

Impact of Divorce on the Holistic Development of a Child: A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, marriage has been revered as sacred and viewed as a lifelong commitment in all cultures. Yet, growing complexities in the current milieu saw a steep rise in divorce rates. The consequences of divorce are exacerbated when there are children involved. This research provides an overview on how this process of change affects children across critical developmental domains. Through the comprehensive study of 30 existing findings from different reputed databases, this paper seeks to understand various dimensions of children's personal growth including academic achievement, emotional, socio-economic and psychological well-being within the context of parental separation. This paper explores the linkages between the contexts during the separation and the children affected by it. Children brought up in a context of divorced and/or separated parents are more likely to be emotionally dis-regulated and tend to display conduct problems. Additionally, children parented in such an environment tend to act out and experience adverse outcomes. Emotional divorce tends to negatively impact the attachment styles of children, resulting in the culmination of the anxious-avoidant attachment style. Such children don't have a tendency to form close and trusting relationships with others. They face difficulties being emotionally intimate and maintaining distances with others. As a result, they don't feel secure in their relationships and are highly neurotic. Furthermore, the paper talks about how some other mediating factors like parental conflicts, custody might mediate the effects on children. Findings highlighted the urgency to understand the sensitive nature of divorce and its long-term effects on the children in order to make informed decisions.

Keywords: *Marriage, Divorce, Separation, Emotional Dysregulation*

Divorce is defined as the legal dissolution of a socially and legally recognized marital relationship that alters the obligations and privileges of the two persons involved. Separation without a child involves the marital dissolution between the two people. Whereas when one has a child, separation becomes complicated. Parental Separation has been linked to significant risks for children and adolescents, posing adverse impacts on their mental health and well-being. Following the marital breakdown, the child becomes vulnerable to various kinds of environmental and psychological stressors. These stressors hamper the child's integral development. Parenting plays an essential role in the life span

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development because the way a child is brought up influences the upbringing of the upcoming generations. The pattern of Attachment Styles of the parents usually determines their approach to child-rearing.

Parenting, also known by the term child-rearing practices, involves providing the child with love, care and discipline which will help them advance towards a successful and healthy adulthood. It's heavily influenced by the cultural backgrounds they have been exposed to. Some of the other detrimental to parenting are personality traits, generation gap, developmental history, their preconceived beliefs and notions about parenting behaviours, socio-cultural factors, lack of substantial time investments, parenting styles, emotional and physical health, attachment styles, family structure, etc. Due to the complex interplay of Nature and Nurture, every parent has a different approach to model and guide their children towards the right path. Parenting styles affect child outcomes. Parenting styles emphasize on the quality interaction between a child and a parent. Diana Baumrind, a Clinical and Developmental psychologist, has given four different styles of parenting. According to Baumrind, these parenting styles have emerged out of two major factors - Responsiveness and Demandingness. Out of these 2 dimensions, emerged four parenting styles — Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, Uninvolved. Authoritarian Parenting, also known by the term Strict Parenting, is high in demandingness and low in responsiveness. Such parents are strict & over-ambitious and expect their children to obey them without any questioning. Parents of this style are restrictive, punitive and often burden their children with excessive expectations. Authoritative Parenting, also known as Balanced Parenting, is high in demandingness and responsiveness. Parents expect their children to adhere to the rules and regulations and they provide explanations for the same. Parents maintain a balance between being assertive and intrusive by providing their child with supportive rather than punitive discipline methods. Permissive Parenting, also known as Indulgent Parenting, is low in demandingness and high in responsiveness. Parents of this style rarely discipline their child. Their approach is non-traditional, lenient, and more responsive in nature. They keep little expectations of maturity and self-control and dodge confrontation. Such parents view their child as their friend more than a parent. As a result, they raise spoiled brats or spoiled sweets. Last but not the least; uninvolved parenting is neither demanding nor responsive. Caregivers fulfil their child's basic needs but largely remain disconnected from their child's life. In exceptional cases, they keep their child deprived of the bare minimum and this is why it's also called Neglectful parenting. Parents are emotionally unavailable and provide no warmth and control towards their children whatsoever.

