



The Role of the Guidance Counselor for Arab Students with Divorced Parents

Zaher Accariya

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the behavior, perception, attitudes and knowledge of guidance counselors regarding students with divorced parents and evaluate the relative effect of these variables on their behavior. Concurrently, we examine the relationship between these variables and the personal and professional characteristics of the counselors and those of the school. The hypothesis is that there is a positive correlation between functional behavior and their knowledge, perception of their role and their attitudes. A greater knowledge of the effects of the divorce on the children, a stance that the school and counselor should take an active role in working with children of divorced parents and positive attitudes towards divorce would result in greater interaction during the crisis and more support over a longer period. In addition, a counselor's personal demographic and professional characteristics and school characteristics would reflect in counselor's knowledge, role perception and attitudes. The participants of the study were 116 guidance counselors in different levels of public schools (elementary, junior high and high). They responded to a questionnaire covering four sub-topics: counselors' behavior in work with children of divorced parents, their perception of their role and that of the school, their attitudes towards divorce, and their knowledge regarding the effects of divorce on children. The results show that counselors invest the most time in initial and ad hoc intervention during the divorce crisis and hardly any in long-term follow-up and support. The findings, which mostly support the hypothesis, indicate the importance of knowledge for the counselors' perception of their role and their functional behavior. Counselors with greater knowledge about the effects of divorce on children believe it their duty to interact with students whose parents divorce, therefore provide crisis support more frequently. Supportive intervention is explained by knowledge and role perception combined—characteristics subject to change—whereas crisis intervention is explained by role perception alone. As to fixed characteristics, no strong link was found from behavior, role perception, attitudes and knowledge to personal-professional characteristics of the counselors and the school. In view of the importance of knowledge for counselor behavior and their role perception, their reports that they never learned about divorce neither during their training nor during their career (supported by low results in the questionnaire) should be a source of concern for those responsible for the professional development of guidance counselors.

KEYWORDS : perceptions, attitudes and knowledge of guidance, counselors, divorced parents, role, intervention.

Rationale

The divorce rate throughout the world is on the rise. In the last decade, the divorce rate of Israeli Arabs rose approximately 61%, from 1,252 divorces annually in 2001 to 2,049 in 2012 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

Parents' divorce is a source of extreme crisis for their children. The main risk factors for children's adaptation include the age and temperament of children; the parents' psychological profile before the divorce; the intensity, quality and frequency of conflicts between parents before, during and after the breakup of the marriage; and the degree of mental and physical estrangement of the parent who was not awarded custody of the children. Children who are exposed to conflicts between divorced parents suffer more psychological, physical, behavioral, cognitive and emotional reactions. These reactions are the root of conditions that increase the risk of developing internalized and externalized disorders due to a lack of adaptation. When the child's environment is so full of turmoil and changes, the school can be the stable, secure anchor that provides a source of support, balance and continuity.

The guidance counselor, being a trained, school professional whose aim is to encourage development of an optimal environment for students, can help promote the psychological well-being of the student with divorced parents through organizational and specific interventions designed to ensure a safe, supportive educational, social and emotional environment.

The aim of the study is to:

Examine the counselor's behavior, perceptions, attitudes and knowledge concerning students whose parents are divorced.

Investigate the relative contribution of the counselor's perceptions, attitudes and knowledge to variances in behavior of students whose parents are divorced.

Assess the link from the counselors' behavior, perceptions, attitudes and knowledge to their personal and professional, background and the school's characteristics.

Background

Effects of Divorce on Children

Children perceive the family as a stable structure that accompanies them throughout their lives—as an anchor from which they may venture forth to explore the world. Dismantling the structure destabilizes the framework, undermines the child's equilibrium and may cause irreversible damage if not diagnosed and treated. The main symptoms in children of divorced parents are a weakening of self-esteem, aggression, adjustment difficulties, social problems and often deterioration in relations with the parents. The children are affected by the many tensions arising from disputes and conflicts between their parents (Ayelet, 2013).

The children carry with them painful memories and, after reaching maturity, many of them report that after the divorce they felt a lack of control over life (Spitzer, 2011). For the children, the divorce process is a sequence of changes with diverse consequences that is experienced at least part of the time as a rupture in need of treatment (Dreman, 1999).

Many studies have found that children whose parents are divorced experience problems in a variety of areas:

Emotional – They report painful feelings, including fear of abandonment, persistent sadness, mourning, guilt, low self-esteem, hopes for reconciliation, anger at parents, concern for their safety, anxiety over parental conflict and depression (Emery, 1999).

Behavioral – They display inappropriate behavior, aggression and use of hazardous substances more than children whose parents are married (Cook, 2010) and are over-represented among delinquents (Emery, 1999).

Educational – They show poorer scholastic performance in various areas than that of children of intact families, such as low achievement, misconduct and dropping out, especially between the ages of 9-11 (Kurdek et al, 2001).

Not every child will be harmed by his parents' divorce, but overall

they represent a risk group in which a rise in responses to crises necessitates prolonged adjustment and mobilization of many coping skills and much emotional strength (Raviv and Katznelson, 2005).

In light of growing family demands and the change in the authoritative structure of the family, some children display increased personal responsibility and maturity as a result the divorce (Emery, 1999) and the child's function improves as time passes. Notwithstanding, it has also been found that children who adopt emotional responsibilities of adults—especially those that meet the psychological needs of their parents—are prone to depression during the early adult years. Even if their function improves, children whose parents are divorced still show more adjustment problems in adulthood compared to children whose parents are married (Hetherington, 2002).

In a longitudinal study over twenty-five years, Goodman & Pickens (2001) showed that children whose parents divorced at an early age were exposed to difficulties and problems at every developmental stage of life as a result. As they embarked in the adult world, they experienced many economic difficulties that affected the choice of a course of study and decisions about their career and forced them to choose a life path fraught with compromises. In adulthood, most of the children of the study reported complex, sensitive relationships with their parents and fear of close, intimate relationships with the opposite sex.

