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AGE AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE
EFFECT OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The differences in the effect of divorce on children were examined. The researcher specifically looked at the difference in the two variables of age and gender to determine if parental divorce had more of an impact on one sex than the other, and/or on a child of one age group compared to a child of a different age group. Seventy-nine divorced, unremarried mothers completed a forty-two item questionnaire which assessed if the parental divorce impacted the child and if so in what manner. The children discussed in the questionnaire responses ranged in age from three to seventeen years old. There were a total of forty males and thirty-nine females discussed by their parent on the questionnaire. The subjects were also divided into three age groups according to the child's age. There were eighteen preschool-aged children, thirty-two elementary-aged children, and twenty-nine adolescent-aged children examined through the use of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire utilized a three point-response format which required the parent to determine whether or not their child feels, thinks, or behaves as the statement implies. To determine if there is a difference in

the scores of the questionnaires in regard to gender, a t-test and Levene's test of equality of variance were run. The results of the t-test conclude that there is a significant difference in the scores of the questionnaires of males and females. The Levene's test confirmed that it is unlikely that males in the population would have the same scores on the questionnaire as females in the population. The male scores, on average, were approximately twenty points higher than the female scores. The researcher concluded that male children in the population are more negatively effected by parental divorce than female children in the population.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if there is a difference in the scores on the questionnaires in regard to age. The elementary age group scores were on average higher than the other two age groups with the preschool age group scoring the second highest, and the adolescent age group having the lowest average score on the questionnaire; however the one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in the scores was not significant. Therefore, it was concluded that in the population, the scores on the questionnaire related to divorce would not be different in regard to the childs' age. The

researcher interpreted the results and concluded that there is no difference in the effects of divorce on children in regard to their age.

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There are a few people without whom I never would have made it through.

To my family, your support, both emotional and financial, made it possible for me to achieve the goals that are so important to me.

And to John, whose continual encouragement and belief in me made me believe in myself and in my abilities as a student and a counselor.

Thank you all for always being there for me.

I LOVE YOU!

DEDICATION

To Teddi and Abbey, two little girls who had to deal with a lot of big changes and are making it through. You made me realize that my greatest joy as a counselor is to make a difference in the life of a child. I love you both.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Divorce is defined in Webster's Dictionary (Webster, 1942) as a legal dissolution of the marriage relation. This definition states that the marriage is legally dissolved, but does not discuss the fact that to a child, divorce means a lot more than the end of a marriage. It also means the dissolution of the family unit. When a child's parents divorce, it changes the child's world in countless ways. Growing up divorced has become an alternative developmental path for a substantial number of children today.

Legally, a divorce is a single event, but psychologically, it is a chain, sometimes a never-ending chain, of events. These events forever change the lives of the people involved. Wallerstein (1989) describes divorce as a "period of madness" for the adult. This "madness" in turn terrifies the children. Children are unsure of what is happening in their lives and of what will happen to them in the future (Wallerstein, 1989).

A parental divorce is a traumatic experience for a child regardless of age. This is primarily due to the number of physical and emotional disruptions that the child experiences as a result of separation or divorce (Hetherington, 1979). According to the U. S. Bureau of the Census

(1981), on the average, the woman's standard of living declines by 73 percent in the first year after the divorce. A divorced male experiences a 42 percent increase in his standard of living during the same period. Since custody is still awarded to the mother in 90 percent of divorce cases, many children who were previously accustomed to a middle or upper middle class lifestyle find themselves living near or below the poverty level (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1981). They often must forego privileges they previously enjoyed such as ballet lessons, karate lessons, or a private school.

In addition to the environmental and economic changes that frequently follow a separation or divorce, dramatic changes occur within the child's primary support system, the family. The child who previously lived with two parents in the home now lives with only one parent. In some cases, the non-custodial parent has little or no contact with the child resulting in the child feeling rejected or abandoned (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). In situations where the non-custodial parent maintains a relationship with the child or where there is joint physical custody, the child still must adjust to the loss of the intact family. Many children who have positive relationships with both parents after a divorce, are still

saddened by the fact that they cannot participate in activities with both parents at the same time (Wallerstein, 1991).

Another significant issue that arises for many children is loyalty conflicts. Frequently, children feel pulled between their parents (Robinson, 1994). They fear being rejected by one parent if they express love for the other parent. This is especially true when there is ongoing conflict between the separating or divorcing parties (Robinson, 1994).

Although it may seem obvious, it is important to note that the parents as well as the children are in crisis, especially during the early stages of separation. Divorcing parents are dealing with the loss of a mate and possibly security, or possessions. Because parents are understandably in a state of crisis, they may not be as emotionally available to their children as they had been in the past. Parental attention may also decrease in some situations because economics dictate that the parent who had previously not worked outside of the home, or who had worked part-time, must now seek full-time employment (Amato, 1993).

The stress of separation or divorce stirs up a multiplicity of sometimes conflicting feelings within children. Commonly, children experience feelings of deep sadness, anger, insecurity, guilt, loneliness,

and anxiety (Rosenthal, 1993). While many or all of these feelings may be churning within a particular child, expression of these feelings can be difficult. One reason that children have difficulty expressing their feelings is because they are overwhelmed by the number of conflicting feelings they are having and are unable to sort them out (Rosenthal, 1993). In addition, their sense of order is so tenuous that they fear acknowledging their emotions because they may be unable to control them. A third important factor is that family communication styles may be such that the child has never learned to talk on a feeling level (Rosenthal, 1993). Finally, a child may not want to burden an already overwhelmed parent with his/her own concerns (Rosenthal, 1993).

When children are unable to express their feelings directly, they often express them through their behavior. According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), the behaviors vary depending on the age of the child and the sex of the child. The following age related behaviors were cited by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980). Pre-schoolers will commonly begin exhibiting regressive behaviors. The child who was previously toilet-trained may have frequent bed-wetting episodes. Some children resort to "baby talk" or begin having temper tantrums. All of these are efforts to

move back to a stage of their development where they felt safer. Pre-schoolers may also show increased fearfulness. They may develop overwhelming feelings of abandonment. These fears stem from the idea that one parent left them and they fear the other parent will leave too. They may become clingy, and have difficulty separating from the parent. Transitions such as going to school or going to bed can be especially difficult.

Young school age children respond somewhat differently. It is common for children of this age to believe that they are somehow responsible for their parents' marriage dissolving, leaving them with feelings of guilt. They may cry frequently and have difficulty concentrating, especially at school. This can lead to a decline in school performance. Other children respond in the opposite way by obsessively concentrating on school in an effort to disengage from the situation at home. Children in this age category more than in any other are very much ashamed or embarrassed by their parents' separation. Finally, they may fantasize frequently about their parents reconciling.

Children in the upper elementary school years many times develop somatic symptoms as a way of coping with difficult feelings. Headaches

and stomach aches, for which there is no physiological cause, may be the child's way of telling the world outside that they are hurting inside. This is also an age where anger is acted out through increased aggressiveness, fighting, and general contrariness. This is especially true of boys. Also, children at this age may desire to compensate for the loss of the parent by becoming the "little man" or the "little woman" in the home.

Divorce is also difficult for the adolescent. Adolescents, who are in the process of gradually separating from the family and securing their own identity, rely on the security of the family as their base as they venture out to establish their independent identities. Divorce creates a disruption in this process leading to an exaggeration of the normal rebelliousness. There is a higher rate of suicide, sexual promiscuity and drug involvement for children of divorce at this age. Teens frequently feel anger toward their parents for not providing them with the stability they need during this already tenuous time in their lives.

Divorce is indeed a traumatic event in the life of a child regardless of age or gender. Researchers have only just begun to study the long term impact of divorce on children. While statistical data is still somewhat sketchy, many professionals in the field of mental health agree that a

large number of children can and do eventually make healthy adjustments to a changed family situation (Wallerstein, 1991). Research seems to show that how well a child adjusts to divorce seems to depend largely on the predivorce parental relationship, how the divorce is handled with the child, and on the quality of the postdivorce family (Shaw & Emery, 1987).

These three factors, as well as others, can help to minimize the effects the divorce has on the child, and help the child to adjust to all of the changes going on in his/her life. Counseling can also be beneficial to a child during this period of adjustment. Counseling provides children with a safe environment in which they can express their feelings about what is happening in their lives, and share concerns or worries they have about what will happen to them in the future. Counseling can also be a preventative measure in that it may lead to open communication in the family so that parents and children feel free to talk about what they are feeling. If children are free to express their feelings through communication with their families, then there will not be the strong need to express their feelings through their behavior.

The differences in the ways that children perceive and respond to their parents' divorces will be examined in this paper. The differences in

age and gender are the two factors that will be addressed. Research findings have shown that these two factors are salient features which affect children of divorce differently (Sandler, Wolchik, Braver, & Fogas, 1991). One can not assume that the effects of divorce are the same for every child. Inevitably, no matter what the circumstances are, children of divorce are affected cognitively and developmentally, as well as socially.

In order to determine what effect the parental divorce had on the children, a questionnaire was given to parents whose children were in group counseling for children of divorce. The parents volunteered to complete the questionnaire which discussed their child's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors since the separation or divorce. Statements such as "My child acts as if it is her/his fault that we were divorced." are responded to by circling a zero for "not true", a one for "somewhat true", or a three for "very much true."

