The Relationship between Parental Divorce and Marital Conflict in Young Adults’ Social Relationships

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INTRODUCTION

There is a large body of research focused on the long-term and short-term effects of parental divorce and marital conflict. Research found that young adults from high conflict families reported significantly lower emotional quality and support and lower independence. That study also found that participants from high conflict families reported significantly lower numbers of social supports and greater anxiety than participants from lower conflict families (Riggio 2004). Similarly it was found that college students who had been exposed to marital conflict described their close social relationships as less reinforcing, helpful, less sustainable and had lower levels of peer support during adolescence (Green and King 2009). Parental divorce is growing in societal acceptance. It is imperative to know and understand the effects of parental divorce. Knowledge about the consequences of divorce can assist parents in understanding the importance of helping children receive counseling or other support, which would help them cope with their parents’ divorce. The current study added to the understanding of the effects of parental divorce and marital conflict, by examining the young adults’ social relationships and determining what role parental divorce and marital conflict had on their current social relationships.

Hypotheses:
1) Young adults who have experienced parental divorce and/or marital conflict will have an overall lower quality of social relationships.
2) Specifically young adults who experienced high marital conflict will have greater negative effect, in that their quality of social relationships will be even lower than that of the young adults who experience just parental divorce.

METHODS

Participants
The present study included 60 undergraduate psychology majors at Eastern Kentucky University, each of whom received course credit for their participation.

Study Task
Participants completed 3 questionnaires. Two of the questionnaires were social support questionnaires which measured the participants’ perceived amount of social support from family and friends. The first social support questionnaire had twelve questions. An example question for this questionnaire is: If I were sick, I could easily find someone to help me with my daily chores. 1=definitely false, 2=probably false, 3=probably true, and 4=definitely true. The second social support questionnaire there were thirteen questions on this questionnaire. An example question is: You have friends who are a real source of comfort to you. 1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Slightly agree, 4=slightly disagree, 5=disagree, and 6=strongly disagree. The third questionnaire used was The Children’s Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych et al., 1992). This questionnaire measured the amount of conflict between the participants’ parents, including measures such as intensity, frequency and perceived threat. There were 49 questions. An example would be: My parents often got into arguments when I did something disapproving. 1=true, 2=sort of true, and 3=false.

RESULTS FOR THE SOCIAL SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRES

The results for the two Social Support Questionnaires that were administered were mostly not significantly different. The first social support questionnaire had three subscales (Appraisal Support, Belonging Support, and Tangible Support), each subscale was compared with no significant difference found. The statistical analysis that was used was a 3X3 mixed design ANOVA with a parental group factor and a repeated measure of the three subscales. The Social Support Scale analysis was found significant, F(2,110)=4.344, P=.017 h2 = .073. However the comparison between the social support scale and the parental group was not significant, F(4, 110)=.330, P=.846. The statistical analysis used for the second social support questionnaire was a dependent-measure ANOVA. There was no significance found, F(2,55)=.183, P=.833.

RESULTS FOR THE CHILDREN’S PERCEPTION OF INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT SCALE

There were several group effects found in The Children’s Perception of Interverential Conflict Scale (CPIC). There were nine subscales in this questionnaire (Frequency-1, Intensity-2, Resolution-3, Content-4, Perceived Threat-5, Coping Efficacy-6, Self-Blame-7, Triangulation-8, and Stability-9). The statistical analysis used to measure the results was a 3X9 mixed design ANOVA with a parental group factor and a repeated measure of the nine subscales. There was a statistically significant effect found within the conflict scale, F(8,440)=34.899, P<.000 h2 = .388. The comparison between the conflict scale and the parental groups found statistically significant results, F(16, 440)=7.805, P<.000 h2 = .221.

DISCUSSION

The hypotheses were not supported. It was expected that young adults who have experienced parental divorce and/or marital conflict will have an overall lower quality of social relationships. Specifically young adults who experienced high martial conflict will have greater negative effect, in that their quality of social relationships will be even lower than that of the young adults who experience just parental divorce. However, the results for the social support questionnaires, which measured the quality of social relationships in comparison with the parental marital status were not significant. This means that there was no significant differences in the quality of social relationships between participants whose parents were still married and those who were divorced. There could be a number of reasons as to why the results for the social support questionnaire were not significant. One reason could be because all the participants were young college students who may perceive they have a lot of social support. Another reason could be that parents who do get divorced know the negative effects it can have on the children, so they are receiving more support for coping with divorce than before.

REFERENCES
