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## A comparative study of selected behaviors of children from divorced/separated and intact families in the parochial school system

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED BEHAVIORS  
OF CHILDREN FROM DIVORCED/SEPARATED  
AND INTACT FAMILIES IN THE  
PAROCHIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Specialist in Education

Sister Elaine Delaney  
University of Northern Iowa  
July 1983

## ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine if there is a significant difference in selected behaviors of children from divorced/separated families in the parochial school system as compared with children of intact families within the same school system. The relationship was examined by taking into consideration the child's self evaluation of his/her home, school, and peer relationships and teacher's evaluation of school related behavior.

Four parochial elementary schools with relatively equal economic status were selected from the metropolitan area of a large mid-western city. Subjects included four hundred eighty-three fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students and their respective homeroom teachers. Sixty-three of these students were from divorced or separated families. The remaining four hundred twenty students were from two parent families including natural parent families, remarried parents, which could include step or an adoptive parent, and conceivably some unidentified adoptive parents.

Data were collected during the months of January through March, 1983. Two subscales from the Brown and Hammill Behavior Rating Profile (BRP), the Student Rating Scale (SRS) and Teacher Rating Scale (TRS), were used to generate data for this investigation. The 60-item SRS, assessing home, school, and peer-related behaviors, was administered to all student participants. School and peer-related behavior of these students was assessed by their respective homeroom teachers through administration of the 30-item TRS.

All data were coded for computer analysis by school, grade, sex and family structure. Raw scores were converted to standard scores for analysis purpose. For each scale score, means and standard deviations were obtained by grade level. One way analysis of variance with correction for unequal group size was utilized to test for significant differences between divorced/separated and intact students.

Findings of the investigation indicated some significant differences were found in behaviors of students from divorced/separated and intact families. Mean scores for the divorced/separated group were all lower in home, school, peer, and teacher-rated behaviors than those from the intact group; however, no statistically significant difference was found between the groups in home and school-rated behaviors. Therefore, the general hypothesis that there would be no significant difference between children of divorced/separated and intact families was rejected.

Based on the results of this study it was concluded that children from divorced/separated and intact families perceived their home and school behavior with relative sameness, while reporting significant difference in peer-related behavior. Teacher assessments indicated significant differences between the groups both in school and in peer behavior.

Future research efforts should be designed to investigate and describe more fully special needs of children from divorced/separated families. It was recommended, also, that teacher inservice programs, specific to developmental and psychological issues of the single-parent child, be incorporated early in the school calendar year to support this segment of the school population.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED BEHAVIORS  
OF CHILDREN FROM DIVORCED/SEPARATED  
AND INTACT FAMILIES IN THE  
PAROCHIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

A Thesis

Submitted

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Sister Elaine Delaney

University of Northern Iowa

July 1983

This Study by: Sister Elaine Delaney

Entitled: A Comparative Study of Selected Behaviors of  
Children From Divorced/Separated and Intact  
Families in the Parochial School System

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the  
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## Chapter 1

### THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction

Recent research has confirmed that divorce contributes to a major crisis in the lives of most children, with the stress engendered by that crisis often spilling over into the academic arena. Despite the absence of any single or uniform indicators of divorce-related stress, children and adolescents whose parents are divorcing share common feelings and concerns that are woven complexly into their school behavior.

Brown (1980) cited a Bureau of the Census report which reported 18 percent of the nation's schoolchildren living with a lone parent. This report projected that 48 percent of all children born in 1980 will live "a considerable time" with only one parent before they reach the age of 18.

Today, the word "divorce" has become a commonplace term within the experiential vocabulary of many students. The impact on schools of such a large number of families changing from two parent to one parent status has been significant. Because of the large numbers of students involved, it is important to gain insight into home, school, peer, and teacher-related behaviors of students living in single-parent families.

Despite the large number of children living in single-parent environments, educators in the United States have paid little or no attention to the school needs of these children. Recent research

indicates that children from single-parent families have special problems and needs which must be taken into consideration at school. Brown (1980) quoted Hetherington, a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University as saying,

There is a greater probability of problems in school occurring with children from single-parent families. The achievement test scores and grades in school of children being reared in single-parent families tend to be lower than those of children living with two parents. (p. 538)

Children of single-parent families may exhibit problems at school while none of these problems are observable in the home. Parents may or may not be relied upon to identify and/or address problematic behavior because they lack the psychic energy to deal with the disruptions within the child that may be occurring as a result of the divorce.

Schools play a significant part in the lives of young people both in terms of time and in preparation for adulthood. It is, therefore, logical that our educational institutions be interested and involved in providing developmental assistance to students faced with critical life situations such as the divorce of their parents. To date, there are only a limited number of published strategies on the manner in which elementary schools can provide assistance to children involved in divorce.

### Statement of the Problem

This study was designed to determine if there is a significant difference in selected behaviors of children from divorced/separated families in the parochial school system as compared with children of intact families within the same school system. The relationship was

examined by taking into consideration the child's self evaluation of his/her home, school, and peer relationships and teacher's evaluation of school-related behavior.

### Research Questions

This study addressed specifically the following research questions and hypotheses:

1. Is there a difference in home-related behavior of children from divorced/separated families as compared to children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile?

2. Is there a difference in classroom-related behavior of children from divorced/separated families as compared to children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile?

3. Is there a difference in peer interpersonal skills and relationships of children from divorced/separated families as compared to children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile?

4. Is there a difference in teacher(s)' perceptions of children from divorced/separated families as compared to children of intact families according to the Teacher Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile?

### Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in home-related behavior between children of divorced/separated families and children

of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile.

2. There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in school-related behavior between children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile.

3. There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in peer-related behavior between children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile.

4. There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in school-related behavior between children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the Teacher Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile.

#### Importance of the Study

The Catholic Parochial Schools in which this study was conducted are religiously affiliated and supported by church parish(es). All schools and teachers within the Archdiocesan system are fully state certified. The Catholic Parochial Schools allow for integration of religious truth and values not only by their curriculum but more importantly, by dedicated teachers who witness their own faith life to students. According to the Archdiocesan Annual School Report (1982), the goals of Catholic Education are as follows:

1. To make faith living and conscious
2. To promote educational process
3. To build a system of support
4. To develop services and resources
5. To encourage and support high standards of personal competence and performance (p. 4)

This study was important as it indicated whether children from divorced/separated and intact families, enrolled in parochial schools, report significant behavioral differences. School administrators can determine the extent to which special problems exist, as well as the implications of such problems. They can then develop policies within their schools which are sensitive to the needs of these children as well as their parents. Examples of such policies might include separate parent-teacher conferences, duplicate notices of school-related activities, and duplicate student progress reports. This study can also be of special help to school personnel in finding new and different ways of working with single-parent children. School counselors with the assistance of social workers or school psychologists, might establish counseling groups which are educational rather than therapeutic in nature, focusing on coping skills to enhance children's adjustment to stresses of divorce or separation.

Teachers should be especially interested in this study because the school is an excellent potential resource for such children. As authority figures, teachers may be the most stable individuals in the child's world. Today's teachers have an awesome responsibility in the partnership of developing young healthy minds. They may spend more contact hours with the child than any member of the family, yet most teachers have no training specific to problems occasioned by parental divorce. Thus, it was the intent of this study to address the needs of this population by providing an awareness of behavioral differences between children from divorced/separated and intact family structures.

### Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in its generalizability as the sample of children was not representative of the total population. The sample did not include public school children or minorities and was limited to residents of a suburban area. Students were not randomly selected as it was necessary to use intact groups.

In addition, there was no control for extraneous variables that might contribute to behavioral problems such as counseling experiences, support from significant others, amount of conflict prior to divorce, religious beliefs, etc. The Roman Catholic Church frowns on divorce, therefore, divorce might be experienced more traumatically by these children than those of other denominations. Finally, the use of rating scales as criterion for rating behavior problems is subjective and, therefore, less reliable than assessment by direct observation.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in this study as defined.

1. Children of Divorce--Persons under the age of 18 whose biological or adoptive parents, with whom they have been residing, have become separated or divorced.

2. Children of Intact Families--Persons under the age of 18 whose biological or adoptive parents are married to each other and living with the child.

3. Divorce(d)--"1. legal and formal dissolution of a marriage . . . 1. to dissolve legally a marriage between; separate by divorce . . . ." (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1970, p. 412).



4. Separate(d)--" . . . 4. to stop living together as man and wife without a divorce" (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1970, p. 1298).

5. Single-Parent Children--Children who are living with one parent due to divorce/separation, death, or birth to an unmarried woman.

