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The Effects of Divorce on Children and Interventions for All Members of the Family Unit

Laurie Arieux
University of Northern Iowa

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THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN AND INTERVENTIONS FOR ALL
MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY UNIT

A Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
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Laurie Arieux
University of Northern Iowa
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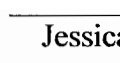
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Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

Introduction

In 1989 more than 1 million children, on average, were affected by divorce in the United States and this number has risen to over 40% of the population under 18 in recent years (Amato & Keith, 1991a). The assumption is that this number will continue to grow. When one considers that there are also parents who suffer from these stresses the number grows substantially into something worthy of much consideration. With so many people being affected by this growing trend the desire to understand the differences it has on families is growing. Divorce changes children in many ways including their behavior, academic achievement, and psychological adjustment. These differences can continue into their adult lives and relationships.

The reasons for these changes in children are difficult to decipher, but many theories can be given for why divorce makes so many drastic changes in the children it touches. These reasons may include the conflict that takes place both before and after the divorce, lower income levels, and less time spent with either parent. Since the single parent is now forced to work more, or start working for the first time, the time spent with the custodial parent is diminished. The non-custodial parent may have designated visitation times that would reduce their time spent with their children. Most studies also show that it is probably a combination of these different reasons, rather than just one that is causing these changes.

The same kinds of struggles may be true of parents. It is clearly shown through the information gathered that divorce also places a heavy strain on the single parent, who is now responsible for something that is a big job for even two people. Divorce can also

affect the interactions that parents, both custodial and non-custodial, have with their children. Parents may experience economic hardships that they never had to worry about when they had two incomes, increased stress and more psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety.

Once these effects are fully understood by others the next step is to develop ways to help families adjust to the divorce. There are many different interventions that can be used to help alleviate the problems many of these people face. For example, getting involved in a support group either within the school or outside of it could be a possible intervention. For very extreme cases the family can go into individual therapy or group therapy to help them deal with their problems. A lot of parents find it very helpful to participate in a support group because it allows them to learn from and related to others in the group.

The changes divorce has on families are very complex and worthy of being looked at more closely. Divorce is affecting society in numerous ways, but it is also important to understand that there are ways to change and help these effects. After examining some of the different outcomes divorce has on children and parents, including behavioral, emotional, and educational, this paper will examine some of the many different interventions offered to those suffering from divorce. These interventions will be focused on families as a whole as well as children and parents individually.

Literature Review

Divorce is a very disruptive event for any child. It may involve the parents fighting, followed by one parent leaving the household for another residence. Children often respond to these changes in the home with disruptive behavior and actions. The

behavior changes can be placed into two general categories, internalizing and externalizing. Internalizing occurs when a child's behavior is over-controlled and may be outwardly manifested by depression, anxiety and shyness (Compas et. al., 1991). Children who externalize their problems may exhibit aggressive or overly assertive behavior as well as displaying hyperactivity (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002).

Children from divorced homes, when compared with two parent households, perceive themselves to be less attractive, feel that they struggle with school work, and have a low sense of global worth (Compas et. al., 1991). These children often have more trouble adjusting and becoming confident individuals, and this may cause them to feel that they are worthless and incompetent.

When comparing children from three different types of homes: single parent, two parent and those living in homes experiencing divorce, those from constantly single parent homes exhibit the worst outcomes in both behavior and cognitive achievement. The children who are undergoing a transition from two parents to one parent homes are slightly better behaved, but the best behaved children are those from two parent families or those that transition from one parent to two parent homes (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001). One reason suggested for this outcome is that single mothers are more likely to be depressed than those in two parent homes, which causes their parenting skills to be less effective and consistent when compared with mothers of intact families. This same trend is not as prevalent for custodial fathers. Differences may also be caused by a lower income due to going from having two incomes to support the family to just one (Carlson & Corcoran).

A majority of children from divorced households live with their mothers and, because of this, often experience economic hardships. Going from two incomes to one is always challenging despite whether there was only one income in the house prior to divorce. Childcare will have to be paid for as well as many additional expenses. It is common belief that females generally make less money than males, whether this is due to the number of years working in the field, the types of jobs women have, or some other factor is insignificant. Because of this fact, children from broken families have less income than those children living with two parents. According to a meta-analysis conducted by Amato (1993), children from divorced families score lower than those of intact families in almost every outcome including adjustment, behavior, cognitive achievement, and self-confidence. When income is controlled this margin is reduced significantly, but not entirely. This fact also implies that children who live with their fathers are better adjusted and have fewer behavioral problems (Amato & Keith, 1991a). This may be due to higher income of the household. It is also believed that boys become more adjusted when they live with their fathers and girls are far better when they reside in their mother's household.

