



THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON TEENAGE CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

All teenage children react differently to divorce, but psychologists have noted that children also react differently according to age. Young children often experience grief when they find out that their parents are separating and become sad and clingy. Teenagers, on the other hand, often view divorce as betrayal and pull away from their parents. As the teenager attempts to distance himself from his parents, he may act out in other ways. Teenagers often become extremely angry at one or both parents. The result can be abusive behavior such as shouting and name-calling, or it may take the form of withdrawal from family contact. Often the teen will take the side of one parent and “punish” the other with abusive behavior or by ignoring them outright. Teens may demand to be allowed to spend more time with their friends to stay away from the house, and may grow angry and abusive if prevented from doing so. Teenagers may become less involved with school, responsibilities, and other activities. Grades will often drop and you may notice a marked increase in truancy. The teen may increase dangerous or self-abusive behavior such as binge drinking, using drugs, and sexual promiscuity. Conversely, teens may try to improve their behavior, improve grades, and focus more on schoolwork in an effort to save their parents’ marriage or make up for what they consider to be their fault.

KEYWORDS: *teenage, divorce, negative, effects, children, parents, behavior, age*

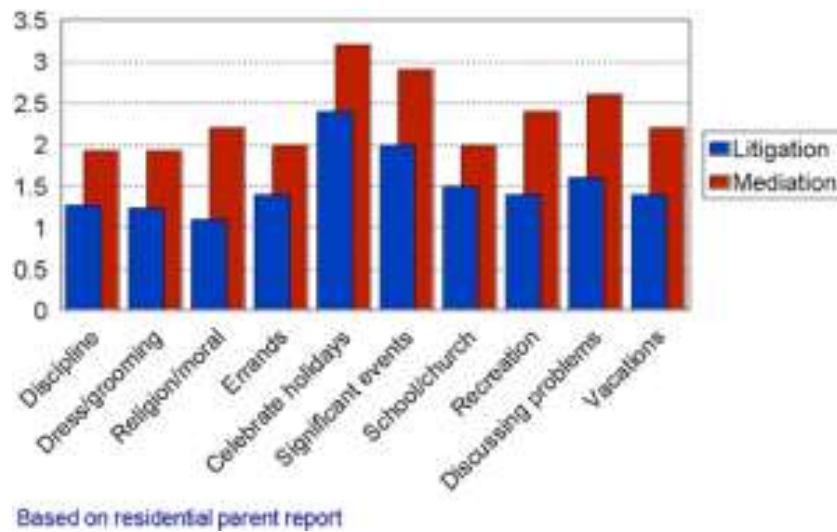
INTRODUCTION

Divorce can be a difficult time for a family. Not only are the parents realizing new ways of relating to each other, but they are learning new ways to parent their teenage children. When parents divorce, the effects of divorce on teenage children can vary. Some teenage children react to divorce in a natural and understanding way, while other children may struggle with the transition.[1]

Teenage children are resilient and with assistance the divorce transition can be experienced as an adjustment rather than a crisis. Since the teenage children in a divorce vary (different temperaments,

different ages), the effects of divorce on children vary, too. Family means understands this and approaches a divorce by understanding what the effects are on teenage children of all dispositions.

Divorce is difficult for all members of the family. For teenage children, trying to understand the changing dynamics of the family may leave them distracted and confused. This interruption in their daily focus can mean one of the effects of divorce on teenage children would be seen in their academic performance. The more distracted children are, the more likely they are to not be able to focus on their school work.



Research has suggested divorce can affect teenage children socially, as well. Children whose family is going through divorce may have a harder time relating to others, and tend to have less social contacts. Sometimes teenage children feel insecure and wonder if their family is the only family that has gotten divorced.

