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Parental Stress and Parent-Child Relationships in Recently Divorced, Custodial Mothers

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Walden University, 2007

BA, University of Akron 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Psychology

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Abstract

Divorce creates significant stress that can have an impact on parent-child relationship satisfaction. Past researchers have indicated that in times of high stress, parents may not be available for their children due to their personal issues. Attachment theory demonstrates the importance of the parent-child bond for the child as he or she matures, so this bond needs to be protected. The purpose of this quantitative, nonexperimental study was to examine the predictive relationship between parental stress as measured by the Parenting Stress Index, 4th Edition, Short Form (PSI-4-SF) and the parent-child relationship satisfaction as measured by the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) following a separation or divorce. A sample of 17 recently separated or divorced, custodial mothers who had at least one child between the ages 5-13 years were recruited through local schools and the Walden Participant Pool. They completed the PSI-4-SF, the PCRI, and a demographics questionnaire. A correlation analysis was conducted to analyze the relationship between parental stress and the level of parent-child relationship satisfaction, which was found to possess a significant negative relationship. Multiple regression analyses were then conducted, but neither child gender or child age influenced this relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction. However, mothers did report higher parent-child relationship satisfaction when their child was male. This study has a small sample size, so results do need to be approached with caution. This knowledge of which families may be most at risk for increased stress may promote positive social change by providing professionals insight into which families may be most in need to learn stress control and management to help protect the parent-child relationship.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving husband, who has been so patient and supportive through this long journey. This project is also dedicated to my three amazing children, Payton, Jonathan, and Kyle. I hope that I have set a positive example of how to multitask and achieve your goals no matter what obstacles get in your way.

Acknowledgements

There are so many people that have had a hand in helping me complete this dissertation. I would first like to acknowledge my husband for being so willing to take over for me with the kids so I could focus. I would also like to acknowledge Stephanie Childers. She has not only been a great friend, but has also many times helped our family out so I could get more work done. Also, I would like to thank Ellen Correll, the superintendent for the local school district for allowing me to advertise this study to the parents in the district.

I would like to thank Dr. Magy Martin, my committee chair, for her extreme patience, guidance, and timely feedback. I would also like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Essel for coming on to my committee to guide the statistical aspects of my dissertation. Dr. Brian Zamboni also provided insightful suggestions in making sure my work was up to university standards.

Throughout this process, many fellow students have been in the dissertation classroom with me. Some have gone on to graduate, while others are still working hard. The classroom that we shared has always been a supportive and positive place that anyone can post ideas or questions. I have heard that this positive feeling is not always the case, so I want to thank Dr. Martin for fostering this classroom atmosphere and to the classmates that were always willing to jump into a conversation to try and help with whatever the situation called for. This was truly helpful.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Divorce is one of the most stressful life changing events a person may experience (Lamela & Figueiredo, 2011). Recent U.S. census data has indicated that close to 2 million adults go through a divorce each year (Center for Disease Control, 2015). Seventeen percent of marriages end before the fifth anniversary, and an additional 28% end before their 15th anniversary, which means that children also may be affected by divorce (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Currently, no data exist on how many children are affected by divorce each year; however, given the divorce rates and the average length of marriage, it is assumed that this number is significant. The divorce process typically disrupts a child's daily routine, which can cause stress and have a long-term effect on the child's attachment to his or her parents (Sutherland, Altenhofen, & Biringen, 2012). Parental divorce can drastically alter the parent-child relationship, and in the long-term, a parental divorce can affect the romantic confidence and commitment of the child who lived through it (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Rosenthal, 2013). The first year following a separation or divorce is the most difficult; thus, making quick, decisive actions are key for the well-being of the children (Cohen & Finzi-Dottan, 2005). Positive social change can occur once a connection is demonstrated between parental stress and the parent-child relationships satisfaction. If certain child ages or gender are shown to predict increased parental stress, researchers can then focus more on these characteristics of the family. Professionals might then be able to inform and teach divorcing parents about the importance of stress management and how stress could have an impact on the

relationship with their children. Additionally, this could lead to more focused research into the effects of parental stress and interventions that could be implemented and further investigated.

This chapter includes the problem of divorce involving children, the purpose of the proposed study, the research question and hypotheses, and an introduction to the theoretical basis for this paper, which is attachment theory (AT). This chapter also includes definitions that will be used throughout the literature review. The assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study will be addressed before transitioning into Chapter 2.

Background

More than 850,000 couples legally divorced in 2012 in the United States, although not all states keep records, so the actual number is higher (Center for Disease Control, 2015). Given the divorce rates and the finding that 50% of divorced adults remarry in less than four years (Kreider & Ellis, 2011), it is likely that many children will experience the divorce of their parents and the divorce of at least one of their biological parents and a stepparent, thus making this a problem that affects many thousands of children on multiple levels.

The relationship a child has with his or her parents is often the first, most important, and longest lasting lifetime relationship. Throughout the years, this relationship can evolve and change in many ways, hopefully resulting in a positive experience for both parent and child. According to AT, this parent-child relationship is mostly based on protection, comfort, and support (Bowlby, 1988). If those elements are

missing or inconsistent, there could be concerns. During and immediately following a separation, the parent who lives with the child may have less time and energy to parent his or her children in the same way as before the divorce, especially if the parent has returned to school or work (Sutherland et al., 2012; Wallerstein et al., 2013). This sudden emotional and sometimes physical unavailability of parents at a time of family crisis can permanently damage even the best of parent-child relationships. This life change also affects the communication between parents and children, the trust in this precious dynamic, and their openness to share with one another (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). When parents are not available or when children are unable to trust their parents, they may turn to peers for companionship. However, children with feelings of loneliness, anger, and confusion may be more open to more negative peer activities such as delinquent acts or alcohol abuse (Wallerstein et al., 2013). The adjustment period following a divorce can sometimes take months or even years for both adults and children (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010).