6. Single-Parent Families--Persons under the age of 18 whose biological or adoptive parent lives with the child.

7. Specific Problem Behavior--Behavior which often leads to difficulty in the classroom; for example, the behavior of acting-out, withdrawal, distractability, and disturbed peer relationships.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

While the process of divorce is a crisis situation for all families, some children seem to make satisfactory adjustments, while others have been seen to exhibit a multitude of behavioral symptoms. The purpose of this study was to examine such symptoms by comparing selected behaviors of children from divorced/separated families to those of children from two-parent family structures.

This literature review is divided into four sections--current status on divorce/separation, single-parent child, social/psychological implications and educational implications. The first three sections support the dependent variable that a large number of single-parent children exhibit behavior problems. In the final section, support is given to the independent variable that teacher inservice programs are needed to help teachers deal with these behaviors exhibited in the classroom.

#### Current Status on Divorce/Separation

Divorce occurs in over one million families per year (Conley, 1981). As a result approximately two million children become offspring of divorced parents each year, which means that between 15 and 20 million school children have experienced the departure of one parent from their daily lives (Conley, 1981).

It has been estimated that 38 percent of first marriages of women in their late twenties will end in divorce (Glick & Norton, 1978).

Although divorce is slightly less frequent among couples who have children under 5 years of age, an estimated 45 percent of the children born in 1977 will live in a one-parent family for at least several months primarily as a result of divorce (Glick & Norton, 1978).

The United States Census Bureau has reported a 79 percent increase in the number of single-parent families between 1970 and 1980. This report is of particular relevance to those involved in the parochial school system, in that according to Reverend Flosi, director of the Chicago Archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Care for Separated and Divorced Catholics, in a recent article in Momentum (1980) he stated that, "By the year 1990, one-third of all the students in our schools will be children of divorced parents" (Flosi, 1980, p. 30).

As the number of two-parent families decline, more and more students are faced with life in a single-parent family. According to Touliatos and Lindholm (1980), "Population survey data indicates that the number of children under 18 years old who reside with only one parent has doubled since 1960" (p. 264). Today, out of about 63 million children under eighteen years of age in this country, some 12.6 million or, one in five, live with one parent--usually the mother. The National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (1980) reported these current figures show a sharp contrast with those of two decades ago.

According to Conley (1981), two million children become offspring of divorced parents each year which means that 15 to 20 million school children have experienced the departure of a parent from their daily lives. If one examines the report of the United States Census Bureau

(1982), 6,839,000 families are headed by one parent. The future, according to the United States Census Bureau (1982), is not pleasant. Glick (1981) projected that although the trend toward more one parent families may peak in the next decade or so, by the time it does, fully one-fourth of all American children will be living with a single parent and half of them will have lived in a single-parent household for at least several months.

Zigli (1983) projected that by 1990, twenty-five percent of all school-age children will be living in single-parent families. The sheer size of the phenomenon makes it one that schools, particularly parochial schools, cannot afford to ignore. Children in these one-parent families are sooner or later students and bring adjustment problems from such family situations to school. These adjustment problems have often been attributed to parental behavior and/or attitudes.

Parents, often unsure of what or how much to tell their children and deeply involved in their own emotional feelings, new jobs, responsibilities, and roles, may find the capacity to parent diminished. McDermott (1970) observed that parents in the process of splitting up fluctuate in moral demands. Children have a difficult time with sudden changes in parental approval or disapproval. He said, "It was as if the parents were really not parents during this time, but were temporarily distorted, inconsistent and corruptible . . ." (p. 426). Teachers and other adults may offer sympathy, attention and patience, but for the most part children are left to adjust as best as they can by themselves.

Contributing greatly to children's anxiety is the fact that many children receive less attention from their parents following the separation. Preoccupied with their own distress and efforts to cope with divorce, many parents are less sensitive to children's distress and have little energy to deal with its manifestations. With the added role of single parent and working full-time, the parent is less physically available and the remaining spouse is out of the household.

Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1977) conducted a two year longitudinal study of the impact of divorce on family functioning and the development of children. In their study of 96 families, the divorced mothers and fathers encountered marked stresses in areas of practical problems of living, self-concept, emotional distress, and interpersonal relations. Low self-esteem, loneliness, depression, and feelings of helplessness were characteristics of the divorced couple. Two years after the divorce, the divorced parents were still less satisfied with their lives than were the parents in intact families.

The expectations held by parents, teachers, and mental health professionals--that marital turmoil causes behavior problems in children--not only may create biased rating data, but also may be problematic in that a self-fulfilling prophecy may result. Parents, for example, who attribute a child's "normal" misbehavior to an emotional reaction to marital divorce may not respond to that child with their usual discipline. Thus, in their attempt to understand the child, some parents may set limits which are inconsistent and confusing and thereby accidentally create problems they are trying to avoid.

Throughout the process of divorce, specific developmental needs of children are often unmet because of parental preoccupation with their own needs and parental role conflicts. When compared to parents of intact families, Hetherington et al. (1976) found that divorced parents of preschoolers were less consistent and effective in discipline, less nurturant, and generally less parent-like with their children because of preoccupation with the divorce process. When compared to parents of intact families, divorced parents communicated less well and made fewer demands for mature behavior of their children (Hetherington et al., 1976).

As observed by Skeen and McKenry (1980) parent-child relationships are altered as a result of divorce. Parenting becomes difficult as the structure of the family breaks down and parents must make interpersonal adjustments such as dealing with stress, loneliness, and lowered self-esteem; yet many questions remain unanswered concerning parenting capabilities and behavior during divorce. A great deal more research needs to be done before we can draw definite conclusions in this area.

### The Single-Parent Child

There is no single behavior reaction to divorce, separation, death, or other one-parent situations; therefore, there are no easy guidelines for recognizing behaviors related to these situations and the emotional changes which may accompany them. Single-parent children are faced with many frustrating and confusing situations. Children subjected to

separation and divorce live in ". . . extreme risk" situations (Damon, 1979, p. 70). Because of this, ". . . we are now discovering that serious behavioral problems often characterize children of one-parent families" (Brown, 1980, p. 537).

A critical question is whether separation from a parent per se, or the interparental conflict that is concomitant with divorce, is related more strongly to child behavior problems. This distinction is particularly relevant because it bears on such issues as whether parents should stay together for the children's sake. The association between divorce and behavior problems in children has been interpreted as evidence that parental separation has a direct and substantial negative effect on the child, regardless of circumstances surrounding the separation (Bowlby, 1973). This interpretation has met with popular support; thus, beliefs about the negative effects of a broken home are widely held.

Contrary to the generally accepted belief that there is a causal relationship between divorce and emotional disturbance in children, a review of literature over the past two decades points to a growing realization that factors other than breakup of the family are significant in causing disturbances in children (Despert, 1962; Rutter, 1971). An increasing number of theorists and researchers have come to regard disharmony or turbulence in the parental relationship as more likely to lead to disturbances in children than the divorce experience itself. Children were found to be poorly adjusted when there was a high degree of interparental turbulence particularly evident preceding and/or surrounding the divorce (Rosen, 1979).

Continued overt hostility between divorcing parents, especially in custody suits, has a profound effect on children's process of identification. According to Tessman (1978),

When a child is chronically exposed to the need of one parent to bolster the self by damaging the other parent as is often the case in the custody suit, his ability to value himself in relation to identification figures cannot help but suffer. (p. 272)

According to Tessman (1978), if the process of identification becomes the overriding mechanism by which children ensure a sense of closeness or access to those they need, it can interfere with the development of an acceptable, individual sense of identity. The broadening of a child's social circle, which normally occurs when (s)he plays with other children, and even more so at the time (s)he enters school and becomes aware of the diversity of values among peers, teachers and family members, often help a child recognize qualities in himself/herself from differing perspectives. In two-parent families, where real but compatible differences between parents exist, new adult figures may easily become meaningful in the child's life. In single-parent families, identification with figures outside the family may seem novel and become increasingly significant to a child's sense of self. "Early identification with parental figures might be seen as the center of gravity around which a child's later affective experience, goals in life, and sense of identity revolve" (p. 44). Tessman further stated that as long as a child's sense of identity is bound primarily to identifications with only one or two others, (s)he remains vulnerable to sudden loss of self-esteem, or, more seriously, loss of a sense of individual identity when there are disruptions in relationships to the identification figure.



Hozman and Froiland (1977) suggested that the experience of losing a parent through divorce is similar to that of losing a parent through death. Conley (1981) stated that even in the most amicable divorce situations, parents undergo stress, whether in the form of guilt, shame, anguish, depression, or elation. This is followed by letdown as reality sets in and loss of emotional and financial security becomes overwhelming. Traumatized and preoccupied parents may not be able to give children as much emotional support as parents with successful marriages. Thus, self-esteem of children may be diminished, and their identification process is more apt to incorporate the notion that life is basically an unhappy experience.

