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# The Behavioral Effects Divorce Can Have on Children

Wanda M. Williams-Owens

*The Graduate Center, City University of New York*

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THE BEHAVIORAL EFFECTS DIVORCE CAN HAVE ON CHILDREN

By

Wanda Williams-Owens

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,

The City University of New York

2017

CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

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CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

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Wanda Williams-Owens

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies  
in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date

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Julia Wrigley

Thesis Advisor

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Date

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Dr. Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

# CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

## ABSTRACT

### The Behavioral Effects Divorce Can Have On Children

by

Wanda Williams-Owens

Advisor: Professor Julia Wrigley

According to a statistical study (Cherlin et al. 1991) 40% of children who live in the United States will experience parental divorce before they reach the age of 18. Consequently, many children are affected by the process of divorce and its finalization. When my daughter was just nine years old, she asked incredulously why my husband and I were the only married couple in our neighborhood? After twenty-two years of marriage, I realized long-term marriages in my community are not conventional. When parents' divorce, children often face the loss of one parent's constant presence and economic stability; as a result, stress may take a tremendous toll on the children. Although independently these consequences are consequential, they do not address the child's academic and social life, or their perspective on what a healthy relationship may resemble. Further, a child's age may play a significant role in divorce. Research suggests that while older children tend to suffer when parents' divorce, younger children, in most cases, suffer more. In this thesis, I will examine the short and long-term adjustments of children who go through their parents' divorce and the specific behavioral problems that may come with the dissolution of their parents' marriage.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my dad, the late Alton Williams, and to my mom, Margaret Howard, for giving me life, and for showing me that although divorce has a significant impact on the family, that their love for their only child always remained the same. To my husband, Thomas Owens, thank you for proving to me that you need us just as much as we need you. To my baby girl, Tia Monaih Owens, thank you for being our constant reminder of why we love being a family.

I would like to also express my deepest gratitude to my Professor/Advisor Mrs. Julia Wrigley for her unwavering support and guidance.

Lastly, with great appreciation and humility I thank GOD for his constant presence in my and my family's lives.

LOVE

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### **Family**

An anonymous quote states: "F.A.M.I.L.Y is one of the strongest words anyone can say because it is believed to stand for: "Father and Mother I Love You!!". Whether dwelling together or separated, the family constitutes a fundamental social unit, consisting of the parent(s) and their offspring. Parents play a vital role in the emotional growth of children. They help them define who they are as human beings and influence how each adapts to societal norms. The home is the first place children discover the importance of values and what it means to belong. From childhood youth are conditioned to believe that family comprised of a mother, father, and children; but family is defined as "a group of people who are united by ties of partnership and parenthood consisting of a pair of adults and their socially recognized children that is otherwise known as the known as nucleic or elementary family, or a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, constituting a single household and interacting with each other in their respective social positions" (Encyclopedia Britannica online, 2017). While this definition focuses on what might be considered traditional families, the ties of "partnership" can include, and increasingly do, unmarried couples who choose to live together in a family formation and families can also include single parents living with children. Whatever the form of the family, the primary role of parents has always been to guide their kids and to ensure that their needs are satisfied. From birth, infants rely on parents for protection, emotionally and physically. By the simplest touch or the sound of a voice, babies can determine whose voice they hear. "Before birth, the brain is being set up to learn a language," says Barbara Kisilevsky a nursing professor at Queens University in Ontario" (abcnews.go.com). Thus, before a baby is born, it begins to develop emotional ties to its surroundings. As children grow, they look to their role models to

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determine what acceptable behavior look likes. Because divorce is prevalent, as are the births of children to single mothers, social understandings of families have broadened.

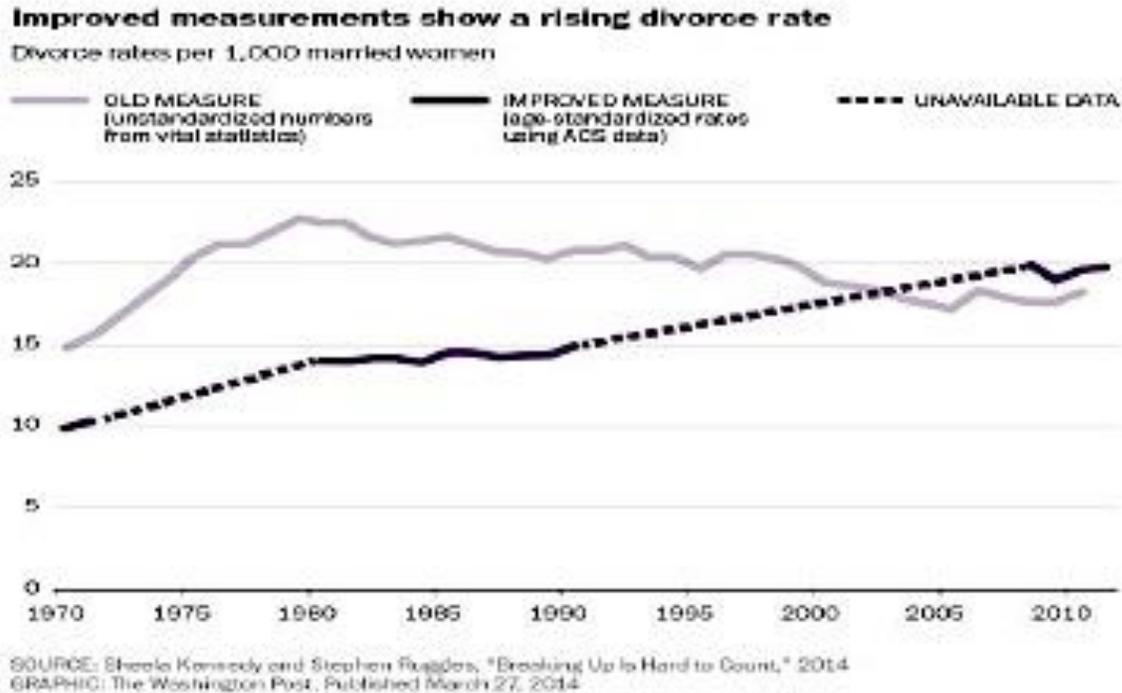
### **DIVORCE**

The first occurrence of divorce in the American colonies is said to have occurred around 1643, at a Puritan court in Massachusetts. Since then, there has been an increase in the number of kids who now live in single-parent households. In the 1960's, Census data showed that 9 percent of children were a product of single-parent families. In some of these cases, the parents were never married while in other cases the parents divorced. Over the last several decades, this percentage has increased by 28 percent (McLanahan and Percheski 2008). In fact, Sheela Kennedy and Stephen Ruggles from the University of Minnesota found that the divorce rate hasn't declined since 1980, "And when they controlled for changes in the age composition of the married population (the U.S. population was younger in 1980, and younger couples have a higher risk for divorce), they found that the age-standardized divorce rate has actually risen by an astonishing 40 percent since then" (The Washington Post 2017).

The African American community suffers from the highest percentage of divorce. According to Cherlin (1992) and to Farley and Allen (1987) in the 1970's over 68 percent of African American couples were married and lived together; this number has dramatically decreased over the years. "According to the 2000 U.S. Bureau of Census, "16% of African American males were married, compared to 60% of White males. On the other hand, 37% of Black females were married in comparison to 57% of White females" (Harris & Bradley p.2. 2004).

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Figure 1. Divorce Rates from 1970-2010



As divorce rates continue to increase, the laws that govern divorce have changed over time. Judicial courts deemed it necessary to oversee the amount of child support and alimony awarded to a parent and exerts particular control over what is known as fault-based divorces. Although fault-based divorce laws still exist in many states, the Family Support Act of 1988 introduced the no-fault divorce law, which enables individuals to divorce without proving just cause for the divorce. This bill was also passed as a result of the increase in single-mother households and the low amounts of child support mothers or fathers often received (Peters 1986). The very fact that divorce rates have strikingly increased and that new laws governing divorce have been established show that divorce could easily be regarded as part of the martial process. In the past, divorce was viewed as an immoral event; it was considered a social disgrace, especially if children were involved. Today, many people divorce for a multitude of reasons. Marriage is perceived by many as a contract rather than a commitment made before God.

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Perhaps the entry of many women into the labor force has created a non-traditional view of marriage. Or it could be that traditional marital standards are too much to bear in modern times. How much does divorce impact the lives of children involved? In what ways are children affected? What is known about what features of divorce cause adverse consequences for children? How will the effects show outwardly? This paper seeks to examine the effects of divorce on children's well-being and will assess the extent to which divorce contributes to children's behavior problems.

Sociologist and functionalist Talcott Parson argued that a stable social system influences an individual's value within society. He believes families should be aware of the gender roles that are assigned to them upon formation. While men take on the "instrumental role," providing financial support, women take on the "expressive role," ensuring that the emotional needs of the children and the husband are met. Parson emphasizes that in order for a marriage to be successful, the family structure must be stable (Parson and Bales 1955, p.315). Throughout the years, research indicates that there has been a decrease in marital stability and attributes this lack to several different factors. Stevenson and Wolfers (2007) view technological changes and women's economic gains as having spurred the rise of divorce. More women are spending less time on household chores due to the myriad of household appliances that have been invented, which decreases the amount of time spent on manual labor. Washers, dryers, and dishwashers are examples of products that have increased productivity in homes and have allowed women to become a significant part of the workforce. Ultimately, the time demands that are associated with women's entry into the workforce can, in fact, strain a marriage, have an adverse impact on how children perceive divorce and can have profound effects on their psychological and emotional well-being. Children, regardless of age, require some level of loyalty, trust, security, safety, and

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a sense of belonging. During and after the divorce process, each child experiences different levels of psychological trauma. Studies have shown that children who experience divorce often have an increase in antisocial behavior, anxiety, and depression, along with increased delinquent and aggressive behavior. Self-blame and abandonment fears are also known contributing factors. Depending on how parents handle the divorce process these feelings can easily diminish within a child. Statistics show that in the United States, more than a million children have experienced some level of social and cognitive harm from a parental divorce that has left them vulnerable (Fagan and Churchill 2012). On the other hand, Weiss (1979, p. 47)) suggests that divorce allows children to "grow up a little faster." The change in family structure may require a different set of rules and responsibilities which may come in handy later in life. In addition, children of divorce often assume more responsibility at an earlier age than their peers. I can attest that this is attributed to that the fact that single parents who work are unable to afford a babysitter; as a result, children are forced to stay at home alone or have to do more chores at home. Weiss also argues that the consequences of divorce—additional responsibility and following a different set of rules—could help make children more competent in social and practical matters during adulthood. Throughout his study, he does not take into account those families who have children with disabilities that need assistance or help in understanding the divorce process.

