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Information about the journal



**"K L A D" IS A STUDENT JOURNAL FIRST PUBLISHED AT M. NARIKBAYEV KAZGUU UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS. THIS JOURNAL IS AIMED AT ENHANCING STUDENTS' INVOLVEMENT INTO SCIENCE AND RESEARCH.**

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JUNE 2021

M. NARIKBAYEV KAZGUU UNIVERSITY  
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# Literature review

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## “MENTAL EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN”

*Otesh Tomiris***Abstract**

The vast majority of adolescents can not cope with parental divorce since it certainly leaves an indelible imprint on their lives. Thus, acknowledging the potential ramifications of every mental health issue that is caused by a parental divorce can assist in reducing the negative effects of these unhealthy reactions on adolescents. Moreover, while determining the scale of those adverse effects might prevent behavioural problems and social as well as psychological maladjustment to divorce. The generalizability of much-published research rises concern over the previous studies that provided limited comparisons of effects on age groups. The major objective of this study is to investigate the mental issues caused by parental divorce to decrease their effects on adolescents. The paper questions why parental divorce has a more detrimental impact than other stressful life events and how marital disruption can lead to significant mental health issues in adolescents than in other age groups. The study will be conducted by using qualitative analysis.

**Introduction**

According to the definition provided by Kathleen (1997), “divorce” is a legal process of dissolving a marital union under the law of a particular country. From a psychological perspective, divorce is associated with the decreased mental well-being of people who experience the traumatic effects and mental agony due to this process.

Teenagers are young people whose age falls within the range from 13-19. While a variety of psychological definitions of the term “teenager” have been suggested, this paper will use the definition suggested by Rachel (2019), who describes this age category as witnessing the season of fast-paced developments in sexual, moral and emotional aspects, which usually influence them to establish a unique identity. This is one of the critical transition periods in the life cycle.

Over the past century, there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of divorce and life in custodial households (Corcoran K., 1997). This longitudinal study reports that approximately two-thirds of teenagers are not able to cope with this troublesome process. This work is complemented by Demo and Acock’s study (2012) which reveals that adolescents predominantly struggle with numerous mental health issues such as delinquent behaviour, low academic performance, emotional distress as well as a social anxiety disorder. Moreover, factors, such as gender difference and parental-child relation can accompany a marriage dissolution. Consequently, identifying causal mechanisms by which divorce affects therefore has important social implications.

**Literature Review****1. Factors**

**Gender.** The mental conditions of adolescents after experiencing long-term consequences of parental divorce differ due to gender differences; therefore, there has been contradictory claims whether boys and girls are affected by divorce similarly. Wallerstein and Kelly’s observations (1990) indicate that approximately 70% of female adolescents are prone to divorce-related problems compared to about 40% per cent of the male ones. In contrast to this observation, however, Demo and Acock’s study refutes this claim, suggesting that both genders endure the pain of parental divorce to the same degree. These two hypotheses add weight to the argument that the overwhelming majority of teenagers cannot endure divorce well irrespective of their gender identities.

**Parental-Child Relation.** The negative quality of the pre-divorce and the post-divorce relationship between parent and adolescents are key indicators of worsening mental health. Whilst some research has been carried out on this issue, only two studies have attempted to investigate its mental consequences for teenagers. There is a consensus among psychologists that while adults struggle to

overcome divorce stress, parental support tends to decline (Hal & Scott, 2013). The hypothesis implies that when parents themselves experience divorce-related stresses, they are disposed to withdraw from their parenting role as well, which will intensify adolescents' emotional strain, disbelief and anxiety after marriage breakdown.

## 2. Mental Health

Divorce has profound health consequences for the entire family thus creating emotional and mental turmoil that can be endured by adolescents and adults differently. If some part of adolescents rebound or recuperate from parental separation quicker than others, in contrast, it can pose a formidable challenge for some of them engendering long-term repercussions. It is noteworthy that there exist less divergent opinions about the main influencing factors that might affect teenagers' mental well-being. For example, Brian (2011) asserts that those negative effects stem from constant familial conflict comparing to the households experiencing divorce with low levels of conflict. On the other hand, it has been proposed that the additional stressors (change of school, parental alienation, resettlement) might be associated with a range of negative outcomes in the post-divorce period (Hal & Scott, 2013). These findings reveal the need for further investigation in adolescents who witnessed a high level of parental conflict because family members are highly emotionally attached thereby familial conflict can be easily intensified. Moreover, the outcomes cannot be extrapolated to all teenagers. While assessing the effect of continued parental conflict on the post-divorce adjustment, Brian also noted that even if conflictual problems in the family are the most widespread indicators of difficulties in adolescent functioning, the levels of conflicts have a different impact. According to him, in families with a high level of conflict, teenagers' mental health was better when marriage was dissolved and vice versa. This observation suggests that parental divorce sometimes can bring real benefits (increased adaptation and empathy) in improving adolescents' mental state.