The decline in cognitive achievement can also be attributed to lower income due to the fact that these children are less likely to have educational toys, or receive special lessons (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002). The custodial parent being employed full time, or possibly working overtime, can lead to a lack of assistance and supervision of a child's homework, which can also affect cognitive achievement. In addition to this, children who continuously live in poverty may not have proper food, shelter, or medical care that would help the child grow. This can lead to an increased number of developmental

defects (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001). Also living in a low-income neighborhood does not provide as many positive peer influences or role models as living in a middle or upper class neighborhood might.

In addition to all of these factors affecting children due to economic strain, one must also consider the amount of stress that is placed on the single parent. They are raising children, working and struggling with the difficulties of being low income. This can put a lot of strain on the adult and cause their parenting to be more negative and inconsistent (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002). In addition, they are struggling with their own sense of emotional loss that often comes along with a divorce. While the adults need time to grieve the loss of their relationship they must also continue to provide for their children and handle the legal aspects of the divorce.

There are no studies, however, that prove that economic hardship is entirely responsible for the decline in children's cognitive achievement and behavioral difficulties. This is not to say that it does not play some sort of factor in it. It is very clear that an economic decline does have some effect, but more than likely, more than one factor plays a part in these declines (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002). Another factor that may be considered part of the problem is the conflict between the parents before, during and after divorce takes place.

Children may respond to divorce and conflict between parents with feelings of guilt at causing the fight, fear, anger and distress (Amato, 1993). In addition to these feelings, a child may be forced into the middle of an argument and asked to side with one parent or the other. This can cause a rapid deterioration of the relationship between the child and the parent. Children can also feel stress, sadness, or a lack of security (Amato

& Keith, 1991a). This perspective has the highest support by studies that have been done. Children who are in high conflict families, despite the marital status of the parents, are not as well adjusted (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002). In addition, children in high conflict, intact families actually scored lower on psychological adjustment, and self-concept than children from divorced families. Because of this, a low conflict divorce can significantly raise the well-being of a child, if the child has been living in a highly conflicted household (Amato, 1993).

This concept, however, does have some limitations such as the subsiding of problems once the conflict is resolved. According to this theory, once the parents are separated and the conflict subsides, the child's well being should rise to the same level as those in intact families (Amato, 1993). This does not, however, hold up in research. In fact there are long-term consequences for children who experienced divorce as children that continue even until adulthood.

In addition to economic hardship and interparental conflict, the adjustment of the parents may also have an effect on the well-being of a child going through a divorce. This may include anything from parenting techniques to the parent's psychological state. These things can determine the child's emotional and psychological well-being following divorce.

An adult going through divorce has a lot of emotions and life changes to handle. They must learn to live by themselves again and adjust to a single income, as well as divorce settlements and possible changes in location. When children are involved this adjustment becomes much more complicated. Not only must a parent adjust to these things, but they must also learn to care for their children alone and handle custody

arrangements. The parents are also going through the grief and distress of ending their marriage and adjust to being a single person again. For people who have been married for many years it is a lifestyle they have not experienced in an extended period of time. Clearly, this is a lot of stress, which some parents express with anxiety, depression, anger or self-doubting (Amato, 1993).

In a study done by Amato (1993), single parents, when compared to married parents, were significantly less affectionate toward their children and have less positive interactions with them. These relationships, however, did improve after two years, except for the relationship between mothers and sons (Amato, 1993). In addition to the parent child relationship improving, the psychological state of the mother improves after two years.

There is support for this concept overall, but there is little agreement amongst researchers. According to this hypothesis a child, after two years have passed, should not show any difference, regardless of the marital status of their parents, in academic or psychological well being. Some studies have found that adolescents from broken families still show a higher drop out rate than children from intact families, even when controlling for the amount of parent involvement in school work and number of years since divorce (Amato, 1993). Furthermore, the well-being of children did not ever improve to be equal with children from intact families (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002).

Despite all of the contradictions in support for this theory, most of the research agrees that the consistency of parenting and the emotional stability of the custodial parent have positive affects on the child's well-being (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002). Like all of

the other perspectives discussed, each perspective cannot account entirely for the differences between children of divorced homes and those of intact families.

Another element that contributes to the changes in the behavior of children is the difference that having one less parent in the household has on children (Amato & Keith, 1991a). In particular, the absences of an active father in the home and the changes that can be seen in boys.

A child who is suffering from the death of a parent has many emotions such as grief, anger, sadness, confusion and so many more. These emotions and the experience in general, are very different from that of a child who is going through the divorce of their parents. However, the similarities between these two types of children are remarkable. This similarity can be attributed to the fact that, in both cases, there is a decrease in the amount of attention the children receive from the parents, and the psychological well being of the parents (Amato & Keith, 1991a).