## **EFFECTS DIVORCE HAS ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY**

The Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School defines a disability as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of an individual's major life activities.” (42 U.S. Code § 12102 ). Children with disabilities often need assistance throughout their lives (McCallion and Nickle, 2008; Shattuck et al., 2007; Smith, Maenner, and Seltzer 2012; Taylor and Mailick, 2014), as functional and behavioral patterns often change. Although there are

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limited studies on the effects of divorce on those families who have children with disabilities, in households where a child has been diagnosed with a disability, parents are usually the primary caretakers. Other family members who reside in the home with a disabled child often assist in the caregiving process as well (Seltzer, Greenberg, Orsmond, Lounds and Stoneman 2005). A family friend of mine lives in the same home with her autistic nephew. Since her sister passing, she is now the primary caregiver and her son has also become significantly involved with raising his cousin and has decided that in the event something happens to his mother, he will continue to take care of his cousin. Having such support systems allow children with special needs to have a sense of security and balance (Hodapp, Urbano and Burke 2010). I also have an aunt who has autism due to a house fire. She had always lived with my grandparents when they were alive, but since their passing, my aunts have been her primary caretakers. Family members play a vital role in the aiding process, and must be willing and able to adapt and accommodate the needs of the child while utilizing support groups, and finding resources that specialize in developing interpersonal and active coping skills that could assist a family who has loved ones with disabilities (Pruchno and Meeks 2004; Smith, Seltzer, Tager-Flusberg, Greenberg and Carter 2008; Woodman 2014). These anecdotes help people to understand why family plays such a huge part in the life of someone who is disabled (Orsmond and Seltzer 2007; Taylor, Greenberg, Seltzer, & Floyd, 2008) and how the separation of a family member can directly affect the child.

Reichman, Corman, and Noonan (2004) conducted a longitudinal study of mothers and fathers who lived together 12-18 months after given birth to a baby with special needs. After completion of the study, they found that having a child with disabilities reduces the likelihood of the parents remaining in the same household together by 10 percent. However, parents desire to stay in the relationship increased by 6 percent. (See chart below) Although in the table below the

## CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

participants differed in marital ages, the number of children born and lost during the marriage and birth order, there was only a 2 percent difference in the divorce rates of those with or without children with disabilities.

Figure 2. Marital History for parents of a child with DD V.S. a child with no disabilities

Marital History and Background for Parents of a Child with Developmental Disabilities (DD) and those of a child with no disabilities (Comparison)

Variables <sup>a</sup>	DD (n=190) M (SD) or %	Comparison (n=7,251) M (SD) or %	t or $\chi^2$ (df)
<i>Marital History<sup>b</sup></i>			
Still married	67.89%	70.65%	.68 (2)
Death of spouse	10.00%	9.27%	
Divorce	22.11%	20.08%	
<i>Parental Characteristics</i>			
Age (years)	64.77 (4.72)	64.70 (3.47)	- .31 (7439)
Gender (% female)	51.58%	53.72%	.34 (1)
<i>Educational attainment</i>			
High school grad or less	58.29%	58.25%	.57 (2)
Some college	14.44%	16.21%	
BA or higher	27.27%	25.54%	
Family religion (% Catholic)	38.42%	41.89%	.91 (1)
<i>Marital Characteristics</i>			
Age at marriage (years)	22.38 (3.65)	21.97 (3.11)	- 1.78 (7431) <sup>†</sup>
Time lag to the first child birth (months)	23.12 (26.24)	21.39 (19.79)	-1.18 (7439)
Number of children born during marriage	3.47 (1.44)	3.08 (1.24)	- 4.35 (7439) <sup>***</sup>
Death of any child	14.74%	6.52%	19.94 (1) <sup>***</sup>
Target child's birth order (% first born)	36.45%	44.27%	4.90 (1) <sup>*</sup>

American journal on intellectual and developmental disabilities \_aaid.2015, vol. 120, no. 6, 514–526

In a similar study, the researchers (Hatton, Emerson, Graham, Blacher, and Llewellyn 2010) found that preschool children with a disability often reside in one parent households compared to couples whose children did not have special needs. These results applied to children between the ages of nine months to three to five years old.

A larger study conducted by Urbano and Hodapp (2007) discovered that families who had children with Down syndrome had a 7.6 percent divorce rate; parents who had children with

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other special needs experienced a divorce rate of 10.8 percent, and families that had children without any signs of disability had an 11.2 percent divorce rate.

Sabbeth and Leventhal (1984) conducted a comprehensive review on how the illness or disability of a child affects marriages. Out of the twenty-three studies they examined, only seven studies included measures of marital discord; four of the studies reported signs of stress within the marriage and while the other three studies found no significant difference.

Kazak and Clark (1986) completed a study that examined children who had spina bifida, and severe or mild impairments, and how it affected the marital status of parents. The families whose child (ren) had a disability exhibited higher levels of marital distress. Theoretically, the greater the impairment increases the level of marital discord. Kazak (1987) conducted another study analyzing the parents of 125 children with and without disabilities.

The findings suggested that although mothers of the children with disabilities admitted to being extremely stressed, the marital satisfaction of both groups was equivalent. This study concludes that divorce rates do not increase because of the disability of the child, but are based on a host of circumstances. Ideologically, families with disabled children divorce for the same reasons as other families, including the inability to work together, lack of economic stability, and parental stress.

## **PRESCHOOLERS AND ADOLESCENTS WHOSE PARENTS DIVORCE**

Researchers have found that preschoolers are the children most vulnerable to divorce, due to their lack of cognitive ability to fully understand the divorce process (Wallerstein and Kelly 1979). Although there is limited study, research has shown that the short-term effects often include a high level of regression, acute separation anxiety, and abandonment issues. Children at such a young age often feel as though they are the blame for the parental dissolution. Yet it is

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hard to predict what long term effects divorce has on preschoolers due to their age. As they get older, their level of perception increases along with their sense of awareness. Adolescents or school-aged children are often fully conscious of the turmoil that exists within the family, and because of this, some research indicates that they do not experience external behavioral problems due to their cognitive development and their ability to express emotions (Hetherington 1981). Other findings indicate that adolescents show significant signs of anger, depression, anxiety, guilt and the inability to trust which is heightened by the level of conflict that they are exposed to prior to and after divorce (Wallerstein and J.S 1991). Not only do these kids experience behavioral and academic problems, but they also report a higher level of child abuse, or have witnessed and remember their parents' physical altercations (Dong et al. 2004; Oliver, Kuhns, and Pomeranz 2006).

A preliminary report was created from a longitudinal study conducted in 1971, to examine the memory, perception and the psychological development that children of divorce experience between the ages of two and a half and eighteen years of age. 131 children from 60 families in Northern California took part in this study, and a follow-up study was conducted throughout a ten years span. Eighteen months after the divorce, the report uncovered those short-term effects that some psychologists agree that preschoolers often succumbed to actually had a profound effect on the boys rather than girls. Boys often have an increased level of trouble in school, at home and in their ability to play with others (Wallerstein, J. S., & Lewis, J. M. (2004).

At the five year mark after divorce, observation showed that children's ability to adjust to the change in the family dynamics is solely based on the comfort level that the parents display during post-divorce and while living together. If the transition is not chaotic, then children tend

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to adapt. Unfortunately, the report showed that one-third of the youngsters in the sample study experienced some level of depression.

One of the earlier papers derived from this study discussed clinical interviews that were conducted on 30 of the 33 preschoolers who were initially involved in the study who were now between twelve and eighteen years of age, along with their parents. Out of this age group, ninety percent of the children remained in the home with their mothers, while fifty-three percent lived in homes where the parent was remarried, and many of these remarriages occurred within three years of the divorce. The majority of the children remained in school and stayed in a middle class environment although half of the fathers lived across the country. Six of the youngsters had some involvement with the law that included petty thefts or drug sales. Overall, there did not seem to be considerable signs of hardship. Those children who were now older (between nineteen and twenty-eight years of age) expressed how they still remembered how they felt while their parents were going through a divorce and many often reminisce about their lives prior to the divorce, while younger children had no recollection of the traumatic experiences. This report determined that although preschoolers have less cognitive ability to understand the divorce process, preschool children are less consciously troubled. The study found that the emotional distress of preschool children is short-term, while the older children continue to struggle with the inability to erase the unpleasant memories (Wallerstein 1984).

Another study on the short-term and long-term effects of divorce and its impact on young people was conducted by Forehand et al. (1997). It was an assessment of children and young adults designed to measure whether victims of divorce suffer from a decrease in academic readiness, grade point average, and standard intelligence test scores. Two assessments were administered—one utilized the family court system, and the other utilized newspapers and flyers,

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distributed throughout the community to recruit individuals to participate in the study. 251 participants were contacted via telephone and mail and paid \$50 for their involvement. Six years later, following the assessments, each divorced parent completed a questionnaire. A variety of sources were used as a means of promoting validity and consistency in the findings. Reports from teachers, children involved, and school records were analyzed. The letter grades that students received in math, science, social studies, and English were converted into numeric grades. During the assessment the effects divorce had on young adult's levels of anxiety, antisocial behavior, aggression, and their educational achievement were also factored in. The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) approach was employed, and the results showed that young adults and adolescents showed a significant decrease in academic preparedness. Research suggests that the process of divorce can be extremely overwhelming for all parties. Children may feel neglected and may feel as though their parents no longer care about their well-being, or parental conflict can lead to academic decline. Being less academically prepared can perhaps have an adverse effect on a young person's desire or ability to develop the necessary scholarly skills that are needed to further their education. The fact that children of divorce experience different strands of emotions makes it imperative that parents work closely together in ensuring the stability of the children.

### **FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS AFTER DIVORCE**

Father-daughter relationships are likely to suffer more emotionally prior to the divorce than father-son relationships (Cooney 1994; Frank 2007; Hetherington and Elmore 2004; Nielson 2011). Some fathers find it difficult to maintain a relationship with their children, which results in fewer visitations (Cooney and Uhlenberg 1990; Umberson 1987). Fathers may

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ultimately feel they have less in common with their daughters due to gender differences, and because girls are generally closer to their mothers, their relationship with their fathers is often underdeveloped. The fact that most men don't seek a support system and internalize their problems means they often experience increased levels of mental stress and health (Reissman 1990), which can make it difficult to be actively involved with their children. Studies show that men often experience higher levels of emotional distress and some experience suicidal thoughts (Reissman & Gerstel 1985; Rosengren et al. 1989; Wallerstein and Kelly 1980), while daughters often suffer from emotional and psychological problems (Amato & Dorius 2010; Carlson 2006; King and Soboboleski 2006; K. Stamps, Booth and King 2009; Stewart 2003). Often earning bad grades, in some cases, they drop out of high school. (Chadwick 2002; Krohn and Bogan 2001; Menning 2006). This study also provided insight into the girls who do not have regular contact with their fathers and who are more likely to participate in rebellious acts and to be arrested for breaking the law (Coley and Medeiros 2007; C. Harper & McLanahan 2004); they have greater self-esteem issues (Dunlop, Burns and Bermingham 2001) and partake in substantial drug and alcohol use (Hoffmann 2002; Lerner 2004), engage in sexual activity at an early age and are more likely to become pregnant as teenagers (Ellis et al., 2003; Nielson 2011).

