

Parental divorce on adolescent cognitive behaviors psychology essay



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There is an enormous amount of literature that found that experiencing parental divorce is negatively related to a wide variety of adolescents outcomes such as educational attainment and cognitive development. This study reviewed several empirical explorations which highlight the effects of parental divorce on adolescents. This research reviews parental loss, economic loss, poor parental adjustment, lack of parental competence, and exposure to conflict between parents and the effects that these factors contribute to the cognitive behavior and development of adolescents.

Keywords: adolescent behavior, parental divorce, conflict, cognitive behavior

Introduction

In recent decades family structures are undergoing changes due to the high rate of divorce (Heck & Walsh, 2000). Divorce has become significantly more common and it is a life crisis for almost all families who experience it. The high number of divorced families over the past decade has raised concern regarding the effect of divorce on children and adolescents (Amato, 2000; Kelly, 2003; Hetherington, 2003; VanderValk et al., 2004). Researchers have found that parental divorce place children and adolescents at greater risk of adjustment problems (Amato & Keith, 1991; Amato, 2000; Kelly, 2000; Hetherington, 2003; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Dimitrieva et al., 2004; Santrock, 2007) especially externalizing problems such as aggression, antisocial behavior problems and delinquency, and internalizing problems such as depression, anxiety and self-esteem and low level of academic performance (Hetherington et al., 1993; Amato, 2001; Malone et al., 2004; Demuth & Brown, 2004; Lansford et al., 2006).

Researchers suggest that adolescents from divorced families have poorer academic, behavioral, and social-emotional outcomes than their peers from intact families (Peris & Emery, 2004). Parental divorce has been associated with maladaptive academic and behavioral outcomes for children, such as depression, anxiety, school dropout, drug and alcohol use, and poor academic performance (Wolchick et al., 2000). Higher levels of misbehavior, more under-controlled behavior, and less competence also are associated with children whose parents have divorced (Ruschena, Prior, Sanson, & Smart, 2005). The effects on these children often linger into adulthood. In general, children of divorce tend to earn less income and obtain less education over the course of their lifetime (Amato & Cheadle, 2005).

As a group, adolescents from divorced families display lower levels of academic and vocational attainment. They demonstrate lower academic performance and achievement test scores and are two to three times more likely to drop out of school (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Compared to adults from intact families, those with divorced parents are less likely to have attended or completed college, are more likely to be unemployed and on welfare, and have fewer financial resources (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

Parental Conflict

Based on parental conflict perspective, an unhappy home environment which is marked by high levels of parental conflict can negatively affect children and adolescents' adjustment. Adolescents react to their parental hostility with fear, anger, and distress and may even blame themselves for conflict between their parents. These reactions may contribute to more problems such as drop out of schools (Amato, 2000).

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Post-divorce parental conflict is characterized by parents' inability to communicate politely, parental battles, and hostility (Neff & Cooper, 2004). It is often assumed that parents in high-conflict marriages continue their conflict after divorce and separation (Hetherington, 2003). Studies have shown that 8 to 15 percent of parents continue high conflict 2-3 years after divorce (Kelly, 2000, Kelly, 2003). There is considerable evidence that most children experience high conflict, verbal and physical violence during their parental divorce (Kelly, 2000; Booth & Amato, 2001; Kelly & Emery, 2003). High conflict between parents following divorce can be traumatic, destroying, and extremely stressful for children and adolescents and it is also the most significant factor for children and adolescents' behavior problems (Amato & Keith, 1991; Emery, 1999; Amato, 2000; Arnett, 2004; Sandler et al., 2008).

Parental conflict also may decrease parental warmth and parental support that reduced control of children behavior, parental monitoring and parent-child relationships, but increased verbal hostility, physical and harsh punishment through the children (Turner & Kopiec, 2006; Bradford et al., 2007). High conflict is more destructive when parents place their children in the middle of their conflict. When parents express their anger and carry their hostile messages, express verbal or physical aggression to each other in presence of the children, the children and adolescents are more like to be depressed, anxious, and poorly adjusted compared to children and adolescents whose high-conflict parents leave their children out of their anger (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Kelly, 2007).

