

Theories and ideas on divorce psychology essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A divorce is defined as the legal dissolution of a marriage according to the Oxford English Dictionary. If a person wishes to begin a petition for divorce they must be married for at least a year. In the UK a divorce is only granted if the court is satisfied that the reasons are adultery by the husband or wife or unreasonable behaviour by the husband or wife. A divorce will also be granted in circumstances where the husband or wife has deserted their spouse for a period of at least two years. When the couple have been separated for two years after a mutual agreement they can also apply for a divorce. A couple where a spouse does not wish for a divorce can still be granted a divorce if there was a separation period for more than five years (HMCS, 2009)

Despite the seemingly rigid criteria for application of divorce, recent statistics show that divorce is vastly common in the UK. In 2007, there was a 2.5% decrease in the divorce rate in England and Wales compared to 2006 where 12.2 divorcing people per 1,000 married population. This is the fourth uninterrupted year that the amount of divorces has decreased and is the lowest number since 1976 when there were 126,694 divorces. The number of divorces last peaked in 2003 when there were 153,490. Although evidence shows that the numbers of divorces cases are decreasing, there are nevertheless still a high number of divorces being granted annually.

Her Majesty's Courts Service states that to apply for a divorce a petition is required to be filled and sent to the divorce court. When the court receives the petition, a copy is forwarded to the spouse involved in the divorce. If the husband or wife contests the divorce, the process can become lengthy as the court will ask for more information and evidence. If there are children

involved, then the court will examine the living arrangements and the contact they will have with the non-resident parent.

In 2007 51% of couples divorcing had at least one child aged under 16. In the same year, 20% of children were under five and 63% were under eleven. The number of children in families where the parents divorced in 2007 totalled 117, 193 - a decrease of 22 per cent from ten years earlier, in 1997, when there were 150, 309 children. In 2007 34% of couples divorcing in 2007 had no children of any age recorded (National statistics, 2007). These figures show that there is a high number of children who have divorced parents. With the divorce rate being high it is important to look at how the divorce process affects the individuals involved especially the children.

Look for 2008 statistics of divorce

Theories and ideas on Divorce

Theories explaining causes of divorce

A number of perspectives have been proposed to explain why individuals divorce. One approach that is the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective (Amato 2000), which regards divorce as a procedure that begins with feelings of estrangement from one's partner, continues as one or both spouses make a decision to separate, and then is followed by adjustment after divorce. This perspective shares similar ideas to the wider " stress-distress" theory by envisaging of divorce as a stressor to which individuals adjust with altering levels of flexibility, depending in part on the social and economic possessions at their discard (Pearlin et al. 2005).

-The selection perspective

<https://assignbuster.com/theories-and-ideas-on-divorce-psychology-essay/>

The selection perspective assumes that people who cohabit before marriage differ in certain ways from noncohabitators and that these differences increase the likelihood of poor marital quality and divorce. Relevant characteristics include having a low level of education, being poor, growing up with divorced parents, holding nontraditional attitudes toward marriage, and being nonreligious. In support of this perspective, several studies have shown that controlling for selection factors causes the association between cohabitation and measures of marital dysfunction to decrease or disappear. For example, (Belsky, 1990) found that cohabitation prior to marriage was associated with less marital interaction, more marital disagreements, greater divorce proneness, and more divorce. After controlling for a variety of selection factors, however, three of the four associations were no longer significant. Nonetheless, some of the selection factors, such as attitudes toward marriage, may have been consequences, rather than causes, of cohabitation.

-Experience of cohabitation perspective

Contrary to the selection perspective, the experience of cohabitation perspective assumes that co-habitation itself increases the likelihood of marital dysfunction as well as the personalities that partners convey to their relationships. According to this perspective, cohabitation changes people and their relationships in ways that undermine later marital quality and commitment. Although this explanation has received less attention than the selection perspective in the research literature, a few studies suggest mechanisms through which cohabitation may affect marital quality and stability. In a longitudinal study Seltzer (1991) found that after cohabiting, people were more accepting of divorce than they had been before