Through divorce, teenagers can be affected by having to learn to adapt to change more often and more frequently. New family dynamics, new house or living situation, schools, friends, and more, may all have an effect. Divorce can bring several types of emotions to the forefront for a family, and the children involved are no different. Feelings of loss, anger, confusion, anxiety, and many others, all may come from this transition. Divorce can leave children feeling overwhelmed and emotionally sensitive. Teenagers need an outlet for their emotions – someone to talk to, someone who will

listen, etc. – teenagers may feel effects of divorce through how they process their emotions.[2,3]

OBSERVATIONS

In some cases, where teenagers feel overwhelmed and do not know how to respond to the affects they feel during divorce, they may become angry or irritable. Their anger may be directed at a wide range of perceived causes. Teenagers processing divorce may display anger at their parents, themselves, their friends, and others. While for many teenagers this anger dissipates after several weeks, if it persists, it is important to be aware that this may be a lingering effect of the divorce on teenagers. Teenagers often wonder why a divorce is happening in their family. They will look for reasons, wondering if their parents no longer love each other, or if they have done something wrong.



Effects of Divorce

On children	On Society	On adults
<p>New Right</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of role model • Discipline • Child poverty • Poor housing • Behaviour problems • Educational underachievement • Teen pregnancy • Instability – moving house <p>Feminists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better to have quality parenting 'one loving parent' 	<p>New Right</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single parents = welfare dependency • Rising crime <p>Feminists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are free from unhealthy relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men lose home • Men struggle to survive financially • Both adults affected by financial costs of divorce • Losing contact with wider family members/ friends • Loneliness • Affect self esteem/ sense of being a failure/ guilt

These feelings of guilt are a very common effect of divorce on teenagers, but also one which can lead to many other issues. Guilt increases pressure, can lead to depression, stress, and other health problems. Providing context and counseling for a child to understand their role in a divorce can help reduce these feelings of guilt. While teenagers go through a divorce, unresolved conflict may lead to future unexpected risks. Research has shown teenagers who have experienced divorce in the previous 20 years were more likely to participate in crimes, rebelling through destructive behavior which harms a child's health, with more teenagers reporting they have acquired smoking habits, or prescription drug use.[4]

The process of divorce and its effects on teenagers can be a stressful. Dealing with these issues can take its toll, including physical problems. Teenagers who have experienced divorce have a higher perceptibility to sickness, which can stem from many factors, including their difficulty going to sleep. Also, signs of depression can appear, exacerbating these feelings of loss of well-being, and deteriorating health signs. Finally, despite hoping to have stable relationships themselves when they grow up, research

has also shown teenagers who have experienced divorce are more likely to divorce when in their own relationships. Some research indicates this propensity to divorce may be two to three times as high as teenagers who come from non-divorced families. Yet, while these are some of the possible effects of divorce on teenagers, they are by no means absolutes, or written in stone. More and more, families understand just how stressful divorce is for their teenagers, as well as their selves. Families have begun to turn to supportive services such as at Family means, seeking help to find a peaceful way to divorce. Through our Collaborative Divorce program, we are helping families more successfully navigate this transition, both for the sake of the parents, and for the teenagers involved.[5]

DISCUSSION

A recent survey of close to 1 million teenagers showed that kids growing up in single-parent homes were more than twice as likely to experience a serious psychiatric disorder, commit or attempt suicide, or develop an alcohol addiction.



Divorce Facts

50% of first marriages & 60% of second marriages end in divorce.

There's a divorce every 13 seconds. That's nearly 7,000 a day.

What about the children?

Teens in single-parent and blended families are 300% more likely to need psychological help than other teens.

&

Children from divorced homes have more psychological problems than those losing a parent to death.

Children of divorce are twice as likely to drop out of high school than their peers.

Group and individual counseling can help children and families work through these issues.

How can these kids be helped?

