

ABSTRACT

Effects of family disruption according to parental relationship quality on children's school readiness

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BACKGROUND: We explore the effect of parental divorce on children with parents in high and low-distress unions. Despite the increasing importance of this subject, only few papers in previous research have examined this field and all suffer limitations. We propose a statistical model tailored to enhance causal effects. Additionally, we consider to what extent parental temporary separation has negative effects on children.

OBJECTIVE: We attempt to establish the interrelationship between parental divorce or temporary separation and parental relationship quality and to explore how the latter affects the cognitive abilities and psychological dimensions of children at age five.

METHODS: Data are drawn from the first three waves of the Millennium Cohort Study, a longitudinal and representative UK survey, thus covering the period from 2000 to 2006. Using an appropriate imputation method, we apply the augmented inverse propensity weighted estimator.

RESULTS: We find that the dissolution of high-quality parental unions has the most harmful effects on children, especially concerning conduct problems. We also find that children who experienced parental temporary separation - which has been absent in most previous research - show higher conduct and hyperactivity problems than children from stable or divorced families.

CONTRIBUTION: We illustrate that temporary separation may increase inattention and peer problems on children. We show the substantial variation on consequences of parental divorce according to parental relationship quality.

CONCLUSIONS: Our findings indicate that early childhood programs and interventions should be developed to target children especially at risk that are those experiencing parental temporary separation and parental divorce from parents not reporting poor relationship quality before the event.

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