Divorce has an impact on the divorcing adults by completely changing their lives and daily routines which can be extremely stressful. One or both parents may need to find a new house or apartment. If one adult has been a stay-at-home caregiver, he or she might need to return to work to pay bills (Sutherland et al., 2012). Starting daycare or spending increased hours with a babysitter can be upsetting for some children at this turbulent time. With financial strain, increased stress, and tension between adults, many children experience emotional, physical, and mental health consequences that may go unnoticed by otherwise distracted parents (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Kahl et al. (2007) reported

that this overall stress felt by adults going through a divorce and the stress felt by the children is problematic in many ways, disrupting many areas of children's lives, including social, economic, and academic.

Researchers have emphasized the importance of the parent-child relationship in the short term as well as the long term, when the adult child may engage in a romantic relationship of his or her own (Wallerstein, 2005). However, while researchers have found that stress occurs during divorce, the levels of stress a parent feels and how this influences the parent-child relationship was lacking in the literature. Only one somewhat similar study was found; however, the authors focused on parental conflict and its impact on the parent-child relationship (Hakvoort, Bos, Van Balen, & Hermanns, 2012).

This study added to the existing literature by helping researchers understand the importance of parental stress and the effect the stress can have on the parent-child relationship if left unmanaged. While there is considerable research regarding children of divorce and the outcomes they may experience in a negative situation, it is unclear what personal characteristics of the child predict this outcome or to what degree parental stress affects parent-child relationship satisfaction. The results of this study will help guide researchers in understanding the severity of this scenario, which will be a positive first step in understanding the need for taking quick steps to help parents manage their stress levels so they can effectively parent their children with minimal negative effects on their relationship.

Problem Statement

When parental stress levels are increased, the communication between parents and children may be affected, thus leading to an increase in tension and fighting. A parent's increase in stress also can affect their ability to parent consistently and reliably, which can negatively influence the relationship they have with their child (Taylor, Purswell, Lindo, Jayne, & Fernando 2011). The timeframe during a parental separation and divorce can result in significant stress to all family members, making this a time of concern for researchers. After reaching an all-time high in 1980, divorce rates remained consistently high, with remarriage rates being frequent at about 50% within four years of divorce, and this rate does not appear to be dropping (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). In other countries such as China, Mexico, and numerous European countries, the divorce rate continues to rise making this a worldwide concern for families experiencing this life event (González & Viitanen, 2009; Swedberg, 2009; & Wang & Zhou, 2010).

It was difficult to find research in this specific area. Even with approximately 500 scholarly research articles published each year focusing on divorce (Anderson & Greene, 2013), there are still gaps in the literature that need to be addressed, not only in the United States, but globally to find effective ways to protect adults and children involved with a parental divorce. Numerous researchers have focused on stress (Hakvoort et al., 2012; Huurre et al., 2006; Kristjansson et al., 2009), and even more studies have focused on the parent-child relationship (Sutherland et al., 2012; Wallerstein et al., 2013; Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge, & Bates, 2010); however, an extensive literature search has resulted in no articles that examine this specific relationship. Examining this relationship

between parental stress, the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship, and the child's age and gender provided insight into parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction. The findings will help to fill the gap in the literature, thus showing that the families going through a separation or divorce need intervention or education quickly to avoid potential damage to the parent-child relationship.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study, which used a nonexperimental design, was to determine if the parent's stress level predicted parent-child relationship satisfaction as reported by the mothers. In this study, I also looked at child gender and child age to see if either of these characteristics influenced the strength or direction of the relationship between parental stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. To attempt to ensure there were no other demographic characteristics that had influenced either parental stress or the parent-child relationship satisfaction, I also examined personal characteristics, such as the mother's age, mother's education, and the ethnicity of both mother and child, the separation status of the parents, and the amount of father involvement. The characteristics that exhibited an influence on either variable were first entered as control variables and will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. This study not only helped to fill the gap in the literature, but it demonstrated that parental stress had an influence on the parent-child relationship satisfaction and this could help guide further research with families that are recently separated or divorced.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1: Is the stress level of recently separated or divorced custodial mothers associated with the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction?

$H_0$1: The parental stress of the recently separated or divorced custodial mother will not be associated with the parent-child relationship satisfaction, as measured by the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI.

H_a1: The parental stress of the recently separated or divorced custodial mother will be associated with a negative satisfaction level of the parent-child relationship, as measured by the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI.

Research Question 2: Does the child's gender moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction?

$H_0$2: The child's gender will not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction.

H_a2: An increased report of parental stress will be associated with a lower parent-child relationship satisfaction and this relationship will be greater when the child is male compared to female.

Research Question 3: Does the child's age moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship?

$H_0$3: The child's age will not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction.

H_a3: The relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction will be moderated by the child's age. It is hypothesized that as the child gets older, this effect will be greater.

A demographics questionnaire was first given to each participant to better understand who the population was comprised of regarding age, ethnicity, education, the number of children in the household, the children's ages and gender, and time elapsed since separation or divorce. I first explored the relationships between these characteristics. I then entered the demographic characteristics that possessed additional significance criterion as covariates in all appropriate analyses. I reported on these significant characteristics in Chapters 4 and 5.

Theoretical Framework

AT was the theoretical framework in which this study was based due to its emphasis on a basic system in living things, attachment (Ainsworth, 1989). AT helps to explain the relationships that parents and children have with one another throughout their lives (Bowlby, 1979). One of the most important human relationships is that between parents and their children; however, many factors can threaten or damage this relationship including a parental divorce and the caregiver not being physically or emotionally available to the child in times of need (Bowlby, 1988).

