

CURRENT RESEARCH ON CHILDREN'S POSTDIVORCE ADJUSTMENT" - NO SIMPLE ANSWERS

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This article reviews the current research on the effects of marital conflict, parental adjustment, custody, and access on children following divorce. Evidence from research demonstrates that significantly more adjustment problems confront children, especially boys, of divorced parents compared to those in never-divorced families. However; when assessed in years following the divorce, these children are functioning in normal limits and do not appear "disturbed," although the media report the opposite. The article discusses an important British study finding that marital conflict and not the divorce affect children and that divorce may mitigate some of the more destructive effects. The analysts of research dealing with joint custody together both current and ongoing studies. A surprising finding in one study was that mothers who share custody are more satisfied than those having sole custody and whose children see their father periodically. However, both groups expressed more satisfaction with their residential arrangement than did sole-custody mothers whose children had no paternal contact. Court-ordered joint custody was less satisfactory than when the parents voluntarily agreed to that arrangement, and spouses reporting high levels of marital conflict tended to do less well in joint custody arrangements than did families with less conflict.

Considerable attention has been devoted in the past two decades to the effects of divorce on children and adolescents. Our knowledge has particularly expanded in the past 5 years, the result of a virtual explosion of increasingly sophisticated and complex studies assessing the longer-range impact of divorce on family members. Many of these studies, using objective and standardised measures, adequate comparison groups, and sophisticated statistical analyses, have gone beyond simply demonstrating whether divorce is good or bad for children. Such studies have explored what aspects of the child's separation and divorce experience create adjustment problems or enhance adjustment postdivorce. It is clear that multiple interacting variables, rather than a single variable, influence children's adjustment. These include characteristics of the child (age, sex, temperament, and predivorce adjustment), characteristics of the parents (psychological adjustment, impulse control), family process variables (conflict, communication, co-operation, parent-child relationships, and child-rearing practices), legal and status variables (custody, residential arrangements), economic status and change, and social support conditions.

As a result of this multivariate approach, it is no longer possible to make simplistic statements about children's postdivorce adjustment. Contradictory findings and more complex results have forced a more thoughtful and integrative approach to divorce and adjustment issues. It is also apparent from recent research that variables that are linked to good outcomes in children are not identical to those that lead to more dysfunctional adjustment. This article summarises more recent divorce and child adjustment issues with respect to parental conflict, custodial parent adjustment, access, and type of custody arrangement.

OVERVIEW

The weight of the evidence, gathered from multiple studies over the past two decades, is that divorced children (particularly boys), when compared to children in never-divorced

families, have significantly more adjustment problems (Camera & Resnick, 1988; Emery, 1988; Guidubaldi, Perry, & Cleminshaw, 1984; Hetherington, Co, & Cox, 1982; Kurdek & Berg, 1983; Warshak & Santrock, 1983; Zill, 1983). The most reliable findings are those concerning the greater number of so-called "externalising problems" of divorced children. Compared to never-divorced children, children of divorce, and boys more so than girls, exhibit more aggressive, impulsive, and antisocial behaviors, have more difficulties in their peer relationships, are less compliant with authority figures, and show more problem behaviors at school. It is important to note that, with the exception of several national studies, most data have been collected on White, middle-class, mother custody families. Further, data collection has relied very heavily on maternal reports of children's adjustment. When paternal reports and measures are included, predictability is increased beyond using maternal variables only (Thomas & Forehand, in press).

Studies comparing the intellectual and academic functioning of children in divorced and nondivorced homes have also found that divorced children fare more poorly on IQ scores, on reading and math achievement test scores, and in grades than do their nondivorced counterparts. But the magnitude of the differences between the two groups, while significant, are consistently quite small. When the confounding effects of race and socioeconomic status are untangled, the differences between the groups are further diminished, and in the case of IQ and achievement scores, they disappear (Guidubaldi & Perry, 1984). Divorced children do appear to have significantly lower academic self-concept and reduced achievement motivation, as do children in unhappily married families (Long, Forehand, Fauber, & Brody, 1987). However, the age of the child at separation may be critical. In a study of seventh and ninth graders, adolescent academic self-concept was not significantly lower among divorced children, compared to never-divorced children, if parents separated before third grade. Nor were there differences in academic achievement after controlling for relevant demographic variables (Smith, 1990). Divorced children are more often absent from school, watch more TV, and spend less time on homework than do children from nondivorced families (Nastasi, 1988).

