Children and Divorce: What We Know and What We Need to Know

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1. Refined Divorce Rates for Five Countries

2. Is Divorce Linked with Negative Outcomes among Children?
   - externalizing problems
   - internalizing problems
   - academic failure
   - problems with peer relations
   - weaker bonds with parents (fathers)

3. Is Divorce Linked with Negative Outcomes among Adult Offspring?
   - less education
   - lower income and job status
   - increased risk of depression
   - increased risk of divorce
   - weak long-term bonds with parents

4. Are All Children Affected Similarly?
   - Some children exhibit lifelong increases in serious problems
   - Some children show only minor, short-term distress
   - Some children are better off in the long-run following divorce, especially if their parents have overtly hostile relationships

5. Distributions of Psychological Well-Being for Offspring with Divorced and Married Parents
Do Gender Differences Exist in the Links Between Divorce and Child Well-Being?

- Perhaps, but the pattern is not clear
- Among children, boys are at greater risk of problems with conduct and social relationships
- Among young adults, women experience greater educational disadvantage than men

Does Divorce Cause These Problems?

Yes, but selection processes also play a role

- Marital conflict
- Parent psychopathology
- Genetic effects

Marital Conflict Model

Marital conflict \rightarrow \text{Divorce} \rightarrow \text{Child problems}

Parent Personality Model

Parent psychopathology \rightarrow \text{Inept parenting} \rightarrow \text{Child problems}

Parent psychological problems, divorce, and child problems (NSFH I & II, Unstandardized coefficients)

\begin{align*}
\text{Parent psychological problems} & \rightarrow \text{Divorce} \\
-0.47^{***} \\
\text{Parenting quality} & \rightarrow \text{Child Problems} \\
-0.15^{***} \\
\end{align*}

\[ \begin{align*}
0.06^{***} \\
0.16^{**} \\
0.24^{**} \\
\end{align*} \]
Passive Genetic Model

Parents’ genes → Parents’ divorce → Child’s genes → Children’s behavior problems

Percentage of Children Exhibiting Behavior Problems by Divorce and Adoption Status

Do We Know How Divorce Lowers Children’s Well-Being?

**Yes**
- Economic hardship
- Mothers’ parenting quality
- Loss of relationship with father
- Feeling caught in the middle
- Multiple transitions

Divorce → Economic hardship → Mother’s parenting → Loss of father → Caught in the middle → Multiple transitions → Child outcomes

Do We Know What Helps?

**Yes**
- Economic security
- Competent (authoritative) parenting from both parents
- Cooperative co-parenting
- Stability

Children Living with One Parent by Marital Status (US)
Questions

- Do children with never married parents experience the same risks as do children with married parents who divorce?
- Are the mediating processes the same for these children?

More questions

- Few studies have focused on minority groups. In the U.S., are the estimated effects of divorce comparable for Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians?
- Are there differences between countries? And if yes, what accounts for these differences? Culture? Social policies?

How Effective are Interventions?

- Court-based parenting education courses for divorcing parents are common in the U.S. Do they work?
- Would more joint physical custody benefit children?
- What can we do about high-conflict couples following divorce?

Programs to Promote Healthy Marriage

- How effective is marriage education at improving marital quality and lowering divorce?
- Is it useful to encourage unmarried parents to marry?
- Are community education programs useful?
- Do these programs benefit children?