

Influence of Divorced Family Environment on Children's Emotional Development

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to explore children's positive and negative emotions in divorced families and which parents had a greater impact on (positive or negative) children's emotional development after divorce, like anxiety, anger, shrink, and low self-esteem, which is based on past studies. Subsequently, positive and effective interventions were proposed, such as family education, and community and school education guidance. Family education guidance includes education guidance for single-parent families and for reorganization families. School education instruction includes home visits and "Mood Corner". This review further explored that the essence of emotional development in children from divorced families is actually the relationship between the parents after the divorce and interpersonal relationship, which includes the relationship between parents after divorce, the care and way of school and society, and the acceptance of others. Based on the analysis of this review can provide some ways for parents of divorced families to promote their children's emotional development, as well as for parents of divorced families to pay attention to the importance of children's emotional development.

Keywords: divorced family, children, emotion, emotional development

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the phenomenon of parental divorce in all countries is very common. China's divorce rate increased from 0.96% in 2000 to 3.1% in 2020, which showed enormous growth. For example, an estimated 41% of first marriages end in divorce [1]. As a result, the incidence of single-parent families has increased rapidly in China in recent years. Meanwhile, the emotional development of children in divorced families has also received widespread attention, and there have been many studies to prove how this change in parental relationships affects children. Various studies also have reported that children of single-parent families as a result of divorce have low self-esteem and aggression, empathy, disruptive behavior and conflict [2].

The development of children's emotions is affected by many factors, such as parental relationship, teacher-student relationships, and social relationships, among which the most influential is the parental relationship. The absence of one or both parents will adversely affect their upbringing and will predispose them to mental illness [3]. This review mainly explores the emotional development of children from divorced families, including positive and negative emotions. However, the key to children's emotional development is not necessarily in the divorce itself but in the harmonious

relationship between parents after divorce. Based on Rappaport's research, it appears that about 20 to 25 percent of children after divorce have serious problems in emotions, and nearly 75 to 80 percent have no obvious psychological barriers [4]. Besides, parents need to guide their children to treat the divorce problem correctly, giving timely attention to the children's emotions and so on. Meanwhile, this article further discusses the impact of harmonious divorce and unharmonious divorce on children's emotional development, which includes child support after divorce and the distribution of time that both parents spend with their children. Furthermore, interventions that parents and schools can adopt to solve their children's emotional problems in their development are discussed in this study. For example, the school can adopt "the cooperation between family and school."

2. Methods

Using Google Scholar and the academic database Web of Knowledge, a comprehensive literature search was carried out. The following search terms, as well as their derivatives, were entered: "children emotions", "divorced family", "depression", "self-esteem", "empathy", "aggression", "disruptive behavior", and "conflict". Studies were included if they: (i) included empirical data; (ii) the family environment must be a divorced family; (iii) the study subjects must be children; (iv) at least one child's emotion must be explored; (v) the study must be published after 2000.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Importance of Interpersonal Relationships in Divorced Families

The divorced family usually refers to a family resulting from a divorce and is typically headed by an individual. Explains the characteristics of divorced families, parental relationship characteristics: conflictual, negative effects on children in this family atmosphere.

The definition of children's emotions is usually used in the brain of a living being, which reflects their attitudes towards the objects that satisfy and hinder individual demands [5]. A majority of children in divorced families will show the following emotional states: loneliness, anger, and pain.

It is important to study the value and significance of emotional development in children from divorced families because children who can adjust their emotions well and in a short period will have more possibility to achieve early school success, while children who experience serious emotional difficulty will face serious risks of early school difficulty.

3.2. Children's Negative Emotion in Divorced Families

Consequences of parental divorce and conflicts depend on gender. For instance, the reaction of girls is an emotional and internalizing problems, such as fear and remorse, and the response of boys is often angry and aggressive [6].

Moreover, parents' timely handling of children's negative emotions. When parents themselves become depressed, they may be more likely to view their children's negative emotions in this light [7]. Because when they are dealing with family conflicts or even divorce will more or less affect their emotions. For example, in the cold war quarrels, quarrels in front of the child have a more profound impact on the child, especially since parents do not tend to solve the problems and makeup after the quarrel.