**Behavioral Issues.** Adolescents with divorced parents tend to be involved in risky and delinquent

behaviour than adolescents from intact families because marital dissolution is inclined to accelerate adolescent's independence thereby eliciting an aggressive response from them (Judith, 2019). A large-scale study by Judith (2019) concludes that the overwhelming majority of teenagers tend to have behavioural issues as 20-50% of them have maladjustment and suffer from a mental illness.

Adolescent behaviour can be categorized into difficult (normal) and risky (Rachel, 2019). As observed in her recent work, if behaviour changes such as obeying rules, rebellion and decreased communication with parents are attributed to normal behaviour, self-injury, psychological harm as well as abusing alcohol and illegal drugs are referred to as risky. A probable explanation of difficult teenage behaviour in post-divorce adjustment may lie in hormonal changes. On the other hand, indulging in destructive activities can be linked to the negative quality of parenting and unsatisfactory situations after the divorce. Consequently, they are tempted to take revenge by embracing risk-taking behaviours. In the current study, it is argued that teenagers are just drawn to be more externally symptomatic in the post-divorce period if before divorce they tend to internalize their distress and anxiety, which can also lead to the development of criminal mindset, suicidal thoughts and self-mutilation (Hal & Scott, 2013).

**Poor Academic Performance.** Several studies have revealed that teenagers' school performance was impaired immediately after the divorce (Kelly, 1990). This also accords with Wallerstein's finding (1994), which determined a high level of adolescent truancy and exclusion from currently disrupted households. A substantial drop in scholastic achievement implies that they are not coping well with a post-divorce adjustment that is why this issue should not be underestimated by parents. For instance, he insists that mothers should adequately adjust to marital disruption because it would avoid lower adolescent educational attainment in the post-divorce period. Furthermore, he maintains that parents' ongoing contentious relationships will diminish their interest in education. Despite the natural post-divorce reactions, it is paramount to

acknowledge that parents' adaptation to divorce can facilitate adolescents' trouble in their academic life.

**Social Anxiety Disorder.** In 2019, Rachel maintained that if parents behave immaturely by constantly involving in a disputatious relationship, the majority of adolescents will be prone to establish a negative relationship with the outside world. In her major study, she identified several causes of adolescents' antisocial behaviour: deceased parental relationship, custodial parent's marriage, adjustment with stepsiblings and inactiveness in extracurricular activities. These might impede their emotional development and damage interpersonal relationships by provoking mental apathy. As a result, they will socially withdraw and remain indoors. To prevent a social anxiety disorder, the majority of researchers (Hal Arkowitz et al., 2019) outline a critical role of familial interactions after the divorce thus showing a correlation between the parental relationship and adolescents' social competence.

**Stress and depression.** Among a wide range of complicated emotions following divorce, depression and stress are the most common mental health issues that adolescents witness and those who experience a prolonged absence of one of the parents after divorce largely suffer from depression unlike stress (Kelly, 1990). A qualitative analysis that was undertaken by Kelly (1990) has speculated that the girls tend to be more depressed and affected mentally, contrary to the boys. He also maintains that the most traumatizing situation for adolescents is when they are being compelled to choose one of their parents as custodial parent. Moreover, sadness

can be extreme in the form of depression. Thus, parental separation might trigger an early phase of depression, which can persist for a long period even until adulthood. This demonstrates that mental health professionals have been more informed about this type of emotional disorders in recent decades. Even if quarrels, conflicts and distress are typical conditions, parents should end the marriage peacefully and establish proper communication with teenagers, because even if it is not able to erase the pain, it can mitigate the effects of depression (Judith, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

Previous works on divorce have been limited to examine adolescents' overall mental health and consider only several contributing factors that can influence them to accept the situation. However, as this paper demonstrates in the context of the existing literature, adolescents are more prone to long-term adjustment difficulties comparing to other age groups. Consequently, this recognizes the need for an in-depth review in adolescents who witnessed parental divorce to prevent longitudinal changes in their well-being. Nevertheless, divorce will not trigger emotional distress as well as exert pressure on the adolescent psyche if parents show quality parenting. The importance of adolescents' mental state should not be undermined and parents are required to understand adolescents' hidden emotions by encouraging effective communication. Besides, ending the marriage peacefully by mutual consent of parents can mitigate the adverse effects of divorce on adolescents.

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