cohabiting. This change in attitudes may have consequences for subsequent marital quality and stability. A longitudinal study by Amato and Rogers (1999) found that married individuals who adopted more accepting attitudes toward divorce reported declines in marital happiness and increases in marital conflict, with the causal path running primarily from attitudes to marital quality. According to these authors, individuals with a weak commitment to the norm of lifelong marriage may invest relatively little time and energy in resolving relationship problems, assuming that it is easier to leave an unhappy marriage than to repair it. Consequently, people who do not support the norm of lifelong marriage are more likely than other people to see the quality of their relationships erode over time. Similarly, research has shown that married people who hold accepting attitudes toward divorce are more likely to divorce, even after controlling for the number of perceived problems in their marriages (Amato, 1996).

Theories explaining divorce effects on children

-The parental loss perspective

Conventionally, it is believed that a family with both parents living in the same house as the child, is a superior environment for children's growth than is a single-parent family. According to this outlook, mothers and fathers are significant resources for the child; each is a resource of emotional maintenance, practical support and general management. Additionally, the existence of two adults in the home permits parents to act as role models from whom children learn social competence such as co-operation, negotiation and compromise.

According to this view, the absence of one parent from the household is problematic for children's socialization. Thus subsequent to divorce, numerous children experience a decline in the amount and quality of contact with the noncustodial parent (Amato, 1987; Furstenburg & Nord, 1987; White, Brinkerhoff, & Booth, 1985). And because most custodial parents are in employment, they are restricted in the quantity of time and energy they can dedicate to their children. A reduction in parental aid may raise the possibility of problems such as poor academic accomplishment, little self-esteem, and misconduct (Rollins & Thomas, 1979). Furthermore, the parental authority organization may be weaker in single parent than in married parent families (Nock, 1988; Steinberg, 1987). Combined with a lack of parental supervision, this may increase the likelihood that children misbehave through truancy, felony, or premarital pregnancy (Dornbusch et al., 1985; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985).

-The parental adjustment perspective

This viewpoint concentrates on the significance of the psychological modification of the custodial parent. Parents who are supportive and who use a reasonable quantity of control assist the maturity and welfare of their children (Baumrind, 1968; Belsky, 1990; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). On the other hand, stress damages the superiority of a parent's childrearing ability, and this is prone to have harmful consequences for children.

Divorce is one of life's most stressful experiences according to Holmes & Rahe (1967), and most adults experience some complexity in adjustment

(Kitson & Morgan, 1990). Moreover, Weinraub & Wolf (1983) discover that single mothers have a reduced amount of social support than married mothers and experience further chronic sources of strain (McLanahan & Booth, 1989). Hetherington et al. (1982) established that throughout the first year after divorce, custodial mothers were more apprehensive, disheartened, angry, and unconfident than were married mothers. They also illustrated less friendliness to their children, conversed less with them, disciplined them more, and were more inconsistent in their use of punishment. Amato and Keith's (1991b) meta-analysis confirmed that children in divorced single-parent families have fewer positive relationships with custodial parents than do children in nondivorced families.

The longitudinal report by Hetherington et al. (1982) as well found that the mother's psychological condition and the superiority of parent-child relations enhanced after 2 years, even though several problems continued between mothers and sons. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) noted comparable changes ultimately in parental well-being and parent-child communication. These conclusions are constant with the concept that most adults adjust to divorce within a couple of years (Booth & Amato, 1991; Kitson & Morgan, 1990). This perception, consequently, assumes that decrements in the custodial parent's psychological condition and capability to work effectively in the parental role following divorce can lessen the welfare of children. Though the behaviour and modification of both parents are important, this outlook concentrates on the position of the custodial parent, since the majority of childrearing job depends on this individual.

-The interparental conflict perspective

<https://assignbuster.com/theories-and-ideas-on-divorce-psychology-essay/>

This concentrates on the role of disagreement between parents. A unhappy home surrounding made distinctive by high levels of marital disagreement is not principle for the development of children, and some studies have signified that marital quarrel has a harmful impact on children's psychological adjustment (Emery, 1982, and Grynych & Fincham, 1990). Interparental differences affect children in numerous ways. Children react to interparental aggression with pessimistic emotions, such as apprehension, fury, and anguish. Children also are inclined to become involved in the conflict amongst their parents and are occasionally forced to take sides, resulting in deteriorations in parent-child relationships (Johnston, Kline, & Tschann, 1989). Additionally, through copying verbal or physical hostility, parents possibly will ultimately educate their children that aggression is a suitable technique for dealing with disputes. Finally, children can point responsibility for arguments between parents to themselves -particularly young children who tend to be egocentric (Grynych & Fincham, 1990).

