

Parental Divorce Impact on Classroom Engagement and School Performance Among Early Adolescence

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ABSTRACT

- Children whose parents separate or go through a divorce experience internal and external changes. Internal changes may include the presentation of mood, anxiety, and/or neurotic mental disorders while external changes can present as disruptive behavior diagnosis (ADHD, ODD, Conduct Disorder) and a decrease in academic achievement.
- The current study utilizes secondary data from Round 7 of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study [United States]: Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999, Kindergarten-Eighth Grade Full Sample (ECLS-K).
- The sample consisted of 8,703 participants, 1,235 with separated or divorced biological parents and 6,062 with married biological parents.
- Overall, the study found that participants with divorced/separated parents performed lower than those with married parents across all categories.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

- Over time, the crude divorce rate doubled from 2.2 in 1960 to 5.2 in 1980 and slowly decreased to 3.5 in 2008
- On average, most marriages last about eight years while 83.3 percent of divorced women have at least one child from that marriage

Purpose

- Identify the impacts that parental divorce has on school-age children, specifically looking at school performance and participation in the classroom.

Research Question

- How does parental divorce impact children and early adolescence in classroom engagement and academic achievement?

Hypothesis

- Children who experience parental separation will be negatively impacted in academic achievement and classroom engagement compared to those who have not experienced parental separation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- There has been a great deal of research looking into the impact that parental divorce has on children.
- Life changes that children experience during parental divorce/separation may include parental conflict, moving to a different neighborhood, changing schools, and loss of contact with the non-residential parent and family.
- Children experience emotional distress and behavioral changes that affect their school work and decrease overall grade point averages.
- There is a gap in the current literature regarding classroom engagement and school performance in specified categories.

METHODS

Research Design

- The current study utilizes secondary data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study [United States]: Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999, Kindergarten-Eighth Grade Full Sample (ECLS-K).
- It used cross-sectional data collected from Round 7 from the ECLS-K.
- Surveys were administered to students, parents, teachers, and schools in a longitudinal study lasting from 1998 to 2007
- The following scales were used throughout the study: computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI), computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI), mail questionnaires, self-enumerated questionnaires, and on-site questionnaires were utilized
- The study gathered data about the effects of a wide range of family, school, community, and individual variables on children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, their early learning and early performance in school, as well as their home environment, home educational practices, school environment, classroom environment, classroom curriculum, and teacher qualifications.

Sample

- The initial sample included 12,129 children, their parents and teachers, and includes kindergarten, first, third, fifth, and eighth grade data collections.
- The current study includes a subsample of the ECLS-K, specifically focusing on students in eighth grade during the Round 7 of the questionnaires. A total of 8,703 participants, 1,235 with separated or divorced biological parents and 6,062 with married biological parents, met criteria for the current study.
- 50.7% female; 62.4% White; Average age= 14

Measures

- **Independent Variable: Parental Separation**
 - Parent reported question
 - Parents who chose married, separated, or divorced were included in the current study
- **Dependent Variable: Classroom Engagement**
 - Teacher reported questions
 - scale measures (child's class participation)
 - dichotomous categorical measures (student works hard for grade).
- **Dependent Variable: School Performance**
 - Teacher reported questions
 - categorical measures to assess a student's ability to apply concepts, conduct proofs, talk about reasoning, explain in writing, represent with models, use a calculator, and use a computer.

RESULTS

Classroom Engagement

- A chi-square test was utilized to determine the impact of parental divorce/separation of participants' classroom engagement.
- A significant relationship was found between parent's marital status and participant's importance of grades, $X^2(3, N = 6996) = 14.08, p < .01$; how often homework is done, $X^2(5, N = 3361) = 78.88, p < .001$; how often attentive in class, $X^2(4, N = 3356) = 69.26, p < .001$; how often disruptive in class, $X^2(4, N = 3360) = 26.07, p < .001$; how often absent from class, $X^2(4, N = 3363) = 50.73, p < .001$; and how often tardy to class, $X^2(4, N = 3365) = 37.59, p < .001$.

School Performance

- A chi-square test was utilized to determine the impact of parental divorce/separation of participants' school performance.
- A significant relationship was found between parent's marital status and participants self-reporting working hard for grades $X^2(1, N = 6767) = 55.34, p < .001$.
- A significant relationship was found between parent's marital status and ability to apply concepts, $X^2(5, N = 3373) = 39.63, p < .001$; ability to conduct proofs, $X^2(5, N = 3373) = 46.68, p < .001$; ability to talk about reasoning, $X^2(5, N = 3373) = 33.65, p < .001$; ability to explain in writing, $X^2(5, N = 3369) = 46.09, p < .001$; ability to represent with models, $X^2(5, N = 3370) = 43.39, p < .001$; ability to use calculator, $X^2(5, N = 3372) = 30.02, p < .001$; and ability to use computer, $X^2(5, N = 3370) = 30.52, p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

Strengths & Limitations

- The current study's limitations include: low response rate, the use of secondary data, and the cross-sectional survey design
- The current study's strengths include: large sample size, reliability, and specific questions used in the study

Implications & Future Research

- Understanding the impact of parental divorce and separation on children in school allows for improvement of education and emotional regulation in those children.
- In schools, teachers and faculty can adjust their teaching and classroom management to better help children experiencing parental divorce/separation adjust.
- Social workers will be able to create school-based programs to address the emotions and changes in children's lives to help with the adjustment.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my boyfriend, Miguel, for supporting me and all of my late nights, stressed days, and social work humor during these last two years. My amazing friends from my bus group who, without them, I never would have been able to accomplish all that I have. Lastly, thank you to all who kept me sane during our quarantine while trying to maintain motivation to finish our assignments.