Kids In The Middle®
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In addition, a study funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that teenagers living with one biological parent were between three and eight times as likely as teenagers living with two biological parents to have experienced one or more of the following:

- Neighborhood violence
- Caregiver violence
- Incarceration of a caregiver
- Living with a caregiver with a mental illness

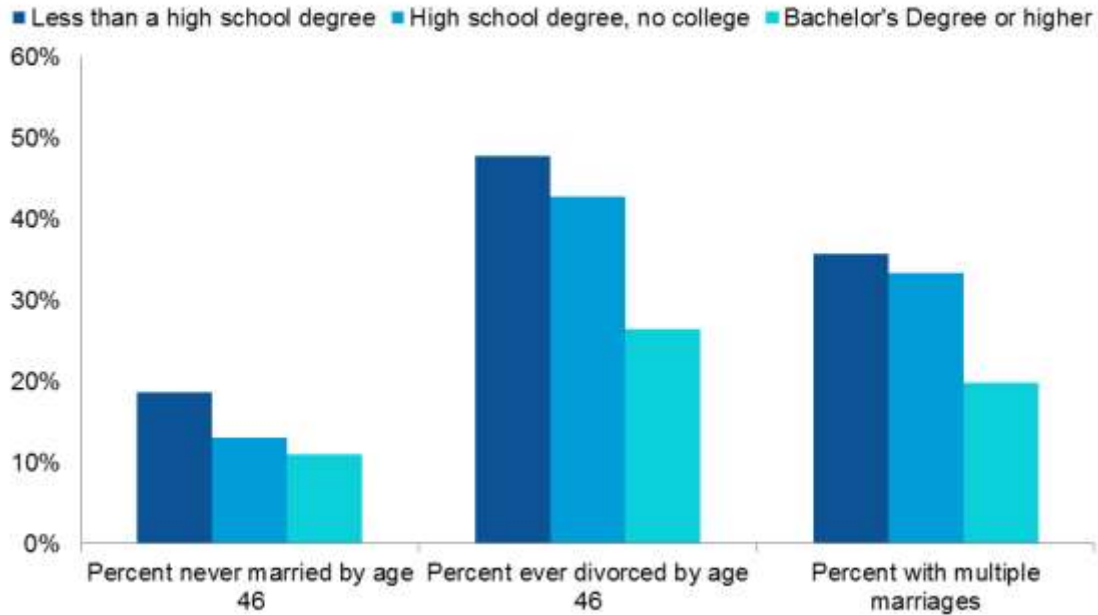
- Having a caregiver with an alcohol or drug problem.

Moreover, research finds that teenagers with divorced parents are more likely to have a weakened relationship with one or both parents. And teenagers of single parents are twice as likely to have emotional and behavioral problems.[6]

In the study, the researchers found that daughters of divorced parents are highly vulnerable to father absence. Since the vast majority of teenagers continue to reside with their mother after the divorce, father absence is quite common.



A Class Divide in Marital Outcomes



Hence, the study found that the rates of teen pregnancy among girls whose fathers were absent were three to eight times higher, depending when in the girls' life the divorce occurred. Moreover, researchers found more evidence of the effects of father absence on early sexual activity and teenage

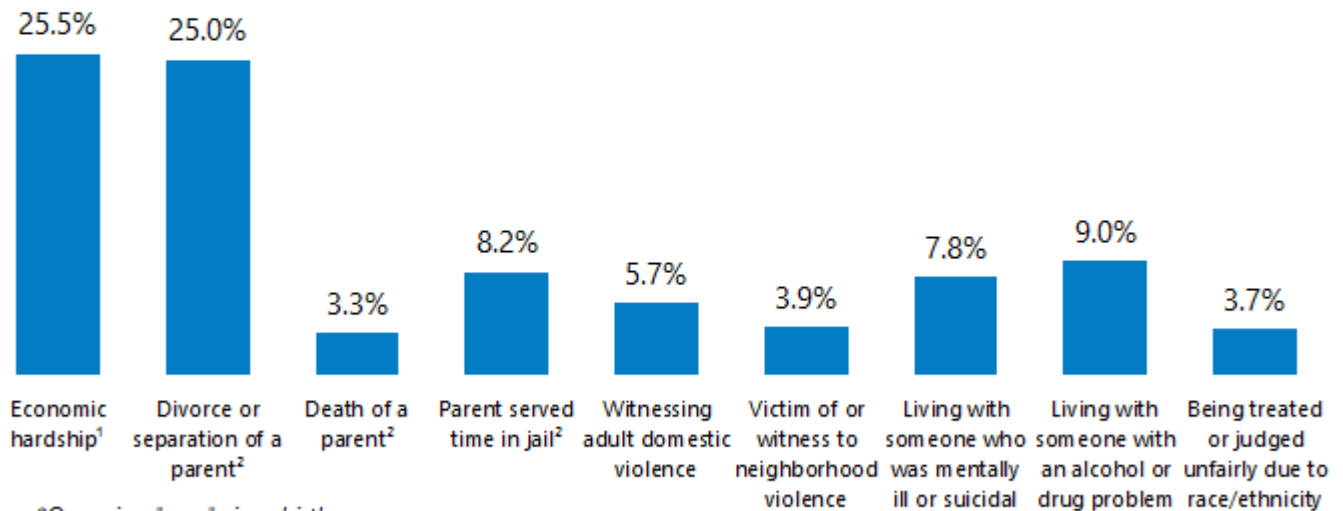
pregnancy than on other behavioral or mental health problems.[7,8]

