

# *The Impact of Parental Divorce on Children's Mental Health*

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**Abstract:** The rising divorce rate has become the norm in modern society. This trend leads to many children of divorced families having certain psychological problems. This review aims to understand the causes and effects of these problems. These problems are likely to have an impact on teenagers in the long term. The psychological effects of the parents' marital status on the children tend to have a certain negative impact on the children's future. Parents' divorce can lead to certain negative psychological problems in children, but this effect may be not as serious as the media states. Some researchers have suggested that the treatment of parent-child relationship is appropriate to mitigate the negative effects of divorce on adolescents. To a certain extent, it helps the child develop resilience and other positive traits as well. At the same time, many research encourage society to be kind to the children of divorced families and accept the diversity of families.

**Keywords:** divorced parents, social adaptability, teenagers, mental health

## 1. Introduction

With the current social and economic development and the modernization process, people's living standards are also constantly improving and have diversified development. As a result, society began to move from opposition to divorce acceptance. People are more willing to pay attention to the quality of their marriage and the pursuit of their own happiness. This has led to a rise in divorce rates, and teenagers from such families have gradually begun to suffer from both negative and positive psychological problems. Divorced family refers to a family in which only one father or mother lives with unmarried children who do not have the ability to live independently [1]. This article focuses on divorced families with children under the age of 18. Adolescence is the transition period of children into adult roles. Teenagers are divided into 14-17 years old and 18-25 years old two stages, 14-17 years old for middle school period, 18-25 years old for university period. Children of divorced families, through the process of complete family structure to single parent families and then the reorganization of the family, which is full of contradictions and quarrels, will inevitably suffer certain psychological and physical damage. At the same time, individuals in adolescence will be brought negative psychological impact. Nevertheless, at the same time, the effects are time-bound, and teenagers often recover from their parents' divorce better than some children of intact families. Sometimes, divorce can also help children get away from unhealthy environments so that they can have better development.

Among them, Zhang supports such a view, which found that children's behavioral problems are related to the low quality of their parents' marriage and negative coping styles. Ham found that teenagers from divorced families will mainly have learning anxiety, physical symptoms, allergic tendencies and psychological problems [1]. However, later, Kelly found the theoretical changes of the relationship between divorce and adolescent psychological development in different historical stages, from the "serious impact theory" to the "limited impact theory" [2]. At the same time, some researchers and others found that parents' divorce does have a negative impact on children's psychological development, but many children will have a corresponding positive impact, such as experiencing growth and maturity in the frustration of family changes.

Everyone has their teenage years. In psychology, there are a lot of studies on adolescent psychological problems, the influence of parenting style on adolescent psychology, the influence of parent-child time on adolescent behavior and so on. Along with psychological changes, many mental diseases, such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder, occur at this time. At the same time, the adolescent period is a time when children's emotions and behaviors fluctuate greatly, so parents' behaviors will also affect children's later growth and development. Children of divorce deserve more attention because they experience life changes that their peers do not. The process of divorce can bring certain negative effects on children. In recent years, the juvenile crime rate only rises, and even maintains a high situation. The younger and younger age also gives people a revelation that it is urgent to pay attention to the mental health of teenagers.

This paper focuses on the influence of divorced families on adolescent psychological problems. It is hoped that an in-depth analysis of previous literature studies will provide a more comprehensive picture of the effects of divorced families on adolescent behavior. This paper discusses the effect of divorce on adolescent mental health from positive and negative aspects. The negative impact is expected to increase social attention to teenagers in divorced families, and at the same time, it can give divorced parents some inspiration to help them better face or solve the psychological problems caused by their parents' divorce. Positive influence can also serve as a compass for the future education of young people. Adolescent mental health is worth extensive attention of the whole society. It is hoped that this article can make contributions to the research of adolescents' mental health.

