

Psycho-Social Consequences in Adolescents with Divorced Parents and Their Minimization

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Abstract

In modern times, where individualism and urbanization prevail, families experience great challenges not only in their structure, but also in their function. Family as the safest shelter for children/adolescents loses its sense when it is experienced the divorce of parents. The psycho-social consequences of some of them are evident in the creation of new social relationships, attitudes and behavior towards others and each parent, but also in their opinions, self-esteem, self-confidence, especially when considered problematic relationships such as parent-parent, adolescent-parent, that causes stress, psycho-emotional instability, up to anxiety, depression. The main purpose of this study is to identify the psychological and social consequences of children with divorced parents, which also determine the important role of each parent and supporting institutions such as school, society, professionals such as social workers/psychologists in treating and minimizing them. This paper is a qualitative research based on live interviews with two-line open-ended questions: subjects who directly experience divorce as adolescent boys and girls, aged 14-16 in high school. There were also interviews with divorced couples to understand how adolescents are experiencing the divorce, seen from their parents' point of view. An important part is also the interviewing of subjects dealing with the treatment of minimizing its consequences, ie professionals working and staying close to these adolescents as teachers of a high school in Kavaja/Albania, social workers and psychologists of the school and the district court that is responsible for the assignment of parental custody, to understand the support that approaches adolescents. Selection of subjects was done through intentional sampling, were identified cases of families with divorced couples with adolescent children and who have legally completed this process at the First Instance District Court of Kavaja/Albania. The results of this study serve to make people aware of the concrete psycho-social consequences of adolescents experiencing parent divorce and how can be improved their future treatment by their parents, professionals in order to mitigate the negative effects of divorce in the family.

Keywords: divorce, adolescent, psycho-social consequences, treatment, parent, teacher, psychologist/social worker.

1. Introduction

After the 90s in Albania, social tensions from time to time have affected normal functioning of the family, not only in the structure, but above all in terms of the challenges of its development. Divorce began to emerge as the most common phenomenon in the 1990s, and is accepted by urban society as a result of a more relaxed mentality after the 90s. Conflict between parents has direct and indirect effects on the long-term adaptation of children. Family function and the quality of parenting are interrelated and parent divorce affects parent-child relationships.

Parents can adopt the most inappropriate parenting styles, making them emotionally weaker and more vulnerable to social closure of adolescents, if they do not pay attention

to swallow it or somewhat anticipating the divorce situation of parents as a solution from children/adolescents. Parents' awareness and psycho-education on positive parenting strategies for the growth of healthy children with a sense of autonomy and confidence despite the divorce of the parents, are considered to be very important, in addition to the essential role regarding the treatment of adolescents in school, family, society to accept divorce as a normal and inevitable situation.

In the situation of losing the only security that the adolescent has, the family environment, it is very important the support he/she receives from the psycho-emotional and social aspect of the peers, teachers, professionals as psychologists, social workers, etc.

➤ *The main purpose of this paper:* Identifying the psychological and social consequences of children with divorced parents, which determine the important role that each parent and supporting institution has, such as school, society, professionals as social workers/psychologists in treating and minimizing them.

- Specific objectives:

1- Identifying worrying issues for adolescents by themselves and professionals considering the consequences of divorce of parents on them.

2- Dealing with divorce problems makes adolescents suffer from psycho-emotional disorders.

3- The role of parents, peers, professionals as teachers, social workers, psychologists in preventing and treating the psycho-social consequences of divorce among adolescents and ways of intervention to minimize them.

➤ Hypothesis: If they are timely identified and treated by the professionals and close relatives of adolescents, the psycho-social consequences of the divorce process of parents can be minimized.

2. Methodology

This paper is a qualitative research based on live interviews with two-line open questions.

First line: the subjects who experienced directly divorce of the parents, in this case eight adolescents (four boys and four girls aged 14-16 years); also five divorced couples (ten parents) were interviewed to understand the way they experienced divorce in the family from the parents' point of view.

Second line: particularly important is also the interviewing of subjects dealing with the treatment of minimizing its consequences, ie professionals working and staying close to these adolescents: three teachers and four social workers working in a high school in the city of Kavaja, Albania and three social workers and two psychologists working in court for assigning parental responsibility to couples in the divorce process.

Selection of subjects was done through deliberate sampling, where were identified cases of families with divorced couples that had adolescent children and who have legally completed this process at the Kavaja District First Instance Court.

Interviews were conducted in the period April-May 2016 and September-November 2016 in the premises of the high school "Alexander Moisiu" and district court of Kavaja/Albania. Also in the data collection and analysis phase, the provisions of the

Albanian law on personal data protection (2008) were respected. The findings of this qualitative research were transcribed interviews of participating subjects through verbal and non-verbal communication.

➤ **Study Limitations:** This study can not generalize and outline all the psycho-social consequences of adolescents experiencing parent divorce, not only because of the limited number of subjects being a qualitative study, but also because each individual, adolescent in this case, is unique in personality, temperament, character, in experiencing such situations, where socio-cultural, economic and family circumstances are different.

