

The Effects of Divorce on Children

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to distill and identify the major outcomes for children of divorced parents. The question is what are the substantive outcomes for children from divorced families? Are they drastically negative? My hypothesis is that divorce is largely a negative life event for children and will have measurable effects on the child's health and future. The effects of divorce on children is a complex topic with many implications for children and parents alike. The research findings generally point to negative outcome in the areas of stress, anxiety, depression, guilt, socialization, insecurity, relationship problems, academic performance, strife with parents, economic challenges, physical health, and future earning potential. Children are prone to feelings of guilt, anger, and blame. Mood disorders and behavioral problems become more common. Effects are generally long-lasting and multi-generational. The impact on children's lives tend to affect not just their childhood but their adult years. The ways to reduce the negative impacts of divorce on children include things like giving children access to both parents, all siblings, and therapy counseling. Negative impacts cannot be eliminated but can be reduced in severity and duration. Some research focuses on specific subsets of children, but this paper focuses on children as a large group and includes all age ranges.

Keywords: children, divorce, impact, outcome

Introduction

Divorce and separation within families is a widespread phenomenon in the United States and has been for much of its history. Data for divorce statistics is scattered and loosely organized, making for a somewhat difficult overall analysis of the current situation. Accurate record keeping for the state of divorce was not made a priority until rather late in the nation's history. Accurate record keeping began in the 20th century and has become clearer over time. Though the popular understanding of divorce statistics is some number between 40 and 50% of all marriages dissolve, the modern numbers are looking less grim. Statistics from the 1970s tell us that roughly 44% (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014, p. 588) of all marriages from that era would end in some form of separation. These numbers appeared to peak around 1980 and have begun to fall off since (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014, p. 592). What has not changed, however, is that divorce is still a highly prevalent social concept in the United States and continues to wreak damage unto families.

Many of these families have children who are necessarily directly involved with the process. These children's ages range from newborn to 18 and include all temperaments and personalities. Being at such a young age in life puts children at a particular disadvantage when facing a challenge as profound and far-reaching as divorce. Youngs minds are perhaps the most malleable and such a cataclysmic event so early on has the potential to leave deep, long-lasting scars. While adults may be insulated from serious psychological damage and repercussions because of their thick skin of decades of experience, children are more vulnerable and apt to be traumatized and left permanently altered after an encounter with divorce. The effects could potentially be especially pronounced if the child considers themselves to have any kind of role in the separation. Children are experiencing such enormous volumes of growth in such a

condensed, short amount of time that it will pay dividends to investigate precisely the effects divorce has on children and to what degree. Research seems to indicate that a 2-parent household is ideal for the raising of successful children even while all the reasons for this may not be fully understood at this time (Nair & Murray, 2005, p. 246).

There are many varieties of outcomes that can result from exposure to conflict and separation in the home. There can be dramatically different effects on children depending on the child's age during the divorce, whether they had access to both parents during the separation, the parent's education, and income levels, whether they had access to siblings and other supportive family members, and whether they received any of the blame for the event of separation or divorce in their life. There are variations in the effects, some more pronounced and obvious than others. While some children may experience something outstanding and remarkable like significant behavior problems, lashing out, and causing violence, others will suffer silently with more stealthy afflictions like reduced self-esteem, depressive thoughts, or self-harm. Much research has been done on the impact and implications of divorce on children and most of it points to the fact that there is substantial and measurable harm done to feelings of self-worth, mood, social ability, educational attainment, physical health, and future earnings. Many children will struggle with increased mood swings, mood disorders, and various inter-social problems. It seems unlikely that there is a child that escapes the divorce situation without some or all of these consequences. Heavy feelings of guilt are especially common amongst children of divorced parents who are old enough to understand the severity of the situation and often arise later in children who are still too young to fully comprehend their predicament when it occurs.

