Volume : 2 | Issue : 11 | Nov 2013 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160

Research Paper | Education

# Emotional behaviors change on children with divorced parents

**Msc Ardiana Mali** Faculty of Education Science, University "A. Xhuvani" of Elbasan, Albania

**ABSTRACT**

*Parental divorce is the biggest change that occurs for the first time in a child's life. In this study were analyzed the emotional symptoms of 130 children around the ages of 8 to 18 years old who attend primary and secondary schools in the prefecture of Elbasan in Albania. The group of 130 children was selected randomly among 600 children with divorced parents. This study aims to identify the change of the emotional symptoms of children with divorced parents and the psychological effects of divorce on these children. The data on the emotional symptoms of these children were taken from the results of the SDQ questionnaire (Goodman 1997). In order to analyze the statistical data, SPSS software package was used. Credibility of the emotional symptoms scale, Cronbach's alpha resulted .733. To conclude, these data show that some of these children reflect significant clinical problems.*

**KEYWORDS : Divorce; Emotional problems; SDQ questionnairet**

## Introduction

In the last decade in Albania, family planning, traditional concepts, values, lifestyles, marriages and family structures have changed. Furthermore, considering the fact that the law on divorce has changed, divorce can be carried out easier and quicker. Due to this big change the number of divorces has increased. The process of divorce is widespread in the prefecture of Elbasan. Many studies show that the divorce rate is quite high in many Eastern countries (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

According to these studies children with divorced parents show a greater level of antisocial behavior and difficulties in group work and school assignments compared to children whose parents aren't divorced, (Najman et al.1997). However, other studies prove that the wellbeing of children with divorced parents doesn't differ a lot from other children, whose parents aren't divorced (Amato, 1991), Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, (1999).

Conflicts and aggravated relations between parents during the process of divorce lead to a certain family atmosphere, in which children feel stressed, sad and insecure.

During the post-divorce period either parent can feel stressed out, depressed, anxious or even become a drug or alcohol addict (Sanger et al.1992), (Walker et al. 1989), which then lead to psychological disorders in their children.

While other studies compare the behavior of children with divorced parents and children whose parents are not divorced, our study is focused on behavior problems and emotional disorders in children with divorced parents reported by children them-self who are compared to the data reported by their teachers and their parents.

## Materials and Method

This study is carried out in the middle schools of the prefecture of Elbasan. It is focused on a group of 130 children who were randomly selected among 600 children with divorced parents from 8 to 18 years old. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, SDQ, was used in this study, Goodman (1997). The questionnaire consists of 25 items which refer to different emotions and behaviors (emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, conduct problems, pro-social behavior and peer problems). For each item the respondent marks in one of three boxes to indicate whether the item is not true, somewhat true or certainly true for the child in question. The questionnaire can give an indication whether a child is likely to have a significant emotional or behavioral problem. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire was completed by children, parents and teachers, respectively, to obtain standardized reports of children's problem behavior. Differences between group means were analyzed with t-test of ANOVAs. The statistical package "SPSS for Windows", release 20 was used for the analysis.

## Results and Discussions

The children with divorced parents suffer silently. They often say to themselves "why are my parents divorced, why do they live separately?" They hope in cohabitation of their parents.

This situation affects their emotions, and their cognitive and social development. It also affects their personality in an unhealthy way, (Cochran & Cochran 1999). Children's emotional and behavioral problems are not always evident. When they are, the problem is usually more severe.

The correlation between the variable of the groups of different ages and the emotional symptoms were carried out using the Pearson coefficient. In order to show the normal and homogeneous dispersion of the data some preliminary tests were carried out.

**Table1. The emotional symptoms level according to the data reported by the students, teachers and parents.**

| Recording | Level 1 (normal) (5-8 points) | Level 2 (close to normal border) (9-11 points) | Level 3 (abnormal) (12-15 points) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student | 52.4 % | 34.6% | 13.2% |
| Teacher | 40.8% | 39.9% | 19.2% |
| Parent | 47.6% | 35.3% | 16.9% |

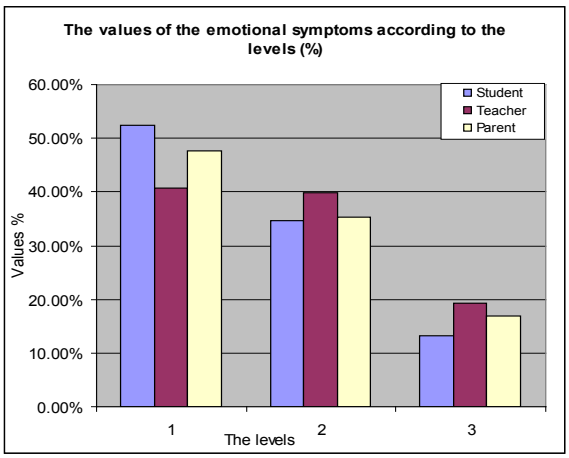
**Level.1. Normal, (Clinical problems are absent)**

**Level.2.Close to the normal border, (clinical problems may be reflected)**

**Level.3. Abnormal (High risk for the presence of clinical problems)**

The data presented in table 1 and figure 1 show that the correlation between student groups of different ages and emotional symptoms is classified as negligent negative, ($r = - .053$) while the high values of statistical meaning show a credible statistical correlation, which is based on the Cronbach's alpha value. In this case the value of alpha Cronbach is 733, ($P (i) = .000$), $< 0.05$).

