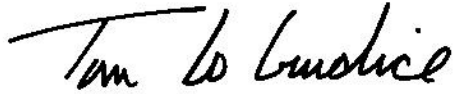


The attached paper, by Sylvia L. Ivory, entitled, The Effects of Divorce on Children:
Implications for Families and Counselors, approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom L. Guadice". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Approved:

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THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN: IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES AND
COUNSELORS

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Sylvia L. Ivory

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ABSTRACT

Divorce and the effects (positive and negative) clearly relate to children. The literature related to effects on children was reviewed. Parenting should be the most important focus for parents divorcing. Several suggestions for parents and counselors are provided. The role of counselors is emphasized. The author provides academic and popular literature to inform the reader.

KEY TERMS:

DIVORCE, COUNSELORS

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Chapter One INTRODUCTION

Divorce is one of the most common environmental stressors experienced by children- with 2% of children living in the United States facing divorce each year (Emery & Forehand, 1994). Based on 1990 census data, 40% of all children can expect to live in a single-parent household because of divorce before the age 16. In the 1960's, 90% of children in the US grew up in two biological parents homes compared with only 40% today. Society's acceptance of children before marriage and cohabitation, and the increased divorced rate contributes to this change. In the US in 1996, 45% of marriages ended in divorce. That year there were 1,150,000 divorces, with approximately 1,000,000 children affected (Hetherington E.M. & Stanley-Hagan M., 1999). Unfortunately, in many families divorce is a reoccurring situation. A case study is illustrative:

“Out of five siblings, three have divorced and re-married while one is waiting for the finances to file for divorce. My parents divorced when I was sixteen years old and although it was a relief because I continued to live with my mother, the less strict parent, it did make life a bit difficult. I was close with both parents so dividing time between the two was complicated. I am a divorced parent with three children so this topic is very important to me. My children witnessed their dad and I argue many times and this is why I ultimately decided enough was enough. My children are now eleven, eight, and seven but were six, three, and two when their father and I separated. We were separated three years before actually divorcing February 2012” (Dr. Tom LoGuidice, 2013, Personal Communication). After children witness their parents argue too many times, as the research suggests (Arkowitz & Lilienfeld, 2013) children may experience relief because they do not have the continued tension of arguing or other stressful events after divorce.

Although divorce seems to have become a commonality in the United States, the transition of the family adaptation shouldn't be taken lightly. The changes that transpire due to divorce are significant for the children and parents, and the divorce itself is only one step of many within the transformation that affects the entire family. There are five stages to divorce and they consist of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kimball, G., 1994). These stages are quite similar to patients with terminal illnesses and children deal with these stages much differently from adults. Along with stages of divorce, most research suggests that children have an increased risk to experience three types of adjustment difficulties due to divorce: externalizing and internalizing problems and cognitive inadequacies (Hoyt et al., 1990). The most common forms of externalizing and/or internalizing behavior problems include delinquency, aggression, and disobedience. Many children will also hold themselves accountable when parents' divorce and this belief can carry over into negative behaviors in the classroom.

For many, children can only receive interventions to address their emotional needs in the school environment. The first to notice possible signs of disturbances in students are teachers and counselors. Individual counseling will consist of counselors considering parenting practices and therapeutic interventions. The school can provide the needed support and counseling, which will help minimize the emotional turmoil so that the child can continue normal daily activities. It is gravely important that there be a collaboration between the school and parents so there will be no underestimation of the difficulties a child may have due to divorce (Amato, P., 2001). Creative interventions and play therapy are both very helpful to assist with a child's adjustment to divorce as well. Any intervention where a child's unique strengths are identified will help with a healthy adjustment.

Through this research this author will attempt to enlighten others on positive effects of divorce, rather than only the negative and therapy that can help children express their feelings and promote positivity.

Statement of the Problem

The problems to be addressed are:

- What are the possible consequences of divorce on children and
- What are the effects of divorce on children?

Definition of Terms

Divorce: the action or an instance of legally dissolving a marriage (Merriam-Webster.com).