While research into the effects of divorce upon children has been ongoing, there are natural limitations as children cannot be studied en masse and at scale, the same way rodents can

be. The issue in enumerating the effect of divorce on children is that the effects can be difficult to uncover and measure, relying often on self-reported assessments and 2nd or 3rd hand accounts. Studies are often small-scale and limited in time. There are many impediments to analyzing in-depth the effects of divorce upon children. There is a natural protective element to a family that will tend to keep unwanted visitors (researchers) out of the family's affairs. There also exists elements of denial and overcompensation in people who grew up in separated households. There may be unconscious bias or an unwillingness to admit the truth. Uncovering the raw, unfiltered data can become a journey unto itself as divorce and separation are considered dark, murky corners of our society. People do not exactly hand out this type of information freely, given the deeply personal nature of the inquiry.

Results from studies and research into the effects of divorce on children, however, are available and could be used to buffer these children from the more severe consequences and mitigate the many potential long-term problems that can plague them into adulthood. Parents and educators who are well-versed and educated in the impact of familial breakup and separation could react in a stable and rational manner with children, lending them some sort of ease and predictability in a particularly volatile period of their life. Adults could use self-control to reduce the particularly violent and tumultuous episodes associated with divorce. Identifying the most at-risk groups of children is also a valid use of the research findings. Special care and attention can be paid to, perhaps the youngest members of a family, or whoever is deemed most at-risk and least able to internalize and deal with the conflict in a psychologically healthy manner.

Children who are facing divorce can be prepared to deal with peers, who may not be aware or understanding of the particular challenges faced by these children. Many of the peers of children of divorced parents will not understand the implications of separation and may be

particularly rude or cruel to children from divorced parents. Children of divorced parents can be counseled on how to prepare for their own relationships and how to avoid a conflict-prone relationship in their own life. Future relationships appear to be of particular challenge to children of divorced parents (Wallerstein, 1987, p. 201). Much of the therapeutic effect of counseling for these children would also be aimed at reducing their feelings of guilt associated with the divorce, as this is a common finding in the research. Another common finding is that children from separated households appear to be at much higher risk of chronic anxiety (Schick, 2002, p. 6).

Effects of divorce on children appear to be lifelong and rather permanent, though not entirely or permanently destructive and chaotic. Children are hardly condemned to a life of wretched suffering purely as a result of having their parents divorced. Effects do occasionally tend to seem worse for girls (Zartler and Grillenberger, 2016, p. 145). The research suggests exposure to therapy and counseling for proper coping. Damage to a child appears, from the research, to be metered based on some extenuating circumstances. Certain children may benefit from having access to a psychologist or other professional therapist. Much of the damage can be reduced in severity by enabling the child to have access to supportive elements in their life, whether that be monetary support or therapy sessions with a counselor. According to Zartler and Grillenberger (2016), there appears to be some therapeutic effects to having other aspects of the child's life in proper order and lacking in chaos. Having a routine and structure can better bolster children against the acute difficulties of divorce. There are other influencing factors like the education and income of both parents (p. 145).

Overview

While there may be some support services and education available to parents and children regarding this dire topic, there is room for growth and improvement in our society

regarding our attention to these people. Many children of divorced parents will carry bad habits learned from their parents forward in time and pass them down to their own children, creating a legacy of conflict and struggle, possibly creating a situation of separation and divorce on a scale that could be reduced or eliminated. The psychological scars remain with the children of divorced parents, marring their romantic and other relationships. The effects of the divorce run deeper than is first apparent and can be measured and felt decades later into the child's adult years. Much of the fight against psychological damage in children of divorced parents may, in fact, be to prepare them to avoid the event of a divorce in their own future marriages (Wallerstein, 1987, p. 201).

This paper aims to enumerate and specify the particularly negative effects children of all ages face when their parents separate or divorce. The research available will be taken into consideration, distilled, and collated. Literature will be examined in-depth and reviewed, assessed for information regarding mostly negative outcomes on children. There will also be a focus on what the research says about mitigating factors, or how the negative effects on children can be reduced. This paper will be used to examine children of divorced parents on a large scale. Rather than focusing on explicitly at-risk groups or those of a particular age range, this paper will be used to broadly interpret much of the available data and aim to be of practical use for parents, educators, and children in coping with this ubiquitous and especially challenging issue. Adults who experienced divorce as children may also find this data of use.