John Bowlby expounded the concept of Attachment Theory which was later expanded by Mary Ainsworth. Her pioneering "Strange situation" study unraveled the significant effects of Attachment on behavior. Their joint work on Attachment styles explains Attachment as the "emotional bond between a Human infant or a young non-human animal and its parent figure or caregiver." They further illustrated the three types of Attachment styles — Secure, Insecure-Avoidant, Insecure-Resistant Attachment Styles. Later on, Main and Solomon added a fourth dimension to this list — Insecure-Disorganized Attachment Style, on the basis of their independent research.

In Secure Attachment, children usually have their needs met and are raised with warmth and comfort. This helps them build trust easily in their interpersonal relationships. This type of attachment style inculcates high self-esteem, high emotional quotient, and an ability to maintain healthy relationships with others in the society. In Insecure Avoidant, children don't have caregivers who fulfill their emotional demands and as a result they become self-

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reliant. They usually struggle with intimacy in their relationships, they don't trust or rely on their partners. However, they often value independence. As per some research, adults with a history of parental divorce exhibit Insecure-Avoidant Attachment Style. People with Insecure Resistant Attachment Styles have an on-off relationship with their parents or caregiver during their crucial stages of development. Their caregivers are inconsistent with providing their children with care, alternating between meeting their needs and other times do not. They grow up to be anxious and desire constant reassurances in their relationships. They fear rejections, often are dependent on their partners, and are jealous. In Insecure-disorganized Attachment Style, children come from a chaotic and toxic family background. This usually leads them to having conflicting sets of behaviours and thought processes. Generally, individuals experience a shift in their Attachment styles over time due to various internal and external factors.

The family structure affects the quality of a child's upbringing. Family systems are intricate and accompany both good and bad impacts. Family systems can be broadly categorized into — Nuclear Family and Joint Family. Generally speaking, a nuclear family can be defined as a family unit with two parents and their biological or adopted children living under the same roof. Children within such a setup are much more than the recipients of love, care and social interaction, they equally influence the family dynamics. Joint family is an extension of the nuclear family wherein multiple generations coexist under one roof. A joint family is characterized by broader social connections, passing down of values and morals, shared responsibilities among the members, development of coping skills and sharing of resources among the other members. Studies have shown that children with nuclear family structure are usually poor in growth and development. Child isn't given proper guidance. In comparison, children of Joint family develop stronger bonds of unity and affection with the family members. Thus, the social, cognitive and language development of children of a joint family is higher than the nuclear family.

Studies have documented various issues that occur after parental separation in children and adolescents that include academic difficulties, adjustment problems, disruptive behaviours, substance abuse, depression, risky sexual behaviours, changes in attachment styles, low self-esteem, etc. Children might also experience regression, social withdrawal from peers, difficulty in acknowledging and regulating one's emotions.

METHODOLOGY

Aim: To examine the impact of divorce on the holistic development of a child.

Sample

The present study includes a systematic and in-depth analysis of 25 related researches from reputed journals and databases. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were followed to ensure the reliability of the findings:

Inclusion Criteria

- The research includes analysis of the studies from 2011 to 2023
- Divorce and impact on children are the only variables studied under the present research.

Exclusion Criteria

- None of the studies before 2011 were included.

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General Characteristics of Included Studies

The quoted studies were done on participants who had been married for at least 2 years and were on an average more than 20 years of age.

Research Design

This is a systematic and qualitative analysis of 26 research studies taken from different journals and reputed databases. It attempts to analyze the impact of divorce on the overall development of a child. The research was concluded in a time of 2.5 months. Each research quoted in the present study was analyzed in depth to understand the impact of divorce on the overall development of the child.

Data Analysis

The researches included in this present study were compared to understand the implication of emotional intelligence in fostering adjustment among married couples. Each study included in this research was compared against the other studies to reach a concrete understanding of the relationship between the variables included in this study.

