THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON DEPRESSION IN ADOLESCENTS

by

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[Sherri McN. Snyder, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies]
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify those elements of parental divorce that are most often associated with feelings of depression in adolescents. Popular press articles and research literature were reviewed on the impact of parental divorce on adolescents, society's role in divorce, adolescent adjustment to divorce, and trends in the treatment of adolescent depression following parental divorce. In this study, an instrument developed by this researcher was administered to 30 adults and 30 adolescents, who had experienced a parental divorce between the ages of 12-17. Moving to a new home, fighting between parents, a parent leaving the family, having less money as a family, parental dating, and not being able to see a parent as often were rated on a severity of depression scale. The element of parental divorce that had the most effect on depression among adolescents was parental fighting. Less time available to interact with a parent and a parent leaving the family were also found to contribute to feelings of depression. Implications of the findings for counselors and parents were discussed and recommendations were made. Communication between parents and their adolescents regarding the parental divorce is extremely important to healthy adjustment to the divorce in adolescents.
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Parental divorce can have a devastating impact on adolescents. Adolescents who parents divorce may become depressed. There are many elements of parental divorce that may be depressing for adolescents, such as having a parent leave the family, parental fighting, a move to a new home, having less money as a family, a parent dating, and not seeing a parent as often. This study is an examination of those elements of a parental divorce that are most often associated with feeling of depression in young people between the ages of 12 and 17 years of age.

Kerr and Beer (1992), stated that the characteristics of depression include self dislike, social withdrawal, pessimism, sense of failure, and complaints about bodily function. This study will utilize this same definition of depression.

Development of the Problem

Parental divorce is not a new phenomena. According to Goldentyler (1995), there were an estimated 12,000,000 divorces in 1992 compared to 385,000 in 1950. There are also many children that must go through the pain of their parent’s divorcing. "Parental divorce is a stressful experience for children at any age and most children
exhibit short term developmental disruptions, emotional distress, and behavior problems” (Palosaari and Aro, 1994, p. 681).

Children of divorce often have a difficult time dealing with the consequences of divorce. “An important factor associated with the adjustment process is the amount of conflict within the divorcing family” (Gander, 1991). However, even the healthiest parental divorce can result in many different internal conflicts for an adolescent.

Many studies have found that parental divorce often times has a negative impact on an adolescent’s well-being. According to Portes and Brown (1991), children of divorce have a two times greater likelihood of being referred for psychiatric treatment than children from intact families. While much is known about how parental divorce in general affects adolescence, there are few studies that concentrate on what element has the biggest impact on these children. It is important to discover which aspect of parental divorce can lead to feelings of depression in adolescents.

Hirshfield (1992, p. 51) discussed many aspects of life that may be threatened in a post divorce home, among children of divorce. Some of these aspects are:

1. relationship with mother, father, siblings and extended family
2. sense of intimacy with mother or father
3. continuity of life as the children knew it
4. values the children knew and lived by
5. the rung of the ladder of intellectual and development
6. notions of morality
7. sense of security
Parental divorce is not only distressing for the parents, but it is also distressing for each family member. “Family members undergoing the stress of divorce experience rapid and drastic changes in their perceptions, attitudes, and interaction patterns” (Portes and Brown 1991, p. 88).

Parental divorce has many ramifications for adolescent children. According to Goldentyler (1995), adolescents go through stages when adjusting to parental divorce: denial, anger, fear, grieving, and acceptance. These stages might not always appear in this order and a child may often times remain “stuck” in a phase.

Depression oftentimes is associated with low self-esteem, withdrawal and feelings of worthlessness. According to Hirshfeld (1992, p. 175), there are many distancing behaviors that children of divorce may exhibit:

1. Rejecting
2. Challenging
3. Arguing
4. Criticizing
5. Talking too much or showing off
6. Manipulating
7. Being disrespectful to the wishes of others
8. Being ungenerous
9. Behaving unpredictably
10. Being willful
Need for the Study

Because depression is a major component of parental divorce for adolescents, therapists and parents should be aware of which aspects of parental divorce contribute to depression in adolescents. Therapists can make parents aware of how best to handle their divorce with their adolescent children.