A third dimension of children's postdivorce adjustment is that of "internalising behaviors," including anxiety, depression, and withdrawal. Numerous studies have failed to find clear and consistent results in this area, perhaps, in part, because of differences in age and gender of the children studied and the length of time since separation, as well as differences in outcome measures used. Divorced children and adolescents do *not* differ from the never-divorced on self-esteem in most postdivorce studies, although separation may temporarily undermine self-esteem. After divorce, self-esteem and depression are more consistently found to be related to parental *conflict* rather than family status. It is good to be aware that parent and child reports of self-esteem and other internalising variables are often contradictory, as are those of clinicians, fathers, and mothers.

Many studies have found that the problems observed after divorce were more severe and enduring for boys than for girls, although there is evidence that there are age- and sex-related differences. Girls initially experience more problems than boys when the parents divorce during the children's adolescence (Frost & Pakiz, 1990), but younger school-aged-boys are initially more affected than girls.

It should be noted that, despite the more negative findings regarding children of divorce, the majority of divorced children, when assessed in the years after divorce, are functioning within normal or average limits. They are not, as a group, "disturbed," although me-

dia reports leave the casual reader with that impression. In fact, the mean differences between divorced and nondivorced groups of children, while statistically significant, are generally quite small. The more sophisticated the study and analyses, the weaker the effect (Amato & Keith, 1991). Even among a sample of chronically litigating, high-conflict postdivorce families, the overall mean adjustment scores of the majority of children fell within the *normal* range on the Child Behavior Checklist. Only 16% of the children were within the clinical range of disturbance (Johnston, Kline, & Tschann, 1989).

Further, there is considerable range of functioning within groups of divorced and nondivorced children. Among divorced children are those functioning quite well, and among the nondivorced are children with major adjustment problems. In short, there is no one-to-one relationship between divorce and psychological adjustment problems in children. We should refrain from perpetrating the “child of divorce” as a person prototype, as this negative stereotype influences not only the children but those with whom they interact.

Recent findings have forced a reconsideration of the overall meaning of the divorce research of the past two decades. Most research has searched for factors in the child’s divorce and postdivorce experience that could be linked to the postdivorce adjustment problems of children. Recent reports from several large longitudinal studies have indicated, however, that some of the difficulties observed in children of divorce were evident *prior* to divorce.

In a study of 17,414 British families, Elliot and Richards (1991) reported that *half* of the behavioral and academic problems of school-aged boys and a smaller proportion of the adjustment problems of girls were reported by parents or teachers several years before the parents divorced. An American study reported by Cherlin et al. (1991) found similar effects for boys. In a third study, young sons (but not daughters) were described by their parents as having serious behavior problems many years before the parents divorced (Block, Block & Gjerde, 1986). And children from marriages with high marital conflict had three times more psychological distress than did children living in families where marital conflict was low or moderate before divorce (Peterson & Zill, 1986). Tschann, Johnston, Kline, and Wallerstein (1990) found that the preseparation variables of marital conflict, history of psychological problems of the child, and relationship with mother were more important predictors of adjustment than were the postseparation variables of conflict, loss of parent, and change.

Child development research and divorce studies demonstrate that *marital* conflict may have both direct and indirect effects on children’s adjustment in the married family as well as in the postdivorce family. High levels of marital conflict may directly influence children’s emotional and behavioral adjustment through modelling processes. When children observe parents expressing emotional distress and anger through aggressive and uncontrolled behaviors, they are more likely to incorporate this way of dealing with upset into their own behavioral repertoire. Thus some of the impulsive, aggressive behaviors observed in children after divorce may, in fact, be well-established prior to divorce. The stresses of divorce may then exacerbate the use of these coping styles.

Second, marital conflict appears to have *indirect* effects on children’s adjustment, expressed through the parent-child relationship. In married families, high marital conflict is associ-

ated with less warm, less empathic relationships between parents and children and more rejection of the child (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991; Caspi & Elder, 1988; Cowan & Cowan, 1987). There is also some evidence that fathers withdraw more from their children under conditions of high conflict. These parental behaviors, in turn, lead to more behavioral difficulties in the children. Continued high conflict after divorce may further interfere with parents' ability to nurture and be responsive to their children's needs and be consistent in discipline, which may exacerbate existing problems or create new problems for children.