## **2. Negative Effects of Parental Divorce on Adolescents' Mental Health**

### **2.1. Cognitive Distortions**

Psychological precocity shows maturity of thought and the possibility of acting out of age. (such as puppy love, lack of innocence). Psychological precocity will cause teenagers from divorced families to have a bias in some people's cognitive concepts. In early youth, children from divorced families show more precocity than children from normal families. One manifestation is that girls tend to have intimate relationships earlier [3]. And precocity here does not mean a more mature solution to the problem. On the contrary, when the parent relationship is not harmonious (including but not limited to divorce), the cognitive level of adolescents will be greatly affected. When the relationship between parents is relatively stable, they will not often vent their bad emotions to their children because of contradictions. The evaluation that the children feel is rational and objective, rather than just an unconvincing state of emotional vent. Then the children will have space to carry out self-analysis and interpretation, and can also improve their self-cognitive ability. In divorced families, most teenagers themselves have a certain cognitive judgment, but in the conflict between parents produce cognitive confusion, thinking confusion. Thus, they are unable to establish a stable ideological system [4]. It is worth mentioning that, according to the authors, children of divorced families, due to the expansion of negative false perceptions, lead to many harmful mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and negative cognitive errors. The impact is profound and lasting negatively associated with

positive delusion scores. The association in between what stressful divorce-related things and children's adjustment problems to show weak and strong recognition of cognitive errors in children and adolescents. These charts consistently show that the relationship between stress-related divorce events and cognitive problems is more pronounced in adolescents. In contrast, from children's point of view, the influence of stressful events related to divorce on adjustment of children was moderated by appraisal biases. The study recounts two main findings. One is that perception of passive cognitive errors enhances that many of the psychological problems (e.g., depression, anxiety) reported in children's self-tests were exacerbated by divorce. Teenagers from divorced families even feel that they have to be responsible for their parents' unhappy life because their parents' feelings are not harmonious, which will have great psychological pressure and distort the concept of happiness and responsibility of teenagers. The various problems existing under the precocity are precisely the major impact of divorce on the mental health of teenagers. And the above mentioned "marital happiness view" and "responsibility view" not only exist in the cognition of teenagers, in fact, according to the "serious affect the theory", the impact of divorce on children is negative and lasting. As teenagers reach adulthood, they are less confident in intimate relationships and less likely to marry and have children [5].

## 2.2. Social Adaptability

Adolescents from divorced families often have poor social adaptability, such as lack of initiative in interpersonal communication. Parents who divorce restrict the healthy development of parent-child relationship to a certain extent. And then produce uncontrollable negative effects on their interpersonal communication. Hai has done research on adolescents' social adjustment in divorced families [6]. The research shows that middle school students from divorced families are in a special family environment, and their family functions are in a passive state. The interpersonal adaptability and psychological resilience of middle school students from divorced families were significantly lower than those from whole families. There was no significant difference in psychological superiority and mental energy between divorced and whole families. In the process of psychological development of adolescents, the need for interpersonal communication and psychological resilience (such as optimism and self-control) are greatly affected by families.

Compared with intact families, middle school students from divorced families have a higher probability of social disorder, and the development of positive and healthy mental resilience is limited. Unhealthy relationships in divorced families have a huge impact on parent-child relationships. When the parent-child relationship is not harmonious and the needs of the relationship cannot be met, the child is prone to poor mental health problems such as low self-esteem, poor sociability, and withdrawal from communication. It is also one of the manifestations of poor social adaptability. In addition, in this study, there are significant differences in interpersonal adaptation among students from divorced families in different grades. The researchers found the results. Among students from divorced families, students in grade two have the strongest interpersonal adaptation ability. The negative impact of changes in family environment on high school students may be more profound. The reason for this can be that the psychology of middle school students and high school students is very different. Junior high school students are in the "experiential" stage of thinking development. In the face of changes in the family environment, they are still in the "insensitive" stage. Moreover, their cognition and perception of events are not as strong as high school students. Finally, the author also studied the gender difference, and the psychological resilience score of male students was significantly higher than that of female students. And divorced events with each other lead adolescents to have a negative view of human relationships. In social life, most children from divorced families will show shyness and serious resistance. At the same time, the grayness of interpersonal relationships will affect the development of psychological resilience. Teenagers show

negative emotions such as pessimism and inferiority, which will lead to serious psychological problems, such as depression.