Evidence has indicated that children of divorce may be better adjusted than children remaining in two-parent homes where there is ongoing tension, conflict, and stress. Hetherington et al. (1978) suggested that divorce is often the most positive solution to destructive family functioning. Divorce can have a positive influence. They noted that children of divorce exhibit more empathy for others, increased helping behaviors, and greater independence than do children from intact families. The ease, however, and rapidity with which divorce may be obtained and the recent emphasis on creative and positive divorce may mask the pain, stress, and adjustment problems inherent in divorce. Five different research studies support this conclusion.

First, several investigators have compared children from homes broken by divorce or separation with those from homes in which death occurred. More behavior problems were found in homes broken by divorce

which suggested that something other than separation had a significant effect on these children (Douglas, Ross, Hammond, & Mulligan, 1966). Second, researchers have found that children from broken but conflict-free homes were less likely to have problems than were children from conflictual, unbroken homes (Gibson, 1969; McCord, J., McCord, W., & Thurber, 1962). Third, children's responses to divorce and discord share many features; for example, undercontrolled behavior, and buffering effects are commonly found among children of both discord and divorce (Damon, 1979). Fourth, children of divorced parents who continue to have conflicts beyond the divorce have more problems than do children from conflict-free divorces as shown both by clinical impressions (Anthony, 1974; Kelly & Wallerstein, 1976) and by research results (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1976; Jacobson, 1978). Finally, one longitudinal investigation found that many problems evident in children from broken homes were present well before the children were separated from a parent (Lambert, Essen, & Head, 1977).

### Social/Psychological Implications

Kelly and Wallerstein (1976) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1975, 1976) researched the impact of the divorce process on children. In their preschool sample, they found that children's self-concept was affected. Children's views of the dependability and predictability of relationships were threatened and their sense of order regarding the world was disrupted. Some suffered feelings of responsibility for driving the father away. Older preschoolers were better able to experience family turbulence and divorce without breaking developmental stride. Older

preschoolers were also better able to find gratification outside the home and to place some psychological and social distance between themselves and their parents. Heightened anxiety and aggression, however, were noted in this group. Almost half of the children in this preschool group were found to be in a significantly deteriorated psychological condition at the follow-up study one year later.

In another study done in 1976, Kelly and Wallerstein reported that schoolage children respond to divorce with pervasive sadness, fear, feelings of deprivation, and anger. At the end of one year, many still struggled with the task of integrating divorce-related changes into their lives. For older schoolage children, Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) found that divorce affected the freedom of children to keep major attention focused outside the family, particularly on school-related tasks. These children displayed conscious and intense anger, fears and phobias, and a shaken sense of identity and loneliness. At the end of one year, anger and hostility lingered and half the children evidenced troubled, conflictual, and depressed behavior patterns.

Hetherington et al. (1976) characterized behaviors of children of divorce as more dependent, aggressive, whiny, demanding, unaffectionate, and disobedient than behaviors of children from intact families. Hetherington noted three areas of anxiety: fear of abandonment, loss of love and bodily harm. Anthony (1974) noted other behaviors of children experiencing divorce--low vitality, restlessness, guilt, shame, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, failure to develop as a separate person, a preoccupation with death and disease, inability to be alone, regression to immature behavior, separation and phobia

anxiety, and an intense attachment to one parent. With certain groups of children, i.e., handicapped, adopted, and chronic illness cases such as asthmatics, epileptics, and diabetics, the divorce process might precipitate a psychosomatic crisis requiring hospitalization. Anthony (1974) concluded that the major reaction during divorce is grief associated with guilt, while the major reaction after divorce is shame coupled with strong resentment. Bowlby (1973) further suggested, that an "acute distress syndrome" commonly is found in children experiencing separation from a parent. He claimed children can have at least three sets of reactions to divorce: conflict responses, separation responses, and life change responses associated with the new single-parent family.

To assess special developmental changes experienced by children whose parents divorce, several investigators have examined the effects of parental divorce on children referred for psychiatric treatment. The number of children from divorced families seeking such services was found to be greater than those seeking this same treatment in the general population (McDermott, 1970; Morrision, 1974). In a review of the records of 387 children referred for outpatient psychiatric evaluation, Kalter (1977) found that children of divorce appeared twice as often as did children in the general population.

McDermott (1970) studied the intake records of 1,487 children under the age of fourteen who were examined at a psychiatric hospital over a three year period. He compared the symptoms of children of divorce with those of the intact families in his sample. With the children of divorce, he observed that the duration of the presenting

problem was shorter and the complaints defined more sharply than with children referred from intact families. McDermott surmised, therefore, that the children were reacting to a more specific, recent stressful experience. He found also that in the divorce group symptoms such as running away from home, very poor home and social behavior, and trends toward delinquency were displayed. Depression was found in at least a mild or hidden degree in virtually all of the records McDermott examined. Some children expressed their depression overtly through suicide threats. Usually the depression was expressed covertly by accident-prone behavior or fatigue and boredom. In addition to a reaction to the loss of a parent, the inability to grieve for the lost family unit was given as a possible cause of the depression (McDermott, 1970).

Similarly, Tuckman and Regan (1966) compared the records of 1,767 children referred to outpatient clinics in Philadelphia. Children from intact families were under-represented while children of divorced, separated, widowed, or unmarried families were over-represented in the clinic sample. Their empirical data suggested that for significant referral problems, the widowed family children were more like the children referred from intact homes in that referral was most often for anxiety and neurotic symptoms. In contrast, children of divorce were referred more often for aggressive and antisocial behaviors than were children from other groups studied. An explanation given by the authors was that death usually does not occur with the same hostile family interactions as with other broken homes, therefore aggressive behavior is not a common reaction (Tuckman & Regan, 1966).

Kalter (1977) studied the first 400 children referred to a youth service center in which inpatient and outpatient treatments were provided for children under eighteen. It was reported that the proportion of children of divorce referred to the clinic was graphically high suggesting that stress placed on children by the divorce of their parents may leave them particularly vulnerable to developmental problems. In his analyses, Kalter found children of divorce to have a higher rate of occurrence of antisocial and delinquent problems, specifically drug taking and sexual behavior, than did children from intact families. In his age-sex subsamples he found aggression and hostility toward parents to be a consistent symptom of children of divorce. It should be noted, however, that the findings concerning sexual behavior and drug involvement were limited to the adolescent female group. His impression of these findings was that adolescent girls in the sample seemed to be in considerably more turmoil and were acting in more self-destructive ways than were adolescent boys of divorced homes (Kalter, 1977).

Crumby and Blumenthal's (1973) study examined the effects of the temporary loss of a father through military absence on children referred to an Army psychiatric clinic. Results of the investigation showed frequent depressive responses manifesting themselves in a wide variety of symptoms including psychosomatic complaints.

Tooley (1976) focused on boys aged four to seven who were being reared in fatherless homes. She found occurrences of sleep disturbances, enuresis, food stealing, food hoarding, and theft of money.

Hetherington (1973) studied the effects of father absence on 72 teenage girls at a community recreation center. Findings of the study revealed that girls from fatherless homes were anxious and had inadequate skills in relating to men. Girls from divorced homes tended to be provocative and clumsily flirtatious in their interactions with men, while girls whose fathers had died were more withdrawn and uncomfortable around men. All of the girls who were separated from their fathers were more likely to seek attention from both male and female adults, initiate more physical contact with male adults and female peers, and spend more time in male activities and less in feminine activities.

#### Educational Implications

Changes in behavior of single-parent children are unpredictable (Hammond, 1979). Some children exhibit behavior changes immediately while in others changes appear gradually. In some cases, these are behavior problems at school which do not show up at home. Other children have trouble at home, but not at school. Some single-parent children, while they maintain academic performance, begin having problems getting along with other children. Other single-parent children have it ". . . together at home and at school and completely internalize their problems" (Hammond, 1979, p. 55).

Studies of the intellectual development of children from single parent families have investigated school achievement and intellectual abilities. Two reviews (Biller, 1973; Shinn, 1978) have concluded

that children growing up in mother headed families show deficits in cognitive performance as assessed by standardized intelligence and achievement tests and school performance.

Aptitude and achievement tests in the general population have shown that females usually are superior to males in verbal areas, whereas males are superior to females on quantitative tasks. In single parent homes, typically headed by women, children are more likely to show patterns of higher verbal than quantitative scores. In studies of selected middle class populations, children raised in single parent families may have verbal scores that are higher than those of intact families (Carlsmith, 1964; Funkenstein, 1963; Lessing, Zagorin, & Nelson, 1970).

Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1978) compared intelligence quotients (I.Q.) of preschool children from both intact and single parent families. They found that while the groups showed no behavioral differences at two months and at one year after divorce, children from intact families scored significantly higher on performance I.Q. and moderately higher on full-scale I.Q. at two years after divorce. The only subscales on which significant differences between children of intact and single parent families were found were block design, mazes, and arithmetic.

