

The Effects of Parental Divorce on a Child's Behavior

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Abstract

In this study, I examine the effects of parental divorce on a child's behavior in their developing stages of life through a conducted library research. A series of peer-reviewed journals have been read, annotated and highlighted to look for significant factors and effects of the experience of parental divorce in a child's life that not only positively but negatively affect a child's behavior. Research shows that children that undergo parental divorce show emotions like anger, depression and anxiety because of how underdeveloped their minds are. The findings include the effects of divorce on a child's relationship between the parents, the siblings and the romantic encounters they acquire in the near future. The findings largely supported that the child's relationships that they acquire are affected by parental divorce at a young age, along with the idea that the child is the one to blame for the dissolution between the parents.

Introduction

From as far back as I can remember, I have always wanted to become a lawyer. Many of my family members have been in the law industry in all different types of fields but the most intriguing to me was matrimonial, family and divorce law. It was not until my parent's divorce that I knew I wanted to go into this field, to help couples, and to prevent harm to each other and to the children; if involved. Having three siblings to help each other through a family breakup helps with dealing with a situation like that head on. In my parents divorce years ago, my dad had used a lawyer that he had still been in contact with to this day. She had become a Supreme Court Judge in the Suffolk County District Court in Central Islip, New York since my parents divorce.

When I became a junior at Purchase College, I realized I wanted to switch my major from Political Science to Liberal Studies: Legal Studies. Legal Studies under Liberal Studies was more in the field of what I wanted to do and I had explored all different types of law in this major. Fast forward to senior year, being home last semester I had interned for the Supreme Court judge that was my dad's lawyer during my parent's divorce. She had called me up one day and had said that it was a pleasure to finally talk to me because my dad had told her I wanted to be a lawyer since I was 10. I started my internship in September 2020 and it changed my life. I was only there from September to January, but it made me realize I needed to be a lawyer in the divorce and matrimonial field and I was going to be successful. I sat in on trials, learned everything I can learn about the rules and regulations of a courtroom, and filed cases corresponding to what form of motion it was going under. I learned an incredible amount about how a divorce starts and all the different paths it can go. It was a very spine-chilling experience to be sitting in on a divorce knowing that my parents went through it. No matter how well the

judge knew me, I never disclosed the information from the past. I was happy where I was with my parents and I did not need to know what was the breaking point. The one thing they stress in a court during a divorce that is easily not going well is, “do not involve the children nor talk to them about what is going on, is that understood?” Why? It affects the child in the long run. This is the most misunderstood rule that runs through a federal courtroom.

Going into depth, my topic is going to be researching the cause of having divorced parents affecting a child’s behavior in the near future. From what I know and my own personal experience, parents who involve children, (that could mean just speaking to them about what's going on behind closed doors), can physically and emotionally damage the child. Many ways they unintentionally damage their child are including less care in their physical appearance, their hygiene, and even their response to the decreasing attendance and homework assignments in school. These are quick reactions to a divorce as a child and the future problems include anxiety, stress and depression where usually the parents are not aware of these conditions because of the slow pace of parenting that comes along with getting a divorce. I think that in my research, I will find that many children who underwent a divorce that lasted longer than a 12-month period, is going to affect children in ways that are going to leave an imprint on them forever. I hope that my research gives me results including anxiety and stress being a major factor no matter what the consequence during the divorce. I want to know that it is also normal to go through a rough patch but come out even stronger.

Literature Review

A parent’s marriage is the most influential relationship in your lifetime. Nearly half of the children born to married parents in this country go through a divorce experience before they are eighteen, (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p.106). The effects of their issues during divorce

can be detrimental to a youths behavior, mental and physical health. The levels of emotions going through a child's head between the ages 6 through 11 is extreme and hard to handle. Divorce is one of the 10 worst adverse childhood experiences to take place in a young child's life. Children from divorced families have more behavioral, emotional, health, and academic problems, (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p.107). This has been used in several studies to assess how these children are coping and how the effects of post divorce are affecting a child. In this paper, I will be discussing the effects of having divorced parents on youths behavior and mental health in the long and short term effects for the children, how these children respond in education, and their future relationships that they are going to make around them in the near future.

Long Term vs. Short Term Effects

Experiencing such a traumatic event like parental divorce can change a child's outlook on their future. The long term effects of a child's degree of emotional problems start at age 7 depending on the outcomes of his/her childhood, (Cherlin, Kiernan, & Chase-Lansdale, 1995). The child is affected mentally, physically and their emotional well-being is disrupted. Children experience many emotions that include betrayal and anger because their family is being torn apart, (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p.106). They have no control over it and their parents have the advantage while the children have no benefit. Almost immediately after the divorce, the short term effects while the child is losing a parent are emotions like anger, fear, anxiousness and powerlessness that are completely out of their control, (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p.107). Research that studies the circumstances of arguments in the early years after the children's parents' divorce, shows that all children feel sad and almost feel angry, and their feelings do not disappear easily, (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p.108). The study also

showed that emotional costs going through divorce at such a young age could involve embarrassment, fear of abandonment, grief over loss, irrational hope of reconciliation, worrying about the parent's well-being, and the uncertainty for future romantic relationships, (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006, p.108).