It is a crucial part of a young girl's development to womanhood that she develops a stable relationship with her father. Girls are emotional beings who crave intimacy and closeness, and if their relationship with their father seems out of place, it could have profound effects on them psychologically and in their relationships with other people. Low levels of fatherly interactions with daughters can result in insecurity issues, along with promiscuity at an early age (Ellis et al., 2003; Nielson 2011). Such behavior interrupts the development of the child, and they can experience externalized and internalized turmoil for the rest of their life.

## CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

The charts below show the percentage of teenage girls who experience sex and pregnancy at a young age as a result of divorce and feelings of inadequacy.

Figure 3. Intercourse at 14 years old or younger

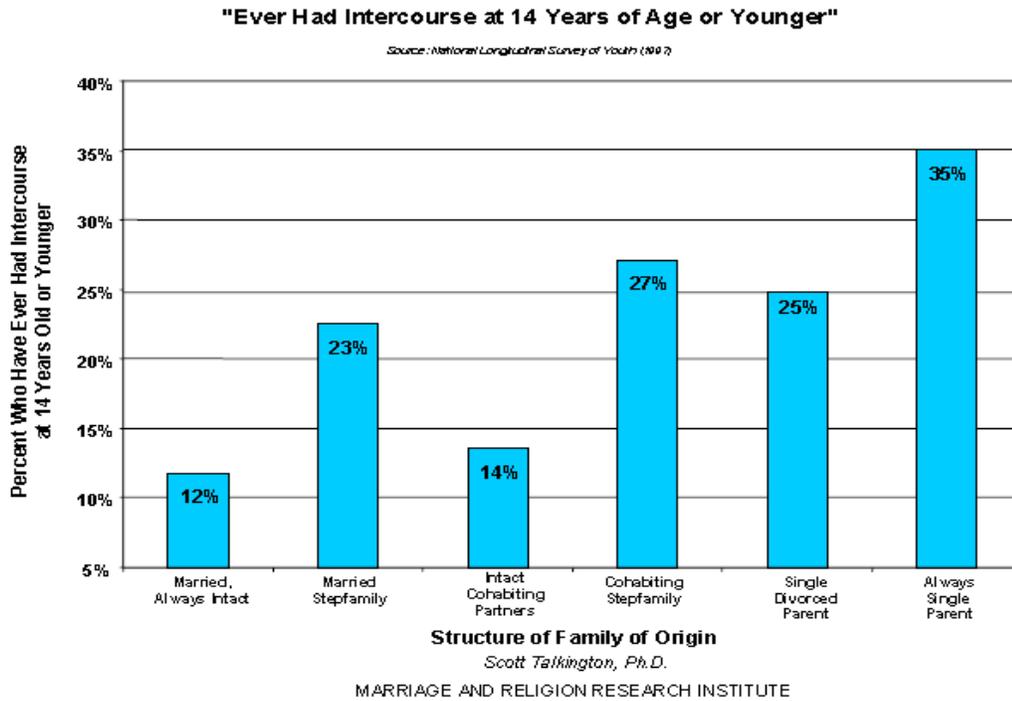
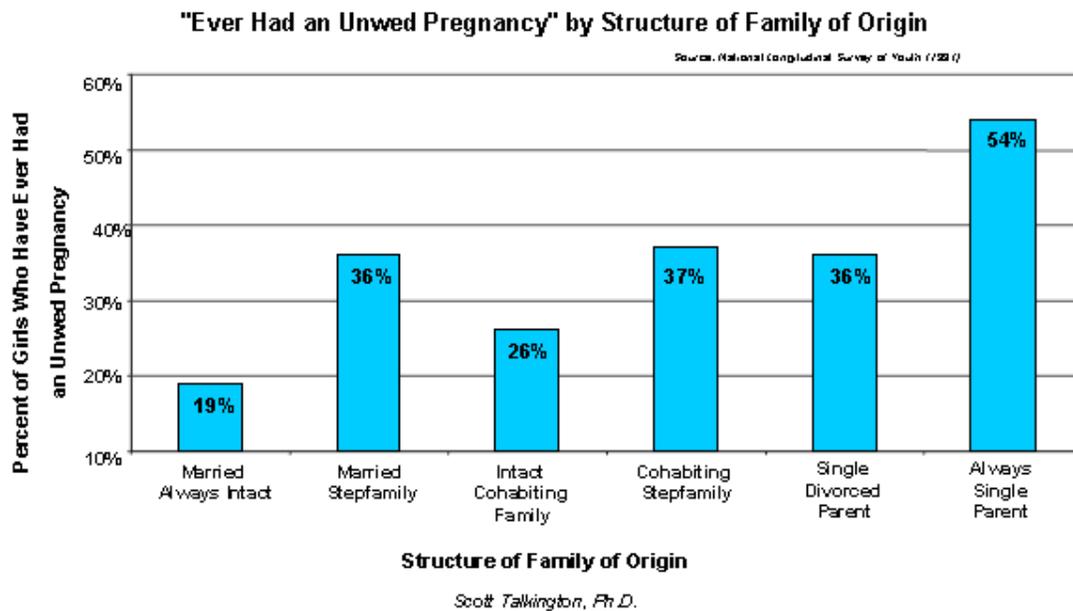


Figure 4. Unwed pregnancy's



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Moreover, if fathers have been active in girls' lives, they often look to their fathers for approval because they were the first males to love them and their opinions and thoughts are valued. Children may look to their role models to determine what acceptable behavior actually looks like. Certainly, one can see how divorce can directly affect the father-daughter relationship due to the change in circumstances. On the other hand, why do some fathers feel the need to distance themselves when the love for the children remains the same? In an episode of Oprah's Life Class, Bishop T.D. Jakes concluded, "It's not a lack of love that stops an estranged father from reconnecting with his child; it's the fear of rejection." Knowing that divorce could change the dynamics of the nuclear family, some fathers are unaware of how to form stable relationships with their children outside of the household. Bishop Jakes recommends that every dad needs to "court" his child so that the lines of communication remain open. In the book *Always Dad*, Paul Mandelstein (2006) advises divorced dads to find ways to stay relevant in their daughter's lives. He suggests that if divorced parents find a way to work together, father-daughter relationships could potentially be saved. Although father-daughter relationships are often strained, throughout history, substantial evidence has also been gathered on the effects that divorce has on father and son relationships.

### **FATHER AND SON RELATIONSHIPS AFTER DIVORCE**

A longitudinal study was conducted that tracked over 6,400 boys for more than 20 years. Findings suggested that children who grew up in a household without their biological father were more prone to commit crimes that led to incarceration (Harper and McLanahan 1998). Other studies show that children of divorced parents are up to six times more likely to experience delinquent behavior than children from intact families (Larson Swyers and Larson 1995). Boys

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raised without their fathers were more than twice as likely to end up in jail as those who lived with their fathers, and 70 percent of incarcerated adults come from single-parent homes (Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Children, Marriage and Family Law 2004). In one study, adolescents in single-parent and kinship families were “significantly more likely than adolescents in intact families to report having been in a serious physical fight, shot, or stab someone,” with the challenges of divorce for children are often manifested in their actions (Franke 2000). Anger and frustration are key examples of the emotional and psychological trauma that children of divorce face. These feelings are often connected to insecurities and fears. The fact that a child who is of age has to witness their home fall apart can create levels of uncertainty and fear about the future.

## **INCREASED CRIME RATES**

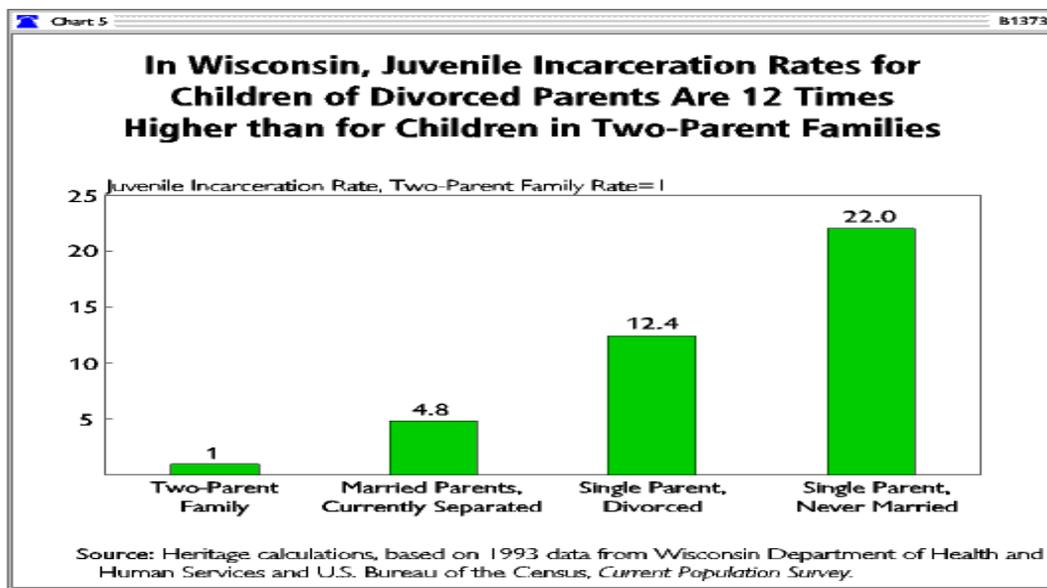
In single-parent households, families often experience substantial financial distress compared to married households (Garfinkel and MacLanahan 1986). Systemically, more mothers are granted custody while fathers are granted visitation rights (Weitzman 1985). The rise in divorced and single parent household's rates has led to the accumulation of non-custodial fathers' refusal to pay child support which has resulted in a \$4-billion deficit in the U.S. In turn, the change in economic stability frequently draws these families into more affordable but 'bad' neighborhoods (Wilson 1987). Demographically, these children attend schools where a high number of students live in single-parent households and have significantly higher rates of violent offenses than students attending schools where more students came from two-parent families (Anderson 2002).