For generations, educators have assumed that children from one parent households have more trouble in school than do children whose families fit what we think of as the traditional nuclear family mold. Findings of the National Association of Elementary School Principals



(NAESP) and the Kettering Foundation's Institute for the Development of Educational Activities (/I/D/E/A/) longitudinal study (1980) helped to confirm this assumption. As a group, one-parent children showed lower achievement and presented more discipline problems than did their two-parent peers in both elementary and high school. They were absent more often, late to school more often, and showed more health problems. In addition, this study found "a definite correlation between school performance and family status" (p. 33). Clearly, stresses resulting from divorce experiences manifest themselves in the academic arena (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1979).

Kelly and Wallerstein (1979), found in their five year study that single-parent children, with few exceptions, saw separation and divorce as very stressful situations. About two-thirds of these one-parent children showed noticeable changes in behavior at school. The intensity of changes differed as did the ways in which children expressed their distress. Teachers reported a high level of anxiety for over one-half of the students involved in the study. This anxiety was expressed mostly by restlessness which was not present before the single-parent situation existed. Also, one-fifth of these students displayed a combination of sadness, daydreaming, concentration problems, narrowing of interest and creativity, and physical complaints which resulted in a definite decline in academic achievement.

Further, Annis and Allers (1979) suggested in The National Elementary Principal that teachers may find that most children who show restlessness, forgetfulness, are unmotivated, nervous, or have inconsistent behavior come from disrupted homes. Students who exhibit

these " . . . minor problems" often are experiencing major problems at home (Annis & Allers, 1979, p. 65). Throughout the year, additional problems may surface such as fighting, withdrawal, truancy, and lack of academic progress. In a 1980 study, Brown indicated that single parent students cause " . . . more than their share of discipline problems at both the elementary and high school levels" (p. 539). In Touliatos and Lindholm's (1980) words, " . . . Studies generally have demonstrated that children whose families have been broken by parental death, divorce, or separation exhibit a greater degree of maladaptive behavior, particularly conduct disorders and socialized-aggressive delinquency, than do youngsters from intact homes" (p. 264).

Wallerstein and Kelly (1979) confirmed that divorce precipitated a major crisis in the lives of most children and that stresses engendered by the crisis often spills over into the academic arena. They reported,

Children and adolescents whose parents are divorcing do share common feelings or concerns that are complexly woven into their school behavior. These shared anxieties appear in various intensities. The particular pattern of each child's response depends on his or her position on the developmental ladder, the child's own unique personality, and the psychological ambience of the divorcing period, particularly the amount of conflict between the parents.  
(p. 52)

### Schools as a Resource

The important role that schools can play in facilitating children's adjustment recently has received attention in divorce related literature (Drake, 1979; Damon, 1979; NAESP & /I/D/E/A/ Report, 1980; Skeen & McKenry, 1980; Palker, 1980; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980;

Henderson, 1981). According to Drake (1979) the school is a natural environment for the child--a familiar place where health professionals can capitalize maximally on a child's receptivity to professional intervention.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1975), in recognizing the importance of schools in dealing with children of divorce stated,

Those children who were doing well at the time of the divorce, despite the turmoil in the family, were mature, bright youngsters who were enjoying school and had begun to derive considerable gratification from these out-of-home activities separate from their parents. (p. 612)

In time of divorce stress, Kelly and Wallerstein (1977) found a child's sense of continuity and stability to be dependent on availability of extrafamilial supports such as school, as well as on protection and concern that can be mobilized in the parent-child relationship during this time.

Teachers can sometimes perceive problems in the school setting that parents may overlook at home due, perhaps, to preoccupation with new parental roles and feelings. According to Drake (1981), "Parents experiencing the dissolution of their marriage often need to attend to so many aspects of their own lives that need restructuring, that unless the children blatantly express their needs . . . they have to receive their help elsewhere" (p. 24).

According to Kelly and Wallerstein (1979), it is crucial that teachers and principals be sensitive to the ways in which stress of the family breakup can disrupt, even if temporarily, their youngsters' ability to participate in the learning process. Such awareness, and the willingness to provide a supportive setting for these children,

will combine to make the school more responsive to changes wrought by a decade of divorce. In so doing, schools will continue to meet their primary responsibility--helping all children learn at the level of their highest potential.

Tessman (1978) stressed the need for people who can empathize with and support the child whose parents are divorcing. She suggested that during periods of heightened distress which is usual before, during, and after the parting of the parents, the need for a human support network is greatest and the individual without it is most vulnerable. Although the support of others can neither change nor undo whatever degree of pain is associated with the parting, its presence, like symbolic comforting arms, may help to make the pain bearable enough to be experienced as such, rather than disguised or distorted into forms which, in the long run, may be more debilitating to the individual.

According to Green (1978), the regular classroom teacher is the best resource, rather than setting up special collective programs with all children of divorce. Green quoted Polches, Superintendent of Schools in Mill Valley, California as saying, "His district did an extensive study a few years ago to determine what the schools should be doing for single-parent children. The conclusion was that support from existing staff was the best idea" (p. 32).

Hammond (1978), and Skeen and McKenry (1980) suggested that educators become more knowledgeable of and more sensitive to special needs and feelings of children from divorced/separated families. Hammond further suggested that teachers and counselors hold classroom discussions about

divorce and other one-parent situations in a non-threatening environment to encourage children to accept these situations.

Palker (1980) found that children have two basic needs in the classroom,

Teachers who recognize that although their families do not fit into the traditional mold, they are, nevertheless, families; and teachers who notice the signs that a child is going through a difficult time and knows how to deal with it.  
(p. 51)

Ourth (1980) noted, that as educators, we agree that the school's primary function is instruction, but we also know that a child who is in a crisis cannot learn until school personnel recognize the crisis and take steps to ameliorate its effects. He referred to divorce or separation as a crisis, suggesting that schools should be a welcome support system for the family to fall back on when the going is tough.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) stated that, "Classroom teaching that acknowledges and discusses the many variants of family life--one-parent households, father-headed and mother-headed, remarried families; two-parent families; extended families--makes children feel secure with their own particular family structure" (p. 15). Further, the NAESP and /I/D/E/A/ (1980) study suggested that, "if extra support and reassurance do not come from the school, the child may have difficulty finding them anywhere else. And without that support, school problems like those this study uncovered are likely to be the result" (p. 35).

According to Conley (1981) the people at school help single parent children by supplying alternative ego ideals by setting up a

human support network. This network can be made up of older relatives, brothers and sisters, substitute families, teachers, counselors, administrators, people at church or temple, and leaders of nonacademic activities. These people need to give children whose home life is undergoing change a sense of continuity, sustained caring, structure of continuity, and structure amid chaos. Conley further suggested that when children perceive that adults can understand their feelings, support them as they struggle from day to day, and offer encouragement for attaining realistic goals, they are both surprised and relieved; adults other than their preoccupied parents find them worthwhile and like them. They feel better about themselves and have a greater desire to try to accomplish.

Children spend one-third of their waking hours each week involved in school and school-related activities. During time in school, the child gains exposure to educators' and societal values. Although teachers and other educators are unable to directly do anything about divorce rates, they can do something to help children of divorced parents to make satisfactory adjustments. Aware teachers have many opportunities to dispel the social stigma, rejection, and negative attitudes often associated with divorce and children from single parent families.

Opinions and expectations of persons other than parents help form a self-concept based on a variety of different attitudes and values. Drake (1979) viewed these relationships as significant,

stating that, "The establishment of a relationship in school to a significant adult, particularly one of the same sex as the absent or non-custodial parent, may be of particular importance in these cases, and self-concept may be raised" (p. 70).

As Weiss (1979), an astute observer of the dynamics of separation and divorce has observed, the school can offer comfort and support to troubled children without putting a single new program in place. He suggested that schools already do a lot simply by being themselves. They provide children with a potentially supportive community, a group in which the child has an assured place, a group that's not going to come apart like the family came apart. They provide children with a teacher who is a concerned professional, invested in the child's development.

Drake (1981) clarified 10 major issues affecting children of divorce or separation with which the school administration must contend. Generally, these issues include:

1. Territorial rights--children should be allowed to remain in the familiar school until the family is no longer in crisis and the child has had time to adjust to the significant changes in his/her life.
2. Access to school records--the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) stated that a school district must give both parents access to records unless a court order removes one parent's right to have such knowledge.
3. Release from school--to the custodial parent only, or with a written request signed by the same person.

4. School visit--contact the custodial parent and abide by the parent's wishes.

5. Medical emergency--if custodial parent or significant others listed cannot be reached, avoid contacting a noncustodial parent. Contact the school doctor.

6. Financial responsibility--some states have a statute requiring the board to pay for field trips in cases of hardship. Administrators need to keep hardship cases in mind when they approve activities.