A series of recent studies has indicated that by the age of 23, those whose parents divorced in their childhood years are more likely to leave home because of friction or the incapability to cohabit within the household, (Malone, Lansford, Castellino, Berlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004). There have been numerous studies to investigate it's target participants were at the age of 23 and most of their stressful life events happened near or at the age of 7. A large number of existing studies in the broader literature have examined the participants split into half of them having divorced parents and the others having intact parents. Children whose parents have divorced have poorer adjustment in a number of domains than childrens whose parents are married, (Malone, Lansford, Castellino, Berlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004). In another study with researcher Cherlin, it states that children with the adjustment problems after divorce cannot so much put all the blame solely on the experience of divorce, but of the family processes leading up to the divorce, (Malone, Lansford, Castellino, Berlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004).

Children in Education

When parents divorce, do you think that they think about the future consequences they are going to put their children through if the divorce ends negatively? There are negative associations between parental divorce and children's academic achievement that affect their social difficulties, behavior problems and psychological adjustment in the near future, (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000). At a young age, it is concluded in

many studies that children after their parents' divorce are recorded to get lower grades and have a higher rate of early school drop-outs, (Havermans, Botterman, & Matthijs, 2014). In addition to the drop-outs and lower grades, which is very common for children with divorced parents, they have a higher frequency of conflict between them and one of their parents, (Havermans, Botterman, & Matthijs, 2014). For example, recent research suggests that living with a single mother instead of the father is the reason these children grow up with these problems, (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000). These children adapt to their everyday surroundings and develop ways in learning how to cope with divorce and how to treat another parent based on what they observe.

School is where the children are supposed to be learning how to make friends with their peers, and use their mind to explore all the interests and topics to learn about in the world today. A recent study by Paul Amato concluded that many studies being examined showed the scores of reading and mathematics, that was used to test the academic achievement of the children, (Amato & Anthony, 2014). The study included "waves" that were a round of tests that focused on the basic skills of word and letter recognition, and rhyming words. They involved the child's ability to control attention, emotions and behavior that included one's temper and peers' ideas, (Amato, & Anthony, 2014). In the end of this study with Amato, they concluded that divorce was indeed involved in declines in reading and mathematics scores, a positive approach to learning and self-control towards themselves and others. Children with divorced parents have significantly worse relationships with their parents and a higher risk of disengagement from school, (Havermans, Botterman, & Matthijs 2014).

Future Relationships

With the results of a divorce, as a parent comes the responsibility of maintaining the same relationship they've had since prior to the divorce. The many relationships being affected during divorce are the parent to child relationship and the future romantic relationships they will acquire, (Roper, Fife, & Seedall, 2020). The failure to establish a relationship between the parent and child is associated close with both physical and emotional distress, (CUI, & FINCHAM, 2010). For example, recent research suggests that girls who witness conflict during their parental divorce may be more sensitive to potential harm of conflict and be closer to the mother, or parent assigned to custody, (Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge, & Bates, 2010).

In the light of reported Amato, it is conceivable that future romantic relationships are probably more affected than the parents relationship because of the criticism and negative communication issues, (Roper, Fife, & Seedall, 2020). Children of divorce are very cautious about entering a relationship in the future because they are unsure about its successes as well, (Roper, Fife, & Seedall, 2020). It is all about the developmental processes that these children go through that when they see a negative divorce at such a young age, they are more likely to develop their negative attitude towards marriage and divorce, (CUI, & FINCHAM, 2010). These issues affect a child to a point where their future is interrupted and they begin to doubt themselves due to things out of their control.

Conclusion

_____The effects of a parental divorce in a child's life can affect one's behavior, mental and physical health in many ways. The long term effects are what most adults are very unaware about when proceeding with a divorce. These types of effects interrupt a child's developing mind and stops them from becoming what they are naturally meant to be. Negative and crucial divorces stand as a barrier in a child's life up until they are old enough to realize what they are going

through. Long and short term effects are usually hidden in situations like divorce because the results can be very drastic. In addition, their future relationships with their parents, friends and teachers in school are heavily subjected to failure because of what the child is deeply going through.