Upon looking at this concept one would think that if a parent remarries the differences between the intact and broken families would disappear. This is actually the opposite of what studies show happen in regard to remarriage. The only time a child benefits from a remarriage is when the stepparent is the same sex as the child (Amato, 1993). Additionally, if the stepparent is the opposite sex as the child it can actually cause a decline in the child's well-being.

Another assumption that one may make is that an increase in visitations of the non-custodial parent would improve the behavior and well-being of the children. Studies show, however, that neither an increase nor consistent levels of visits has any affect on the conduct of children (Amato & Keith, 1991a).

A male child growing up without a father can experience both lower self-esteem and cognitive ability (Bishop & Lane, 2000). Since a young boy has no male to set the example many may feel lost and have an unsure sense of self (Bishop & Lane). In addition, these boys may try to get the attention of older males by acting out in the classroom or other public settings. They may also feel that they are somehow responsible for the absence of the father or that they are the cause of the divorce. Lower academic performance is also evident in boys without fathers (Bishop & Lane).

In addition to the negative aspects seen in male children, the absences of a father can be very stressful for the mother because she does not have someone to support her in the decision-making and control of the children (Gadsden, 1995). It is also a large strain on both parents involved when child support is necessary. Some of the changes seen in children can be decreased if child support is both regular and does not place an economic strain on either person (Gadsden, 1995).

A majority of children are placed in the custody of their mothers rather than fathers, but this trend is slowly moving more toward the center. Although the number of single mothers outweighs the number of single fathers, there are more single fathers now than ever before (Hilton & Divall, 1998). One may wonder how the well-being of children is different depending upon which parent they are living with. The custodial parent does not effect many of the problems expected of the children, but there are some that are noteworthy.

In general, fathers are more confident in their parenting skills, which cause children to be better behaved (Hilton & Divall, 1998). Furthermore, fathers are able to make more money in the work force without putting in the extra hours. Therefore they

have more time to spend at home, both supervising their children and helping with homework as well as being more involved in the activities they participate in (Hilton & Divall, 1998).

The cognitive abilities of children from broken families are different from those who come from intact families. As already mentioned, the economic hardships and stress of the divorce have clear effects on the cognitive abilities of these children. The cognitive achievements of children from broken families will be discussed in more detail presently.

According to a meta-analysis done by Amato and Keith (1991a), children from divorced families score lower on academic measures, including reading recognition and comprehension, and mathematical achievement than children from intact families. Income is a strong predictor of reading ability, according to a study done by Carlson and Corcoran (2001). In addition to income, there are a lot of things that play a part in cognitive ability. A few of these include the stress that divorce has on children as well as the lack of parental supervision and assistance on outside of class activities. Moreover, a child may not have any role models in their life that may value a higher education, especially in lower income, single parent homes. The more transitions a child must go through in their family structure the less physically and psychologically healthy they are. The only exception to this general rule is children who transitioned to stepfamilies at a very young age. This may be due to the fact that there is extra strain placed on children as they deal with and adjust to the changes that accompany divorce (Spruijt & de Goede, 1997).

Besides the physical and psychological health, divorce also affects adolescent relationships. Children of divorce tend to experience more break ups in their relationships than do those from intact families (Spruijt & de Goede, 1997). These children also live together longer and earlier than children from stable families. Children from broken families may also have children earlier and give birth to more children out of wedlock (Spruijt & de Goed).

Adolescents from divorced families are more likely to be less educated and, therefore, more likely to be employed at lower paying jobs than those from intact families. In addition, children from broken families are more likely to be unemployed. All of these differences remain significant, even when background demographics are held constant, including sex, education and income of the family (Spruijt & de Goed, 1997).

Because single parent families tend to have lower incomes and educational attainment than those from single parent families dysfunction is to be expected (Amato & Keith, 1991b). Adults from broken families have lower levels of well-being than other adults in the areas of psychological adjustment, quality of life, and marital satisfaction. In general, the modifications experiences from divorce are more evident in males than in females and stronger for white than black people.

Children who had divorced parents were more likely to be divorced or separated than others and are also more likely to be unsatisfied with their marriage. These effects do, however, decrease with time, but never completely go away (Amato & Keith, 1991b).

Adults are changed by divorce throughout their lives, despite the age they were when their parents got divorced. The age of the child did not appear to have any effect on the difficulties experienced as an adult, unless the divorce took place when the child

was out of high school and living outside of the home (Amato & Keith, 1991b). Based on this information the stress and strain of divorce clearly has lasting results on both adults and children.