AT has had many decades of research and support to maintain its credibility. This instinctual bond between caregivers and their children is important, as it can have a

significant effect on the caregiver-child relationship well into adulthood. Further, this bond can have a positive impact on individual well-being (Bowlby, 1979) and influence peer and romantic relationships. Stress is one such factor that can damage both the attachment style of the involved children and the ongoing parent-child relationship. AT will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 with relation to behaviors both caregivers and children display and the corresponding attachment styles that can influence other areas of an individual's life, especially in friendships and romantic relationships.

Nature of Study

In this quantitative study, I examined the predictive relationship between parental stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship with mothers who have recently experienced a separation or divorce. The mother's stress was measured using the Parenting Stress Index, 4th edition, short form (PSI-4-SF) (Abidin, 2012). The satisfaction of the parent-child relationship was measured by the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI; Gerard, 1994). Both the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI were adapted for online use with the permission of the respective publishers. All survey questions were the same as the print version but were online as a convenience for the participants. Self-report surveys were used due to the ease at which larger numbers of participants can be reached in a relatively brief timeframe (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Once mothers agreed to participate by reading and accepting the informed consent, they first filled out a brief demographics questionnaire. I first analyzed demographics items, such as the mother's age, ethnicity, education, time since separation or divorce, and the amount of time the father spends with the children were to see if any statistical relationships emerged. The statistical

relationships that emerged within the demographics were entered as covariates in all analyses where appropriate and then were reported on in Chapters 4 and 5. Responses from participants were collected through a secure online website (SurveyMonkey) via self-report. All participants utilized a password-protected link that directed them to the informed consent, which was authorized electronically, a demographic questionnaire, the PSI-4-SF, and the PCRI. A correlation was run to analyze the relationship between parental and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. Then multiple regression analyses were run to analyze the data regarding the child's gender or age being a moderator of the effect of parental stress and the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) found that when the face-to-face component of research is taken away, participants may feel like they can be more truthful because they have an increased feeling of remaining anonymous. This observation was made about surveys that are mailed to participants. It is assumed that online, anonymous research will also have this effect and participants will feel comfortable enough to be truthful, even if the truthful responses are not socially desirable.

Prospective participants were recruited by an advertisement in the online newsletter of a local school district, which reaches approximately 2000 families. This newsletter was e-mailed to parents once every two weeks and included news from the school, the district, and the community. The e-mailed newsletter and Facebook were among the most reasonable, cost-effective routes to reach a large population of parents. Due to the private nature of divorce, it is not feasible to address only the parents who are

separated or divorced. While the school employees may have known of some families that qualified for this study, they were not going to provide this confidential information for research purposes. The school district included students in kindergarten through eighth grade and is in a diverse part of the Midwestern United States. This school district is a consolidated district which means that families that attend are in several different though nearby towns. The school district also shared this opportunity with their families by posting a link to the study invitation on their Facebook page, which has over 2000 followers. Prospective participants were instructed to contact me via an e-mail address that was set up for this study for more information. Since participant recruitment was difficult due to the private nature of divorce, it was also necessary to utilize the Walden Participant Pool. Even after a significant amount of time, the ideal sample was not reached. This will be discussed more in later chapters.

A separate e-mail just for this study was set up as another way to make potential participants feel more comfortable sharing their experiences by feeling anonymous. This was a password-protected e-mail account that was only used for this study. It will be monitored after the study is completed in case participants wish to follow up and ask questions. Those who e-mailed me and were willing to participate were e-mailed the website link and password to enter the study. The publishers of the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI allowed these surveys to be adapted for online use; however, additional security needed to be utilized to protect these copyrighted surveys from being seen by anyone with Internet access. Employing a password-protected link on SurveyMonkey and

controlling the number of participants who received this password satisfactorily addressed the publishers' security concern.

Definitions of Key Terms

Attachment theory: AT describes the relationships that parent and children have with each other that later influence peer and romantics relationships (Bowlby, 1979).

Coparenting: Coparenting is the ability of separated or divorced parents to work together to raise their child and to meet their child's needs (Roberson, Sabo, & Wickel, 2011).

Divorce: A divorce is the legal ending of marriage (Cyr, Di Stefano, & Desjardins, 2013).

Legal custody: Legal custody refers to who retains the legal authority to make decisions for the child (Braver, Ellman, Votruba, & Fabricius, 2011).

Marital separation: Marital separation is the decision made by a married couple to live apart from one another due to marital problems (Hartman, Magalhães, & Mandich, 2011).

Negative life event: A negative life event can include the loss of a parent, parental divorce, a life-threatening illness (of a parent or child), a parent psychiatric disorder, and sexual or physical abuse (Strine et al., 2012).

Parent-child relationship: Parent-child relationship, according to Taylor et al. (2011) is the way in which a parent describes the relationship he or she has with his or her child. This may be a positive description or could include the parent's desire to be more connected to his or her child.

Parenting stress: Parenting stress is the feeling a parent has when he or she believes that he or she is unable to handle the parenting demands (real or perceived) at a moment (Harkvoort et al., 2012).

Postdivorce adjustment: Postdivorce adjustment is the process of adapting to the life changes that result from divorce as well as obtaining psychological and emotional well-being at some point after the divorce (Krumrei, Coit, Martin, Fogo, & Mahoney, 2007).

Residential or physical custody: Residential or physical custody refers to where the child lives a most of the time (Braver et al., 2011).

Separation: A separation is when a romantic relationship deteriorates to the point where the couple decides to live apart from one another (Cyr et al., 2013).

Shared parenting, joint physical custody, or equal parenting: Shared parenting, joint physical custody, or equal parenting is a situation when the child spends about half of his or her time with each parent (Kruk, 2012).

