

# Experimental design



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There are a large number of factors that decide how severely parental separation or divorce affects a Child's adaptability or long-term adjustment to life. It has been documented that the age of the child at the time of divorce [ Barber & Eccles, 1992; Forehand et al., 1991; Shybunko, 1989], gender effects, i. e., whether the child was raised by the parent of the same sex as the child or not (Hetherington, 1979), whether the child was involved in a custody litigation or not (Franke, 1983) and finally, therapy or intervention all are factors that play influential roles in how the child adjusts to life in the long run. Difficulties in adjustment typically manifest in forms of the child later being involved in troubled relationships with their partners or spouses, substance abuse etc (Franke, 1983).

This study will discuss a research design that will attempt to evaluate the validity of these claims. That is, we will design a research that carries out an impact evaluation of the conditions created by

- a) Age
- b) Gender effects
- c) Custody litigation
- d) Therapy/intervention

on the child's long term adjustments measured by

- i) Relationship troubles/divorce of child in later life
- ii) Substance abuse problems.

The design of the study is detailed below:

Our population of interest is people who as children witnessed divorces of their parents. Since we are concerned with how these people adjust to life after growing up, we want to evaluate the quality of life of grownups whose parents were divorced.

So, we collect a random sample of people whose parents went through divorces and create four separate groups as detailed below:

Table 1

Relationship Status

Troubled/Divorced

Happy

substance abuser

Group I

Group II

Not substance abuser

Group III

Group IV

Now, the second step is to gather information about:

- i) What was the age of the person when parents were divorced?
- ii) Was the person raised by the father or the mother?
- iii) Was a 'custody litigation' involved in the proceedings?
- iv) Was the child given therapeutic care or intervention to deal with possible trauma from the parents' divorce?

The critical point to note here is that since it is the impact of these conditions we are evaluating, factors i through iv represent the 'treatments'.

Each of the four groups mentioned in table 1 should be subjected to an evaluation of impact for each one of these treatments.

Therefore, in order to answer the quantitative question we are designing a research that involves evaluations of four separate treatments on each of four separate groups.

For each treatment we shall evaluate whether the mean was different. For instance, consider the variable 'age'. The way the impact of this variable will be evaluated is, we shall look at differences in mean age among groups I to IV. Similarly for each of the other three treatments, we shall look at whether the mean scores of the variables differ across the groups. If we find significant differences, then this will imply that the variable for which such a difference was found indeed has an influence on the impact of parent's divorce on the child's adjustment.

The research design here is essentially a " Posttest only Control group" type for each separate treatment. Defining the age treatment as " treatment  $T > 0$  if age was greater or equal to 3 years" the diagram for this test can be shown as follows:

Figure 1: Posttest control only research design

Similarly we can test for the other groups as well.

This design does allow establishing causation. This is because we test for differences in impact of the causes by separating the sample into groups who differ in accordance with the effect.

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