This problem is evident in all areas of society including the media, schools, and the public at large and is greatly affecting the structure of America. Many children are growing up in homes where only one parent is present or a blended family and, as studies have shown, it is affecting a child's behavior, attitude and well-being. As a profession social workers strive to alleviate some of these problems with various techniques such as group support or individual counseling. The next section of this paper will discuss a variety of different interventions that have been used when dealing with divorce. These interventions may deal with children, custodial parents, non-custodial parents, or families as a whole. While these studies are fairly recent there seems to be a lot of interest in the topic and most professionals recognize the importance of this topic.

Interventions with children

When dealing with children who are suffering from the confusion and pain of divorce, it is important to consider the baseline behaviors before deciding upon a proper intervention. Some children, as shown in the research discussed above, have only minimal problems when dealing with divorce and would need a different kind of help than ones that have severe behavioral problems. In general, children in elementary school through middle school do much better in a group setting than with individual counseling (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001). These groups tend to last between six and fourteen weeks and discuss a variety of topics (Bonkowski, 2005).

The benefits of a group setting are seen most drastically in children from ages seven through fourteen. This can be attributed to the fact that at younger ages the attention span is very short and the level of understanding is much shallower. When the children get a little older they are capable of more in-depth conversations and concepts, making both the understanding of divorce much deeper and the discussions in a group setting more helpful. These groups are also mixed in gender until the child becomes middle school age, when gender separation becomes more prominent and it is more difficult for the children to open up around each other (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001). At this time same sex friends become more important and these adolescents are less prone to talk about serious issues with members of the opposite sex.

Group settings are also ideal for this age because it offers more social support from peers and alleviates any feelings of isolation that a child from a broken family might experience (Stolberg & Mahler, 1994). These children may feel that no one else can understand what is happening, but a support group allows the children to see other children going through similar situations and hear about the different types of emotions the other children may be going through. Children can also learn from each other and are better able to relate to children their own age than adults (DeLucia-Waack & Geritty, 2001).

Children who participate in support groups have shown marked improvement in many areas when compared to those who have not received any support. One area where this has been found true is in the social aspects of a child's life. Children have statistically been shown to have significantly higher self-esteem immediately following the end of a support group, as well as better social skills within a few months following

the end of a support group, when compared to children of divorce who did not participate in group (Stolberg & Mahler, 1994). Both of these improvements are long lasting. In addition to self-esteem, children have an improved relationship with their parents, especially the custodial parent, after participating in a support group (DeLucia-Waack & Geritty, 2001). These improvements are based on a questionnaire given to both the child and the parent(s) before and after participating in the group. Improvements include, specifically in the areas of effective communication, more mutual respect and overall a more positive atmosphere (DeLucia-Waack & Geritty, 2001). According to an article by Stolberg and Mahler (1994) these support groups also decrease anxiety felt by the child, increase rule compliance both inside and outside of school, and decreased shyness. Furthermore, improvement can be seen in school performance (i.e. academic) (Bonkowski, 2005).

School-based support groups are the most common because it is a convenient location where both students and parents feel safe (DeLucia-Waack & Geritty, 2001). Furthermore, students may feel more comfortable speaking about their feelings with students they already know and will also be able to gain a more long-lasting support system since they will be in the same school together after the group ends.

There are many different things that can be discussed in a support group and much of it may depend on the struggles a majority of the participants are experiencing. For example, if the baseline problems are identified as internalizing behaviors, such as anxiety, depression or shyness, then the group would need to focus on activities and discussions that help alleviate these problems rather than some more externalizing behaviors like aggression. Discussions may also be different depending upon the severity

of these problems, since more basic needs must be met before other issues can be covered. Handling behavioral problems may become more important in order to avoid disruption within the group. In fact, it is very common to not allow children who have very high baseline behavioral problems to be part of a support group (Stolberg & Mahler, 1994). These children may need more individualized attention and may be better suited for individual counseling.

Many of the topics discussed at a support group may be based around raising self-esteem, and teaching children how to label and properly express their feelings (Stolberg & Mahler, 1994). They may also deal with supporting each other and other topics that generally deal with emotions. Divorce support groups will also deal with issues of self-control, specifically dealing with aggression and other external behaviors seen in children (Barnes, 1999). Support groups may teach basic skills like problem solving, anger management, and communication (DeLucia-Waack & Geritty, 2001).

Most groups are held more as a led discussion where the group facilitators have a topic of the day or week and will start the conversation, but allows for everyone to voice their opinion. The facilitator will offer advice and redirect the conversation away from negative or harmful suggestions, but the discussion is student-led. For this reason it is hard to predict where a conversation will go and the ideas a facilitator has planned for a group may not materialize. This type of atmosphere allows for the group to focus more clearly on the problems that the children in this group are experiencing and allows for them to get the most benefit from the group.

Some support groups may also utilize role playing as a form of therapy. For example, a child may be given a realistic situation and asked to act out what they would

say or do in response to this situation. After the role play the group, under the leadership of the facilitator, would discuss whether the actions of the child were positive or negative and what changes could have been made (Barnes, 1999). This technique works better on children that are older because the younger children are not capable of critical thinking.