Occurrence of divorce varies greatly depending on numerous factors such as race, age, and education of the participants. Divorce rates continue to climb the longer the marriage lasts. Data shows that the younger, less educated, and more African American citizens have the highest incidence of divorce and separation. The studies seem to indicate that the more education one

attains and the longer one waits to marry, the lower the risk of divorce (Raley & Bumpass, 2003, p. 250). Low education and low income also tend to be predictors of a higher chance of divorce. Causes of divorce have a strong tendency to fall into the categories of “alcoholism, domestic violence, infidelity, “didn’t get along,” “no longer loved each other” and “money problems” (Ambert, 2005, p. 16). Divorces can occur at any point during the lifespan of the marriage but will increase in likelihood the longer the marriage persists.

Divorce is a prevalent institution in the modern Western world. Although absolute rates peaked around 1980 for the United States (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014, p. 592), numbers are still substantially high enough to impact a large number of children. Anderson (2014) states “In 1970, 84 percent of children lived with their married biologic parents, whereas by 2009, only 60 percent did so. In 2009, only 29 percent of African American children lived with their married biologic parents, while 50 percent were living in single-mother homes. Furthermore, 58 percent of Hispanic children lived with married biologic parents, while 25 percent were living in single-mother homes” (p. 379). A 2009 survey revealed that 45.8% of children will reach the age of 17 while still living with their biological parents. (Anderson, 2014, p. 379). According to 2000 census data, 28% of divorced or separated parents had at least one child under the age of 6 (Leon, 2003, p. 258).

Children, being too young to make most of their own decisions, are at a particularly disastrous disadvantage when exposed to divorce in the home. There is a high degree of formative processes taking place during the years of 1 – 18. It is likely that exposure to stressful situations can leave a much lasting impact on a child than a similar situation would on an adult. The ages of 6 - 14 are a particularly intensive time of development for a child’s identity (Eccles, 1999, p. 30). Though Freud and Piaget famously saw middle childhood as a sort of “plateau” in

development, recent theorists have proposed that this stage of development is crucial because it represents the period of life in which children are moving from the home into the wider arena of social interaction and public venues (Eccles, 1999, p. 32). Socialization is an area of potential shortcoming in children of divorced parents as they learn to interact in complex social situations with their peers. Concepts like self-esteem and self-confidence will become more important for the child entering school and forming new connections and relationships. Children will be forming their sense of place in the world as well as a more nuanced understanding of the people who surround them in complex social hierarchies. The influence of divorce during this time can serve as a complicating factor that will bring undue burden and stress to bear on the child who is already coping with rapid change. It can influence the way a child thinks about and behaves towards others. Childhood socialization being challenging enough on its own, divorcing parents could be seen as tipping the child into a type of overload.

According to Arora, Shah, Chaturvedi, & Gupta (2015), children of divorced parents are typically considered to be in a “vulnerable” group. This group of people is generally more at risk for things like abuse, neglect, deprivation and violence (p.194). Other potential problems for young people in vulnerable groups can be increased risk of injuries, early sexual experimentation, sexually transmitted diseases, including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Arora et al. stated that “Undoubtedly, parents form the main shield for social protection of children and young adults; thus, absence of even one of the parents or orphan hood is one of the major determinants of vulnerability” (2015, p. 194).

Literature Review

The research methods used in the studies on the effects of divorce on children tend to have relatively small sample sizes of a few dozen to a few hundred subjects. The studies are

voluntary opt-in based, where the participants generally understand what they are being asked about. The focus tends to be on a specific age range for each study such as 4-10 years, 10-14 years, and 14-18-year-old groups. There are few studies that focus on children as a whole. There are relatively few examples of long-term studies that examine thousands of children from infancy to adulthood.