The import of these data is clear. Family processes that exist during the marriage are critical in shaping divorced children's positive or negative psychological adjustment. Certain types of family, parental, or marital dysfunction appear to place children at risk long before divorce occurs. Some of the variables affecting children's adjustment during marriage include the amount of conflict between spouses, the nature of the parent-child relationship, parenting or child-rearing practices, the extent of anger toward or rejection of the child, the psychological adjustment of one or both parents, and the presence of violence. In light of these compelling findings, it is time to abandon the search for the one postdivorce solution that will create good adjustment for all children. Further, it is clearly inappropriate to simply blame divorce or postdivorce conditions for causing children's problems. We must simultaneously look backward into the child's predivorce family and integrate that information with divorce process and postdivorce factors to advance our understanding.

As divorce and family research continues to point to the power of previously unstudied variables in determining children's adjustment, it sheds light on inconsistencies in the divorce literature. Some of the apparent contradictions are a function of which and how many variables are selected for study. How those variables are measured, who the reporter is, and the age and demographic composition of the samples will also affect the outcome.

CONFLICT

Early studies led to the general acceptance of conflict as a predictor of negative outcomes for children. Intense or frequent *marital* conflict was found to be associated with poorer psychological adjustment among children in nondivorced as well as divorced families (Emery, 1982), and divorced children in low-conflict environments were found to be better adjusted than were children in high-conflict *married* families (Hetherington et al., 1982). Continuing high conflict between parents after divorce has been linked to more somatic and psychosomatic symptoms and greater social and behavioral adjustment problems in children, particularly if parents expressed their conflict with physical aggression (Johnston et al., 1989; Kline, Tschann, Johnston, & Wallerstein, 1989). In general, however, correlations have been low, suggesting that conflict does not produce a consistent outcome for children.

Recent studies suggest that the relationship between child adjustment and conflict is neither universal, simple, nor particularly straightforward. Wolman and Taylor's (1991) study of children whose parents contested custody reported that the contested children had significantly less anger and guilt at posttest, compared to a matched group of children whose parents did not dispute custody. In a study of children between ages 7 and 11 years, postdivorce interparental hostility was not significantly related to child adjustment.

Instead, several different measures of the custodial mothers' psychological adjustment were predictive of adjustment in boys and girls (Kalter, Kloner, Schreiser, & Okla, 1989). Three additional studies found no *direct* effect of degree of conflict on children's adjustment after separation or divorce. Rather, the effects of conflict were *indirect*, either mediated through other behaviors of the parents (Tschann et al., 1990), or dependent on the strategies used to resolve conflict (Camera & Resnick, 1989) or related to the extent to which parents expressed their conflicts directly with and through the children (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991).

Mothers reporting higher levels of marital conflict tended to have more postseparation conflict with their spouses. They were more rejecting with their children and used their children more during the divorcing period for both emotional support and the expression of conflict. These *indirect* effects of marital conflict influenced child adjustment, as did children's age, history of psychological problems, time with father, and specific social or environmental changes (Tschann et al., 1990).

Camera and Resnick (1989) found that the strategies parents used to resolve conflict were more reliable predictors of children's adjustment. In both married and divorced families, children were less aggressive when parents had higher parent co-operation scores. When fathers used verbal attack styles in resolving conflict, young children had more behavioral problems and lower self-esteem in both married and divorced families. Mothers' use of verbal attacks in attempts to resolve conflict with fathers resulted in more parallel, solitary (or withdrawn) play for their children. In divorced families, when mothers used negative, attacking dispute resolution styles, both the mother-child and father-child relationships were poorer, compared to the families where mothers used compromise strategies.

It appears that, rather than discord per se, it is the *manner in* which parental conflict is expressed that may affect children's adjustment. High interparental discord has been found to be related to the child's *feeling caught* in the middle, and this experience of feeling caught was related to adjustment (Buchanan et al., 1991; Johnston et al., 1989). Feeling caught was assessed by the extent to which a parent asked a child to carry messages, asked intrusive questions about the other parent, or created in the child a need to hide information or feelings about the other parent. Four and a half years after separation, adolescents were more depressed and anxious and engaged in more deviant behaviors, the more caught they felt. But high conflict itself did not cause more depression or deviant behavior *unless* the child felt caught up in it by one or both parents. Whereas adolescents from high-conflict families were more likely to feel caught than were adolescents in disengaged or co-operative families, 40% of the adolescents whose parents had high discord scores were below the median on "feeling caught." These parents refrained from those behaviors that caused the child to feel caught and did not express their conflict in front of the children. Adolescents who were closer to both parents reported fewer feelings of being caught than did adolescents close to only one or neither parent.

