

Independent Study Project: Final Report

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Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology HSP3U1-H1

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June 3, 2019

Introduction

Hostile parental divorces can impact children mentally, affecting many areas of their lives. Hostility throughout the divorce can change a teenager's outlook on life which can lead to stress, changes in performance in school, and less ability to socialize. This study will focus on the negative impacts of hostile divorce on adolescents mental health specifically in terms of stress, changes in performance in school and the ability to socialize. For the purpose of this study, mental health will be defined using the World Health Organization terminology: "as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community". This report attempted to answer the following question: what are the impacts of a hostile divorce on the mental health of teenager's? This study hypothesizes that a teenager's perception of divorce can negatively impact mental health in terms of their ability to have healthy relationships and performance in school.

This study collected information through conducting a survey and references primary research about this topic gathered from scholarly journal psychologists such as Margreet Visser and Nele Havermans amongst others. Primary research has concluded that the reason why some teenagers may experience great amounts of stress during their parent's divorce is that they are living in an unhealthy environment at home. Teenagers may alter their priorities in order to focus on adapting to the change they are experiencing at home, causing them to perform worse at school. Witnessing the hostile relationship an individual's parents hold may cause a teenager to be less sociable due to their inability to understand what a healthy relationship looks like.

Divorce can cause negative changes in the behaviour of children aged 14-18 which can alter their outlook on both themselves and the people around them. More specific examples from Havermans (2017) study include their conclusion on post-divorce living arrangements and school engagement, he argues that: “shared residence is related to a better father-child relationship and in this manner improves school engagement” (p. 3425). This research will be used to discuss the validity of the results of this study.

This study was limited by a few factors. Firstly, respondents may have a lack of desire to share personal information related to their family. Due to the emotional toll parental divorce has on individuals, asking individuals to be honest about their home situations is difficult. These limitations were mitigated by guaranteeing confidentiality to participants and letting them know it is safe to express how they feel.

Method

The research method designed for this study was in the form of an online questionnaire which called for respondents to answer twenty questions about their experiences following the divorce of their parents. Questions included multiple choice, rating scale and short answer. Survey questions were made to gather information gathering specifically the mental impacts divorce had on them, and how it affected their daily routines. To prevent the impact of the mentioned limitations of the study, the questionnaire was designed using questions that a teenager would feel comfortable answering. The results are based on the responses of the research sample, which includes 17 individuals from Northern Secondary School. The age of

respondents ranged from 15 to 18 both male (41.2%) and female (58.8%), of which 88.2% had the first-hand experience with parental divorce.

Results/Analysis

Referring to Figure 1, this study found that the majority of respondents (35.3%) were 5 to 10 years old when their parents got divorced. The two age ranges with the smallest sample size were ages 1 to 5 and 16+. This is a key detail to consider when analyzing the results because these years are extremely important for a child's development. When an individual is in between the ages of 5 and 10, they are aware enough to understand what is happening yet still require support from their parents.

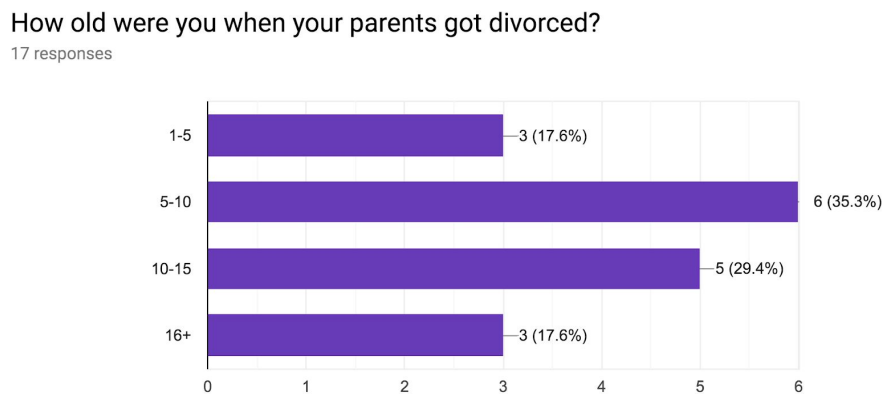


Figure 1: Age at Which Parental Divorce Occurred for Participants

This study has hypothesized that hostile parental divorce does have an impact on a teenager's mental health no matter the age of the child when the divorce happens. In reference to Figure 2, 58.8% of respondents stated that divorce "very much" has an impact on mental health.