3.2.1. Anxiety

Children's observations of precocious age children show that anxiety is a common response to divorce. Therefore, the active involvement of parents and schools is extremely important for children. Esmaeilian [8] studied the emotions of 243 children with divorced parents. Furthermore, girls and

boys showed statistically significant differences in pre-test state anxiety and trait anxiety, and girls presenting more anxiety symptoms than boys.

3.2.2. Anger

Anger has a high probability of occurring in families, and it can be very powerful in the relationships between family members. It is not necessarily the anger itself that occurs but the way in which it is expressed that causes problems. The negative emotions that parents feel as a result of a fight often have a negative emotional impact on their children [9]. Some parents are able to use angry feelings as a rational and effective way of solving problems. In contrast, others turn their anger inward and engage in self-destructive behaviors [10]. Early adolescents from divorced families will have higher levels of state anger than other early adolescents from intact families [11].

On the gender dimension, Esmaeilian studied boys who scored higher on trait anger compared to girls. However, there was no significant difference between boys and girls in state anger [8].

3.2.3. Shrink

When people are hurt in a relationship, their instinctive reaction is to retreat, refuse to communicate, and be unwilling to give emotion to others. After parental divorce, children in a single-parent family may feel distant from their parents and alienated (though sometimes classmates and teachers do not despise them). Hence, children tend to actively alienate others and put themselves in a “safe” situation. In this self-withdrawal behavior, they will feel lonely and severely, which and even lead to depression [12].

3.2.4. Depression

There have been identified various symptoms of depression, such as sadness, aphasia, fatigue, insomnia, loss of appetite, feeling of guilt, loss of personal worth, decreased concentration, and even some children may generate suicidal ideas [6].

Besides, the probability of depression is different between girls and boys. In accordance with Twenge JM’s survey and Peterson AC’s survey of depression in adolescents, gender is expected to play an important role in the presentation of depression, which indicates that the girls in this study showed a higher degree of variation in depression. [6].

3.3. Positive Emotions

Fabes’s study on children’s emotions in divorced families has shown relatively consistent results that divorce affects children to a greater or lesser extent, but the results vary if the parents’ relationship is well maintained [7]. A meta-analysis of 57 studies found that children who had close relationships with their fathers benefited from frequent contact when their fathers remained actively involved as parents [13].

Based on the logic and facts of parent-child communication, the evaluation, the process of the mother’s actions and behaviors and how to deal with these behaviors are formed. Mothers of the PST (Problem Solving Treatment)-based training courses that encouraged them in dealing with child psychological problems was to conduct parent-child communication, which allows mothers to feel better about their mental state and better control their children’s traumatic emotional reactions [14].

The essence that affects children’s emotions lies in the relationship between the parents after the divorce and interpersonal relationship, which includes the relationship between parents after divorce, the care and way of school and society, and the acceptance of others.

Although most children may feel better living in an intact family than in a divorced family, our position from the stereotypical view are differentiated by two essential caveats [15]. First of all, a family with both parents may not provide a good family environment for promoting the healthy development of children's emotions. Although there are still some differences between children of divorce and children of two-parent families, most children of divorce do adjust well emotionally. [13,16].

4. Implications

4.1. Family and Community Education Guidance

4.1.1. For Single-Parent Families

For single-parent families, parenting styles generally have the following three kinds: authoritative parenting style, authoritarian and permissive parenting style. However, children whose parents have authoritative parenting styles, characterized by warmth, supportiveness, and appropriate limit-setting and control, have fewer difficulties comparing with children of authoritarian or permissive parents, because raising mode and parenting skills obviously are risk factors that may affect children's way of dealing with divorce or buffers [4].

