

Impact of Divorce on Children Wellbeing

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Abstract:

Background: Divorce influences well-being; many individuals experience depression, loneliness and isolation, self-esteem lowering, or other psychological issues. Two of the recent issues concerning communities are the higher rate of broken homes and aggressive behavior of children and adolescents. Between 2004 and 2014 there was one divorce for every five Iraqi marriages.

Objectives: To assess the influence of divorce on children behavior.

Materials and methods: A cross sectional study was carried out at Supreme Judicial Council, Personal Status Courts of Al-Karkh and Al-Bayaa, Baghdad- Iraq from 1st of July 2021 to 30th of November 2021. A total of 92 children were included in the study their age ranged 6-11 years, giving male to female ratio of 1.25:1. An interview was done with child's custodial parent in the court. Questionnaire of 2 parts: Sociodemographic features and Behavior Problems Index (BPI). Chi square test (fisher's exact test) was done. $P < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Results: Success rate was 53.3%, failure rate was 31.5%, while 15.2% were drop out of school. There were 37 (40%) children with low behavior problems and 55 (60%) children with high behavior problems. There were significant differences between high behavioral problems and children of second grade, poor school achievement, and children with custodial father, $P < 0.05$.

Conclusions: High prevalence of behavior disturbance was observed among children of divorced parent.

Keywords:- Divorce, children wellbeing, Child custody, Academic achievement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Divorce influences well-being; many individuals experience depression, loneliness and isolation, self-esteem lowering, or other psychological issues.¹

Two of the recent issues concerning communities are the higher rate of broken homes and aggressive behavior of children and adolescents.²⁻³

The effect of family structure on the health and well-being of children determined that children living with their parents have more physical, emotional, and academic well-

being. Society promotes the family structure that has the best chance of producing healthy children.⁴

The majority of divorces affect younger children; 72% of divorces occur during the first 14 years of marriage. Kids struggle the most during the first year or two after the divorce. They are likely to experience distress, anger, anxiety, and disbelief.⁵⁻⁷

Socioeconomic factors, which include family structure, also explain inequality in differences in health behaviors such as tobacco⁸, alcohol, and drug use in adolescents.⁹ Also, the family structure and parental factors affect adolescents' physical activity¹⁰, internet addiction¹¹, weight¹², and well-being.¹³

Between 2004 and 2014 there was one divorce for every five Iraqi marriages.¹⁴

- Objectives:
This study was carried out to assess the influence of divorce on children wellbeing.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross sectional study was carried out at Supreme Judicial Council, Personal Status Courts of Al-Karkh and Al-Bayaa, Baghdad- Iraq from 1st of July 2021 to 30th of November 2021. A total of 92 children were included in the study their age ranged 6-11 years, giving male to female ratio of 1.25:1.

An interview was done with child's custodial parent in the court. Privacy was considered.

Collecting data was done using a structured questionnaire. This modified questionnaire of 2 parts: 1) Sociodemographic features: age, sex, grades, school achievement of last year, Duration of separation, information about the Custodial Parent; 2) Behavior Problems Index (BPI): Questions had 3 levels of scores, 0 for not true, 1 for sometimes, and 2 for often. A total score of $< 50\%$ considered to be low behavior problems, while $\geq 50\%$ considered high behavior problems.¹⁵

Chi square test (fisher's exact test) was done to examine the impact of independent variables (age, sex, divorce) on the dependent variable (behavior problem). $P < 0.05$ was considered significant.

The approval of scientific board of community medicine –ethical committee was obtained prior to the start of the study. Consent was taken from Custodial Parents after explaining the aim of study.

III. RESULTS

Out of the total; there were 52 (56.5%) children within age group 6-8 years and 40 (43.5%) children within age group 9-11 years. Twenty five percent of the total children were within third grade of primary school.

According to the school achievement; success rate was 53.3%, failure rate was 31.5%, while 15.2% were drop out of school. Duration of separation was 6-10 years among 63% of children and 1-5 years among 37%. Table1.

