

Childhood Trauma

What are the critical factors which influence the development of children from disrupted homes?

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Divorce rates are high and are likely to increase still further. It is estimated by some researchers that between 50 and 67% of first marriages will end in divorce (Gottman, 1998). Figures derived from recent statistics indicate the number of new children involved in divorce in this country, will be around 366,000 each year. This account examines research literature on divorce from the child and young adult's perspective. The report has been divided into four areas relating to the child; their parents; family and education. The aims of examining this literature are threefold. Firstly, to delineate key perspectives, to provide structure to the diverse areas outlined in this field. Secondly, to distinguish research pertinent to all child development from research pertinent only to children from disrupted homes. Thirdly, to break down the set of outcomes from divorce into its constituent parts so that each area may be examined independently. From this review, five key perspectives emerged: 1) emotional cohesion, encompassing attachment, sensitivity and conflict; 2) family relatedness, including factors such as lineage between child and parent, siblings and grandparents, and the sex of the custodial parent; 3) social disadvantage and disruption, such as reduced social and economic status and major disruptions within the social environment; 4) parental psychological and physical wellbeing and 5) temperament and personality of the child, resilience, self concept and self efficacy. Suggestions for future research based on a biopsychosocial model and practical proposals for assistance for families undergoing marital disruption have been proffered.

There has been a dramatic decrease in the overall number of marriages, which have fallen by roughly a quarter between 1988 and 1995. Also, the proportion of twenty one to twenty four year olds getting married has halved in this same period, suggesting couples are tending to marry later in life (ONS NTC). However, despite the plausible acclaimed benefits to couples leaving it longer before they marry (Amato, 1996 Norton and Glick 1979) and this highly significant decrease in the overall number of marriages, divorce is six times more common in 1996 than it was in 1961 and twice as common in 1996, compared to 1971 (ONS).

In respect to the number of children affected, Furstenburg, Nord, Peterson and Zill (1983), estimate that 50 to 60% born in the US, will live with only one parent for at least a year, before reaching their eighteenth birthday. In Britain, as there are approximately 13 million married couples, with an average of 2.1 dependent children and an average of 13.4 divorces each year per thousand married couples, the number of new children involved in this country will be around 366,000 each year (figures derived from statistics in the Lifestyle Pocket Book, 1998). There has also been a rise in the percentage of births

outside marriage from around 5% in 1960 to 28% in 1990 (Halsey, 1990). Lastly, researchers examining the intergenerational transmission of divorce, have forecast higher rates for the future as significant associations have been made between parental divorce and offspring divorce (Feng, Giarrusso, Bengtson and Frye, 1999) These statistics make the investigation of all aspects of divorce and separation highly pertinent in today's society.

Research examining the effects of divorce and separation on children is widespread. This account aims to address most issues raised in this literature from the child and young adult's perspective. The report has been divided into four areas examining research related to 1) the child 2) their parents 3) family and 4) education. The literature on a specific topic aims to reflect previous research priorities. However, due to the diversity of the topic it has not been possible to examine all relevant areas. Initially, two further sections were postulated. Firstly, that of societal and legal, looking at issues concerning access, maintenance, social policy and changes in the law. Secondly, initial proposals were to examine literature on adults who experienced divorce of their parents as children, with the view that later experiences may not be independent of earlier ones. This section was designed to cover issues such as the age at which the divorced offspring marries, the level of marriage within this group, personality and emotional growth, including resilience, self concept, self esteem, and the over representation of disorders such as agoraphobia, anxiety, depression, panic disorders and neuroses. Qualitative research, using narrative interviewing, is planned for next year to explore issues raised in the literature in all of these areas.

The aims of this review are threefold. Firstly, this account is designed to delineate key perspectives to provide structure to the diverse areas outlined in the literature. Secondly, in so doing, the identification of research pertinent to all child development can be partially segregated from research pertinent to children from disrupted homes. For, whilst issues regarding attachment and sensitivity affect all children, the addition of step relatives will obviously only affect this particular group. Thirdly, divorce has a very negative public image, laymen and professionals alike, see it as a unified, global entity but encapsulating it in these terms is unhelpful, as it leads to only two possibilities, to divorce or not to divorce. Generally parents want to do the best for their children but they need to know specifically what it is about divorce which may affect their family, so that they can take practical steps to assist themselves during the critical transition period and afterwards. This, coupled with a greater level of awareness and an increase in facilities available outside the family, such as counselling, lessons on relationships in schools and so forth, can be used to support the whole family if necessary.

Not all divorces adversely affect children, some bring relief, nor are all aspects of divorce detrimental, parents need to know specifically what it is about divorce which may adversely affect their child.

The child

Key issues: *Age*
 Sex
 Ethnicity

This section aims to examine literature pertaining to specific characteristics of the children involved. From the child's standpoint, is marital disruption more harmful if it occurs early in life, or during adolescence? Are girls more highly affected than boys, or vice versa? Are both affected equally but one responds more ardently than the other? Due to the paucity of literature regarding ethnicity, a discursive account could not be formulated, with the result that the small amount of literature has been summarised briefly at the very end of this section.