Counselor: a person who gives advice or counseling (Merriam-Webster.com).

Significance of the Study

This paper will offer insight to personnel staff in law enforcement field who wishes to enhance their retention rates by reviewing customer service practices is critical. Upon completion this research will help inform professional obligations and offer practical applications to families. Divorce is at once a personal and societal problem for the divorcing parents and the children. Counselors and other helping professionals need to be informed to be effective.

Purpose of the Study

A review of literature related to the problem statement informs public service personnel of best practices as provided. The professional obligations of the writer and others involved with counseling youth and families on the effects of divorce.

Delimitations of Research

The references used for the review of literature were collected over a period of 62 days using the resources of the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin- Platteville and the Golda Maier Library at the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee. The several search engines provided by EBSCOHOST were used. The key search terms were “children and divorce,” effects of divorce on children,” and “consequences of divorce and children.”

Method of Approach

A brief review of the history of post-secondary degree completion rate through (1990-present) was conducted. Also, a review of literature will be conducted as it relates to research and anecdotal evidence of the history of national education statistics while comparing the needs of traditional and non-traditional college students. The findings will be summarized and recommendations will be made.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Divorce originated in the United States in the early 1600s and has been a major part of history ever since. What seems to now be a trend, the end of marriage, and the effect it has on children is an important and pressing concern (Christine, M., 2005). Sometimes divorce is the best decision for all involved, however children are usually the victims due to having gone through what ultimately led to the divorce and the division of their family. Adjustment to divorce can take up to two years or more and the memory of it remains with children sometimes all of their lives. Age, gender, and temperament will also contribute to this adjustment period.

Studies show that children experience the greatest impact from divorce within two or three years of it occurring (Oesterreich, L., 1996). The first few years following divorce are seen as being the stressful and difficult period for most children and their parents (Faber, & Wittenborn, 2010). Divorce frequently contributes to depression, anxiety, or substance abuse in one or both parents and may bring about difficulties in balancing work and child rearing (Arkowitz and Lilienfeld, S., 2013). These problems can impair a parent's ability to offer children stability and love when they are most in need. Divorce is indeed a disruption for the entire family but a child's belief about divorce will change over time due to their cognitive maturity and evolving relationships with their parents (Foulkes, L., 2001). There are many evident negative effects divorce has on children but there are also positive effects divorce has on children, such as children being more resilient following divorce.

“Children (and adult children) have the attitude that their parents should be able to work through and solve any issue. Parents, who have given the children life, are perceived by the children as very competent people with supernatural abilities to meet the needs to their children.

No problem should be too great for their parents' abilities to care for them and to make decisions that truly consider their well-being" (Interview with Earl M.A., M.S., L.P.C., C.A.C., III, August 2001).

The stages of divorce are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The denial stage consists of the children not believing their parents could ever part. During this stage the children believe the parents will either stay together or reunite. Children then show anger due to them being furious, believing their parents could have worked harder to fix their marriage. Children are generally upset with their parents in this stage for allowing the divorce to happen and ruining their lives and future as they planned it (Kimball, G., 1994). In the bargaining stage children believe if they do better their parents will reunite. This will consist of children improving their grades, doing household chores, getting along with siblings, and ultimately displaying better behavior overall. The depression stage will consist of prevalent sadness evident in every aspect of child's life. This can also cause children to be very tired in school and at home. Lastly, acceptance comes when children are able to see that divorce was the best for all involved. Children will come to realize their parents are happier apart than they would have ever been together.

Statistical Findings

In order to better understand the extent of how divorce impacts children, one must examine statistics and current trends. Data provided by Shaw and Ingoldsby, (2006) indicate:

- Around fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce.
- Approximately one-half to two-thirds of those who divorce will remarry.
- One in every six adults will divorce two or more times.

- Half of all divorces involve minor children.
- One in three of these children will live with a step-parent before the age of nineteen.
- Forty percent of all children can expect to live in a single-parent household because of divorce by the age sixteen, based on 1990 census data.
- Twenty-three percent of families in America are single-parent families with children under the age of eighteen.
- Within the last two decades, the divorce rate in the United States has increased substantially.