A policy brief completed in 2005 by the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy (IMAPP), discovered that there is a significant decrease in both the individual risk and rates of

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crime when children come from a two-parent household, indicating that a healthy family structure and support are instrumental in the development of children's overall behavior. A family that can sustain divorce without making it problematic can enhance a child's ability to perform better academically while encountering less juvenile delinquent behavior. The most critical family characteristics that help youth avoid associations with delinquent peers are parental supervision, care, and support (Kumpfer 1999). The figure below displays the overall effects of divorce amongst juveniles:

*Figure 5 . Juvenile Incarceration rates in Wisconsin for children of divorce*



In 2007, law enforcement agencies reported 2.18 million arrests of juveniles. Juvenile delinquent behavior is believed to be underrepresented due to the limited methods of collecting data. Most reports are provided by the juvenile justice system and are based on juvenile justice agencies' self-reporting. Reports conclude that 16 percent of juvenile arrests involve violent crimes such as murder, rape, and assault. Burglary, theft, and arson make up 26 percent of all property crime arrests (Puzzanchera 2009). Other offenses include gambling, disorderly conduct,

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weapons possession, illicit drug/liquor violation (including DUI) and prostitution. It is important to note that some misdemeanor crimes go unreported while serious offenses involving injury and substantial economic loss are reported more often.

It is estimated that \$14.4 billion is spent annually on the federal, state and local juvenile justice systems; this includes the costs of law enforcement and the courts, detention, residential placement, incarceration and substance abuse treatment. However, this figure does not account for the costs of probation, physical and mental health care services, child welfare and family services, school costs and the costs to victims. It is estimated that combined spending on juvenile justice could exceed \$28.8 billion (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University 2004).

Policymakers are beginning to recognize the link between family structure and juvenile crime. An investigation into the cause of juvenile delinquency shows that there is an association between family structure and the criminal behavior of these minors, even when socioeconomic status is controlled. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 72 percent of jailed juveniles come from a disintegrated family (Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Children Marriage and Family Law 2005). A study conducted in Wisconsin found that the rate of incarceration of children whose parents were divorced was 12 times higher than children in two-parent families (Fagan 2001). This does not imply that young people who are not incarcerated are not directly affected by marital dissolution.

## DEPRESSION AND YOUNG ADULTS

Depression amongst young adults was hypothesized by Drill in 1987; she addresses the issue of depression amongst college students whose parents had divorced in the New York/New Jersey Metropolitan area. Findings showed that these populations of students were more

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depressed than peers from an intact home, which can ultimately have an adverse impact on the college experience. Approximately 4,693 first-semester freshmen at a large, public university completed a survey developed by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP); they answered questions about their behavior in high school, future goals, college readiness, and expectations during their orientation in the summer of 2007. Based on their responses, the results of a logistic regression analysis determined that those students who experienced parental divorce have lower academic achievements during their first year of college. When conducting the survey, several variables were considered, as indicated in Figure 6 below.

*Figure 6 . Variables Included*

**TABLE 1** Description of Variables Included in Analyses

	<i>n</i>	%
Divorced family	959	20.4
Female	2,632	56.1
First generation	775	16.5
African American	201	4.3
American Indian or Native American	53	1.1
Asian American	520	11.1
Hispanic or Latino	112	2.4
International	80	1.7
Pell Grant recipient	879	18.7
In-state resident	3,117	66.4
Lived in residence halls	3,954	84.3
Business college	299	6.4
Education college	525	11.2
Science and engineering college	725	15.4
Biological sciences college	299	6.4
Food, agriculture, and natural sciences college	280	6.0
Retention to second year	4,174	88.9
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cumulative GPA	3.141	0.649
Academic ability compared with peers	4.172	0.694
Drive to achieve compared with peers	4.136	0.797
ACT scores	26.131	3.940
Age	18.124	0.455

Note. *N* = 4,693. GPA = grade point average.

*SORIA(2014)*

According to the results of the study, students who were victims of divorce had a notably lower grade point average than their peers.

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Figure 7. First Year Students GPA

**TABLE 2** Regression Model Predicting First-Year Students' Cumulative Grade Point Average

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	Significance
(Constant)	.410	.365		
Divorced family	-.080	.022	-.049	***
Female	.133	.018	.102	***
First generation	-.066	.025	-.038	**
African American	-.144	.046	-.045	**
American Indian or Native American	-.500	.082	-.081	***
Asian American	-.102	.031	-.049	**
Hispanic or Latino	-.168	.057	-.040	**
International	.070	.068	.014	
Age	.046	.019	.032	*
Pell Grant recipient	-.026	.025	-.016	
ACT scores	.046	.003	.278	***
In-state resident	-.039	.019	-.028	*
Lived in residence halls	.118	.026	.066	***
Business college	.174	.032	.076	***
Education college	.047	.031	.023	
Science and engineering college	-.125	.027	-.069	***
Biological sciences college	.039	.037	.015	
Food, agriculture, and natural sciences college	-.141	.037	-.051	***
Academic ability compared with peers	.052	.015	.055	**
Drive to achieve compared with peers	.095	.011	.117	***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>				19.2%

Note. *N* = 4,693.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

SORIA(2014)

Parental separation: effects on children and implications for services

When determining how many first-year students continue their academic journeys the subsequent year, variables indicate that the likelihood of a college student of divorce returning was reduced by 3 percent based on an 88.9 percent retention rate. Many studies have found that based on demographic variables, pre-college academic indicators, college experiences, and academic motivation control samples, it is clear that child victims of divorce, who are now

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college students, have a harder time academically, financially, and mentally because of their parents' split (Aseltine 1996; Cartwright 2006; Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale and McRae 1998; Christopoulos 2001; Laumann-Billings and Emery 2000; Wallerstein and Lewis 2004). Brackney and Karabenick (1995); Kessler, Foster, Saunders, and Stang (1995); Kitzrow (2003) agreed that divorce was a factor that could influence students' academic achievement and retention. The effects associated with divorce begin to change as one becomes an adult.

## ADULT CHILDREN AFFECTED BY DIVORCE

As children moved into the adult phase, also considered the intimacy versus isolation stage by researchers, those who are able to go through this juncture without conflict are known to connect with others more effectively. Unfortunately, young adults who are children of divorced parents have difficulty developing these skills, which could lead to isolation and loneliness throughout adulthood. The relationships of young adults are directly correlated to what they have witnessed as children (Erickson 1980).

“Erikson emphasized three elements of the capacity for intimacy: the willingness to make a commitment to another person, ability to share at a deeply personal level, and capacity to communicate inner thoughts and feelings. Individuals who favorably resolve the so-called ‘Intimacy vs. Isolation’ psychosocial crisis is, then, high on these three components. Isolation, at the opposite pole of the spectrum, is characterized by an inability to commit, share deep feelings, and communicate.” (Kacerguis and Adams 1979)

These issues related to intimacy can continue throughout adulthood (Whitbourne, Sneed, and Sayer 2008). Those adults who witness their parents' divorce also experience emotional and psychological effects that can impede their ability to sustain a relationship that requires intimacy

## CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

and companionship later (Duran-Aydintug 1997). When parents' divorce while their children are young adults, Erikson (1980) theorized that these young adults are extremely vulnerable to the implication of divorce, which could hinder intimacy and may serve as a predictor for divorce in their life. Thus, Erikson suggests that those individuals who can cope with any intimacy issues as a young adult are often able to maintain stable marital relationships when they get older.

Conversely, young adults who are isolated are less likely to sustain a relationship, even if they enter a marriage. Psychologist Albert Bandura's theory on social cognitive and social learning argues that a person's individualistic behavior is influenced by environmental and personal factors such as personal beliefs, and expectations (Corey 2009). To interpret the relationships and attitudes of adult children who were victims of divorce, Segrin, Taylor, and Altman (2005) applied the theory of social cognition to their research. They discovered that adult children who had experienced their parents' divorces were less likely to engage in long-term, committed relationships because of the hostile environment they had endured as children. As a result of observing contentious relationships between their parents, adult children learn from an early age that marriage does not always lead to lifelong commitments and accept that divorce is an option when marriage is unstable (Corey 2009; Segrin et al. 2005).

## BLENDING OF FAMILIES

Although there is an increase in divorce and a high level of turmoil that is usually associated with marital discord, remarriage and recoupling have become a common occurrence in the United States (Ganong and Coleman 2004; Teachman and Tedrow 2008). This can result in the children living in a household with a stepfamily (Mahoney 2008). Stepfamilies usually exist after the dissolution of marriage or the death of a parent. In the past, marriage was often required to define a stepfamily; in today's society, people no longer see marriage as a

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requirement to cohabit with someone you love. An increasing number of individuals have chosen to live together as a family without the formality of marriage. The blending of families often includes children from previous relationships. Depending on the custody arrangements following divorce such change can be devastating to the children. The following terms are used to define members of a stepfamily:

1. stepparent: a non-biological parent:
2. stepchild: a non-biological child brought into the family by marriage or cohabitation with the biological parent
3. Stepsiblings (stepbrother, stepsister): siblings who are not related biologically, whose parents are married to each other or cohabiting long-term.

An estimated 10 percent of children in the U.S are members of stepfamilies (Bumpass and Raley 1995; Sweeney 2010). Research on stepfamilies has lagged considerably behind research on divorce and is still a young area of study (Booth and Dunn 1994; Ganong and Coleman, 1994; Jeynes 1997). In the United States divorce rates have been studied throughout the years and the remarriage rates continue to rise (Amato 2010; Smock 2000; Sweeney 2010; U.S. Census Bureau 2000). Could this be an indication that people like the idea of being married? Studies completed by Heyman (1992) and Milne (1989) found that remarriage benefits children from divorced homes, especially if the stepparent is of the same gender as the child, and there are potential socioeconomic status increases. Other research by Amato and Keith (1991) found that having stepparents creates different kinds of emotion, including; depression, lowered self-esteem, and anxiety in children. Many children experienced internalized, externalized, and academic issues, combined with risky behavior (Coleman, Ganong, and Fine 2000). In order to understand how children are affected by divorce and their subsequent stepfamilies, a study of

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1,088 children between the ages of ten and sixteen was conducted. The study examined the relationship between the child (ren) and their step-parent. The purpose of the survey was to provide clinical insight, on the positive outcomes of stepfamilies while evaluating how the roles and characteristics of stepfamilies help shape the child (ren) (Cherlin, 1978, 2004).

Three research questions were addressed:

1. Will the role of the family contribute to an increase in stepfamily relationship-quality for children?
2. Will parental-subsystem characteristics increase levels of stepfamily relationship quality for children?
3. What resources will contribute to an increase in stepfamily relationship quality for children?