The depression that results from parental divorce in an adolescent can lead to many emotional problems. Understanding which element of parental divorce is responsible for the depression can benefit the adolescents. Parents and therapists can focus on the correct area of discomfort and work on that area therapeutically.

It is important for the therapist to know at which stage their adolescent clients of parental divorce are. Therapists can help the client to move from stage to stage until the client finally reaches the stage of acceptance. Some adolescents will have a more difficult time reaching the acceptance stage.

It is often difficult to reach the acceptance stage. Therapists must assess the amount of discomfort that their adolescent clients of parental divorce might be feeling. “Often adolescents may become depressed when their parents divorce” (Kerr and Beer 1992).

Parents and therapists must monitor these adolescents for distancing behaviors as they may become introverted or even suicidal. Recognizing warning signals will be extremely important in the therapeutic process of treating the depression.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify those elements of a parental divorce situation that are most often associated with depression in adolescents.

Research Question

What elements of parental divorce are most often associated with depression in adolescents?

Definition of Terms

Adolescent - A child between the ages of 12-17 years old.

Depression - "The characteristics of depression include self dislike, social withdrawal, pessimism, sense of failure, and complaints of bodily function" (Kerr and Beer 1992).

Parental divorce - When a child's parents divorce.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review provided the conceptual framework for the elements of parental divorce that most often lead to depression in adolescents. There are six components to this chapter which includes the following: 1) The Impact of Parental Divorce, 2) Society’s Role in Parental Divorce, 3) The Elements of Parental Divorce, 4) Adolescent Adjustment to Parental Divorce, 5) Trends in Treatment of Adolescent Depression Following Parental Divorce, 6) Long Term Adjustment to Parental Divorce.

Impact of Parental Divorce on Adolescents

The impact of parental divorce on adolescents has been explored by many researchers. According to Berman (1991), children expect to grow up in intact, happy families, however divorce writes the end of that expectation. These children may then begin to feel insecure as their expectations begin to crumble. “Many young people react to their parents divorce by withdrawal which can contribute to depression” (Goldtyler, 1995). Children of divorced parents may feel the effects of the divorce for years after the actual divorce itself.

Adolescent depression in families of divorce is rampant. In a study, Speigelman and Englessen, (1994) found that 62% of the children in their study reported that they often thought about the divorce and 54% described themselves as still feeling sad. It is
usually extremely difficult for these children to overcome their sadness. It appears that
the healing process, for a child that experienced his or her parents divorcing, is extremely
slow.

Other researchers have found similar findings. “Findings consistently show that
children experience distress during the process of parental separation and divorce and
that it is associated with a variety of short and long term negative outcomes” (Gately and
Schwebel, 1992 p.57). According to Wadsby and Svedin (1993) some studies showed
that after a parental divorce, children exhibited an increase in aggression, irritability,
disobedience, parental dependency, depression, and inhibited behavior. Sometimes
parents who are divorcing are so involved with their own problems that they do not
realize that their children have been seriously affected by the decision. It should be
explained to the adolescent that the decision to divorce is the parent’s decision and it was
not caused by the children. “The children should consistently receive individual time
with each parent; don’t make excuses for why the children cannot or should not visit the
other biological parent” (Greydanus, 1991, p. 35). Following this advice parents may be
able to make parental divorce an easier transition for adolescents. Even well adjusted
adolescents can be become completely different people when they hear that their parents
are divorcing. “Kids in single parent homes do worse on a variety of measures of well-
being than kids in intact families. The children of divorce also run greater risks of
dropping out of school, having behavior problems, and becoming single parents
themselves” (Peterson, 1996, p. 1D). It is important for the parents to realize and be
sensitive to their children’s feelings.
Divorce does not only affect the couple who is actually divorcing, but also their children. Kerr and Beer (1992) found that the students they surveyed scored as more depressed than students whose parents were not divorced. It is evident that depression in adolescents can be a direct result of their parents' divorce. It is also apparent that parents oftentimes do not notice the effect that their decision has had on their children.

**Society's Role in Parental Divorce**

Society used to look down on divorce, especially in couples with children. Many people used to and still do believe that a couple should stay together "for the sake of the children". Society looked at a parent who wanted a divorce as selfish. It seems that this trend has improved in the 1990's, but there still exists a negative stigma attached to divorcing parents.

