

Literature critique

Literature



Introduction

Strohschein's (2005) report discusses a research conducted among Canadian children over a five year period. The children's level of anxiety/depression and their tendency towards anti-social behavior were analyzed at specified intervals during the five-year period assessing mental health adjustment to changes in the family in the form of a divorce between children whose parents eventually divorced and those whose parents remained together. Children in families considered dysfunctional prior to the divorce were assessed for improvements in mental health.

The primary objective of the study is to determine a connection between divorce and mental health in children. This research assesses the children's home environment both prior to and after a divorce to determine any correlation. There is need for this because prior researches that did not take into account this factor. The literature review reveals that the current research is distinguished based on the methodology used.

Methodology

A qualitative approach is taken. The anxiety/depression state of children is examined over a five-year period by means of interviews and their relative state of mental health is assessed. The longitudinal survey methodology employed is justified on the grounds that alternative methods such as two-wave panel studies that assess developmental changes between two set time-periods for comparison as well as cross-sectional data used to pit children in divorced families against those in intact families, have been deficient.

The multi-wave, longitudinal approach of the current study is clearly detailed as the better alternative. The researchers assume that the home environment prior to a divorce could determine divorce effects on children. They also assume that even prior to a divorce the mental health of children of divorced parents may be substantially different from those whose parents remain together and that divorce could positively alter the mental health of children.

Two specific research questions are posed – are there negative effects of divorce on children’s mental health and is anxiety/depression diminished by a divorce within a dysfunctional family. A clear definition of what constitutes a dysfunctional family was given. The target population as well as exclusions is described by the researchers. The initial longitudinal sample was reduced after excluding children not 4 to 11 years, single-parent homes and children losing a parent by death. The final sample size was 2, 819 with 5. 9% experiencing divorce within the research period. The selection criteria appear unbiased and equitable given the requirements of the research. The data instrument used was a national survey the 5 year period covered lends much validity to the data collected as it allows for equitability in responses over time.

Findings

The findings of the research are consistent with the data gathered and analyzed. There is enough evidence to conclude that there is a greater prevalence of anxiety and antisocial behavior in children whose parents divorce than in those whose parents remain together. However the research does not show any correlation between preexisting family problems and

decreased anxiety levels subsequent to a divorce. These findings cannot, however be generalized outside the context of children below the age of 11 years.

Discussion & Conclusion

Two research limitations are highlighted. Only a single informant, a parent, was used for the assessment of the child's mental health and no effective mechanism to determine the nature and distribution of resources in the household was possible; only inventory type data collection was conducted for this variable. The researchers suggest that the methodology of analysis used has proved to be effective in gauging children's reactions to parental divorce and therefore future research on the issue on a broader scale should employ similar techniques.

REFERENCES

Strohschein, L. (2005, Dec). Parental Divorce and Child Mental Health Trajectories. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(5), 1286-1300.