Age

Young children of divorce have been shown to demonstrate more "acting out" behaviour, showing increased disruptive and agitated behaviour, than older children and adolescents (Hodges and Bloom, 1984 and Furstenburg, 1983). Several plausible explanations supporting these findings are possible. Firstly, younger children are more dependent on parents for their emotional support and guidance. It is likely that there will be a greater level of interaction due to this dependence and therefore an increased likelihood that the parent will be missed. In contrast, during adolescence, support stems from broader networks, where friendships with peers become more important and intimacy with parents typically declines (Kouser and Najam, 1992). This could mean that adolescent adjustment following divorce may be moderated by a larger network of relationships (O'Connor, Neiderbiser, Reiss, Hetherington and Plomin 1998). Secondly, young children are more likely to demonstrate acting out behaviours because they are less likely to fully understand or be fully informed about their parents' break up (Waldron, 1986). There is perhaps also an increased likelihood that younger children's behaviour will be ascribed to marital disruption, whereas an adolescent's disruptive behaviour may be more prone to be attributed to fluctuating hormone levels.

However, adverse effects are not confined to the very young. There are perhaps equally as many studies supporting the idea that older children have more problems adjusting than their younger counterparts (Messerschmitt,

Legrain and Hamasaki, 1998). There are also many explanations for why older children should show greater adjustment problems than younger children. For example, perhaps adolescents' experiences were comparatively more recent and, therefore, more salient. Or maybe older children are more sensitive to their emotions and those of others. Or perhaps they are more likely to be drawn into parental disputes and suffer from feelings of divided loyalties (Cummings, Iannotti and Zahn-Waxler, 1985). It seems that there are different problems associated with different ages.

Studies have been undertaken to attempt to separate the effects of age from time since disruption. Kinard and Reinherz (1986) found that recent disruption had a greater influence on the child's academic performance than early disruption. This seems plausible since time is notoriously claimed as a healer. However, Amato and Keith (1991) found in their meta analysis that, whilst longitudinal studies generally provided support for the notion that children's well being improves with the passage of time since divorce, findings from cross sectional studies were conflicting. Three of their reported studies found that recent disruptions were associated with poorer outcomes for children, whilst six others failed to find any such association, despite the children being the same age.

Wallerstein and Lewis (1998), in a twenty five year follow up study of interviews with twenty six children all between two and a half and six years at the initial break up, found that they faced greater difficulties than their peers at all ages but the nature of the difficulty changed depending upon the age of the child at interview. The children's earliest memories were of feelings of "abandonment" "terror" and "loneliness". Adolescence was marked by early "sexual activity and experimentation with alcohol and drugs" and in early adulthood, relationships with parents, particularly fathers, were strained and fears of intimacy dominant. However, these results were based on clinical impressions with small samples using retrospective data and, therefore, cannot be viewed as overly reliable.

Where negative effects have been shown in the recent aftermath of divorce, it has been argued that these may have only a modest influence on adult adjustment (Sinclair and Nelson, 1998). Some researchers have gone a step further, arguing that these children may develop positive outcomes from their experiences as learning to adapt to their new environment may lead to psychological growth and well adjusted adults (Gately and Schwebel, 1992). Similarly, Messerschmitt et al (1998) found that adolescents of divorced or separated parents showed "greater tendencies towards extroversion, self reliance and interest in the concrete". Whilst no-one is likely to ascribe great benefits to divorce, children who have experienced it may display a greater

level of understanding and empathy to others' problems in their adult years. Nonetheless, this is in no sense intended to belittle the negative affect which may ensue divorce immediately before, during or shortly afterwards.

Sex

Where adverse effects have been demonstrated, there have been differences between the sexes, with boys showing more severe and enduring detrimental effects than girls (Freeman, 1985, Hodges and Bloom, 1984 and Gullotta 1981). Explanations for these differences are few and have tended to focus on the mother-child relationship, perhaps due to custody still favouring the mother (Gladstone, 1987). Controversially, Barber (1998) argues that "parents who are not capable of producing high quality children invest more in their daughters". Studies have suggested that the investment per child declines following divorce as the parents both become preoccupied with their own resulting feelings and problems, hence this may be a potential critical factor (Patterson, 1971 and Barber, 1998).

A further plausible explanation may be linked to sex differences in behaviour. Boys typically display more aggressivity and conduct problems, whilst girls may be more inclined to withdraw or show anxiety related problems (Block, 1983). The differences found in these behaviours, mean that boys' behaviour is viewed more socially unacceptable than girls and hence, more likely to come to an outsider's attention. Therefore, differences between the sexes may reflect greater reports of male problems over females, rather than a real difference. Also Flander (1968) found that boys are more likely to imitate aggressive behaviour than girls. Fathers may display heightened aggression throughout their disturbed marriage which is more likely to be modelled by their son than their daughter. Or it may be that differences are only a matter of degree, hence equally as many girls as boys may show negative effects but boys respond more vehemently.

Summary

Studies examining age effects yield inconclusive results as to whether there is a critical age in which children are particularly vulnerable to marital disruption. Whilst very young children may be more emotionally tied to both parents leading to heightened risk, older children may have been exposed to longer periods of conflict or maybe are more likely to be drawn into parental disputes (an issue discussed in greater depth in the parents section). Whilst there is greater consistency amongst findings examining sex differences, with boys appearing to fare worse than girls, it may be that girls are more prone to internalise their grief rather than outwardly express it. Depression amongst

adults is twice as prevalent in women as men, perhaps distress in females evolves later in life.