The influence of parental conflict on adolescents' adjustment differs by gender. Some studies have shown that the association between parental conflict and child maladjustment and behavior problems is more significant for boys than girls, especially in the prediction of externalizing symptoms (Amato & Rezak, 1994; Davies & Lindsay, 2004). However, other findings reveal that parental conflict may actually be a strong predictor of adjustment problems for adolescents' girls than for boys (Unger, Brown, Tressel, & McLeod, 2000). Davies and Lindsay (2004) conducted a study on children between 10 to 15 years to investigate the relationship between parental conflict and adolescent psychological symptoms and adjustment. They found that parental conflict was a stronger predictor of adolescent internalizing problems for girls and externalizing problems for boys. Davies and Lindsay argued that girls were more vulnerable to their parental conflict. In general, both boys and girls are influenced by parental post-divorce conflict in a different way. Post-divorce parental conflict to predict externalizing behavior problems for boys and internalizing behavior problems for girls (Grych & Fincham, 2001).

Economic Loss

Economic hardship may relate to academic achievement through availability of resources necessary for educational attainment. In general, divorced families are often faced with financial instability that reduces their capacity to provide environment conducive to and material and nonmaterial support that enhance learning. Economic hardship can also increase the likelihood of negative family interactions such as parental conflict and hostility, parent-

adolescent conflict, and parental harsh discipline, which in turn negatively impact adolescents' academic achievement.

One important theoretical explanation for the negative educational consequences of divorce is resource deprivation. Proponents of this perspective (e. g., Coleman, 1988; McLanahan, 1985 and Sandefur, 1994) argue that parents' financial, human, and social capitals are crucial to their children's educational success. Parental divorce, however, deprives children of such parental resources. Financially, divorce often lowers the living standards for children (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985), cuts the family's educational budget (Downey, 1995b), and increases children's chances of moving into an economically deprived (and often academically noncompetitive) school district (McLanahan and Booth, 1989). In addition, when a non-custodial parent leaves the household after divorce, the parent (usually the father) may take away some human capital (e. g., tutoring and educational advice derived from his education) which otherwise would be available to the child.

More Life Stress

An alternative perspective views divorce as a potentially stressful experience for children (Amato, 2000). According to stress theory, a large number of changes concentrated within a short time can have adverse effects on the mental and physical health of adults and children (Pearlin, Schieman, Fazio, & Meersman, 2005). Moreover, studies indicate that exposure to stressors during childhood predicts mental and physical health problems in adulthood (e. g., Clark, Caldwell, Power, & Stansfeld, 2010). Divorce brings about

significant changes in most children's lives, including the departure of one
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parent from the household, a decline in standard of living, moving to a new residence and neighborhood, giving up pets, changing schools, losing contact with friends and classmates, dealing with parents' new romantic partners or spouses, living with step- or half siblings, and adjusting to parents' future union disruptions. Given that children thrive on stability (Cherlin, 2009), the cumulative effect of multiple changes concentrated within a short time increases children's risk for a variety of problems. Even among children who do not develop clinically significant disorders, parental divorce can generate long-term feelings of unhappiness, confusion, and pain – despite parents' best efforts to be supportive (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000; Marquardt, 2005). If mothers and fathers enact their parental roles competently and cooperate in raising their children, then some of the potentially negative effects of divorce can be avoided. But good parenting and co-parenting only partly mitigate the full range of risk factors that often accompany divorce. According to this perspective, children who experience good divorces will benefit in some respects but will still experience many of the same problems as children in other types of post-divorce families.

Parental Adjustment

Co-Parenting

Following separation and divorce, the child's time is divided between the two parents, so that for most children, there is a decrease in the amount of contact with both parents. Amount of time each parent has with the child is a frequent focus of the conflict between divorcing parents which the court is asked to adjudicate. The division of time children spend with each parent is specified in parenting plans, which are formulated at the time of the divorce.