The first experience for children of parents who divorce will usually occur long before the actual separation of the adults. Typically, the child will be exposed to stress and tension within the home, often for prolonged periods of time. Most parents are not experts at keeping their squabbles and disagreements hidden from the curious minds of children for long. There is usually a good deal of spillover of emotional disturbance and trauma onto the child. Well before the parents begin hunting for separate homes or apartments, the child will become subject to the forces of a toxic, less-than-ideal environment. While parents may think they are doing a good job of keeping the conflict to themselves, the sponge-like nature of a child's mind will readily absorb all of the information within its environment. According to Troxel and Matthews (2004), "Marital conflict can be particularly distressing for children as it can lead to an unpleasant emotional climate in the family, can threaten the child's emotional and physical well-being, and can diminish the physical and/or emotional availability and sensitivity of the parents" (p. 29).

Several studies have pointed to anxiety as being an outcome for many children. Children of divorced parents are, in general, more likely to develop anxiety than children from intact families. They are also more at-risk for severe levels of anxiety. Divorced parents tend to report high levels of anxiety in their children. Teachers of children of divorced parents also report higher than usual levels of anxiety in their students. Interestingly, children of divorced parents themselves do not report high levels of anxiety in response to surveys. Anxiety seems to be a

result of the presence of stress, which to a child indicates a clear threat. There is evidence that prolonged exposure to stress can lead to chronic anxiety. Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski (2003) stated that, “In this study, state anxiety is defined as a transitory emotion including such feelings as tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry” (p. 268).

According to Healy, Stewart, & Copeland (1993), guilt and self-blame are two other common feelings associated with children involved with divorce. The literature seems to indicate that the problem is more pronounced soon after the break-up, with studies claiming that within the first 6 months after the divorce, about a third of children will experience some feelings of self-blame in response to the divorce. A year later this figure falls to 20% (p. 279). Healy et al. (1993) stated that “Being caught in triadic relations with the two parents was associated with self-blame, but parental disagreement over child rearing and a history of physical, mental, or school problems were not” (p. 279). Self, Mother, and teacher responses suggest that children’s adjustment period is negatively impacted by feelings of self-blame (Healy et al., 1993, p. 279). Interestingly, guilt is not considered the same feeling as shame. Guilt is typically defined as the feeling that one has committed some kind of wrong, where shame is the “translation of that feeling to one’s self-image, i.e., the feeling of not being a good person” (Kalmijn, 2020, p. 271). Shame is not as natural a reaction for a child from a divorced household as feelings of guilt are. Children may feel directly involved with the bringing about of the end of a union, but it does not translate into their worth as a person, as much as might be expected for one of the adults involved in the failed marriage. Leon (2003) stated that, “For example, preschool-age children may be more likely to feel responsible for their parents' divorce and to fear abandonment and separations than are older children” (p. 258).

Social problems begin mounting for the child of divorced parents who leaves home to attend school. Likely, many of their classmates come from intact families and the implicit stress, anxiety, and guilt are somewhat or completely foreign concepts to them. This situation can potentially stand to alienate a child. Nair and Murray stated that, “These children tended to have more behavioral, social, and learning problems, both at home and in school settings, than did children from intact families” (2005, p. 246). Children from divorced homes represent a substantially more vulnerable group of kids than children from families whom are not struggling with separation issues. Along with the behavioral, social, and learning problems, other challenges can include emotion, self-esteem, academic achievement and psychosomatic disorders. (Schick, 2002, p. 11). School can be the place where underlying psychological difficulties can begin to rear their ugly heads and show their true form. The social situations provided by school and playdates can become the theater in which issues take form. Schick (2002) stated that “parents evaluated their children as exhibiting more behavior problems, showing more signs of social withdrawal, being less consistent in their academic performance, and displaying delinquent behavior more frequently than children of non-divorced families” (p. 11). Additionally, Schick explains that the extreme degree of social anxiety experienced by children of divorced parents may be seen as enhanced shyness, which can otherwise be seen as an extended need for avoidance. This can become a way for the child to avoid the topic of separation and divorce entirely. This can alienate them from their friends.