Ethnicity

Due to limited space and the paucity of research, further specific characteristics of the children can only be briefly summarised. There is a limited amount of literature suggesting that children from ethnically mixed marriages are more likely to experience the divorce of their parents, than children from non mixed marriages (Waldron, Ching and Fair, 1986) and divorce probabilities are higher amongst African Americans than white Americans (Kposowa, 1998). It may be that ethnic background and different cultures may create potential conflict between the parents at each developmental stage of the child and result in these raised statistics.

The parents

Key issues: *Attachment and sensitivity*
 Conflict
 Cognitive Appraisal
 Discipline.

Attachment and sensitivity

The parents offer the primary social environment for young children to learn and experience emotional relationships. Bowlby (1973) argued that children develop an internal working model, a system of beliefs as regards relationships with others, particularly their parents. Based on the care giver's sensitivity to the child's distress signals, the child learns to expect the care giver's behaviour to follow a given pattern. Where a child's call for help is repeatedly ignored, this is likely to discourage the child from turning to his care giver in times of need and may ultimately result in the child becoming insecurely attached. Ainsworth, Bell and Stayton (1974) further examined the mother-child relationship in home settings. Sensitive responsiveness to infant signals and communication were argued to be the most influential factors associated with secure attachments, which reflected the child's ability to explore and play.

In a more recent meta analysis of 66 studies, the role of sensitivity in secure attachments was explored by Wolff and Ijzendoorn (1997). Twenty one of the studies using the strange situation procedure, in non clinical middle class samples achieved a medium effect size for the association between attachment and sensitivity (magnitude of effect was based on Cohen's criteria, 1988).

However, whilst sensitivity was argued to be important it was not claimed an exclusive condition for attachment security.

Researchers have inferred that negative effects of divorce may be attributed to the disruption to this emotional bond, either through deficiencies in attachment or reduced sensitivity. It has been argued that high parental stress significantly lowers the quality of parent-child interactions and raises the number of problems within the dyad as early as eight to twelve years prior to divorce (McKay, Pickens and Stewart, 1996). Low quality in the parents' marriage has been argued largely to account for these associations (Amato and Booth, 1996) Further, early problems in the parent-child relationship and low quality in the parents' marriage when children were ten years old predicted low parental affection for children when they were eighteen years old. Patterson (1971) reasoned that parents may become so emotionally absorbed in their marital problems that they may be unable to adequately attend to the emotions of their offspring.

Nonetheless, Amato and Keith (1991) found that children of divorce experience lower levels of well being, than do children who have experienced parental death. This, therefore, suggests that other mechanisms over and above attachment and sensitivity are involved. Also, Bowlby and Ainsworth et al's theories of attachment focus on maternal attachment and sensitivity where in cases of divorce paternal loss is more typical. Lastly, whilst attachment and sensitivity issues may affect children from disrupted homes to a greater degree, the above points are relevant to all children, not just this particular group.

Conflict

Researchers addressing conflicting reports have postulated that marital conflict may play a major role. In an extensive review, Davies and Cummings (1994) produced convincing evidence of the major role of unresolved marital conflicts and the profound negative effect this may impose on children, despite a good bond between mother and child and a sensitive interaction between them. This finding implies that the role of conflict, rather than attachment and sensitivity, may be central to any negative effects. Supporting this hypothesis, Buehler, Krishnakumar, Stone, Anthony, Pemberton, Gerard and Barber, (1998) found that inter parental conflict variables account for over 20% of the variance in youth problem behaviours, whilst Harold and Conger (1997) reporting on the role of conflict in intact families, found it increased the risk for adolescent maladjustment. Hence, protracted divorces, or instances where couples decide to stay together for the sake of the children, may exacerbate children's difficulties if marital problems remain unresolved.

Whilst extreme parental conflict or family dysfunction may be resolved through divorce leading to a better outcome for the children involved, (Barber and Eccles, 1992 and Hazelton Lancee and O'Neil, 1998) nonetheless, divorced parents may still war with one another despite being apart and use their children as pawns in the process (Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornsbusch 1991). Again, it is noteworthy that conflict in the family is perhaps more probable in families experiencing divorce and separation but it is not confined to only include these parents.

Cognitive Appraisal

Harold and Conger (1997) argue that the critical predetermining factor is not conflict per se but the child's interpretation or appraisal of marital hostility. According to Lazarus (1991) appraisal is assessed on the basis of its relevance, its likely effects (beneficial or harmful) and the level of involvement for the child. Thus, the impact of hostile events is a consequence of their subjective meaning.

The interpretation of hostility seems likely to be shaped by current characteristics of the conflict situation, contextual effects as well as past events and their outcomes, therefore, in this sense attachment and sensitivity will play a role. Lastly on this issue, the child's coping strategies are likely to be highly relevant in estimating the influence of parental conflict. Krantz, Clark, Pruyn and Usher (1985) found that positive cognitive coping by children of divorce related to fewer adjustment problems. This prophylactic effect is not surprising given the purported benefits of cognitive therapy in the treatment of negative thoughts.

Suggestions as to the precise nature of conflict which may be detrimental and the possible negative outcomes for children are varied. Fauber, Forehand, McCombs, Thomas and Wierson (1990) postulated acting out behaviour may be due to modelling following the child's repeated exposure to angry exchanges between parents, although this finding was evident only in children from intact but not divorced families in their study. Whilst Harold and Conger (1997) suggest that parents who are angry and hostile to each other are also more likely to treat their children similarly. They proposed that conflict within one family subsystem serves as an emotional primer for the generalisation of the same behaviours with other members of the family. Theoretical models describing the influence of conflict on the parent-child relationship seem to gloss over the influence of the child on the parents. Hence, just as conflict between the parents will influence the child and his behaviour, the child who is in conflict with his parents will similarly influence his parents. Hence, it may be that the child's acting out behaviour following

divorce has led to increased conflict between the parents, leading them to become more upset and argumentative with each other. This area would benefit from further research taking a more biopsychosocial stance.