OVERVIEW OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE

Amini, B. et al (2024) conducted a study that explored the impacts of divorce in Iranian Children. Participants administered various questionnaires related to their adjustment to divorce, beliefs, anxiety, stress, cultural identification, and the role of culture in divorce, using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The study inferred that adjusting to divorce and beliefs exhibited negative and positive correlations correspondingly with current stress and anxiety.

Hooshmandi, M. (2023) carried out a Review to study the implications of Parental Divorce on the child's Adjustment Levels, Emotional Regulation and Depression. The study concluded that there's a significant impact of divorce on emotional adjustment. Children negatively assess their quality of life when there's a perceived gap between them and their parents, when there's conflict between them. However, proactive coping with the problems makes children happy.

A study was conducted by Agusiobo, Hilda, et.al, (2023) to understand the influence of divorce on the academic performance of primary school children. The study was conducted on 800 students using a well- structured questionnaire. This study concluded that children from divorced households faced various educational challenges like not having sufficient textbooks, lack of concentration in the teaching learning process and poor academic performance.

A comparative analysis given by Guetto, R., et al in 2022 investigated the negative impact of parental separation on children's educational qualifications considering parents' socioeconomic background. The study findings showed a stronger negative link between parental separation and the chances of university degree attainment among the children of educated parents.

This review talked about the effects of parenting styles and the relationship between parent and child on the child's cognitions. In 2022, Lanjekar et al unraveled parenting, child development and maturation. This review paper concluded that good parenting is involved in the early cognitive development of the child, emotional intelligence and the progression of thought processes.

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A study undertaken by Sanayeh, E. B. et al in 2022 to examine the association between Parental divorce and nicotine addiction in Lebanese adolescents. The study enrolled 1810 adolescents aged between 14 and 17 years from 16 Lebanese schools. Results were calculated using Linear Regressions. The paper observed that adolescents from divorced families were highly dependent on cigarettes and water pipes than those who have intact families.

Tullius, M, J, et al. (2022) we're interested in studying the timings when emotional and behavioral problems occur in adolescents after divorce and how these problems influence them over time. The study included 2230 children aged 10-12. The investigations incorporated EBP were measured through the Youth Self-Report to assess the data. The study concluded that after a parental separation, an adolescent begins to develop emotional and behavioral problems having a long-lasting impact and requires special attention and care.

The current paper conducted by Lange, A, MC, et al (2022) hypothesized that children in high conflicts divorce often experience Post-Traumatic stress symptoms and parental conflicts. The sample consisted of 167 parents participating in the study. In the study, Children's Revised Impact of Event Scale was employed. The findings revealed that there's a positive correlation between parental conflicts and children's PTSD symptoms.

Juwariah, T. et al (2022) have conducted a comprehensive study on how emotion regulation relates to academic achievement in Children of Divorce. The study recorded 715 articles from three databases like CINAHL, PubMed and Scopus. The presented study found a significant relationship between individuals with parental separation and academic performance and emotion regulation.

S. Muskan (2022) conducted a study on the impact of divorce on a child's emotional development. Her study concluded that a child who has suffered the pain of divorce of her parents tend to find difficulties in forming new relationship as well as sustaining relationship with her friends and family. They tend to withdraw themselves and become inattentive in their classroom consequently impacting their academic performance. The study further stated that, children with separated parents tend to succumb to psychological disorders like anxiety and depression.

According to the study by Issen.I (2022) on the relationship between divorce and academic performance of the high school students, divorce involves a significant amount of stress for the child involved in the conflict. It interferes with the child's daily routine thereby impacting his/her academic performance. Due to the changes caused by the event, the child may feel a sense of loneliness and abandonment taking a toll on their self-esteem. This consequently has the potential to lead to rejection of school rules, hostility towards teachers and disinvestment on the contrary.

According to the findings of the study by Abate Ashenafi Nigusse (2021) on the impact of divorce on the academic performance of the secondary school students, there exists a statistical mean difference between student's academic performance before and after parental divorce. The author further recommends that these children should be provided with appropriate care and support to enhance the psychological well-being of the children as they are susceptible to depression.