According to research findings, as long as a divorced mother ensures the needs of her children are met, and the lines of communication remain open, children will be able to transition into the new family dynamics smoothly. When children witness a harmonious relationship between their parent and step-parent, they tend to have a healthy relationship with their step- parent. In a 1981 national study of stepparents and stepchildren, each was asked who they considered a family member. The kids were between the ages of eleven and sixteen, so they were acutely aware of the questions being posed. 15 percent of the parents who had stepchildren did not include them as family, while 31 percent of the children who had a stepfather did not include them in the process either (Furstenberg 1987). Marsiglio (1992) believes these percentages have a lot to do with the ages of the children when they became a part of a stepfamily. Younger children tend to be more responsive to the idea of a stepfamily, making it easier to establish a relationship. Secondly, the role that the non-custodial parents play in the child's life can determine the

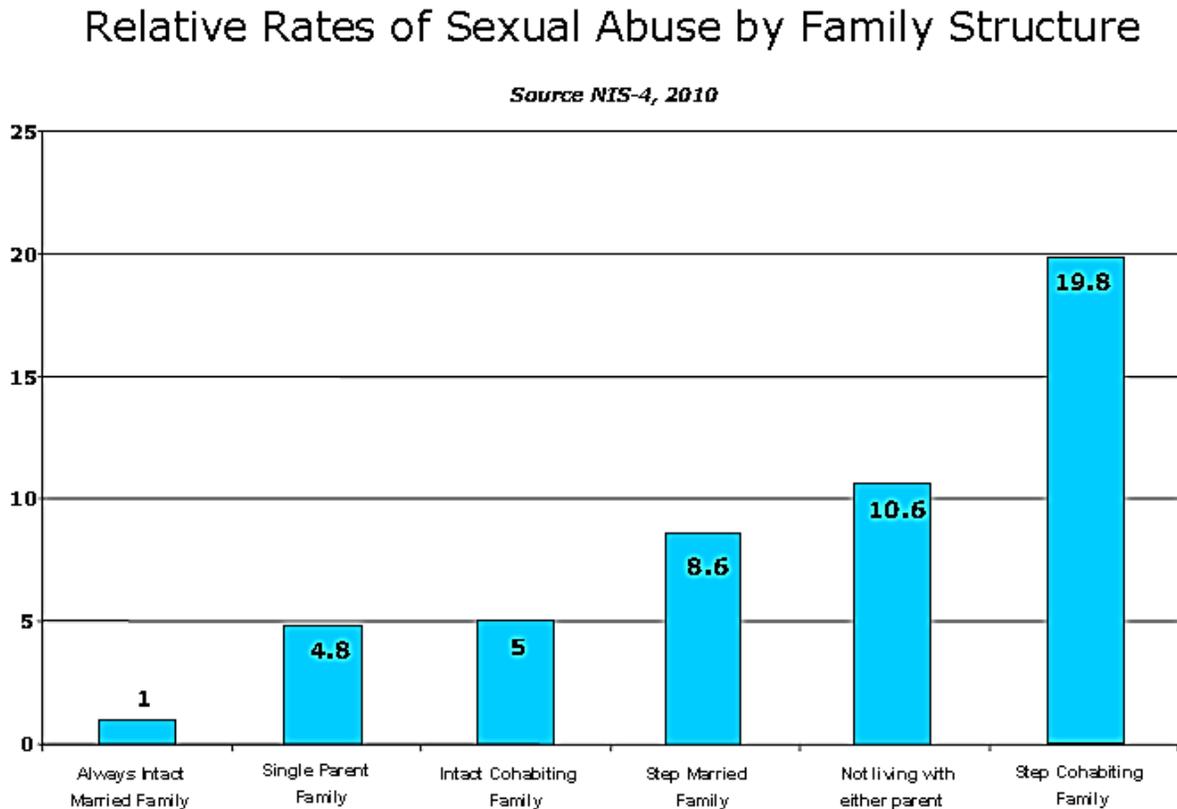
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stepparent–child relationship. The study has shown that the stepmother and child relationship can be harder to achieve than the stepfather and child relationship (White 1993).

Ideally, stepmothers are often trying to fit into a role that has already been filled by the biological mother and because many children of divorce often live with their mothers following divorce makes it can be difficult for the stepmother to find a comfortable place to fit in. On the other hand, fathers are usually the non-custodial parent, and the child may have less interaction. In the event the biological parent is not around, then the child may be more willing to accept greater involvement by the stepfather. Lastly, Marsiglio believes that the temperament of the child is also a key factor.

In addition, there has also been some concern in regards to the level of sexual abuse that children of stepfamilies experience. Reported cases suggest that stepfamilies have higher percentages of physical abuse, homicide, neglect, and injuries than in two-parent households (Burgess and Garbarino 1983; Daly and Wilson 1981,1985,1987,1991 Gil 1970; Giles-Sims and Finkelhor 1984, Kimball, Stewart, Conger and Burgess 1980; Wilson, Daly and Weghorst 1980). In a retrospective study, 17 percent of girls were sexually abused by their primary stepfathers, and those rates are significantly higher amongst stepfathers who were not considered a primary caregiver (Russell 1984). The study suggests that these acts of violence that are committed have a lot to do with the predator's socio-economic background, drugs, alcohol and of course mental instability.

Figure 8. Sexual Abuse by Family Structure



“Margo Wilson and Martin Daly (2012) professors of psychology at McMaster University, Canada, reported that children two years old and younger are 70 to 100 times more likely to be killed at the hands of stepparents than at the hands of biological parents. (Younger children are more vulnerable because they are so much weaker physically)”.

Although many studies used remarriages and children’s academic performances as metrics for comparing the achievement of divorced families, these studies are relatively new and do not give definitive information because there several variables to consider, such as the length of time and quality of the remarriage (Heyman 1992; Milne 1989). National Education Longitude Surveys (NELS) for the years 1988, 1990 and 1992 were analyzed to examine the social economic status (SES) and achievement gaps of those students whose parents remarried. In the 1988 study, over 24,000 8th-grade students from 1,052 schools participated in the surveys.

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Questionnaires were given to the children, parents and the teachers on external behaviors, academic performance, and classroom conduct, while achievement tests in math, reading, science, social studies, history, civics, and geography were given to students. These tests were “curriculum-based cognitive tests that used item overlapping methods to measure” academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education 1992). The studies had some inconsistencies. The 1990 study did not include the SES of children, while the 1992 study placed all students in the same household category, without distinguishing the type of households they lived in. The 1988 data, however, did provide more detailed information. This analysis involved looking at academics from a broader perspective. Eighteen categories were created, and students were matched by three variables: (1) family structure (intact, divorced and remarried, and divorced single-parent); (2) race (including Black, Hispanic, and White children); (3) SES (low SES/lower 50th percentile or high SES/higher 50th percentile). The analysis showed that those children from stepfamilies have higher SES, but have a lower level of achievement than those from divorced single-parent homes. In fact, data reveals that remarriage might have an adverse impact on academic performance of middle school kids, especially in math. Although researchers continue to look at the SES status as a happy median for reconstituted families, the academic success rate shows distress. This study showed that students whose parents remarried did not do as well as students whose parents had remained married (Jeynes, 1988).

## FATHERS AS THE CUSTODIAL PARENT

Although there is literature available regarding stepfamilies, more and more fathers are obtaining custody of their children. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of single dads raising children alone increased from 275,000 to 1,355,000 (Greif 1987). A study conducted by the Whirlpool Corporation found that 88 percent of women surveyed agreed that it is a mother’s

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responsibility to take care of their members of the family” (Families and Work Institute 1995) and non-custodial moms that don’t are often ostracized and considered incompetent because of the traditional role of mothers. A study of 38 mothers who did not have custody of their children by Todres (1978) found that each mother was emotionally unstable due to their inability to financially provide support to their child(ren). When couples are married, they often work together to ensure the family is financially secure. Zagorsky completed a study of Americans in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, and found that those who were married had a higher net worth than those who were single (Zagorsky 2005). Zagorsky identified three economic beliefs that underlay marital and financial success:

1. People who form a life together often invest more in their future, especially if they intend to raise a family.
2. Married couples often divide financial responsibilities. The two incomes make it easier for each person to pay their share and save.
3. An agreement that describes the role of each partner is usually developed between married couples, ultimately leading to cohesiveness and solidarity.

Once it is determined that the relationship is severed, former couples must decide on the division of assets, including the home, any vehicles, and investments. Many former couples find it difficult to come to an agreement on who gets what. Other painful compromises are often necessary when children are involved such as co-parenting, custody, and visitation (Scott 2010). In the most common cases, the father lives away from the family and supports his ex-wife and their children. According to records on child support, most fathers continuously fail to pay child support. The failure to pay child support by some fathers has forced some mothers to become non-custodial parents. Economic instability, which results from divorce, is one of the leading

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causes of women rescinding their parental rights (Albrecht 1980; Peterson 1989; Reissmann 1990; Weitzman 1985). Especially if a woman was unemployed before the divorce and decides to go to work after divorce, she may have considerable difficulty entering the job market. She may not be lucky enough to find a job that pays enough to sustain her household (Albrecht 1980; Weitzman 1985).

Herrera (1995) conducted a study of 130 mothers that found that the mothers' emotional instability and financial insecurities were the primary reasons for their noncustodial status. Fischer and Cardea (1981) interviewed 17 mothers who believed that their children were "bought off" by fathers who often provided their children with gifts that would encourage the children to agree with them in some cases. In a study of 517 mothers by Greif and Pabst (1988) they found that money and emotional instability were reasons they did not have custody of their children. Additional reasons included children choosing to live with their fathers, court decisions, a mother pursuing a career, a father pressuring his children or their mother, or a father abducting his children. More than half of the mothers in Todres's study experienced shame and guilt, and a few reported lying when asked about their custody situation. Herrera (1995) noted that following the relinquishment of custody, 80% of the mothers cried for days and weeks. Greif and Pabst (1988) reported that the mothers in their study reported that being a noncustodial parent is stressful.

Over the course of time, one-third of the mothers felt comfortable and one-third felt uncomfortable, while one-third had mixed feelings about their noncustodial status. Three studies found that many non-custodial mothers visited their children at least once a month— Herrera (1995) found that 50 percent visited; Greif and Pabst (1988) reported that 63 percent visited, and Furstenburg et al. (1983) found that 69 percent visited. Distance, remarriage, and lack of interest

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are all factors responsible for these sporadic visitations. Some noncustodial mothers may make visitation emotionally difficult for their children if they seek information about the fathers of the children, ultimately making the children feel guilty. Those who voluntarily turned over custody were, for the most part, better adjusted.

In addition, noncustodial mothers are less likely to be court-ordered to pay child support because most mothers lose custody due to lack of income. Furthermore, when fathers are ordered to pay child support, some refuse to pay their ex-wives. Fathers may decline payment from their children's mother because they believe she cannot afford it (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1995).

