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THE IMPACT OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN: EFFECTS OF DIVORCE

Introduction. The demographics of families are changing, and with that, the philosophical underpinnings of relationships are also changing. Many young adults consider marriage is old-fashioned and open cohabitating relationships provide a healthier option that is more conducive for personal development.

In 1960, the average age of a woman's first marriage was 20.3 and a man's was 22.8. But by 2010, it had changed: the average age for the first marriage was 25.8 for women and 28.3 for men.

Review of recent publications. This topic is actual all over the world. Divorce is one of the most common problems of modern families. So, with confidence it might be said that psychologists are researching this topic thoroughly. The works on the topic are presented by Amato P.R., Booth A. («A generation at risk: Growing up in an era of family upheaval»), Billingham R.E., Brown J., Cohen P., Johnson J.G., Salzinger S. and others.

Objectives of the paper are to demonstrate how divorce can affect children's health and behavior.

Results of the research. Each child and each family are obviously unique with different strengths and weaknesses, different personalities and temperaments, and varying degrees of social, emotional, and economic resources, as well as various family situations prior to divorce. Despite these differences, divorce has been shown to diminish a child's future competence in all areas of life, including family relationships, education, emotional well-being, and future earning capability. One review of the literature conducted in the United Kingdom claims “although children are at increased risk of adverse outcomes following family breakdown and the negative outcomes can remain in adulthood, the difference between children from intact and non-intact families is a small one, and the majority of children will not be adversely affected in the long-term” [6].

Two large meta-analyses, one reported in 1991 and the other in 2001, showed that “children whose parents divorced continued to score significantly lower in academic achievements, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, and social relations” [1].

The consequences of divorce are the following. The child may lose time with each parent:

- Parents may not have as much emotional strength and time to invest in parenting, i.e., the parents experience a “moratorium on parenting.”
- Although laws are gradually changing, most children spend more time with one custodial parent and obviously have less time with each parent overall.
- For most children, it means much less time spent with their fathers.
- The child may also spend less time with their mother as she may need to work longer hours to support the family.

The child may lose emotional security:

- The child may have a weakened relationship with his/her mother.
 - a. Divorced mothers are less able to provide emotional support [5].
- The child may have a weakened relationship with his/her father.
 - a. Divorced fathers spend less time with their children.
 - b. A study in 1996 found that fewer than a half of children living with a divorced mother did not see their fathers more than one year, and only one in six saw their fathers once a week [8].

c. The child may find it more difficult to trust their father [4].

- The child may lose family traditions, celebrations, and daily routines [7].

The child may be less physically healthy:

- Fewer children in nuclear families were considered to be in poor health than children in non-nuclear families (12% of children in nuclear family versus 22% of children of a single parent) [3].
- Children living with married parents are less likely to be abused or neglected [9].

The child may have a higher risk of emotional distress:

- A study of almost one million children in Sweden demonstrated that children growing up with single parents were more than twice likely to experience a serious psychiatric disorder, commit or attempt suicide, or develop an alcohol addiction [2].

Conclusion. There are clearly negative long-term consequences of divorce – children, parents, and society all suffer. Wallerstein's long-term study shows that many children never have full “recovery” as each special event, holiday, or celebration reminds the child of their loss. The process of divorce and its effects on children can be stressful. Dealing with these issues can take its toll, including physical problems. Children who have experienced divorce have a higher perceptibility to sickness, which can stem from many factors. Also, signs of depression can appear exacerbating these feelings of well-being loss and deteriorating health.

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