Thus, accumulated knowledge suggests that divorce is not a momentary crisis, limited in time, which culminates in parents' separation, but a long process, changing and full of turmoil, affected by all stages of life, and affecting children's adjustment and coping in a variety of fields.

Variables that Influence the Effects of Divorce

In many studies, researchers monitored children for several years after divorce and found that certain reactions are typical of the first year after divorce, while others appeared even after many years (Spitzer, 2011). There are prominent, individual differences in children's reactions influenced by age, sex, basic personality traits, their perception of the severity of their emotions, parents' behavior, etc. The child experiences loss and grief in divorce, in a process similar to that of mourning (Oren, 2008).

Studies show that when divorce occurs at a young age, the anger is directed at the mother, or alternatively displaced to other significant figures (teachers, friends, siblings). At more advanced ages, the anger is directed one or both parents. Many children are angry with the parent they consider responsible for the divorce (Lazovsky, 2004). The child's age and developmental stage at the time of the divorce affect his adjustment. The limited cognitive and social skills of the young child and his dependency on his parents generate a harsher reaction than that of the older child (Fish, 2010).

The major reactions to parents' divorce in infants and toddlers (ages 0-3) involve bonding and contact with the parents, cognitive ability, physical symptoms and the mental health of the infants. Children at this age may feel abandoned by the parent who leaves his home, which may lead to separation anxiety (Kot & Shoemaker, 2005).

Typical reactions among pre-school age children (ages 4-6) are tears, loneliness, visible signs of depression, physical symptoms, regression to an earlier stage in the development, anger, aggression, false hopes for family unification (Krishnan, 2007) and feelings of guilt and responsibility for the family breakup (Kurtz, 2009).

The most prominent response in early elementary school (ages 6-9) is deep sadness expressed by sobbing. Characteristic reactions at this age are unorganized behavior to the point of loss of control, compensation through overeating or begging for gifts, guilt, false hopes for parents' reconciliation and a conflict of loyalty toward parents (Krishnan, 2007). Older elementary school children (ages 10-12) attempt to overcome the distress in a variety of ways: attempts to understand, denial, appeals for help and distractive action. Concurrently, shame about the parents' divorce emerges, which results in attempts to hide the fact of the divorce (Cowan, 2005). At this age, children express anger in a more direct, organized and goal-oriented manner (Clark & Clifford, 2006).

Many adolescents (ages 13-18) whose parents divorced feel that they must develop independence quickly and mature at a rapid pace, while others are delayed in their maturation. Some teenagers deal with divorce through detachment and distancing. Adolescents also experience a sense of loss, grief and emptiness expressed in crying, difficulty concentrating and constant fatigue. Unlike the previous age group, adolescents feel less guilt; their image of divorce is more realistic but they are concerned about their future and their relations with the opposite sex (Kot & Shoemaker, 2005). At this age, the anger is sometimes expressed in violence, delinquency and sex (Krishnan, 2007).

Both boys and girls experience difficulty and pressure from their parents' divorce, but the expression, intensity and the way they deal with it is different. Girls of various ages report pressure from family related events, express concern and take upon themselves the responsibility for the situation more than boys do (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2006). Girls tend to respond with depression, bossiness, searching for help and support, and fantasizing about family reunification (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2004).

Boys show more adjustment problems and tend to turn to sports (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2004) and other ways to ease the stress that accompanies the divorce, like listening to music, reading books and watching TV (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2006). In addition, boys tend to react to divorce with behavioral disorders and excessive activity at home and at school, but if their mother remarries, there is an improvement in their adjustment (Dreman, 1999; Amato & Bruce, 2000).

The Guidance Counselor's Role Behavior with Students whose Parents are Divorced

The school plays a central part in a child's life with the capacity to serve as a safe haven during turbulent times. The teachers are in close, constant contact, so are able to identify weaknesses that parents may not notice (being preoccupied) and provide support and assistance in dealing with problematic situations, creating a secure, stable environment. Hetherington's study (2002) found that students in a school with a predictable, authoritative yet nurturing framework displayed better achievement and social competence and less behavioral problems. The effects of this stable framework were found to be particularly notable among students whose parents divorced, reducing the stress following a divorce.

The literature devotes significant attention to school intervention groups with students whose parents were divorced led by the guidance counselor, school psychologist and professional parties from outside the school (Flasher, 2003), and less to individual interventions and interventions among teachers or parents (Richardson & Rosen, 1999). The results point to the effectiveness of support groups within the school for students whose parents are divorced. The opportunity for them to share worries and difficulties with children of the same age group, along with the acquisition of specific skills, can be of great help to students and even assist in building a strong, social support network, which helps the student feel that his experience is more "normal".

"Role behavior refers to the recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others, so as to yield a predictable outcome." (Katz & Kahn, 1978) According to role theory, role behavior is more a function of the social set-up than personality traits and is a result of the following components: 'role expectations' or evaluations on the part of coworkers, 'sent-role' from colleagues who attempt to influence the person, and 'received role', which is the response to the evaluations and influence. 'Received role' incorporates the personal views, values and attitudes, has immediate impact on the organizational behavior and is the immediate source of motivation for performance of the role.

These components comprise the role episode, which is shaped by three factors:

Organizational—Size, technology, sub-systems, procedures, formalities, field, clients, etc., are relatively stable and therefore independent of a particular individual. These variables are major determinants of role expectations.

Personal—Human tendencies and characteristics provoke specific

behavior and are tied to motivation, values, preferences, sensitivities and fears. These characteristics strengthen or weaken colleague evaluations and determine how the person experiences the messages.