3. Literature Browsing

Parenting is the process of encouraging and supporting physical, emotional, and social development, also the intellect of a child, from childhood to adulthood. Parenting refers to a child's growth activity rather than biological relationships. (Davies, Martin, 2000). In the case of humans, this is usually done by the biological parents of the child concerned, (Bernstein, 2008), although governments and society also play a role.

Parenting is a process of promoting and supporting physical, emotional, social and intellectual development from childhood to adulthood. Parenting styles may increase the level of anxiety (Psychology Today Journal, 2009). Problems coming from overprotecting parents are not only noticed during adolescence, but are also carried along adulthood. There is little research about the incidence of problems in parent-child relationships. In a well-structured epidemiological study of 1,000 young people aged 9-13 years without psychotic diagnosis, the incidence of parent-child problems during the previous year was only 3.6%. (Kaplan & Sadock, 2009).

Theoretical models of anxiety disorders have put emphasis on the influence of parenting on the development, maintenance or alleviation of anxiety during childhood and adolescence (McLeod B, et al., 2007). Reviewing empirical data, which link parenting with childhood anxiety, has found somewhat, but unclear, support for existing theories, but they have not responded to the basic question: Is parent divorce associated with anxiety in teenage children?

The psycho-social report performed by the social worker or the psychologist¹ on the assignment of parental custody is a task set by the court within a set time, whereby social situations and the dynamics of socioeconomic, psycho-emotional factors by the parties (divorcing parents), based on Article 155 of the Family Code in Albania, which has priority the interest of children. (Cited: Before the court issues a temporary or final decision regarding the manner of exercising parental custody, the right of visit of one of the former spouses, it should summon a psychologist or social worker who, before giving the opinion, must obtain information on the material and moral condition of the family, the conditions in which they live and where the child is most appropriate).

Referring to the International Convention on the Rights of Children, it is very important cooperation with third persons such as relatives, grandparents, doctors, teachers, social workers, peers to create a safe social and supportive environment in the development and education of children.

¹Family Code in Albania, 2008, Article 155

Comenius in the XVII century and Froebel in the XIX century emphasized the visible link between school and family. So their co-operation is the guarantor for a more peaceful period of experiencing the divorce of parents by adolescents.

4. Results and Findings of the Study

- By transcribing interviews with adolescents about the consequences of divorce, it turns out that boys and girls experience different ways of divorcing in the family. Boys tend to take on the role of “head of household” when family responsibilities are placed under the care of their mother after divorce. They also tend to appreciate more the role of women and girls in society. But when they are under the custody of their father, they tend to blame their mother and adopt male gender roles, such as making gestures or acting to show more and more manly in the eyes of others, but also being stricter in discussions related on gender roles topics in the family and society.
- Adolescent girls, when assigned to the custody of their mother, turn out to be more attentive to gender roles and support girls and other women who are growing up in office, and become part of the local or central government decision, seeking to have as much results as possible even at school, thinking that when they grow up, they will become independent to keep the family and will not be dependent to the spouse for the minimum socioeconomic needs. Girls assigned under the custody of their father take the role of housewife in the family, tend to disconnect the connection with their mother by minimizing the appointments and phone calls with them.
- With regard of the parents’ attitude during a divorce process, apart from its causes, the parties blame each other. It is noticed that many times adolescents are placed in a position to support one parent, as a result of the custodial parent. It happens that with the non custodial parent these relationships fade referring to contacts, but also cause repression of emotions and feelings in adolescents.
- According to professionals working with adolescents in schools and those who participate in the divorce process of parents in the court such as teachers, social workers and psychologists, children experience rage, feelings of guilt for parents’ divorce, which is induced to them by distorting the perception of the right situation with consequences not only in the relationship of adolescents with the other parent, but also with consequences for themselves in relationships that will build in the future, complexity of inferiority. Generally, divorced parents do not avoid blaming and the negative language against one parent from the other parent.
- In the adolescence age, their sensitivity and difficulty in adapting to a new social environment (other school) should be taken into account if they are to stay with a parent who lives in another city from where they lived, despite the best socioeconomic conditions they would have if they stayed with that parent. This would involve frustration, but also the emotional instability of adolescents, where social relationships such as school for this age are considered very important.
- Referring to the effective, cognitive, behavioral exploration of children, for a sustainable and normal development of adolescent personality, without the pressure of a traumatic and conflictual family situation, it is required to continue the relationship with the other parent regardless of the residence of the custody parent.

▪ It should be acknowledged that the figure of the mother and father in the life of adolescents is of considerable significance with regard to the stages of their further development. The fact that children had previously consolidated these relationships (living in a home with their father and mother), and now the separation from them creates a couple of doubts in values, confusion, perception at this age as punishment, neglect and distortion to the authority of one parent, in which case it is required to maintain the contacts of each adolescent with both parents.