PolitiFact.com estimated in 2012 that the lifelong probability of a marriage ending in divorce is forty to fifty percent.

Divorce and Children: Consequences and Effects

Research of children of divorced parents and married parents (Desai, 2006)

shows the following:

- Children from divorced homes suffer academically. There are high levels of behavior issues. They don't obtain favorable grades, and they aren't like to graduate from high school.
- Kids whose parents divorce chances of going to jail for committing a crime as a juvenile are greatly increased.
- Children are five times more likely to live in poverty due to the income loss of the other parent, opposed to two-parent households.

- Sexual promiscuity and drug and alcohol use is more likely in teens from divorced homes than those married.
- Illness is more frequent and recovery from sickness slower in divorced homes. Those children are more prone to child abuse as well.
- Psychological distress is suffered more frequently in children of divorced homes.

Divorce causes an extraordinary change in the life of a child, despite the age. Dr. Carl Pickhardt posted a blog on Psychology Today December 19, 2011, “Witnessing the loss of love between parents, having parents break their marriage commitment, adjusting to going back and forth between two different households, and the daily absence of one parent while living with the other, all create a challenging new family circumstance in which to live. In the personal history of the child, parental divorce is a watershed event. Life that follows is significantly changed from how life was before.” According to an article in the popular publication Huffington post (July 1, 2013), children whose parents divorced when they were between births and three to five years old had a greater level of insecurity in the relationship with their parents than children who divorced when they were older. This same article references two studies that analyzed the effects of divorce on children’s relationships with their parents. Seven thousand seven hundred and thirty-five people were surveyed about their personalities and close relationships, and more than one half of those surveyed came from homes of divorce (Fraley & Heffernan, 2013). The writer of the article emphasized people’s relationships with their parents and romantic partners playing important roles in their lives.

Researchers have consistently found that high levels of parental conflict during and after a divorce are associated with poorer adjustment in children. Children in divorced families, with little conflict following divorce, adjust no differently than children from low conflict intact families (CPANCF.com, 2011). If there is ongoing conflict with parents after divorce, children tend to have long-term adjustment difficulties. In a 1985 study, it was found that some children who are exposed to high levels of marital discord prior to divorce adjust better than children who experience low levels (Arkowitz et al., 2013). What is most essential for a child's long-term adjustment, following a divorce, is the relationship children continue to have with their parents. Children not being with both parents is the most stressful and painful part of divorce so the relationship with their parents is of utmost importance. Often children will blame themselves for their parents divorcing and actually feel it is their responsibility to get them back together. A continued close relationship with both parents after divorce can hopefully ease that burden.

Researchers have shown that divorce can strongly affect adult children's intimate relationships (Christine, 2005). For example, it was found that children from a divorced home possibly hesitate about marriage and suffer from a fear of intimacy. Many adult children experienced fears that they would be abandoned and betrayed by their lover or spouse (Christine, 2005).

Although some children are relieved that the disharmony may end due to their parents separating, they will usually act more frustrated, impatient, or anger easily. They may become depressed, withdrawn and moody, act aggressively, or even try to get back at their parents (Pickhardt, 2011). Divorce can cause children to feel disconnected at a time they want and need to feel more connected. This can lead to separation anxieties, crying at bed times, breaking toilet

training, bed wetting, clinging, whining, tantrums, and temporary loss of established self-care skills; in an attempt to get the parental attention they desire (Pinkhardt, 2011). A child that is more independent may act more aggressively regarding divorce. This could include reacting in a mad, rebellious way, more resolved to disregard family discipline, and take care of himself since parents have failed to keep commitments to family that were originally made (Pinkhardt, 2011). Sometimes a child may experience depression due to feeling the lack of both parents. These feelings can be elevated in school until teenage years, when maturity can impact the outlook of divorce (singlestat.us, 2013).