Another type of resource a group might use is therapeutic homework, such as relaxing music, short books that can be taken home for reading and a sketch book. Each of these can be used by the child when a stressful or upsetting event is taking place in the household (Stolberg & Mahler, 1994). This type of technique, along with learning games, is especially effective with younger children because they are simpler concepts to grasp. In addition, using other forms of communication such as writing a letter or story and drawing pictures may make expressing feelings easier for a child (Bonkowski, 2005).

There are some support groups that may offer a joint session with parents, especially the custodial parent (Tein, Sandler, MacKinnon, & Wolchik, 2004). These support groups would be held in separate rooms, but at the same time. The parents and children would be discussing the same general topics simultaneously and then given “homework” for the parent and child to discuss after the support groups have ended. This offers a way for the parents and children to be learning and improving on the same things in parallel groups. Being involved in a child-parent support group has been proven to improve the amount and quality of parent-child conversation, has made discipline more effective and more positive and has also improved the quality of the relationship between the custodial parent and the child (Tein, Sandler, MacKinnon, & Wolchik).

This type of support group is actually more effective than a child alone support group, but is much more challenging to administer. It is extremely difficult to find a time

when the maximum of both children and parents would be available to come (Tein, Sandler, MacKinnon, & Wolchik, 2004). When dealing only with children, the maximum attendance time would be directly following school, when the children are already at the school, but a majority of parents, especially single parents, would still be working. Another struggle is to get an already overburdened and overworked parent to attend once they have left their job. The most effective way to get both parents and children there is to offer free, onsite childcare and possibly provide a meal, if the group must be held around a meal time. So, while this type of support group is highly effective it comes with its own set of challenges.

Individual counseling can also be very effective in improving both external and internalized problems, but is generally not necessary (DeLucia-Waack & Geritty, 2001). This type of counseling is necessary only if these problems are very severe and would be disruptive in a group setting. Additionally, counseling may be needed if the behaviors are causing harm or danger to the child or people the child comes into contact with. When the behavior upon entering individual therapy is very relentless then the child can benefit a great deal from receiving this kind of treatment, but less extreme cases may not see these same kinds of benefits (DeLucia-Waack & Gerritty, 2001).

Interventions with adolescents

As the children of divorce reach adolescence, it becomes a much more daunting task for both the parents and the child(ren). Adolescents from broken families have a lot of problems trusting others and entering romantic attachments (Kienhuis, Wilks & Reece, 2003). As all people in this age group, these teens must also deal with struggles such as finding their own identity and self confidence. Because of these struggles, support

groups for this age group might be slightly different from groups intended for elementary age students. They may discuss more in depth topics such as romantic relationships and forgiveness.

Many children from divorced families develop a mistrust of other people, specifically those of the opposite sex and, therefore, have a lot of struggle throughout the rest of their lives with commitment (Kienhuis, Wilks, & Reece, 2003). Because of this, many support groups will discuss this issue along with other more mature issues such as the relationship with the non-custodial parent, loyalty, feelings of loss and self-purpose (Hage & Nosanow, 2000). For example, a group with adolescents might discuss some of the struggles to expect when adjusting to a single parent family and can discuss unrealistic beliefs during this transition (Kinehuis, Wilks, & Reece, 2003). In addition, teenagers may grow to better understand the impact divorce has made on their lives and how those changes may affect them the rest of their lives (Hage & Nosanow).

Adolescence groups may also talk about forgiveness, specifically forgiving their parents. Many teenagers will blame one parent, usually the one who has left the household, for all of the problems they are experiencing. This can cause a great deal of anger, resentment and emotional pain (Freedman & Knupp, 2003). Discussing forgiveness is usually most successful if the divorce has been settled and the adjustment has been made by everyone involved. If forgiveness is discussed during the middle of the change it is unlikely to be productive because the teen is still very involved in that process and the anger and resentment is likely to be felt very strongly (Freedman & Knupp).

Once the commotion of the divorce has subsided this is the appropriate time to begin discussing forgiveness. The first step to forgiveness is to help the adolescent discover their emotions and label them. Frequently the angry and resentful emotions will be displaced and it is important for the teen to identify this mistake. During this time the individual will be encouraged to release anger, rather than hold it in, and may be able to look at the situation from another person's perspective. This phase may take months or even years to complete, depending on the maturity of the teen and the time that has passed since the divorce (Freedman & Knupp, 2003). Once this phase is completed the individual must then make the decision to forgive. Without this decision the forgiveness will never take place, but for many they will never complete this process or decide not to forgive. Once the decision has been made to forgive the teen enters the work phase. During this time a person will be able to express empathy toward the person they are trying to forgive and accept the injury they have experienced. In the final phase of the process, called deepening phase, the participant identifies times when they should have forgiven in the past and finds others that have had the same experiences (Freedman & Knupp, 2003).