Assumptions

It was assumed that participants who volunteered for this study did not intentionally bias the results. It was further assumed that participants would understand the informed consent and would give appropriate answers to the questions asked of them. Also, it was assumed that participants would answer honestly, would recall with close accuracy the time frame since their separation or divorce, and would recall the recent events in their lives regarding answering the questions on the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI. It was also assumed that if more than one child lived in the household, the parent would

correctly recall the events involving that target child, which they would be asked to identify by age and gender on the demographics questionnaire before beginning the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI. It was assumed that this sample was representative of the parent population in this Midwest area. Making these assumptions helps us to clarify that, in research, not all things are within a researcher's control. As a researcher, I believe that these previously stated things are true but have limited means of proving this.

Scope and Delimitations

The relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction was examined in this study with recently separated or divorced mothers. This relationship was identified as being one such area of professional research that has been overlooked and not previously investigated. Multiple researchers implied that stress can affect parent-child relationships (Sutherland et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2011; Wallerstein et al., 2013); however, an extensive literature search and review failed to locate any studies that demonstrated this fact. Additionally, the strength of this relationship, should one exist, needs to be measured. This study also aimed to examine the child's gender and the child's age as moderators between parental stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. Researchers have demonstrated that children of divorce can exhibit numerous outcomes following a parental separation and divorce, these outcomes can vary greatly depending on the child's age (Lansford et al., 2006). For example, the older a child is, the more likely they might be to try alcohol or engage in other deviant behavior instead of talking about what is going on at home. However, a young child might show his or her emotions by crying or throwing a tantrum. These behaviors may

have an impact on parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction. Daughters tend to be emotionally closer to their mothers than sons (Beelmann & Schmidt-Denter, 2009). Following a separation or divorce, this typical closeness may change. Therefore, this study aims to examine this to see what the effect is on parental stress or the parent-child relationship satisfaction.

For this study to be feasible to conduct, decisions were made as to how to make this study researchable in a reasonable time frame. One such decision was only to include custodial mothers, rather than including mothers and fathers. This was based off on recent custodial arrangement estimates which indicated that mothers retain custody of the children in 68-88% of cases, while fathers only retain custody in 8-14% of cases (Braver et al., 2011). This decision was also based on the findings of Breivik and Olweus (2006), who reported many behavior problems with children who lived only with the father. This finding could be due to various unknown problems with the mother not being able or fit to take custody of the children.

The population criteria of mothers being divorced within two years was based on the frequently cited *crisis period* time frame following a separation or divorce (Vélez, Wolchik, Tein, & Sandler, 2011). Vélez et al. (2011) and Sigal, Wolchik, Tein, and Sandler (2012) guided this study's exclusion criteria of mothers who were not remarried or residing with a romantic partner. This was to remove the potential stress that comes with additional relationship transitions for the mother and for children. The results of this study have limited generalizability. With such as small sample, generalizing the results should be done with caution.

AT was the theoretical framework for this study due to its overall abundance of published research about to parent-child relationships as the child ages and matures. Mary Ainsworth has stated that the main strength of AT in research is due to its dedication to the biological basis of a person's behaviors (Ainsworth, 1989). There is also significant research regarding how parental divorce can affect the child and the parent-child relationship.

Limitations

Limitations to this study pertained to potential problems with the study design, which includes limitations to external and internal validity. Threats or issues related to internal validity were minimal in this study. Every participant completed the same demographic questionnaire as well as the same assessments (PSI-4-SF and the PCRI). First, participants read of this opportunity via electronic, e-mailed newsletter or Facebook, then they were asked to reach out to me via e-mail, so there was some familiarity with using computers or tablets on the part of the participants. Because this study was a confidential Internet study, the selection bias was minimal. Participants who contacted the me and then followed through and complete all assessments were included in the study. The mood the participant was in at the time she decided to log in and complete the surveys was beyond my control and could have been influenced by multiple conditions, as could exact feelings of stress at that moment. No intervention or treatment was offered; hence, social threats to the internal validity were eliminated.

Threats to external validity are that only participants who saw this invitation for the study who had Internet access and responded could participate. The findings may

reflect self-report bias, as participants may not have accurately and truthfully responded to all questions due to the use of the self-reported questionnaires. This study included those who had separated or divorced within the past two years, which ruled out valuable input from those divorced parents who may otherwise have been willing to participate. However, Mitchell (2010) reported that over two-thirds of respondents miscalculated their divorce date by 3 months on average. While this should not have greatly affected the data gathered, it does need to be considered when looking at the external validity of the study. This study included families with at least one child ages 5-13 years, thus excluding numerous families with children from a different age group. Participants completed this study from various computers or tablets in various locations. In this type of study, the researcher was unable to ensure that the location was private and quiet with minimal distractions. Possibly due to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, it was found that an adequate sample size is difficult to obtain. An additional challenge to recruitment with this population, of recently separated or divorced mothers, was that professionals that work with these women are highly protective of them. Attorneys, support groups leaders, and mediators were unwilling or felt ethically unable to present this study opportunity to their client or group members. The most frequent reason for this decision to not participate was that they did not want to add stress to these mothers by asking them to complete the study.

Significance of the Study

It was important to assess the relationship between parental stress and subsequent state of the parent-child relationship satisfaction to determine whether there was a need for intervention or education to prevent or undo damage associated within this 2-year timeframe in a separation or divorce. While divorce can influence many areas of parents' and the children's lives, not many studies have been published on the effect of parental stress on the parent-child relationship, leading me to believe there is still much unknown about the effects of postdivorce parental stress on the parent-child relationship. Additionally, examining specific demographic aspects of the participants and their families, such as the age and gender of the child to see if stress was influenced by these factors could give researchers insight as to which families, with certain characteristics, could need more assistance in getting through this tough time frame. While this is a small step toward a huge problem, it addresses concerns that millions of people face each year, not only in the United States but worldwide. Divorce rates are rising in numerous countries worldwide, which had previously been low occurrences; this rise is possibly due to the introduction of women's rights to developing countries (Kneip & Bauer, 2009; Swedberg, 2009; Wang & Zhou, 2010), thus making these findings promising for all regions of the globe.