## **DEPRESSED MOTHERS AND THE EFFECTS ON THE CHILDREN**

The fear that a mother is unable to provide for her family can lead to excessive anxiety, anger, and resentment. It can bring forth emotions that are difficult to handle and can result in depression, social isolation, and health issues. During and after a divorce, parents can experience an array of problems. Sometimes these problems can affect them mentally and how parents handle these problems determines how stable their relationships with their children will be.

In the United States, over 20 million people have been diagnosed with a mood disorder. Those who experience the hardship of divorce have a higher degree of depression and bipolar disorder than those who do not (Kessler, Chiu, Demler and Walters 2005). Because these disorders have been recognized as a contributor to mental instability during and following a divorce, there have been considerable studies on the illness.

Depression contributes to 30 percent of marital dissolutions and has a direct effect on each party (Gotlib and Hammen 1992) and often leads to marital dissatisfaction. Anyone can be diagnosed with depression and mood disorder; depending on the severity of the illness it can cause persistent feelings of sadness and apathy. Depression affects people's emotions, how they

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feel, think, and handle daily activities; sometimes, these individuals even lack the desire to interact with other people. The illness can lead to a host of other emotional and physical problems, which require long-term treatment. Most people with depression use medication, or psychological counseling to manage the illness (mayoclinic.org). Depression is often triggered by a chain of events that are emotionally and psychologically overwhelming. When this occurs within a marriage, rather than sympathizing with their partner, spouses often feel angry, discouraged, and stressed as they witness their partner becoming more distant, hopeless, and tired; these individuals often lose interest in social interactions, as the symptoms become more recognizable and increase over time (Rosen and Amador 1996). Rotermann (2007) conducted a study over a two year period using longitudinal data from the National Population Health Survey. Examining how marital discord is directly associated with depression amongst Canadians between the age of twenty and sixty-four. Results determined that women of divorce are more likely in the two years following their divorce to be depressed than married women. Whereas divorced men had six times the occurrence of depression when compared to men who remained married.). “Nationally representative cross-sectional and longitudinal studies from the United States and Europe suggest that, compared with people who remain together, those who have experienced marital breakdown are at increased risk of mental health problems.” Symptoms include:

1. persistently sad, anxious, or “empty” mood (or just feeling numb);
2. feelings of hopelessness and pessimism
3. the sense of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
4. children were once enjoyed but less so when depressed
5. decreased energy, fatigue, being “slowed down.”

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6. difficulty concentrating, remembering, and making decisions;
7. insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping;
8. appetite or weight loss or, conversely, overeating and weight gain
9. thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts;
10. restlessness or irritability;
11. persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

According to Weissman and Paykel (1974), the emotional and psychological discord a mother goes through during depression could interfere with her mother-child relationship. Depressed mothers have little ability or desire to be active parents or to supply their children with the emotional support they need (Webster-Stratton and Hammond 1988). A depressed mother usually shows little or no interest in disciplining her children or having discussions about the consequences of misbehaving and the mother is often dismissive when the unruly behavior occurs (Kuczynski 1984). Bonding is also difficult for a mother who is dealing with depression. They tend to be irritable and hostile toward their children (Cohn, Campbell, Matias and Hopkins 1990). Therefore, when dealing with a parent who suffers from severe depression, it is important to be aware of any signs that may signify child abuse, and whether or not the parent can use additional help. In a report by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, when a mother experiences depression while raising her children, her children are more likely to feel the effects of her illness starting at infancy (Beardslee, Versage and Gladstone 1998).

According to the study, due to her inability to bond with the infant, the baby may cry more than other babies, have a greater fear of strangers, and could be easily frustrated. Moreover, when entering preschool, some children who have mothers who suffer from depression are more

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likely than their classmates to have an attention-span deficiency. The NIMH's longitudinal study showed that in five to seven year-olds, 64 percent of the older children and 55 percent of the younger children showed either depression, anxiety, or a disruptive behavioral disorder. Fear was present in one-third of children aged eight to eleven (Radke-Yarrow 1998). This study brings awareness of the psychopathological effects that depression has on children whose mothers suffer from the deadly disease. The symptoms that come with depression, such as mood disorders, bizarre thoughts, or lack of self-love, just to name a few, can easily be passed down to their offspring. Research suggests that during the processes of depression and divorce, it is important that parents have an open conversation with their children and inform them about what is happening while encouraging them to express their fears and emotions about the processes (Taylor 2001 Andrews 2002). Symptoms of depression should be discussed so that children are aware it has nothing to do with them. They should understand that it is a sickness that cannot be fixed overnight but should also be reassured of their parents' unconditional love for them. Lastly, they should strive to have healthy relationships with their peers and other adults to assist with coping (Andrews 2002, 2003).

## ADOPTED CHILDREN AND DIVORCE

Most research looks at divorce from a biological or remarriage aspect. Unfortunately, adopted children may also experience an array of emotions that are common in family discord. Despite a significant amount of research conducted regarding children of divorce, there is still a robust debate concerning the effects divorce has on adopted children.

The National Survey of Families and Households analyzed five types of households with different family structures. The study investigated the relationship and well-being of children who live in the home with adopted parents, single mother, biological parents, stepfathers, and

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stepmothers. Some researchers have found that adoptees often experience higher levels of academic difficulty, problematic behavior, and psychological instability, along with other symptoms (Haugaard 1998; Wierzbicki 1993). Other studies suggest that there are no significant differences in the behavior of any population of children or adolescents (Borders, Black, & Pasley 1998). Because of society, a stigma has always been attached to parents who adopt. Some people believe that adopted parents are often unable to love their adopted children because they did not actually give birth to them and may question the authenticity of the parent-child relationship (Miall, 1987).

Recently the Search Institute surveyed a random sample of 1,262 parents, 881 adopted adolescents, and 78 non adopted siblings and found that 74% of the adopted adolescents reported positive family dynamics (Benson, Sharma & Roehlkepartain 1994). No variation could be found among either population of children, and adoptive parents did not show any sign of increased family dysfunction. However single-parent households seemed to have the least adaptive family structures due to life challenges, which include unequal economic growth and lack of emotional support compared to their peers.

The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH; Sweet & Bumpass, 1996) included 799 families. The sample examined five different family types. In one family type, the child in the home was at least one eighteen years of age who resided with both biological parents. The sample also included (a) married couples who had at least one adopted child eighteen years of age or younger (b) biological children who lived with both biological parents. (c) single unwed mothers due to divorce with biological children only; (d) biological mothers who remarried and the husband was the stepfather to one of the children; (e) biological fathers who had remarried with a wife who was the stepmother to at least one of the children. Reports

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from each participant were evaluated separately. Depending on the family structure of the participants, information was gathered from two parents in a household, and their child, from one parent, from both parents, or from one parent and a child. The assessment measured parents' well-being paying close attention to any recently depressed emotions that they might have experienced using a rating scale. Child well-being was also viewed from the parent's perspective, taking into account if the child had ever been suspended, academic success rates, criminal activities, and the level of self-esteem, behavioral issues and quality of peer relationships. The children were also asked if they indulged in any drug use, smoked cigarettes, skipped school and engaged in fights with peers. Parents were asked how well their children got along with other family members, while the children also discussed their views on family, how much their parents knew about their overall life and their views on marriage and having children. The quality of the parent's spousal relationship (understanding, love, and affection, time together, demands, sexual relationship, money, work around the house, parenthood) was also considered.

Figure 9: Adoptive mothers reported that their child had higher levels of internalizing and externalizing issues, and they experienced more disagreements with their children than mothers in two-parent biological, stepfather, or stepmother households.

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Figure 9. Constructs Reported by Mother

Construct	Adoptive <i>M (SD)</i>	Two-Parent Biological <i>M (SD)</i>	Single-Mother Biological <i>M (SD)</i>	Stepfather <i>M (SD)</i>	Stepmother <i>M (SD)</i>	Univariate <i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
<b>Mother well-being</b>							
Depressed affect	1.36 (1.34) <sup>a</sup>	.96 (1.02) <sup>bc</sup>	1.68 (1.52) <sup>d</sup>	1.14 (1.17) <sup>bc</sup>	1.29 (1.22)	4.84***	.03
Self-esteem and efficacy	3.82 (.52)	3.87 (.49)	3.69 (.70) <sup>a</sup>	3.92 (.54) <sup>b</sup>	3.89 (.53)	2.50**	.02
Life satisfaction	5.18 (1.25)	5.46 (1.12) <sup>a</sup>	4.95 (1.40) <sup>b</sup>	5.51 (1.18) <sup>a</sup>	5.47 (1.27) <sup>a</sup>	3.82***	.03
<b>Child well-being</b>							
Internalizing	1.49 (.33) <sup>a</sup>	1.28 (.28) <sup>b</sup>	1.34 (.35)	1.31 (.31) <sup>a</sup>	1.49 (.42) <sup>ad</sup>	3.19**	.04
Externalizing	1.65 (.38) <sup>a</sup>	1.44 (.32) <sup>b</sup>	1.58 (.41)	1.50 (.36) <sup>b</sup>	1.62 (.40)	2.26**	.03
Problem behaviors	.21 (.41) <sup>a</sup>	.07 (.26) <sup>b</sup>	.26 (.44) <sup>ac</sup>	.21 (.41) <sup>a</sup>	.19 (.40) <sup>d</sup>	2.38**	.03
School grades	5.33 (1.63)	6.05 (1.61)	5.34 (1.93)	5.41 (1.88)	5.13 (2.05)	1.10	.02
<b>Child's friendships</b>							
How often friends over	3.57 (1.66)	3.82 (1.63)	3.77 (1.80)	3.75 (1.62)	3.45 (1.72)	.35	.00
How many parent knows	4.51 (.87) <sup>a</sup>	4.45 (.76) <sup>ac</sup>	4.19 (.96) <sup>de</sup>	4.31 (.96) <sup>d</sup>	3.72 (1.25) <sup>bd</sup>	7.42****	.08
<b>Relationship with spouse</b>							
Overall quality	5.73 (1.46)	5.94 (1.26)	—	5.98 (1.32)	6.07 (1.10)	.71	.00
Satisfaction	5.22 (1.13)	5.34 (1.22)	—	5.51 (1.22)	5.63 (.99)	1.42	.01
Disagreements	2.21 (.88)	2.18 (.84)	—	2.07 (.78)	2.13 (.91)	1.01	.01
<b>Child's family relationships</b>							
Parent-child	.06 (.61) <sup>a</sup>	.12 (.51) <sup>a</sup>	.00 (.79) <sup>a</sup>	.04 (.55) <sup>a</sup>	-.49 (.97) <sup>b</sup>	3.65***	.04
Disagreements	2.47 (.80) <sup>a</sup>	2.06 (.74) <sup>b</sup>	2.28 (.89) <sup>ac</sup>	1.99 (.70) <sup>bd</sup>	1.90 (.68) <sup>bd</sup>	4.94***	.05
Grandparents	-.12 (.72)	.04 (.79)	.04 (.93) <sup>a</sup>	.09 (.75) <sup>a</sup>	-.35 (.76) <sup>b</sup>	2.83**	.03
Child's sibling relationship	2.45 (.82)	2.46 (.81)	2.49 (.88)	2.51 (.82)	2.47 (.80)	.09	.00
<b>Family life</b>							
Satisfaction	5.47 (1.43)	5.98 (1.09)	5.49 (1.52)	5.74 (1.26)	5.72 (1.32)	1.95	.02
Time with children	.00 (.59) <sup>a</sup>	.16 (.58) <sup>a</sup>	-.09 (.75) <sup>de</sup>	-.06 (.57) <sup>de</sup>	-.23 (.71) <sup>def</sup>	5.49****	.04
Family cohesion	3.99 (.65) <sup>a</sup>	4.08 (.56) <sup>a</sup>	3.97 (.77) <sup>a</sup>	3.95 (.65) <sup>a</sup>	3.75 (.66) <sup>b</sup>	3.12**	.02

Note: Superscripts of a and b indicate pairs of means that significantly differ from each other, as do c and d, e and f, g and h, and i and j. *n* = 696 for reports of mother well-being, spouse, family life, and sibling relationships. *n* = 402 for reports of child well-being, school grades, child's family relationships, and friendships.