Society today has changed its opinions on divorce. Since there is less of a negative stigma attached to people who divorce, there are many more couples who do decide to divorce. Many couples today go into marriage believing that if their marriage does not work, they can get a divorce and start over. As a result of these liberal ideas regarding marriage, there are more children of parental divorce trying desperately to cope with the turmoil of having their parents divorce each other.

According to Peterson (1996), there are many people who falsely accuse divorcing parents of being self-centered and unrealistic about marriage and relationships. However, usually these marriages are fraught with tension and parental divorce can be less harmful to the children than living in a tense environment. At times, children who know that they are in bad environment tend to see the divorce as relief.
“Many parents make the decision to stay married, hoping to protect their children from the difficulties of divorce. Sometimes it is the best decision, but many times it is the worst decision” (Goldentyler, 1995, p.25). Society often leads couples to perceive that staying together for the sake of the children is the best thing that parents can do. “In fact, the end of a marriage can sometimes lighten the load” (Peterson, 1996, p.2D).

The Elements of Parental Divorce

There are many elements of parental divorce that can result in depression in adolescents. Some elements that can be harmful to children are moving to a new home, quarreling between parents, abandoning the family, and increased financial burdens. It is important that parents take these elements into consideration when making the divorce arrangements.

A move to a new home can be terrifying for a child whose parents just divorced. “How can one ever forget the moment when one discovers that a life as you have always known it, will never be the same again” (Berman, 1991, p. 87). An adolescent goes through the fear of the unknown, which in this case is a new home. “If possible, avoid moving away from friends, school, and a familiar environment” (Greydanus, 1991, p.35).

Quarreling between parents can be distressing for an adolescent. Many parents do not keep their troubles to themselves. “Adolescents may notice their parents not are talking to each other, or fighting openly, and can feel the tension in the air” (Goldentyler, 1995). Adolescents may then feel stressed which can lead to depression. Adolescents may feel that they themselves are the reason that their parents are fighting.
A custody battle can be a distressing circumstance. The child may feel like he or she must take sides and choose a parent to live with. The visiting parent may not be consistent with visitation or vanishes out of the adolescents life. This turmoil often results in depression in the adolescent. It is important for divorcing parents to have the least amount of conflict around what the custody arrangements will be.

When a parent abandons the family it is often disturbing for an adolescent. According to Peterson, (1996) the decision to divorce or abandon a family is selfish, but a lot of decisions that adults make are quite selfish. Parental abandonment can result in depression in children whose parents divorce. The child may long and grieve for the parent that left the family.

Parental divorce can lead an increased financial burden that can be harmful to adolescents. Goldentyler (1995), states some interesting statistics:

Percentage of women who receive alimony after a divorce: 10-15%.
Standard of living for a woman after a divorce: down 70%.
Standard of living for a man after a divorce: up 10%. (p. 12)

These statistics are important because most often the woman gets custody of the children and typically has a harder time making ends meet. If a father had custody of the children, his income has still been raised 10%, so that he would have a easier time raising the children.

Knowing these statistics, it is easy to see why adolescents could become worried about financial problems as their entire living and financial situation can change after
their parent's divorce. Their mother may have to get a job. They may have to cut back on spending money and allowance. Adolescents may resent this and become angry with the parent that is raising him or her. Anger and resentment can also lead to depression.

**Adolescent Adjustment to Parental Divorce**

It can take quite a long time for adolescents to adjust to a parental divorce. “Adolescent adjustment is difficult to measure because few studies consider child and family functioning before and after divorce,” (Portes, et al., 1991). It would be difficult and time consuming to do longitudinal studies like these.

According to Goldentyler, (1995) there are five stages of adjustment to parental divorce: denial, anger, fear, grieving, and acceptance. Some adolescents go thorough these stages easily, but some often find themselves trapped in a certain stage. Depression can set in during one of the first four stages.