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Most often, one parent assumes the role as primary caregiver while the other is considered the “visiting parent” or nonresidential parent. The typical parenting plan is for children to spend every other weekend (including one or two overnights) and some holidays with the nonresidential parent (approximately 14% of time) and the rest of the time with the primary caregiver (Kelly, 2005; Kelly, 2007). Studies have shown that well-established, clear visitation schedules are most likely to be followed if they are designed and implemented immediately following the divorce or separation (Kelly, 2000). Recognition that the typical parenting plan does not take into consideration the developmental needs of the child, the quality of parenting provided by the parents, or the nature of the child’s relationship with the parents (Kelly, 1994; Kelly, 2005) has led to tailoring of plans to better fit the family’s needs. This change is partly in response to recent findings illustrating the inadequacy of the typical parenting plans for fostering adaptive nonresidential parent-child relationships. Several researchers have noted that children who see their nonresidential parents only biweekly report less closeness in relationships with them and greater feelings of pain in response to the divorce or separation (Cashmore, Parkinson, & Taylor, 2008; Kelly, 2005; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007) than children who spend more time with their nonresidential parents. Furthermore, studies from the developmental literature emphasize the role that both parents play in children’s social, cognitive, and psychological development (Lamb, 1997). For example, studies have shown that although the primary caregiver may spend more time with children, infants also develop strong attachments to other

consistent caregivers (usually the father) and that these attachments have a positive effect on their psychological growth (Lamb, 1997).

Children's Meaning Concerning Divorce

Some research provides evidence in favour of a focus on children's meaning construction concerning divorce. Smart (2006) explored the narratives that 60 children between 8 and 15 years old constructed about their post-divorce family. Some children expressed that their parents damaged their lives, not by divorcing, but by failing to divorce in the proper manner. In a study by Dunn et al., (2001), 238 children talked about their divorce experience. Many of them reported that they were confused during the process because the changes in their family were not clearly explained. They did not understand what was happening so they concluded that the parent did not love them. Furthermore, children stated that they had more positive feelings when given an active role in decisions about how to divide their time between their parents. Maundeni (2002) examined the extent to which children in Botswana (Africa) expressed their needs for information concerning their parents' divorce. The majority of children were dissatisfied about the informational support from their mothers. The few who expressed satisfaction about the communication mentioned that their mothers sought their opinions, told them why they had decided to leave their fathers and discussed the implications of the separation for their lives. These studies exemplify the crucial role of children's meaning construction in the bidirectional parent-child relationship in order to understand the child's perspective concerning divorce.

A part of the meaning construction within parent-child relationships is having the feeling of being important to each other – this is what Marshall (2001) terms ‘mattering’. Children want to matter to specific others, especially their parents. The perception of mattering develops through interpersonal interaction and may function to provide individuals with a sense of social meaning and relatedness. It can be considered a relational dimension of identity, emerging from validation by specific others (Josselson, 1994). Moreover, a feeling of mattering contributes to psychosocial well-being (Marshall & Lambert, 2006). Some divorce research indicates that children want to matter. In a qualitative study of children aged 8-12, Hogan et al., (2003) found that children adapted best after divorce when they received reassurances from both parents of their commitment to their relationships with them. Smith et al., (2003) interviewed 107 children between 7 and 18 years old about the divorce transition. These children wanted parents to listen to them, to ask them what they wanted, to be given information and not to be forced into arrangements they did not want. Using in-depth interviews, Neale (2002) explored children’s discourses on the issue of being listened to during their parent’s divorce. Younger children wanted some degree of autonomy, older children attached importance to their autonomy when it came to making decisions about their personal lives. In the research by Dunn et al., (2001) children reported more positive feelings when being given an active role in decisions about how to spend time in the two households, but they also stated that dealing with decisions that affected other family members (e. g. contact and residence) was more problematic. These studies show that children’s agency including their perceived

matter concerning their post-divorce life should be acknowledged and explored more fully (Haugen, 2010).

Career Counseling for Children of Divorce

It is important to note that all children from divorced families are not doomed to poor vocational outcomes. Many demonstrate remarkable resilience. Resiliency has alternately been defined as the ability to bounce back from a traumatic event or situation (Chen & George, 2008) and doing well in the face of adversity (Patterson, 2002). Resilient children of divorce have protective factors in their character or environment that moderate the effects of risk factors, and although parents are important for the well-being of their children, peers, schools, and neighbors also are vital support systems (Rodgers & Rose, 2002). The opportunity to process the experience of divorce helps build resilience in adolescents, and teens given the opportunity to find new meaning in their family situations tend to do better in school and in their future relationships as a result of their meaning-making (Barnes, 1999). By offering support and fostering resilience, the effectiveness of interventions aimed at children of divorce may be enhanced (Greeff & Van Der Merwe, 2004).