This outlook states that a difference between parents before and during the termination process is accountable for the reduced welfare of children of divorce. It must be noted that since marital conflict leads both divorce and children's trouble, this viewpoint proposes that the link between negative child outcomes and divorce is false. This perspective states that children in single-parent families after divorce should have a higher level of welfare than children in high-conflict nondivorced families, once they have recovered from any ill effects of conflict. Alternatively, since ex-spouses may persist to fight over child maintenance, supervision, and visitation arrangements, post-

divorce disagreement between parents may be a persistent strain that effects negatively on children's happiness.

-The economic hardship perspective

This perspective presumes that it is economic hardship produced by marital dissolution that is first and foremost accountable for the problems faced by children of divorce. The majority of children live with their mothers subsequent to divorce, and divorce commonly leads to a relentless reduction in the pattern of living of mother-headed families (Duncan & Hoffman, 1985; Weitzman, 1985). This reduction may amplify the risk of numerous problems for children. Economic hardship may harmfully influence children's diet and health (Williams, 1990). Poor single mothers are not capable to afford private lessons, educational models, books, home computers, and other goods that assist children's academic success. Limited income may also compel families to live in neighbourhoods where school programs are inadequately financed, services are poor, and crime rates are high (McLanahan & Booth, 1989). Adolescents, may feel forced to leave school in order to take a job and supply economically to the household (Weiss, 1979).

The economic hardship perspective can be differentiated from a associated perspective based on the idea that low socioeconomic status (including income) is a likely reason of both divorce and child problems. This second perspective asserts that any alliance between divorce and child maladjustment is forged. On the contrary, the economic hardship perspective believes that divorce causes economic decline, which, in turn, intensifies the risk of child problems. Meaning, that economic hardship is

linked to the effect of divorce on children. Even though it is complicated to attain measures of family income preceding divorce, a lot of studies have incorporated statistical controls for parents' education and occupational position. These studies normally show that part of the link between parental divorce and children's welfare is indeed spurious. Nevertheless, even after controlling for predivorce socioeconomic status, generally studies persist to find noteworthy links between divorce and children's outcomes (Amato & Keith, 1991). Consequently, the assumption that predivorce social class provides an explanation for the link between divorce and child problems can be rejected for present purposes.

-The life stress perspective

The fifth perspective is the largely universal one and, to a extent, integrates aspects from the previous four. Just as divorce is known to be a stressful occasion for adults, it is also supposed to be stressful for children (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). In reality, each of the factors noted above—loss of communication with the noncustodial parent, decline in the superiority of the relationship with the custodial parent, experience of an interparental conflict, and a decline in pattern of living—are stressors in their own right. Besides, divorce is connected with other proceedings, such as travelling, shifting schools, giving up pets, and loss of communication with grandparents that may be upsetting to children (Wolchik, Sandler, Braver, & Fogas, 1985). This viewpoint highlights that it is not a single stressor, but the gathering of negative actions, that may result in trouble for children.

Not only are actions around the time of divorce frequently stressful for children, but parental divorce can also set into movement future events that may reduce children's well-being. One modification that has involved a good deal of notice is parental remarriage. Some authors have pointed out that adding a stepparent, and possibly stepsiblings, to a family can cause tension for adults and children (e. g., Visher & Visher, 1983). Parental remarriage also creates the likelihood of further divorces. In fact, half of all children whose parents divorce will be familiar with a second parental divorce (Bumpass, 1984). Numerous instances of divorce expose children to frequent periods of conflict, reduced parenting, and financial hardship (Brody, Neubaum, & Fore-hand, 1988). Consequently, stressful events may mount up during childhood for some children of divorce.