Method

Materials

My primary methodology that I chose was further library research. I found four more articles to further my research on the effects of parental divorce on the future relationships of children. I searched on the Purchase College library, using the peer-reviewed journal tab, “divorce effects on children’s future romantic relationships,” “effects of parent’s divorce on future relationships” and “effects of parental divorce on the siblings.” These topics were giving me the appropriate results in furthering my research on future relationships. I had found full access to every full text and I read through all four articles, taking notes and highlighting the key information in each text. I used a pen to take notes of the key ideas of each article, putting them all in categories. I used a highlighter to highlight the main categories to help me organize my information.

Design and Procedure

I had conducted further library research, therefore I needed to find enough articles that matched where I wanted to go with this section. Doing more library research would further my knowledge on a certain topic and I would be able to find scholarly articles that have added to my ideas about a certain topic. For example, I researched the effects of parental divorce on children’s future relationships. My research consisted of peer-reviewed journals based on my topic on future relationships and how the effects of parental divorce causes children to have unstable

relationships in the near future. Once I had finished researching for my literature review, I knew that I wanted to go more into depth about the relationships and who it affects. My research question is: In what ways does having divorced parents affect a child's future relationships? I began my research at the Purchase College Library on February 20th, 2021, and completed my research on March 30th, 2021.

Results

Parent to Child Relationship

Divorce is the way out of a marriage when the marriage is starting to have some potential negative conflict. The reason divorce affects child relationships with their parents so much is that divorced parents were likely to have difficulties in interactions with their children due to their own adjustment such as emotional vulnerability, financial decline, or even juggling multiple tasks after divorce (Lee, 2018). The event of parental divorce affects three major relationships in a child's life. The first being the direct relationship between both mother and father towards the children, the siblings' relationship during and post divorce, and how their relationship evolves with their romantic partners in the near future. Parents play a vital role in the emotional growth of children (Williams-Owens, 2017). There has been research conducted over several years showing the effects of parental divorce on children's future relationships with their own parents. Parents are the most significant people in their children's lives and experiences with parents teach children how to interact and develop relationships with people, which can shape their relationships with romantic partners (Lee, 2018). From birth, children rely on their parents to keep them alive during the major developing stages of their life.

Father daughter relationships are more likely to suffer emotionally prior to the divorce than father son relationships (Williams-Owens, 2017). This is happening because fathers have

been found to become even more disengaged with children, less supportive to children, and assume a recreational and companionate role rather than a teacher role (Lee, 2018). While most mothers receive custody with visitation from the fathers, these are the results of a father-child relationship post divorce. Low levels of fatherly interactions with daughters can result in insecurity issues, along with promiscuity at an early age (Williams-Owens, 2017). Most of the research found explained only the relationships between the father and daughter mostly because of gender. Girls are emotional beings who crave intimacy and closeness (Williams-Owens, 2017), so when the only man in their life is not giving them that during the developing stages then how are they going to apply those emotions in real life?

Sibling to Sibling Relationship

The first relationship to be affected during parental divorce is clearly the parent-child relationship, but another is the sibling relationship between the children post divorce. Sibling relationships are the longest-surviving family relationships and an important source of comfort and support throughout the life course (Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009). They are your outlet to the outside world whether they are older or younger, siblings can teach you things that your parents cannot. The findings show that there are two opposing views that argue that parental divorce either brings siblings closer together or it drives them apart. With divorce children may compensate for this stress by developing closer sibling bonds as they seek support and comfort from their brothers and sisters (Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009). On the opposite end of this view, stress may translate into aggression and hostility toward siblings in the near future (Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009). According to one of the articles mentioned, even when parental divorce happens, children may have to choose whose side they are on when parents fight which is likely to strain sibling relationships as well (Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009).

If high conflict and negative effects occur between the parents, then the best outlet to this situation is to have the parents divorce. Poortman and Voorpostel support this theory because part of the sibling relationship shows that during divorce the bond between siblings from a divorced family is worse because their parents more often had conflicts (2009). The theory of divorce having a positive or negative effect on the sibling's relationship is found that sibling relationships among young adults to be less positive in cases where parents divorced (Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009). On the opposing view, for parental divorce improving sibling relationships due to high conflict, studies show research on other child outcomes, such as well-being and problem behavior, showing that children are actually better off when quarreling parents divorce (Poortman & Voorpostel, 2009).

Future Romantic Relationships

In a study with Weldon and Haleman, they talk about how developing romantic relationships is a key milestone during adulthood (2016). The studies show that children are negatively impacted because of the parental conflict they had dealt with in the past. With parental divorce thrown into the mix, the development of romantic relationships by the child has been negatively impacted by the parents. Children are said to have less commitment, less competence, more infidelity and conflict, and higher instability in romantic relationships (Lee, 2018). The way that the parents treat their children when conflict is involved is how the children apply those qualities to their own situations.

