

ASSOCIATION OF PARENTAL DIVORCE AND PARENTAL LOSS WITH DEPRESSION IN ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of the present study was to investigate the association of parental divorce and parental loss by death with depression in adolescents. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in the level of Depression between Adolescents with Parental Divorce, Adolescents with Parental Death, and Adolescents Living in Intact-Two Parent Families.

Research Design: Non-Experimental Research Design (Differential Research).

Place and Duration of Study: Different Orphan and Shelter homes and Educational Institutions of Karachi from 2015-2016.

Sample and Methods. The sample comprised of 180 participants with an age range of 11-19 years. The measure used along with Demographic Information Form was Siddiqui-Shah Depression Scale (Siddiqui & Shah, 1992).

Results and Conclusion: The results of Analysis of Variance shows significant differences on the scores of depression between adolescents with parental divorce, adolescents with parental death and adolescents living in intact-two-parent families. Further, results of Post Hoc Tukey's HSD reveals that the adolescents with parental divorce scored higher than adolescents living in two-intact parent families. Moreover, the mean differences between adolescents with parental death and adolescents living in intact-two-parent families and also adolescents with parental divorce versus adolescents with parental death were found to be statistically insignificant. Outcomes of the study highlights the significance of parental divorce in relation to depression within Pakistani cultural context.

Keywords: Divorce, Parental Loss, Death, Depression, Adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Family institution plays a central role in an individual's life course. Certain disruptions in the family structure are inescapable and bring along sorrow and distress for every member of the family. *Parental Divorce* and *Parental Loss by Death* are the most common forms of disruption impeding the normal course of a family life (Behere, Basnet, & Campbell, 2017) and documented to have far-reaching adverse impact on mental health of children depending upon their age (Amato, 2001; Behere et al., 2017). In the same line, the present is also an endeavor to contribute to existing body of literature from Pakistani culture perspective.

Parental divorce is irrefutably a potentially disastrous life event causing the major disruption in the family life course. It is seen to affect every member of the family and most of all causes upheaval in children's lives (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Regardless of the intensity and severity of the circumstances, when parents are divorced, the children are divorced as well. Divorce does not bring any improvement in lives rather it has just the opposite effects on children for the rest of their lives in terms of abandonment, confusion, embarrassment, and rejection (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Parental divorce brings number of changes in children's life for instance, participation in parental conflicts, shifting a house, changes in the nature of relationship with the living parent, loss of contact with a parent who left home, and probable financial problems (Woosley, Dennis, Robertson, & Goldstein, 2009). The children are impacted by these consequent changes in varied means depending upon their age and at different points in the process (Hines, 2007). Adolescents and youngsters are acknowledged to have the greater propensity to experience the adverse effects in comparison to younger children (Zieman & Baker-Randall, 2000). The reason being the children's inability to comprehend the underlying reasons for separation and lack of resources to seek help beyond the family environment. Nonetheless, adolescents and youngsters rely on external sources for relaxation, comfort and to seek support (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). Thus, parental divorce has more negative impact on adolescents.

In adolescents' mental health context, a large body of research has established that parental divorce causes a variety of behavioral and emotional problems (Kelley & Emery, 2003), particularly an increase in depression compared to adolescents living in intact-two families is documented (de Figueiredo & Dias, 2012; Richardson & McCabe, 2001; Woosley, et al., 2009).

Wallerstein and colleagues (2000) conferred that parental divorce certainly impacts and threatens the growth and development of teenagers. Consequently they develop problems related to adjustment, irritable mood and behavioral difficulties. Likewise, Chun and colleagues (2016) also stated that parental divorce put adolescents on higher risk of depression.

Parental loss by death is another very sad and challenging event that an adolescent can experience and which causes disruption in normal course of family life and complicate the life of the children (Behere et al., 2017). The surviving family members are presented with profound difficulties in short and long-term adaptation. In particular, children get deprived of immensely important emotional exchange as the left over parent is left alone with poor preparation to undertake the role and responsibilities of departed parent in addition to fulfilling his own role (Tremblay & Israel, 1998). Children's conceptualization and reaction to parental death is affected by their developmental age. The younger children are unable to process the concept of death and meaning of irreversibility due to their underdeveloped cognitive skills. However, adolescents and youngsters have enough cognitive maturity to comprehend the complexity of death and also to express their feelings and reactions (Christ, 2000). Hence, adolescents are more likely to suffer from parental death.