\*\**p* < .05. \*\*\**p* < .01. \*\*\*\**p* < .001.

Figure 10: Biological fathers in two-parent household had closer bonds and spent more time with their children than fathers in other groups. Nonetheless, there was no evidence that families with other structures showed any signs of trauma.

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Figure 10. Constructs Reported by Father

**TABLE 2. MANCOVAs BY FAMILY STRUCTURE ON CONSTRUCTS REPORTED BY FATHER**

Construct	Adoptive <i>M (SD)</i>	Two-Parent Biological <i>M (SD)</i>	Stepfather <i>M (SD)</i>	Stepmother <i>M (SD)</i>	Univariate <i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
<b>Father well-being</b>						
Depressed affect	1.04 (1.18)	.89 (1.03)	.99 (1.02)	.88 (1.04)	1.34	.01
Self-esteem and efficacy	3.89 (.56)	3.92 (.58)	3.86 (.54)	3.89 (.54)	.61	.01
Life satisfaction	5.24 (1.13)	5.43 (1.12)	5.34 (1.27)	5.51 (1.21)	.82	.01
<b>Child well-being</b>						
Internalizing	1.43 (.37)	1.32 (.32)	1.45 (.40)	1.41 (.41)	.60	.01
Externalizing	1.64 (.36)	1.51 (.39)	1.65 (.42)	1.66 (.40)	1.14	.02
Problem behaviors	.23 (.43)	.11 (.31)	.18 (.39)	.19 (.40)	.36	.01
School grades	5.04 (1.87)	6.22 (1.74)	5.44 (2.17)	5.48 (1.65)	1.77	.05
<b>Child's friendships</b>						
How often friends over	3.23 (1.44)	3.85 (1.64)	3.95 (1.52)	3.25 (1.69)	2.34*	.03
How many parent knows	3.89 (1.28)	3.74 (1.08)	3.56 (1.10)	3.71 (1.18)	2.57*	.04
<b>Relationship with spouse</b>						
Overall quality	5.74 (1.45)	5.79 (1.22)	5.94 (1.30)	5.99 (1.17)	.17	.00
Satisfaction	5.41 (1.07)	5.31 (1.13)	5.51 (1.05)	5.60 (1.02)	.25	.00
Disagreements	2.20 (.84)	2.22 (.86)	2.16 (.82)	2.31 (.96)	1.14	.01
<b>Child's family relationships</b>						
Parent-child	.01 (.65)	.20 (.56)	-.22 (.77)	-.09 (.63)	1.39	.02
Disagreements	1.91 (.48)	1.88 (.74)	1.82 (.72)	2.20 (.86)	2.43	.03
Grandparents	-.18 (.78) <sup>a</sup>	.22 (.78) <sup>b</sup>	-.27 (.82) <sup>a,c</sup>	.32 (.77) <sup>a,c</sup>	6.72****	.08
Child's sibling relationship	2.50 (.76)	2.46 (.94)	2.55 (.84)	2.46 (.79)	.05	.00
<b>Family life</b>						
Satisfaction	5.64 (1.13)	5.92 (1.05)	5.82 (1.35)	5.76 (1.12)	.98	.01
Time with children	-.11 (.65) <sup>a</sup>	.19 (.66) <sup>b</sup>	-.17 (.71) <sup>a</sup>	.03 (.66)	4.58***	.04
Family cohesion	3.85 (.67) <sup>a</sup>	4.13 (.62) <sup>b</sup>	3.86 (.66) <sup>a</sup>	3.89 (.57) <sup>a</sup>	4.92***	.04

Note: Superscripts of a and b and of c and d indicate pairs of means that significantly differ from each other.  $n = 506$  for reports of father well-being, spouse, family life, and sibling relationships.  $n = 261$  for reports of child well-being, school grades, child's family relationships, and friendships.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Figure 11. Showed that those children who lived with their mothers, adoptive, two parent biological households, or stepmothers had better relationships than those children who resided with stepfathers. Those children who were in adoptive families were the only population that looked forward to being married and having children in the future.

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Figure 11. Constructs reported by Child

TABLE 3. ANCOVAs AND MANCOVAs BY FAMILY STRUCTURE ON CONSTRUCTS REPORTED BY CHILD

Construct	Adoptive <i>M (SD)</i>	Two-Parent Biological <i>M (SD)</i>	Single-Mother Biological <i>M (SD)</i>	Stepfather <i>M (SD)</i>	Stepmother <i>M (SD)</i>	Univariate <i>F</i>	$\eta^2$
<b>Child well-being</b>							
Self-esteem and efficacy	3.12 (.37)	3.07 (.35)	3.05 (.38)	3.00 (.30)	2.99 (.33)	.35	.01
Life satisfaction	7.65 (1.50)	7.43 (1.51)	7.19 (1.93)	7.52 (1.55)	7.30 (1.49)	.28	.01
<b>Problem behaviors</b>							
Cigarettes	1.15 (3.12)	1.15 (4.77)	1.91 (7.35)	1.24 (3.99)	1.89 (6.81)	.32	.01
Marijuana	.19 (.98)	.13 (.62)	.57 (1.41)	.45 (1.20)	.00 (.00)	1.61	.03
Skip school	1.88 (.33)	1.74 (.44)	1.72 (.45)	1.78 (.42)	1.81 (.40)	1.59	.03
Fights at school	.46 (1.07)	.41 (.83)	.57 (1.27)	.69 (1.48)	.30 (.61)	1.86	.04
School grades	5.54 (1.39)	6.09 (1.35)	5.65 (1.73)	5.84 (1.69)	5.93 (1.47)	.47	.01
<b>Friendships</b>							
How often friends over	3.92 (1.62)	3.87 (1.54)	4.11 (1.56)	4.41 (1.50)	3.78 (1.72)	.82	.02
Extracurricular activities	9.85 (8.39)	9.83 (9.11)	10.48 (9.40)	9.64 (10.43)	5.67 (6.81)	1.67	.03
Relationship with mother	-.05 (.72)	.10 (.46)	-.02 (.85)	.01 (.61)	-.29 (.79)	1.11	.02
Relationship with father	.34 (.44) <sup>a</sup>	.13 (.55) <sup>a</sup>	—	-.23 (.81) <sup>a</sup>	.24 (.24) <sup>a</sup>	5.27***	.11
Relationship with siblings	.01 (.76)	.12 (.69)	.08 (.86)	-.05 (.84)	.10 (.73)	.49	.01
<b>Family life</b>							
Parents monitoring	3.85 (.91)	3.89 (.80)	3.60 (1.08)	3.70 (.89)	3.49 (1.03)	1.84	.04
Thoughts: future family	2.39 (.93) <sup>a</sup>	1.62 (.62) <sup>b,c</sup>	1.60 (.53) <sup>b</sup>	1.47 (.47) <sup>b,c</sup>	1.81 (.57) <sup>b,d,e</sup>	5.88****	.12
Family cohesion	3.27 (.62)	3.37 (.54)	3.10 (.77)	3.12 (.57)	3.28 (.65)	2.25	.05

Note: Superscripts of a and b indicate pairs of means that significantly differ from each other, as do c and d, e and f. *n* = 212.  
\*\*\**p* < .01. \*\*\*\**p* < .001.

## CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN SWEDEN

Sweden provides an interesting contrast to the United States regarding the effects of divorce and varied family structures. Nearly 60 percent of children in Sweden between the ages of thirteen and fifteen live in two-parent households. However, the parents in 30 percent of divorced families share joint custody (Demografirapport 2007:4. Stockholm: Statistics Sweden, 2007). Researchers now see shared custody as a healthy way to co-parent (2010 Stockholm Statistics Sweden).

Europeans believe that in cases where parents have lower levels of conflict during and after a divorce children often benefit from shared custody because it gives them the ability to have both parents in their lives, but research shows that it is not as beneficial when parents have elevated levels of dissension (Kelly JB; Emery 2003).

One study determined that 26 percent of children whose parents shared custody had a higher rate of alcohol and drug abuse compared with adolescents from two-parent families.

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In a cross-sectional design, the behavior of 3,699 school-aged ninth grade adolescents from Sweden was evaluated in an attempt to determine the direct effects of divorce in situations of shared custody. Children were grouped into three categories: they (a) lived with both parents, (b) parents shared custody, or (c) they lived in single parent households. A series of questions was asked about the children's living arrangements, family structure, parent's economic-employment status, and the stability of the parent/child relationship.