The scores circled for each item were totaled. T-tests and one-way analysis of variances were run to determine if there were significant differences in the total scores of the questionnaires in regard to gender and/or age.

The purpose of this paper is to determine if there is a significant

difference in the effects of divorce on children depending on their age and on their gender. The research gathered suggests that boys are more negatively affected by divorce than are girls. The research also suggests that younger children are more negatively affected by their parents' divorce than middle-aged children or older children. The parents completed the questionnaire and then the scores were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference in the scores in regard to the two aforementioned variables.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Divorce is a process that impacts the lives of the people involved forever (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The most dramatic consequence of divorce is the effect upon the children. Divorce rates in the United States have doubled since 1970 and tripled since 1960, and it has been projected that by the turn of the century nearly fifty percent of all children will have experienced the dissolution of their parents' marriage before they reach eighteen years of age (Hoyt, Cowen, Pedro-Carroll, & Alpert-Gillis, 1990). Divorce has reached epidemic proportions in this country in the 1980's. America's divorce rate is the highest in the world -- nearly two times that of second place Sweden (Hoyt et al., 1990). Divorces are occurring at the rate of one million per year, impacting 1.1 million school aged children (Rosenthal, 1993). In more simplified terms, a divorce takes place every twenty-seven seconds in the United States (Rosenthal, 1993).

Research has demonstrated that the number of children affected by divorce, has increased at a more rapid pace than the divorce rate itself (Shaw & Emery, 1987). This trend is alarming. During the period

between 1970-1980, the ratio of divorced persons rose 113%; from 47 per 1000 individuals to 100 per 1000 individuals (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1981). Sixty percent of these cases involved children (Shaw & Emery, 1987). In 1990, there were 1,175,000 couples who divorced, and 1,045,750 children were involved in these divorces (Kantrowitz, 1992).

Effects of Divorce

The divorce of a child's parents shatters the child's world in a way that can not be easily understood by individuals who have not experienced a similar event in their own lives. With the divorce of parents, a child is forced to go through a number of changes or transitions. For example, when a divorce occurs, one or both of the parents may relocate. This brings about the need for the child to adjust to a new environment. Not only do they no longer have both of their parents living with them, but now they have a new home, a new neighborhood, and possibly a new school. The most common reason for the need to relocate is a financial need. The U. S. Bureau of the Census (1981) states that one year after a divorce, the ex-husband's income increases by forty-two percent while the ex-wife's income decreases by seventy-

three percent. Because custody is still granted predominantly to mothers, children also experience a decline in their standard of living. Children may be forced to sacrifice some of the activities they are used to participating in because they can no longer afford it.

Another dramatic change in the child's life goes hand-in-hand with the decrease in the mother's income. A mother who used to stay home to be a full time wife and mother may secure full time employment to support her family (Amato, 1993). For children who are used to having mom home, this is a big adjustment.

Of course, the most painful change a child has to undergo due to the divorce is to adjust to the loss of the family as he/she knew it. When parents divorce, the child loses the security of having both parents together. The only idea of family they have ever had is the idea of mom, dad, and child living together in one home. Now that idea is shattered. Coming to terms with their new family structure is a huge hurdle.

With all of these changes occurring in the child's life, children often experience a wide range of feelings. These feelings are most likely extremely confusing to the child. Unfortunately, in most cases children do not express their feelings (Rosenthal, 1993). Sometimes children do not

understand their feelings enough to be able to express them. Other times, they feel guilty about burdening their parent with their feelings. In addition, in a lot of families feelings are not communicated, therefore children do not know how to express in words what it is they are feeling.

Children tend to take unexpressed feelings and express them through their behavior. The behavior varies depending on the age and sex of the child. Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989) reported that divorce is the leading cause of childhood depression. An alarming statistic gives merit to their claim: 63% of youth suicides are children which come from single-parent homes (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

Robinson (1994) cited the results of a 1987 Harvard University study in which the following statistics were given: children of divorce are five times as likely to be suspended from school than children from intact families; three times as likely to need psychological counseling; and two times as likely to repeat a grade. The study also reported that of the teens interviewed whose parents recently divorced, 66% felt alone, angry, and sad; 73% of the females had trouble with studies; 33% of the males had trouble with studies; 20% began consuming or increased their consumption of alcohol; 37% had sleeping problems; and 27% had eating

problems (Robinson, 1994).

Gender Differences

Female children of divorce tend to have not only study, sleeping, and eating problems, but they also develop problems in heterosocial relationships (Zaslow, 1989). Wallerstein (1980) conducted longitudinal studies of children who were between the ages of six and nineteen years during the time of their parents' divorce. At the time of her ten-year follow up, she found that a significant subsample of females had intense fear of betrayal in heterosocial relationships as well as anxious anticipation of failure in their efforts to sustain commitment and intimacy (Wallerstein, 1980).

Wallerstein (1980) also found a subsample of women age nineteen to twenty-nine who seemed to be caught in a web of short-lived sexual relationships. These women voiced an intense, unfulfilled wish to be cared for by a man, and often chose partners older than they were. This subgroup of young adult daughters directly attributed their own problems to conflicts stemming from their parents' divorce (Wallerstein, 1980).

In a subsample of adolescent girls, age sixteen to eighteen, Wallerstein (1980) found that despite a recurrent theme of vulnerability and fear of being hurt in present and future romantic relationships, behaviorally these girls were much more active and precocious in their relationships than boys. Forty percent of the girls had three or more boyfriends during the adolescent years, one quarter of the girls had abortions between the age of thirteen and sixteen, and one girl had a second abortion (Wallerstein, 1980).

Although Wallersteins' research has been questioned due to the lack of a comparison group of children and adolescents from non-divorced families, her findings do indicate a pervasive and intense concern in children from divorced families regarding the success of their future heterosocial relationships (Kalter, 1985).

Male children express their feelings both inwardly, by becoming depressed and withdrawn, and outwardly as seen in a number of behaviors such as becoming more aggressive and violent both at school towards peers and teachers, and at home towards siblings and a parent. Males also tend to take part in reckless behavior such as beginning to consume or increasing their consumption of alcohol and/or drugs, which

may result in mood swings and an all around bad attitude in which the male child is openly defiant (Zaslow, 1988). Because these behaviors are so noticeable and possibly out of control, researchers tend to believe that divorce has a greater effect on sons of divorce than on daughters (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978).

Researchers that have specified divorce as the reason for the disruption of a family, have consistently agreed that there is undoubtedly a gender difference that impacts upon these children (Zaslow, 1988). Hetherington (1979) reported that "the impact of marital discord and divorce is more pervasive for boys than for girls" (p. 127). Both boys and girls do suffer when their parents' marriage ends; however each gender responds to the divorce differently. Considerable evidence suggests that marital turmoil is more strongly related to boys' than to girls' maladaptive behavior (Emery, 1982); however it may be that the affects of divorce on girls may be delayed in early childhood, but are seen in adolescent and young adulthood, especially in future relations with the opposite sex (Emery, 1982; Zaslow, 1988).

Boys are especially likely to respond to parental divorce by demonstrating conduct problems, aggression, hostility, problems of

undercontrol, and externalizing responses (Zaslow, 1989). Hetherington et al. (1978) have thoroughly researched the topic of divorce and its effects on the children involved. They found that antisocial behavior is prevalent in children after parental divorce. Their research shows that sons, but not daughters, show more hostile and angry affect after parental divorce (Hetherington et al., 1978). Findings suggest that girls seek attention, affection, and positive physical contact with adults (Zaslow, 1989). Girls are also more dependent than boys. They appear to be more anxious and withdrawn, however these reactions were not shown in boys (Zaslow, 1989). Other responses that are characteristic of daughters of divorce are: internalizing reactions (whereas externalizing appears to be more characteristic of sons), problems in heterosexual relationships, and problems of overcontrol (Zaslow, 1989).

It is clear that there are gender differences on specific cognitive and socioemotional variables that could be the reasons that sons and daughters of divorce react differently from one another (Zaslow, 1988). Girls are socialized to express emotions as well as play in pairs, thus developing more intimate relationships. On the other hand, boys are socialized to be unemotional and to play in aggressive groups. Girls are,

in all likelihood, to be just as troubled by divorce as boys are, but they may show their feelings in a manner that is more relevant to their socialized gender role. Specifically, they may become anxious, withdrawn, and perhaps even very well behaved (Emery, 1982).

One main reason for the differences between boys and girls may be related to the fact that 90% of children of divorce reside in the custody of their mother's (Cherlin, 1992). Research shows that post disruption custody by the opposite sex parent is less optimal for children. Boys, in general, may be documented to fare less well following parental divorce because mother custody is the prevalent pattern and parents may know how to interact more effectively and feel more comfortable with a child who is the same sex as they are (Santrock & Warshak, 1979; Zaslow, 1988). The absence of the father, for boys, is associated with more masculine, disobedient, aggressive, independent behaviors and with less moral development (Wallerstein, 1991).