This study has implications for positive social change at the individual, familial, global, and societal levels. This study has implications for positive social change by providing a better understanding of the degree to which parental stress affects the parent-child relationship satisfaction and what child characteristics may be exacerbating this

effect. Quantitative studies assessing these concerns are currently absent from the available literature.

Summary

Included in Chapter 1 is the background for this proposed study, demonstrating that not enough is known about the effect parental stress has on parent-child relationship satisfaction. According to AT, one of the most important relationships in someone's life is with their caregiver, which is usually the parents (Bowlby, 1979). This relationship needs to be protected from stressful life events such as a divorce. If children seek out their parents for comfort during this time, they may find that parent is not available emotionally or physically. This, over time, can result in a negative change in the parent-child relationship dynamic (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). Parents and children who experience a divorce need assistance in this challenging time. Life changes that stem from a parental separation or divorce have a ripple effect on many areas of daily life, such as school and living situation, in addition to emotional and mental health effects that can last well into adulthood (Wallerstein et al., 2013).

Also, reported in this chapter was a brief overview of AT, the guiding theoretical basis for this study. The nature and variables of this study were discussed, which consisted of measuring the parental stress levels and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. Key definitions, assumptions, and limitations were outlined to provide clarification. The research questions and hypotheses were introduced, as was a brief introduction to the study which will be given in much greater detail in Chapter 3.

The significance of this study was provided to show the study's goal to add to the current literature on parental stress and its effects on the parent-child relationship satisfaction.

Provided in Chapter 2 is a more comprehensive overview of AT, which helps to explain much about the parent-child relationship from birth until adulthood. A detailed review of the existing literature on children of divorce, including parental stress and the parent-child relationship will be presented. Additionally, Chapter 2 includes several types of parenting relationships that can affect the family dynamics and plays a significant role in the family stress and well-being.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Little is known about the direct link between parental stress and the resulting parent-child relationship satisfaction. Although thousands of scholarly research articles pertain to children of divorce and their parents, this specific area lacks research. The parent-child relationship is precious and could be permanently damaged in many ways, such as the parent withdrawing from the child to deal with his or her own adult issues during the separation and divorce process.

With the number of divorces remaining high and involving numerous children worldwide, it is imperative that researchers find ways to protect the breakdown of the parent-child relationship. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parental stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. Additionally, demographic variables were examined to see if factors, such as the child age or the child gender influenced parental stress and the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. Also examined were the other demographics variable collected, such as the mother's age, education, or ethnicity to see if any significant relationships emerged that were not previously researched and reported upon in the literature.

It is well understood that a separation and divorce could be an extremely stressful experience not only for the adults but for children adjusting to the changes in their lives. Amato and Cheadle (2008) pointed out that a divorce is not a simple one-day event for a family. Many issues precede an actual separation, and the recovery process can be long. Hakvoort et al. (2012) reported that parental stress could have a negative impact on the

parent-child relationship; however, we do not know to what degree nor do we know what specifically causes the parental stress. It is unknown now the amount of damage parental stress following a separation or divorce could do to the child, the adult, and the parent-child relationship in the short and long-term.

AT was used as the guiding principle with this research because it focuses on the parent-child relationship from birth until adulthood. The ways in which the attachment styles and bonds are tried are discussed along with ways in which the attachment styles can change over time (Bowlby, 1988).

This chapter begins with the methods used to locate relevant literature. A brief review of Bowlby's AT (1988), which is followed by current literature that uses AT as it relates to children and families facing divorce. An overview of divorce as a worldwide problem is included. Next, ways in which stress can manifest itself within the family unit before and after a separation or divorce will be addressed as will the effects the children may feel and react to. Some concerns regarding the postdivorce mother-child relationship are presented as are concerns regarding the postdivorce father-child relationship. The child characteristics that are of special interest in this study are then highlighted. This chapter concludes with a brief overview of seeking help during this transition and why some divorces could be considered a good thing.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature reviewed was located through several universities and library databases. When searching the PsycINFO database, the following search terms were

used: *divorce and children, divorce and adolescents, children of divorce, children of divorce and adolescent development, children of divorce and family relations, children of divorce and family, children of divorce and divorce, parent stress and divorce, and children of divorce and child custody*. When using the University of Akron's Electronic Journal Center, which also includes PsycINFO, the following search terms were entered: *children of divorce, divorce and children and stress,* and *divorce and stress*. Many of the original articles used by Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby had been located, printed, and saved many years ago as a student at the University of Akron. At that time, students at the University of Akron could access these historical articles through the History of Psychology Archives. The more recent searches for literature were restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles that mostly employed quantitative research methods. No specific years were entered as search criteria; however, older sources were eliminated when appropriate, and the most current articles were utilized. Numerous valuable sources were from approximately 10-15 years ago; however, no more current articles with the same information could be located. When looking for appropriate assessment tools, the Mental Measurement Yearbook database through Walden University was utilized using the search terms *stress and children* as well as *divorce*.

Attachment Theory

The theoretical framework upon which this study was based is AT, which was proposed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth in the 1940s. AT helps explain the behaviors of children based upon their relationship with their parents or other caregivers

(Bowlby, 1979). Attachment is the relationship that two individuals share (Ainsworth, 1969) and has several characteristics: (a) directed at a small number of people, (b) long lasting, (c) involves many shared emotions, (d) involves most of one's time being spent with the mother at the beginning of life, (e) involves both people in an attachment relationship learning from one another, (f) involves a fairly consistent organization pattern, and (g) involves an obvious biological aspect to protect each species (Bowlby, 1979).

Caregivers, often mothers, are the secure base for the child to return to after exploring his or her environment. Even babies as young as eight months start to investigate their world in short distances from their mothers; however, they frequently return to them or look at them for security to know it is safe to continue exploring (Bowlby, 1979). The child with a trusted secure base will go further and further away from his or her mother but will return in order reduce anxieties felt in the exploration (Bowlby, 1973). These attachment behaviors help babies form ideas about successful interactions and relationships. Not only does the mother need to be the secure base for the child, but she also needs to be aware of and respect her child's attachment needs and behaviors (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment behaviors are instinctive from infancy and are typically first noted between the ages of 6 and 12 months old (Bowlby, 1979). These lessen in frequency and intensity around the time the child is 3 years-old, when the child is confident enough to separate from the mother for small periods of time (Bowlby, 1958). Later in life, a child's relationships as an adolescent and into adulthood are influenced by the attachment he or she shared with the childhood caregiver in which can

be identified as being in three main categories; secure, anxious resistant, and anxious avoidant (Bowlby, 1973; 1988). More recently, a fourth attachment type for those children who did not fit neatly into one attachment category was proposed. This fourth attachment style was labeled disorganized (Purvis, McKenzie, Kellerman, & Cross, 2010).

The ways in which the primary caregiver interacts with an infant greatly influences the response of the child when the distance between the parent and child increases. The attachment style will be more secure if the child's needs are met immediately. For example, an infant, when crying for food or a diaper change, will benefit from his or her mother or another caregiver who comes quickly and consistently during crying fits. Infants want not only a clean diaper or milk but, also the caregivers' various soothing techniques, such as their voice, rocking, or being held by them (Bowlby, 1958).

AT helps explain why the quality and quantity spent with each parent is so important for the parent-child relationship. Although Bowlby and Ainsworth introduced AT and have provided a plethora of information, countless researchers have continued their efforts to expand on the theory and keep it relevant. In doing so, many have identified not only additional characteristics of parents and infants but also have described the children's potential behaviors at various ages. Parents are key in the attachment style formation in their children (Bowlby, 1973).

A secure attachment is in part created by a caregiver who quickly and appropriately takes care of a child's needs, and most children do fall into this category.

This caregiver also helps the child reduce his or her stress by being there as a secure base (Lowenstein, 2010). Caregivers are typically more emotionally available to their children and appropriately use discipline (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). Secure children are confident that their caregiver will be responsive and available when they need them and overall are less anxious (Bowlby, 1973; 1988). They also possess a sense of worthiness as well as a belief that people are accepting (Platt, Nalbone, Casanova, & Wetchler, 2008). Teti, Nakagawa, Das, and Wirth (1991) shared that as preschoolers, children with secure attachments are less irritable, show fewer instances of avoidance and exhibit less aggressive actions toward their mothers or main caregivers.

Anxious-resistant children are not sure whether their caregiver will be readily available or responsive to their needs. These children exhibit anxiety when separated from their caregiver for fear they may not return. Anxious-resistant children frequently cling to their caregiver (Bowlby, 1988). A child with a resistant attachment style has been exposed to highly inconsistent parenting styles. His or her caregiver may go from being responsive and appropriate to the child's needs to be ignoring the child's needs. These children become concerned with their caregiver's responses to the point of showing signs of stress (Lowenstein, 2010).

Anxious-avoidant children possess little or no confidence that their caregiver will respond when needed. As children with an anxious-avoidant attachment type get older, they often let other children push them around. To keep this stressful situation with other children from occurring they attempt to keep a distance which prevents them from making friends. Parents of children with anxious-avoidant attachment styles may have

frequently refused or been unavailable to provide comfort or protection to their child when they needed it (Bowlby, 1988). Avoidant attachments typical have a caregiver who does not respond to the child when he or she is in need. In this case, the child also might be overly encouraged to be independent (Lowenstein, 2010).

Lastly, children with disorganized attachment do not fit neatly into any one attachment style (Purvis et al., 2010). The behaviors these children exhibit is too inconsistent to able to categorize them as anything different. A child with disorganized attachment has experienced a caregiver who is filled with dangerous or frightening behaviors such as abuse or other actions that a child could perceive as being threatening. In this case, communication is often confusing, and the roles that should be in place can be confusing as well (Lowenstein, 2010). The primary source of the trouble is that the child needs the parent, but is also afraid of them (Purvis et al., 2010) which accounts for the inconsistent attachment behaviors that may fluctuate dependent on the parent's perceived mood at the time.

People who do not possess a secure attachment more often see others as untrustworthy and as having negative intentions (Platt et al., 2008). In adolescence, attachment types manifest themselves in many ways. Adolescents who are avoidant can be described as quiet, possibly withdrawn, and sometimes have anger outbursts (Atwool, 2006). Page and Bretherton (2003) reported that an insecure attachment (which includes anxious resistant, avoidant, and disorganized), in addition to an unstable family environment, often resulted in increased anxiety in children about whether their noncustodial parent would be available if they needed them.

Attachment Through Divorce

These attachment styles can change over time, so determining what actions can influence these negative changes and finding ways to prevent negativity is key to a child's well-being. In households in which parental separation is a frequent threat, the attachment styles of children to their parents can change in a negative direction. The child also may experience anxiety and fear over this separation threat even if it never occurs (Bowlby, 1979). Pain, fatigue, and things a child can view as frightening, as well as the mother (or main caregiver) not being available, can all negatively influence ongoing attachment behaviors. Parents can help create a positive attachment relationship by being aware of and respecting their child's attachment behaviors (Bowlby, 1988). The parent-child relationship is based on protection, support, and comfort.

Stressful life events can increase the likelihood of someone's attachment style transitioning from secure to insecure by about 66%; however, when no major negative life event occurs, this transition to insecure attachment occurs only about 15% of the time (Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011). The forming of an attachment bond is a gradual process as is the breaking or damaging the attachment bond. When difficult events such as a divorce occur, the bond with a parent who moves out will not be severed; however, without contact and an attempt at some ongoing relationship this bond may diminish over time (Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011).

While fathers may be concerned about being there to tuck the child in at night or not being in the house when the child has a bad dream, Sroufe and McIntosh (2011) reported that day-time visits could be much more helpful in maintaining the secure

attachment bonds that have been built over the years. Additionally, it has been pointed out that there is no set number of hours of contact needed to create or maintain a secure attachment, and consistent, ongoing positive contact will protect this relationship. However, Main, Hesse, and Hesse (2011) reported on the noncustodial parent spending time with the child. It is reported that taking the child out for a meal or to a movie might not be enough quality time for the parent-child relationship to strengthen. It is recommended that the parent attempt to engage the child in a long-term project that they do together, such as a large puzzle or planting a garden, so the child will be more excited to come back and see not only the project but the parent.

As children get older, the ways in which they are attached to a caregiver becomes more difficult to determine. As babies, it is appropriate to be held by a caregiver; however, older children do not tend to show as much open affection to their parents (Ludolph, 2009). During major life stressors, it may be noted that children may start to reengage attachment behaviors, even if these actions have not been present in quite some time. However; Faber and Whittenborn (2010) cited that the potential problem resides in the parents' availability and responsiveness to these attachment behaviors. If not available for their child, physically or emotionally, for an extended time frame the parent-child relationship could suffer. If the parent then becomes available to the child again, this negative effect could be reversed, and the parent-child attachment relationship could return to its former state.

The current study has built upon AT by demonstrating the connection between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction. Now that it has been shown

that parental stress immediately following a divorce results in a lower parent-child relationship satisfaction, future research can be aimed towards reducing parental stress to protect the parent-child relationship.

Divorce Overview

In recent decades, divorce has become a more common occurrence, with divorce rates remaining significantly high since reaching an all-time high in 1980 in the United States. Divorce rates have been steadily increasing in most industrialized countries (Kneip & Bauer, 2009), meaning that children in much of the world are experiencing the separation of their parents (Hakvoort, Bos, Van Balen, & Hermanns, 2011). Divorce has a direct impact on more than 2 million adults each year in the United States (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). For several decades researchers have been speculating why divorce rates are so high and figuring out how to quickly and effectively help families that are going through this transition.

One reason the divorce rates had once been lower is that in the 1950s, a significant stigma was associated with divorce (Neale & Flowerdew, 2007); thus, divorce was not yet considered a national concern due to its rare occurrence. Children of divorced parents were considered from 'broken homes' (Kelly, 2003). Between the years of 1966 and 1976, divorce rates grew by 113%, calling for more research on this issue. The term broken home is no longer a common way to describe divorced or separated families, thus demonstrating the decrease of the previously attached stigma associated with divorce (Abbey & Dallos, 2004).

European divorce rate also has risen due to new legislation adopted. Divorce used to be banned, except in cases where one spouse could prove adultery or physical abuse (González & Viitanen, 2009). Now many countries allow for 'no fault' divorces and will still permit a divorce even if one person does not want the divorce to occur (Kneip & Bauer, 2009). Divorce rates also have increased significantly in Mexico since the 1900s due to changes in legislation; thus, these rates now make divorce a global issue, not just an U.S. issue (Swedberg, 2009). Worldwide rates of divorce can vary greatly, with the United States ranking the highest at 50% (McCarthy & Ginsberg, 2007) and China's divorce rate as high as 26%. However, with over 1 billion people in China, having up to 26% of marriages end in divorce, China could be facing a significant problem (Wang & Zhou, 2010).

Children worldwide may be experiencing the same issues when their parents separate; however, depending on the country, individuals experiencing a divorce may receive different support and government assistance to make this process less stressful (Bratberg & Tjøtta, 2008). Furthermore, the overall findings indicate that, in recent years, the divorced couple is younger than in previous years, has completed less education, and often has fewer children (Strohschein, 2007). The size of the household is also smaller, and in general, they claim to be less religious than those couples that remain married (Djamba, Mullins, Brackett, & McKenzie, 2012). In analyzing census data, Kreider and Ellis (2011) found that in 2009 approximately 10% of marriages ended within the first five years of marriage; however, the average length of a first marriage was seven to eight years (at seven years the separation occurred, and, by the eighth year, the divorce was

finalized). Also found was that a person's second marriage also lasted, on average, seven to eight years. Overall these authors found that 83% of marriages last at least five years; 55% of marriages last 15 years, and 35% last 25 years (Kreider & Ellis, 2011).

The first two years following a separation or divorce is sometimes called the crisis period (Rogers, 2004), and it can be the most difficult for children due to various transitions, such as, relocating, attending a new school, the mother returning to work, and the caregivers being less available both physically and emotionally. During these first two years after a separation or divorce, children may exhibit troublesome behaviors or symptoms related to their overall mental health and well-being (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004), including increased insecurities related to the fear that the other parent can leave them at any given time (Rogers, 2004). Grades in school may decline, and older children may begin experimenting with drugs or sex and may be getting into trouble with the law. Prevention programs that target families early on during this two-year period have not been as evident in the literature. Many studies have been done with children of divorce; however, there is no clear-cut answer on how to help these vulnerable children move through the process with minimal damage. Schools, churches, and community centers have employed various interventions; however, with little long-term success (Botha & Wild, 2013). More recently, with the advances in technology, several online based divorce education programs have been created and show promise for being successful (Bowers, Mitchell, Hardesty, & Hughes, 2011).