Residence by itself was not related to feeling caught. Adolescents in dual(shared)-residence arrangements did not feel more caught than did adolescents in mother- or father-custody residence arrangements. Nor was amount of visiting related to feeling caught. There was a significant effect, however, of the interaction between type of residence and the parental relationship. Dual-residence arrangements appeared to be more harmful when parents were in high discord than were sole-residence arrangements. In contrast, adolescents in dual-residence arrangements where there was co-operative communication between par-

ents benefited more than did adolescents in sole residential arrangements.

These studies indicate that children can escape the negative consequences of parental conflict when they are not caught in it by their parents or when their parents avoid direct, aggressive expressions of their conflict in front of the child or use compromise styles of conflict resolution. Conflict per se is not necessarily the best predictor of adjustment and should not be used by itself as a sole determinant in decision making about sole or joint custody or extent of access. The differences in children's adjustment to conflict may also be explained, in part, by the observation that children respond to parental conflict in different ways. Some children try to placate an angry parent or attempt to mediate parental disputes. Others cope by withdrawing or form an alignment with one parent and reject the other. Children's age and psychological adjustment will also determine their responses to continued high conflict.

Two longitudinal studies indicate that conflict diminishes for the majority of parents (and their children) in the first several years after separation (Kelly, 1990; Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990). At final divorce, 40% of the parents reported moderate or high levels of disagreement regarding visiting or co-parenting during the previous 6 months. Two years later, only 20% said arguments were frequent about their children. At 2 years postdivorce, only 24% of the parents reported minimal or no co-operation, whereas 60% reported moderate to high levels of co-operation regarding their children (Kelly, 1990).

In the second study, 70% of their sample had mild or no *legal* conflict getting custody or visiting issues resolved, whereas 30% had substantial or intense legal conflict. In the second year after divorce, one third of the parents were still in conflict. Half of this group argued in front of their children. Sixty percent of the youngsters were not experiencing postdivorce conflict between parents, either because their parents had disengaged from each other or were capable of co-operative communication. Dual-residence (joint physical custody) parents had the highest co-operative-communication scores but did not differ from mother custody or father custody parents in the amount of discord. Shared residence did not exacerbate or diminish conflict but did appear to lead to more co-operative communication.

The strongest predictors of later postdivorce conflict and low co-operation in these two studies were the frequency of child-specific conflict during the marriage (Kelly, 1990), the degree of conflict at the beginning of the divorce process, and the amount of legal conflict, whether over support or custody (Albiston, Maccoby, & Mnookin, 1990). The hostility of mothers and fathers at the beginning of divorce proceedings had equal weight in predicting the amount of discord after divorce. However, mothers' hostility at the beginning of divorce proceedings had more weight in predicting subsequent co-operative communication than did fathers' hostility (Albiston et al, 1990).

ADJUSTMENT OF THE CUSTODIAL PARENT

The psychological adjustment of the custodial parent after divorce is emerging as a central factor in determining children's postdivorce adjustment. Maternal depression and anxiety at the beginning of divorce proceedings predict children's emotional and social adjustment 2 years later (Kline et al., 1989). Maternal self-reports of alcohol abuse have been associated with children's inattention in the classroom and inappropriate involvement with peers (Guidubaldi & Perry, 1985).

One study found a significant relationship between several different measures of adjustment of custodial mothers and the adjustment of children between 7 and 11 years of age, although boys and girls were affected in different ways. Mothers' social adjustment and self-esteem are more predictive of *boys'* adjustment; mothers' psychological symptoms were more predictive of *girls'* adjustment. Neither interparental hostility nor time with father was a predictor of children's postdivorce adjustment (Kalter et al., 1989). These studies suggest the importance of including not just one but several objective measures of parental adjustment in all studies exploring factors hypothesised to determine children's postdivorce adjustment.

It should be noted that the psychological functioning of parents after separation and divorce improves significantly over time in both men and women (Kelly, 1990). The best predictor of psychological adjustment several years after divorce appear to be the baseline adjustment scores at separation or final divorce (Coysh, Johnston, Tschann, Wallerstein, & Kline, 1989; Kelly, 1990).