Discipline

Further parental factors examine the issue of discipline. A parent who feels riddled with guilt for having broken up the family home may be at an increased risk of lax parenting, even if this is only short term. Patterson (1982) examining the role of parenting on conduct problems, demonstrated that the best predictor of delinquency in a non clinical sample of boys was a reduction in consistency or effectiveness of parental discipline. Whilst children require direction from their parents, this has to be appropriately aimed in order that the child does not feel alienated at a time when they may feel least secure. Nonetheless, this was not supported with evidence attained from a comprehensive study undertaken by Fauber et al (1990). Self reported data from adolescents living in intact and recently divorced families was used to examine the role of lax control, psychological control and parental rejection / withdrawal. Lax control was not a particularly important variable for explaining the relationship between marital conflict and adolescent adjustment problems but rejection / withdrawal were consistently associated with higher levels of adjustment problems. They claim that children who have lost one parent through divorce, may be primarily concerned with maintaining a close bond with the custodial parent. It must be questioned however, whether adolescents would freely admit their parents were lax in discipline.

Summary

Theorists such as Bowlby (1973) and Ainsworth et al (1974) saw disruption to the emotional bond between the parents and child as vitally important in terms of healthy development. Theorists examining the effects of divorce have suggested that adverse effects may be attributed, in part to this disruption. This has been partially supported by recent theorists such as Wolffe et al (1997) although they state sensitivity is an important but limited predictor of attachment security. Also, the level of attachment and sensitivity will affect *all* children, although children from divorced parents are obviously at a greater risk. There is also a significant amount of research demonstrating an absence of negative effects following parental divorce and disruption to this bond (Summers, Forehand, Armistead and Tannenbaum, 1998; Hazelton, Lancee and O'Neil, 1998) with the result that researchers have been forced to examine further factors such as the role of conflict (Davies and Cummings, 1994;

Cummings and Cummings, 1988; Buehler, Krishnakumar, Stone, Anthony, Pemberton, Gerard, and Barber, 1998) lax discipline (Patterson, 1982) rejection and withdrawal (Fauber, Forehand, McCombs and Wierson, 1990).

There are also a number of geneticists who have argued, equally vehemently, that many of the negative effects often associated with divorce, for example adolescent antisocial behaviour and depressive symptomatology, could equally be due to the child's inherited disposition (O' Connor et al, 1998; Neiderheiser et al, 1999). Whilst at first glance these researchers seem to be engaging in the age old nature versus nurture debate, they may nonetheless be in agreement. For example, divorce may result in a child residing with a lone parent who is dissimilar to them, as they may share more characteristics with the absent parent, both in respect to temperament and looks. It may be that this constant reminder of the ex partner leads to friction between the child and the resident parent. It has not been possible to discuss literature examining the possible influence of the sex of the custodial parent and the child's well being. Nonetheless, the recent research trend seems to have moved away from gross characteristics like parental sex, moving towards a broader array of factors like temperament and personality, academia and socio-emotional fit (Powell and Downey, 1997; Downey, AinsworthDarnell, Dufer, 1998).

Lastly, the majority of the approaches which researchers have used tend to assume that there is coherence in personality over time but early assessments may not necessarily predict the presence of later developmental difficulties. Longitudinal studies performed in non clinical samples and including children prior to disruption in parenting, would yield a richer source of data in which the contributions of both innate personality differences as well as environmental influences could be better assessed. Also, this would enable the level of childhood difficulties carried into adulthood to be estimated. Further influential factors concerning step parenting, sibling relationships and the grandparents role are outlined in the next section on the family.

Family relations: step parents, siblings, step siblings, grandparents and step grandparents.

Key issues: *Step parents - the child's physiology and stress*
 Lineage and parent-child relationships
 Lineage and sibling relationships
 Grandparents
 Grandparents and access

Analysis from the Office for National statistics (ONS) in the U.K. indicates that one in eight children in the United Kingdom will live at some stage in a

family in which their birth parent has either remarried, or formed a new partnership before they reach the age of sixteen. Seventy two per cent in the ONS analysis started to live in a step family before their tenth birthday (Haskey, 1994). It is noteworthy that these figures do not include children born from cohabiting parents who have since separated, or married couples who have separated but not divorced, adding to the number of children affected. What are the implications for the children represented in these statistics? The previous section primarily examined research pertaining to psychological features surrounding divorce, attachment, sensitivity and so forth, this section considers research regarding the child's physiology and considers some of the practical implications which may be associated with divorce. Also, whilst the last section primarily examined the child's divorced biological parents, this section begins with discussion focusing on the relationship of step parents with their children and follows on to examine relationships between biological and step siblings and grandparents and step grandparents.