Additionally, a parent may identify the child of the opposite sex with the ex-spouse. The outcome may be feelings of emotional distance and anger that are more likely to be introduced into this relationship (Zaslow, 1988). Hetherington (1979) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) have

concluded that children residing with the mother, and the documented pattern of decreased relation with the noncustodial father, may involve more psychological loss for sons.

There also appears to be less positive consequences for daughters in their father's custody. These daughter's seem to show more depression and antisocial behavior (Zaslow, 1988). Boys have stronger bonds with their fathers, therefore the removal of the father from the home would be expected to create more anxiety and psychological dysfunction in boys (Kalter, 1985).

Findings that boys are more adversely affected by their parents' divorce appear in studies in which the custodial parent is an unremarried mother. Findings that girls are more adversely affected are found when the mother has custody and has remarried. Post-divorce family forms must be considered when evaluating gender differences in response to parental divorce. Not only does divorce effect children differently because they are male or female, but there are also age specific distinctions in the adjustment of the child to the parental divorce.

Age Differences

Regardless of the child's age, nearly all children react to their parents' divorce with pain and distress (Kalter & Rembar, 1981). The earlier view of divorce as a short-lived crisis has shifted. Researchers now believe that a significant number of children suffer long-term, perhaps permanent detrimental effects from divorce; and that others experience submerged affects that may appear years later (Wallerstein, 1991). From the child's perspective, divorce represents an ongoing condition of family life that gives rise to a series of particular experiences and numerous life changes throughout childhood, adolescence, and often extending into adulthood (Wallerstein, 1991). Yet research has demonstrated that the age of the child at the time of their parents' divorce effects the developmental functioning of the child, with relation to the child's experience and subsequent emotional development at different stages throughout their lives (Kalter & Rembar, 1981). The different stages of childrens' development and how their adjustment varies at each stage is discussed further.

Toddlers and preschoolers.

Furstenberg & Allison (1985) report that a tendency for the strongest effects of divorce are found among children who were the

youngest at the time of parental divorce, and have therefore experienced the longest duration and disruption. During the infants first two years of development, the infant will not be intellectually capable of understanding the divorce of their parents; however they are affected by, and responsive to, the tensions taking place in the household (Schwartz, 1992).

Attachment and bonding may be negatively affected and separation anxiety heightened (Schwartz, 1992). This lack of attachment and separation difficulties are seen in toddlers and preschool children as well.

Among preschoolers who experience divorce, increased levels of separation anxiety and the crucial role of attachment and bonding in the development of the children is interrupted (Wallerstein, 1983). Preschool children suffer from fears of being abandoned and experience a sense of vulnerability as the security of the family disintegrates (Schwartz, 1992). Unfortunately, children this young do not have the cognitive ability to understand what has happened to their parents' marriage and therefore, because of this inability, they are not able to mourn the loss of their parents' marriage at the time of the divorce (Kalter & Rembar, 1981).

Preschool aged children are not able to understand all the confusing feelings which are stirring inside of them. These feelings are

directly related to the dissolution of the family unit as they know it. The children are unable to communicate these feelings verbally because they are too complicated to put into words. They therefore express their feelings through their behaviors. Preschool aged children tend to regress to previous developmental stages to a time when their world felt safe to them. Children who have been successfully toilet-trained frequently wet themselves (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). They begin to act like a baby, crying a lot, talking "baby talk", and clinging to a parent.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1975) state that preschool children show the most severe distress to the conflict of divorce. Therefore, the stress of the divorce and coping with the loss of both the intact family and the absent parent for the preschool age child leads them to become an extremely vulnerable group (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978).

Elementary years.

The feelings of being rejected, abandoned, or not deserving of a parent's love are not limited to preschool aged children. Young elementary school aged children may deny the reality of their parents' divorce because it denotes a threat to their well being and their own sense of security (Schwartz, 1992). The cognitive ability of these children

is greater and they are able to understand the circumstances of the family breakup; but it is difficult for most children at this age to comprehend the changing relationships that have taken place. Furthermore, this age group has memories of the intact family that have become troublesome, which conflicts with the current reality of the new family separation (Schwartz, 1992).

Older elementary school children tend to be more able of cognitively dealing with the realities of the family dynamics and of developing alternative ways of reacting to it (Schwartz, 1992). However, they also experience anxiety and hostility during their uncertainty and pain (Johnston, Kline, & Tschann, 1989).

Elementary aged children tend to feel guilty about their parents' divorce and blame themselves for their parents' unhappiness (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Developmentally, children at this age are still egocentric. They believe that the world revolves around them; therefore if their parents get a divorce, it must be their fault. They feel sad, confused, and powerless (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Although they broke their parents up, so they believe, they feel powerless because all their efforts in getting their parents back together have failed.

Children at this age fantasize about their parents reconciling, and over and over are devastated when this does not happen (Rosenthal, 1993). They are not able to concentrate in school and as a result their grades tend to suffer. Children at this age also feel torn between their parents and believe that they have to choose sides (Robinson, 1994). All of these feelings and behaviors are characteristic of elementary aged children whose parents have divorced.

Adolescent years.

Adolescents are more vulnerable than most people believe them to be. Young adolescents need a family structure, as well as a sense that they are being valued and protected by their parents (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990). Wallerstein (1989) found that adolescence is a period of particularly grave risk for children from divorced families. Adolescents feel abandoned, both physically and emotionally, due to the lack of family structure and clear guidelines for moral behavior (Wallerstein, 1989). For these children, divorce occurs during the formative years. What they see and experience becomes a part of their inner world, influencing their own relationships, ten to fifteen years later (Wallerstein, 1989).

Adolescents are well aware that divorce is the result of parental conflict and view the event of divorce more realistically than young children (Schwartz, 1992). Some older adolescents assume adult roles prematurely. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1990) state:

These pressures can overburden children to the point that they become psychologically depleted and their own emotional and social progress is crippled. Instead of gathering strength from their childhood and adolescent experiences to facilitate the move into young adulthood, these young people are seriously weakened by the demands made on them within the divorced family. (p. 189)

Teens frequently feel anger toward their parents for not providing them with the stability they need during this time in their lives (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This anger is sometimes turned outward towards their parents, teachers, and siblings while other times it is turned inward on themselves (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The pressure put on them to act all grown up and become the "man of the house" or a "second mom" to their siblings can be too much for them to handle. There is a high rate of suicide and alcohol and/or drug consumption for teenage children of divorce (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

Schwartz (1992) concludes that the level of cognitive development at the time of the parental divorce is a direct influence on a child's reaction to the divorce. Wallerstein (1989) also adds that the children who were best adjusted ten years after the divorce were those who exhibited the most difficulty at the time of the divorce. The opposite is true as well. Children who manifested less frustration at the time of the divorce, were the least adjusted ten years after the divorce, and showed more signs of distress. Children of all ages are vulnerable to divorce, yet some develop better coping skills to deal more effectively throughout the divorce process.

Why do some children cope better with their parents divorce than other children? Although there are numerous effects that divorce can have on children, these adjustments do not have to become long-term problems. There are factors that influence how deeply affected by the divorce the child will be, and there are steps that can be taken to minimize these effects.

Minimizing the Effects of Divorce

In the past it was believed that the actual event of divorce was the

change which had the most detrimental effects on the children. Now researchers are concentrating their research on pre-divorce situations as well. Research has shown that the children with the most severe adjustment problems are those who witnessed an enormous amount of parental conflict before the divorce, during the divorce, and/or after the divorce (Brown, Portes, & Christenson, 1989). Brown et al. (1989) stated that children's postdivorce functioning is often influenced by how much they were drawn into the marital conflict and whether they had a good relationship with each parent prior to the divorce. Studies show that children do better when there is less conflict between their parents and if they are shielded from disputes (Cherlin, 1992).

Children often become entangled in loyalty conflicts and are expected to choose one parent with which to align (Robinson, 1994). In such an environment it is understandable that a child's ability to grow and develop is often at risk (Brown et al., 1989). Children who come from a home in which the amount of parental conflict is high, often model the verbal or physical abuse that they witness; therefore, parents may be indirectly teaching their children that fighting is an appropriate method for dealing with disagreements (Amato, 1993). Children will then

demonstrate this behavior at home and at school and this aggressive behavior will be seen as inappropriate and as a problem by parents and teachers.

Children also suffer from the feeling of loss during the time of separation and/or divorce (Wallerstein, 1989). They feel as if they are losing one parent, and their idea of the family. The presence of two adults in the household allows parents to serve as role models from which children learn social skills such as cooperation, negotiation, and compromise (Amato, 1993). If the child's relationship with both parents was a good one before the divorce and the noncustodial parent plays an active and consistent role in the child's life after the divorce, then this feeling of loss will subside as soon as the child realizes that both parents will still be there for him/her.

Children are clearly at risk when divorced parents are not able to separate their parental and spousal roles. Parents who still focus on their marital problems and are unable to negotiate a new postdivorce relationship pose a risk to their children's adjustment. Brown et al. (1989) found that "The most distressed children were found to be those who became the focus of their parents' conflicts..." (p. 319). Thus, a

coparental relationship without conflict and regular and consistent contact by the noncustodial parent are directly related to better adjustment of the child after the divorce (Brown et al., 1989).