Aside from the emotional damage divorce can cause, children can also suffer academically, be more likely to be incarcerated for committing a crime as a juvenile, recover from sickness more slowly, and suffer child abuse (Desai, , 2006). The effects divorce can have on academics include the following:

- Children who have experienced a divorce frequently have lower academic achievement than children from non-divorced families (Wolchik, S., 2002).
- Children from divorced families are twice as likely to drop out of high school and are less likely to attend college than children from non-divorced families (Rodgers & Rose, H., 2001).

The academic problems associated with children from single-parent families, may have a direct correlation to the economic impact of divorce. Divorce may cause a now single-parent family to move to a less-expensive neighborhood, which also increases the chances of them living below

the one percent poverty level (Santrock, 2003). This of course affects the type of education a child from a divorced family will receive opposed to that of an intact two-parent family.

The transition deriving from divorce is attributed as the cause of the negative adjustment displayed in academics because it disrupts the functioning of the family and causes behavior disruptions. Because of one parent possibly facing financial hardships due to divorce, a family may be forced to relocate to a disadvantaged area where education may not be the most valued.

Although psychological, academic, and behavior problems have been shown through research to increase in children from divorced families, there have not been signs of these problems in a majority of children who've experienced divorce. While there are many negative effects of divorce, research also shows that children of divorced parents might actually have strengthened intimacy and relationship skills developed by living through the divorce experience, thereby becoming well-adjusted adults (Christine, 2005). Researchers have found that only a relatively small percentage of children experience serious problems in the wake of divorce or, later, as adults (Arkowitz et al., 2013). Couples come to the difficult decision of divorce for various reasons. Although painful and usually undesired, divorce can prevent a child's suffering psychologically seeing parents at odds and/or violent, in which separation is best. A child's development can be hindered by constantly being in an environment of depression, sadness, and strife (Singlestat.us, 2013), making divorce a positive effect. Most children from divorced families are resilient, especially when parents control the level of stress from the divorce (Emory, 2013). Children actually emerge stronger, wiser, and with closer family connections (Ahrons et al., 2010). There is a belief in general that divorce only negatively affects children but this author believes divorce can be a stressful event yet can actually enhance a person's life when

handled correctly (Ahrons et al., 2010). In a quantitative review, by sociologist Amato (2001) reviewed the effects on children several years after a divorce. The study consisted of children of married parents compared to children who experienced divorce at different ages. The subjects were followed into later childhood and adolescence/teenage years, assessing their academic achievement, emotional and behavior problems, delinquency, self-concept, and social relationships. Amato's 2001 study found that the majority of children endure divorce well.

For the counselor it is important to have a strong theoretical foundation, build and maintain a positive therapeutic rapport, use interventions that are appropriate for each client, and introduce, process, and bring closure to each activity (Lowenstein, 2006). This is important because the goal of therapy is to gain children's attention to keep them interested and motivated in therapy. Feeling as they are in a therapeutic environment will encourage a child to express themselves. A treatment goal for the counselor will be to provide an appropriate outlet for the child to express their feelings of anger about the divorce. Resilience among children is encouraged through positive thinking and problem solving and is considered active coping for children. If therapy is playful and innovative, along with engaging, children are more likely to embrace it.

Most therapy for children of divorce will consist of family interventions with children and/or their parents. Children's coping skills and inter-parental conflict often improved in these groups (Shaw & Ingoldsby, 2006). Other treatment includes school based group interventions, preventive programs, children's support groups, and homework assignments. The outcomes prove that those measures that require more time/sessions are most productive. The

interventions were designed for children to identify and work through the usually confusing issues of divorce and to develop effective coping strategies for dealing with negative feelings and family interactions (Shaw et al., 2006). Through creative interventions children are able to use what they have within and place focus on their personal experience. Music has been used as an intervention for children of divorce and was found to significantly decrease cognitive and social anxiety and all irrational beliefs about divorce, which in turn can possibly decrease depressive symptoms (Delucia-Waack, J. and Gellman, R., 2007).

