated in family mediation between May and November 2017 reported being satisfied with the service (Heard et al., 2024). Research on family mediation indicates that, compared to the judicial route, it may be more beneficial for the coparenting relationship, provided that risks such as domestic violence are identified and managed (Anderson, 2017; Ballard et al., 2011b; Sbarra & Emery, 2008). However, despite the widespread use of mediation in Québec, little is known about the characteristics of the parents who use it, and particularly the problems they experience. These problems can compromise the basic principles of mediation and make it challenging for professionals to meet their obligations, such as recognizing the limits of their expertise, referring participants to the necessary

resources, and ensuring the physical and psychological safety of participants (COAMF, 2016).

Separated parents who use family mediation

The literature reports heterogeneity in the characteristics of parents who use family mediation. In Québec, the evidence indicates that parents who use mediation tend to have above average education and income levels, are more likely to be married, and are less likely to have preschool-aged children than those who do not use mediation (SOM, 2017; Poitras et al., 2023). However, this overall portrait masks considerable diversity among mediation users. Given that half of separated parents in Québec participate in family mediation within two years of their separation (Poitras et al., 2023), substantial heterogeneity in their individual and family characteristics should be expected. This highlights the need for person-centered approaches.

A major challenge for mediation professionals is to account for the multiple risk factors involved and their interactions. Domestic violence has been widely documented in parents who are separating and in parents who use family mediation, and it is the most documented risk factor. In a Statistics Canada survey (Conroy, 2021), almost half (45%) of domestic violence victims in Canada reported experiencing violence after separation, and for 38% of these, the violence continued for over six months after the breakup. Moreover, the severity of violence can increase after separation, along with higher risks of injury, harassment, sexual assault, homicide, and so on (Brown & Mazuy, 2022; Bureau

du Coroner, 2022a, 2022b). Notably, divorced and separated women are nine times more likely to experience domestic violence than married women (Brownridge et al., 2008). Several studies highlight the impact of domestic violence on the family mediation process, particularly in terms of threats to individual safety and process fairness (e.g., Huot, 2019; Jiang et al., 2023; Riendeau, 2012), as well as lower possibility of reaching an agreement (Ballard et al., 2011b; Beck et al., 2010; Kelly, 2004). Accordingly, several mediator associations consider domestic violence a contraindication and offer guidelines for assessing violence as a risk factor (e.g., COAMF, 2016; Association of Family and Conciliation Courts [AFCC], 2025). Nevertheless, studies indicate that even though a significant proportion of parents (40%–80%) participating in court-ordered family mediation report exposure to various types of domestic violence, they are rarely excluded from the process (Beck et al., 2009; Beck et al., 2010; Beck et al., 2013). Although domestic violence is not an absolute barrier to the use of family mediation (Ballard et al., 2011a; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2021a, 2021b; Poitras et al., 2023), it can negatively impact the underlying principles of mediation, namely fairness, safety, and free and informed consent (Huot, 2016, 2019; Jiang et al., 2023).

Furthermore, to our knowledge, very few studies have addressed mental health issues in the context of family mediation. However, a longitudinal study by Gibb and colleagues (2011) suggests a bidirectional relationship between separation and mental health issues. On the one hand, pre-existing mental health problems can increase the risk of separation by affecting marital dynamics and relationship stability. On the other hand, separation

itself can cause or exacerbate psychological difficulties, such as depression and anxiety, and increase the risk of suicidal behavior (Gibb et al., 2011). While some studies suggest that these effects may be short-lived, making it difficult to establish clear causal links (Tran et al., 2024), others indicate that recent separation is a significant risk factor for suicide, similar to other major stressors (Ide et al., 2010; Kõlves et al., 2010, 2011). It has been established that psychological distress can hinder parents' ability to participate constructively in family mediation. Psychological distress can impact essential functions such as communication, negotiation, and solution-seeking (Amani et al., 2023; Zamir et al., 2020). Furthermore, parents with significant symptoms of psychological distress are less likely to reach a mutually satisfactory family mediation agreement due to the difficulty in engaging in cooperative dispute settlement (Sbarra & Emery, 2008). Given the debilitating effects of mental health issues, psychological distress should be considered a risk factor for family mediation users so that it can be properly identified and referred as needed.

Studies addressing adjustment to separation show that the psychological effects of breakup (distress, anxiety, depression, lower quality of life) are more pronounced in the short term, when individuals are more likely to seek family mediation services, and that these effects diminish over time depending on personal and contextual variables (Ding et al., 2021; Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2024). Perceived social support is one of the strongest facilitating factors for breakup adjustment (Kołodziej-Zaleska & Przybyła-Basista, 2016), and one of the best predictors of good emotional health after a breakup,

along with having a new partner (Tran et al., 2024). In addition, individuals who initiate the separation tend to report fewer negative emotions than their ex-partners (Tran et al., 2024). However, although adjustment problems can influence the mediation process, and mediation can in turn serve as a gateway to specialized services, no study to our knowledge has examined the link between family mediation and adjustment to separation.