Sensitivity to rejection pops up frequently in the literature. Children from divorced homes appear to be especially sensitive to any and all forms of social rejection (Schaan & Vögele, 2016). This can obviously make meeting new people, making friends, and forming romantic relationships considerably difficult. The offspring of divorced parents appear to have lower

levels of overall resilience. These children have a higher incidence of insecure attachment style orientation. They have a heightened tendency according to Schaan and Vögele statement “to anxiously expect, readily perceive and intensely react to rejection” (2016, p. 1267). Preschool children have been observed to have lower attachment security scores within 1 year of divorce compared to children from families not dealing with divorce (Nair & Murray, 2005, p. 261). These children will feel less secure with forming relationships. Their friendships and later romantic relationships will likely suffer as their idea of normalcy has been affected. Children of divorced parents may overly attach themselves in an effort to compensate for their lack of or threatened levels of intimacy at home. Their anxiety about all types of relationships elevate as they call into question the integrity and predictability of all types of connections. They can respond very negatively to normal amounts of rejection.

Academic performance apparently suffers for children whom are the product of a divorced household. Anderson, (2014) stated that, “Children of divorced parents are more likely to have lower grade point averages (GPAs) and be asked to repeat a year of school” (p. 382). Studies have shown that children from intact 2-parent homes have higher math and science scores. Children from single-parent homes were more likely to have excessive absences in school (Anderson, 2014, p. 382). The reason for these deficiencies seems to be that the process of handling the damage and loss to the integrity of their household consumes excessive amounts of mental and emotional energy (Brand, Moore, Song, & Xie, 2019, p. 265). The child simply does not have the spare mental resources to adequately perform in the academic region. The child’s immediate focus is on maintaining some level of certainty and structure within the home, that academic pursuits are seen as something of a luxury, or an extra in life that will be achieved if only there were the resources and time. A lot of elements in a child’s life can, in this way, be put

on hold. Interestingly, the educational achievement of white children seems to suffer more in an environment of divorce than the achievement of nonwhite children. This data plays into the overall picture of how divorce impacts and affects people of different race. The effects are not evenly distributed but appear to group up on specific racial identities. The drop in academic achievement among white students can be partially explained by the slashing of income inherent in splitting up a household. When parents separate, the child's fundamental cognitive abilities do not appear to be affected, rather their levels of emotional stability are tossed into a chaotic situation. Brand et al. (2019) stated that, "We also find that parental divorce does not limit the educational attainment of nonwhite children because declines in economic resources and stability are offset by increases in child wellbeing" (p. 285).

Children of divorced parents exhibit higher levels of anger, especially early adolescents, as compared to children of the same age from intact families. Mahon et al. stated, "That is, on average, the youngsters from divorced families reported a high level of subjective feelings of tension, annoyance, irritation, fury, and rage" (2003, p. 271). According to Maldonado (2009), divorce can easily foster feelings of resentment amongst the children in a divorced household. Whether or not the child picks one or both parents to be angry with, there are multiple targets for rage and anger. The child may also become angry at him or herself or siblings, depending on who the child feels holds more responsibility. Anger can spill over towards peers, teachers, and other adults (p. 445). The feeling of anger can be closely tied with feelings of blame. Maldonado (2009) found that, "Children who experience unresolved anger are at higher risk for high blood pressure, behavioral problems, poor academic achievement, drug use, truancy, bullying, depression, violence, juvenile delinquency, and promiscuity" (p. 445). Children are far more likely to handle their anger in less productive ways. They are likely to vent their anger in

unhealthy, possibly dangerous ways. Adults have the added experience and wisdom to be able to channel their anger and minimize its collateral damage, but children have no such abilities, or at least diminished capacity in this regard.