Figure 12. Control and Outcome Variables

Table 1 Frequencies, percent distributions and bivariate analyses of variables by family structure, control and outcome variables (%)

Variables	Two-parent family n (%)	Shared physical custody n (%)	Single-parent family n (%)	Significance: $\chi^2$ test; df; P
Gender				
Boy	1111 (49.6)	144 (53.7)	353 (44.6)	8.843; 2; 0.012
Girl	1129 (50.4)	124 (46.3)	440 (55.4)	
Father got work?				
Yes	2111 (94.3)	261 (97.0)	590 (87.8)	41.481; 2; 0.000
No	127 (5.7)	8 (3.0)	82 (12.2)	
Mother got work?				
Yes	2003 (89.8)	246 (91.1)	626 (82.7)	30.011; 2; 0.000
No	227 (10.2)	24 (8.9)	131 (17.3)	
Economy				
Not satisfying	73 (3.3)	15 (5.6)	106 (13.4)	107.625; 2; 0.000
Satisfying	2159 (96.7)	253 (94.4)	687 (86.6)	
Foreign background?				
No	1897 (84.1)	258 (95.6)	677 (84.5)	25.346; 2; 0.001
Yes	359 (15.9)	12 (4.4)	124 (15.5)	
Able to talk to father				
No difficulties	1420 (63.7)	172 (64.7)	363 (56.0)	13.450; 2; 0.001
Difficulties	808 (36.3)	94 (35.3)	285 (44.0)	
Able to talk to mother				
No difficulties	1756 (79.2)	209 (78.6)	551 (74.0)	8.872; 2; 0.012
Difficulties	462 (20.8)	57 (21.4)	194 (26.0)	
Being a smoker?				
No	1864 (86.5)	206 (80.2)	577 (75.8)	48.503; 2; 0.000
Yes	291 (13.5)	51 (19.8)	184 (24.2)	
Been drunk?				
No	1455 (65.5)	143 (53.8)	383 (48.7)	73.444; 2; 0.000
Yes	768 (34.5)	123 (46.2)	403 (51.3)	
Sexual debut <15 years				
No	1657 (74.5)	187 (70.0)	464 (59.1)	66.410; 2; 0.000
Yes	566 (25.5)	80 (30.0)	321 (40.9)	
Conduct Problems				
No	1852 (83.8)	219 (82.6)	602 (77.1)	18.001; 2; 0.000
Yes	357 (16.2)	46 (17.4)	179 (22.9)	

Carlsund, A., Eriksson, U., Lofstedt, P., & E. S. (2013). Risk behaviour in Swedish adolescents: is shared physical custody after divorce a risk or a protective factor? p.5

1. Adolescents who did not live with both biological parents were prone to smoke at a higher rate (24.1%, 19.8%) than those adolescents living in two-parent families (13.5%).
2. Adolescents in single-parent families had a much higher rate of drunkenness (51.1%) than those in shared physical custody families (46.2%) and two-parent families (34.4%).

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3. Sexual interaction took place at a younger age and was more prevalent among adolescents in single-parent families (40.9%) and shared physical custody families (30%) than in two-parent families (25.5%)
4. Conduct issues amongst adolescents living in single-parent families were higher (22.9%) than those living in shared physical custody (17.4%) and two-parent families (16.1%).

Figure 13. Risk Behaviors and conduct problem

Table 2 Multivariate logistic regression models showing the OR with 95% CI for adolescent risk behaviours and conduct problem

Variables	Model 1 Being a smoker OR (95% CI)	Model 2 Been drunk OR (95% CI)	Model 3 Sexual debut < 15 years OR (95% CI)	Model 4 Conduct problems OR (95% CI)
Gender				
Boy (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Girl	1.34** (1.08–1.66)	1.11 (0.95–1.30)	1.09 (0.92–1.29)	0.42*** (0.34–0.52)
Father got work?				
Yes	1	1	1	1
No	1.24 (0.82–1.87)	0.98 (0.70–1.37)	1.12 (0.79–1.59)	0.92 (0.60–1.39)
Mother got work?				
Yes	1	1	1	1
No	0.96 (0.67–1.36)	0.83 (0.63–1.08)	0.93 (0.70–1.24)	1.15 (0.83–1.60)
Economy				
Satisfying (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Not satisfying	1.64** (1.08–2.49)	1.14 (0.79–1.64)	1.25 (0.86–1.82)	1.93** (1.29–2.90)
Foreign background?				
No	1	1	1	1
Yes	0.91 (0.65–1.27)	0.63*** (0.49–0.80)	0.63** (0.48–0.84)	1.05 (0.77–1.44)
Able talk to father				
No difficulties (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Difficulties	1.22 (0.95–1.55)	1.23*** (1.02–1.48)	1.1 (0.91–1.34)	1.56*** (1.23–1.99)
Able talk to mother				
No difficulties (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Difficulties	1.47*** (1.34–2.25)	1.47*** (1.20–1.81)	1.41** (1.14–1.75)	1.73*** (1.34–2.23)
Family structure				
Two-parent family (ref.)	1	1	1	1
Shared physical custody	1.60** (1.13–2.27)	1.50** (1.15–1.96)	1.23 (0.92–1.63)	1.06 (0.74–1.52)
Single-parent family	1.80*** (1.40–2.32)	1.79*** (1.47–2.19)	1.89*** (1.54–2.32)	1.33* (1.04–1.72)

\* $P < 0.005$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ .

Carlsund, A., Eriksson, U., Lofstedt, P., & E. S. (2013). Risk behaviour in Swedish adolescents: is shared physical custody after divorce a risk or a protective factor? p.5

1. Model 1: found that adolescents who lived in parents shared custody homes, or single parent homes had a higher chance of becoming a smoker compared to those who lived in two-parent households. The study also found that girls who had a strained relationship with their mothers or had difficulty economically were more likely to smoke.

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2. In Model 2: adolescents whose parents shared custody and those who lived in single parent households were more prone to partake in drunken behavior. Teens in shared physical custody, or in single-parent families along with those teens who found it difficult to talk with either parent, seemed to have an increased number of drunken behavioral episodes.
3. In Model 3: although there were no significant differences in the sexual experience of those adolescents in two-parent households or shared custody homes, the study did show that those in single parent households usually engaged in sexual activity by the age of fifteen.
4. Compared with adolescents from two-parent families, adolescents living in shared physical custody were not at a higher risk for conduct problems, whereas adolescents from single-parent families had a higher level of conduct problems. Families who have financial stability have fewer behavior issues than families with lesser economic means. Adolescents who reported difficulty talking to their fathers and mothers were more at risk of having conduct problems.

It is evident that divorce is universal and that all kids go through some level of discomfort when their parents decide on marital dissolution. Based on the research from Sweden, joint custody is seen as a positive experience for children. However, shared custody seems to be less beneficial when children experience their parents' relationship as highly combative and thus the benefits of shared custody remain in dispute. (Kelly and Emery [2003]: 352-62).

Overall, there is limited evidence to support the theory that the family structure of adopted children is less gratifying than that of biological parents who reside with their biological offspring. Mothers of adopted children confirmed that apparent issues do exist, while biological

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mothers had more disagreements with their children than stepmothers or stepfathers while adoptive parents still spent more quality time with their kids. Although two parent households are favorably viewed within society, children in single parent households did not have significantly more problems with their relationships or well-being. Biological mothers and stepmothers both agreed that their kids had fewer behavioral problems, while the amount of time they spent with their children was identical to adoptive parents. There were no major differences in the children's academic preparedness and relationships with family members. Overall, the research demonstrated that family structure is not necessarily a factor when evaluating someone's well-being and the quality of relationships. Once again, the level of conflict that children experience in the home emerged as the common denominator when discussing their overall development.

## CONCLUSION

After a divorce, a mother must learn to co-parent with her ex-husband while adapting to the loss of her role as spouse and often as the primary caretaker. Mothers who willingly give up custody can reconnect with their children; they adjust psychologically to the custodial situation more quickly, with less animosity toward the father. If the breakup was rancorous, this task is challenging. Moreover, the most common problems that arise relate to child support, visitation, property division, remarriage, and the rearing of the children. In some cases, allegations or histories of child abuse or domestic violence will taint the parents' ability to co-parent. Research indicates that if the father-mother relationship is successfully resolved, the father is likely to find parenting easier and more enjoyable, which ultimately benefits the children (Greif 1990). Many mothers give up custody for altruistic reasons. If a mother fought for custody and lost or felt that

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custody was unfairly removed from her, she will most likely experience a longer period of adjustment than if she had given up custody willingly.

Despite a significant amount of research regarding children who experienced divorce, there is still a robust debate concerning the effects divorce has on these children. Most studies have reported adverse effects of divorce, but many have failed to examine the potential benefits that may follow children of divorcees adjusting to their new surroundings. We know that some children will fare better than others after divorce, yet not much research is available to assess the impact of contextual factors--financial pressures, marital conflict--that are associated with divorce. In addition, there is a lack of research on the outcomes of the pre-divorce environment on children's development, although all of these variables have an impact and need to be interpreted and understood in order to assist children throughout the divorce process.

Furthermore, it is often difficult to separate the countless number of factors that impact children who suffer from divorce. Research has found that children whose parents divorce struggle to adjust to new surroundings, compared to children whose families are still together (and thereby live in environments with more regularity or familiarity). Children who have experienced divorce, for example, may also experience financial instability, academic instability, employment instability, and have a tendency to use alcohol and cigarettes. Substance abuse thus may aid and contribute to indifference toward education; the most common long-term consequence that is linked to divorce is a detrimental effect on educational achievement. That is, divorce could lead children to show apathy toward their education, often not wanting to pursue higher education. Not only this, but factors such as age, time since the divorce occurred, parenting, financial stability, and parental conflict all contribute to how well children may adjust to their environment and thereby succeed in school.

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However, it may be that parents contribute to a significant amount of stress that the child goes through rather than solely a change in environment. A parent's way of dealing with and managing conflict is vital to how well a child adjusts after divorce. If a parent lacks skills in handling conflict, a child may have a harder time adjusting. Essentially, children may begin to develop emotional insecurity as a result of their parents' lack of conflict-resolution skills. Further, a child's fear and distress may be relieved if their parents are proficient at resolving the conflict. Rather than the conflict that occurs during or after divorce, conflict during marriage has been found to be significant in predicting how well a child adjusts. When married parents fight, especially in front of their children, children may develop a subsequent fear of future familial strife. Children with parents who are prone to constant fighting have reportedly suffered from academic problems such as disobedience, aggressive behavior, poor self-esteem, and depression. Moreover, young adults who have experienced such conflict as children are prone to developing depression and other psychological disorders.

Finally, some key factors that may ensure healthy adjustment for children who have experienced a divorce in their families include low parental conflict, smooth co-parenting, and compromise. Research suggests that in order to have a "successful" upbringing, children must be provided with emotional support and should also be disciplined when necessary. There has been an ever-increasing movement to provide these factors to adolescents. For instance, research suggests that children who have fathers who assist them with schoolwork and provide them with emotional support have proven to do much better academically. Consequently, over the past two decades, many divorced fathers who do not have primary custody of their children have increased their visitations, which could aid in helping children adjust better post-divorce.

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Moreover, joint legal custody contributes to fathers' increased frequency of visitations to their children after divorce and indicates a higher chance of regular payments of child support. Essentially, if a divorced family can still off the factors that contribute to a "successful" upbringing, a child may be as deeply affected by divorce as one who is lacking this close parenting after divorce.

Ultimately, research has found that a child's adjustment is based upon the psychological health of their parents, the relationship they have with their parents and their environment. In summation, it may not be the act of divorce that creates the psychological and emotional stress within the family, but rather, how divorce is handled both prior to the separation and after the divorce is enacted.

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