In parallel, studies suggest that increased use of substances such as alcohol and drugs after separation can result from weakened mental health and contribute to exacerbate tensions between ex-partners (Baum, 2004; Braver et al., 2006). Some men increase their alcohol use after separation as a strategy to cope with emotional distress (Baum, 2004; Braver et al., 2006; Dubeau et al., 2016). Similarly, Varin and colleagues (2021) report that Canadian women of childbearing age who are separated, divorced, widowed, or single are more likely to report excessive alcohol use than those who are married or in a common-law relationship. However, little is known about the substance use effect or its consequences in the context of family mediation.

Finally, some parents may have to deal with severe separation conflicts, which can hinder effective family mediation. Separation conflicts are characterized by significant problems in coparenting, high hostility and mistrust between parents, mutual denigration, and inability to collaborate to reach mutual agreement (Cyr et al., 2020; Ferraro et al., 2025; Polak & Saini, 2019). Moreover, severe separation conflicts are predictors of failure to reach a family mediation agreement (Anderson et al., 2017; Ballard et al., 2011b). Such

conflicts can directly hinder parents' ability to engage in effective family mediation. Moreover, these parents tend to drain significant psychosocial and legal resources (Anderson et al., 2010; Cyr et al., 2020). Identifying these parents can facilitate targeted support and tailored interventions, as well as referral to more suitable resources.

In sum, despite the marked interest in risk factors such as domestic violence, we know little about the different risk factor profiles of family mediation users or their impact on the appropriateness of mediation. Given the cumulative and interrelated nature of these factors, person-centered analytic approaches are particularly appropriate for identifying clinically meaningful patterns across individuals. Most studies that address these aspects use variable-centered approaches, while few use individual-centered analyses to explore the diversity of profiles. Mediation outcomes (e.g., complete or partial settlement of issues via mediation, subsequent litigation) have also been neglected. Accordingly, the present study aims to: (1) examine the diversity of profiles of parents in Québec who use family mediation services in relation to risks to safety and well-being (mental health, substance use, coparenting conflicts, domestic violence, adjustment to separation); (2) examine associations between parents' profiles and their sociodemographic and family characteristics; and (3) examine associations between parents' profiles and the methods they used to resolve the consequences of separation in parallel with, prior to, and after family mediation.

Method

Participants

We obtained data for our analysis from the first of three measurement waves of the Longitudinal Study of Separated Parents and Stepfamilies in Québec [LSSPSQ] (Saint-Jacques et al., 2020), a population-based study. To be eligible, parents had to have lived with the other parent during at least the pregnancy, have at least one child below age 14 from their union, and have been separated for less than 24 months as of June 1, 2018. Data were collected from September 2018 to September 2019. The sample was stratified according to parent's gender to obtain an equal distribution of fathers and mothers. The final sample for the first measurement period includes 1,551 separated respondents representative of 56,000 separated Québec parents (sum of the population weights of the sample). Note that the sample was drawn at the parent level. Mothers and fathers were sampled independently, meaning that both parents of the same child could be included in the sample. However, each parent was included only once, regardless of the number of children associated with that parent in the administrative database.

Our study focuses on the 808 parents (52%, 48% fathers) who reported that they used or were awaiting family mediation services in connection with the separation documented in the LSSPSQ (Saint-Jacques et al., 2020). These parents (M = 38.94 years, SD = 6.17 years) had been separated for an average of 21 months (SD = 7.8). In addition, 70% of the parents were common-law spouses prior to separation, and 47.6% had remarried or entered into a new relationship.

Measures

Reasons for separation

Reasons for separation (multiple-choice question): No longer in love with each other and/or marital dissatisfaction; Conflictual relationship and/or disagreement; Mental health issues (excluding addiction issues); Meeting someone else and/or infidelity; Domestic violence and/or violence towards children; Addiction issues (alcohol, drugs, medication, gambling); Other.

Domestic violence / safety issues

To measure *post-separation violence against self* (yes, no) or *committed* (yes, no), parents responded whether, from a list of incidents, one or more had occurred since the separation: *psychological violence* (e.g., belittling the other parent, destroying something that belongs to them, frightening them, or making them feel insecure); *psychological violence using the children* (e.g., using the children to convey degrading messages, threatening to make them lose custody of the children); *physical/sexual violence* (e.g., pushing, grabbing, or shaking the other person, forcing the other person to perform sexual acts against their will). For *use of one or more personal protection services in connection with the separation* (if any of the following services are selected: yes, no) they responded whether they had used or were forced to use any of the following: youth protection, shelter (adults only), shelter (adults and children), hospitalization, police services, access rights supervision.

Mental health

Parents' nonspecific *psychological distress* was measured using the Kessler (K6) (Kessler et al., 2003), a brief, six-item scale that assesses several forms of psychological distress, including behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and psychophysiological distress (feelings experienced during the past 30 days, ranging from 1 = never to 5 = all of the time; 6 items summed and converted to a scale of 0 to 4, min. 0–max. 24). The scale has been used in several health surveys of the general adult population due to its conciseness and psychometric properties (Kessler et al., 2002), with internal reliability ranging from 0.89 to 0.92, internal consistency of 0.76, and validity across various cultures (Kessler et al., 2010). The item *adjustment to separation* (5-point Likert scale, 1 = completely to 5 = not at all) was taken from the Acrimony Scale (Shaw & Emery, 1987, translated by Lemieux & Cloutier, 1994).

Substance use

Frequency of alcohol use and *frequency of cannabis use* were measured on a seven-point scale (over the past 12 months, 1 = never to 7 = 4–6 times per week). The item for alcohol use was taken from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) – Mental Health 2012 (Statistics Canada, 2013). The item for cannabis use was adapted from the item for alcohol use.

Conflicts

Quality of the coparenting relationship was measured using an adapted reverse translation of 16 items from five subscales of the Coparenting Relationship Scale [CRS] (long and short versions, Feinberg, Brown, & Kan, 2012): absence of coparenting undermining, coparenting support, endorse partner parenting, educational agreement and exposure to conflict (reverse mean). The convergent validity and reliability of the CRS have been demonstrated (Feinberg et al., 2012). A coparenting score was created by averaging the subscale scores. The higher the score (min. 0, max. 6), the better the overall coparenting. The *frequency of unpleasant disagreements* was assessed using an item adapted from the Multidimensional Measure of Interparental Conflict (Tschann et al., 1999) (1 = never to 6 = every day).

Settlement of consequences of separation

Method of settling the consequences of separation (yes, no): amicably, without the use of professional services or family mediation; negotiations with the help of lawyers; at least a court appearance or decision after a trial. The method that corresponds to the highest degree of judicial involvement was used in the analysis.

Sociodemographic and separation-related variables

As *contextual variables*, we included *parent's gender*; *parent's age*; *demographic area* (4 categories based on population size: Montreal Census Metropolitan Area (CMA); other CMA; agglomeration with 10,000–100,000 inhabitants; small towns and rural areas

< 10,000 inhabitants); *marital status at the time of the union with the ex-partner* and *current marital status*; *number of children with the ex-partner*; *age of the target child* (randomly selected from among children under 14); *duration of the union*; *personal income level*; *education level*; *current family structure*; *country of birth*; *occupation at the time of separation* and *current occupation*; *person who ended the relationship*; and *time elapsed since separation*.

Analysis plan

Analyses were performed using SPSS (version 29) and MPlus (version 7). Analyses were conducted using the population weights provided with the original survey dataset. The sample weight developed for the survey was calculated based on the probability of (a) being selected (based on age group, gender and geographical region), (b) being eligible (based on child's age and time since separation) and (c) responding (age group, gender, language, geographical region, socioeconomic deprivation index).

Factor analysis

An initial exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation was performed to reduce the complexity of the set of continuous (*frequency of alcohol use*; *frequency of cannabis use*; *quality of coparenting*; *frequency of conflicts*; *psychological distress*; *adjusting to separation*) and categorical variables (*reason for separation: conflictual relationship and/or disagreement*; *reason for separation: mental health problem*; *reason for separation: meeting someone else/infidelity*; *reason for separation: domestic violence*;

reason for separation: addiction issues; *use of one or multiple personal protection services*; *physical abuse against self*; *physical violence committed*; *psychological violence against self using the child and/or partner*; *psychological violence committed by oneself and/or using the child*). To determine the number of factors to retain and summarize the set of variables, we examined the theoretical significance of the obtained factors in addition to the following statistical fit indices: the Comparative Fit Index [CFI] (Bentler, 1990), the Tucker-Lewis [TLI] (Tucker & Lewis, 1973), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA] (Steiger, 1990).

Latent profile analysis [LPA]

LPA was performed based on the weighted factor scores for each dimension extracted from the exploratory factor analysis in order to identify subgroups of separated parents with similar characteristics. The optimal solution was selected using the Akaike information criterion [AIC] (Akaike, 1987), the Bayesian information criterion [BIC] (Schwartz, 1978), entropy (classification quality from 0 to 1), and the clinical significance of the observed profiles. The best solution has the lowest AIC and BIC and the entropy closest to 1 (Geiser, 2013; Nylund, Asparouhov & Muthén, 2007).

Comparison of profiles using Chi-square and ANOVA

Finally, the obtained profiles were compared with the sociodemographic characteristics and the methods used to settle the consequences of separation.

Results

Factor analysis

The factor model was selected in two stages. First, after analyzing the CFI, TLI, and entropy adjustments in solutions with one to six factors, we noted that additional factors were associated with systematically better adjustment indices. Based on the ratio between the change in chi-square (additional fit) and the degree of freedom (addition of complexity to the model), the three-factor model appeared to provide the best compromise between explanation and complexity (see Table 1).

Table 1

Factorial solution indicators

	1	2	**3**	4	5	6
Free parameters	24	41	**57**	72	86	99
Chi-Square	430.262 (*df* = 135) *	364.051 (*df* = 118) *	**269.803 (*df* = 102) ***	206.429 (*df* = 87) *	157.527 (*df* = 73) *	102.925 (*df* = 60) *
Ratio Δ / df	NA	66.21/17 3.89	**94.25 / 16 5.89**	63.37/ 15 4.22	48.90 / 14 3.49	54.60/13 4.2
RMSEA	.052	.051, 90% CI [.045 - .057]	**.045, 90% CI [.039 - .886]**	.041, 90% CI [.034- .977]	.038, 90% CI [.030-.046]	.030, 90% CI [.020-.039]
CFI	.852	.877	**.916**	.940	.958	.979
TLI	.832	.840	**.874**	.895	.911	.945
Items by factor		1: 4*, 1 non-sig. 2: 8*, 2 non-sig. Any: 2 items	**1: 4* 2: 7*, 1 non-sig. 3: 2*, 1 non-sig. Any: 3 items**	1 : 6* 2 : 3* 3: 6 non-sig. 4: 2 *, 1 non-sig.	1: nothing 2: 5* 3: 4* 4: 2*, 2 non-sig. 5: 3* Any: 1 item	1: 5* 2: 2*, 1 non-sig. 3: 4* 4: 1* 5: 2* 6: nothing Any: 3 items
Interpretability			**Best ratio and distribution of items by factors**	Non-significant items in factor 3	No items on factor 1	No items on factor 6

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom. Δ = delta. RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation. CI = Confidence Interval. CFI = (Comparative Fit Index). TLI = (Tucker-Lewis Index). * $p < .05$

The results of the factor analysis indicated three dimensions. The first dimension, Security issues, includes the following variables: reasons for separation (conflictual relationship and/or disagreement, mental health problems, meeting someone else/infidelity, domestic violence, and addiction problems); frequency of alcohol use; use of one or more individual protection services; physical violence against self, and physical violence committed. The second dimension, Conflictual climate, includes the following variables: frequency of cannabis use, quality of coparenting, frequency of conflicts,

psychological violence against self using the child and/or partner, and psychological violence committed by oneself and/or using the child. The third dimension, Psychological distress and adjustment problems, includes the following variables: psychological distress and adjustment to separation (see Table 2). Descriptive data (mean, standard deviation, and frequencies) for the main variables for the entire sample are also presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Factor analysis: items and factor loadings

No	Items	Mean Standard deviation	Frequency	Factors		
				Security issues	Conflict climate	Mental health and adjustment Issues
1	Reason for separation: conflictual relationship and/or disagreement (**yes**/no)		45.5%	.315*	.140	-.140
2	Reason for separation: mental health problem (**yes**/no)		12.5%	.296*	.028	-.095
3	Reason for separation: Meeting someone else/infidelity (**yes**/no)		31.7%	-.235*	.107	.142
4	Reason for separation: domestic violence (**yes**/no)		7.4%	.789*	.030	-.108
5	Reason for separation: addiction issues (**yes**/no)		11.6%	.329*	.235	-.025
6	Frequency of alcohol use	*M*: 4.62 *SD*: 1.79		-.168*	-.012	-.030
7	Use of one or multiple personal protection services (**yes**/no)		14.0%	.533*	.288	.012
8	Physical abuse against self (**yes**/no)		8.9%	.636*	.211	.017
9	Physical violence committed (**yes**/no)		1.4%	.780*	-.019	.276
10	Frequency of cannabis use	*M*: 1.64 *SD*: 1.55		-.089	.221*	.036
11	Quality of coparenting	*M*: 4.03 *SD*: 1.24		-.226	-.519*	.033
12	Frequency of conflicts	*M*: 2.59 *SD*: 1.12		.165	.496*	.006
13	Psychological violence against self using the child and/or partner (**yes**/no)		54.1%	.005	.837*	-.162
14	Psychological violence committed by oneself and/or using the child (**yes**/no)		32.5%	-.246	.881*	.006
15	Psychological distress	*M*: 6.05 *SD*: 4.01		.197	.223	.322*
16	Adjusting to separation	*M*: 1.64 *SD*: .93		-.002	.163	.832*

Note. * $p < .05$.

Latent profile analyses

Using the three dimensions identified in the exploratory factor analysis, a latent profile analysis was conducted by estimating models with one to six profiles (see Table 3). Both the four- and five-profile solutions demonstrated good fit according to the

statistical indices. The five-profile solution was retained because it identified an additional, clinically meaningful subgroup of parents exhibiting elevated levels across all three dimensions (n = 67), a profile that was not distinguished in the four-profile solution (Figure 1).

Table 3

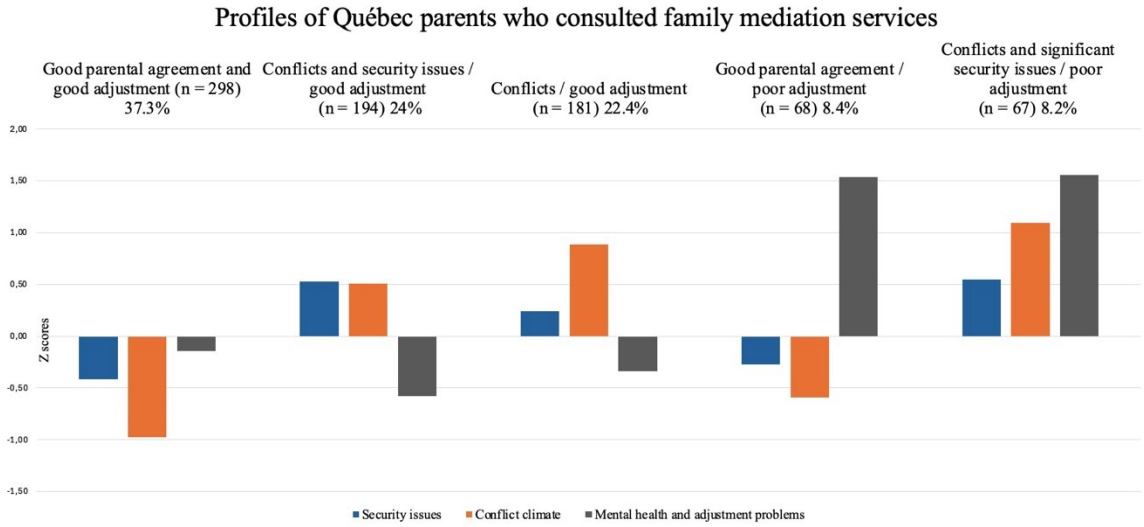
Adjustment indices for the tested solutions

	1 profile	2 profiles	3 profiles	4 profiles	**5 profiles**	6 profiles
AIC	5437.980	4856.537	4686.053	4407.916	**4306.308**	4241.434
BIC	5470.842	4908.178	4756.471	4497.113	**4414.283**	4368.187
aBIC	5448.613	4873.246	4708.837	4436.777	**4341.244**	4282.446
Entropy	1.000	0.982	0.950	0.965	**0.910**	0.926
Profile size	100% (*n* = 808)	C1 : 46% (*n* = 372) C2 : 54% (*n* = 436)	C1 : 47% (*n* = 380) C2 : 46% (*n* = 372) C3 : 7% (*n* = 56)	C1 : 45% (*n* = 364) C2 : 9% (*n* = 73) C3 : 37% (*n* =2 98) C4 : 9% (*n* = 73)	**C1 : 23% (*n* = 186)** **C2 : 9% (*n* = 73)** **C3 : 37% (*n* = 298)** **C4 : 8% (*n* = 65)** **C5 : 23% (*n* = 186)**	C1 : 22.7% (*n* = 184) C2 : 36.6% (*n* = 296) C3 : 8.8% (*n* = 71) C4 : 22.9% (*n* = 185) C5 : 3% (*n* = 26) C6 : 5.7% (*n* = 46)

Note. AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; aBIC = sample-size adjusted Bayesian information criterion.

Figure 1

Selected profile solution



Comparison of profiles

Analyses of variance and chi-square tables were then performed to compare sociodemographic variables and variables related to dealing with the consequences of separation in order to better understand differences between the five profiles. Although some characteristics proved to be statistically significant, they did not allow clear differentiation between profiles. The variables that showed significant differences are discussed below (see Table 4).

Table 4

Distinction of profiles based on sociodemographic and family variables and methods of dealing with the consequences of separation

	Good parental agreement and good adjustment (*n* = 298)	Conflicts and security issues / good adjustment (*n* = 194)	Conflicts / good adjustment (*n* = 181)	Good parental agreement / poor adjustment (*n* = 68)	Conflicts and significant security issues / poor adjustment (*n* = 67)	Total sample (*N* = 808)
Gender (Female)*	46.30%^{b}	59.80%^{a}	56.40%^{a}	47.10%^{ab}	52.20%^{ab}	52.00%
Parent's age (years)*	*M* = 40.04^{b}	*M* = 38.06^{a}	*M* = 38.00^{a}	*M* = 38.82^{ab}	*M* = 39.20^{ab}	*M* = 39.00
Age of the target child (years)*	*M* = 8.64^{b}	*M* = 7.71^{a}	*M* = 7.81^{a}	*M* = 7.37^{a}	*M* = 7.13^{a}	*M* = 8.00
Currently in a relationship*	48.20%^{a}	55.20%^{a}	50.30%^{a}	30.90%^{b}	32.80%^{b}	47.60%
Person who ended the relationship*						
Respondent	40.90%^{c}	64.40%^{a}	52.50%^{d}	25.00%^{b}	38.80%^{bcd}	47.60%
Former partner	33.20%^{cd}	20.60%^{a}	26.50%^{ac}	54.40%^{b}	44.80%^{bd}	31.40%
Mutual decision	25.80%^{b}	14.90%^{a}	21.00%^{ab}	20.60%^{ab}	16.40%^{ab}	20.90%
Duration of the union (years)*	*M* = 11.70^{b}	*M* = 10.38^{a}	*M* = 10.63^{ab}	*M* = 11.21^{ab}	*M* = 10.48^{ab}	*M* = 11.00
Time since separation (months)*	*M* = 21.38^{b}	*M* = 21.92^{b}	*M* = 21.38^{b}	*M* = 18.32^{a}	*M* = 19.36^{ab}	*M* = 21.00
Methods of settling the consequences of separation*						
Amicable / mediation	91.20%^{b}	66.00%^{a}	63.90%^{a}	86.80%^{b}	72.70%^{a}	76.60%
Lawyer	4.40%^{c}	13.40%^{ab}	18.30%^{a}	5.90%^{bc}	6.10%^{bc}	9.90%
Appearance in court or trial	3.70%^{b}	19.60%^{a}	17.20%^{a}	5.90%^{b}	21.20%^{a}	12.10%

Note. * $p < .05$. For post hoc tests, different letters indicate pairs where there is a significant difference.