When an individual forgives there are a lot of advantages that come from it. These include a greater psychological well-being, more hope for the future and self-esteem (Freedman & Knupp, 2003). Forgiveness decreases anxiety and also helps increase coping skills for the future. Perhaps the most important thing that is gained from this is acceptance by peers. As an adolescent, peer acceptance is very important and can help with a wide variety of challenges including self-esteem and the creation of a positive identity. The disadvantage to a group setting, though, is that the participants are not

allowed to progress at their own rate (Freedman & Knupp). This means that some people may be ready to move on to the next stage, but is unable to until the rest of the group is ready, but it could also mean that participants are moving on before they are fully ready to do so. Despite this disadvantage a group setting still has a lot of positive aspects.

Intervention for Parents

The interventions for parents can vary a great deal depending upon the types of problems that the parent(s) are experiencing. For example, a parent may choose to be involved in a support group that would meet on a regular basis, or a divorce workshop that would be an intensive day or weekend, or use mediation or individual therapy to help them deal with their problems (Zimmermann, Brown, & Portes, 2004). Some interventions may focus entirely on parenting and learning how to manage the task of parenting alone or effectively communicating with the ex-spouse as a co-parent while others may deal with some of the emotional problems the parent is dealing with. The intervention can also be very different for a non-custodial parent than one that has custody of the children. Because of this, it is impossible to say which type of intervention is the most successful or effective, but instead each type of intervention will be discussed.

Non-custodial parents deal with a wide variety of emotional issues despite whether it is a mother or a father. Being a non-custodial mother, however, has a much greater negative social stigma attached to it (Greif, 2005). For example, many people would view a mother without custody of her children as being lazy or overly self-involved, but may not have the same view for fathers. Because of this, non-custodial mothers may have a lot shame associated with their role (Greif, 2005). Only 16% of

mothers do not have custody of their children, making this population overall very small (Zimmermann, Brown, & Portes, 2004).

Both fathers and mothers experience a lot of different emotions that come along with the end of a marriage and separation from their children. Many non-custodial parents experience such emotions as guilt, shame, anxiety and depression (Greif, 2005). A support group with non-custodial parents deals with a lot of different topics including the rejection and anger from children and successful co-parenting (Greif, 2005). Much of the discussion is based on these topics as well as teaching the non-custodial parents about the rights they have and their role in the life of their children.

The struggles of non-custodial parents have only recently been dealt with in a structured way. Many professions are just beginning to form groups and do research on this topic so the information about the effectiveness of this type of intervention is minimal. Because of this it is difficult to say how much support groups for non-custodial parents benefits the children and both parents. However, the minimal research that is available is positive and shows overall improvement.

Divorce workshops are an intense way for parents to learn a lot about being a more successful co-parent, developing more optimism, a better self-image, and identity (Quinney & Fouts, 2003). A divorce workshop is good for people who are recently divorced or only experiencing minimal adjustment problems. These workshops may be highly effective for people who fit this category, but ineffective for those with more intense problems. Another thing that makes divorce workshops very effective is the flexibility it offers. Workshops will have a variety of "breakout" sessions dealing with certain topics that the attendant can choose from. For example, there might be a session on

co-parenting, one on finances, and one on self-esteem. The variety of topics makes it easy for an individual to get the help they may need, despite their problems (Quinney & Fouts, 2003).

Of the people that attend a divorce workshop 70% show improvement in their adjustment to divorce than before attending the workshop (Quinney & Fouts, 2003). Improvement can also be seen in areas such as optimism, problem solving skills, identity and self-esteem. These effects have been proven to last long term, but the more resilience an individual has prior to the workshop, the more improvement can be seen after (Quinney & Fouts).

Another type of intervention for parents of divorce is a support group specifically for custodial parents. Support groups for custodial and non-custodial parents are generally set up in the same way. They both discuss issues of parenting, psychological functioning, and conflict resolution (Zimmermann, Brown, & Portes, 2004). There are also some differences between the two groups. A group consisting of custodial parents may spend a great deal more time discussing parental struggles and communication with their children than a group made up of non-custodial parents (Zimmermann, Brown, & Portes). Other topics that may be discussed in a support group may be things dealing with their financial stability (i.e. teaching them budgeting or informing the parents of available financial assistance) and their relationship with the non-custodial parents. Groups may spend a great deal of time discussing this relationship due to the importance of the topic for helping their children adjust better.

These groups have been proven to be highly effective in helping parents make the difficult transition to becoming a single parent (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003). For

example, those who participated in a support group showed much lower rates of conflict between the participant and their ex-spouse (Zimmermann, Brown, & Portes, 2004).