The father or mother needs to establish the correct parenting attitude: (i) continuous communication. Parents should understand that for their children, losing a complete family at a young age will make them feel very lonely and helpless. Therefore, parents should timely pay attention to their children's emotions and communicate with them so that their children can feel that they are valued and cared for, so as to reduce the negative feelings caused by their parents' divorce; (ii) parents should keep their expectations and demands for children. To have certain expectations and requirements for children, such as supporting them to develop their own interests and stick to them, encouraging children to listen carefully in class, and actively participating in some social activities.

4.1.2. For Reorganization Families

For the remarriage reorganization family, should pay attention to the following principles: equality principle, democratic principle, and fairness principle, in order to avoid children's resistance, jealousy, retreat psychology and other problems. In addition, remarried families should pay attention not to restrict children's communication with their biological parents and give children the complete freedom to enjoy family love, which is conducive to the development of children's physical and mental health, and also can establish trust with children.

4.2. Community Education Guidance

In the process of parents' divorce, children from divorced families are more or less traumatized by different degrees of heart, so they need the cooperation and assistance of the community, family and school to better help these children in difficulties. Therefore, it's essential to build child-friendly communities. A child-friendly community can distract children's attention from their parent's divorce. In conclusion, the application of a gamified child participation approach is highly hands-on and can also be fun and educational, fostering children's independent development.

The community can help these children try to accept their parents' divorce and gradually get out of it through publicity and education, such as family lectures, special seminars and so on. In addition, the community can organize activities specifically for single-parent families or stepfamilies, providing a platform for them to know each other and encourage each other in order to get out of

trouble. As a result, school education guidance, family education guidance and community education guidance are all essential to the development of children's emotions.

4.3. School Education Guidance

4.3.1. Home Visits

Teachers need to visit each child regularly to understand the family status and mental health of children, develop a special home contact manual and communicate with parents regularly to discuss solutions. For single-parent families, establish student files of single-parent families in the teaching process, strengthen the love education for the current children, consciously guide some cheerful children to communicate with them, and help them out of difficulties.

4.3.2. "Mood Corner"

Teachers understand the situation with parents, choose the right way to help children express their emotions, or can also set up a similar "mood corner" or "mood cabin" so that children have a space to be alone or consult the teacher alone. For example, the school can arrange for the classroom teacher to communicate with three or four children every day, and the content of the communication can include life at school, such as eating, sleeping and whether they get along well with their partners or whether there is any conflict. The content of the communication can be recorded in the home-school contact book, and regular feedback can be given to the parents to achieve the state of "co-parenting".

There are also some limitations in previous studies: (i) Although the media continue to report the negative results of children from divorced families, there are two longitudinal studies that report children and young adults have very different results in the long run [16, 17]; (ii) earlier studies did not distinguish well between the effects of different amounts of father involvement. Some studies have simply assessed children's resilience and the ability to determine how it relates to frequency of visits, regardless of the length of visits [4]; (iii) In determining the overall impact of parental emotional socialization on children, it is critical to study the interaction between severe parental distress and coping measures and other more positive forms of coping [7].

5. Conclusion

Although most children may feel better living in a happy two-parent family than in a divorced family, emphasizing two key considerations to distinguish our position from old points. First of all, a family with both parents may not provide a good family environment for promoting the healthy development of children's emotions. For example, parents' emotional instability is caused by the wrong upbringing of both parents' families of origin, or both parents are concerned with the child's academic performance, but not with the child's emotions and emotional experiences. Although there are still some differences between the children from divorced families and the children from two-parent families, the majority of children from divorced families are indeed emotionally well-adjusted if their parents are using the right parenting style for their children's emotions.

The essence that affects children's emotions lies in the parent-children relationship and interpersonal relationship, which includes the relationship between parents after divorce, the care and way of school and society, and the acceptance of others. Parents need positive parenting attitudes, which include patience, love, same requirements as the children in intact families. Schools should actively guide children out of emotional distress, and the methods available are described in the previous section. Communities can hold family lectures and special seminars regularly or organize activities where children from divorced families can get to know each other and work together to get out of the shadows. Based on the above findings can provide some ways for parents of divorced

families to promote their children's emotional development, as well as for parents of divorced families to pay attention to the importance of children's emotional development.

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