Profiles of parents who used family mediation

Profile 1. Profile 1, labeled "*Good parental agreement and good adjustment,*" comprises 37.3% (*n* = 298) of parents who had used or were waiting to use family mediation. These parents did not report any safety issues (*z* = -0.42), conflictual climate (*z* = -0.97), or psychological distress, and they tend to show good psychological

adjustment (z = -0.14) (see Figure 1). They also have older children (M = 8.64 years). This profile contains a lower proportion of woman (46.3%) and more parents who are older (M = 40,04 years) compared to profiles 2 and 3 (described below). They are more likely to have decided to separate by mutual agreement (25.8%). Finally, along with profile 4, "*Good parental agreement / very difficult adjustment,*" they are the most likely to reach an amicable agreement without professional help or mediation (91.2%) to settle the consequences of separation (see Table 4).

Profile 2. Profile 2, labeled "*Conflicts and security issues / good adjustment,*" represents 24% (n = 194) of the sample. On average, these parents reported above average safety issues (z = 0.53) and conflictual climate (z = 0.51), but the overall level of psychological distress and adjustment problems falls below the distribution average (z = -0.58) (see Figure 1). Of all the profiles, they most frequently ended the relationship with their ex-partner themselves (64.4%). Finally, this profile, along with profiles 3, "Conflict / good adjustment," and 5, "*Conflicts and significant security issues / poor adjustment,*" includes a higher proportion of parents who, despite using mediation, had gone to court to attempt to resolve the consequences of the separation. This profile also includes the lowest proportion of parents who reported that the decision to separate was made mutually (see Table 4).

Profile 3. Profile 3, labeled "*Conflict / good adjustment,*" accounts for 22.4% (n = 181) of the sample. These parents reported slightly more safety issues (z = 0.24) than the

population average, but the issues were less severe than in profile 2. The conflictual climate is also more pronounced (z = 0.89) than in profile 2, and they are less well adapted psychologically compared to the distribution average (z = -0.34) (see Figure 1). Moreover, a higher proportion of parents resolved the consequences of separation with the assistance of a lawyer (18.3%), similar to profile 2, "*Conflicts and security issues / good adjustment*" (13.4%). Along with profiles 2, "*Conflicts and security issues / good adjustment,*" and 5, "*Conflicts and significant security issues / poor adjustment*," profile 3 shows a higher rate of court involvement or litigation (17.2%) compared to profiles 1, "*Good parental agreement and good adjustment,*" and 4, "*Good parental agreement / very difficult adjustment*" (see Table 4).

Profile 4. Profile 4, labeled "*Good parental agreement / very difficult adjustment,*" represents 8.4% (n = 68) of the sample. It is characterized by higher-than-average psychological distress and adjustment problems (z = 1.54). Nevertheless, few safety issues were reported (z = -0.27), and little conflict (z = -0.59) (see Figure 1). This profile, along with profile 5, "*Conflicts and significant security issues / poor adjustment,*" differs significantly from the other profiles in that a higher number of parents have not remarried (69.1%) and a larger proportion of separations were initiated by the ex-partner (54.4%). In addition, the parents have been separated for less time (M = 18.32 months) compared to profiles 1, "*Good parental agreement and good adjustment,*" 2, "*Conflicts and security issues / good adjustment,*" and 3, "*Conflict / good adjustment*" (see Table 4).

Profile 5. Finally, profile 5, labeled "*Conflicts and significant security issues / poor adjustment,*" represents 8.2% (n = 67) of the sample. These parents reported issues at all levels: security (z = 0.55), a marked climate of conflict (z = 1.10), and psychological distress and adjustment problems more than one and a half standard deviations above the population average (z = 1.56) (see Figure 1). More than one in five parents in this profile had gone to court.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to profile separated parents who used family mediation services in relation to various risks to safety and well-being. More specifically, we aimed to examine relationships between risk profiles, sociodemographic and family characteristics, and alternative ways of dealing with the consequences of separation. This population-based study, which is rare in this field, provides a nuanced portrait of parents who used family mediation and highlights the need to better understand the heterogeneous subgroups that make up this population.