Parental loss is a universal experience however its causes and manifestation can be unique to its sufferers (Fiorini & Mullen, 2006). The findings of the study by Gray and associates (2011) revealed death of a parent a significant risk factor for depressive symptoms and depressive episodes in bereaved adolescents compared to non-bereaved. In another study, an increased risk of functional impairment and depression in adolescents having prolonged grief reaction was found (Melhem, Porta, Shamseddeen, Walker, & Brent, 2011). Numerous other studies have documented an increased risk of depression in adolescents who experienced parental death as compared to adolescents living with intact-two families (Brent, Melhem, Donohoe, & Walker, 2009; Melhem et al., 2008; Zidron, 2008).

So far, above-stated literature suggests that both adolescents with parental divorce and parental loss by death constitute the high risk for depression in comparison to adolescents living in intact-two-parent family. However, little is known about the differences in the level of depression between these groups of adolescents in a single study (Ely West, Sweeting, & Richards, 2000). The most studied outcomes in relation to parents' marital status are adjustment issues,

school outcomes (Amato & Anthony, 2014) and well-being (Corak, 2001). The findings from these studies indicate adolescents to be at risk who lost a parent through divorce than death. The reason being the parental death encompasses less often the self-choice (except for in case of death by suicide or using other self-destructive means) compared to parental divorce (Amato & Anthony, 2014). In contrast, in case of parental divorce, adolescents are faced with divorce process (witnessing the reasons for divorce), custody decision, financial support matters (Lansford, 2009). Moreover, divorce causes disruption in parent-child relationship, continuous discard between former partners, and increase in negative life events (Amato, 2000) eventually making the situation far worse than in case of parental death. Hence, variance in the level of depression between adolescents with parental divorce versus parental loss by death is yet an important dimension to be explored

As adolescence is marked as the most crucial time period when an individual undergoes a number of cognitive, psychosocial, emotional and physiological transitions (Hines, 2007). These transitions are far too stormy and stressed and increase adolescents' vulnerability to develop mental health problems particularly depression (Santrock, 2003). Provision of parental support, warmth, and guidance while adolescent are struggling through the stressors of this particular phase may aid in smooth transition and healthy psychological development. Nonetheless, parental divorce or parental loss by death can disrupt the normal course of family life eventually depriving adolescents of essential support and warmth. Hence, it could be speculated that the surplus burden of parental divorce or parental death may quadruple the stress associated with this particular phase of life and eventually upsurge their vulnerability to develop depression. Nonetheless, depression in adolescents can have further debilitating repercussions for their lives (Naz & Siddiqui, 2010). Envisaging, the present study is an attempt to examine the association of parental divorce and parental loss by death with depression in adolescents.

Grounded on existing literature, it was hypothesized that: There would be a significant difference in the level of Depression between Adolescents with Parental Divorce, Adolescents with Parental Death, and Adolescents Living in Intact-Two Parent Families.

METHOD

Participants

The participants consisted of 180 adolescents with an age range of 11-19 years divided into three groups of 60 participants in each: (a) adolescents with parental divorce with mean age of 14.37 ($SD=2.092$); (b) adolescents with parental death with mean age of 14.40 ($SD=1.653$); and (c) adolescents living in intact-two-parent families with mean age of 13.43 ($SD=2.329$).

The adolescents in parental divorce and parental death group were recruited from orphan and shelter homes of Karachi, Pakistan where they were left by their parents after divorce or death either due to remarriage or lack of financial resources for child's upbringing. The adolescents in both groups were studying at different educational levels in respective schools of these shelter and orphan homes. Due to privacy policy of the respective shelter/ orphan homes, no further personal and family related demographic information could be obtained about these participants.

The sample of adolescents living in intact-two-parent families was recruited from educational institutions of Karachi. Further, adolescents with the history of neurological impairment, major surgery, severe head injuries, cancer, diabetes, legal problems, sexual abuse and psychological illness in themselves or their first degree relatives etc. were excluded from the sample to control the potential impact of these conditions on one's mental health. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

Demographic Information Form, self-developed according to the established research criteria, was used to obtain personal, academics, and family related information of the participants.

Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale (Siddiqui & Shah, 1992)

Siddiqui-Shah Depression Scale (Siddiqui & Shah, 1992) was used to assess the level of depression in participants. The SSDS is an indigenously developed self-report measure of depression consisting of 36 items further divided into 12 items each as mild depression, moderate depression and severe depression. The participant were required to respond to items on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 as '*Never*' to 3 as '*Every Time*'. The minimum score on SSDS can be 0 and a maximum can be 108. The Cronbach's alpha value for nonclinical samples was reported to be .89 indicating very good internal consistency.