The role of parent adjustment in determining children's adjustment after divorce is a central one only barely studied thus far. Whereas maternal adjustment has been recently explored, only one study (Thomas & Forehand, in press) has looked at the impact of paternal adjustment on children, and none have tested the relative contribution of maternal versus paternal adjustment on children. In married families, the father's depressed mood was linked to conduct and anxiety problems in 11-15 year-olds. In separated families, the father's depressive mood was not a predictor of adjustment of children in maternal custody. The quality of the father-child relationship was a significant predictor of adjustment, with a poorer relationship associated with more conduct problems and a better relationship associated with fewer anxiety and withdrawal problems. No studies to date have explored the effect and interaction between both parents' adjustment, conflict, time with both parents, and residence.

ACCESS AND CLOSENESS TO THE NONCUSTODIAL PARENT

Findings are increasingly mixed or inconclusive regarding the role of the noncustodial parent in children's adjustment after divorce. Although there are consistent findings that the majority of children describe the loss of contact with a parent as the primary *negative* aspect of divorce (Hetherington et al., 1982; Kurdek & Berg, 1983; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Warshak & Santrock, 1983), these feelings of loss may not *directly* translate into changes in adjustment. It is clear there are gender differences. Father-custody girls generally desire more contact with their mothers than do father-custody boys; mother-custody boys more often want more visits with their fathers than do mother-custody girls (Warshak & Santrock, 1983). This finding would not necessarily be replicated with samples of adolescents or preschool children.

When children see their fathers infrequently, fathers are perceived as having less control, offering less support, and providing less punishment compared to children in intact families (Amato, 1987). Children also develop a less positive view of the father-child relationship over time (Nastasi, 1988).

Early studies reported low but significant correlations between predictable and frequent contact with the noncustodial parent and more positive child adjustment, unless the fa-

ther was poorly adjusted or extremely immature. This finding has been more consistent for boys than for girls (Hetherington et al., 1982; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Warshak 1986). The positive relationship between visiting frequency and adjustment in children was stronger when the custodial mother approved of the father's continued contact with the child and rated the relationship positively (Guidubaldi & Perry, 1985; Kurdek, 1988).

There is some evidence that behavioral scores and peer relationships are better and spelling and math scores significantly higher for children where father contact remains higher after separation, particularly for boys. Bisnaire, Firestone, and Rynard (1990) found that elementary school children who maintained their academic performance after separation spent significantly more time with both parents than did those children whose academic performance declined.

Other studies have found no significant relationship between visiting frequency and child adjustment (Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Kalter et al., 1989; Kline, Johnston, & Tschann, 1991; Thomas & Forehand, in press). It is anticipated that such contradictions will continue with respect to postdivorce frequency of father contact and children's adjustment. As newer research increasingly focuses on variables more centrally linked to child adjustment (parent adjustment, marital conflict, quality of parenting, and quality of father-child relationship), the significance of visit frequency may be obscured or overshadowed.

Newer research has enabled us to understand that father contact is not unidimensional, nor is it always beneficial. The impact of paternal access after divorce must be seen in relation to the child's age and sex, the closeness of the father-child relationship prior to divorce, marital conflict, maternal and paternal adjustment, and mother's hostility after separation. No one study has yet included all of these variables.

Healy, Malley, and Stewart's (1990) study demonstrates the complexities of the impact of access and father involvement. This study of children, aged 5-8 years and 9-12 years, assessed the effect of age, gender, frequency and regularity of visiting, father-child closeness, and parent legal conflict at two points in time, using two measures of adjustment: child reports of *self-esteem*, and maternal reports of *behavior* problems. Visit frequency and visit regularity were significantly correlated with father-child closeness, suggesting that fathers who are close to their children may be seeking and getting more time. Frequency of visits and father-child closeness were not, however, directly related to child self-esteem. Instead, age and sex and closeness interacted to affect self-esteem. In the first months after separation, younger children and boys benefited in higher self-esteem from more frequent and regular contact with fathers. Older children and girls had lower self-esteem when visits were regular (although this relationship was not true for frequency). Overall, father-child closeness was important at both points of study and had long-term positive effects on children's behavior. Visit frequency and regular visits were associated with higher self-esteem for those children reporting a closer relationship with their father.

In contrast to the findings on self-esteem, girls whose fathers visited frequently or regularly had fewer behavioral problems. In general, children had the fewest problems 1 year later when they initially experienced frequent (but not regular) visits, particularly in the context of a close relationship to their father. Across gender, there were more behavior problems if visits were irregular. Good father-child relationships were also associated with lower levels of anxiety and withdrawal in 11-15-year-olds (Thomas & Forehand, in press).