Although divorce affects all children differently and age and gender do play a role in the childrens' adjustment, all of these children need someone to help them through this difficult time. The effects of the divorce on children at the time of the divorce may be serious, but if these children are not assisted in the changes that they are going through, the long-term effects on them could be irreversible (Wallerstein, 1991).

Parental Role

There are a number of important guidelines that parents can follow to help their childrens' adjustment to the divorce be as painless as possible. The following suggestions were taken from the article written by Rosenthal (1993). The most important thing parents can do to help their child adjust to the divorce is to explain to the child, as honestly as possible, what is happening. It is important that both parents be present when this explanation takes place in order to give the child a sense of security that neither parent, although they are separating, is leaving

him/her. Parents should also give the child facts about what changes will be taking place in the family in the near future in order to keep the child from imagining the worst case scenario about his/her future. These facts would include changes such as which parent will move out, if the child will have to relocate, and what the visitation schedule will be with the non-custodial parent. Both parents should encourage the child to have ongoing relationships with the other parent. The child needs to be reassured that although mom and dad do not love each other anymore, they both still love their son or daughter. Parents should encourage their child to express his/her feelings. By modeling this behavior, it will be easier for the child to share his/her feelings. Another important "do" for parents is to try to provide a structured, non-chaotic home. The child feels that his/her world has fallen apart, he/she needs consistency and structure in order to feel safe in an unreliable and changing world. Most importantly, parents should continuously reassure the child that the divorce is in no way his/her fault.

Children of different ages may need different things during this time of chaos. Rosenthal (1993) created a list of age appropriate parenting tips for divorcing parents. The following is a summary of those

suggestions. Preschool aged children need firm limits. This consistency makes younger children feel safe. In a world that has been turned upside down, they can count on going to bed every night at 8:00pm right after mom/dad reads them a bedtime story. Younger children also need continual reassurance that mommy and daddy love them and that they are never going to leave them. Repeated reassurance will help diminish their fears of abandonment associated with the divorce. Finally, consistent and frequent contact with the noncustodial parent is important for children of all ages.

Elementary aged children also need clear and consistent rules. They need to feel that their home is predictable and secure. Children at this age also have a greater understanding of what has happened to their family, and therefore deserve honest answers to their questions. Children also need to be encouraged to express their feelings, and supported when they do, especially when their feelings are not favorable.

Elementary aged children are not too old to need a parents' reassurance that they are loved. Also at this age, it is extremely important that the noncustodial parents' visits be predictable so as the child has something to look forward to and hold on to.

As children move into the adolescent years, it is important to them that parents respect their busy social schedules and leave room for flexibility in the visitation schedule. What teenagers from divorced and non-divorced families want most is to be treated with respect. Parents should have adequate rules, but allow flexibility in the rules, but not in the discipline when rules are broken. Teenagers do not like to be punished, but the consistency in rules and discipline gives the child's world stability.

What is most important for children of all ages is for parents to attempt to put their differences aside and do what is best for the child. Low levels of parental conflict will help to ensure that any effects the divorce has had on the child will be minimized. However, if parents feel that they alone can not help the child adjust to the change in the family due to the divorce, there are counseling services available to the child.

Counseling

Most children of divorce need some help in learning to adapt to the changes which are occurring in their lives so that both the present and long-term effects can be minimized (Bonkowski, Bequette, & Boomhower, 1984). Social support has been shown to enhance adjustment of adults

as well as children to separation and divorce. Support groups for adults have been widely known for many years now, but only recently have support groups for children seen a rise in popularity.

The majority of support groups have been developed for latency-aged and preadolescent children; however models for working specifically with preschoolers and adolescents have also emerged (Farmer & Galaris, 1993). Most group programs for children experiencing separation and divorce are school-based and time-limited, from six to twelve weeks (Farmer & Galaris, 1993).

There are also support groups which are not school-based. These groups tend not to be time-limited and are available to children of all ages. However, on-going groups specializing in counseling children of divorce have also been established throughout the United States. An organization in St. Louis, where this study was conducted, runs support groups specifically for children of divorce. The groups are available to children from the age of four to eighteen. The groups are on-going which means that children stay in the groups until the child, the parent, and the counselor, or some combination thereof, believe that the child is adjusting to the changes in his/her life with few complications.

Whether the program be school-based, hospital-based, or privately ran, there are a few core objectives in counseling children of divorce; however the objectives are somewhat different depending on what the time frame of the group is, time-limited or on-going.

If the group is time-limited, such as the school-based groups, the core objectives include increasing self-esteem, developing coping strategies through the discussion of divorce-related issues, improving communication and problem-solving skills, and validation of affective experiences by identification of feelings and affiliation with others (Farmer & Galaris, 1993). Interventions in these child support groups consist of empathetic listening, enactments and behavioral rehearsal, and problem-solving using techniques such as role-playing, puppet use, and artwork (Farmer & Galaris, 1993).

These time-limited groups may also be used as preventative measures for children experiencing their parents' divorce. Unfortunately, because parents also have a lot of changes occurring in their lives at this time, they may not be able to provide adequate emotional support for their child (Bonkowski et al., 1984). At this point, a parent may feel that the child is adjusting to the divorce with few problems and that no dramatic

changes in his/her behavior is apparent; however in order to give the child permission to express the feelings he/she is feeling, in a safe environment, a time-limited support group may be a good idea. These groups can take on a preventative aspect in that they encourage children to express their feelings (Bonkowski et al., 1984). The children feel safe to do so because counseling is a safe environment where they know that what they say will not get back to mom or dad. The children are guaranteed this through the rule of confidentiality (with the exception of if a child is being hurt or is planning on hurting himself/herself).

Encouraging children to talk about what is going on in their lives will prevent them from having to express their feelings through their behavior due to lack of communication in the family unit. Also, being in a group with other kids who have experienced a similar loss, will normalize the experience for the child (Bonkowski et al., 1984). Discussions surrounding the topic of the parents' divorce will allow children to express their worries, concerns, and beliefs about what has happened to the family, and what will happen to them in the future.

The counselor's role in the time-limited group is basically that of educator and empathetic listener (Bonkowski et al., 1984). Counselors

provide information to the group about what a divorce is, and dispels some of the myths of divorce. Counselors also teach the group some coping skills or techniques for dealing with the changes occurring in their lives (Bonkowski et al., 1984). At the same time, counselors are there for the children as a confidant, someone they can trust to keep what they say from getting back to their parents (Bonkowski et al., 1984). Counselors can listen without condemning and unlike parents, counselors will not get their feelings hurt from what the child says (Bonkowski et al., 1984).

The primary goal of on-going group counseling for children of divorce is to keep predictable post-divorce difficulties from becoming long-term serious problems through social support, sharing feelings, and the development of coping skills (Farmer & Galaris, 1993). The structure and curricula are based on the following five fundamental objectives taken from an article of group counseling of children of divorce (Farmer & Galaris, 1993).

- * **Foster a supportive environment.** A peer group reduces the sense of stigma, overcomes feelings of isolation, and allows children to seek support from others inside and outside of the group.

- * **Help children identify and express their feelings.** Stressful life changes can cause complex feelings that are difficult for children to understand. The program seeks to enhance childrens' ability to identify and label feelings in themselves and others, and to express them appropriately through discussion and the use of structured game-like activities.
- * **Help children understand family changes and clarify misconceptions.** Helping children to achieve a realistic understanding of what divorce does and does not mean is achieved through story telling, role-playing, books, and therapeutic board games among other techniques.
- * **Teach children skills to enhance their competence and capacity to cope.** Social problem-solving training teaches children how to think, not what to think when faced with a problem, in addition to helping them distinguish between problems they can and cannot solve. Coping skills are taught over a number of sessions using a wide variety of games and techniques to encourage practice and skill. This helps them disengage from parental problems and concerns.

- * **Enhancing children's positive perceptions of themselves and their families.** Because children may feel different or "defective" following parental separation, there is a need to focus on strengths and special qualities. It is also important to feel good about their families and to recognize positive family changes. (p. 44)

In addition to these core objectives of group counseling for children of divorce, Judith Wallerstein (1983) identified six psychological tasks that a child of divorce needs to accomplish in order to successfully adjust to his/her new life.

Task I : Acknowledge the Reality of the Marital Breakup This task is usually mastered by the first year of the separation and is the easiest to master. Children need to understand the family changes are different than their unrealistic perception of the changes, i.e. Mom's going to leave too; I will never get over my parents splitting up.

Task II : Disengaging From Parental Conflict and Distress and Resuming Customary Activities Most children accomplish this task by 1-1 and 1/2 years following the separation. Siblings help

this process, however adolescence appears to be a difficult stage at which to accomplish this task. This task is a dual challenge because the child has to return to customary activities and relationships at play and school, and separate from the adults when the family is in crisis. This requires the child to remove the family crisis from its commanding position in their inner world by gaining mastery over anxiety, depression, and conflicting feelings.