Procedure

First, the approval of the objective of the entire study, procedures followed and material used was sought from Advanced Studies and Research Board (ASRB), University of Karachi, Pakistan. Then, formal approval was sought from concerned authorities of different orphan and shelter homes for data collection from adolescents with parental divorce and parental death group. On set appointments dates for data collection, the researcher was introduced to the adolescents by the designated staff of the respective Institutions and was provided with a separate room. After putting the adolescents at ease, they were briefed about the research purpose, the confidentiality of their personal information and research findings and about their rights as a participant as well. Formal consent was obtained through Consent Form prior to data collection. The administration was done in group form with a maximum of 10 participants in each group. First, the Demographic Information Form was presented to screen participants according to the pre-set inclusion criteria. Followed by Siddiqui-Shah Depression Scale was administered. At the completion of data collection procedure, participants and concerned authorities were thanked for their assistance and time.

Similar procedure to recruit sample of adolescents living in intact-two-parent families from different educational institutions of Karachi was followed in terms of seeking approval from concerned authorities, obtaining consent and administration of research measures.

Scoring and Statistical Analysis

The research measure was scored according to the standard scoring procedure. One Way Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA) and Post hoc Tukey's HSD analysis were computed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, V-20).

RESULTS

Table 1

Summary of Demographic Characteristics of Adolescents with Parental Divorce; Adolescents with Parental Death; and Adolescents living in Intact-Two-Parent Families

Variables	<i>A-PDV</i> (N=60)		<i>A-PDT</i> (N=60)		<i>A-ITP</i> (N=60)	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender						
Male	30	50	30	50	30	50
Female	30	50	30	50	30	50
Family Structure						
Joint	-	-	-	-	13	21.7
Nuclear	-	-	-	-	47	78.3
Education Level						
Grade 5 to 8	29	48.33	34	56.67	33	55
Grade 9 to 10	25	41.67	24	40	25	41.67
Grade 11 to 12	6	10	2	3.33	2	3.33

Note: A-PDV = Adolescents with Parental Divorce; A-PDT = Adolescents with Parental Death; A-ITP = Adolescents living in Intact-Two-Parent Families

Table 2

Means, Standard deviations, one way Anova of Adolescents with Parental Divorce, Adolescents with parental death and adolescents with living in intact two parent families.

Groups	M	SD	F	Sig
Adolescents with Parental Divorce	28.83	14.55		
Adolescents with Parental Death	24.25	15.01	4.06	.02
Adolescents living in Intact-Two-Parent Families	21.78	11.43		

p <.05, *df* = 2, 177

Table 3

Post Hoc Tukey's HSD Analysis for the variable of Depression among Adolescents with Parental Divorce (N=60); Adolescents with Parental Death (N=60); and Adolescents living in Intact-Two-Parent Families (N=60)

		MD	SE	Sig.
Adolescents with Parental Divorce	Adolescents with Parental Death	4.583	2.512	.16
	Adolescents living in Intact-Two-Parent Families	7.050*	2.512	.02
Adolescents with Parental Death	Adolescents living in Intact-Two-Parent Families	2.467	2.512	.59

The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the association of parental divorce and parental loss by death with depression in adolescents. Key findings pertaining to the hypothesis of the study are as followed. The results of Analysis of Variance showed significant differences on the scores of depression between adolescents with parental divorce, adolescents with parental death and adolescents living in intact-two-parent families (Table 2). Further, results of Post Hoc Tukey's HSD (Table 3) reveals that the adolescents with parental divorce scored higher than adolescents living in two-intact parent families. Moreover, the mean differences between adolescents with parental death and adolescents living in intact-two-parent families and also adolescents with parental divorce versus adolescents with parental death are found to be statistically insignificant.

These findings are consistent with the formulated hypothesis and validate the previous studies that reported higher depression level in adolescents with parental divorce versus adolescents living in two-intact families (Cohen, 2002; de Figueiredo & Dias, 2012; Lansford, 2009). However, these finding are inconsistent with studies which have reported higher level of depression in adolescents with parental death versus adolescents living in intact-two parent families (Sharifi, 2007; Zidron, 2008) and in adolescents with parental divorce versus adolescents with parental death (Amato & Anthony, 2014).

Various plausible explanations could be ascribed to the findings of the higher level of depression in adolescents with parental divorce group (Table 3). One plausible pathway through which parental divorce may lead to depression is the erosion of parent-child emotional bond and warmth (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). To illustrate, parents are undoubtedly an imperative source of emotional support and guidance in children' lives. As a consequence of parental divorce adolescents loose contact with the non-residential parents (Kelly & Emery, 2003) eventually the parent-child emotional bond is eroded (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000) and nature of parent-child relationship changes (Woosley et al., 2009). Hence, adolescents are deprived of the essential emotional warmth, practical guidance, knowledge and skills (Kelly & Emery, 2003). The decline in emotional bond in parent-child relationship is suggested to be associated with subsequent psychological outcomes (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Adolescents with parental divorce in the present study sample were deprived of the emotional support of both the non-resident and the custodial parent. Since, their custodial parents left them in the shelter and orphan

homes due to either lack of financial resources for the upbringing of the child or remarriage. As after remarriage of custodial parent, the new step parent refused to support the child and also the non-resident parent refused to take the custody of the child. Hence, the custodial parent is left with no choice other than admitting them in shelter and orphan homes. Consequently, they are deprived of emotional support and practical assistance of both parents at this critical phase of their life. Thus, the risk for depression in already vulnerable adolescents becomes quadruple.

Another potential pathway through which divorce leads to negative psychological outcomes can be the socio-economic status changes (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Page & Stevens, 2004) along with other transitions in standard of living. It is commonly believed that economic hardships are presented to families post-divorce which may cause many difficulties into adolescents' lives. Such as changing residence which eventually results in change of school, friends, and other social network (Anderson, 2014). In our study, most of the custodial parents left these adolescents to orphan and shelter homes because of lack of financial resources for their up-bringing eventually leading to changes in school, changes in social network and loosing significant contacts. Thus, economic deprivation associated with parental divorce and consequential transition in standard of living may take a toll on these adolescents and augment the risk of depression.

The Post Hoc Tukey's HSD analysis revealed insignificant mean difference for adolescents with parental death versus adolescents living in intact-two parent families (Table 3). As aforementioned, depression is the less researched area with regard to parental death and parental divorce in Pakistan and this study was an initiative in this regard. The review of existing studies conducted in Western culture have shown that parental death is a stressful event and encompass greater risk for depression in adolescents in contrast to adolescent living in intact-two parent families. Nonetheless, the findings obtained in our study indicate equal likelihood of developing depression in both groups of adolescent. Though these findings show some unique trends with regard to our culture but to have more conclusive results further research in this area needs to be done.

The Post Hoc Tukey's HSD analysis have further shown statistically insignificant mean difference between adolescents with parental divorce and adolescents with parental death (Table 3). It has been posited (e.g., Sengendo &

Nambi, 1997; Amato & Anthony, 2014) that though parental death and parental divorce have equal likelihood of accompanying stressors including loss of a parent, lack of financial resources, in some cases school changing, moving a house, etc. But parental divorce has far more worse psychological consequences for adolescents' mental health than parental death (Otowa et al., 2014). Parental death is not stigmatized rather it is accepted in most societies as a will of God. There are no unpleasant memories and bitterness involved. Though, adolescents don't possess the control over either parental death or divorce. But in case of divorce, they personalize it more and are prone to blame themselves for the mishap. They are able to comprehend that death is inevitable however divorce is a choice and one parent is still alive however he is not with them. Hence, making the situation worst. The findings obtained in our study show some unique trends with regard to our culture. The insignificant differences may be attributed to the fact that adolescents in both groups were left by their custodial parent and left over parent in shelter and orphan homes because of remarriage and lack of finances to bring them up. Thus, adolescents in both groups are deprived of important resources from their both parents eventually minimizing the difference on the variable of depression between both groups.

In a nutshell, the findings of the current study suggest statistically significant difference only between the adolescents with parental divorce and adolescents living in intact-two-parent families. Thus, parental divorce is inarguably an intensely stressful event carrying increased risk for depression in adolescents in Pakistani cultural context. Further research is warranted to validate our findings. This study being no exception has its own set of limitations which can be addressed in future studies. The sample size and inclusion of sample only from orphans and shelter homes limits the generalizability of the findings on population which has some form of social support available from their relatives and extended families. Future studies may employ a larger sample from community settings and in addition to depression other psychological outcomes may also be examined.

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