▪ The study shows that the amount of time the adolescent passes through with the father, who has not earned the child custody, in general is not related to the child's education. An important factor is the quality of the relationship between the father and the adolescent. Children who have a good relationship with non-custodial parents have good academic results, are successful and exhibit very little bad behavior. However, having a father who is not always included in the child's life or does not often visit the child, leads to a differentiated parent-child relationship. These fathers are generally more tolerant and take on the role of a friend rather than a parent.

▪ *Visual representation scheme of positive and negative parent-adolescent relationship, parent-parent in divorce situation:*

1. SCHEME +

RELATIONSHIP:

2. SCHEME -

1. Scheme + From this relationship scheme it is understood that when the child is in close, positive relationship with each parent and also after divorce the parents have positive mutual relationships with each other, the adolescent does not experience a psycho-emotional gap, which is clear from the transcript of the interviews with subjects that directly experience divorce.

2. Scheme - From this relationship scheme it is noticed that each parent maintains contact with the child/adolescent, but in the meantime between the parents of the adolescent there is no communication and these relations are frozen. In this distant relationship he/she, who experiences the severe psycho-social consequences of divorce is the child, because inevitably lives in a "hostile" environment with one parent when he/she lives or meets another, where negative language against each party is inevitable.

▪ Some children as the result of divorce, ie sharing parents become less sociable, avoid group work, classroom presentations, or other socializing activities. Sometimes these children are categorized by teachers as unsocial children with low performance, when in fact their only difficulty may be the anxiety and fear of peer judgment on the family situation they are in.

▪ Children with weak family ties, as well as social-cultural problems, prepare a favorable ground for the emergence of depression in the form of traumatic and psycho-emotional disorders. Traumatic situations in life such as abandonment, domestic violence, continuous school problems, parent divorce can cause depressive states in them.

▪ The stress that adolescents can experience can become an explosive factor for anxiety, and both can lead to depression. This means that if they are under constant stress as a tense relationship with the parents and fail to dominate or minimize it, then uninterrupted concern may be a sign of anxiety.

▪ There are several risk factors that interact with each other in the emergence of anxiety disorders, such as the surrounding environment: economic problems, parent divorce, family conflicts, very critical, very anxious or protective parenting and lack of immediate

support can be the basis of a continuous anxiety for the child in the future. Traumas, such as divorce of partners that is experienced as “the loss” of loved one, may leave traces that can be the basis of anxiety disorders. If they experience long-lasting anxiety, they can easily go to depression. In about 50% of cases, anxiety disorders are associated with depression, so it is very important to detect and treat them in time. Adolescents under anxiety have a sense of fear, tension, and suspicion. They find it difficult to focus because the concerns “slay” their minds. They may be irritated or nervous, think the worst, look for signs of danger, make wrong connections, exaggerate the consequences of a fact, and draw conclusions without proof. In adolescence depression is more than an unstable mental state, accompanied by a pronounced pessimism, makes a person feel hopeless, inalienable, worthless, often speaking of death or suicide.

○ Psychotherapy focusing on thoughts and behavior helps identify and avoid negative and unrealistic thoughts that nourish anxiety to adolescents who experience divorce with a psycho-emotional condition and their substitution with positive thoughts.

○ There is a need for a general awareness on this issue, the causes and consequences of divorce, as well as efforts for their cooperation on the unconditional admission of the adolescent. This is because when a phenomenon exists, it is good to talk, discuss. There are various forms of prevention because prejudice and stigmatization exacerbate the situation and the psycho-emotional state.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

- Psycho-social services in schools and professionals involved in it as psychologists, social workers should also be able to recognize the mental health problems of children and to identify in the early stages anxiety or fears of children as a consequence of trauma in the family.
- By identifying the psycho-social consequences of adolescents, it can be possible to interfere with psycho-social programs to avoid their involvement in criminal activity, attempted suicide, anxiety and depression, as a result of feelings of guilt, loneliness, self-closure.
- A negative language against the other party should be banned in the presence of the child from both parents, as this induces the children into negative experiences, feelings of guilt and brings self-assessment problems, inferiority complexes in the future, in addition to the negative image of one parent and consequently weakening of the very important parent-child relationships.
- It is worth noting that for important decisions in the lives of children and for their interest, it is necessary to restore a positive distance communication with parents by being more cooperative and well-coordinated in the possible worrisome issues for the well-being of children in the future, which should be welcomed by both parents for the best interest of the child.
- The value of psycho-social assessment in courts for the assignment of parental custody that social workers and psychologists take during divorce should be temporary, because it refers to the dynamism of the teenage situation under current conditions. By changing the factors or elements considered as the balance of the children, it is not excluded the reassessment of their state of psycho-emotional elements, interpersonal relationships

with each parent, socio-economic conditions associated with the highest interest of children.

- Although psychosocial service in schools has been established for many years, school psychologists/social workers still need training in the field of identification, treatment and referral of children with psycho-social problems, who experience trauma in the family such as divorce. For this reason, communication between psychologists and social workers of schools and those in court dealing with the divorce process should not be superficial, but prolonged in time and productive.
- Establish a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators that would enable monitoring of the quality of care provided in psycho-social services in schools for adolescents with divorced parents, etc

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