Zero percent of respondents answered less than a five. This clearly shows that everyone is in some way impacted by their parent's divorce and that they are aware of this impact.

Do you believe that a hostile divorce between parents can have an impact on the child's mental health? (Hostile meaning unfriendly and/or unhealthy)

17 responses

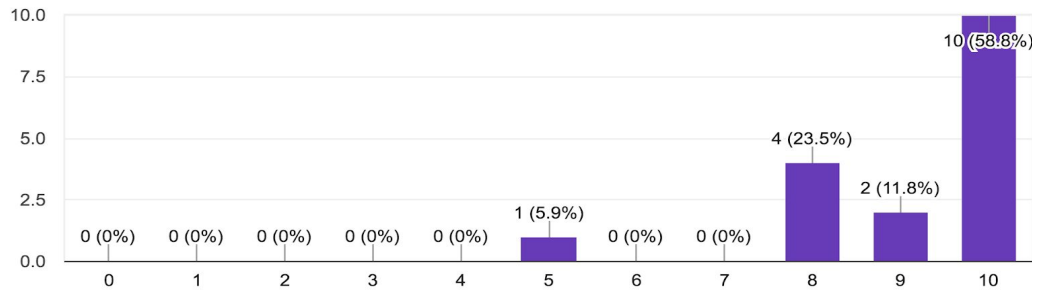


Figure 2: Mental Health & Hostile Divorce

Students who are not engaged in school are less likely to do well because of distractions at home such as parental divorce. As shown in Figure 3, 23.5% of students responded that they did, in fact, find themselves thinking about their parent's divorce during school. Interestingly, 11.8% of students stated that they had never thought about their parent's divorce during school and it did not provide any distraction.

During or after your parent's divorce did you find yourself thinking about it at school?

17 responses

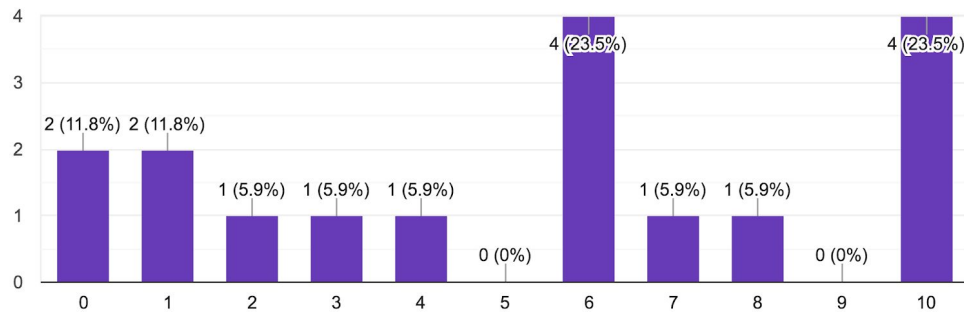


Figure 3: Thinking about Parental Divorce at School

Arguably, most students have a hard time admitting that they are performing poorly in school. Despite that Figure 4 shows that 11.8% of students feel their parent's divorce did have an impact on their performance in school and a further 17.5% felt it impacted them as a nine out of ten on the given scale. Contrastingly 29.4% of students felt that their parent's divorce did not have an impact on their academics while choosing a three out of ten on the given scale.

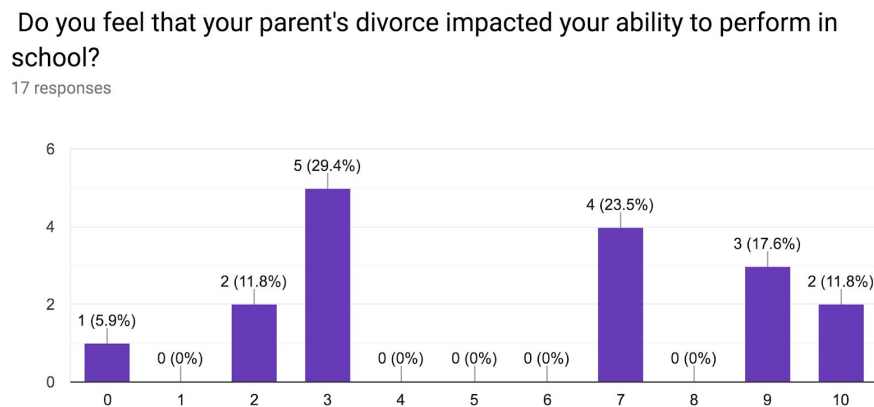


Figure 4: The Impact parental divorce students thought had on their ability to perform in school

Discussion and Conclusion:

This study hypothesized that a child's perception of divorce can negatively impact mental health in terms of their ability to have healthy relationships and good performance in school.