Reduced conflict can have a great effect on both the children and the adults involved in the divorce. For example, reduced conflict can lead to lower anxiety and stress levels in addition to high self-esteem in adults. Children improve in their overall behavior as well as their psychological well being (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003). Furthermore, the parents participating in the group have a much more positive view of the transition and tend to feel less hopeless after participating in a support group (Zimmermann, Brown, & Portes, 2004).

Fostering creativity within a group intervention or an individual therapy session can improve the outcomes for the family involved (Morgan & Wampler, 2003). Examples of creativity include using role plays, metaphors, and using the imagination, especially when discussing the future. These types of interventions can help the individual or group focus more on the future and how to improve it than on their current problems. This type of therapy can also allow people to change their opinions and perceptions in order to form a more positive outlook (Morgan & Wampler). Another important thing that can be gained from using creativity in therapy is an increased amount of flexibility. Becoming a single parent and co-parenting with an ex-spouse requires a great deal of flexibility and understanding. For example, when discussing rules such as a bedtime, meal times, and nutritional values there is a great deal of compromise and understanding that must come from both parties.

Thus far all of the types of interventions have been voluntary and, therefore, did not involve any sort of court mandated attendance. Having court mandated attendance in

a support group is becoming more and more common as the rates of divorce continue to rise. According to an article written by Douglas (2004) in 1998, 44 state or local laws mandated participation in such groups. These groups are involuntary and involve a predetermined number of meetings they must attend in order to fulfill this requirement. In addition 98% of judges agree or strongly agree that such programs are helpful for families and improve their functioning as a family and as individuals (Douglas, 2004).

While the topics covered are generally the same, court mandated groups may prove to be slightly more challenging. This may be due to the negative attitude toward the group or the unwillingness to try. One topic that may be discussed in greater detail may be teaching the parent how to co-exist and co-parent (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003). This is true because generally the couples that are court mandated to a support group have much more difficulty with this. It is also not uncommon for each parent to be mandated to a parent group and have to complete the hours in separate groups.

While many participants may unwillingly attend such group meetings the vast majority (95%) believe that these support groups have helped them adjust better to divorce (Douglas, 2004). These parents felt that it helps them adjust better to the negative aspects of the divorce such as conflict between both the adults and children and also the adjustment to single parenting. Furthermore, participants felt that it improved the adjustment of their children to the divorce. During the support group many of the effects children experience are discussed and this simple knowledge helps parents to recognize the emotions and problems children experience (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003). Parents also learn how to better support their children through these challenges and help make the adjustment as easy as possible for the children affected by divorce.

Like many other treatable problems the difficulties faced by families are more successfully resolved if all members involved work together. The same is true of parents who have trouble adjusting to sharing custody of their children and co-parenting after a divorce. That is why a treatment that involves both parents cooperatively, called directed co-parenting intervention, has been proven effective, but it does not come without many struggles. For example, the couples that experience the most challenges with this task and are the most likely to need assistance are the ones with the most intense conflict. Because of this it is very challenging to administer this kind of mediation. There are, however, several ways that make this kind of process possible.

A directed co-parenting intervention tries to allow the couple to focus less on their problems as a couple and more on the children and parenting successfully (Garber, 2004). This type of intervention can also allow a couple to avoid court involvement, which can be a long, stressful and hurtful process. A couple who has entered this type of intervention knows upfront that they will not receive assistance with their differences as a couple and they both agree to put these things aside in order to focus more in-depth on their children. If couples cannot agree to this or shortly after the intervention has started discover that this will not work, it is possible for the intervention to be conducted in a parallel manner (Garber, 2004). This can be accomplished by holding separate sessions where the same things are discussed and each person is able to express their opinion on the parenting issue, then the facilitator will help the couple make a decision. For example, if a couple is discussing bedtime for their children and one believes 8:00 p.m. and the other 9:00 p.m. then a consensus might be reached, with the help of the facilitator, to put the children to bed at 8:30 p.m. While this may seem very simple, when

discussing larger issues such as ways to discipline it may become much more complicated.

If a highly conflicted couple can agree to work together on parenting in this type of setting it may lead to a higher mutual respect and less conflict (Garber, 2004). This, in turn, leads to a more positive and smooth transition overall. Less conflict frequently leads to a better adjustment both emotionally and behaviorally for children and emotionally for adults. In addition, while the focus of this intervention is not to improve the relationship of the parents, it may have the effect indirectly (Garber). This is due to the fact that they are able to successfully do something, which may carry over into other areas of the relationship and also help reduce arguing, because many arguments revolve around parenting.