7. Child's surname--a child may use whatever name he/she prefers. However, legal names are consistently used on all school records.

8. Retention--home situations dramatically affect academic progress and performance for the first couple of years.

9. Confidentiality of records--a non-custodial parent can request the sending of school records to psychologist, physician, lawyer, etc.

10. School functions--avoid discrimination against single-parents by using new terms such as, for your parent or significant others.

Schools with an appropriate administrative mechanism can do a great deal to support the single-parent child. The following suggestions from the NAESP staff report, (1980) were suggested:

#### Record Keeping

1. The schools could send a standard form home each semester that asks for the names and addresses of the student, the mother, and the father.
2. Information on file at the school should also include home and work telephone numbers for both the custodial and non-custodial parents, so that one or the other may be reached in case of emergency.



3. Schools should be aware that unless there is a court order to the contrary, non-custodial parents have the same rights of access to student records, under the Family Education Right and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA).

### Inservice

1. The schools need inservice programs that:
  - (a) provide teachers with information about the changing family patterns;
  - (b) sensitize them to their own values and possible prejudices regarding separation, divorce, and living-in arrangements;
  - (c) alert them to personality and behavior changes in children that may signal trouble at home;
  - (d) advise them on ways to help children who are experiencing unusual stress; and
  - (e) provide them with lists of books, community agencies, and support groups that may be helpful to one-parent children and their families.
2. Inservice programs might also be extended to include single parents. The school's parent-teacher organization can coordinate discussion sessions, information sharing sessions, and other joint activities that include both single parents and school personnel.

### Curriculum and Instruction

1. School staff should be alert to the need to choose textbooks and other classroom materials that show a variety of non-stereotyped family configurations.
2. Consider offering courses or units in family life or parenting, which can be an appropriate forum for discussion of changing family patterns in general and individual students' own experiences in particular.
3. Consider offering courses or units in coping or survival skills, such as basic food preparation, first aid procedures, and dealing with emergency situations, for the benefit of all students but particularly those who have to take care of themselves (and younger siblings too) for part of the day until their parent or parents get home from work.
4. Teachers should recognize that it is often difficult for children who divide their time between custodial and non-custodial parents to complete homework assignments. Often the noncustodial parent has planned a full weekend of activities, leaving no time for studies. Or the child does not have a quiet, well-equipped workplace at the noncustodial

parent's home. Furthermore, children of working single parents commonly participate in before-and after-school child-care arrangements, which seldom offer either the opportunity or the place to study. These problems should be discussed with the children involved and suggestions offered for personal time management. Also, the school should contact child-care facilities and ask that they provide study time if possible. (p. 36)

### Counseling

1. The loss of a parent through death, separation, or divorce is almost always extraordinarily stressful for a child. Many children handle the loss well with the support of family and friends. But others may benefit from some kind of counseling. Three suggested approaches are peer counseling or "rap groups" for children from one-parent families; individual or small-group meetings with the school counselor or social workers; and referral to an outside professional if indicated. Whatever form the counseling takes, it is crucial that the students involved are not made to feel singled out or stigmatized in any way by their participation.
2. On an informal level, individual teachers can provide much counseling support--especially at the elementary school level, where the relationship between student and teacher is apt to be a more personal one. Simply encouraging children to talk, and listening to them in an understanding, nonjudgmental way, can be very supportive and can give children the security of knowing that there is another adult in their lives who really cares. (Senior citizens and other community volunteers can also serve as adult role models for children who need them.)
3. School principals, counselors, and social workers should be prepared to refer parents who themselves feel the need of counseling to the appropriate community agencies.
4. For use in counseling, or by individual teachers, students, and parents, the school should maintain a resource library of books and filmstrips on divorce, death, single parenting, and the like.
5. Some schools also maintain a Family Crisis Hot Line, staffed by volunteers from the community and a liaison from the local department of human services. (p. 37)

Inservice programs might also be extended to include single-parents.

Henderson (1981) suggested that teachers and single-parents examine jointly the many stereotypes that exist about single-parent families.

Home and school organizations can coordinate discussion sessions, information sharing sessions, and other joint activities that include both single parents and school personnel.

According to Annis and Allers (1979) social workers and school psychologists "should be asked to conduct inservice sessions that provide suggestions and recommendations teachers can use in the classroom" (p. 65). Damon (1979) agreed with the need for inservice programs of one-parent children and suggested that needs of single-parent children be discussed by the school faculty early in the school year and at regular intervals throughout the year. Damon developed ten guidelines for administrators and classroom teachers regarding the needs of single-parent children in school:

#### Guidelines for Administrators

1. Set up one inservice workshop each year to discuss problems of separation and loss in families.
2. Make professional help available to families and teachers by redirecting or expanding existing services or by suggesting where these services may be obtained.
3. Offer extended day programs for people who need them.
4. Try to keep track of the children involved in separation, divorce, and remarriage. Assign a mentor to these children.
5. Be careful about both direct and indirect discrimination against children in these situations; both public labels and supplementary charges for activities can hurt.
6. Hold parent activities, not father/mother activities.
7. Be willing to work with professionals from outside the school.
8. Hold conferences and meetings at times that are convenient to all parents, and provide for the non-custodial parent to receive information.

9. Provide teachers with appropriate opportunities to share information from one year to the next.
10. Do not assume that children from one-parent families will necessarily have difficulty in school. But be prepared to provide them with support whenever they need it--which might be years after the event. (p. 71)

#### Guidelines for Teachers

1. Know your own feelings about separation and divorce.
2. Be alert for personality and behavior changes.
3. Seek support and information from colleagues and parents.
4. Provide time to talk with students about separation and divorce.
5. Find out custody and visitation responsibilities if possible.
6. Be alert to whether or not the student is eating and sleeping properly.
7. Provide time for student to talk about his/her feelings.
8. Provide the student with a lot of positive comments, opportunities to excel, and occasions to be in charge.
9. Share aspects from school and your own family backgrounds.
10. Do not presume anything. (p. 73)

Finally, a few specific interventions have been described for counseling children of divorce. Wilkinson and Beck (1977) described a developmental approach which consisted of eight 45-minute sessions with elementary students. The goal was to help clarify a child's feelings about divorce, to gain a realistic picture of the divorce situation, to help the child see that others experience similar feelings, and to assist the child in learning new ways of coping with his/her feelings.

Magid (1977) developed a six session program for parents and children of divorce. Parents and children met separately for the first five sessions to discuss common concerns and vignettes depicting recurring family scenes; at the last session parents and children met together for shared activities.

Hozman and Froiland (1977) designed an intervention method based on five stages of death and dying delineated by Kubler-Ross. First is denial, in which the reality of the divorce is not yet accepted. The second stage is anger, in which the child begins to face the hostility toward self and toward those who are leaving his/her world. Stage three, bargaining, usually occurs next. If the child cannot get his/her own way through anger or temper tantrums, perhaps "a deal" will be worked out to negotiate desired goals. Stage four, depression, is a critical stage in the counseling process. During this stage children frequently will become very depressed as a result of their inability to control or modify their fate. The final stage is acceptance. The participants learn to accept situations which they cannot control but which definitely have a major effect upon their lives.

Green (1978) developed an eight session multi-modal comprehension approach geared toward health, emotions, learning/school, people relationships, image, interest, need to know and guidance of actions (HELPING) children cope with the stress of divorce. This approach can be generalized and applied to many other clusters of problems which children experience.

Kessler (1977) designed groups for elementary school age children of divorce consisting of sharing feelings, concerns, values clarification, and training for empathetic assertiveness. She found that conducting one day workshops were limited in their effect because of the distance the children had traveled. She recommended, however, that the model consist of a number of sessions spaced over a period of weeks.

Cantor (1977) ran similar groups for children of divorce within the school setting. She found a lessening of shame regarding the divorce and amazement on the part of the children that someone else had parents who also were divorced. The group members shared experiences, provided information to one another, clarified their role in the family, and expressed their fears and anger.

Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird (1980), focused on the processes and techniques of group counseling for children of divorce in elementary grades. The divorce group offered a natural blend between therapeutic group processes and developmental-sociological phenomenon of peer group membership. The group brought children together for the expressed purpose of catalyzing peer group interaction based on the group's common bonds, needs, feelings, and life experiences. The children's developmental needs for peer validation served to foster the therapeutic process. In addition, a more subtle communication process based on peer modeling became a part of the group process.

## Summary

This chapter presented a review of literature regarding the effects of divorce and separation on children. Current statistics indicate that over two million children become offspring of divorced parents each year. There is no single behavior reaction to divorce, separation or other one-parent situations; therefore, there are no easy guidelines for recognizing behaviors related to these situations and the emotional changes which may accompany them.