Female children of divorced parents are more likely to divorce, while male children are less likely to marry at all (Weldon & Haleman, 2016). Gender is a huge component when researching romantic relationships within the children. The children are experiencing what their parents are going through at such a young age and applying it to the real world with their own

relationships. They tend to develop more negative attitudes toward marriage in general and are less likely to be in close relationships (Weldon & Haleman, 2016). Lee argues that women have been socialized based on creating and sustaining interpersonal relationships and women might be more likely to be vulnerable to the qualities of relationships with people than men because women have been more relationship-oriented than men (2018).

Discussion

The conducted research did address my research topic specifically, therefore it was found that the answers to future relationships being affected by parental divorce was supported by my research topic. There is a clear impact of a child's behavior and parental divorce affecting the future relationships of the child. The major relationships being affected during divorce are the parent to child relationships, the future romantic relationships and the relationships between the siblings. The most important findings that I had researched strongly affected the parent-child relationship post divorce due to the parent's certain comfort levels, there was a non-residential parent involved, or the parents become so involved in their divorce that they forget the children. These factors highlighted the most important issues that children experience everyday going through parental divorce.

One finding in this study shows that the action being taken that is known as divorce is both a stressful life event for not only the parents, but the children going through their developing stages. Divorce is breaking up a family's routine and malnourishment when they do not have a full family anymore, they start to pick up bad relationship qualities and have less confidence in school. The idea of parents forgetting to malnourish their children through divorce causing their children to have problems in the near future. Both parents going through divorce are both competing and absent in their children's lives. Competing for their children's attention

and not even paying attention at the same time because the divorce is more important. This is important because of how much this affects a child in the long run emotionally and physically.

Another finding in my research showed that the long and short term effects of parental divorce are more important to the study than the others. The emotional problems that are automatically triggered when their families are being torn apart is one of the most intense emotions a child goes through during their lifetime. Most of the findings that included long and short term effects included that children started showing significant signs of anger, depression, anxiety and the inability to trust anyone due to parental divorce. This is all heightened by the level of conflict and pain prior and post divorce. These emotions are overbearing for a child going through their developing stages because they are learning to become the best person they can be.

Lastly, one of the last findings in my research showed that without one parent residentially a part of the child's life, many issues start to arise. In situations where the parental conflict is so detrimental to everyone in the family, divorce is encouraged for the sake of the children. If it turns for the worst and the father does not residentially live around the children because of how the divorce left off, then this affects the child in the long run. Most of the time the mother receives custody leaving the father with barely any visitation rights and cannot see their children grow and develop into their own. It is important to stress the fact that every child growing up in those stages should be accompanied by both parents due to the sole reason that the child starts to think there is a lack of love or fear of rejection.

While there are clear similarities between my literature and my research, there are limitations in the action of parental divorce. The long and short term effects, children in education and the future relationships of children all support the behavior of children going

through a parental divorce. This study serves as a guide in showing how children might be the most affected during a parental divorce because of how underdeveloped they are. As there was conflict throughout most of my research, there was no steady age group that was being studied. The age group had ranged from age 2 to the age of 31 years old. The findings in my research highlight the drastic emotions and changes that a young child has to go through because their parents could not do it anymore. Also, there was conflict in the research with the gender of the participants. Most of the participants were males and over the age of 18 whereas the data collected should be even between genders. I would recommend further research on this topic.

Conclusion

The purpose of my study was to research the effects of parental divorce on the developing children's behavior. Expanding more on the concentration of how the children would feel if the parents decided to call it quits after 20 years, to think how would the children feel in the long run? This idea was followed by the literature describing the long and short term effects of divorce for children developing, the personal relationships they acquire as they grow older, and their education that plummets because of emotions. My findings highlighted new issues not mentioned in the literature describing children that go through divorce while developing under the age of 18 have severe issues in trusting a significant other because of the past they have lived. Other findings showed that most children post divorce live with their mother which crucially affects the relationship they do not develop with their father. It is critical for a child to go through divorce at such a young age because their brains are so underdeveloped that the view of their parents has the most significance in their lives.

There were conflicting results with my research and the literature because there was no common age group. Most findings ranged from the ages of infancy to 30 years old when in my

research, I was looking more between the ages of 2 years old to 22 years old. There were no similarities in the results affecting the child's relationships and education. I think expanding more on the study of the education of the child, shows where the child is developmentally in school. With the help and resources from the school, it can help benefit the child by just talking to people to help relieve the aftermath effects of the divorce. Talking to someone can help the child mentally, so when they physically go home they are able to adapt to the situation a little better. I think the research should also include more expansions on the results of the children answering who they live with post divorce. I think that having the idea of which parent the child gets to live with is most important when tracking certain emotions and behaviors. Children at such a young age often feel as though they are the issue arising between their parents because of the lack of attention. The findings show that most children feel they are the blame for their parents' dissolution. These parents are absent and competing in their child's lives and they tend to say it's all about the children but in reality they only think about themselves in these types of situations.

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