**Figure1. The emotional symptoms level according to the data reported by the students, teachers and parents**




In this case the value of alpha Cronbach is 733. (P (i) = .000), (<0.05). The cross- tabulation of the self-reported data of the children with divorced parents shows that 52.4% of them are normal. This group of children doesn't show clinical problems. But there are two other groups which show that 34.6% of children are close to the normal border of the emotional well-being and 13.2% show high level of abnormal emotional symptoms.

Some other data reported by proctor teachers show that 40.8% of children are normal, 39.9% are close to the normal border and 19.2% show high risk for the clinical problems.

Based on the data reported by the guardianship parents this study shows that 47.6% of children are normal from the emotional point of view, 35.3% of them are close to the abnormal border who can reflect clinical symptoms and the rest, 16.9% of children show high level of risk of the abnormal emotional symptoms.

The comparison of the data reported by the teachers with those reported by the parents clearly shows that teachers report the highest level of the emotional symptoms of the children with divorced parents.

This tendency is also presented by some other studies carried out in Eastern Europe. According to these studies, guardianship parents have the tendency to underestimate the clinical problems of their children, (Amato & Keith, 1991). But another study carried out in China reports a different conclusion. According to it the Chinese guardianship parents have the tendency to overestimate the behavior problems of their children, (Liu 1999). The data reported by teachers and guardianship parents are different because they are reported in a different context, (Najman et al 1997). In our study the highest level of the emotional symptoms are those reported by teachers and students in an age from eight to ten years old. The teachers and the parents analyze children from different points of view, and have different relationships with them, (Santrock & Tracy 1978). The teachers analyze a child with one parent like a cliché, so they may overestimate his emotional problems. The high level of emotional symptoms for children between 15 and 18 years old is reported by parents. Usually, parents are the best reporters about their children's behaviors, but parents and teens often complain about each-other's behavior problems, (Achenbach 1991). Traditionally, parental divorce is prejudiced and in these conditions children may lose their sense of self-esteem, may decrease their participation in social activities, and may undergo in withdrawal, Amato (1991). Their teacher and psychologist are the first who can point out the negative emotional behavior of these children. Their teachers, the psychologist and classmates are those who can help children with emotional behavior problems in order to decrease their negative impact. They can do that through teaching and games, (Bistamam & Nasser 2009). The maintaining of the communication between the psychologist, teachers, family and children is very important as well, (UNICEF 2006).

## Conclusions

The children with divorced parents show various emotional symptoms in school and family, which belong to three different levels.

The highest value of the abnormal emotional symptoms of the children with the divorced parents is reported by the teachers.

The parents have the tendency to underestimate the abnormal emotional symptoms of the children with divorced parents and to overestimate the normal one.

## REFERENCES

1. Achenbach TM (1991), Manual for the Child Behavior Checklist 4-18 and 1991 Profile. Burling: University of Vermont Department of Psychiatry | 2. Amato Pr, Keith (1991), Parental divorce and well-being of children; a meta-analysis Psychology Bull. 110: pp. 26-46 | | | 3. Bistamam, M.N. and R. Nasser, (2009). An application of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy in group counseling: A case study on adolescents whose parents were divorced. European Journal of the Social Science., 10(2): pp. 334-431. | 4. Cochran, J.L. and N.H. Cochran, (1999). Using the counseling relationship to facilitate change students with conduct disorder. Professional School Counseling, 2(5): pp 22-34. | | | 5. Goodman R (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: A research note. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry. 38: pp. 581-586. | 6. Hetherington EM and Stanley-Hagan M (1999), The adjustment of children with divorced parents: a risk and resiliency perspective. J child Psycho psychiatry 40: pp. 129-140. | 7. Liu. X (1999). Behavioral and Emotional Problems in Chinese Children of Divorced Parents. | 8. Najman JM, Behrens BC, (1997). Impact of family type and family quality on child behavior problems: A longitudinal study. Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry 36: pp.1357-1365 | 9. Sanger MS, Maclean WE, Van Slyke DA (1992), Relation between maternal characteristics and child behavior ratings. Clinical Pediatric (Phila) 31:pp. 461-466 | 10. Santrock JW, Tracy RL (1978). Effects of children's family structure status on the development of stereotypes by teachers. | 11.UNICEF, (2006). Manual në ndihmë të psikologut në shkollë pp.72-79 | 12. Walker WO, LaGrone RG, Atkinson AW (1989), Psychological screening in pediatric practice: identifying high risk children. Journal of the Development Behavior Pediatric 10: pp.134-138 | |