To summarize, it is evident that out of the five explanatory perspectives reviewed above, the strongest and most dependable support is obtained for the interparental conflict model. Ironically, this viewpoint proposes that the link between parental divorce and children's welfare is spurious because interparental arguments produce both child problems and marital dissolution. In reality, divorce may develop the well-being of children if it leads to a reduction in conflict between parents. A few researchers suggest that this perspective is lacking crucial details. Firstly, due to the fact that conflict between parents usually decreases following divorce, children's well-being should improve as time passes. Nevertheless, Amato and Keith's (1991) meta-analysis proposes that even as adults, children of divorce display somewhat lesser well-being than do people from nondivorced families of origin. This suggests that some aspects, other than marital

conflict, occur in some single-parent families to affect children's well-being negatively. Secondly, even though marital conflict may be the most significant factor in the adjustment of children of divorce, some support exists for each model.

Research into effects of divorce

Positive effects of divorce

-Social well-being

Sandler, Tein, & West (1994) study found that children who use dynamic coping skills (such as problem solving and reacting to social support) are more likely to adjust to divorce more quickly compared to children who use avoidance or distraction as a coping mechanism.

McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) initiated that the length of time in a single-parent family was not associated to children's graduation from high school or risk of a teenage birth.

-Relationships

Arditti (1999) found that numerous children from divorced families, particularly daughters, stated developing a close relationship with their custodial mothers.

-Divorce as an escape

Jekielek (1998) found that children were better off if parents in high-conflict marriages divorced than if they remained married. When argument between

parents is severe, persistent, and explicit, divorce symbolizes an escape from an aversive home atmosphere for children.

Amato and Booth (1991) found that individuals who went through a low-stress parental divorce did not differ in terms of measures of psychological, social and marital well-being compared to those individuals who came from a married parent's home.

Negative effects of divorce

-Lifestyle

Amato and Booth (1991) used a sample of adults for their meta-analysis research regarding negative effects of divorce. Amato combined the results of 92 studies in which researchers had compared the welfare of children living with nondivorced families compared to divorced single parents family. He found that in 70% of cases children in divorced parents had lower levels of well-being. Children from these families performed poorly in schools. Overall children scored lower on measures of psychological, social and marital well-being except socioeconomic adequacy.

-Social well-being

Cherlin and colleagues 1995-1998 claimed that the gap in psychological well-being between children from divorced and nondivorced families grew larger, not smaller, with the passage of time.

Children who place some of the blame for the divorce on themselves tend to be more poorly adjusted than children who blamed the parents of external matters(Bussell, 1995).

In a study of primary school children it was found that 6 months after parental separation, one third of the children reported some feelings of self-blame which was related to a diversity of child problems, including depression, externalizing problems, and lowered feelings of self-proficiency (Healy, Stewart, and Copeland, 1993).

Divorce has long been linked to physical and emotional health problems (Simon and Marcussen, 1999)

-Parenting style

Thompson et al. (1992) found that divorced custodial parents, in contrast with married parents, devote less time, are less compassionate, have fewer rules, distribute harsher control, give less supervision, and take on more conflict with their children.

Silitsky (1996) found that depression among custodial mothers, which is likely to detract from parenting, is connected to poor adjustment amongst children.

There is a lack of long term studies as there is not enough focus on pre-divorce factors that can also affect well-being later on an individual's life.

External factors to consider: (ways to reduce effects, pre-divorce factors, parental relationship etc.)

Boney (2003) conducted a literature review examining the most well-known studies considering the consequences of divorce and in particular, the methods used by the researchers. Boney observed that the longitudinal studies propose that several negative outcomes found amongst children with

divorced parents exist years before the marriage ends, and subsequently might be due to parental or family problems rather than marital dissolution.

-Parent personality and parenting style

Particular parenting style had additional effect on children's adjustment to home life following divorce. There is evidence to suggest that anti social personalities in mothers, in particular, accounted for the association between mothers' marital transitions and boys' adjustment problems (Capaldi and Patterson, 1991). Further evidence suggest that negative emotions were more likely to be transmitted from single mothers to adolescent children than vice versa, especially when mothers were under stress (Larson and Gillman, 1999). Nevertheless it must be noted that even though many children in single- mother households are deprived by a lack of economic resources, some children in single- father households are disadvantaged by a lack of interpersonal resources (such as single fathers' relatively low level of involvement in school activities), resulting in roughly equal outcomes (Downey 1994) . The latter research is supported by evidence concluding that single motherhood (or absent father hood) is often cited as an important cause of crime, delinquency, and community decline (Popenoe, 1996).