Recent research reported that children of divorced/separated families experience many problems relative to adjustment or parental discord and/or loss of a parent. Because of these findings, the role of the school is emphasized as a viable resource and a system of support for single-parent children.

## Chapter 3

### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine self and teacher-reported differences in home, school, peer, and teacher-rated behaviors of children from divorced/separated and intact families. This chapter presents a description of the study participants and the instruments used for collection of the data. In addition, the procedures that were followed are described, as are the types of data analyses used to interpret information obtained in the course of the study.

#### Background Information

The study was conducted during the months of January through March, 1983 in an Archdiocesan Parochial School system in a mid-western city. The Archdiocesan school system includes a metropolitan and a surrounding rural area within a radius of 250 miles. It is comprised of 63 elementary and 22 high schools, educating a total population of 20,498 students. The enrollment in the elementary schools the year of the study was approximately 10,252 students in the metropolitan area and 3,491 students in the outlying rural area.

#### The Subjects

For purposes of this study, four elementary schools, referred to as schools A, B, C, and D, with relatively equal economic status were selected from the metropolitan area. These schools were selected because they represented the population desired and because of the



researcher's familiarity with the students, teachers, and administrators. It was determined that kindergarten through third grade students would not be included in the study because of their limited use of language and the inappropriateness of the instruments for use with younger children. Thus, four hundred ninety-four fourth through sixth graders in schools A, B, C, and D, participated in the study. Sixty-three of these students were from single-parent families as a result of divorce or separation. The remaining four hundred thirty-one students were from two-parent families including natural parent families, remarried parents, which could include step or an adoptive parent, and conceivably some unidentified adoptive parents.

Schools A, B, C, and D, were located in neighborhoods of older, single family homes, inhabited by predominately white, middle class families. Although the majority of children lived within walking distance to that school, a small segment of students were transported to school by private bus companies or by individual parents. The four elementary schools had at least some access, though limited, to support services from the public school system in the areas of reading, mathematics, and speech. The provision of psychological services was extremely rare and often provided at individual cost to the parent(s) through private agencies.

### Instruments

The principal instrument used for the study was the Behavior Rating Profile (BRP) (Brown & Hammill, 1978). This instrument provided a standardized, highly reliable, experimentally validated, and

norm-referenced, ecological evaluation of student's behavior. The BRP contains six independent components; the Student Rating Scale: Home, School, and Peer; the Teacher Rating Scale; the Parent Rating Scale, and the Sociogram. Only the Student Rating Scale (SRS) and the Teacher Rating Scale (TRS) were used.

Reliability of the BRP's internal consistency has been studied using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha (Brown & Hammill, 1978). Reported reliability coefficients ranged from .74 to .98. In general, most authorities accept .80 as sufficient for the BRP's purpose. Reliability studies indicated that 87 percent of the coefficients reported exceeded the .80 coefficient level.

Validity studies have established both construct and concurrent validity of the BRP. In a study of concurrent validity, the relationship of the BRP scale, to the Walter Problem Identification Checklist, the Behavior Problem Checklist, and the Vineland Social Maturity Scale was examined. Using a criterion level of .35 correlation coefficient, 86 percent of the 72 correlation coefficients reported exceeded .35 and were statistically significant (Brown & Hammill, 1978).

Construct validity studies examined the inter-correlations of subtests. The 40 coefficients ranged in size from .49 to .96 (median = .81) and all were statistically significant at the .01 level. All were also above the .35 criterion, and thus construct validity of the BRP was established.

The SRS consists of sixty items reflecting selected home, school, and peer behavior. Each of the three component scales contains twenty

items, but all scale items are intermingled in a common format instrument. In response to each descriptive statement, the student is asked to check "True" or "False" as an indicator of the accuracy of the statement in relation to his/her own behavior.

The TRS consists of thirty descriptive sentence items. For each student the teacher is asked to indicate, on a four point scale ranging from "Very Much Like The Student," to "Not At All Like The Student," the degree to which the statement is reflective of the individual student.

### Methodology

Data for this investigation were collected during the months of January through March, 1983. First, information regarding the number of students from divorced/separated and intact families was requested from the sixty-three diocesan elementary schools. Each selected school's administrator received three letters, one of which delineated the purpose of the study, the second of which confirmed Archdiocesan support and the third, a school survey (Appendixes A, B, and C). The survey requested information regarding the number of students from divorced/separated and intact families with a subdivision indicating numbers in grades four, five, and six. All parent(s) of these fourth, fifth and sixth grade students in the four identified schools received a letter explaining the purpose of the study and were requested to indicate their permission for student participation (Appendix D).

The Brown and Hammill Behavior Rating Profile - Student Rating Scale was administered to all students by the researcher. In addition, the classroom teacher completed the Brown and Hammill Teacher Rating Scale on each of his/her students.

Students were asked to complete the SRS during a regularly scheduled class period. Teachers were then asked to complete the TRS for each student and to identify those students from divorced/separated or intact families. Teachers also were asked to indicate the recency of change in the family structure for students of divorced/separated families by placing symbols of less than ( $<$ ) or more than ( $>$ ) two years since the family dissolution.

#### Data Analysis

All data were coded by the researcher for computer analysis by school, grade, sex and family structure (see Appendix E for coding format). All raw scores were converted to standard scores for analysis purposes. For each scale score, means and standard deviations were obtained by grade level. One way analysis of variance with correction for unequal group size was utilized to test for significant differences between intact and divorced/separated students. Cronbach's alpha level of .05 was set to test for statistical significance.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if significant differences existed between children of divorced/separated and children of intact families on self-rated/reported home, school, peer, and teacher rated behaviors. Presented in this chapter is a summary of the data obtained in the study and a discussion of the results. Included is a description of the sample studied and the results of the analysis of variance for the scale standard scores of home, school, peer, and teacher rated behaviors.

The demographic and personal information obtained from the Behavior Rating Profile provided a description of the sample. Distribution of the subjects according to family type, sex, grade, and school is presented in Table 1.

Four hundred eighty-three children participated in the study reflecting 98 percent of subjects who returned permission slips. Eleven children of deceased or single parent (never married) were excluded from the sample. As may be observed in Table 1, more females than males participated in the study.

Tables 2 and 3 contain information relative to the Brown and Hammill Behavior Rating Profile for the various subgroups. Table 2 contains the means and standard deviations of the students in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of the students identified from intact and divorced/separated families.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Sample by Family Type, Sex, Grade, and School

Group	Characteristics								
	Sex		Grade Level			School			
	F	M	4	5	6	A	B	C	D
Intact (N=420)	225	194	125	148	147	182	100	53	85
Divorced/Separated (N=63)	37	26	22	24	17	29	11	6	17
Total (N=483)	263	220	147	172	164	211	111	59	102

As noted in the tables, mean scores for home and school clustered around 10, the reported standard score mean of the instrument. In Table 3, it is observed that the means for divorced/separated group all were lower than those for the intact group. Four statistical hypotheses were tested. Results of the analysis of variance tests are reported in Tables 4 through 7.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in home related behavior from children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the SRS of the BRP.

Analysis of variance of the home scale standard scores is summarized in Table 4. The  $F$  value of 1.631 was not found to be significant. Thus, the data analysis indicated no significant difference existed between divorced/separated and intact groups on the home-related behavior scale.

Table 2

Standard Score Means and Standard Deviations of Home, School, Peer, and  
Teacher Scale Scores by Grade Level

Grade	Scale							
	Home		School		Peer		Teacher	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Fourth (N=147)	9.8867	2.6049	10.4933	2.8842	9.5933	2.7904	11.9195	2.7424
Fifth (N=172)	9.7955	2.6084	10.1875	2.8813	10.2216	2.9803	13.0114	2.1354
Sixth (N=164)	10.0719	2.6652	10.4311	2.7887	10.3952	2.8706	12.5030	2.2837
Total (N=483)	9.9168	2.6240	10.3631	2.8485	10.0892	2.9001	12.5081	2.4189

Table 3

Standard Score Means and Standard Deviations of Home, School, Peer, and Teacher Scale Scores  
by Group

Group	Scale							
	Home		School		Peer		Teacher	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Intact (N=420)	10.0119	2.6176	10.4881	2.8964	10.2571	2.8696	12.6571	2.2550
Divorced/Separated (N=63)	9.5625	2.6540	9.7813	2.5353	9.4375	2.8333	11.5714	3.2365
Total (N=483)	9.9525	2.6241	10.3946	2.8589	10.1488	2.8754	12.5155	2.4293



Table 4

Analysis of Variance of Home Standard Scores by Group

Source	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F Value
Between	11.217	1	11.217	1.631 NS
Within	3314.690	482	6.877	

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in school-related behavior from children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the SRS of the BRP.