This study concludes many findings similar to what had been hypothesized.

Referring to Figure 4, 52.9% of participants rated on a scale of one to ten that their academic performance was diminished over a five due to their parent's divorce. This shows that the impacts parental divorce can have on a teenager may cause them to perform worse in school,

but for some, they are not affected. This somewhat proves the hypothesis of the study. Referring to Figure 3, 58.8% of respondents found themselves thinking about their parent's divorce in class quite often (rated over a five on a scale of one to ten) following experiencing parental divorce. This hints at the mental health impacts parental divorce can have on children and gives reasoning to their decreased ability to perform well in school. This reveals that their thoughts may be in a different place when teachers are teaching in class. Again, these statistics somewhat prove the hypothesis of the study as not all participants were affected in the same respects.

Statistics that reveal more affirmative responses include a question that asked participants whether or not they believe hostile divorces can impact a child's mental health. 94.1% of respondents rated on a scale of one to ten that hostile parental divorce can impact a child's mental health over an 8. Although the statistics gathered surrounding the impacts parental divorce can have on a child's academic behaviour only somewhat proved the hypothesis of the study, this statistic reliably supports the hypothesized responses.

The majority of respondents believed that their parent's divorce was or still is hostile. This could be the reason why respondents agreed that hostile divorces can affect a child's mental health as the participants have experienced it first hand. Respondents also said that they are not comfortable when their parents are in the same place; this could lead to a lack of communication between parents and cause anxiety or stress for the child due to being on edge whenever their parents are together for example during drop-offs or pickups. There were opposing points of view when it came to the long-term impacts of a hostile divorce on a teenager's mental health. This may be due to the fact that some respondents used their personal experience to answer this

question and were basing it off of how their mental health has been affected over time, which may differ among all participants.

This study found that the majority of respondents felt that they are social people which contrasts Figure 5 (see below). While most respondents consider themselves a social person, they also answered that a hostile divorce does have a negative impact on a teens ability to socialize. From analyzing the data it is clear that teens make an effort to be social in order to foster relationships with friends as to make up for the lack of a healthy relationship at home. There ended up being some opposing points of view and discrepancies which helped to better understand the issue as a whole. This is not necessarily surprising as every divorce is unique and has its own issues.

This information is important because it shows what kind of impact a hostile divorce can have on a teen in terms of mental health, school performance and ability to socialize. The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact a hostile divorce can have on a person in their teenage years and how it can shape one's outlook on relationships. In that sense, the study was successful in terms of gathering first-hand information that reinforced the hypothesis from the beginning stages of the study.

Do you believe hostile divorce affects a teens ability to socialize?
17 responses

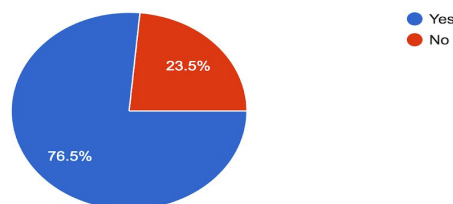


Figure 5 Hostile Divorce Impact on a Teens Ability to Socialize

Based on responses from the survey, this study recommends that talking to friends can be the best way to handle a parents divorce as opposed to isolating yourself from others and substance abuse. With further study and training, it could potentially be beneficial to have designated peers in schools to be there to talk to about issues that arise when dealing with ramifications of a hostile parental divorce. Another recommendation is to push teachers to utilize their positions to establish a relationship and help a student through the effects of a hostile divorce. Atilas (2017) argues that: "Teachers are well-positioned to play a critical role in fostering resiliency in children of divorce in reducing the risk for adjustment problems"(p. 25). One of the largest issues that were encountered in gathering information was finding applicants to fill out the survey and open up honestly about something which is so personal. If there were to be further research done about this topic it would look into the parents perspective of how a hostile divorce's impact teens and also how it shapes a persons ability to maintain a healthy relationship possibly with the same sample group of respondents. If something were to be changed with this study it would be adding additional questions revolving around support from the parents and including more long answer questions which would allow for personal input. Psychologically, one might ask about the personal effects of a hostile divorce on the brain and how that impacts one's mental health. Sociologically, there are questions surrounding a person's future ability to maintain healthy relationships as divorce rates continue to rise. Anthropologically, questions arise involving the changes in human behaviour following a hostile divorce and how that has altered over time.

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