The quality of parental functioning is one of the best predictors of children's behaviour and welfare.

Amato and Keith (1991) speculated that the gap in well-being between children with divorced and nondivorced parents might have narrowed either because divorce became more socially accepted or because parents were making greater efforts to reduce the potentially disruptive impact of divorce

<https://assignbuster.com/theories-and-ideas-on-divorce-psychology-essay/>

on their children. An authoritative parenting style on the part of noncustodial fathers consistently predicted children's higher academic achievement and lower internalizing and externalizing problems (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999).

-Pre-divorce factors

Research evidence suggests that in some circumstances the negative effects visible in children's well-being after divorce is not always due to the divorce process. Problems in parent-child relationships (including parents' reports that their children had given them more than the usual number of problems) were present as early as 8 to 12 years before divorce (Amato and Booth, 1996). Further support for this is from Cherlin and colleagues (1991) who concluded that children from maritally disrupted families had more postdivorce behaviour problems than children from nondisrupted families. These differences, however, were apparent several years prior to divorce, especially for boys. Interparental conflict is linked with children's adjustment problems, whether in intact or divorced families (Grych & Fincham, 1990).

-Parental remarriage (mixed results regarding this)

There are mixed results regarding the effects of parental remarriage on the well-being of children.

The positive effects of parental remarriage are that offspring with remarried custodial parents were less depressed, have fewer interpersonal problems than children with single custodial parents (Aseltine 1996 ; Bolgar et al., 1995)

There is also a significant difference between parental remarriage which was associated with fewer child problems, compared to parental cohabitation which was associated with more problems, especially among boys (Buchanon, Maccoby, and Dornbusch, 1996).

The negative effects of parental remarriage are that children in stepfamilies were not at an advantage and in some ways were more deprived, than children living in single-parent households following divorce (Amato, 1994). There are also studies showing that parental remarriage affects certain ethnic races more than other. Mc-Lanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that parental remarriage appeared to benefit African Americans more than children of white background.

It might be difficult to reach large overview about the role of parental remarriage in children's adjustment, since these effects fluctuate with children's ages, children's gender, the time since divorce, and other reasons.

Conclusion

A universal model of the effect of children's preceding divorce can be created to involve the idea of resources and stressors. Children's well-being can be regarded as being assisted by the ownership of certain amount of resources. Main resources for children comprise of parental support (which includes emotional maintenance, practical aid, guidance, supervision, and role models) in addition to parental socioeconomic resources. Children with elevated levels of resources not only have chance to extend social and cognitive forms of capability, but are better able to deal with stressful life circumstances than are other children. Divorce can be problematic for

children for two reasons. First, it entails a number of stressors that challenge children's development. These stressors comprise of interparental disagreement that may precede and follow divorce, as well as consequent disruptive life changes. Second, marital dissolution can obstruct with children's capability to consume parental resources. This transpires if divorce reduces the quality of the relationship between the custodial parent and the children, ends in a loss of contact with the non- custodial parent, or reduces children's access to parental income.

A severe stressor may counteract the benefit of a particular resource. For instance, sustained communication with the noncustodial parent may be more damaging than helpful if it is connected with regular arguments between parents. These factors propose that potential investigations on children of divorce needs to consider and reflect connections between stressors and resources; scrutinizing particular features out of context, instead of trying to grasp the larger pattern, will probably only produce more findings that are conflicting and clashing.

Such a viewpoint also has the potential to emphasize more clearly variation in children's responses to divorce. Children who undergo minimum loss of resources and insignificant stress following divorce are not likely to go through a decline in welfare. In reality, they may even gain if stress diminishes or resources amplifies following divorce (e. g., if a formerly distant father confirms a fresh relationship with his children). Alternatively, children who lose contact with parental resources and are exposed to numerous unwanted and aversive changes are almost certainly at elevated risk for developing problems.