Healy et al. (1990) found that when legal conflict was high, frequent visits were linked to fewer behavior problems; that is, reduced visiting had detrimental effects on behavior in high-conflict situations. Kurdek (1988) also found that the frequent involvement of the non custodial father was most beneficial where interparental conflict was high. It may well be that fathers who engage in legal conflict after separation to obtain more time with their children do so because they were very involved with the children in the marriage (Kelly, in press; Kruk 1992).

This and other research demonstrates the complexity of father involvement after separation and indicates there is no straightforward relationship between visiting and child adjustment. In general, a close relationship with both parents is associated with positive adjustment after divorce. But divorce sometimes separates a child from a disturbed or an abusive mother or father, and such distancing from a corrosive or damaging parent-child relationship is often beneficial (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Given reports of the high incidence of fathers not visiting their children after divorce (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985), surprisingly little research has focused on determinants of father involvement or father dropout after separation. A recent study of engaged fathers (child seen at least once a month) and disengaged fathers (no contact in prior 3 months) reported that *disengaged* fathers reported the highest levels of involvement, influence, and attachment to their children during the marriage, compared to engaged fathers (Kruk, 1992). The most frequent reason for disengagement, cited by 90% of disengaged fathers, was obstruction of paternal access by the ex-spouse and the mother's desire to break contact between father and child. Secondary reasons mentioned for disengagement were fathers' decisions to cease contact because of their inability to adapt to the constraints of the visiting situation (33%) and practical problems of work, distance, and money (28%). Only 7% of fathers indicated their child did not want contact.

Both external and internal factors were found to contribute to disengagement. Among external factors were the adversarial system and the relationship with the former spouse. The legal system was reported to contribute to increased antagonism and conflict between spouses. The disengaged fathers reported being discouraged by their attorneys from seeking more substantial time, regardless of extent of predivorce paternal involvement. In some instances, agreements reached by parents prior to lawyer contact were destroyed during subsequent adversarial proceedings. Internal factors identified were the fathers' experience of loss and bereavement, the loss of the father role which was central to the father's identity, and the constraints of the visiting situation.

Other research focusing on determinants of father involvement after divorce has reported a significant link between marital conflict and the amount of contact with the child after divorce (Koch & Lowery, 1984; Kurdek, 1988), with fathers in high-conflict marriages visiting their children less often, less regularly, and for smaller amounts of time. It is apparent that custodial mothers have considerable influence on the father-child relationship after divorce. Based on interviews with pairs of custodial and noncustodial parents, custodial mothers interfere with fathers' visits with their children at the rate of 20%-40% (Braver, Wolchik, Sandler, Fogas, & Zvetina, 1991). Mothers' hostility at the beginning of divorce proceedings is significantly associated with less overnight visitation 3 years later. The higher the emotional functioning of the custodial mother at the beginning of divorce proceedings, the less hostility she feels toward the father several years later. The pattern

of the father's visiting at the beginning of divorce proceedings is the strongest predictor of access patterns with the child at follow-up, suggesting the importance of establishing and implementing the parenting plan immediately after separation (Albiston et al., 1990; Kelly, in press). It is evident from the research literature that when mothers allow and/or encourage visitation without excessive hostility and when children have had positive relationships with their fathers prior to divorce, then frequent and predictable contact with fathers can be demonstrated to be beneficial for children.

Such studies point to the need for available mediation services for divorcing parents, where continuity in parent-child relationship can be addressed by both parents and where parents can collaboratively address their children's economic needs. Research indicates that when parents use comprehensive divorce mediation, they experience less conflict during the divorce process and have significantly more co-operation, less conflict regarding visiting and decision making, and more communication regarding their children in the year after divorce, compared to parents using the two-attorney adversarial system. There are also fewer either/or outcomes with respect to visiting or custody. In mediation, more parents agree to and structure "expanded visiting" rather than the very limited access more characteristic of the adversarial process (Kelly, 1991, in press).