Interpersonal—'Sent role' and its interpretation is dependent on the quality of interpersonal relations in the role.

Accordingly, role behavior is a complex, dynamic system influenced by a person's beliefs about the role, expectations of colleagues and interactions between the person and his surroundings. Role gap affects these factors and is affected by them, affording the ability to model the role actively, dynamically, and autonomously (Katz and Kahn, 1978).

Guidance counselors that strive for student's psychological wellness can help create a safe, stable social environment and develop various school interventions for the student whose parents divorced. The counselor's role is to encourage the student to attain optimal functioning in a supportive, accepting and nurturing environment. They have at their disposal great functional autonomy and a wide range of options for action at the individual, group and organizational levels. In general, counselors direct their intervention to the organization, emphasizing empowerment of teachers through guidance and instruction, affording them tools to lessen the development of emotional difficulties among students (Erhard, 2007).

The best paradigms to guide the work of the counselor are centered on the concepts that every person has the ability and the right to achieve their maximum capability and that emphasis should be placed on holistic development and personal choice (Cowen, 2005; Mayers, 2000). Accordingly, the school should assist students by promoting a supportive social environment that creates a sense of belonging and enhances the ability to cope with life stages and resilience for stress and crisis. In this context, the role of the counselor is to help promote a quality social-learning environment with these characteristics (Erhard, 2007).

In addition, the counselor should promote the development of prevention skills; every person undergoes changes during life resulting from growth and development that create new situations that necessitate psychological, social, physical and behavioral adaptation and therefore may create unrest, uncertainty and adjustment problems. According to the preventive paradigm, the individual can and should prepare for these events in order to prevent the development of future problems (Klingman & Eisen, 1990). Preventive intervention is aimed at students in general; students whose parents are divorced in particular; divorced parents and educational staff. It may be applied at the primary preventive level, addressing potential difficulties and providing tools and coping skills; the secondary level, easing the situation and preventing deterioration in early stages of difficulty; or the tertiary level, helping students who experienced a crisis from parents' divorce to return to normal functioning (Klingman & Eisen, 1990).

The guidance counselor has access to an extremely wide range of interventions for students with divorced parents, including:

Individual intervention:

Individual instruction – ensuring the student receives the necessary information and guiding student and parents to in-school or external support resources (Gysbers & Henderson, 2008).

Individual counseling – personal interaction focusing on the issues and concerns that the student presents, such as adaptation, coping, self-esteem, scholastic problems, substance abuse, relationship problems, etc. (Neukrug, 2005). Individual counseling can provide an immediate response to the crisis created by the separation of parents, accelerate effective skills, focus the counselor on identifying potential problems and prevent future problems (Stern & Newland, 1994).

Consultation – enabling a teacher, administrator, parent or other professional who shares concern about the student to find new ways to assist him (Thompson, 2002). This may include private meetings, committees or team development activities. The counselor should discuss the importance of the relationship and support of the child with the parent, instruct him on the possible effects of divorce on the child and emphasize the need to avoid using the child as a partner in the

war with the other parent (Eldar-Avidan & Barnea, 2010).

Group intervention:

Group training – focusing on broader didactic methods (Neukrug, 2005) or promoting personal development and growth (Gysbers & Henderson, 2008) in small or large groups. Training may be aimed at teachers, through workshops dealing with education about family life, or at students, through homeroom programs about family life that also touch on divorce.

Small-group counseling – interaction with a few students, teachers or parents who meet in a fixed number of meetings for in-depth discussion of common issues (divorce, coping with stress and crisis, etc.) These meetings provide an opportunity for participants to discuss common concerns, present solutions, provide and receive feedback, get support from others, and practice new behaviors (Baker, 2000; Neukrug, 2005).

General organizational intervention:

Teacher empowerment – instruction and guidance to give them the tools for intervention in order to minimize development of students' emotional hardship (Erhard, 2003): (1) Instructing teachers, who meet students relatively often, on how to monitor students whose parents are divorced and notice sudden changes in functioning (educational, emotional, social and behavioral). (2) Directing teachers how to contact the parents of the student and the student himself and assist by providing tools for open, empathic discussion with students and parents (Stern & Newland, 1994). (3) Providing faculty with information on divorce and its impact on children through various means (e.g., referral to related resource materials). Lectures and discussions may raise subjects such as: statistical facts and forecasts about the status of the family in the country; the tension and pressure that accompany a change in the family; the availability of support networks during the change; the effects of divorce on children; children's responses to divorce according to age; typical class behavior of students whose parents divorced; and options for action by the teacher (Goldman & Beuthin, 2002). (4) Workshops in which teachers clarify their views and feelings regarding divorce in order to increase self-awareness, help them deal with their attitude towards the subject and prepare to act as facilitators in their classrooms (Eldar-Avidan & Barnea, 2010).

Managing indirect services for the benefit of students – collecting information from external sources about a student whose parents divorced, helping coordinate between the school and different community agencies, and directing the student to professional therapists outside the school (Baker, 2000; Neukrug, 2005).

Advising and initiating discussions with the school board concerning school policy with regard to students whose parents are divorced – raising questions concerning inviting both the parents to school activities, sharing confidential information about the student and developing relevant financial policies (Goldman & Beuthin, 2002).

Developing a network of information services for students and their parents about various issues related to divorce (Neukrug, 2005).