Analysis of variance of the school scale standard scores is summarized in Table 5. The  $F$  value of 3.412 was not sufficiently large to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 5

Analysis of Variance of School Standard Scores by Group

Source	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F Value
Between	27.748	1	27.748	3.412 NS
Within	3919.878	482	8.133	

Thus, the data analysis indicated no significant differences existed between divorced/separated and intact groups on the school-related behavior scale.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in peer-related behavior from children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the SRS of the BRP.

The analysis of variance of the peer scale standard scores is summarized in Table 6. The  $F$  value of 4.546 was found to be statistically significant and therefore the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 6

Analysis of Variance of Peer Standard Scores by Group

Source	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	$F$ Value
Between	37.311	1	37.311	4.546*
Within	3955.979	482	8.207	

\* $p < .05$ .

Thus, the data analysis indicated a significant difference existed between divorced/separated and intact groups on the peer-related behavior scale.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in teacher-rated behavior from children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the SRS of the BRP.

The analysis of variance of the teacher scale was found to be statistically significant and therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, the data analysis indicated a highly significant difference existed between divorced/separated and intact groups on the teacher-rated behavior scale.

Table 7

Analysis of Variance of Teacher Standard Scores by Group

Source	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F Value
Between	64.576	1	64.576	11.173*
Within	2780.057	481	5.780	

\* $p < .01$ .

## Summary

The findings of the present investigation indicate some significant differences were found between students from divorced/separated and intact families. The divorced/separated group mean scores were all lower in self rated home, school, peer, and teacher-rated behaviors than those from the intact group, however, no statistically significant difference was found between the groups in home and school rated behaviors. Significant differences were found at the  $F$  value of 4.546 for peer-related behavior and 11.173 for teacher-rated behavior. Therefore, the general hypothesis of no significant difference from children of divorced/separated and intact families was rejected.

## Chapter 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if differences exist in selected behaviors of children from divorced/separated and intact families. Specifically, the following research questions and hypotheses were investigated.

#### Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in home-related behavior of children from divorced/separated families as compared to children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile?

2. Is there a difference in classroom-related behavior of children from divorced/separated families as compared to children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile?

3. Is there a difference in peer-related behavior of children from divorced/separated families as compared to children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile?

4. Is there a difference in teacher perceptions of children from divorced/separated families as compared to children of intact families according to the Teacher Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile?

## Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in home-related behavior between children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile.

2. There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in school-related behavior between children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile.

3. There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in peer-related behavior between children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the Student Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile.

4. There is no significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in school-related behavior between children of divorced/separated families and children of intact families according to the Teacher Rating Scale of the Behavior Rating Profile.

Four hundred eighty-three fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students enrolled in four midwestern parochial schools, and each student's home-room teacher participated in the study. Home, school, and peer-related behaviors were assessed through administration of two self-report instruments. The 60-item Student Rating Scale (SRS), designed to examine the reciprocal nature of the various environments in which students function was completed by the 483 student participants. To assess teacher perceptions of student behavior, the Teacher Rating Scale (TRS), a 30-item using a Likert-type response format was completed

for each of these 483 students by their respective homeroom teachers. Data were collected during the months of January through March, 1983.

One way analysis of variance with correction for unequal group size was utilized to test for significant differences between divorced/separated and intact students. Cronbach's alpha level of .05 was set to test for statistical significance.

Data gathered through use of the SRS and TRS indicated some significant differences in behaviors of students from divorced/separated and intact families. While no statistically significant difference was found between the groups in home and school behaviors, significant differences were found in self-report peer and teacher rated behaviors. Moreover, mean scores for students in the divorced/separated group were lower in all areas of behavior assessed--home, school, peer, and teacher-rated. The general hypothesis of the study, that no significant difference would be found between children from divorced/separated and intact families, was therefore rejected.

### Discussion

Results of this study, specifically those obtained through use of the BRP, support, in part, previously reported studies which indicate that the experience of divorce does affect behaviors of children (Brown, 1980; Kelly & Wallerstein, 1979; Kalter, 1977; Tooley, 1976). Home and school-related behaviors, as reported by the students themselves, showed no statistically significant difference between groups although, overall, mean scores for children in the divorced/separated group were lower than those for the intact group. These

findings may suggest that some children from the intact group may have been experiencing parental discord at the time this research was conducted. Similarity in the attributes of home and school behaviors also may be indicative of satisfactory adjustments made by children from divorced/separated families. Moreover, evidence exists which indicates that divorce can have a positive influence on children and the family, i.e., these children may be better adjusted than those remaining in two-parent homes where there is on-going tension, conflict, and stress (Hetherington et al., 1978; Lamb, 1978; Weiss, 1979).

These results further may suggest that single parents are doing an excellent job of coping and managing transitions and adjustments of family living. The lack of reported differences in areas of home and school-related behaviors may suggest also that the religious factor incorporated within the parochial school program serves as a means of support and guidance for children during times of crisis.

If children of divorced/separated and intact families exhibit relative sameness in their experience of home and school, a critical question as posed by Bowlby (1973) may be whether separation from a parent per se or the interparental conflict that is concomitant with divorce is related strongly to children's behavior problems e.g., aggressiveness, withdrawal and belligerent and attention-seeking behaviors. Studies have indicated that a relationship exists between the amount of turbulence during divorce deliberation, litigation, and transition periods and the subsequent success during redirection of the parents and adjustment of children (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1976; Rosen, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1979; Damon, 1979).



As noted in Chapter IV, significant differences in peer-related behavior did exist between groups and were most evident among fourth grade students--the youngest of the study participants. This finding may be reflective of varying developmental phases suggesting that age or maturity level are important variables relative to one's ability to adjust to changes in family structure.

Also worthy of mention is the fact that significant changes in teacher and peer relationships may be occurring for students in these particular grade levels. Departmentalization, which, in the parochial school system takes place in grade four, requires that students, whose previous exposure has been to one primary teacher and a single peer group, now interact with several instructors and new groups of classroom peers. Thus, higher scores at the fifth and sixth grade levels may be reflective of students' growing adjustments to such changes. As noted in a study by Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1979), patterns of play and relationships with peers have been found to be areas in which stress and difficulties in coping often are reflected.

Results of the TRS showed a significant difference in teacher's perceptions of children from divorced/separated and intact groups. These findings suggest that as a group, teachers perceive children of divorced/separated families to display significantly more school and peer behavior problems than do children of intact families in their daily performance at school.

Also suggested by these results may be that teachers expect children of divorced/separated families to have weathered the crisis of

family dissolution in a shorter period of time than is realistically possible. Therefore teachers may assume that a child's understanding of and feelings about divorce would be crystallized relatively quickly.

These findings may further indicate that teachers are not aware of the duration of time that is needed for a child to adjust psychologically and emotionally to dissolution of his/her family. Although a child may appear in external situations to have weathered the crisis of parental divorce, the reality of the adjustment may take years.

Damon (1979) emphasizes two points to remember about single-parent children:

1. One-half of these children are exposed to a possible series of crisis situations for at least three years or more.
2. They may also have been affected by geographical, emotional, social, and financial changes that come as a surprise and lasted varying lengths of time.  
(p. 69)

Behaviors exhibited by some single-parent children may, at times, speak to the inner turmoil experienced as a result of family breakup. Inconsistency in children's classroom performance as witnessed daily by their teachers may be characterized by behavior of disinterest in work, distractability and even overt actions. These manifestations may be interpreted by the teacher as deliberate negative conduct by the student.

Another aspect that may contribute to significant differences is the fact that teachers knew the purpose of the study. Six weeks prior to administration of the SRS, the TRS was mailed to each teacher for completion. Perhaps the internal validity was threatened as a result of this awareness. As noted by Tuckman (1972):

Experimenter bias has been well documented by Rosenthal (1966). When an experimenter is in a position to influence the outcome of an experiment, albeit unconsciously, (s)he may behave in a way that improves the performance of one group and not the other, and thereby alter the results. (p. 101)

Stereotypic influences reflected in many current educational journals about single-parent children also may have prejudiced teacher's perceptions of divorced/separated children. This is often referred to as the pygmalion effect.

Finally, further research is needed to understand why these differences exist. It was not the intent of the study to explain these differences, but only to find if differences existed in self-rated behaviors between children of divorced/separated and intact families in parochial school systems.

### Conclusions

This study was designed to examine differences in home, school, and peer-related behaviors of children from divorced/separated and intact family structures. Based on the data collected from 483 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students enrolled in four parochial schools, and their respective homeroom teachers, the following conclusions were drawn.

1. Students from divorced/separated and intact families perceived their home and school-related behaviors with relative sameness.
2. Peer-related behaviors of students from divorced/separated and intact families, when assessed by the students themselves, differed significantly.

3. Teachers perceived school and peer-related behaviors of children from divorced/separated and intact families to be significantly different.