Task III: Resolution of Loss Loss refers to the partial or total loss of one parent, the loss of the family routines, the loss of symbols, traditions, and physical protective presence of two parents, the possible loss of the family home, school, and neighborhood, and the loss of financial income. The child must mourn all these losses to come to terms with future limitations and potentialities (the five stages of loss will be discussed further in greater detail). The child must also overcome the profound sense of rejection and powerlessness. This task can be facilitated by a consistent visitation schedule and consistency in routines.

Task IV : Resolving Anger and Self-Blame Divorce is between the parents and is a voluntary decision for at least one of them.

The children realize that one person made the decision and they have different responses to this realization. They may blame one or both parents or themselves. This blame gives rise to anger and disapproval of their parents' conduct. This anger keeps children alienated from the parent and correlates with acting out behaviors. Most importantly, it keeps children from achieving closure and gaining perspective on the reasons for the divorce.

Task V : Accepting the Divorce is Permanent Children cling to their fantasies of reconciliation. Unlike death, which can not be undone, a divorce appears to be fixable. Developmental factors are relevant to this task.

Task VI : Achieving Realistic Hope Regarding Relationships

Children who accomplish this task will be able to have a vision of themselves as loving and loveable and is willing to take a chance on loving again. This task is built on the successful negotiation of the previous five tasks.

The five stages of loss defined by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) are also necessary stages or tasks that a child of divorce must work through. These stages are closely related to the psychological tasks

outlined above. The five stages of grief or loss describe the process that children need to go through in order to get them to a place where they can accept the loss of the family unit and all of the losses they have encountered due to the divorce, and then be able to move on with their lives.

The first stage described by Kubler-Ross (1969) is that of denial and isolation. It is the initial period of not accepting the reality of the death, divorce or other loss. Denial is a natural defense that allows an individual enough time to accept what is happening. The child will feel numb or in shock over the news of the parents' divorce. The child will be unable to accept that this is really happening and will say things such as "This can't be happening to me or my family".

Anger is the second stage of grief or loss. Anger is an intense feeling of rage or resentment, and the feeling may be targeted at innocent bystanders. Often one feels anger over being let down by someone they counted on, such as a child's parents. The child may act out feelings in a variety of inappropriate ways. Finding an acceptable way to express anger is an integral part of the healing process.

The third stage is that of bargaining. In this stage a child will want

to "fix" things that are beyond his/her control. This is especially true with children of divorce. They may believe that the divorce is their fault and will try to bargain with their parents by saying things such as, "If you get back together, I promise I'll be good".

Depression occurs when the reality of the loss sets in. In this stage individuals question their own ability to deal with their own sadness, and they may turn to unhealthy coping devices to ease their pain. Eating disorders, sleeping disorders, excessive alcohol consumption, and drugs are all manifestations of a depressed state. During this stage, individuals need nurturing and support, and they need healthy ways to live with their sadness. The support is especially important for children of divorce. They need to know that their parents still love them and will be there for them.

The final stage of loss is the acceptance stage. This is the time when change is no longer threatening to them. Depending upon the circumstances, individuals might be more optimistic about the future, or more accepting of their present circumstances.

Individuals work through these stages in different amounts of time and also in different orders, sometimes working through a stage and

going on, and then revisiting the previous stage again later. Children can work through these stages of loss and come to a feeling of acceptance about the divorce and about the changes occurring in their lives, but most of the time they can not do it on their own. Children need support to get through the difficult times surrounding the divorce of their parents.

Without support, the effects of the divorce may leave permanent scares.

Is group counseling for children of divorce really necessary? Is counseling successful in helping children adjust to the changes in their lives due to the divorce? Research says yes. Bonkowski et al. (1984) report the results of group counseling designed for helping children adjust to parental divorce. The group design was time-limited with no more than eight children, ages seven to eleven, and with three counselors facilitating the groups. The groups met once a week for an hour and a half. The groups met a total of eight times. The groups were described as "...open, relaxed, and nonthreatening...It was hoped that such an atmosphere would enable the children to speak more freely of their fear, anger, sorrow, and other feelings initiated by the divorce of their parents" (Bonkowski et al., 1984. p. 133).

At the end of the eight weeks, the leaders saw a growth in the

children's self-esteem as demonstrated by increased optimism about the future and openness in self-expression. About eighty percent of the parents stated on an evaluation of the group, that they now had more open communication with their children, especially around divorce-related issues (Bonkowski et al., 1984). Overall, parents saw a decrease in acting-out behavior and an increase in willingness to express their feelings and opinions since participating in the group. All of the parents said they would recommend the group for other children of divorcing parents (Bonkowski et al., 1984).

Another group model called the Marriage Council group also counsels the specific population of children of divorce (Farmer & Galaris, 1993). This group model is also time-limited. The groups meet every two weeks for one and a half hours. There are a total of ten group meetings. The Marriage Council group program has also reported tremendous successes in helping children adjust to the changes which occur due to the divorce of their parents.

Parents of children who have participated in the support groups at Marriage Council report that open discussions between themselves and their children on divorce-related issues occur more frequently, with the

children often initiating the discussions for the first time since the divorce (Farmer & Galaris, 1993). Also, noncustodial parents report increased comfort and greater candor from their children about past and present dissatisfactions and fears of abandonment (Farmer & Galaris, 1993). Experience and research have shown that outside-the-home support groups such as the two described above, can facilitate the child's adjustment by increasing the child's understanding and acceptance of the events and by increasing the communication among the child and family members.

Parental divorce is a reality in millions of children's lives today in the United States. Parental divorce has been associated with negative effects for children and adolescents, as demonstrated by numerous studies. The effects may be a result of pre-divorce conflict, the actual divorce and dealing with the loss of a parent, the post-divorce adjustments, or a combination of the three. The negative effects that divorce has on children are numerous and can be long-lived if the children do not get the help they need, either parental support or counseling, in adapting to all the changes that are taking place in their lives.

Research shows that although all children are negatively affected

by their parents divorce, some children are more severely impacted than other children. Both boys and girls do suffer when their parents' marriage ends; however each gender responds to the divorce differently.

Researchers tend to believe that divorce has a greater effect on sons than on daughters (Hetherington et al., 1978).

Research has also demonstrated that the age of the child at the time of their parents' divorce effects the developmental functioning of the child, with relation to the child's experience and subsequent emotional development at different stages throughout their lives (Kalter & Rembar, 1981). Furstenberg & Allison (1985) report that a tendency for the strongest effects of divorce are found among children who were the youngest at the time of the parental divorce, and have therefore experienced the longest duration and disruption. Parents completed a questionnaire which assessed their child's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in order to determine if the scores on the questionnaires support the research that there are significant age and gender differences related to the impact of divorce on the child. That is the purpose of this paper.



CHAPTER 3

Method

Subjects

The 79 subjects who participated in this study were parents of clients at a non-for-profit organization which performs group counseling for children of divorce in the St. Louis area. The children receiving counseling ranged in age from three to eighteen years old. All parents who have children in counseling at the organization were asked to volunteer to complete a questionnaire which focuses on what effects the divorce has had on the child and also to determine the degree to which the divorce has affected the child. All of the parents understood that they and their child were guaranteed complete anonymity and confidentiality. For this reason, no names were placed on the questionnaire. The parents were asked for three additional pieces of information: the age of the child, the sex of the child, and which parent has primary custody of the child.

The organization which allowed the researcher to conduct the study, is a non-for-profit organization. They have a sliding scale for fees which allows accessibility to families of all income ranges.

The children whom the questionnaire discussed, ranged in age

from three years old to seventeen years old. Table 1 gives the frequency distribution of the age of the subjects according to gender.

TABLE 1. Frequency Distribution of Children's Ages
According to Gender

Age	Male	Female	Total
3-5	9	11	20
6-8	12	5	17
9-11	5	8	13
12-14	14	4	18
15-17	0	11	11
			<u>N=79</u>

A total of 113 questionnaires were completed and returned. Of the 113 questionnaires, eighteen were completed by fathers who had custody of their child. For the purpose of this study, the researcher wanted to look at children who lived primarily with their mothers. Another requirement for being included in the study was that the mother could not be remarried. These two requirements were necessary because research has found

that the effects of divorce on children, and how dramatic the effects are, will vary depending on who has custody of the child and whether or not a step-parent is involved in the equation (Kalter, 1985; Wallerstein, 1991; Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the eighteen questionnaires completed by fathers who had primary custody and an additional sixteen questionnaires completed by mothers who had primary custody but were remarried were not used. The study was based on the remaining seventy-nine questionnaires.

The parents completed the questionnaire instead of the children due to the large age range of the children. The organization has group counseling for children as young as three years old. The younger children are developmentally incapable of understanding and/or completing a questionnaire; therefore for consistency, the parents' perceptions were the focus of this study.

Materials

The questionnaire (See Appendix A) used in this study consisted of questions which covered a number of different feelings, thoughts, and behaviors correlated to parental divorce. This questionnaire is the

measurement tool used by the counseling organization to assess the parents' perceptions of how children are functioning in relation to the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors discussed in the questionnaire since the parental divorce.

The questionnaire consisted of forty-two statements and utilizes a three-point response format. The response format requires the parents to determine whether or not their child feels, thinks, or behaves as the statement says and circle zero for not true, one for somewhat true, or three for very much true. Responses are weighted from zero to three points, therefore theoretically the subject's score could range between 0 and 126. Nine of the statements in the questionnaire are reverse-scored (items 3, 4, 11, 14, 29, 33, 35, 40, and 42). As previously stated, the score for each item ranges from zero to three. Reverse scored items have scores which range from three to zero. The total score for each questionnaire is calculated by summing the score circled for each item.

Parents respond to the items from their point of view as to what problems, issues, or behaviors they have seen arise in their child since the divorce. Due to the fact that children themselves are not completing the questionnaire, there may be misperceptions on the part of the parent which may not in fact be true from the child's point of view. The reader

must remember that the information gathered on the child is from the parents' perceptions of the child. This is one factor that must be considered when analyzing the results of this study.

Another factor to address is that there is no standard for reliability nor validity for this questionnaire because it is not a test. This questionnaire is an assessment tool. It assesses the child's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors from the understanding of the parent. The organization uses this tool as an indication of how children are functioning in relation to each thought, feeling, or behavior discussed. The questionnaire was compiled by the organizations therapists based on the research they had collected on the effects of divorce on children.

Design

The results were examined according to the total score of each questionnaire. The purpose of the study was to determine if there was a significant difference in scores in regard to two variables. The two variables examined were gender and age. The first variable divided the children by gender into two subgroups of male and female. The second variable, the age groups, consisted of three subgroups. The first subgroup was preschool-aged children, age two to four. The second

subgroup consisted of elementary-aged children whose ages ranged from five to twelve. The last subgroup was adolescent-aged children from thirteen to seventeen years of age.

In order to determine if there was a significant difference in scores in relation to gender, the researcher ran a t-test. In this case, the null hypothesis was: there is no significant difference in the total scores related to gender. The alternative hypothesis was: there is a significant difference in the scores related to gender. In order to test to see if an effect is significant, the researcher ran a t-test which incorporated the Levene's test for homogeneity of variance.

The researcher also tested to determine if there was a significant difference in the total scores of children of different ages (preschool, elementary, adolescent). In order to determine if there was a significant difference, the researcher ran a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). In this case, the null hypothesis was: there is no significant difference in the total scores related to age. The alternative hypothesis was: there is a significant difference in the total scores related to age.

Procedure

The researcher had completed a practicum requirement at the

counseling organization and therefore was familiar with the staff and administrators. The researcher asked permission to distribute the questionnaires to the parents of the organizations client's in order to gather data for her thesis paper. The organization agreed and allowed her to use their facility and their questionnaire which they use in assessing new clients. It was explained that all information about the organization and the participating subjects would remain confidential.

The research conducting the study went to the organization every evening (the time at which the organization runs its groups for children of divorce) for one week. The experimenter left the questionnaire with the receptionist with instruction's stapled to each questionnaire. The receptionist was asked to repeat the following to each parent who walked in: "A graduate student is conducting a study for her thesis paper on the effects of divorce on children. Would you like to participate in the study by completing this questionnaire?"

When a parent agreed to participate, they were given a clip board, a pen, and the questionnaire with the attached instructions (See Appendix B). No additional instructions were given to the parents by the receptionist. The parents completed the questionnaire in the waiting room while their children were in their groups. The parents were allowed

as much time as they needed; however no parent took longer than one hour (the length of their child's counseling group). All of the parents who agreed to participate in the study completed the questionnaire and returned it to the secretary before leaving.

After collecting all of the questionnaires and excluding those of fathers who had primary custody and those of mother who had custody but were remarried, the remaining seventy-nine questionnaires were examined. The researcher totaled the scores of all of the instruments by summing the circled score for each item, and then separated the questionnaire according to gender (male and female) and age (preschool, elementary, and adolescent).

CHAPTER 4

Results

The questionnaires were categorized by gender and age. For the purpose of this study, alpha was set at a value of .05. Of the 79 questionnaires examined, there were 40 discussing male children and 39 discussing female children. The questionnaires were also divided into three groups with regard to age. There were 18 questionnaires discussing preschool-aged children, 32 discussing elementary-aged children, and 29 discussing adolescent-aged children. Table 2 shows the results of examining the scores from the 79 questionnaires.

TABLE 2. Results of Scores on Questionnaire

Valid cases:	79.0	Missing cases:	.0		
Percent missing:	.0				
Mean	44.6329	Std Err	1.8744	Min	15.0000
Skewness	.7753	Median	41.0000	Max	103.0000
Variance	277.5430	S E Skew	.2705	Range	88.0000
5% Trim	43.7799	Std Dev	16.6596	IQR	25.0000
Kurtosis	.6971	S E Kurt	.5350		

Of the 79 scores, the mean score, or average score, was 44.6329 with a standard deviation of 16.6596. The scores had a range of 88 with a minimum score of 15 and a maximum score of 103. The scores of the questionnaires have a high variance (277.5430) which shows that the scores are highly dispersed or spread out. Table 2 also shows that the scores are positively skewed (.7753) which translates that more scores fall above the mean than below the mean. The statistic for kurtosis is also presented in Table 2. The kurtosis for the distribution of scores is .6971 which means that there are more scores in the tails than would be expected. In other words, the curve is platykurtic (or has thick tails).

Is there a difference in the scores of the questionnaires in regard to gender? This is the first question asked by the researcher. The variable of sex was examined. The results of the scores for the males are presented in Table 3. The mean score for males was 54.5250 with a standard deviation of 15.6762. The minimum score was 27 while the maximum score was 103 which equals a range of 76. The variance for male scores was high (245.7429) because the scores are highly dispersed. From Table 3 it can also be seen that the male scores are positively skewed (.5755) which means that more scores fall above the mean than below the mean. The statistic for kurtosis is also presented

TABLE 3. Results of Scores on QuestionnaireAccording to Gender

Males (1.00)

Valid cases:	40.0	Missing cases:	.0		
Percent missing:	.0				
Mean	54.5250	Std Err	2.4786	Min	27.0000
Skewness	.5755	Median	55.5000	Max	103.0000
Variance	245.7429	S E Skew	.3738	Range	76.0000
5% Trim	53.8611	Std Dev	15.6762	IQR	21.0000
Kurtosis	1.1499	S E Kurt	.7326		

Females (2.00)

Valid cases:	39.0	Missing cases:	.0		
Percent missing:	.0				
Mean	34.4872	Std Err	1.6705	Min	15.0000
Skewness	.8277	Median	33.0000	Max	60.0000
Variance	108.8354	S E Skew	.3782	Range	45.0000
5% Trim	33.9900	Std Dev	10.4324	IQR	12.0000
Kurtosis	.6574	S E Kurt	.7410		

in Table 3. The distribution of male scores have a kurtosis of 1.1499.

In addition to the male scores, Table 3 presents the results of the females' scores as well. The mean female score was 34.4872 with a standard deviation of 10.4324. It is important to note that the females' mean score is lower than the mean score of the males. The minimum score for females was fifteen with a maximum score of sixty, which equals a range of forty-five. This range is smaller than that of the range for the male scores. The variance for female scores was high at 108.8354, but this statistic was more than half that of the variance statistic for the male scores. Furthermore, Table 3 shows that the female scores are positively skewed (.8277) which means that more scores fall above the mean than below the mean, just as they did with the male scores. The kurtosis for female scores was .6574 which means that the curve is platykurtic. In other words, the curve has more scores in the tails than would be expected.

A t-test was performed to determine if there was a significant difference between the scores of males and females on the questionnaires. A t-test compares two sample means. The null hypothesis for these two categories of scores was: There is no significant difference in the male and female scores of the questionnaires. The

alternate hypothesis was: There is a significant difference in the male and female scores of the questionnaires. The results of this t-test are presented in Table 4. The mean and standard deviation of both male

TABLE 4. Results of T-test Scores for Gender

Variable	Number of Cases	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
SCORE	Score on questionnaire			
SEX 1.00	40	54.5250	15.676	2.479
SEX 2.00	39	34.4872	10.432	1.671

Mean Difference = 20.0378

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances: $F=5.034$ $P=.028$

t-test for Equality of Means

Variances	t-value	df	2-Tail Sig	SE of Diff	95% CI for Diff
Equal	6.67	77	.000	3.004	(14.055, 26.021)
Unequal	6.70	68	.000	2.989	(14.072, 26.004)

and female scores are presented in Table 4 along with the standard error of the mean. The variable of sex is separated into two groups with males represented as 1.00 and females represented as 2.00. The mean difference of the scores is 20.0378.

The Levene's test was also used to compare male and female scores. The purpose of the Levene's test is to test the null hypothesis that the variances of the two groups are equal. The Levene's test for equality of variance shows that $P=.028$. Because P is less than alpha ($\alpha=.05$), we reject the null hypothesis that the scores of two groups of gender are equal.

Therefore, at the bottom of Table 4, the values in the row labeled "Unequal" were used to determine if the difference in scores according to gender is significant. The standardized score for the column labeled "t-value" is 6.70, with 68 degrees of freedom. The degrees of freedom along with the t-value are used to determine how likely it is to get a score as big as 6.70, or as small as -6.70, if the mean value for the scores of the two groups of males and females is the same in the population. The probability is .000 (shown in the column labeled "2-Tail Sig").

It can be concluded that it appears unlikely that males in the population would have the same scores on the questionnaires as females

in the population. The last column at the bottom of Table 4 is labeled "95% CI for Diff" which represents the 95% confidence interval for the average score for males and females. The 95% confidence interval is from 14.072 to 26.004. Because the mean difference value is 20.0378, which falls in the 95% confidence interval, once again it can be concluded to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis that there is a significant difference in male and female scores on the questionnaire.

Is there a difference in scores of the questionnaire in regard to age? This is the second question asked by the researcher. The variable of age was examined. The null hypothesis was: There is no significant difference in the scores of the questionnaires in regard to age. The alternative hypothesis was: There is a significant difference in the scores of the questionnaires in regard to age. The scores were divided into three groups according to the age of the child being discussed. The first group was preschool-aged children from age three to four years old. The second group was elementary-aged children from five to twelve years of age. The last group was adolescent-aged children ranging from twelve to seventeen years of age. The results of this examination for all three age groups are presented in Table 5.

The mean score for the preschool-aged children is 43.2222 with a

standard deviation of 15.2453. The median score, or middlemost score is also 43. The range of scores is 63 with a minimum score of 15 and a maximum score of 78. The statistic for variance (232.4183) is also presented in Table 5. The scores for preschool-aged children are

TABLE 5. Results of Scores on Questionnaire
According to Age

	Preschool 1.00	Elementary 2.00	Adolescent 3.00
Mean	43.2222	48.3438	41.4138
Std Dev	15.2453	19.3234	13.8164
Median	43.5000	51.5000	38.0000
Std Err	3.5933	3.4159	2.5656
Range	63.0000	82.0000	47.0000
Minimum	15.0000	21.0000	22.0000
Maximum	78.0000	103.0000	69.0000
Variance	232.4183	373.3942	190.8941
Skewness	.3062	.7070	.6800
S E Skew	.5363	.4145	.4335
Kurtosis	.3737	.4846	-.5757
S E Kurt	1.0378	.8094	.8452
IQR	19.5000	28.7500	19.5000

positively skewed which means that more scores fall above the mean than below the mean. The scores are platykurtic (.3737) which translates that there are more scores in the tails than expected.

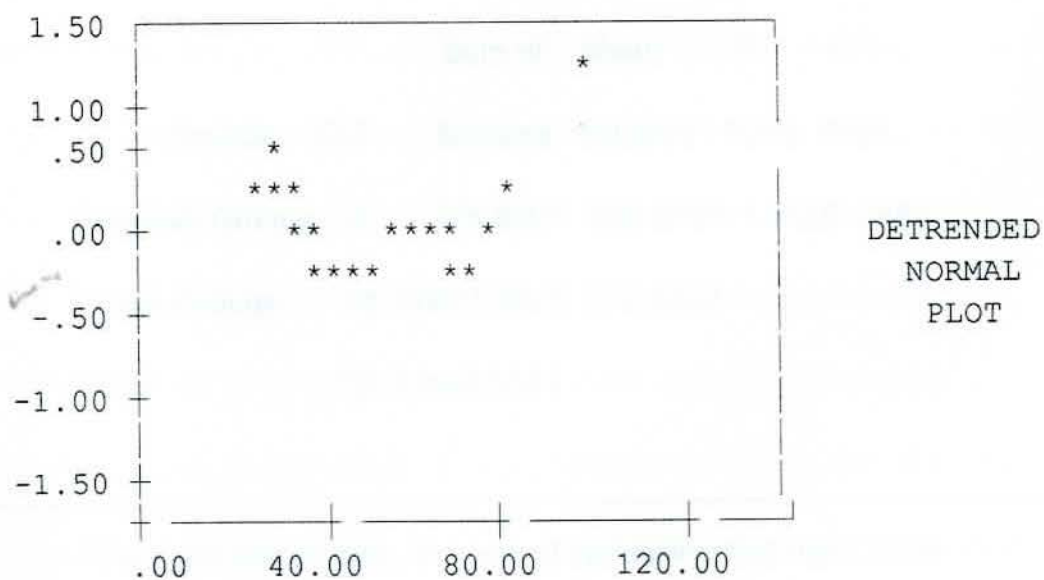
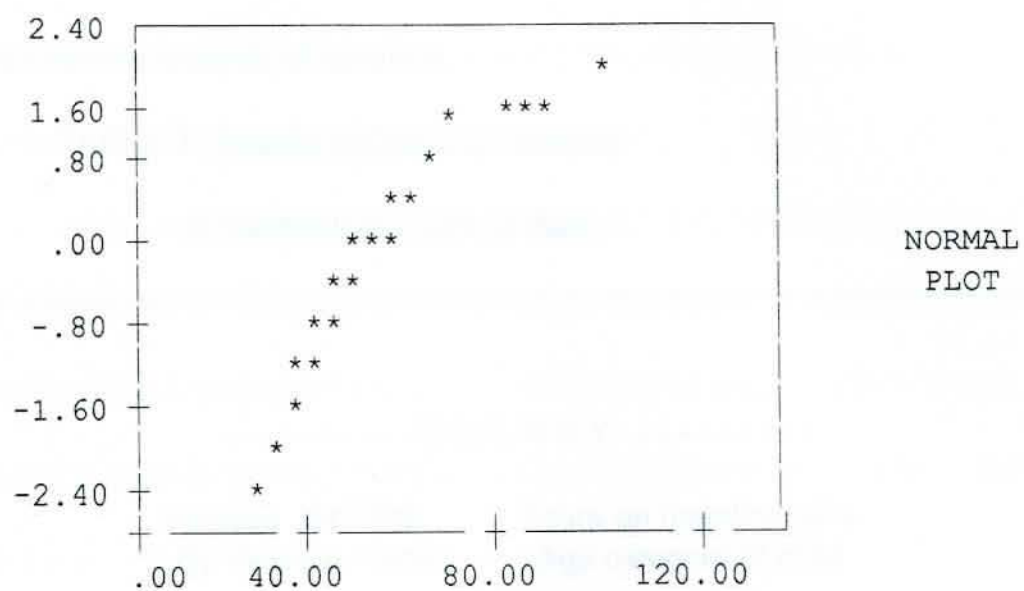
In addition to the preschool-aged scores, the results of examining the elementary-aged childrens' scores are presented in Table 5. The mean score for this age group is 48.3438 with a standard deviation of 19.3234. The median score for the elementary-aged children is 51.5000. The range of the scores is 82 with a minimum score of 21 and a maximum score of 103. The scores for this age group are highly dispersed as can be seen in the variance statistic in Table 5 of 373.3942. The scores are positively skewed (.7070) which means that more scores fall above the mean than below the mean as they did with the preschool age group. Also like the preschool group, the curve for the elementary-aged childrens' scores is platykurtic (.4846).

The last column in Table 5 presents the results of the adolescent age group scores. The mean, or average score for this group is 41.4138 with a standard deviation of 13.8164. The median score for this group is 38.0000. The range of scores is much smaller than the other two age groups at 47 with a minimum score of 22 and a maximum score of 69. The variance for this age group is 190.8941. The scores for adolescent-aged children are also positively skewed (.6800) which means more scores fall above the mean than below the mean. Unlike the preschool and elementary age groups, the adolescent age group scores are

leptokurtic (-.5757) which means that there are fewer scores in the tails than expected. In other words, the tails in the curve representing the adolescent age group are thin.

After examining the variable of age, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed in order to determine if there is a significant difference between the mean scores on the questionnaires in regard to the different age groups. An assumption in performing a one-way ANOVA is that the scores are normally distributed. Along with looking at the measures of central tendency (as seen in Table 5), the researcher also looked at the normal plot and detrended normal plot to determine if the scores for the three age groups were normally distributed. Table 6 shows the normal plot and detrended normal plot for the distribution of scores for age. The distribution of scores in the normal plot show that the scores fall in a straight line which implies that the scores have a normal distribution (Norusis, 1991). The distribution of scores in the detrended normal plot have a predictable shape, therefore, it can be concluded that the scores are normally distributed (Norusis, 1991).

Once normality was established, a one-way ANOVA was run. This statistical technique is used to test the null hypothesis that the population means are equal. It is called an analysis of

TABLE 6. Normal Plot and DetrendedNormal Plot for Age

(Norusis, 1991). The test used by the researcher is a one-way ANOVA because the scores fall into a group based on their values for one variable. In this test, that variable was age. Table 7 shows the results of the one-way analysis of variance.

**TABLE 7. Results of One-way Analysis
of Variance of Score by Age**

----- O N E W A Y -----

Variable	SCORE	Score on questionnaire			
By Variable	AGE	Age category of child			
Analysis of Variance					
		Sum of	Mean	F	F
Source	D.F.	Squares	Squares	Ratio	Prob.
Between Groups	2	776.9901	388.4950	1.4146	.2493
Within Groups	76	20871.3643	274.6232		
Total	78	21648.3544			

There are two groups, or types of variability, that need to be examined. The first group is labeled "Within Groups" in Table 7. Within group variability is a measure of how much the observations vary within a

particular group. This statistic is used to estimate the variance within a group in the population. Table 7 shows that the within group sum of squares for this sample is 20871.3643. The within group mean square for the sample is 274.6232. This statistic (the mean square) is an estimate of the average variability in the groups.

The second type of variability examined is between group variability. Between group variability is how much the group means vary among themselves, the three groups of age in this case. Table 7 shows that the between group sum of squares for this sample is 776.9901. The between group mean square for the sample is 388.4950.

Now that the two estimates of the variability of the population have been determined (the within group mean square and the between group mean square) the researcher can determine whether or not to accept the null hypothesis. If the null hypothesis is true (that there is no significant difference in the scores of the three groups of age), the two numbers of the within group mean square and the between group mean square should be close to each other. If one number is divided by the other, the ratio should be close to one. This ratio is called the F statistic, or F ratio. As can be seen in Table 7, the F ratio is 1.4146. The F ratio does not appear to be close to 1; therefore it must be determined how often it can

be expected to see a ratio of 1.4146 or larger if the null hypothesis is true.

The observed significance level is also presented in Table 7 under the heading of "F Prob". The F probability for this sample is .2493. In other words, it is likely that a large F ratio will be seen when the null hypothesis is true. The researcher therefore accepted the null hypothesis that in the population the scores on the questionnaire related to divorce would not be significantly different in regard to the child's age. This differs from the previous finding that in the population, the scores on the questionnaire related to divorce would be significantly different in regard to the child's gender.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Conclusions

This study examined the differences in the effects of parental divorce on children. Male and female scores on a divorce-related questionnaire were compared to assess whether or not divorce has a greater impact on one sex than it does on the other. The results of the t-test and Levene's test show that the male children have higher scores on the questionnaire than the female children. The tests also show that the difference between the male and female scores is a significant one; therefore, the researcher concluded that in the population male childrens' scores would be higher than female childrens' scores.

What do these findings mean? The organization which utilizes this divorce-related questionnaire does so to assess what effects the divorce has had on the child and the severity of those effects ("Not True", "Somewhat True", "Very Much True"). If the questionnaire in this study is utilized in the same manner, then the results of the study would imply that because male scores were on average higher than female scores, then the males in the study were more negatively effected by their parents divorce. These findings would agree with the findings of Hetherington et.

al (1978), which is that divorce has a greater impact on sons than on daughters. Boys tend to show increased aggression, anger, and hostility especially when in their mother's custody (as all of these male children were).

The research collected for this paper supported the theory that age differences are also evident in the effects of divorce on children. Although the research supported this theory, the results of this study did not. This study found that although children of all ages were negatively impacted by the parental divorce, there was no significant difference in the scores on the divorce-related questionnaire in regard to age. It is safe to conclude that children, no matter what their age, are going to be negatively effected by the dissolution of their parents' marriage, but not necessarily one age group moreso than another. All three age groups (younger children, middle-aged children, and older children) showed signs of distress and pain from the divorce as can be seen through their average score of 44.6329 on the questionnaire. Although this score is not extremely high, it does suggest that the "Not True" response was not circled very often which means that the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors stated in the questionnaire did at least somewhat represent the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the children being assessed.

The major conclusion drawn by the researcher is that in almost all cases, children are negatively effected, in one way or another, by the divorce of their parents. Are their differences in the effects of divorce in regard to the childs' age and/or gender? This researcher concludes that the scores on the divorce-related questionnaire imply that there is no difference in the effect of parental divorce on the child in regard to the child's age; however this researcher also concludes that the results imply that there is a difference in the effect of divorce on the child in regard to the childs' gender, with males being more negatively impacted than females.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher found two limitations of this study. The first limitation of the study is that because the age span of the children examined included children as young as three, it was impossible to have the children themselves answer a questionnaire because the younger children are unable to understand and answer an instrument such as the one used. Therefore, the responses on the questionnaire were those of the parents and their perceptions of how their child is feeling, thinking, and behaving. The results of this study would be more accurate if the

questions on the instrument could be answered by the individuals who were being assessed.

The second limitation of the study is related to the assessment tool used by the researcher. The instrument used is not a reliable, valid test. It does not have a norming sample, statistics for reliability, or statistics for validity of the tool. Because of this lack of technical data, it is difficult for the researcher to generalize the results of the study to the population with a large degree of certainty to back up the conclusions. The researcher has drawn some conclusions based on the knowledge of what the instrument was made to measure, previous use of the instrument, and conclusions drawn from the instrument in the past.

It has been projected that by the turn of the century nearly fifty percent of all children will have experienced the dissolution of their parents' marriage before they reach eighteen years of age (Hoyt et. al, 1990). It has been made abundantly clear that children are negatively impacted by their parents' divorce, some more severely than others. It is this researcher's opinion, and research appears to agree, that these effects can be minimized if children receive the help they need to adjust to all the changes taking place in their lives which are a result of the divorce. A suggestion for future research is to develop a standardized test which

can assess the effects and the degree of the effects that the divorce has had on the child in order for professionals to be better able to assist the child in the adjustment process. With one out of every two children in the U.S. by the year 2000 being a part of a divorced family, there is definitely a need for the development of a divorce-specific instrument.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Child's age: _____

Child's sex: _____

Parent with custody of child: _____

	Not	Some	Very
	True	what	much
	<u>True</u>	<u>True</u>	<u>True</u>

My Child:

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1) is afraid to be left alone. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 2) tries to help take care of me a lot. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 3) gets along with most people his/her own age. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 4) and I talk about things a lot. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 5) seems to enjoy being "babied" a lot. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 6) fights with his/her siblings a lot. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 7) acts as if it is her/his fault that we were divorced. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 8) doesn't like to talk about his/her real feelings. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 9) complains of feeling sick a lot since the separation. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 10) tends to misbehave when overwhelmed with feelings. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 11) completes his/her schoolwork. | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| 12) has a hard time telling me his/her wants and needs. | 0 | 1 | 3 |

	<u>Not</u> <u>True</u>	<u>Some</u> <u>what</u> <u>True</u>	<u>Very</u> <u>much</u> <u>True</u>
13) acts as if things are hopeless much of the time.	0	1	3
14) doesn't seem to mind if others know his/her parents are separated.	0	1	3
15) puts himself/herself down a lot.	0	1	3
16) is often in the middle of fights between my ex-spouse and I.	0	1	3
17) thinks that he/she can get us back together.	0	1	3
18) seems very sad and upset since the separation.	0	1	3
19) is afraid of a lot of things in the world.	0	1	3
20) seems to think that if he/she shows love to my ex-spouse that I will stop loving him/her.	0	1	3
21) acts as if she/he has little power to change things in life.	0	1	3
22) seems to have withdrawn a lot since the separation.	0	1	3
23) has fears that I may leave also.	0	1	3
24) grades are worse since the separation.	0	1	3

	<u>Not</u> <u>True</u>	<u>Some</u> <u>what</u> <u>True</u>	<u>Very</u> <u>much</u> <u>True</u>
25) hits people or breaks things when angry.	0	1	3
26) often acts younger than he/she is.	0	1	3
27) believes we will get back together.	0	1	3
28) misses a lot of school and other activities due to illness since the separation.	0	1	3
29) brings up problems to me.	0	1	3
30) expects me to solve conflicts he/she has with my ex-spouse.	0	1	3
31) believes she/he should have been able to keep us together.	0	1	3
32) seems to think that if he/she shows love to me that my ex-spouse may stop loving him/her.	0	1	3
33) has many friends.	0	1	3
34) and I argue a lot.	0	1	3
35) and I do a lot of things together.	0	1	3
36) talks about being ashamed that his/her parents are separated.	0	1	3
37) complains that she/he is not treated as well as siblings are treated.	0	1	3

	<u>Not</u>	Some	Very
	<u>True</u>	<u>True</u>	<u>True</u>
38) thinks that is is wrong to feel the way he/she does feel.	0	1	3
39) acts more grown up than usual. ie: prefers "grown-up" activities; checks up on parents; tells parents what to do.	0	1	3
40) seems to like and care about himself/herself. ie: accepts compliments; interested in appearance; makes positive statements about self.	0	1	3
41) seems to think that if he/she shows love to a step-parent that the original parent will stop caring about him/her.	0	1	3
42) feels safe in the world. ie: is comfortable being alone; explores new areas, etc.	0	1	3

APPENDIX B: COVER LETTER

[Handwritten mark]

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. The information you provide on the attached questionnaire will be used to help me in the completion of my Master's thesis. My research will attempt to ascertain (1) if there is a difference in the effects of divorce on children of various ages, and (2) if there is a difference in the effects of divorce on children in regard to gender.

I would like you to fill out this questionnaire to the best of your knowledge. Please be as honest as possible. When you begin, please fill out the top three lines which ask for your child's age, your child's sex, and which parent has primary custody of your child. Neither your name nor your child's name will be placed on the questionnaire. This will guarantee your anonymity and confidentiality.

If the statement does not apply to your child, circle zero, and place NA next to the item. When you've completed the questionnaire, please return it to the receptionist. Thank you for your cooperation. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Maureen Knox
Graduate Student
Lindenwood College

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