Recent research indicates that the amount of time fathers spend with their children on a weekly / monthly basis after divorce has definitely increased in the past decade (Albiston et al., 1990; Braver et al., 1991; Coysh et al., 1989; Healy et al., 1990; Kelly, in press; Kruk, 1992; Seltzer, Schaeffer, & Charng, 1989). This trend has been obscured by continued use of old national data sets. Healy (1990) reported that two thirds of father-child pairs visited at least every other week after separation and that the majority of these were regular rather than irregular contacts. Kelly (in press) found that the average time spent with fathers was 30%, with 33% of fathers sharing physical custody. A typical paternal access pattern was every Thursday overnight and every other weekend from Friday to Sunday evening or Monday morning. Access is typically greater among fathers who are better educated and who live closer to the children (Arditti, 1992; Seltzer et al., 1989). These changes, found not just in California, reflect the effects of social and legal change over the past decade. The number of children or their age does not appear to be associated with visit frequency (Seltzer et al., 1989), although frequency decreases in adolescence. Visit frequency also decreases with elapsed time since separation (Seltzer et al., 1989).

TYPE OF CUSTODY ARRANGEMENT

Several studies have sought to determine whether the postdivorce adjustment of children was related to the time of custody arrangement. In general, studies indicate that custody status alone does not predict the child's postdivorce adjustment (Camera & Resnick, 1988; Warshak & Santrock, 1983). No differences have been found in studies of maternal and paternal custody with respect to children's self-esteem, anxiety, sex-role typing, maturity, independence, psychosomatic and behavior problems, and social competence. Nor have differences been observed in the quality of parent child relationships among custodial fathers when compared to custodial mothers, including scores on measures of nurturance and involvement with the child (Chang & Dienard, 1982; Orthner & Lewis, 1979). Men as well as women with primary custody report being closer to their children following divorce (Warshak, 1986). Similar to the mother-custody studies reported earlier, the adjustment of father-custody children was related to the degree of conflict and co-operation in the coparental relationship and the type of parenting style.

Two studies comparing maternal and paternal custody have found that children, aged 7 to 10 years, living in the custody of the same-sex parent were better adjusted than were children living with the opposite-sex parent. Father-custody boys and mother-custody girls showed significantly more social competence, maturity, co-operativeness, and self-esteem. With an adolescent sample, this finding was not replicated. The issue of the importance of same-sex and cross-sex identifications with custodial and noncustodial parents in the longer-term adjustment of children is one deserving greater study.

Research on the impact of joint custody remains limited. Joint *legal* custody, now the norm in California, was not found to be significantly linked with higher levels of father involvement in decision making or time with children, nor did it result in greater compliance with child support after controlling for income. There was a slight decrease in discord of the joint legal custody group by final divorce but no parallel increase in co-operative communication (Albiston et al., 1990).

Three California studies have demonstrated that when joint physical custody (more than 30% time with both parents) is an available legal option (since 1980), the number of families actively co-parenting increases substantially. Between 17% and 33% of the families shared joint physical custody in these studies, with more joint custody agreements found among better educated parents (Kelly, in press; Kline et al., 1989; Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1988). Studies of joint custody have focused on different variables and parties. Children have expressed higher levels of satisfaction with joint physical custody than with sole custody arrangements; citing the benefit of remaining close to both parents. Joint custody does not create confusion for the majority of youngsters about their living arrangements or about the finality of the divorce, nor does it increase loyalty conflicts (Leupnitz, 1982; Shiller, 1986a, 1986b; Steinman, 1981).

Among parents, gender differences in satisfaction found in the early 1980s appear to be diminishing with more experience with the joint custody statute. Maccoby et al. (1988) reported that dual-residence (joint physical custody) women were more satisfied than were mothers with primary physical custody whose children saw their fathers. Both groups of mothers were more satisfied with their residential arrangements than were sole-custody women whose children had no father contact. Fathers with joint physical custody consistently reported more satisfaction than did fathers with visiting status (Ahrons, 1983; Irving, Benjamin, & Tracme, 1984; Kelly, 1990; Maccoby et al., 1988; Steinman, 1981). Among parents with dual-residence arrangements, there were no sex differences in satisfaction. Court-ordered joint physical custody resulted in less satisfaction than when parents voluntarily agreed, and spouses reporting high levels of marital conflict tended to be less satisfied with their joint custody situation than were parents from lower-conflict marriages (Irving et al., 1984)

Joint physical custody appears to result more often in maintenance of the father-child relationship. In contrast to diminishing visiting over time between fathers and children reported in postdivorce mother-custody homes (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985), fathers with joint custody stay more involved with their children 1 year after divorce than do noncustodial fathers (Bowman & Ahrons, 1985; Leupnitz, 1986). Father "dropout" also occurs significantly more often in sole-custody arrangements compared to joint custody (Coysh et al., 1989; Kline et al., 1989; Leupnitz, 1986). Although there is no significant difference in child support payments between joint and sole custody, joint-physical-custody fathers

pay for more extra or supplemental costs for their children.