In order to choose the appropriate single or combination method of intervention, the guidance counselor must take into account that the population of students whose parents are divorced is heterogeneous as to the time of change and crisis in their lives, therefore must distinguish between intervention during the divorce crisis and intervention later, after parents are divorced. During the crisis, the counselor's goal is to help students adjust to the dramatic change in their lives (Klingman & Eisen, 1990), which involves actions at the primary and early secondary prevention levels, such as direct training and support for parents and students, teacher and parent consultations, informing concerned parties and referral to external factors. In the later stages, the goal is to provide students with continued support and an ongoing sense of belonging, which involves actions at the secondary and tertiary prevention levels, such as group interventions, training and counseling to prevent regression in students' adaptation, and training educational staff to assist the reintegration of students who experienced a serious crisis (Klingman, 2000). The choice will also depend on the extent of the counselor's knowledge of the effects of divorce on children and the students' sex, age and stage of life.

Over the years, a small number of studies were conducted that explored a link from the characteristics of the guidance counselor and the school to the counselor's role behavior. The personal characteristics that were found to influence counselor behavior are:

Age and sex – These characteristics do not contribute significantly to counselor behavior. Most counselors in Israel are women so the comparison between the sexes is not significant, while the age does not contribute to a variation in the work of counselors (Lazovsky, 2004).

Counseling experience – While Eyal (1977) and Wiesner (1999) found that consultants with greater experience express a stronger desire to engage in "clinical", personal and psychotherapeutic consultation, Harel (2008) found no link between seniority to preferences for work styles.

Training in the subject – The counselor's job behavior (viewed in integrating students with special needs) has been linked to the amount of training undergone, such that counselors with more training in an area devote more time to working on that subject (Umansky, 1998).

School standing – The findings of various studies point to a link between the counselor's work style and the standing of the school where he works: the higher the school's rank the more time the counselor devotes to individual work with students (Harel, 2008). Furthermore, counselors in elementary schools focus on training activities, counselors in junior high focus on examination, evaluation, group counseling and consultation, while high school counselors focus on administration (Neukrug, 2005).

The percentage of students whose parents are divorced in the school – To date, the link between this percentage and counselor behavior has not been examined. However, in examining the link between the number of students belonging to a specific population (e.g., integrated students or students from another village or city) and counselor behavior, it was found that the more students from a certain population learn in the school the more time the counselor invests in working with them (Umansky, 1998; Bar-On, 2005).

The Guidance Counselor's Role Perception with Students whose Parents are Divorced

Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (TPB) (1985) explains the variables that determine human behavior: behavioral intention – the individual's motivation and conscious plan for effort to create the behavior – and perceived behavioral control – the perception that the behavior is in his control. Stronger behavioral intention increases the likelihood that the behavior will indeed be implemented. The concept of behavioral control is similar to Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) but TPB refers to perceived behavioral control within that context (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen, 1991).

Behavioral intention is determined by three variables: 1) the attitude toward behavior—the degree to which the behavior is positively or negatively valued; 2) subjective norms—the perception of significant others' attitudes about the validity of the behavior; 3) perceived behavioral control. The latter predicts both the intentions and the behavior itself, since when the intention remains fixed, the efforts to perform the behavior are likely to increase with an increase in perceived control. In addition, if the perceived control reflects actual control, this predicts a direct effect on behavior (Ajzen, 1985; Sparks et al, 2011).

An examination of the cognitive process that connects intentions to behavior reveals that at the base of specific response planning for a specific goal lie behavioral intentions of an applied nature (the intention to perform goal-oriented behavior in a specific context). Such planning serves as powerful self-direction and promotes the application of behavior (Ajzen, 2010). According to TPB, a specific behavior is more likely if there is intention to perform it. Indirectly, the performance may be predicted if the individual believes that the behavior will lead to certain results that he values, if he believes that people he values think he should undertake this behavior and if he feels he possesses the necessary resources to perform the behavior. The relative importance of each of the three components will vary depending on the behavior and the situation. In studies conducted to test this theory (Hope et al, 2002) and in an extensive literary review of those stud-

ies (Sutton, 2004) strong, direct links were found between behavioral intentions and the behavior, such that intentions predict behavior. Similarly, links were found from behavioral intentions to perceived behavioral control, subjective norms and attitudes, such that the latter three are predictors of intention.

The counselor's intention to work with students whose parents are divorced represents his motivation to do so and his conscious intention to make an effort to act. The counselor's role perception corresponds with his applied behavioral intentions. According to TPB, stronger behavioral intentions increase the likelihood that the behavior will indeed be implemented. Planning these specific responses will promote the implementation of the behavior (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen 2010).

The counselor's role perception when working with students whose parents are divorced includes the decision as to whether this is an issue to be discussed or ignored. The counselor may choose to ignore the divorce, whether the intention is to protect the student from dealing with the difficult issue and help him forget his pain (Eldar-Avidan & Barnea, 2010) or on the assumption that divorces are a family crisis that should be handled only within the family (Smilansky, 1990). However, if the advisor believes that intervention is within his duties, he must decide whether to take a proactive approach (with teachers, parents and students) to prevent problem development or to take a passive position. The basis for the passive stance is the premise that divorce is a natural phenomenon that requires no special, professional intervention as long as no worrisome symptoms appear, so the counselor should intervene only when the student reveals scholastic, social or behavioral problems (Smilansky, 1990) or when parents or teachers request help.

The Guidance Counselor's Attitudes towards Divorce

An attitude is the readiness to respond in a certain way to an object and represents a summary evaluation of the object, which is classified as good-bad, beneficial-harmful, pleasant-unpleasant and kind-unkind (Ajzen, 2010; Schwarzwald 1978). Interactions between the attitude and social behavior and its prediction, as well as variables that mediate between the attitude and the behavior have direct and indirect impact on the behavior (Ajzen, 2010).

Different attitudes toward divorce were formed among diverse populations (e.g., young and old, those with divorced parents and those whose parents are married, urban and rural dwellers, teachers and students, therapy professionals and students) and from various perspectives (attitudes towards divorce itself, attitudes toward divorced people and attitudes towards children whose parents are divorced) (Lissitsa, 1999).

The studies that focused on attitudes towards children whose parents are divorced found a difference between how the child of divorced parents is perceived and how the child whose parents are married is perceived. Gefen (1998) examined how teachers and students assess children whose parents are divorced and found that these children are viewed less positively than children whose parents are married. Similarly, Stern & Newland (1994) examined attitudes of teachers and student teachers and found that children whose parents are divorced are viewed more negatively regarding the variables of happiness, emotional adjustment and coping with stress. In contrast, Green & Schaefer (2006) concluded that teachers' attitudes towards students with divorced parents are directly connected to the age group they teach. While teachers of students in the lower elementary school grades estimated that students whose parents are divorced have special needs, teachers of older students did not think so. The researchers explained this finding by the frequent interaction that occurs between students and teachers in the lower grades.

Thus, studies focused on the attitudes of teachers. In fact, to date attitudes of guidance counselors in the Arab population toward divorce have not been examined, despite the fact that counselors, like any other therapist, base their work on a system of values, attitudes and opinions and draws on them for decisions concerning implementation and initiation of activities, tasks and occupations. The counselor must examine his attitudes and feelings about divorce and be aware of them before embarking on any action to help students whose parents divorced. Negative attitudes toward divorce and a negative assessment of the student whose parents divorced may directly af-

fect the role behavior of the counselor and indirectly affect student behavior, methods of coping and adaptation (Guttmann, 1990).

Studies found a link between the personal-professional background characteristics of interviewees from diverse populations and their attitudes towards divorce:

Age – Younger people express positive attitudes toward divorce more than older people (Dattner, 1988; Lissitsa, 1999).

Religion – Religious people express more negative attitudes toward divorce (Krishnan, 2007; Hayes, 2004; Dattner, 1988; Lissitsa, 1999).

Education – People that are more educated express greater acceptance of divorce (Krishnan, 2007; Dattner, 1988; Lissitsa, 1999).

Personal experience with divorce – People who divorced or whose parents divorced during their childhood are more liberal in their attitudes toward divorce than people who live in families free of divorce. Mulder & Gunnoe (1999) conducted a longitudinal study on the subject and found that after divorce, people change their attitudes slightly and adopt a more favorable position toward divorce.

Contact at work – Dattner (1988) found that a person who encounters divorce more often in his work expresses attitudes that are more favorable toward divorce, but Green & Schaefer (2006) did not find a link between the volume of teachers' work with students whose parents are divorced and their attitudes toward divorce.

The Guidance Counselor's Knowledge about Divorce's Effect on Children

Guttmann (1990) suggests that researchers and other professionals do not assign the school a role in crisis intervention for the child following a divorce because they do not consider the teachers and counselors skilled enough to deal with it.

According to Bandura (1995), self-efficacy is the individual's belief in his abilities to organize and execute the behaviors necessary to cope with future conditions. An individual's beliefs about his self-efficacy affect the way he thinks, feels, is motivated and acts and are based on the skill level that he thinks he will be able to exercise in a specific situation. The individual's beliefs about self-efficacy emanate from four sources: first, successful, personal experience; second, viewing a similar, social model of behavior; next, social, verbal persuasion about the individual's ability; and finally, the individual's assessment of his physiological responses to the situation (Bandura, 1995).

The basis of counselors' knowledge lies in a variety of sources, such as academic studies, reading resources, courses, workshops and seminars. Umansky (1998) found that the role behavior of counselors is linked to the number of seminars in which they participate. It follows that counselors who invest time learning to enrich their knowledge and acquire tools and skills will promote their sense of self-efficacy, embrace the concept that their role is to engage actively in working with students whose parents are divorced and invest more time in this type of work.

This theory is supported by Green & Schaefer (2006), who examined teachers' knowledge about divorce and found that teachers who participated in a short seminar on the subject tended to be more aware of the unique needs of students whose parents are divorced compared to teachers who had no training.

Method

The sample for the study comprised 116 guidance counselors in public schools in roughly equal distribution throughout the different levels: 40 in elementary (34.5%), 41 in junior high (35.3%) and 35 in high school (30.2%). The counselors responded to a questionnaire with an introduction that explained the topic of the study and stated, "References to students with divorced parents in this questionnaire includes those whose parents are in the process as well as those whose parents have been divorced for a number of years."

The questionnaire covered five sub-topics:

Counselors' perception of their role and that of the school for students with divorced parents (Goldman & Beuthin, 2002) – includes

five questions regarding their perception of the school's role and eleven questions regarding their own role with students, teachers and parents, each with a scale of 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement).

Counselors' attitudes towards divorce (Dattner, 1988) – The original 44 questions were compiled by Dattner to evaluate the attitudes of social workers and students of social work concerning various aspects of divorce. This study utilized nine questions, of which 4 reject divorce and 5 condone divorce in certain situations, with a scale of 1 (total disagreement) to 5 (total agreement).

Counselors' knowledge regarding the effects of divorce on children (Erhard, 2007) – includes six questions based on up-to-date studies of the effects of divorce on children, of which half of them are true and which require True/Not True answers to evaluate the counselors knowledge.

Counselors' behavior on the job (Erhard, 2003) – evaluated through two indices: a) 26 statements concerning their work with various parties—children of divorced parents, the parents, the school staff (home room teachers, specialized teachers, psychologists and administrators) and external parties—for which counselors indicated the frequency of their activity on a scale of 1 to 5; b) a percentage estimate of the amount of time out of their total work time that they spend working with students with divorced parents, and the distribution among the various parties.

Background information – includes personal demographics, professional training and experience, professional training in the field of divorce and satisfaction from the level of knowledge, school ranking and percentage of students from divorced families.

Findings

Descriptive Data

The average percentage of students with divorced parents was 22.57 for counselors working with a single grade level and 20.7 for those working with the entire school.

Most counselors (84.3%) have never undergone training in divorce and most (59.3%) are certain that they do not have sufficient knowledge about divorce or children of divorce. The overwhelming majority (78.1%) wish to acquire more information.

Counselors' perception of their role ranges from passive to active ($M=3.44$, $SD=0.71$). It seems that there is ambivalence: they believe that some aspects of working with children of divorce should be tackled actively but other areas call for a passive position. There is uniformity concerning "One of the roles of the guidance counselor is to increase divorced parents awareness of the needs of their children." ($M=3.63$), but also about "The counselor should monitor students with divorced parents and approach them only when necessary." ($M=3.67$) and especially about "The counselor should consider addressing divorced parents only when distress is apparent in their children." ($M=3.85$). Counselors do not agree about "Counselors should initiate a meeting with divorcing parents in order to support the family in the process." ($M=2.35$).

Counselors' perception of the school's role is relatively passive ($M=2.76$, $SD=0.72$). On the one hand, counselors believe that the school's role is not to engage actively with students whose parents are divorced. On the other hand, there is a relative consensus regarding "The school is one of the most important factors in helping children of divorced parents" ($M=3.20$) and blatant disagreement about "Today, divorce is a natural phenomenon that requires no special school intervention." ($M=2.01$). Thus counselors agree in part that the school is an important factor in helping students whose parents divorce and do not deny a need for intervention in this regard, yet they believe that they should contact the student and his parents only when distress is evident; it is not their job to proactively assist the family through the process.

In general, counselors express positive acceptance of divorce ($M=3.8$, $SD=0.58$). There is high consensus that "A person should not stay married at all costs when dissatisfied in family life" ($M=4.08$) and "Divorce is an expression of personal liberty; when one feels distress in

marriage it is one's right to end it" ($M = 3.94$). There is some ambivalence about "When one partner feels suffocated he should divorce." ($M = 2.81$) and "Family crises are natural so even amidst crisis it is advisable not to dissolve the family" ($M = 2.88$). Counselors greatly opposed "Dissolving the family is a negative thing and should be avoided at all costs." ($M = 1.5$), "Divorce should be avoided out of concern for the children." ($M = 1.53$) and "Divorce is a disaster for children." ($M = 2.29$). In summary, counselors accept divorce in a variety of situations and believe that one should not remain in the marriage at all costs.

Generally, counselors possess average knowledge concerning the effects of divorce on children ($M=2.71$, $SD=1.38$). A high percentage of counselors gave correct answers to the statements: "Children of different ages react similarly to parents' divorce." (False) and "In the long term, the child's function improves as time passes from the divorce." (True) Most counselors gave wrong answers to "Generally, scholastic achievement of children of divorced parents is low compared to children from families with married parents." (True), "Remarriage of the divorced mother contributes to her son's mental well-being." (True) and "There is no connection between parental divorce and delinquency." (False) There is some disagreement about "In most cases, boys and girls react similarly to parents' divorce." (False)

Links between Independent Variables

A Pearson correlation table for job perception, attitudes and knowledge showed a significant positive correlation ($p < 0.001$) between the consultants' perception of their role of to that of the school: The stronger counselors believe that it is their role to care for students with divorced parents, the stronger they believe that it is the school's role as well. It also showed a significant positive correlation ($p < 0.05$) between the counselors' perception of their role to their level of knowledge: The greater their knowledge about the effects of divorce on children the more they believe it is their role to actively engage in the subject. By contrast and contrary to the hypothesis, a significant link was not found ($p > 0.05$) from attitudes and knowledge to job perception.

A Pearson correlation table to compare job perception, attitudes and knowledge with personal characteristics revealed a significant negative correlation ($p < 0.01$) between the perception of the roles of the counselor and the school to their age and seniority as counselors. The older and more senior the counselor the less he believes it his role and that of the school to deal actively with students whose parents are divorced. No significant correlation ($p > 0.05$) was found between the independent variables and the rest of the background variables (relationship with a divorced person, counseling job format, training in divorce and the percentage of students whose parents are divorced).

One-way Anova tests were conducted to examine the relationship between knowledge, attitudes and role perception and the other personal variables (ordinal or less). No significant correlation ($p > 0.05$) was found between the counselors' perception of their role and the role of school in working with students whose parents are divorced, their knowledge and attitudes and the variables: religion, marital status of the counselors and their parents, formal education, formal teacher training, the teaching profession, reported knowledge, interest in acquiring knowledge and school rank.

A t-test for independent variables was conducted to examine the difference between secular and religious counselors in attitudes toward divorce. Significant differences ($t = 2.27$; $p < 0.05$) were found: secular counselors have a more positive attitude ($M = 3.86$) than religious counselors ($M = 3.36$).

Analysis of the answers to the questionnaire on job behavior showed that counselors tend to do crisis intervention with students whose parents are divorced immediately upon receipt of the news of parents' divorce. ($M=3.58$, $SD=.062$) Counselors work often with teachers in consultation, guidance and information sharing ($M= 3.7-4.34$), and less with the divorced parents ($M=2.6-3.18$). In the long term, counselors tend to provide much less supportive intervention ($M=2.23$, $SD=.57$), settling for monitoring students and maintaining contact with therapists outside the school ($M=3.11-3.0$) and providing individual and group intervention only rarely ($M=1.67-1.15$).

A paired t-test was conducted to test the difference between the frequency of crisis intervention and the frequency of supportive intervention. Significant differences were found ($t (115df) = 22.73$; $p < .01$): the frequency of crisis intervention was higher ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.57$) than the frequency supportive intervention of ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 0.62$).

Counselors were asked, "How much of your job do you devote to working with students whose parents are divorced (out of 100% work time)?" Ninety-five responses to this question resulted in an average of 13.3 ($SD = 9.82$), with a minimum of 2% and a maximum of 25%.

A Pearson correlation table examined the correlation from the dependent variable (counselor job behavior) to the endogenous independent variables (role perception, attitudes and knowledge) and the exogenous independent variables (personal-professional characteristics). Corroborating the hypothesis, this revealed a significant positive correlation ($p < 0.01$) from the frequency of supportive intervention to the perception of the roles of the counselor and the school and counselors' knowledge in the field. The more the counselor believes it his role and that of the school to deal actively with students whose parents are divorced and the greater their knowledge the more frequently they provide supportive intervention to students and their divorced parents. In addition, a significant positive correlation ($p < 0.05$) was found between crisis intervention and the perception of the roles of the counselor and the school. The more the counselor believes it his role and that of the school to deal actively with students whose parents are divorced the more frequently they provide crisis intervention to students. No significant correlation ($p > 0.05$) was found between crisis and supportive intervention and the personal (demographic, professional and training about divorce) and school variables.

Prediction Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses regarding prediction of the frequency of crisis and supportive intervention by counselors according to their perception of their role and the role of the school. The independent variables—the counselors' perception of their role and that of the school in working with students whose parents are divorced, their knowledge about and attitudes toward divorce—explain about 15% of the variance of the frequency of supportive intervention. The variables that contribute significantly to explaining the variance are their knowledge about the effects of divorce on children and their perception of their role with students whose parents are divorced. Counselors' perception of the role of the school in working with students whose parents are divorced, and attitudes toward divorce do not contribute significantly to the explanation of the variance. However the independent variable, counselors' perception of the role of the school, was found to have a link to the frequency of intervention ($r = 0.031$).

The independent variables—the counselors' perception of their role and that of the school, and their attitudes toward divorce—explain about 5% of the variance of the frequency of crisis intervention. The independent variable that contributes most significantly to explaining the variance is their perception of their role with students whose parents are divorced. Counselors' knowledge about divorce, their perception of the role of the school in working with students whose parents are divorced, and their attitudes toward divorce were not found to contribute significantly to the explanation of the variance. However the independent variable, counselors' perception of the role of the school, was found to have a link to the frequency of intervention ($r = 0.18$).

In other words, counselors' perception of their role in working with students whose parents are divorced predicts both their supportive and crisis intervention with these students, while knowledge of the effects of divorce on children predicts their supportive intervention with the students.

Discussion

In recent years, the divorce rate has increased dramatically. In Israel, close to 120,000 children now live in families with divorced parents. Despite the prevalence and the fact that today's children of divorced parents do not feel unusual as they did in the past, divorce is a considerable change in a child's life that brings in its wake a variety of short and long-term effects. The separation of parents and the need to adapt to two homes is extremely difficult for the children and ne-

cessitates a long process of dealing with the new situation and adapting throughout all the developmental stages of life.

The large number of children affected by divorce is a matter of public and scientific concern has drawn the attention of the Ministry of Education (Circular of the Director General, 2014). The unique status of these students requires the special attention of the school system and especially of the guidance counselor, who is the professional charged with creating a supportive social and educational atmosphere.

In view of the prevalence of divorce and the importance of providing support to the children, we posed the following questions: Do guidance counselors believe their role is to initiate action with students whose parents are divorced? What is the level of their knowledge about the effects of divorce on children? What are their attitudes towards divorce? How is this reflected in their functional behavior?

We distinguished between counselor's intervention during the divorce (crisis intervention) and support given the student after the divorce for long-term adaptation (support intervention). Crisis intervention occurs immediately after the beginning of the divorce process for students who are not yet experiencing adjustment difficulties or are experiencing primary adjustment difficulties and aims to reduce the development of emotional and behavioral problems in this first stage. Support intervention is intended to reduce the impact of the crisis experienced by the student following the divorce, to prevent his decline into adjustment problems and psychopathology and to ease the return of a student who has experienced an ongoing crisis to normative behavior at school (Klingman, 2000).

The findings indicate that counselors invest slightly more than a tenth of their working time to crisis intervention, while support intervention is very rare. The support provided consists mostly of managing services for the benefit of the student (e.g., gathering information from outside agencies, coordination between school and community agencies and directing student or parents to professional therapists) and monitoring the student in the school system. By contrast, they perform crisis work relatively often. This includes informing educators, teachers and other relevant school staff about the change in the life of the student; encouraging collaboration between teachers to share information; monitoring the student; and consulting, including recommendations to teachers to meet with the student and the parents. Counselors also work to some extent with parents through consultation, mentoring and referral to therapists.

Thus, it is apparent that currently most of counselors' efforts are focused on crisis intervention and primary level prevention and hardly focus on more organized methods of assistance, such as long-term individual interventions and group interventions, which are grounded in the principles of crisis treatment that involve activities at the tertiary prevention level (Klingman, 2000).

This situation reflects the guiding paradigm during the last decade that stresses counseling school staff for empowerment with a broad organizational view and ignores individual and group counseling for students, even though many studies show that group interventions with children of divorced parents are effective and serve as a great help and a significant source of support (Flasher, 2003).

As for counselor's perception of the roles, counselors feel unequivocally that the school need not engage proactively in working with students whose parents are divorced. In contrast, their perception of their own role is vague, probably reflecting their dilemma. On the one hand, they believe it is their place to increase divorced parents' awareness of the needs of their child, yet at the same time, they believe that they should monitor the student and only consider turning to parents if they identify student distress. Note that this position is not related to the concept that divorces are a natural phenomenon that does not require special intervention, but rather that counseling students of divorced parents is not one of their primary functions.

