

# Effects of parental divorce on children's growth



Divorce has become an important social issue which can not be ignored and avoided. In mid-19th century, only 5% of the marriages were broken in the United States, and now almost 50% of first marriages were ended in divorce, there were 100 million children who experienced parental divorce in the United States, in England and Wales, more than 140, 007 children were facing parental separation every year. The children of this kind have become an important part of the ‘vulnerable group’ in modern society, which also attracts the attention of many scholars’. A large number of social evidence shows that the psychological trauma which the breakdown of a family brings children is obvious and will exist for a long term. Relevant scholars’ sociological research also showed that divorce had a negative impact on the cognitive development, personality development, mental health, relationships, social behavior development and other aspects of Children’s. To explore the influence of parental divorce on children’s growth trajectory, this essay reviewed relevant literatures and conducted a critical analysis towards the literatures.

## **Chapter II Discussion**

Through reviewing relevant academic literatures on divorce, research on the influence of divorce on children’s development included the following contents.

### **2. 1 Cognitive levels and academic performance**

Research (Amans et al, 2001) showed that there was a very significant difference in areas of cognition, reasoning and academic achievement between children in divorced families and complete families, the impact of divorce on children’s learning performance was the most, the impact on

cognition was less than the impact on academic achievement, the impact on the non-text logical reasoning was minimal. There was no significant difference in the cognitive aspects between the children of different genders in divorced families, and the girls' academic performance was significantly better than the boys'. Levels of cognitive development and academic performance of seven, eight or nine year old children's from divorced families were significantly lower than the children's from complete families. Amato (2001) made use of Meta analysis in his study. Meta analysis refers to using a number of statistical methods to analyze the collected research data. Its advantage is to increase the reliability of conclusions through increasing sample sizes, so as to address the inconsistency of findings. The conclusion of Amans' research (Amans et al, 2001) was also based on Meta analysis, he used appropriate statistical to conduct systematic, objective and comprehensive quantitative analysis towards lots of relevant research results in 1990s and found that the scores of learning of children's in divorced families were significantly lower than the children's from complete families, he pointed out that this gap was increased slightly when compared with the situation in 1980.

## **2. 2 Emotional development and personality development**

Amato's (2001) study showed that children from single parent families were less able to control themselves and their assessment for themselves was too high. There were a higher proportion of children who were abnormal in their mood, emotion and personality, their specific performance included preferring crying, depression, irritability, anger, fear, etc., their bad character included low self-esteem, unsociability, poor self-control ability, frailty, lying,

cheating, apathy, anxiety, etc., but majority of them had a strong independence. Children whose parents were separated had significantly polarized introversive or extroscopic characters, and most of them had singly introversive or extroscopic personalities, and majority children who were from complete families had the intermediate personalities. The research method which Amato (2001) adopted was Meta analysis, by comparing conclusions of a large number of research he found that, in fact, there was difference between children who grew up in complete families and children who grew up in single parent families, but the difference was not as big as what usually imagined. His (Amato, 2001) research showed that parental divorce was only one factor in the process of a child's growth, there were other factors that could influence a child's growth, but his research did not specify what these other factors were.

### **2.3 Mental health**

Relevant research (Aaron et al, 1999) has indicated that there was significant difference in the general levels of mental health between children from divorced families and children from complete families, children with single parent had more psychological problems, including tendency of a serious loneliness, unwilling contacting with people, tendency of self-accusation and giving low evaluations for individual abilities and qualities, strong feelings of inferiority, obvious anxiety, lacks of confidence in interpersonal relationships, lacks of security, tendency of serious impulsions, etc., many children often felt depressed, irritable and had extreme behavior, their physical symptoms which caused by psychological problems were more obvious. Relevant research (Aaron et al, 1999) also explained this

phenomenon, because the children's parents divorced, they lacked parental encouragement, in the face of setbacks, they couldn't get strong incentives, resulting in a lack of confidence. And because of parental divorce, it caused the reduction of parents' concern about the children, lack of communication with their children and failing to detect changes in the children's life and thought would lead to the children's failing to deal with the problems in a timely manner, thereby resulting in depression, irritability and other emotions.