For the family it is important to recognize that children need the freedom to express themselves. All that they have known and been accustomed to has now changed. Parents need to focus on the children's needs during a divorce and after as well as staying involved and in contact with the teacher. Parents need to be positive role models and minimize their conflicts and hostility. Parenting skills need to be worked on and interventions should be considered (Ahrons et al., 2010). Most importantly parents need to respect one another and not talk negatively about the other parent in front of children. This puts the child in the middle and can cause confusion for the child and the desire to choose sides. For this reason, communication is what will ultimately help this transition. This is especially true for children because it will help them to not internalize things and discuss exactly what they are feeling. This discussion will then assist parents in knowing what interventions to consider. Parents need to be sensitive to the needs of their child. This will also include understanding the developmental differences of children to ensure there are not behavior issues that are being overlooked (Foulkes-Jamison, 2001).

A child wants to feel a sense of normalcy and this is to be continued after divorce. Whatever routines have been in place need to remain a part of family practice during the transition period. This allows the child to feel a sense of family order. Any observed family rituals should continue. Although it may now consist of one parent, it's important for there to be some form of predictability (Pickhardt., 2011). Also important for a parent is to reassure their child that they are loved, it is not their fault, and they will be taken care of. Spending time with children individually can be helpful during this transition; providing an opportunity to ask any questions they may have privately. Continued access to both parents will show children they are still loved. Parents should give permission to the child to have a close and loving relationship with the other parent. This could include encouraging the child to look forward to a visit with the other parent. Consistency from parents and failure to miss visits will make this transition an easier one for all involved. Child-Parent Relationship Therapy (CPRT) is helpful in reducing parenting stress and child behavior problems. Parents who participated in this therapy reported CPRT helped them feel more connected to their children and provided them with new tools for parenting (Dillman- Taylor, Purcell., Lindo, N, and Fernando, 2011).

Summary

No one marries with the intent, hope, or desire to divorce. However, divorce is sometimes inevitable and most recent, happens at alarming rates. Although divorce is a difficult conclusion for those married, children ought to be the primary focus. Not that people should remain together solely because of the children, but after all other attempts have been made to salvage the marriage the well-being of the children to be considered. The main point ought to be the reduction of conflict between the parents as this ultimately is associated with the best adjustment for children. Children already have challenges they will have to endure through life so to involve them in a procedure/transition they have absolutely no control of, should be done with care. There are indeed negative and positive effects of divorce but divorce is similar to the death of one parent. This transition can either be as smooth or as complicated as the parents make it. As noted, there are several implications from the research for parents, child, and counselors. It is important that parents listen to and observe their children to ensure the proper implications are administered.

Chapter Three

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review of literature the following conclusions and recommendations are reasonable:

1. Divorce and the effects (positive and negative) does clearly relate to children. Due to the increased divorce rates, it should be expected that divorce will continue to occur. Because divorce does not only affect the couple who's decided to separate, when children are involved, consideration has to be given to the care and support of the children. It is possible for children to endure many negative effects of divorce but if they are given the necessary attention, this can hopefully be prevented. All divorces include change for children. These changes may have occurred prior to the divorce, having some conditions actually improve rather worsen. What led to divorce was usually actively occurring well before divorce was initiated, and the effects on the children may reflect stress of the divorce and problems that preceded divorce. Despite the outcome, adaptation is necessary and required of the child. Both separation and divorce are both events that are emotionally difficult, but it is possible to have a healthy break-up. Children commonly feel abandoned and/or rejected as a result of divorcing parents. Anger, grief, anxiety, and fear are all emotions to expect at the end of a marriage. At times they can catch you off guard due to them rising up when you least expect them. The intensity of these feelings will subside with time and are normal. Most children will adjust well within two years of the divorce but if parents remain in high conflict marriages rather divorce, children experience more problems. Change is not usually welcomed for most but for children it's especially important that it not be drastic. Giving a child time to adjust, allowing a move to a new home or the removal of a parent to happen gradually, will assist with a child's adjustment.