Depression is a commonly reported ailment from those people struggling with divorce. Children are no exception. Mahon et al. (2003) stated that, "Depression appears to form a final outcome for a variety of stresses" (p. 268). Adolescents who are predisposed to depression will often relapse into a depressive episode upon entering adulthood. For healthy, non-depressed adolescents, parental divorce doesn't seem to increase the risk of future depressive episodes in adulthood (Bohman, Låftman, Päären, & Jonsson, 2017, p.10). The research seems to indicate that depression is not a direct result of divorce for most children but puts certain at-risk groups at greater risk of relapse or increased severity. This can possibly be explained by the idea that children of divorced parents end up in single-parent homes with less access to resources and forced into a more trying situation, creating a more depressing atmosphere. Some children appear shielded from this effect of depression while others seem exceptionally vulnerable to the condition. In general, children are at higher risk of developing mental illnesses as young adults if they experienced divorce while children. They do not appear to be at higher risk of developing personality disorders (Schaan, Schulz, Schächinger, & Vögele, 2019, p. 99). Specific psychiatric disorders, according to research, do not appear to be linked directly to specific childhood trauma, including divorce (Hovens et al., 2010, p.66).

There is a risk of a child or children losing touch with one parent or the other in the fallout of a divorce. There may be one parent who the child blames for the present situation. There can be resentments being harbored towards one parent in particular, who may receive the bulk of the accusations from a child. Over time, there can be a gulf that grows between parent

and child as the young person alienates themselves, often choosing one parent over another to spend most of their time with. Typically, this situation results in children spending less time with their fathers, as mothers historically and still do tend to get most of the custodial responsibilities of a child. According to Anderson (2014), “A study in 1996 found that fewer than half of children living with a divorced mother had seen their fathers at all in more than one year, and only one in six saw their fathers once a week” (p. 381). Parents may spend less time overall parenting their children and may withdraw from some of their parenting responsibilities.

Anderson (2014) stated that, “Parents must adjust to their own losses as well as to their new role as a divorced parent. Thus, parents may not have as much emotional strength and time to invest in parenting, i.e., the parents experience a “moratorium on parenting” (p. 380). Children from intact families will have a greater opportunity to maintain a relationship with both parents, something that can become something of a luxury for a child of separated parents.

A great risk for children of divorced parents is the added stress of financial trouble. Divorced parents will generally separate. Things that were once shared amongst the mother and father, such as housing, vehicles, food, and fuel will generally have to be provided by each parent individually. Married couples, in this way, provide a more rigid and reliable foundation on which a family can grow. Divorce threatens the integrity of the family unit entirely. Fathers seem to recover financially more quickly than mothers (Anderson, 2014, p. 380). There is a roughly 25-50% drop in income for mothers who have custody of their own children. This kind of a drop in income can mean a staggering drop in quality of life and access to resources for the child. Life can become much harder for the child at this stage of separation. Parents may have to take on additional work hours and responsibilities in order to pick up the slack and cover the gaps created by divorce. This inevitably means time away from children and the children of divorced

parents having more unsupervised time on their hands. This can lead to behavior problems and high-risk activities. The chances of a child living in poverty is much higher if that child is living with a single mother than if they were living in an intact home. The economic threat to the child can mean less access to nutritious food, threatening growth. It can mean less access to educational resources, threatening future achievement and earning potential.

Researchers looking to estimate the economic damages done to a child through the loss or absence of a parent have learned that the child of divorced parents faces a lifetime future income reduced by between 3 and 12 percent. As researchers Kane, Spizman, Rodgers, & Gaskins (2010) have explained, “the absence of a role model of the same gender reduces expected educational attainment and lifetime earnings whether it is the result of relationship discord or death.” (p. 388). The limitation for the child begins with the distress in the home, creating a hyper-focus on the stability of the home-life environment. This extends into distraction from school activities. The parents’ reduced income can have the effect of reducing a child’s educational opportunities. The career advancement of a child of divorced parents is therefore in jeopardy from the moment the parents decide to separate. The effect is especially pronounced for girls (Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2008, p. 792).