Hence, the divorced mother-daughter relationship is a crucial piece of the puzzle when it comes to the effects of divorce on teenage daughters.

Experts suggest that the effects of divorce on teen daughters fall into four distinct areas:



Percent of Children, Ages Birth to 17, with Specific Parent-Reported Adverse Experiences*: 2016



*Occurring "ever" since birth.

¹ Experienced "somewhat" or "very" often.

² Parent refers to a parent the child lived with.

childtrends.org

1. Separating from the Family Unit

Losing trust in parents, daughters foster social distance by relying on friends.

2. Taking Greater Chances

Daughters are more willing to experiment and take dangerous risks after divorce.

3. Curiosity and Questionable Information

No longer trusting their parents, daughters rely on questionable sources of information.

4. Autonomy and Opposition

Lacking secure autonomy, daughters assert greater opposition to parental authority.

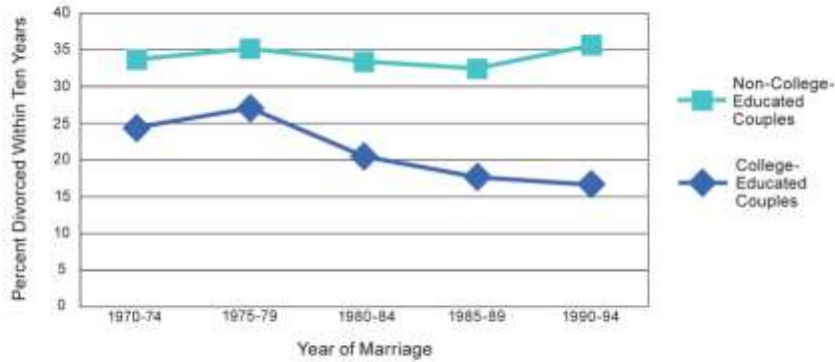
RESULTS

Divorce is common in the contemporary way of life and deserves objective study. It may have redeeming features, but from the point of view of teenagers, divorce is a stressful experience because of

the disruption of the home and its financial, emotional, and social costs. The adverse impact, however, can be minimized by realistic and sensitive attention to its effects on teenagers. Although divorce alters the living arrangements of affected families, it does not end family relationships. For this reason, marriage and divorce counseling should deal with the perspectives of both adults and teenagers. Most teenagers and their parents adjust to divorce and later regard it as having been a constructive action; but one-third do not. In those instances the turbulence of the post-divorce phase plays a crucial role in influencing pathological reactions in affected teenagers. The physician is in a strategic position to act as diagnostician, a clarifier of values, an educator in the facts of family life and divorce, a counselor in working through feelings about and attitudes toward divorce, and a source of support for teenagers.



The Growing Divorce Divide



Source: Steven Martin. 2004. "Growing Evidence for a Divorce Divide?" New York: Russell Sage Foundation Working Paper.