It is typical for an adolescent to spend time in each of the stages. The denial stage is when the adolescent is in a stage of disbelief and tries to deny that his or her parents are divorcing. In the anger stage, the adolescent could feel angry with his parents for not being able to stay together or to work things out. The fear stage is when the adolescent fears all of the different ways that his or her life will be different. In the grieving stage, the adolescent may grieve for the life that he or she had. The acceptance stage is the final stage when the adolescent accepts and respects his or her parents decision and adapts to his or her new environment. These stages are normal for teens of divorce to go through (Goldentyler 1995).
There are many adolescents who find it difficult to adjust to parental divorce. “A correlation seems to exist between children’s post-divorce adjustment and the quality of the father-child contact” (Spigelman et al., 1994, p.173). In fact, Peterson (1996) believes that it is continued conflict between former spouses, and not divorce itself, that makes it difficult for adolescents to adjust. Ex-spouses should try to remain on friendly terms which would make adjustment easier for these teenagers.

Interruption in an adolescent’s comfortable life can be quite upsetting. According to Goldentyler (1995), if an adolescent hears that his or her parents are divorcing, it is normal to have feelings of sadness and loss. It is almost like an adolescent having to deal with someone close to them dying. Depression is closely associated with grief.

“Many adolescents whose parents divorce feel bad about themselves because most of the children around them have parents who are still married” (Gardner, 1970). However this trend has changed, and more and more children are from divorced homes. This can also result in depression in adolescents because they may long for the life that they once had. There are many difficulties that can result when adolescents try to adjust to the divorce of their parents.

**Trends in Treatment of Adolescent Depression following Parental Divorce**

Many adolescents may need to seek treatment after their parents divorce. According to Gately and Schwebel (1992), adolescents need a more realistic view of their parents’ strengths, weaknesses and a more realistic view of the hazards and potentials of marriage. Treatment of adolescents should encompass all of the above areas. Support groups for children of divorce are also helpful.
There are many different treatment modalities. Many therapists believe that counseling can be helpful. "Conflict mediation with the family following the divorce is necessary also" (Gander, 1991, p. 175). Simply allowing the adolescent to have some sort of a voice can allow him or her to feel more empowered. An adolescent must be given some choices regarding living arrangements and the school he or she will attend. Having choices regarding these decisions may make adjustment easier and with less conflict for the adolescent.

Adolescents can experience depression, as severe as adults. According to Goldentyler (1995), it is important for adolescents to deal with their feelings and they should be able to express their feelings, and even get professional help from a counselor or a doctor. Symptoms, indications of depression; withdrawal, mood swings, falling grades and emotionality, should not be ignored.

Adolescents who have experienced a parental divorce should be monitored by a therapist to evaluate the severity of the depression that he or she may be feeling. "Today suicide is the second leading cause of death for the adolescent and is exceeded only by accidents" (Orvin, 1995, p. 149).

Therapists should assess these adolescents for suicidal tendencies. If an adolescent reports suicidal ideations, a suicide agreement that the adolescent will not attempt suicide can be signed. If the thoughts are believed to be extremely severe, therapists should refer clients to an inpatient treatment center for a suicide watch. In these circumstances confidentiality can also be broken in order to help these clients.
Medications for elevating the client’s mood may also be prescribed by a psychiatrist (Palosaari and Aro, 1994).

Teen hot lines can also be a source of solace for adolescents. Depressed teens can talk to theirs peers anonymously over the phone. Adolescents often rely on their peers for support and strength, and this can be an important in the healing process. These teen hot lines can be an extremely helpful source of guidance and friendship (Goldentyler, 1995).

Eventually, adolescents must deal with the fact that their parents are divorced. According to Scott (1995), it is exceptionally difficult to determine whether teens are worse off emotionally than they would have been in a home where parents fight constantly or have other problems. Some adolescents may benefit when the fighting between their parents ends, while others have a greater difficulties in adjusting to the divorce situation.

All adolescents and younger children need to be able to communicate their feelings. They need to have a special person that they can talk to, such as a therapist, clergy person, peer or a relative. Being able to voice their concerns and thoughts to another person and being able to be heard are a crucial part of the healing process for the adolescent. Without a person like this to turn to, adolescent depression resulting from parental divorce is likely to increase.
Long Term Adjustment to Parental Divorce

"The impact of a child’s age at the time of divorce on later adaptation has received less attention than the impact on short-term reactions" (Palosaari and Aro, 1994, 689). However, according to Gately and Schwebel (1992), more than half of the number of children whose parents divorced entered adulthood as worried, underachieving, angry, and depreciating young women and men. These characteristic can lead to deficit coping skills for the real world and in relationships. Coping skills are essential for adolescents and should be learned for success in adulthood.

Many negative traits can result in adults who had experienced parental divorce in adolescence. "There are negative long-term consequences of divorcing such as: how it places children at greater risk of poverty, fatherlessness, delinquency, psychological disorders, and it can lead to both more divorce and more illegitimacy" (Gallagher, 1996, p. C3). These different traits can lead to a downward spiral of marital decay that may not be reversed.

Although Palosaari and Aro (1994), found the opposite to be true in children who have experienced parental divorce, only 6% of the adolescents, in their study, were depressive in young adulthood. It could be that by young adulthood most of the pain experienced as a result of parental divorce had diminished with time. Perhaps, some of these subjects were not representative of the current population of adolescents experiencing parental divorce.

The long term adjustment to parental divorce does not appear to be positive. There are many characteristics that can result in teenagers whose parent’s divorce, such
as withdrawal from home, insecurity, and fear of abandonment. It is important for parents to be aware of the possible negative consequences, in their children, that can result from their divorce. Symptoms of depression in their adolescents should be taken seriously.

Summary

The literature indicates that parental divorce in adolescence, can be terribly difficult for children. Parental divorce appears to have a major impact on adolescents. Society’s views of divorce can also impact how adolescents felt about their parents divorce. In addition there are certain elements of parental divorce that can impact adolescents differently. Adjusting to parental divorce can be quite painful. More research needs to be done into treatment methods for depressed adolescents of divorced parents. The long-term adjustment to parental divorce can result in negative traits in the children when they enter adulthood.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify those elements of a parental divorce situation that are most often associated with feelings of depression in adolescents. What elements of parental divorce are most often associated with depression in adolescents?

Research Design

The research design selected for this project was the descriptive design. "The central focus of descriptive research is to examine facts about people, their opinions, and attitudes" (Merriam and Simpson, 1995, p. 61). The descriptive design can be used to examine how two different phenomena are related. The two phenomena examined in this study are the parental divorce and the extent of depression associated with it, in adolescents.

This study includes: (1) collection of facts which describe the extent of depression resulting in adolescents who experience parental divorce; (2) identification of different elements that are associated with depression in adolescents; (3) comparisons of adolescents' responses to survey questions regarding the severity of depression to certain elements of parental divorce. The technique used to gather the necessary information was the survey process.
Instrumentation

The researcher created a survey that measured levels of depression associated with elements of a parental divorce. Responses were on a scale of one to five with one being least severe and five being most severe regarding responses to their own parental divorce.

The instrument was developed by this researcher to measure degree of depression to different elements of divorce. The elements that were measured were feelings regarding a move to a new home, parent fighting, parent leaving the family, having less money as a family, parents starting to date, not being able to see a parent as much, and an overall rating of how depressed they felt about their parent’s divorce.

The formulation of the survey questions was based on information gathered during the literature review and the researcher’s personal and professional experience as a child and adolescent therapist. Most of the questions were scaled ratings of depression. Basic demographic questions about age and gender included in the instrument. A copy of the instrument used in the study can be found in Appendix A.

Population and Sample

The researcher surveyed 60 individuals who were residing in the southwestern United States at the time the study was conducted. Thirty-two of the respondents were female and 28 of the respondents were male.

These respondents were selected from the population of families that are participating in counseling at an outpatient counseling agency. Thirty of the subjects
were adolescents at the time of the survey and 30 of the subjects were parents of children in counseling. These parents had also experienced parental divorce as adolescents.

Procedure

All questionnaires were distributed and collected during July 1996 to September 1996. Each respondent was given a questionnaire to complete independently. Each subject was asked permission for this researcher to use their responses to the survey as data collection. Some of these subjects were the clients of this researcher and others were clients of other therapists from an outpatient counseling agency.

Respondents were selected by this researcher and by other therapists. Each therapist was given 10 surveys and was asked to give them to their adolescent clients and parents who had experienced a parental divorce during adolescence. The therapists were asked to have their clients and parents fill out the survey before their counseling session. The respondents were chosen by the therapists. After the researcher asked if their clients could participate. Respondents were chosen by the first 60 questionnaires that were returned to this researcher.

Method of Analysis

Frequency and percentage of response were calculated for all categorical items. Means and standard deviations were calculated for all scaled response items. Frequency and percentages were used to identify which elements of a parental divorce were most often associated with clinical depression in adolescents.
Assumptions and Limitations

The key limitation of this study is that the adolescent subjects that have been surveyed are all in outpatient counseling, and are not necessarily representative of the general population. It is also assumed that these subjects responded to the survey in an open and honest manner. The self report measure used in this study for screening depression does not meet the DSM IV criteria of depression, yet measures the severity of each element.

This researcher has recently worked through her own parental divorce and is currently working with many adolescents in a outpatient counseling environment. Many of the children in counseling at this agency have experienced a parental divorce. In addition, adult respondents reflecting back on their thoughts and feelings regarding their parent's divorce may be limited in their ability to recall.
CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Demographics

The sample consisted of 60 respondents of which 28 of the subjects were male and 32 were female. Thirty subjects were adults who had experienced a parental divorce during adolescence, and 30 were adolescents who had experienced a parental divorce during adolescence.

Table 1 presents responses gathered from demographics questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-17</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-35</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-44</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;45</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the adults surveyed most were between the ages of 18-35, adults in their child rearing years.

Table 2 presents data in regards to severity of depression associated with each element in a parental divorce.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not at all Depressed</th>
<th>Seldom Depressed</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Depressed</th>
<th>Very Depressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moving</td>
<td>5.0 (3)</td>
<td>16.7 (10)</td>
<td>18.3 (11)</td>
<td>36.7 (22)</td>
<td>23.3 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents fighting</td>
<td>1.7 (1)</td>
<td>5.0 (3)</td>
<td>11.7 (7)</td>
<td>38.4 (23)</td>
<td>43.4 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents left family</td>
<td>8.4 (5)</td>
<td>11.7 (7)</td>
<td>10.0 (6)</td>
<td>31.7 (19)</td>
<td>38.4 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having less money</td>
<td>5.0 (3)</td>
<td>11.7 (7)</td>
<td>41.7 (25)</td>
<td>35.0 (21)</td>
<td>6.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent dating</td>
<td>11.7 (7)</td>
<td>13.4 (8)</td>
<td>16.7 (10)</td>
<td>40.0 (24)</td>
<td>18.4 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>6.7 (4)</td>
<td>10.0 (6)</td>
<td>11.7 (7)</td>
<td>48.4 (29)</td>
<td>23.4 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>11.7 (7)</td>
<td>10.0 (6)</td>
<td>11.7 (7)</td>
<td>46.7 (28)</td>
<td>20.0 (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This researcher found that the element of divorce that most often associated with depression in adolescents was fighting between parents. Forty-nine respondents felt somewhat depressed or very depressed when their parents fought with each other. The element of having less time with their parent elicited 43 respondents who felt somewhat
depressed or very depressed. Having their parent leave their family elicited 42 respondents who felt somewhat depressed or very depressed about this issue.

Table 3 presents means and standard deviations for each element of parental divorce. Response categories on the instrument had a range from 1 to 5 and were coded so that a high level of depression associated with and element of parental divorce received a score of 5 and a low level of depression received a score of 1.

Table 3

Elements of Parental divorce

Means and Deviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moving</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents fighting</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents left family</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having less money</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Dating</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not seeing parent often</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall divorce of parent</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this research was to provide information about which element of parental divorce was most likely to result in depression in their adolescents. This was done using the Depression Rating Scale.

The intent of this study was to provide an increased understanding of which element of parental divorce most negatively affects adolescents. This researcher found that these adolescents were most distressed with the elements of parental fighting and having less time with one of the parents.

Conclusions

It was found that the element of their parents fighting had the most profound affect of their adolescents. This might occur because teenagers may become distressed when hearing their parents fight and may not be able to concentrate on school and or themselves. The fighting of their parents can result in a fear in teenagers that their life will be changing soon.

Respondents rated the element of having less time with their parent after the divorce as distressing, also. There were 43 respondents (71.8%) who felt somewhat depressed or very depressed when they had less time with their parent.
Respondents rated the element of having their parent leave the family as depressing, also. There were 42 respondents who felt somewhat depressed or very depressed when their parent left the family. While parents cannot continue living together following a divorce, their adolescents need to feel secure in this area.

Thirty-six (60%) respondents rated the element of moving to a new home, following a parental divorce as somewhat depressing or very depressing. This could be because the move to a new home is stressful at any time for anyone of any age. Adolescents may be displaced from friends and school as a result of a parental divorce.

Respondents rated the element of having their parent start dating as not as severe as the other elements. There were 35 (58.4%) respondents who felt somewhat depressed or very depressed when their parent started dating. It is surprising that adolescents rated this as less depressing than the other elements. Perhaps adolescents can sense that their parents may be happier with a different partner.

The element of parental divorce that had the least depressing impact on their adolescents was the element of having less money as a family after the parental divorce. 25 respondents (41.7%) answered not applicable to their parents divorce. Still 25 respondents (41.7%) felt that having less money as a family was somewhat depressing or very depressing. Socioeconomic status of their parents may decide the answer to this question. Children from families that have money may have a harder time when income is split.
Overall, respondents felt that the divorce of their parents was depressing. Forty respondents (66.67%) felt that the divorce of their parents was somewhat depressing or very depressing. Parental divorce, is not usually looked at by adolescents, as a positive experience.

Implications for Counselors and Parents

In order for adolescents to have a healthy attitude regarding their parents divorce, counselors must take the different elements into account. Counselors need to teach the parents of adolescents the best possible ways of working through this divorce for their adolescents. If parents are made aware of these elements they may be more cautious of their decisions regarding their divorce. Parents should avoid distancing themselves too far from their adolescents or it could result in complications for their child.

Counselors should teach parents to talk with their adolescents to find out their feelings and reactions. Parents should be warned to keep their fighting to a minimum or to argue in places where their adolescents cannot hear. The parent who leaves the family should remind their adolescent that they love them and that the adolescent can call or visit anytime. A move to a new home should be in the same neighborhood so the adolescent does not have to change schools. When a parent decides to date, the adolescent should be forewarned before meeting the date. The adolescent may not want to meet the date and this should be respected. Counselors can teach parents how to make this less tragic transition for the adolescent and the parents may feel better about that too.
Recommendations for Future Research

For counselors and parents to be proficient in dealing with depressed adolescents who are experiencing a parental divorce some recommendations are made.

Recommendations for future research include replication with a larger sample, pretest and posttest of severity of depression before a parental divorce and after, and research on how the typical parent would break the news to their adolescents on all elements of parental divorce. Finally, more appropriate measures for counseling depressed adolescents, who are dealing with the divorce of their parents, need to be developed and studied.


APPENDIX A
SURVEY INSTRUMENT
Appendix A
Survey Instrument

Circle One:

1.) I am a teenager or an adult.

2.) Male or Female.

3.) My age is between 12-18, 19-35, 36-45, 45 or older.

Think back to the time your parents divorced and rate how depressed it made you feel.

4.) Moving to a new home made me...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very depressed</td>
<td>somewhat depressed</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>seldom depressed</td>
<td>not at all depressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.) When my parents fought it made me...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>somewhat depressed</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>seldom depressed</td>
<td>not at all depressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.) When my parent left the family it made me...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very depressed</td>
<td>somewhat depressed</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>seldom depressed</td>
<td>not at all depressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.) Having less money as a family made me...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>somewhat depressed</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>seldom depressed</td>
<td>not at all depressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.) When my parent started dating it made me...

5  4  3  2  1
very depressed somewhat neutral seldom not at all
depressed     depressed depressed

9.) Not me seeing my parent as often made me...

5  4  3  2  1
very depressed somewhat neutral seldom not at all
depressed     depressed depressed

10.) Thinking back on the divorce of my parents, makes me feel...

5  4  3  2  1
very depressed somewhat neutral seldom not at all
depressed     depressed depressed