Narrative career counseling is proposed as one of those interventions to foster resilience and improve career prospects. Narrative career counseling with adolescents help them to identify and build on their protective factors as they construct the resources and positive events in their stories.

As the career counseling profession evolves in the 21st century, postmodern narrative approaches are emerging to assist students in uncovering career-

related themes and meanings in their personal stories (Brott, 2004). The narrative approach of viewing students as the experts of their own lives is a departure from traditional career theories, especially the classic concept of the counselor-as-expert, matching client traits with job requirements (Bujold, 2004). In narrative career counseling, not only is the student the expert, but also both the author and the main character of the career story (Christensen & Johnston, 2003). This approach assigns a central focus to the role of the environment, culture, and family as major influences in a student's life. Narrative meaning gives form to understanding a purpose to life, combining everyday actions and events into episodic units, providing a framework for understanding the past, and planning future actions (Polkinghorne, 1988). Applying this meaning-making of past events to future actions related to career choice has tremendous implications for adolescents from divorced families.

Cochran (1997) was among the first career theorists to apply general narrative counseling specifically to career. He believed that, unlike the classic trait-and-factor approaches, career counseling should be about meaning-making and personal identity development.

Additionally, Cochran suggested that planning for the future was naturally affected by interactions from the past. Therefore, students construct a narrative, or organizational structure, to explain how they make meaning in their worlds. Once these personal narratives have been revealed, the school counselor can help the students discover potential new meanings that may help them lead more fulfilled and satisfied lives. The linking of the past,

present, and future in a narrative form helps distinguish narrative career counseling from other career approaches.

Brott's (2001, 2004) "storied approach" of narrative career counseling explores the students' world through the metaphor of story development using the process of co-construction, deconstruction, and construction. The students inevitably begin counseling with a career-related concern such as postsecondary plans or high school course selection. Rapport is built during the co-construction phase, in which the student and school counselor collaborate to tell the student's life story from past and present experiences, a process of revealing. During co-construction, the counselor listens to and begins to develop an understanding of the student's key experiences, events, people, and words. Because family factors have been related to both developmental problems and difficulties with academic motivation and performance (Peterson, 2002), the way the students choose to tell their story reveals their identity. Assessment techniques—including lifelines, card sorts, life-role circles, and goal maps—are used to help students author their stories (Brott, 2004).

During the deconstruction phase, counselor and student together examine the stories, viewing them from different perspectives. They work to identify patterns and themes and note areas needing further exploration. For example, many adolescents look at their lives through a filter of divorce because the divorce stands out as the formative negative event in their lives (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). In the deconstruction phase, students can challenge that filter and weigh their decisions from a different perspective. In

deconstruction, the counselor returns to the initial goals for career-related counseling and helps students view the problem from multiple perspectives.

Finally, during the construction process, the students reauthor their stories in a future orientation. Students accentuate patterns and themes they wish to develop and become aware of those they wish to diminish or eliminate.

Again, these themes relate to their initial career-related concerns, but they also reflect their overall life experiences. The school counselor's role is to help students clarify their choices, generate alternatives, and extend their plotlines into the future. The narrative approach reflects a shift from "finding a job to finding one's self" (Brott, 2004, p. 190), which could be important for adolescents from divorced families considering future career barriers and options.

Summary

Children from divorced families are more likely than not to experience some type of cognitive behavioral disorder. It is up to the parents to think about their children when they are in the process of divorce. Children need to be assured that they are loved, that they are not the reason for the divorce, that they still matter to their parents and that both parents will continually be in their lives after the divorce. I believe that if more children were made aware of the different options available to them regarding people they can speak to during a divorce that they may be able to handle the divorce without as many negative effects. I believe that the narrative career counseling is a great option for children experiencing divorce. Children would have a counselor that they would be able to talk to and express their feelings of what they are experiencing and/or feeling. I also believe that parents need <https://assignbuster.com/parental-divorce-on-adolescent-cognitive-behaviors-psychology-essay/>

to involve their children in the decision making when it comes to what happens to them after a divorce, so that they can feel included and not feel as if their family unit is gone forever, although both parents may not live in the home with the child, they can still raise the child without all of the negative behaviors.