The future romantic relationships of the child can be compromised and come under threat from the actions of a parental divorce. The child learns particular patterns of behavior from their parents. The observed relationship within the household is identified in the child’s mind as a “normal” relationship. Bad habits and unrealistic expectations can be born in this stage of life. Studies show that children of divorced parents are far more likely to experience anxiety and insecure attachment styles when dealing with dating and marriage in their own lives (Schaan, Schulz, Schächinger, & Vögele, 2019, p. 92). Children of divorced parents are far more likely to

experience earlier sexual contact, unwanted and early pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases. Children of divorced parents show a consistently higher level of approval for activities like premarital sex, cohabitation, and divorce. Their views of relationships in general are more reckless. Chaos being the normal mode of operation for these children, all kinds of behavior are within the range of acceptable and normal. These children almost always begin having sex earlier. Anderson (2014) stated that, "Girls whose fathers left the home before they were five years old were eight times more likely to become pregnant as adolescents than girls from intact families." (p. 382). Adult female children report less levels of trust and satisfaction in their romantic relationships. Children of divorced parents do not generally view marriage as a permanent bond and union. They tend to view divorce as a more casual, always-available option. It becomes a previously validated emergency exit. It should be noted that the negative effect of divorce upon future romantic relationships is generally stronger in girls (Whitton et al., 2008, p. 792).

The physical health of children from divorced households is generally under threat. These children face higher levels of physical abuse and neglect. The chances of physical abuse for a child in a separated household can be double the amount of a child not impacted by divorce. The overall health of children from intact, nuclear families appears to be higher in almost every measure when studied. Children from divided households visit emergency rooms in higher volumes than kids from nuclear families. These at-risk children also face higher rates of self-harm, and attempt suicide in higher numbers. They are at higher risk for drug and alcohol addiction (Anderson, 2014, p. 383).

There are some benefits to divorce, which explains why the process exists and has become more readily accessible around the country. Some relationships can become excessively

turbulent and dangerous. This paper does not argue that marriages should continue at all costs. Marriage and divorce, being complicated topics, are not subjects that can be summarized or put neatly into categories. Each case has to be examined independently by all parties until an appropriate decision can be made. Children being a large concern for most parents, are at the top of the list of considerations when making an enormous decision like divorce. The research reviewed here seems to indicate that divorce is generally a bad deal for children. The effects on them are numerous and highly influential. This fact doesn't, however, mean that divorce should never happen in a family containing children. There will be relationships that are better dissolved than to entertain the risk of continuing, even for the sake of a child. There are relationships that are excessively violent for either the spouses or the children, and an end to the union and household may be the wise move. What this paper aims to highlight is that parents should consider heavily their decision to divorce. It does not seem appropriate to seek only a healthy relationship for themselves but to seek a healthy family household for everyone involved. It is a fact that this is not always possible or a realistic option. If there exists the possibility of reconciliation, counseling, renewing of vows, or any other number of things that may serve to bolster or reinforce the marriage, these things must be considered before the option of flight. Many states require mediation in the event of separation or divorce and many other states recommend it (Maldonado, 2009, p. 457). Studies have shown that a 2-parent nuclear household is ideal for raising children. Life satisfaction is lower in children from separated households (Bjarnason et al., 2012, p. 59). Single parent households may have come into vogue in recent decades, but the literature does not support the efficacy of these arrangements for the process of raising children.

Therapists can be especially useful for children in a separation situation because often, as previously discussed, the parents are highly preoccupied, either working out their own housing and career options or getting involved with new romantic relationships. The child can often feel ostracized and alone. A counselor or therapist serves as a good bridge for gaps such as this. The children that visit therapists and counselors for help dealing with divorce are alike in many ways to children seeking help for various other traumatic stressors. There are numerous issues that children may need to discuss and bring out into the open. Several in particular have been highlighted in the research literature. According to Jordan (2016), "Optimal adjustment was dependent on children accomplishing the following psychological tasks during and after the parent's divorce: understanding the divorce and its consequences; disengaging from the crisis and resuming normal activities; coping with the loss, dealing with the anger, and resolving the guilt and self-blame; accepting the permanence of the divorce; and achieving hope regarding relationships" (p. 431). Therapists or psychologists can help children reach these steps in particular and navigate the other emotional burdens that come with divorce. Studies have indicated that children respond well to the opportunity to share feelings about the divorce process (Maldonado, 2009, p. 457). There are group therapy sessions available to some children in some schools. (Jordan, 2016, p. 431).