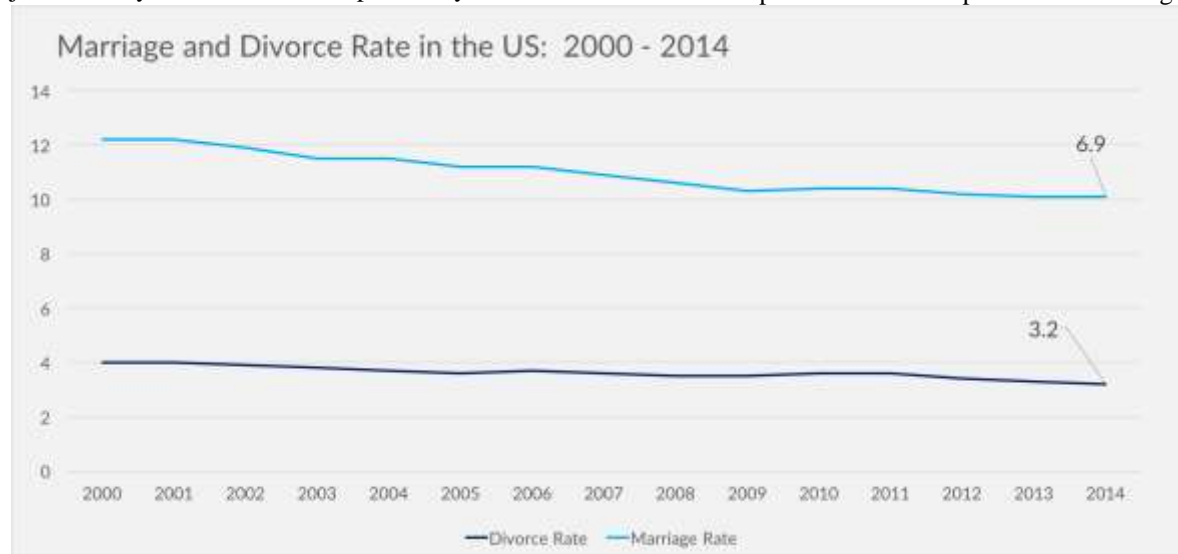
Although divorce can have significant negative impact on teenagers, a variety of protective factors can increase the likelihood of long-term positive psychological adjustment. [9]

- Exposure to high levels of parental conflict is predictive of poor emotional adjustment by the child regardless of the parents' marital status.
- Epidemiologic data reveal that custody and parenting arrangements are evolving, with more emphasis on joint custody and access to both parents by the child.

• Pediatricians' knowledge of childhood development is essential in providing anticipatory guidance to parents throughout the divorce process and beyond.[10]

CONCLUSION

The analytical efforts made aforesaid conclude on the point that the teenagers' psychological balance is deeply affected through the marital disruption and adjustment for changes is affected by the way parents continue positive relationships with their teenagers.



Also, as regards the recorded rise in female headed households, the scholarly opinion largely asserts that fathers need to take up a larger responsibility and provide for timely maintenance. Apart from the developmental considerations due to family disruption, there are certain rights which need to be looked into

from a distinct standpoint to cater to special situations the teenagers are found in during the time of their parents' divorce. As it has been argued, these rights though cannot be distinctively articulated from that of the parent's rights, yet the teenager should be considered as an autonomous self to be accorded



individual rights. The researcher also reiterates the need for enumerating the parameters to determine the best interests of the teenager rather than leaving the judiciary with absolute powers to determine the teenagers' welfare. From a legal standpoint, the researcher suggests that a single law governing teenagers rights in divorce cases and also matters pertaining to custody and maintenance must come into place for an enhanced framework protecting the teenagers' future.[10]

To ensure that the teenager receives a stable and nurturing environment after the divorce of the parents, some scholars have opined that if a parent fails to promote the child's interest at some threshold level of adequacy, a form of intervention, ranging from counseling to obtaining fine from the parent as well as loss of parental rights to the teenager, may be legitimate. The farfetched idea of a prenuptial agreement may also be worked out though it shall take a while for the Indian environment to be suited to the design.[11]

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11. Robert Weiss, *Marital Separation*(1975). 12. Steven L. Nock, *THE FAMILY AND HIERARCHY*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50 (Nov): 957-966 (1988). Article 9(1) of the Convention states that: States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence.