

The Impact of Divorce on Child Development

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Abstract

Previous research has looked at the effects of divorce on children to understand the different types of impacts that divorce has on children's development. Research has found two factors (e.g., interparental conflict and custody arrangement) that can occur after divorce and its impact on children emotional development, their parent-child relationship, and their overall adjustment. Both interparental conflict and custody arrangement are linked with more emotional problems in children, such as stress, depression, and anxiety as well as more adjustment problems and poor parent-child relationships. Lastly, future research and implications for parents and children are provided.

Interparental Conflict

- Children and adolescents are likely to express feelings of anxiety and depression when their parents are anxious or depressed as a result of conflict after divorce (Sandler et al, 2008; Stallman & Ohan, 2016).
- Boys with parents in conflict are more likely to be depressed, rather girls are more likely to be depressed and anxious (Burns & Dunlop, 2002).
- The more conflict parents have after divorce, the more it impacts the parent-child relationship for both mothers and fathers, especially if the child is in the middle of that conflict (Amato & Afifi, 2006).
- Children experience more adjustment problems, especially into adulthood if their parents conflict resulted in lack of parental warmth and support, as well as parental rejection (Arshad & Naz, 2014; Clark-Stewart et al., 2000; Cummings et al., 2001).

Custody Arrangements

Sole Custody

- Children are more stressed with the lack of equal time shared by both parents (Tornello et al., 2013; Turunen, 2017).
- Children are more likely to be stressed if they see one parent struggling to take care of them, while the other parent doesn't help (Sweeney, 2007).
- The parent-child relationship is more impacted with the parent who does not have custody (Nielson, 2014).
- If mothers have sole custody, the father-child relationship is more impacted because fathers are more likely to withdraw from their children (Laumman-Billings & Emery, 2000).
- Children are more likely to have adjustment problems if the other parent is constantly absent (Faust et al., 2017).
- Children are more likely to have more adjustment problems with fathers than mothers because mothers tend to show more support and warmth towards their children (Hilton & Kopera-Frye, 2004).

Joint Custody

- Children have more adjustment problems if one or both parents lack good communication and co-parenting with the other parent (Bauserman, 2002; Drapeau et al., 2017).
- Children are more likely to be stressed with having two separate types of parenting and households (Bauserman, 2002; Smart et al., 2001).
- There is an impact on the parent-child relationship with the parent that shares less time with the child, while the other parent spends more time with them (Schwartz & Finley, 2005).

Future Directions

- Understanding the impacts of interparental conflict and custody arrangements on the parent-child relationship overtime can be helpful to understand what issues remain after divorce (Bjarnason & Arnarsson, 2011; Nielson, 2014).
 - Future research should use longitudinal designs to see the long-term impacts.
- There's a lack of research on how age and gender play a role in how children deal with their parents' divorce (Burns & Dunlop, 2003).
 - Future research should look at different age and gender groups to understand how different children experience these impacts from divorce.

Implications

- After divorce, parents and children are less likely to express and communicate their feelings to each other which impacts their relationship (Riggio, 2004).
 - Therapeutic intervention can be helpful for both children and parents to express and communicate with each other about their feelings to better adjust to the divorce, as well as gain support through the process.
- Divorced parents are less likely to co-parent with each other (Drapeau et al., 2017).
 - Parents can attend a parent education program to help with their issues and find better ways to co-parent with each other.