Analysis

Upon initiation of investigation into this topic, the thesis I held was that the outcomes for children in families who face divorce and separation would be largely negative. The literature available on the topic of damage done to children by divorce is fairly extensive and long-term. The data provided indicates that there is an overall negative effect placed upon children in this situation. Children suffer unduly in the areas of stress, anxiety, depression, guilt, socialization,

insecurity, academic performance, relationship problems, strife with parents, economic challenges, physical health, and future earning potential. The effects of divorce seem to shatter and fragment the typical psychological makeup of a child and have a ripple effect throughout the lifespan. There are other factors at play in the outcome for children, including and especially the situation of the parents. The personal care and attention the parents yield towards their children will have a great impact on the future outcomes of the child.

Conclusion

Given the factual data about the effects of divorce on children, there should be great consideration from all appropriate angles on how best to proceed in the event of marital discord and disruption. Parents may be tempted to make enormous relationship and household maneuvers based mostly on temporary feelings or situations that can be remedied. While this type of destruction may be superficial in a situation where children are not present, like a dating situation, the household that has children is a scenario where great care must be taken. The literature tells us that the effects and damage of divorce for children is deeply personal, severe, and chronic. The effect of a separation on adults may be profound and painful but the effects on children are life-altering and permanent. Multiple studies now show that life satisfaction is lower all around and in all categories for the offspring of parents who divorce.

The argument can be made against “Staying together for the kids” because the parents happiness and life satisfaction are also considerations. These are not unimportant or ill-considered matters. Parents have a responsibility not only to provide a structured, beneficial order to the household in general, but to make themselves good role models in the everyday course of their lives. Part of being a good role model for children will necessarily include showing kids that mom and dad are capable of finding good partners and maintaining healthy

relationships in their own personal lives. It is important that children see what kind of behavior their parents will tolerate and what is considered too much or unhealthy. Much of the evidence suggests that children conceptualize their own ideas of what is normal and healthy by viewing what their biological parents do while they are at a young age. Essentially, whatever we grow up with is considered normal to us. Taking this into consideration, parents may eventually decide that their own marriage is too much of a liability for their and their children's lives, even if it will come at a great cost to become divorced. This should normally be considered a last resort, when all other methods aimed at restoring the relationship have failed.

Divorce may have become somewhat normalized in the late 1970s and accelerated to unprecedented levels, but this was not without cost. Approximately one million children each year experience their parents' divorce. The damage to these children will not be entirely avoided but can be mitigated in some ways. Allowing the child access to resources such as both parents, whether that time is split up evenly or not, seems to buffer the child from excessive damage. Having access to counseling, a therapist, or psychologist of some kind can offer a level of security to a child that may otherwise be entirely lacking. The effects of talking to someone are a great boost to the condition of a child in this predicament. The usefulness of therapy can be interrupted if the situation in the household is entirely too dire, however. It is optimal if the child has support from the parents in attending therapy or counseling. For a great degree, parents serve as the greatest protective asset to children. Their actions will have the most effect on the lives of their children, over any other adult. Teachers and counselors may very well play a role in supporting a child, but parents need to pay specific attention to the kind of environment they are creating for their offspring.

Ultimately, divorce has profound effects on not only the individuals involved but society at large. The family unit serves as a basic building block and structural component in our civilization. Healthier children mean healthier futures for all citizens. Having generations of children produced from countless divorces will no doubt have a measurable impact on the amount of success we can achieve collectively. The psychological and health damage is impossible to calculate but we must also consider the cultural and sociological damage incurred by massive, world-wide destruction of the family unit. Pain on a global scale seems an inevitable outcome for this habit. Finding ways to cull and mitigate the disastrous outcomes of divorce should be considered a noble priority.

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