4. Whereas teachers perceived significant differences between children from divorced/separated and intact families both in school and peer-related behaviors, students from divorced/separated families reported their school behavior to be similar to that of students from intact families while reporting their peer-related behavior to be significantly different from that of intact family students.

#### Recommendations and Implications for Future Research

This comparative study provided information relative to differences in selected behaviors of children from divorced/separated and intact families. Based on the literature reviewed and the results of this investigation, the following recommendations were made.

1. Longitudinal studies with periodic and long-range assessments, should be conducted to examine behaviors of children of divorced/separated families at various time intervals in the divorce/separation process i.e., at the onset of parental discord, following departure of a parent, during divorce proceedings, and following dissolution of the marriage.

2. Research should be conducted to explore other aspects of the total child and his/her environment such as attitudes toward self, peers, school, etc. to develop a more complete profile of the child undergoing changes in family structure.

3. Studies such as the present investigation should be undertaken with sample groups which reflect varying demographic and other selected characteristics (e.g., groups which differ by sex, age, grade level, place of residence, religious affiliation, etc.).

4. Correlational studies should be attempted to explore relationships in selected behaviors of (a) students enrolled in parochial and public schools, (b) children who differ by sex, age, grade level, religious affiliation, etc., (c) catholic students enrolled in public schools and catholic students attending parochial schools, and (d) children of single-parents who have never married and children of adoption to children experiencing parental divorce/separation. Other correlational studies should be carried out to determine (a) similarities and differences in parent and child assessments of behavior, and (b) relationships between selected behaviors and other psycho-social constructs such as self concept, locus of control, general well-being, etc.

5. Teacher inservice programs specific to single-parent children should be scheduled early in the school calendar year to develop and implement strategies to support this segment of the school population. Periodic evaluations should be conducted throughout the year.

6. It is recommended that schools use educational materials which do not discriminate against single-parent families, but acknowledge alternate forms of family structure.

7. Findings and conclusions of this study should be disseminated to practicing school-related professionals to promote a better

understanding and awareness of the needs of single-parent children and to aid in the development of teacher training workshops.

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## APPENDIX A

Dear Principal,

I am writing to you to request your assistance in a research project that I will be conducting in several of the Archdiocesan Elementary Schools. This study is a requirement for my Ed.S. degree in Counseling of which I am working toward at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls.

The purpose of this research is to see if there is a relationship in school behavior for children who have experienced parental divorce or separation as compared to the school behavior of children from intact families. The target age population of this study will be children in grades 4 thru 6. The study will require giving each student the Hammill Behavior Rating Scale which I will administer to all students in these grades. It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The classroom teacher will be asked to complete a similar but shorter questionnaire on each student in his/her class. This is done by simply checking from a list of descriptive words or phrases behaviors that are most relevant to the student's performance in class.

Confidentiality will be secured by the use of numbers rather than names. All material will be destroyed immediately after the forms are scored. The results of this study will be shared with each Administrator of the participating school. The reason for my selection of your school is not only because of the large enrollment but as a means of controlling for Socioeconomic Status. There will also be a form letter to parents explaining the study and requesting parental permission. I will have them printed and delivered to your school one month in advance. I would like to administer the questionnaires during the week of March 14, 1983. This is in conjunction with our spring break at the University. [REDACTED] Superintendent of Schools, has approved and supports this research project. A cover letter from her is enclosed.

At this time, I need to know if you are willing to have your school involved in this study. Would you kindly complete the attached form and return to me in the self-addressed envelope. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy day to consider this research project.

Sincerely,

*Sister Elaine Delaney*

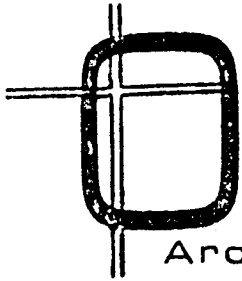
Sr. Elaine Delaney

ED/pk

Enclosure

APPENDIX B

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Archdiocese

December 3, 1982

Dear Principals:

Several weeks ago Sister Elaine Delaney spent time discussing her research project with me. As all of us know, the number of students whose parents are divorced or separated continues to grow each year. Her topic, therefore, is certainly timely and the results will be helpful to all of us.

I think Sister Elaine's background as an elementary school teacher along with her present studies in counseling will make her an invaluable counselor for elementary school children and an available resource person for administrators and teachers when she returns to Omaha.

I strongly encourage your support, cooperation, and involvement in her research project.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted line]

Superintendent of Schools

[Redacted line]

[Redacted footer text]

SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

ADMINISTRATOR \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL ENROLLMENT \_\_\_\_\_ STUDENTS

I. NUMBER OF STUDENTS FROM DIVORCED OR SEPARATED FAMILIES: \_\_\_\_\_ STUDENTS

NUMBER OF STUDENTS FROM INTACT FAMILIES, (BOTH PARENTS LIVING TOGETHER) \_\_\_\_\_ STUDENTS

PLEASE INCLUDE:

- STUDENTS WHOSE PARENT(S) DECEASED
- STUDENTS OF SINGLE PARENT - THOSE NEVER MARRIED

II. SPECIFIC BREAKDOWN

NUMBER OF STUDENTS	<u>GRADE 4</u>	<u>GRADE 5</u>	<u>GRADE 6</u>
FROM			
DIVORCED OR SEPARATED FAMILIES	_____	_____	_____
FROM			
INTACT FAMILIES	_____	_____	_____
TOTAL	_____	_____	_____

PLEASE RETURN TO:

SR. ELAINE DELANEY  
314 PEARL STREET  
CEDAR FALLS, IA 50613

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 1, 1983

February 4, 1983

Dear Principal,

I am writing to you to request your assistance in a research project that I will be conducting in several of the Archdiocesan Elementary Schools.

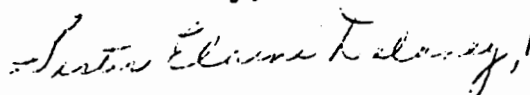
The purpose of this study is to see if there is a relationship in school behavior for children who have experienced parental divorce or separation, as compared to children of intact families. [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Superintendent of Schools, has approved and supports this research project. A cover letter from her is enclosed.

In order to compile statistics of divorced or separated families for students in the elementary school population, the information requested on the attached sheet is of vital importance. All information regarding your school will remain confidential, as no school name will appear within this study. Once the data is gathered, all information will be destroyed.

There is a self addressed envelope enclosed for returning the information directly to me.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation in responding to this portion of the study. I truly appreciate you taking the time out from a busy day to collect the information.

Sincerely,



Sr. Elaine Delaney  
314 Pearl St.  
Cedar Falls, IA 50613  
(319) 277-3671

ED/pk

Enclosures: cover letter  
                  form  
                  envelope

## APPENDIX D

Dear Parents,

I am a student at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls and working toward my Ed.S. degree in Elementary School Counseling. Prior to this, I have taught for eight years in the Parochial elementary schools in [REDACTED] and will return in the fall of 1983 to provide counseling services through the [REDACTED] to elementary school children and families.

At this time, I am doing a study to determine if there is a relationship in school behavior for children who have experienced parental divorce or separation as compared to school behavior of children from intact families. The target age population of this study will be for children in grades 4 thru 6. All children will be asked to rate themselves on the Hammill Behavior Rating Profile of which I will administer. The classroom teacher will also complete the Hammill Teacher Rating Profile for each student. The scores derived from these questionnaires will be compared and studied. For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, no names will be used and numerical numbers will be assigned. Also, classroom teachers may receive a summary of the study but will not know results for individual students. All material will be destroyed once the forms are scored. Both student and teacher questionnaire forms will be available to you at the school office if you so wish to view them beforehand. I will administer the questionnaire during the week of March 14, 1983.

[REDACTED], Superintendent of Schools, has approved and supports this research project. Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to consider my study. Please indicate below your choice in regard to your child's involvement in this study and return back to school by February 28, 1983.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please leave your name and telephone number at the parish school office and I will contact you when I return to [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

*Sister Elaine Delaney*

Sr. Elaine Delaney

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PLEASE SEND YOUR RESPONSE BACK TO SCHOOL WITH YOUR CHILD BY FEBRUARY 28, 1983

\_\_\_\_\_ I give Sr. Elaine Delaney permission to administer the Hammill Student Behavior Rating Profile to my child.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(signature)

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give Sr. Elaine Delaney permission to administer the Hammill Student Behavior Rating Profile to my child.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(signature)



## APPENDIX E

Coding Format

<u>Card Number</u>	<u>Column Number</u>	<u>Information</u>
1	1	School identification
	3	Grade
	5	Section
	8	ID. Number
	10	SEX
	13	AGE
	15	Marital Type
	18-24	Home RS., SS., PR.
	27-33	School RS., SS., PR.
	36-42	Peer RS., SS., PR.
	45-48	Teacher RS., SS., PR.