During this type of intervention many different topics can be dealt with from simple to complex. Parents can discuss simple things like bedtimes, mealtimes and nutritional values. These things are relatively simple to compromise between the parents and do not require very much discussion. Other more challenging topics may require many separate sessions of discussion before a consensus can be reached. These topics may be things like having the same rules for the children as they travel from house to house, having the same daily routine and how the children will be disciplined. These things are not only more complicated because of the wide range of possible opinions, but can also be challenging because of the adverse affects they have on children (Garber, 2004). For example, if the rules at the father's house are very lenient and relaxed and the mother has much more structure the children are going to be confused. These types of situations can lead to behavioral problems due to the lack of consistency. Another

example is the daily routine. This is especially important for younger children who still require a nap because a different nap time can cause the children to stay up during the evening hours and be overtired. Overtired children, especially young children, tend to be less healthy, more irritable and much more difficult to control. Obviously the decisions parents make for their children are very important and, if not made jointly or administered equally, can lead to some potentially serious problems for the children.

There are times when a direct co-parenting intervention is not effective. For example, if either parent has psychological problems, anything from depression to bipolar disorder, that are uncontrolled this type of intervention would not be effective (Garber, 2004). In addition, if the couple has a history of domestic violence this intervention would not be effective. Both of these problems require much more intensive and extreme types of therapy.

Discussion

The effects of divorce are great for everyone involved. Children display these problems both internally and externally through both behavior and emotions. Children have such problems as depression, extreme isolation and anxiety. Also seen are outward behavioral problems such as intense aggression, a disagreeable personality and general anger towards people, even those they once felt close to. Children who display these types of behaviors need assistance, despite what types of problems they exhibit. The appropriate type of assistance depends upon the severity of the problem. The most successful and common type of intervention for elementary age through adolescence is a support group. These support groups can help children with a variety of problems and can give a well-rounded discussion about a variety of topics. The level of depth into each

topic may vary from group to group and also by age level, with older children having a greater capacity to look more deeply into each topic.

While group interventions have been proven to be the most effective way to treat children who suffer from the negative consequences of divorce there are certain times when individual therapy may be necessary. Individual therapy is generally the most successful for children with very serious emotional or behavioral problems that could not be handled successfully in a group setting. Early intervention is the best way to avoid problems escalating to these levels.

Parents also suffer from the negative changes caused by divorce, although they are displayed more emotionally than behaviorally. Depression, anxiety and stress are common emotions for many divorced parents to feel. In addition, many parents feel the differences when looking at their self-esteem and confidence. Financial struggles, specifically for women, are also something that can be seen from divorced individuals. Similarly to the children, support groups in which parents enter voluntarily have been proven to be highly successful. These groups assist parents in anything from the emotional struggles they are feeling to financial issues. Many groups, however, focus on parenting specifically. Individual counseling is only needed in very extreme cases, similar to the trend seen in children.

A comprehensive approach to dealing with the effects of divorce has been proven to be very effective. This may be due to the fact that the problems can build on each other. For example, a parent may feel extreme stress due to the acting out behavior displayed by the child. Having both the child(ren) and the parents become educated in how to handle these problems can lead to a much more positive transition for everyone

involved. In addition, being able to overcome the relational problems between the parents and set some general guidelines for co-parenting can also lead to an improvement for the entire family.

Implications for Future Research

The most important factor that is missing in current research on this topic is time. Since high divorce rates are a new dilemma for society much of the current research is unable to track the positive outcomes of the interventions long term. Showing that these interventions cause long term positive results will help strengthen the belief by the general public that it is an important thing to participate in. Furthermore, having larger participation in each study will also be an important step in proving the effectiveness. This can also be linked to the recent nature of this problem. Large participation should also include greater inclusion of those from of different racial, ethical, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Having this variety will lead to more wide spread practice of these interventions. As this issue becomes more prevalent, which can be attributed to the high divorce rates, more people will begin becoming interested in interventions to help alleviate the problems experienced by youth and adults alike.

Conclusion

Approximately 50% of those who are married in the United States will get divorced. This leads to over one million children and twice that number of adults who are affected by divorce every year. A majority experience problems and need help. Some just want to be heard, others need more. Alli Rogers, a local musician, wrote a song called "The Family is Fine" about a family as they struggle to adjust to divorce. She says "You couldn't be a husband or father when you were never around." She continues

by saying “Don’t say that the family is fine. Don’t say that your wife doesn’t mind the cold in the covers when she goes to sleep. The children have their own lives, but they miss seeing you on the sidelines.” This is a song about one family who struggles to adjust to a divorce, but each family suffers and has their own story. The negative consequences of divorce are very severe and widespread, but there are also many different interventions to help people who are struggling through a divorce. Interventions can give children and parents alike a feeling of support, an increased amount of self-esteem and improved parenting skills. These interventions can help alleviate the problems seen in so many American’s today.

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