The analysis revealed five distinct profiles, differentiated mainly by the level of presence or absence of security issues, conflictual climate, and psychological distress. The first profile, "*Good parental agreement and good adjustment*" included more than one-third of the sample. Profile 2, "*Conflict and safety issues / good adjustment*" represented about one-quarter of the sample, as did profile 3, "*Conflict / good adjustment.*" Profiles 4 and 5, respectively "*Good parental agreement / very difficult adjustment*" and "*Conflict*

and significant safety issues / very difficult adjustment," comprised a more negligible portion of our sample, at below 10% each.

Nearly two-thirds of the parents presented various risk factors such as safety, mental health, adjustment, and conflict issues, but at various intensities. Profiles 2 and 5, which together represented 32% of the sample, were vulnerable due to safety issues associated with domestic violence. Women were also overrepresented in these two profiles, which is consistent with evidence that women are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence (World Health Organization, 2023). Regarding the profiles of domestic violence identified, our findings are consistent with those of Beck and colleagues (2013) in a study of 845 couples going through divorce and court-referred family mediation. The authors identified five distinct profiles of self-reported domestic violence, differentiated according to the severity and dynamics of violent behavior. They found low to moderately severe forms of violence in 46% of couples, with severe forms in 17%, characterized by coercive behavior and high risks to the safety of victims (Beck et al., 2013). These findings are concerning, as such forms of behavior may jeopardize the fundamental principles and conditions of family mediation, namely free and informed consent, fairness between parties, and parental safety (COAMF, 2016; Huot, 2019; Jiang, 2023; Tisher et al., 2004; Zimmerman et al., 2009). Although adaptive measures can be taken to protect the safety of users experiencing domestic violence, such as careful screening and mediation by videoconference or shuttle mediation (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2021a, 2021b), several studies raise doubts about the ability of family mediators to accurately identify these

parents at the start of family mediation, especially when validated tools are not used for this purpose (Ballard et al., 2011a; Johnson et al., 2005; Rossi et al., 2015). Furthermore, our results underscore the importance of training professionals in the use of empirically validated screening tools, such as the MASIC-S (Rossi et al., 2024) or the DOORS (Detection of Overall Risk Screen) (McIntosh et al., 2016; Wells et al., 2018). The DOORS, which has been used in Australia for 10 years, identifies risks associated with domestic violence and other issues (Lee et al., 2021). The findings of the present study concur with studies indicating that a history of domestic violence reduces the likelihood of reaching an agreement (Ballard et al., 2011b; Beck et al., 2010; Kelly, 2004). Our obtained profiles suggest the need to exclude parents with violent behavior from the mediation process or to adapt specific interventions. Although the parents in profiles 2, "*Conflict and safety issues / good adjustment,*" and 5, "*Conflict and significant safety issues / very difficult adjustment,*" used the judicial system the most after profile 3, "*Conflict and good adjustment,*" a significant proportion of the parents in all three profiles (profile 2: 66%; profile 3: 63.9%, profile 5: 72.7%) still managed to reach an agreement using family mediation alone, which would have entailed adapted strategies rather than systematic exclusion. In this sense, family mediation can, under certain conditions, remain a useful tool even for families at risk, provided that practices are rigorously adapted (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2021a, 2021b). However, this would assume that risk factors were adequately identified prior to and throughout the mediation process. Recent findings from Québec suggest that this is not always the case, as the use of structured risk-screening tools and specialized training remains uneven among family mediators (Godbout et al.,

2024). This suggests that some safety concerns are not systematically detected at intake. Consequently, some families categorized as having successfully completed mediation may have done so despite unrecognized vulnerabilities. This calls for caution when interpreting agreement rates, and highlights potential issues regarding both the safety of the process and the fairness of negotiated outcomes. Further studies are needed to examine in greater depth the profiles of parents who resort to legal proceedings, as well as parents for whom mediation can still be beneficial. Studies should also focus on the development of specialized skills in family mediators and the implementation of services tailored to address specific risk factors in mediation contexts.

Furthermore, the present findings suggest that relational, adaptive, and family-related characteristics were more informative in distinguishing the different profiles than several sociodemographic variables, many of which did not emerge as significant differentiating factors. In this regard, approximately 16% of parents belonged to the two profiles characterized by poor adjustment (profiles 4 and 5). Compared with the other profiles, these parents were less likely to have repartnered and were more likely to report that their former partner had initiated the separation. Although causal inferences cannot be drawn from the present data, these findings are consistent with the possibility that psychological adjustment may be more difficult when the separation is experienced as involuntary or unexpected. Conversely, parents who reported having initiated the separation themselves, such as those in profile 2, appeared to show more favorable adjustment despite experiencing elevated levels of conflict and safety issues. Parents in the better-adjusted