Parents in joint custody arrangements report relying on each other significantly more often for child care and are more likely to indicate that joint custody benefited the parent-child relationship than were sole-custody parents. Dual-residence parents report less difficulty finding time to play or chat with their children and perceive their former spouses to be more supportive and understanding compared to maternal-custody parents (Maccoby et al., 1988; Shiller, 1986a, 1986b). Arditti (1992) found that joint-custody fathers spend more time and are more involved with their children after divorce, compared to noncustodial fathers, even after controlling for the predivorce quality of the father-child relationship. She found no difference in co-operation between spouses or level of hostility of divorce proceedings between the two groups.

Very few studies have compared the adjustment of children in joint and sole physical custody, and findings have been mixed. There is less yearning for the father among school-aged boys in shared physical custody (Schiller, 1986a; Leupnitz, 1982), and fewer joint-custody boys had emotional and behavioral problems than did maternal-custody boys (Schiller, 1986a, 1986b). A second study (Kline et al., 1989) found joint- and sole-physical-custody children to be equally well adjusted. Neither study used random sampling nor group matching on marital or parenting variables. The research on joint custody, as with much of divorce research, has used measures emphasizing psychological symptoms or negative outcomes. Additional measures are needed to assess positive aspects of shared custody. Although joint-custody children and adolescents report in interviews a strong sense of being loved and supported by both parents, of being "lucky" compared to their divorced peers in sole custody, these indications of emotional well-being and satisfaction have not been assessed with objective measures.

As with mother-custody families, children's adjustment to shared custody may be adversely affected by high interparental conflict (Leupnitz, 1986; Steinman, 1981). As noted earlier, the children also may have been negatively affected by marital conflict before divorce. Children, particularly girls, whose parents were involved in protracted, highly contested custody disputes after divorce, were more likely to be emotionally troubled and behaviorally disturbed when they had more frequent access to both parents and more transitions per month (Johnston et al., 1989). However, the children's predivorce adjustment was not known, and the psychological adjustment of these chronically disputing parents was not measured nor considered in the analyses.

The adjustment of 517 adolescents (aged 10 years, 6 months to 18 years) in three residential arrangements was compared 4.5 years after separation by Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch (in press). Looking at both family process and status variables, these researchers assessed adolescent adjustment in terms of depression, deviance, school effort, and school grades. Statistically, more boys were in dual-residence and father-residence arrangements, whereas more girls were in mother-residence arrangements. Overall, dual-residence adolescents were better adjusted than were mother-residence adolescents. Father-residence adolescents had poorer adjustment (more deviant behaviors) than did mother- or dual-residence adolescents, but father residence families had higher interviewer ratings of parent hostility than did the other two forms. The poorer adjustment of father-resident adolescents was associated with poorer monitoring in father-residence families, and for boys, more parent hostility and the parent's high working hours. Dual residence parents were as effective or more so in asserting authority and in monitoring their adolescents'

activities than were sole-residence parents. This and other recent studies suggest that looking for simple group differences between sole- and joint-custody children is not productive. It is critical to assess the type of residential arrangement and extent of access to each parent in the context of important demographic, individual psychological, and family process variables at different points in time.

SUMMARY

Overall, the evidence suggests that when children begin the divorce experience in good psychological shape, with close or loving relationships with both parents, their adjustment will be maintained by continuing their relationships with both parents on a meaningful basis. There will be gender and age differences within this framework. Parents will maintain their children's positive adjustment by reducing their conflict or working their disputed issues out in a mediative or counselling forum and avoid placing their children in the middle of their struggles.

When children are compromised by a highly conflicted marriage, compromised parent-child relationship, and a history of adjustment problems, there is no specific formula that will produce better adjustment for these youngsters after separation. Some will need counselling or other support systems and the collective resources of two struggling parents. Others will need relief from an abusive, critical or rejecting parent or from the anxiety and fear of violence between parents, thus enabling these children to benefit from the changes in their lives.

There is still much to be learned about the longer-range impact of divorce on the overall adjustment of children and adolescents. The research literature summarised in this article suggests that multidimensional aspects of the marital, parental, divorce, and postdivorce experience for the family system must be considered to more fully understand the postdivorce adjustment of children and adolescents.

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