Step Parents - the Child's Physiology and Stress

Recently, a handful of researchers have begun to draw somewhat controversial conclusions from research relating to the physical development of children from divorced parents. The leading researcher in this field, Mark Flinn, headed a team of researchers to compare the physique of children from step parents, with children residing in non step parent families (Flinn, Leone and Quinlan, 1999). Extensive physical measurements were taken of children from birth up to twenty years. Height, weight, head circumference and three skin fold measurements were compared in 238 male and female children living in the Dominica over a ten year period. Results tentatively suggested that co-residence with a step father was associated with sub-optimal growth, whereby both female and male children had lower body weights for their age than other children, including their co-resident half siblings, despite showing similar birth weights.

The results from this highly controversial piece of research, somewhat weakened by the small sample size, were offered as supporting evidence for an earlier study (Flinn and England, 1997) in which step children (with and without step siblings) were shown to have higher cortisol levels than children from intact and non step parent families. The suggestion is that step family environments are more stressful and long term stress may ultimately have a detrimental effect on growth. The physiological effects of high corticosterone levels per se is beyond the realm of this report, suffice to state there is nonetheless a fair amount of research noting the detrimental effects of

corticosterone on growth as well as cognition, memory and psychological disorders.

Also, further research supports the detrimental role of stress in family relationships but stress has typically been examined as that experienced by the parent and the indirect effect this may have on the child. Indeed, this has led a number of researchers to question whether or not any adverse effects of remarriage, such as renewed emotional stress, outweigh the beneficial effect of increased wealth into the family or vice versa. The presence and persistence of everyday hassles, for example concerns about money, work, children difficulties, lack of leisure time, were negatively associated with maternal well being, the quality of the mother-child relationship and maternal strain (Pett, Wampold, Turner and Vaughan-Cole, 1999) and depression in the mother and growing up in a low income household has been associated with heightened adjustment difficulties for the child (Dunn, Deater-Deckard, Pickering, and O'Connor, 1998). These factors, however, affect all families not just the single parent or reconstituted. There is perhaps equally convincing research showing the benefits to children who have working mothers, in respect to being able to provide a more enriching environment and more positive perceptions of mothers (Youngblut, Singer, Madigan, Swegart and Rodgers, 1998). Hence, what seems to be of paramount importance is the right balance where neither parent is overly stressed.

Lineage and Parent – Child Relationships

Flinn et al's (1999) more recent explanation for the differences found in the physique of these children takes an evolutionary perspective. He argues firstly, that step fathers have less reason to care for another man's child than their own, as they do not have the same desire to pass on their genes. Secondly, step parents who create mixed families, where biological siblings are living with step siblings, are likely to carry the greatest risk of disproportionate care giving. Thirdly, children raised by a biological and a step parent who has no children of his or her own, nor a desire to parent any in the new relationship, may not particularly like children, may resent caring for another man or woman's child or see the child as a hindrance in the new parent relationship. Lastly, biological mothers or fathers of these children may be motivated to minimise their parental obligation to their children, in an attempt to minimise conflict within the parental relationship, particularly if they are dependent upon their new partner for financial support. The psychosocial trauma associated with these factors have been associated with disruption of phenotypic development, particularly growth.

Support for a sliding scale in paternal care, dependent upon the relatedness between the parents and the offspring has come from a few other sources. For

example, Anderson, Kaplan, Lam and Lancaster (1999) classified male parental care into four main categories based on the genetic link between father and child and the father's present emotional link with the mother. When the father is both genetically related to the child and is in a current relationship with the child's mother, the child is likely to receive greater paternal attention than when the father is neither genetically related, nor in a current relationship with the mother. Between these two extremes fall genetically related but not romantically involved with mother and not genetically related but romantically involved with the mother. Two studies undertaken in Cape Town, South Africa and Albuquerque, USA (Anderson et al, 1999 and Anderson, Kaplan and Lancaster, 1999) supported this model, men were found to invest more time and money into rearing their genetic offspring and in the children of their current mates. Whilst the researchers state the actions of these fathers is not conscious, they assert the primary reason for men to care for non genetically related children is to keep their partner.

Lineage and Sibling Relationships

An analysis undertaken by Mekos, Hetherington and Reiss (1996) of 516 families with two same sexed siblings found that differential treatment of siblings was greater in remarried than in non divorced households, especially when the siblings do not share the same biological parent. Hence, it seems that siblings are treated differently depending upon their genetic relationship with their parents. Differential treatment was also more strongly related to problem behaviour with the mother's child at greater risk of problem behaviour and aversive relationships with both parent and step parent than the father's child. These findings thus add further support for those studies outlined above. Mekos et al (1996), agreeing with Flinn, also propose that displaying greater differential negativity and more differential warmth towards step children may be due to a bias to protect their own offspring who can ultimately pass on their genes. Also, they suggest that the greater differences in responsiveness from parents may be due to genetically influenced characteristics such as temperament.

Stocker, Ahmed and Stall (1997) investigated sibling relationships by analysing reports made by 64 mothers regarding their marital relationships and their seven year old children's reports of their relationship with their sibling(s). Results showed associations between marital dissatisfaction and hostile and rivalrous sibling relationships, where negative maternal emotional expressiveness was associated with poor sibling relationships and positive emotional expressiveness was associated with affectionate sibling relationships. This notwithstanding, evidence has also shown that siblings

may display greater levels of warmth and affection to one another in spite of, or because of, their mother's expression of negative emotions (Cassidy, Parke Butkovski and Braungart, 1992). Parents of children in intact families are likely to have observed how siblings side with one another against parents in family conflict situations. It seems likely that the relationship between siblings is dependent upon the genetic link between them, the degree of liking between each other, the emotional expressiveness of the parents and the level of hostility within the family. Children of violent and aggressive parents seem equally as likely to stick together so as not to create a further enemy with their sibling.