Sociodemographic features		N	%
Age Group	6-8 years	52	56.5
	9-11 years	40	43.5
Gender	Male	51	55.4
	Female	41	44.6
Grade	1 st	15	16.3
	2 nd	8	8.7
	3 rd	23	25.0
	4 th	17	18.5
	5 th	10	10.9
	6 th	5	5.4
	Drop out of school	14	15.2
	School achievement	Success	49
	Failed	29	31.5
	Drop out of school	14	15.2
Duration of divorce or separation	1-5 years	34	37.0
	6-10 years	58	63.0
Custodial Parent	Father	8	8.7
	Mother	84	91.3
Total		92	100.0

Table 1: Sociodemographic features of children and their custodial parent

According to the total score, there were 37 (40%) children with low behavior problems and 55 (60%) children with high behavior problems. Figure 1.

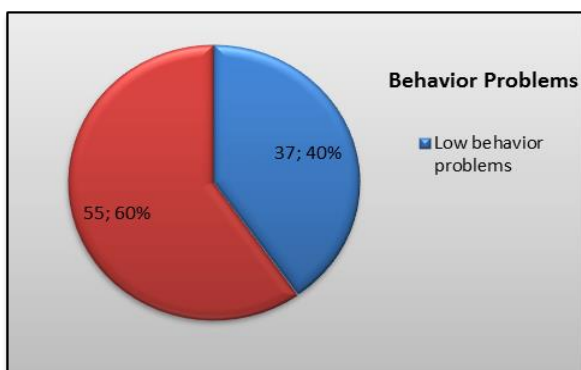


Fig. 1: Levels of behavior problems.

Distribution of sociodemographic features of children according to the behavioral problems represented in table 2. There were significant differences between high behavioral problems and children of second grade, poor school achievement, and children with custodial father, P<0.05.

Sociodemographic features		Behavioral problems			P
		Total	High Behavioral problems		
			N	%	
Age Group	6-8 years	52	33	63.5	0.27
	9-11 years	40	22	55.0	
Gender	Male	51	30	58.8	0.51
	Female	41	25	61.0	
Grade	1st	15	11	73.3	0.021
	2nd	8	7	87.5	
	3rd	23	13	56.5	
	4th	17	4	23.5	
	5th	10	8	80.0	
	6th	5	3	60.0	
	Drop out	14	9	64.3	
School achievement	Success	49	17	34.7	<0.001
	Failed	29	29	100.0	
	Drop out	14	9	64.3	
Duration of divorce or separation	1-5 years	34	20	58.8	0.53
	6-10 years	58	35	60.3	
Custodial Parent	Father	8	8	100.0	0.013
	Mother	84	47	56.0	

Table 2: Sociodemographic distribution of children with behavioral problems

IV. DISCUSSION

Children of divorced parents have an increased risk of different problems. Divorce leading to lower levels of psychological health in adulthood and appears to erode children's emotion.¹⁶

High behavioral problems found in 60% of children of divorced parent. It is much higher than that reported by Europe (21%).¹⁷ This difference might be due to the social support availability. In Iraq, divorced women lack the social support.¹⁸ Divorce was an additional ordeal to those children was exposed to (i.e. wars, conflicts).

No impact for age and sex on the behavior problems among children might be explained by the fact that they were of limited age group (6-11 years only). Another study reported that girls have higher aggressive behaviors than males.¹⁹

Poor school achievement was observed among 41.3% of children from divorced parent (failures plus drop out children). It is in the line of that in literature²⁰ where the failure rate was 41.7%. The high rate of single parent families (due to high rates of divorce)²¹ is considered as a first reason of school failure and other problems such as delinquency, drug misuse, and poverty.²²

Dropping out schools was affected by high behavior problems in this study, (15.2%). It is a multifactorial and multileveled phenomenon.^{23, 24} Children at most risk of dropping out of school are from socially conflicts family separation.²⁵

All children with custodial father were with high behavior problems. It is in contrast with that in USA²⁶ indicating high behavioral problems that may be caused by single motherhood associated with lower incomes, increased poverty, poor maternal wellbeing, poor parenting, and a host of other disruptions. In UK, father absence is associated with absenteeism, delinquency, crime and poor school achievement; especially for boys from low income families.²⁷ This difference might be explained by that the dominant raising parent in Iraq is mother rather than father.²⁸

Recent research on shifts in family structure and adolescent well-being indicates that children who experience transitions show poor cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional outcomes.^{29, 30}

V. CONCLUSION

High prevalence of behavior disturbance was observed among children of divorced parent associated with poor school achievement.

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There is nothing to be declared

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