### 3. Reflections Beyond Negative Effects of Divorce Family

In past research, It is observed that the relationship between divorce and adolescent psychological development has been further studied and found that children of divorced families are not severely negative. In 2020, Khairunnisa and his members conducted experiments in which divorced families had a strong impact on children's ability to develop gratitude and resilience among teenagers [7]. This experiment aimed to decide the role of gratitude in resilience in the Jakarta metropolitan area where parents had divorced most. In this experiment, non-probabilistic sampling was used to recruit participants. The experiment suggested that gratitude played an important factor in the participants' resilience [8]. In addition, the experiment showed that 28.9% of the difference in resilience might be explained by gratitude based on the regression formula that was summarized in the table, as participants exhibit high levels of gratitude. Also, they showed high levels of resilience. These results highlight the importance of gratitude interventions to increase the resilience of teenagers whose parents divorced. It suggests that gratitude effect resilience among adolescents whose parents have divorced. The more grateful teenagers were, the more resilient they were. This finding highlights the essential of gratitude interventions to increase the resilience of teenagers whose parents have divorced. Therefore, parental divorce does not just have a negative impact on teenagers. Teenagers may emerge more mature from this unusual experience. Teenagers will be more grateful and resilient. This growth will also help them to have better development in the future.

An experimental study by Xu and Ye showed that children will grow and mature in the changes and setbacks of divorced families [9]. Investigation and research have found that many children grow up and mature in the frustration of family changes. Among them, a sample survey was conducted to investigate the influence degree of self-reported divorce of parents in divorced families. Among them, in life, learning and emotions, the proportion of children with greater influence is relatively low. The proportion of children with no influence was higher. In addition, the guardian also investigated whether the children reported positive and mature development. Research shows that more children have improved self-care skills. Children of divorced families are more self-care ability than the average child, more considerate parents, more thrifty, more adaptable and compassionate, respectively, 30 to 40 percent. Therefore, the study found that parents' marriage changes are not as serious as the media propagates. At the same time, children of divorce tend to become more mature and have better self-management skills [10]. At the same time, the survey also found that establishing a non-discriminatory school and social environment would greatly reduce the negative impact of parental divorce on children. It is hoped that society will more respect the independent choices of the parties concerned, view the diversified family structure and lifestyle more peacefully, and stop perpetuating the past prejudice of "disabled families", "problem children" and "deformed education". In order to further improve the social environment of schooling for children of different family structures, it is necessary for the academic community and the media to assess more comprehensively and objectively the actual impact of family changes on children and to analyse their social, economic, cultural and psychological causes.

### 4. Conclusions

This paper discusses the effects of divorced families on adolescent mental health. In recent years, with divorce rates on the rise and the prevalence of mental illness among adolescents, more and more research has focused on the relationship between parents and teenagers. However, there is limited literature to describe the negative impact and reflection of divorced families on adolescents. This

article summarized the literature on the impact of divorced families on adolescent mental health and discussed the negative effects of divorced families and the reflections derived from them. First of all, the impact on adolescent mental health is mainly from two aspects: cognitive distortions and social adaptability. At the cognitive aspect, adolescents are more affected in this respect than some younger children. They are more likely to have cognitive errors exacerbated by their parents' divorce. Wrong cognitive concepts can also amplify adolescent psychological problems, such as depression. Secondly, according to the literature reviewed, divorced families have more than just negative effects on adolescents. Compared with teenagers from typical families, they are more mature and have better self-management and problem-solving skills. Finally, the article mentions the atmosphere of prejudice, fighting, arguments and lack of communication that exist in divorced families, which have a serious impact on the mental health of adolescents. This paper hopes to give parents in similar situations some guidance in educating their teenagers. However, there are many areas for improvement in this article. All views are based on the summary of previous literature, so the content has certain limitations. It still hoped that this article can give divorced parents some guidance to educate their children, and also reduce the occurrence of some psychological problems in children.

### Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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