

Divorce, Effect on Child Development

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Childhood experiences of divorce affect multiple domains of development. Cognitive, emotional and physical areas of a child's development may be impacted by the separation. Models of development which take into account both biological and environmental influences suggest that problems of divorce impact the parental practices towards the children which lead to difficulties in emotional regulation and insecurity. These arenas impact health in both explicit health risk behaviors as well as biological responses within the body. The combination of these seen and unseen processes contribute to an overall impact on health.

Children of divorce experience an increase in both internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Internalizing behaviors are those typical of symptoms seen in diagnoses of depression and anxiety and are commonly picked up as feeling behaviors. Externalizing behaviors are actions that impact others and are those associated with peer interaction problems, and aggression. As a result of both internalizing and externalizing behaviors, children see issues in their social and psychological development. Indications of behavior problems noted in childhood have effects into adolescence with the behaviors either sustaining or increasing.

Cognitive areas affected as a result of divorce include the development of coping skills and information-processing skills. These processes affect the development of proper regulation of emotions as well as affect the development of the perception in attribution and relationships. Mental blueprints are developed as the result of the child's experience of the divorce. This affects not only how the child views themselves, but others and how others view them. The deficits impact the child's development of trust in others. Like behaviors, these perceptions

impact psychosocial development in varying domains. Emotional and cognitive problems impact physical problems.

Physical problems in development as seen by the impact of divorce are seen in body complaints (e.g. headaches, nausea and pain), increased injuries and hospitalizations. In addition, children experience more acute and chronic health problems. Other effects of divorce are seen in internal biological systems. Issues in within the result in stress and coping responses and can impact physical growth and the development of psychological problems. Prolonged stress negatively impacts physical and psychological domains. Problems in the hormone systems that are seen after divorce also impact the stress response leading to increased possibilities of both psychological and physical problems.

The effects of divorce on children is seen in various areas. Children are affected in emotional, mental, and physical domains. Current models have each of these areas intertwining. The first level starts with the divorce which directly affects parenting practice. This practice impacts the child and starts to create pathways that can bypass emotional and cognitive issues onto physical health problems. It is important to note that emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physical domains are all linked. Each has its role in the development of children. Differing degrees and combination of these areas can lead to varying physical and psychological problems. These in turn can lead to the development of psychological issues. The impact of divorce is well documented as impacting a child's personal, social, and academic development and its effects should be mediated and intervened in order for trajectories to stay on track.

Further Reading:

Troxel, W. M., & Matthews, K. A. (2004). What are the costs of marital conflict and dissolution to children's physical health? *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 7(1), 29-57. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/10.1023/B:CCFP.0000020191.73542.b0>

Weaver, J. M., & Schofield, T. J. (2015). Mediation and moderation of divorce effects on children's behavior problems. *Journal of Family Psychology, 29*(1), 39-48.
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxylocal.library.nova.edu/10.1037/fam0000043>