2. Parenting should be the most important point of focus for children of divorce. If conflicts are unpreventable, it is best to have a neutral third party readily available to diffuse and or support and encourage cooperation. It is very important for parents to realize and embrace the fact that despite their divorcing, they must continue to parent and this will be for a lifetime. In order for their children to develop appropriately their interaction has to be or evolve into a mature interaction, especially in the presence of the children. Parents can't use their children against one another and have to resist the urge to depreciate the other parent to their children. Although the parents may see their lives being in turmoil, they must value their children's needs. Whatever rules that have been in place need to remain in place and co-parenting need to be consistent. Although divorce may cause emotional disturbances for the parent, it is important that parents try to remain calm and not expect the child to meet their emotional needs. It's crucial for parents to put their children's needs first. If a child sees their parent in frenzy, they are more likely to act the same. The emotional state of a child has to be catered to by their parents. With that being said, a parent should never interrogate or question a child after visiting with the other parent.

Ten Commandments for Divorcing Parents:

- 1. Inform the children of the divorce, and explain the reason for the divorce in terms that are appropriate for the ages of the children and are neutral. Both parents should be present, and all children should be told at the same time unless it is impossible.*
- 2. Reassure the children (especially the younger children) that the divorce is not their fault. Repeat this explanation over and over and over.*
- 3. Except for cases of abusive relationships or concerns of immediate safety, inform the children well in advance of anyone moving out of the house.*
- 4. Clearly inform the children of the expected family structure after the divorce, and who will live where. Discuss visitation clearly.*
- 5. Do not make children be adults.*
- 6. Do not discuss money. Children do not comprehend money or the true costs of maintaining a home. If they ask, do not lie, but be aware that \$200 seems like a small fortune to a school-aged child.*

7. Children need rules. Be consistent in this area even if it is the only area in your entire life that is consistent.

8. Children must never be forced into taking sides. Both parents love them and they can love both parents.

9. Belittling your ex-spouse should be avoided within earshot of the children. They believe everything you say, even when it is out of anger or frustration. But do not lie to cover up irresponsible behavior by the other parent. Children will see through it quickly, and your credibility will suffer in other areas.

10. Never, ever put your children in the middle between you and your spouse. They are not buffers or pawns or messengers or prizes to divide like property. They are your children. They are the most precious things in the world to any parent. They are the one best thing that came out of the marriage (www.medscape.com, Children of Divorce, 2001).

3. Divorce causes difficulties for all involved and speaking to a psychologist/therapist may be beneficial for adjustment and dealing with emotions. Counselors and/or physicians must intervene for the family's sake but most importantly the child. Depending on the stage of development, children cope differently and divorce will affect them differently as well.

Often physicians are required to intervene because they are seen as objective and usually who the family sees regularly. Due to school being a place of normalcy in a child's life and the next place a child spends most time, school counselors should be given enough time to provide the necessary individual counseling. This form of intervention will consist primarily of the child only. During this interaction, children are able to identify and work through whatever issues they have regarding divorce and strategies are developed to address them. Teachers and counselors usually have the initial contact with the display of any behavior caused by divorce. There is an important collaboration necessary to meet the needs of the child. Teachers and counselors have to have regular communication with one another as well as contact with the parents. Parents are able to share how the child is coping at home, which in turn assists with implementing effective ways to help the child express how they feel. Child-focused

interventions will assist with the child appropriately expressing their feelings, whether through creative play, drawing, or games. Creative interventions allow the therapist to possibly have an entryway through any resistance. This assists with building up positivity and again, expression of emotions.

With children being the focus of therapy, a counselor must decide which form of therapy best fits each family. Divorce mediation is sometimes effective, with focus being on the reorganization of a new structure. Counseling can occur between both parent and child and is believed to help in the transition of separation. Some therapists conduct sessions with each parent with children as it is similar to what the unit will look like after the divorce. If there are specific concerns, individual therapy may be useful. If parents won't participate or cooperate, only then will individual counseling with a child be considered. Most effective for all involved will be the resolution of parental conflict through mediation. This is due to children seeing their parents getting along after divorce and acceptance being easier for the children and possibly mirroring of the same behavior.

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