Grandparents

Grandparents have been shown to have a predominantly positive influence on the development of their grandchildren (Ganong and Coleman, 1998). Influence may be direct, through emotional support, cognitive stimulation and so forth or indirect, through parental advice, financial and emotional support (Tinsley and Park, 1984). However, there may be subtle differences between the role played by grandparents and step grandparents. Ganong and Coleman (1998) found that divorce and remarriage of the middle generation did not affect grandparents' perceived obligations to financially assist their grandchildren but step grandparents were not seen as obligated to assist financially following divorce and remarriage. Again, this seems to echo sentiments outlined above. The closer the genetic link between relationships the more likely support, in this instance financial, will be proffered.

Grandparents and Access

Smith (1991) noted that contact between genetic grandparent and grandchild is also affected by blood relatedness, whereby the relationship between them is more likely to be maintained by maternal than paternal grandmothers where the child's mother has custody. Paternal grandparents whose children do not have custody, in contrast may have access problems, particularly if either parent moves away. Although there has been a slight swing in custody arrangements from mother to father and an increase in joint custody (Waldron, Ching and Fair, 1986), given that custody is still typically more likely to be awarded to the mother, the paternal grandparents are most likely to be adversely affected. Gladstone (1987) also indicated that maternal grandparents may have increased access to their grandchildren as they adopt the role of surrogate parent. Contrary to Smith's finding, Gladstone (1987) believed the level of contact was primarily dependent upon geographical proximity between grandparents and grandchildren, in combination with the

relationship between the custodial parent and the grandparents, putting less emphasis on friction amongst the generations.

Finally, there is a growing debate over the expansive rights given to grandparents over visiting their grandchildren in the United States. Stanton (1998) reports that in every state grandparents have the legal right to go to court to seek visitation rights with their grandchildren. Since court orders will only be sought by grandparents who have already been refused visitation by the custodial parent, it seems likely that such imposed visitation rights will simply add further fuel to an already emotionally charged situation. Drew and Smith (1999) report comments given from such grandparents who have received contact orders in Britain but have still been denied contact by the custodial parent, one proclaimed "the judiciary do not enforce the act". In view of the involvement of children in these battles, the motives of such grandparents appear to the writer to be misplaced, for their primary concern is seemingly for themselves, rather than the children they so desperately want to see.

Summary

Whilst many studies have shown that remarriage may bring primary (another parent) and secondary (financial and emotional support to the parent) gains to the children involved, these may carry an element of secondary risk. Weak evidence but from a number of sources, has suggested that stepfathers display differential treatment towards stepchildren. Due to space confinements it has not been possible to review literature on stepmothers. Also, as custody is primarily given to mothers, the literature on stepmothers is sparse by comparison. It may also be that the addition of step siblings increases the chances for friction within the family, again primarily because of differential treatment, divided loyalties and different temperaments. The extent to which these factors will negatively influence the cohesion within the new family, is dependent upon the commitment of the parents and the personalities of the children involved. Findings from studies examining the role of grandparents have been mainly derived from data provided by the grandparents themselves. With this limitation in mind, two main conclusions can be drawn from this literature. The relationships between blood related grandparents and grandchildren are likely to be as good and perhaps better following the divorce of the child's parents, providing the grandparent lives in close proximity, is blood related to the parent or has a good relationship with the custodial parent. However, the literature on step grandparents mimics that on step parents showing evidence supporting the role of lineage, in so far as step grandparents are less likely to provide financial support to their step grandchildren.

Education

Key issues: Age, early or late marital disruption and academic achievement
Single parenting, remarriage and joint parenting
Methodological issues
Resilience

The effects of marital disruption on children's academic achievement in schools has been widely published. Results showing detrimental effects are prevalent (Mulholland, Watt, Philpott and Sarlin, 1991; Barber, 1998; Japel, Tremblay, Vitaro and Boulerice, 1999 for example) although not unanimous (Messerschmitt, Legrain and Hamasaki, 1998) and are highly variable in terms of the level and areas of deficit (Kinard and Reinherz, 1986) and the groups of children affected (Furr, 1998). For example, educational liabilities have been shown more pronounced for boys than girls (Krein and Beller, 1988) and for ethnic minorities (Grimes and Register, 1991). Whilst many studies could be criticised for reporting immediate detrimental effects, which arguably would be expected, the impact of an unstable environment is more likely to result in poorer concentration, a lack of interest, poorer productivity and achievement and so forth (Japel, Tremblay, Vitaro and Boulerice 1999; Hamilton, 1993; Mills 1984; Guidubaldi and Perry, 1984) nonetheless, studies undertaken in young adulthood have indicated that lowered academic performance may not be transitory (Mednik, Baker, Reznik and Hocevar, 1990; Bisnaire, Firestone and Rynard, 1990).

Age, Early or Late Marital Disruption and Academic Achievement

Detrimental effects following parental separation and divorce on academic performance and achievement are more widespread than those making no such claims and have been reported across all age groups 4-6 years (Kinard and Reinherz, 1986) 6-12 years (Hamilton, 1993); 10 to 14 years (Mulholland, Watt, Philpott and Sarlin, 1991) and 9-25 years (Bisnaire, Firestone and Rynard, 1990). However, despite this breadth of research, it is difficult to separate the effects of the age of the child at disruption from the effects of time since disruption. Is, for example, a divorce which occurs early in a child's life more detrimental to academic achievement than divorce which occurs later? Do detrimental effects accumulate, making it harder for a child to catch up with his peers? Or do adverse effects decline as the child adjusts to a new environment at home?