profiles were also more likely to have repartnered, suggesting that the availability of a new intimate relationship may represent an additional source of emotional or social support during the post-separation adjustment process. One possible explanation is that initiating the separation reflects a longer period of psychological preparation before the relationship officially ended, thereby facilitating subsequent adjustment. Although future longitudinal research is needed to clarify the respective roles of separation initiation and repartnering in post-separation adjustment, the present findings already underscore the importance of considering parents' adjustment when they enter family mediation. Given that the adverse effects of separation, including psychological distress, diminish over time (Ding et al., 2021; Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2024), it is important to recognize the vulnerability of parents entering family mediation and keep in mind that clinical psychology studies suggest that psychological distress can affect functions that are essential to the process, such as the ability to communicate, negotiate, and generate solutions (Amani et al., 2023; Zamir et al., 2020). In addition, poor adjustment to separation can make parents reluctant to find solutions or cooperate with their ex-partner (Paquin et al., 2022; Saini, 2012). However, our findings suggest that difficulty adjusting to separation appears to affect how the consequences of separation are dealt with only when combined with conflict or safety issues. Furthermore, given that legal training generally glances over psychological issues (Sternlight & Robbennolt, 2015), the adjustment problems that parents may experience during separation may be underestimated, especially at the subtle end of the spectrum. Thus, our results support the idea that adjustment to separation is a fundamental issue that is often underestimated in

family mediation assessment practices and highlight the importance of determining whether the process should proceed as planned, be adapted to parents' needs, be temporarily suspended, be complemented by appropriate support services or be redirected to legal services. Sometimes, postponing mediation may not always be feasible or desirable. Important decisions regarding parenting arrangements, finances, and property often need to be made shortly after separation, and delaying the mediation process may prolong conflict and uncertainty for parents and children.

Our results indicate that family mediation could also serve as a gateway to resources tailored to mental health needs. Indeed, in the most extreme cases, maladjustment to separation may be associated with safety concerns, such as higher risk of suicidal behavior (Gibb et al., 2011), which could potentially be prevented by providing appropriate and timely resources. However, this would require adequately training mediation professionals and informing them about the available resources for various issues, a topic that has been overlooked. The research has focused mainly on screening and referral in the context of intimate partner violence (Huber et al., 2025), rather than additional services such as mental health support. To address this gap, studies, training programs, and regular updates on mental health issues and relevant referral options should be undertaken. Moreover, our findings are consistent with broader family justice research that stresses the importance of systematic screening, the establishment of upstream triage services, and the provision of a comprehensive range of services, including tailored psychosocial support adapted to families' specific needs (Department of Justice Canada, 2009; *Institut*

québécois de réforme du droit et de la justice [IQRDJ], 2023). This approach could provide effective solutions to meet the unique needs of each family and make optimal use of psychosocial and legal services, given the heterogeneity of families in separation contexts in terms of intimate partner violence, adjustment challenges, conflicts, and other factors.

Parents with conflictual profiles are most likely to resort to litigation to resolve the consequences of separation. One might assume that family mediation is less suitable for parents experiencing high levels of conflict, as they often face significant coparenting challenges (Cyr et al., 2017; Cyr et al., 2021; Ferraro et al., 2025; Polak & Saini, 2019). However, Emery and colleagues (2005) suggest that even parents with initially high conflict levels can gain from family mediation compared to a judicial process. The benefits can include greater satisfaction with agreements, improved parental communication, and reduced conflict. A constructive avenue for future research would be to more deeply explore the conditions for effective family mediation as well as the process adjustments required to maximize outcomes.

Finally, our results suggest that over one-third of parents reach a satisfactory parental agreement and adjust well to separation. Most of the parents examined used family mediation alone to resolve the consequences of their separation, and only a few turned to the courts to settle remaining disputes. This finding suggests that, given a favorable context, mediation is an effective method to reach an agreement (SOM, 2017).

This study includes some notable strengths and limitations. One major strength is the quality of the population-based sample. It comprises recently separated Québec parents with at least one child under 14 years old (Saint-Jacques et al., 2020), a population that is rarely examined in family mediation research. Furthermore, this study shows exceptional originality and relevance thanks to its individual-centered analysis, which uncovers complex interactions among various risk factors that are rarely examined together. This enables a deeper understanding of the influence of population heterogeneity by identifying subgroups of parents who share common characteristics (Bergman & Trost, 2006) in an underexplored field where variable-centered analyses predominate.

However, this study also has certain limitations. First, the analyses focused exclusively on data collected at a single assessment point. Although this choice was consistent with the objectives and analytical strategy of the present study, it precludes examining changes over time, which would be particularly relevant in the context of parental separation, as psychological adjustment is known to change over time. Studies on the impacts of separation in large samples report improvements in psychological symptoms over periods ranging from approximately 2 to 5 years, depending on personal and contextual characteristics (Ding et al., 2021; Perrig-Chiello et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2024). This suggests that family mediation could be more effective once the critical period following separation has passed. However, as discussed earlier, delaying mediation is not always a realistic option, as many families must address urgent parenting, financial, or legal issues soon after the separation. Second, some variables, particularly substance use,

were measured using single-item measures, which may provide less precise and reliable assessments than multi-item validated scales. This limitation may have attenuated the strength of some observed associations and should be considered when interpreting these findings.

Further studies are also needed to inform adapted mediation methods. Studies could examine the optimal timing for participating in family mediation by considering parents' psychological, social, financial, and adaptive resources, as well as the conditions required for maximum mediation effectiveness. Other studies could investigate the relevance of family mediation in nonoptimal conditions, particularly when no better options are available.

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