## **2. 4 Interpersonal relationship**

The research on the interpersonal relationship of children's from divorced families was mainly carried out in the areas of peer relationship, parent-child relationship and control ability. Study has shown that judging from the perspectives of peer relationship, subjective and objective control abilities, children with single parent was not as good as the children's from complete families. In terms of parent-child relationship, children with single parent were not satisfied with their parents and families, their relationship with their parents wasn't as good as the children's from complete families. Even when they grew up, they still showed their distrust towards their parents, as Jacquet and Surra (2001) found in their study that even taking full consideration of the quality of parent-child relationship, the adult children still had a strong sense of distrust. Moreover, parents divorce also had a profound effect on the children's establishing a close relationship with their lovers when they grew up. Jacquet and Surra (2001) took young couples of 19- 35 years old as research objects and investigated the determinacy of the relationship between them and their cognition and understanding towards

the problems between them, they found that women from divorced families had a sense of lack of trust and satisfaction, showing ambivalent feelings and conflicts. Although there was no difference between the men from divorced families and the men from complete families (Emery, 1999), but because of the marital status of their own parents', the former thought that the relationship between couples was temporary. Thus, parental separation not only affects children's close relationship with their parents, but also has a negative impact on the children's creating their own intimate relationships when they grow up, the impact of parental separation on children's understanding of interpersonal relationship is negative and permanent, making the children show great adaptability in dealing with interpersonal relationship.

## **2. 5 Behavior problems**

Study (Jeynes, 2001) showed that the problem behavior of children's from divorced families was more than children's from complete families, the behavior included lying, cheating, bragging and boast, poor school performance and fearing of school, etc. There was a very close relationship between children's Internet addiction and their divorced families. Jeynes (2001) investigated the children's alcohol problems after their parents divorced and found that compared with the children whose parents have divorced for more than 4 years, the children whose parents divorced newly had the same frequency of drinking, the number of the children who indulged in drinking was increased, and they were more likely to be affected by alcohol, the frequency and quantity of the two groups of the children who addicted drinking were more than the children from complete families

(Jeynes, 2001), the children who didn't have complete families were more likely to drink and affected by alcohol. The greatest significance of Jeynes' research (2001) did not lie in confirming that children of divorced families were more likely to drink than children of complete families, but proving that both children whose parents divorced four years ago and the children whose parents divorced newly had the same frequency of drinking, thereby refuting some people opinion of thinking that divorce only had an impact on children at the time when their parents divorced, it further confirmed that the influence of parental divorce on children would be lasted for a long time.

### **Chapter III Conclusion**

Through literature review, this essay summarized the impact of divorce on children's development and tried to find out the problems existing in relevant study and explore the directions of future research.

·The above-mentioned research on children of single parent families particularly concerned about adolescents, especially callan, there was less study on young children. Therefore, it should seek for evaluation means which is suitable for the characteristics of infants and preschool children, paying more attention to their psychological development and adaptation.

·The previous research on children who were from divorced families generally compared the behavior problems between children from divorced families and complete families, or by statistical methods to control other household variables to examine the direct impact of parental separation on children's behavior problems. The study has provided a wealth of useful information, but often overlooked the impact of other family variables in the

divorce process on children. Thus future research should not only concern about the impact of divorce itself on children, but also pay attention to the role of other variables relate to divorce, such as the quality of parent-child relationship, the marriage conflicts before divorce and during parental separation, the living conditions of children after their parents divorce, etc. It should pay a special attention to the changes of the internal mechanism which affects the children's adaptability.

·Research on Children from divorced families was mostly transverse study, few was longitudinal study. Children's development is a process, only depending on the existing transverse study is difficult to explore the impact of parents' separation on children's development of different stages and its change process. Therefore, the relationship between parents' divorce and children's development needs to be analyzed with a clear and tracked investigation which is the problem needs to be resolved in future study.