A number of researchers have attempted to answer these questions but conclusions remain divided. Furstenburg (1983) reported greater detrimental effects on children's cognitive functioning when marital disruption occurred during the child's pre-school years, stating that children who experience an early disruption never recover. Whilst Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) and Kelly and Wallerstein, (1976) examining children in the latency stage of development, claim that generally, where there has been a decline in school performance, performance returned to normal achievement levels one year later. Lastly, Kinard and Reinherz (1986) performed analysis of covariance on data from a large scale longitudinal study and found that children from recently disrupted homes showed greater problems in some but not all areas of school achievement in comparison to children who had experienced early disruption or who had never experienced disruption. Generally researchers tend to agree that divorce adversely affects academic achievement in the short term, however researchers remain divided as to whether these effects are long lasting or occur only during the crisis period. A highly influential factor will be the extent to which divorce has resolved or exacerbated relationships between family members.

Single Parenting, Remarriage and Joint Parenting

Many researchers have assumed that where single parents remarry the children's academic attainment will improve. This assumption has been primarily based on the premise that financial pressures on the single parent are greater than those in a dual income household (Boggess, 1998). Also, two parents may arguably have more time for the children as household chores may be shared (Beller and Graham, 1993). The detrimental effect of poverty and low social economic status has been widely documented and supported from a diverse literature base, with strong evidence demonstrating adverse effects in terms of poorer academic achievement, higher levels of delinquency (Pagani, Boulerice, Vitaro and Tremblay, 1999) and increased risks of childhood mortality and injury (Klerman, 1991).

However, William Jeynes (1999) found powerful evidence to suggest that children from reconstituted families scored no higher and often lower than children of divorce from single parent families. Hence, it may be that the stress caused by parental remarriage is greater for the child, than that experienced through lower social economic status. For example, children may demonstrate a reluctance to accept a new parental figure, struggle to befriend new step siblings, or just perhaps miss the close relationship they had experienced with their biological parent before the step parent came along. Further, environmental changes are perhaps more likely, such as moving

house, living in a new area and perhaps a change of school. Life changes per se have been shown to have a negative effect on wellbeing.

Researchers searching for the ideal solution have promoted joint custodial arrangements, which would typically enhance social relationships with fathers as mothers are still more likely to gain custody (Waldron, Ching and Fair, 1986). Furr (1998) found that students from intact families, who perceived their fathers as encouraging and involved in their education, performed higher in college entrance exams than students who did not hold these beliefs. Whilst the level of involvement, encouragement and visitation from absent fathers made no difference in divorced families on college entrance exam performance. Similarly, Hamilton (1993) extols the virtues of children being given free access to both parents throughout their education. There is no ideal solution, however, children may experience great distress on repeated separation and reunion with parents. They may feel they do not fit in either household or neighbourhood. Where the child has free access to both parents, the parents are also likely to have frequent contact. The success of joint custody, or frequent access rights, is dependent upon the ability of the parents to remain on good terms, the child's desire to see both parents, as well as practical considerations such as the proximity between the two houses. Unsurprisingly, Ahrons and Miller (1993) found that high levels of conflict and little co-operation tend to hinder father-child contact whereas low conflict and high support facilitated it.

Methodological issues

Methodological analysis of these studies raise a number of critical issues. Firstly, whilst researchers examining this area have commonly controlled for birth order, socio-economic status, maternal education, maternal employment and IQ of the parents, what remains fairly consistent across the vast majority of these studies, is a lack of detail analysis encompassing specific characteristics of the children and the families involved. Generally speaking researchers have tended to amalgamate data from all children of divorced parents when examining academic achievement, when in reality the relatedness of the parent or parents to the child is extremely varied. Children may be raised by their single father or mother, a combination of step parent (mother or father) and biological parent (mother or father), with or without step siblings, or by neither biological parent but a family member or someone unknown to the family. There may be a sliding scale, with children experiencing the greatest number of new family members, displaying lower academic achievement than those who have remained in a single parent family environment.

Resilience

Secondly, literature fails to adequately address the role of resilience and a number of issues related to it. Resilience refers to the individual's ability to overcome stress or adversity. Rutter (1999) emphasises that resilience may be artefactual if too narrow a range of outcomes are considered or if there is measurement at only one point in time. The ability to cope in the future will depend on how effectively the individual managed in the past. Hence studies which have taken the typical narrow fielded snap shot approach comparing between group differences can neither be adequately used to predict how the child will fare in the future, nor adequately capture the vast diversity of individual differences, such as the temperament of the child, his or her previous experiences, individual differences in cognitive processing, which will all determine to a degree, whether or not resilience develops. Research would benefit greatly from longitudinal qualitative and quantitative analysis which could be designed to address these issues and would also provide the opportunity to observe the two way interaction between the child and his parents and the child interacting with his peers. The way the child interacts with others, affects how others interact with him, this influence has not been sufficiently examined.

