

Divorce and Children

Elizabeth A. Mellin, The Pennsylvania State University

Lindsey M. Nichols, The University of Montana

Description of Divorce and Children

Prevalence

The National Center for Health Statistics reported data from the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth indicating approximately 50% of first marriages end in divorce. Divorce rates were influenced by several factors including cohabitation before marriage, educational attainment, race, and age at first marriage (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012; www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/divorce.htm).

Effects of Divorce on Children

Child adjustment to parental divorce often varies by age, gender, parental interactions, and socioeconomic status. According to Lambie (2008): younger children are at higher risk for internalizing (e.g., depression, anxiety) and externalizing (e.g., fighting, disobedience) problems, adjustment to divorce is often more challenging and prolonged for boys, post-divorce parental conflict is associated with behavioral and academic difficulties for children, and economic instability following divorce is related to more significant adjustment problems for children. A comprehensive collection of resources about divorce and children is provided by The University of California, Los Angeles Center for Mental Health in Schools at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/divorce.htm>

IDENTIFICATION/ASSESSMENT

Tools are available for assessing the effects of divorce on children. Specifically, two instruments have been designed to identify and assess the effects of divorce on children. Counselors may use these scales to gather information from both custodial parents and their children following a divorce.

The **Divorce Adjustment Inventory-Revised** (DAI-R; Portes, Smith & Brown, 2000). The 42 items included in the DAI-R were designed to elicit information on demographics, pre-divorce family functioning, post-divorce co-parental relations, parent-child relationships, social support for the custodial parent/child, custodial arrangements, post-divorce parental functioning, and post-divorce coping skills of the child. Sample items include “Since the divorce, my ex-spouse and I have tried to turn the children against the other parent” and “Generally, I wish my children were able to see more of their other parent than they do.” Items are measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

The **Child’s Divorce Adjustment Inventory** (CDAI; Portes, Lehman, & Brown, 1999). Unlike the DAI-R that is completed by the custodial parent, the CDAI collects information from children from elementary to high school grades. This 25-item inventory considers four aspects of child adjustment to divorce: (a) conflict/maladjustment; (b) depression/anxiety; (c) social support; and (d) acceptance of the divorce. Items such as “My parents often fight about me,” “Since the separation I have times when I feel sad,” “My grandparents and other family members do things with me,” and “Since the separation I get along better with my parents” are measured on a scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree (Gilman, Schneider, & Shulak, 2005).

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