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Yuga Maya Limbu (2021) conducted a study to understand the impact of divorce on a child's mental well-being and academic performance. The concrete objective of the research was to explore the impact of dissolution of marriage of parents on their children. The study further explored the social perspective of divorce and its consequence on their children. The study concluded that togetherness of parents, parental love and steady financial support are the important element to ensure the overall development of the children.

Caksen, H. conducted a study on the topic on effects of parental divorce on children in the year 2021. The study emphasized on how parental separation can contribute to the development of various psychological disorders in children. Findings from the study showed that children are affected from various psychosocial, psychosomatic and conversion disorders post-divorce of their parents.

In 2021, Velasquez, Y. Y. conducted a study on the connection between marriage dissolution and Child's psychological health. The findings of the current study showed that parental separation makes the children susceptible to chronic health conditions and mental disorders like depression.

In 2021, Boccia, M, L, et al. published a review paper that studied the impact of divorce on oxytocin levels. The data for the study was collected through questionnaires on attachment style, parental history of divorce and a urine sample. The conclusion of the study examined that parental divorce severely affects oxytocin levels in humans and this in turn impacts the adult attachment styles.

Obeid, S. et al (2021) undertook a study to understand the effects of divorce on psychological well-being of Lebanon adolescents. A cross sectional study included 1810 adolescents from 18 private schools. The study found that teenagers with divorced parents exhibited elevated levels of social fear and avoidance, depression, and suicidal thoughts, highlighting the need for appropriate intervention strategies.

According to the study by Carly & Synder (2021), divorce causes children to loose daily contact with one parent and specifically the father. The decreased contact impacts the parent-child bond and researchers have found that many children feel less close to their father after divorce.

This review was given by Ayerbe, L, et al in 2020 studied the risk of psychosis in children with separated parents. The presented study consisted of 12 studies from 22 different countries around the globe. The study showed a significant amount of risk of psychotic disorders caused due to the separation of the parents.

Lindström, M. & Rosvall, M. (2020) conducted a study to investigate how childhood experiences of parental separation relate to adult tobacco smoking. The study deduced that a significant proportion of men (17.6%) and women (17.1%) reported tobacco smoking. Men experienced parental separation/divorce particularly at ages 0–4, 5–9, and 15–18 years, whereas women with similar experiences, especially at ages 0–4, 5–9, 10–14, and 15–18 years, had higher chances of smoking.

In a study conducted by Roper, S. W. et al in 2019 interrogated the effects of parental divorce across generations on the relationships between young adults. The research paper

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suggested that those who have experienced parental separation are likely to show low levels of parental regard, relationship dissatisfaction and distress than those who have not experienced parental separation.

A systematic study was conducted by Mauskopf et al. in 2015 on 37 preadolescents to understand how Parental separation affects obesity risk. The data was collected on a 5-day basis in the form of an eating behavior questionnaire. In the presented study, it was concluded that family routine is essential against obesity risk behaviours even when there are conflicts and stress due to marital separation.

In 2015 a research was conducted by Mc Lanahan which concludes that typically single mothers have fewer or limited economic resources to provide children with financial security. It further negatively impacts their education and ability to attend higher education. Relationship transactions occur more frequently following parental divorce, and such instability disrupts children's lives and their schooling.

Anthony, C. et al conducted a longitudinal study in 2014 to investigate how divorce impacts children's academic development over time, considering different learning approaches and factors that influence the relationship. The findings showed that divorce was linked to slower improvement in test scores, with approaches to learning (ATL) explaining 18% and 12% of this connection in reading and mathematics, respectively.

Baert, S. & Greet Van der Straeten, G. V. D (2015) came together to investigate how educational performance during secondary education was influenced because of the parental divorce over a period of time. The data was collected through unique panel data. The findings showed that the negative impact of divorce on academic performance is at peak during the school year when the divorce occurs. No significant effect was found in the later years leading up to or following the divorce.

A study was conducted by Jurma (2015) to understand the impact of divorce on children. According to the finding of the research, children of separated or divorced parents have more emotional problems than children of married parents. The study also states that single mothers usually exhibit poor psychological well-being and display more hostility while parenting which leads to various emotional and behavioral problems in children.