It is interesting to note that the older the counselor and the longer they have been counselors, the less they display job initiative. It seems that the consultants' perception of their role is influenced by their age, seniority in their profession and perhaps even their being from a generation with less divorce and more traditional perceptions

about family unity.

Role perception influences behavior. Counselors who see it their role and that of the school to engage in work with students whose parents are divorced engage in this work more frequently. This corroborates Ajzen's theory (Ajzen, 2010) that hypothesizes that the stronger the intentions for a specific behavior the more likely that the behavior will actually occur.

While the link found between job perception and behavior was expected and consistent with the literature, the strong link found from knowledge to job perception and behavior is relatively surprising.

Counselors' knowledge about the effects on children of divorce is average to minimal, yet contributes to their perception of their role and their supportive intervention with students whose parents are divorced. Moreover, counselors who have up to date knowledge tend to invest time in ongoing action and tertiary prevention. Contrarily, there was no link found between the level of knowledge and crisis intervention. Perhaps the reason for this is that as regards the long run, the counselor can invest time and thought and base their work on the knowledge they possess, but when counselors receive information about parents' divorce they react according to the principles of crisis intervention (Raviv and Katznelson, 2005). These principles are applicable to varied crises and are not based on theoretical knowledge of the impact of divorce on the child but on the available information about a specific student.

The impact of the counselors' knowledge (or lack thereof) on their behavior is intensified by the link found between knowledge and role perception. The higher the level of knowledge the more they perceive it their role to actively engage in working with students whose parents are divorced. The study by Green & Schaefer (2006) reports similarly that teachers with knowledge about the effects of divorce on children believe that the school plays a significant role in helping these students and feel responsible for providing special help. It can be inferred that consultants' knowledge on the subject reinforces their perception that students whose parents are divorced have unique needs that should be addressed and affects the way they think, feel and are motivated to action.

The findings concerning the counselors' minimal knowledge together with their subjective reports concerning their deficiency in this area and the fact that most of them never attended a course on the subject are very strong indicators. Professional activities in general and the counseling profession in particular should be based primarily on up to date knowledge. Knowledge is a most important component of role perception and supportive intervention. Therefore, developing consultants who believe it is their role to work with students whose parents are divorced and act on this concept is dependent on plans aimed to expand their knowledge. The fact that most counselors expressed an interest in learning the subject shows that they are aware of their lack of knowledge in this area and possibly this provokes professional dissatisfaction. There is no doubt that investment in training will contribute to counselors' sense of competence, effectiveness and ability to plan relevant goals and action (Bandura, 1995). The seminars should focus on a wide range of subjects: a discussion of recent statistics, forecasts regarding the rates of divorce, children's reactions to divorce according to age and gender, developing emotional and personal awareness to the subject, availability of support networks during crisis, methods of response and action open to teachers and their empowerment (Eldar-Avidan & Barnea, 2010).

The findings in this study indicate that training for counselors need no longer address modification of attitudes toward divorce. The data show that counselors hold no prejudices against divorce. The counselors accept divorce in many situations and believe that divorce is an expression of personal freedom that should not be avoided out of concern for the children.

Contrary to the hypothesis, counselors' attitudes towards divorce were not linked to behavior, perception of the role and knowledge. The high average in attitudes and the small standard deviation suggest that this variable does not distinguish between guidance counselors: All counselors have modern, liberal attitudes and accept divorce as a normative response to dysfunctional relationships.

Limitations

The method used in this study was a self-assessment questionnaire, which supplies only one point of view—that of the counselors themselves. It is possible that if the counselors' behavior had been explored through a survey of school staff, parents and the students themselves, the resulting picture may have been a broader, better representation of the work with children of divorced parents. At the same time, it would be possible to evaluate the staff's, parents' and students' perception of the counselors' intervention.

Furthermore, any time a self-assessment questionnaire is used there is a risk of bias aimed at social desirability. As a result, it is possible that part of the reports about their work or their attitudes toward divorce reflect an attempt to conform to today's accepted expectations and norms.

Implications and Recommendations

The uniqueness of the study is its originality. This is the first study in Arab society that examines the subject of divorce from the aspect of guidance counselors' work process. To date, no study has been conducted that examined the involvement of counselors with students whose parents are divorced and asked questions about their perception of the role and the knowledge they possess. This study is directly linked to guidance counseling and the function of the counselors, thus can serve as a basis for a body of professional, theoretical knowledge that will contribute to the development and awareness of the guidance counselor in this area. Although it is clear that the current study is not exhaustive regarding all aspects of counselor behavior when working with students whose parents are divorced, it illuminates the subject and enables a better understanding of the factors of counselor behavior.

A direct result of the originality of the study, a number of important issues and additional questions for further studies were raised:

Since the underlying basis is an attempt to explain the effect of the study's variables on the counselor's behavior as regards divorce, we recommend further investigation of other variables, such as counselors' attitudes regarding their evaluation in their role with students whose parents are divorced, their subjective views on parenting and their perceived control of their behavior. This last variable is particularly important in light of the great autonomy of school counselors on the one hand, and their perception of the approach of the school and the principal in this regard, on the other.

Most studies claim that it is possible to alleviate the harm to children whose parents divorce with a total mobilization of the various parties on their behalf. Since the school staff includes other professionals who can serve as important, vital resources in helping these children, we recommend exploring the perceptions, attitudes and behavior of the entire system (principals, educators and teachers).

The moderate to low level of knowledge about divorce exhibited in the knowledge questionnaire combined with the counselors' own reports on their lack of knowledge indicates the importance of training on the subject. This importance increases in light of the clear link found between counselors' knowledge about the effects of divorce on children and their perception of their role and behavior on the job. Besides awareness of counselors' desire to learn about the subject, it is worthwhile exploring with them their needs concerning topics of relevant courses, desired course type, preferred framework and the possibility of adding training in the subject during the course of professional training.

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