Summary

There is a vast amount of fairly solid evidence documenting adverse effects of marital disruption on the academic achievement of children of all ages. Although it remains unclear as to whether or not a child's academic attainment recovers or diminishes over time and whether or not there is a particular critical period related to the child's chronological age, in which divorce is likely to have the most damaging effect. Whilst remarriage has been widely advocated to counteract the negative side effect of reduced social economic status, remarriage has also been shown to be detrimental due to the heightened stress incurred.

Due to the vast subject area and limited space, a number of issues can only be summarised. Whilst the literature has tended to focus upon academic achievement, a few researchers have examined the child's social relationships in school and found children have poorer peer relationships (Gallagher, 1981) and are less likely to become intimate in young adulthood (Wallerstein, 1991) and form less secure romantic attachments (Summer, Forehand, Armistead and Tannenbaum, 1998). Other researchers, noting the recent shift from parents to peers, in terms of influencing children's behaviour (Judith, Harris 1999) commend the benefits of students acting as peer counsellors for students experiencing divorce (Sprinthall, Hall, and Gerler, 1992). To date, the

positive effects of peers as counsellors have not been assessed in respect to academic achievement. Whilst researchers remain divided as to whether the stigma of divorce has diminished (Spanier and Thompson, 1984) or persists (Hoffman and Avila, 1998 and Amato and Keith, 1991) Cox and Desforges (1986) note some benefit of heightened divorce rates which have led to an increase in understanding the plight of some pupils and a greater willingness from teachers to support children in school, which may, in some ways, be more beneficial to the child than bringing in an unknown councillor.

Conclusion

There are a number of themes which run through each of the sections of this report. Due to limitations on length, it has not been possible to demonstrate each theme under each section heading, rather only an illustration has been given of their possible influence in one of the preceding sections. Hence, whilst attachment, sensitivity and conflict have appeared only in the section on the parents, these themes are prevalent in the literature pertaining to characteristics of the child, their family and education. From this review five key perspectives have emerged: 1) emotional cohesion encompassing attachment, sensitivity and conflict; 2) family relatedness, including factors such as lineage between child and parent, siblings and grandparents, and the sex of the custodial parent; 3) social disadvantage and disruption, such as reduced social and economic status and major disruptions within the social environment, such as moving house, school, proximity to friends and relatives and so forth; 4) parental psychological and physical wellbeing, particularly concerning stress associated with possible difficulties outlined mainly in 2 and 3 above and, lastly, 5) temperament and personality of the child, resilience, self concept and self efficacy. This latter area has only be touched upon in this report but will be covered in greater depth in research pending.

Using these perspectives it is possible to speculate the areas of heightened risks to the development of children from disrupted families, over those associated with all children growing up. The perspective carrying the major risk to child development over and above that experienced by all children concerns family relatedness. All children who experience divorce will experience changes in the relationships they hold with family members, irrespective of whether or not the custodial parent remarries. Where the parent does remarry, this arguably adds further opportunities for relationship difficulties, as the greater the number of new members to the family, the more opportunity for relationship problems to arise. Although this has to be

weighted against reports that remarriage may bring increased social and economic status and reduced stress to the custodial parent, as the new partner may provide emotional support to the biological parent. Whilst the other perspectives may affect any child, irrespective of whether they are from an intact or a disrupted family, parental separation also leads to heightened risk of detrimental effects in each of these fields. Whilst the delineation of themes from this research is arguably beneficial in terms of targeting specific issues, in reality, the perspectives will interact with one another to produce a biopsychosocial model.

In view of these findings, what positive steps can be taken to promote the healthy growth and development of this significant group of children? Despite widespread research in this field, very little, if any, has examined children who have been through disruption and reported a favourable outcome. Analysis of this type of literature is equally as important as that showing detrimental effects. Also, it has only been in the last decade that investigators have begun to report some of the positive ways in which parents and children have been supported. For example, a growing number of researchers have shown the beneficial effects of education and counselling for both children and parents (Omizo and Omizo, 1987; Dubow, Schmidt, McBride and Edwards, 1993; Shifflett and Cummings, 1999; Arbuthnot and Gordon, 1996; Arbuthnot and Kramer, 1998; Fischer 1997; Biondi, 1996). To date these short courses and seminars are only voluntary in the U.K., although over half are mandatory in the U.S. (Arbuthnot and Kramer, 1998). Beneficial effects have been shown in parents in respect to lowering the level of parental conflict, raising confidence levels, and heightening acceptance of their children. The children have shown increased self efficacy and self concept and improvements in problem solving skills. Whilst the mandatory introduction of attendance by parents to such courses, would likely be beneficial to most families (couples involved in substance and spousal abuse excepted) further changes in the community, such as school based education programmes for children, teacher training, to improve sensitivity and awareness, may both bring primary aid and secondary support, in the form of decreased stigmatisation and heightened awareness. Perhaps attention should be directed towards government legislation in order to enforce the education of all parents and children, irrespective of whether or not they are from disrupted families. This could be achieved relatively easily in the U.K. by the introduction of these issues in parent classes, which are already being run in the U.K. for expectant mothers. The focus needs to be pitched at relationship issues more generally, with suggested coping strategies, rather than divorce. Similarly, teachers in both primary and secondary schools could run critical issues lessons which deal with divorce and other emotive topics such as bereavement, race, difficulties facing people with disabilities and so forth. After all, whilst taken singularly these issues may only affect the minority, when combined they will affect a sizeable majority and the plight of disrupted families alone may soon affect half our population.

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