Thomas Babalis, Konstantina Tsoli, et.al (2014) studied the effect of divorce on school performance and behavioral deviations of children. The research was conducted on 314 students and the findings of the result concluded that the emotional development of a child is dependent on the family pattern. The study also states that there is a significant relationship between school performance, behavioral disturbances and family structure.

DISCUSSION

The present study explores the impact of divorce on the overall or holistic development of their children. Divorce is definitely a difficult period/transition for married couples but it is even more difficult for their children. Marriage is an institution sanctifying the union of two individuals and giving birth to a child is considered to be the most important decision that couples have to undertake. The present studies have systematically analyzed 30 research papers and have successfully concluded the common consequences of divorce on the healthy development of a child. The researches reveal that divorce has a multifaceted/ dimensional impact on the lives of their children. It evokes multitude of emotional reactions among them,

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ranging from constant confusion, anxiety, sadness, and anger. These emotional upheavals lead to the development of delinquent behaviours. The disrupted state of the family and loss of constant contact with parents leads to a mounted feeling of abandonment among children thereby giving birth to insecurities in them. A study by Miller and Davis, 1997 states that, generally divorced mothers fail to provide her child with emotional support and divorced fathers struggle to spend time with their children. The finding of the quoted researches suggests that children from broken family are more prone to depression, lowered self-esteem and develop various behavioral deviancies. Children of divorced parents tend to score low on self- concept and self-esteem (Amato, 2001). In the later ages of their life, they develop trust issues, struggle with attachment issues, and exhibit various symptoms of trauma along with obesity risk behaviours. When we talk specifically about adolescents, college students who have divorced parents tend to indulge in verbal aggression and violence in conflict resolution with their partners in future (Billingham, 1993). It is further stated that as a child witness the conflicts and acrimonies of the divorce process it potentially leads to lifelong emotional scars. The atrocities and the conflict among the parents can even disrupt the developmental trajectory and the cognitive functioning of a child. Nevertheless, if the child is provided with quality post-divorce parenting and social support network then it is expected that the child will develop resilience and will be able to navigate the challenges of life successfully. Divorce can also significantly impact the child's social adjustment and relationships. This is attributed to the disruption in the living arrangements, probable change of schools and peer groups leading to feeling of isolation and loneliness. They will also struggle in forming secure relationships in future as they tend to develop trust issues. This is also because of the burdened feeling of choosing any one parent, one home or delving between two homes thereby getting devoid of any loving relationships. A child from a broken household tends to start sexually experimenting early in their life leading to increased cost for the society. A study by Jeynes, 2001 there occurs an increased sense of approval by children of divorced parents for cohabitation, premarital sex and divorce. On academic grounds, researches prove that children from two parent families score better in their exams and children with separated parents are highly likely to score lower GPAs. The studies have shown that children of divorced parents are more likely to experience difficulty in way they learn and perform academically with girls facing special difficulty. Further, children living with both parents are less likely to be physically abused or neglected than children living with any single parent (Family Structure and Children's Health in the United States 2010).

CONCLUSION

On the basis of this study we can conclude that divorce is an event which has adverse implication on both parents and children involved in this tussle. A healthy development of the physical, social, psychological, emotional and academic aspect of the children warrants a healthy atmosphere at home. Separation and constant conflict at home is a cause of various behavioral and academic issues among children as they long for care, love, togetherness and a sense of emotional and financial security from their parents.

Limitation

1. The main limitation of this study was that it didn't specify the age group of children being affected from parental divorce.
2. Further, our study was limited to only 26 reviews of literature that restricts the scope of our investigation.

Future Implication

The study provides us with valuable insights on the impact of parental divorce on children's development. The result of the study can be used by any organizations or a group of people working in the area of mental health, child rights, social service and education to create awareness and sensitize the population. It further helps us to understand how parental divorce affects a child's social relationships, including friendships, romantic relationships, and interactions with family members. This study explored the long-term outcomes that might shape adults' career choices & overall life experiences. The findings can help to design interventions strategies and training programs to support the families and children during and after the divorce including counseling services, family therapy and educational programs. It can further fuel other related studies in this field.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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