Parental Stress

Kristjansson, Sigfusdottir, Allegrante, and Helgason (2009) agreed that the stress level of a family contemplating divorce could be quite high. This stress easily can remain elevated long after a separation or divorce, depending on the situation. Cooperation between parents at the time of separation or divorce can reduce the stress felt by the household, which can help to protect the parent-child attachment style. Stress associated with divorce influences all family members and adds strains on the relations among family members, often leading to additional family conflicts. When parents are separating, they may be distracted and become emotionally and physically unavailable to their children (Sutherland et al., 2012). It was reported by Taylor et al. (2011) that in times of trauma, some people become egocentric and fail to think of others' needs, including those of their children which also can stress to the household. Even though a divorce is typically a stressful experience, the stress does not begin with the court's granting of the divorce. A divorce can be just one indicator of more underlying familial problems that need to be addressed (Huurre, Junkkari, & Aro, 2006). The stress can begin months or even years before the physical separation takes place as the relationship deteriorates to the point of making the decision to separate. One such cause of parental stress is the redefining of their roles as a parent with the other parent, but not being part of that couple as they were during the marriage (Lamela & Figueiredo, 2011). When adults are emotionally distraught and confused, children in the home feel the stress, confusion, and anger during and after their parents' divorce even if parents attempt to shelter them from arguments. Stress can jeopardize communication, thus making talking

to kids after a divorce more difficult (Afifi, Huber, & Ohs, 2006). Parents who attempt to remain in control of their ex-spouses' actions can add to this stress due to continued conflict. Teaching and often reminding divorced or separated parents that they can no longer control the actions of their ex-spouses could help relieve some of the tension that children experience (Sommers-Flanagan & Barr, 2005).

Hakvoort et al. (2012) report that parenting stress occurs when parents are not able to handle the parenting demands. Conflict with the other parent greatly increases one's stress. In a study with 8 to 12-year-old children, the authors utilized the Parent-Child Interaction Questionnaire. They found that maternal parenting stress significantly correlated with the rate of mother-child acceptance as well as mother-child conflict. The conflict between parents increased the mother's stress, which then negatively influenced the parent-child relationship (Hakvoort et al., 2012). According to Sutherland et al. (2012), the mother's stress has been attributed to increased parenting demands and from trying to balance her job outside the house with her household responsibilities.

Children's Reactions to Increased Stress and Divorce

The end of a marriage can surprise children. They may have been sheltered from the arguments and issues that lead to this separation. Even when they witness the fights, many children may not realize that the fights could lead to divorce. Due to this often-unexpected change in their lives, children view divorce as a major life crisis that turns their world into upheaval. Distractions, such as finding a job or new housing, may inhibit or prevent parents from taking the time to reassure their children about the future and about what may or may not happen (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Children often assume

that catastrophic events will occur, although the reality is usually not quite as bad. Reassurance of everyday events, such as still having a birthday party or attending an upcoming event may be what the child needs to hear, even if he or she is unable or unwilling to verbalize it. Of course, reassurance of the bigger things, such as their house, school, and continued contact with the parent that left the house is much needed even if not asked.

Parental divorce is difficult on children at any age and differentially affects children in various developmental stages; therefore, the outcomes also vary with age (Lansford et al., 2006). From infancy, children may notice that someone is missing or that the mother is not as attentive. As children age, their emotions can become easier to distinguish because they often act out in frustration or to get attention. A child may receive poor grades and talk back out of anger. In adolescence, this acting out can be extremely harmful if left unnoticed or unaddressed. Adolescents are given more social freedom, which can mean more unsupervised time to get into trouble and experiment with alcohol, drugs, sex, and delinquent behaviors due to increased availability and natural curiosity (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). When parents are consumed with their personal issues, they may not notice a gradual decline in their children's grades, new friends, or indications of concerning activities in which their children may be involved, such as smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol.

Instead of focusing on their children who are desperately in need of attention, parents can become self-involved due to a separation or divorce. To get the attention, children may take ill-conceived advice from friends and television (Wallerstein & Lewis,

2004). This advice or information is most likely not going to be appropriate to their specific situation, and it can lead to increased fears and stress. With their parents being inattentive, children may live in fear of what they believe will occur instead of asking for clarification.

Both parents and children tend to make efforts to reduce tension within the household. Some children may attempt to keep the daily schedules similar in both households while other children may avoid talking about activities at the other parent's house (Yarosh, Chew, & Abowd, 2009). Children's communication abilities are positively associated with their ability to cope with a parental divorce. Parental empathy (or the lack of it) can lead to the child stop talking about the divorce, which can affect his or her coping ability (Afifi et al., 2006).

Custody

Historically, child custody often was given to fathers; however, in the 1950s this changed from who could care better for a child financially to the one who primarily cared for the child's daily needs (Van Houtte & Jacobs, 2004). With the introduction of a 'no fault divorce' came the legal concept of the 'best interest of the child' to determine custody and living arrangements (Baiter, Buysse, Brondeel, De Mol, & Rober, 2012). Each custody case is now expected to be examined to determine the situation that best benefits the children (Breeden, Olkin, & Taube, 2008). This concept within the legal system of the best interest of the child has been implemented not only in the United States but in other countries such as Australia. However, if the mother has been the primary caregiver, then it is likely she will obtain custody of the children, provided there

are no safety concerns (Harmer & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014). Mothers are estimated to be awarded primary custody of children in 68-88% of cases, while fathers are granted this same designation only 8-14% of the time (Braver et al., 2011). Once a custody arrangement is agreed upon and filed with the courts, it can be difficult and costly to change; however, custody arrangements should be focused on the parent-child relationship and not necessarily on the amount of time spent together (Neale & Flowerdew, 2007). United States census data revealed that in women aged 25-44 lived with their minor children only slightly more than 50% of the time. Men in this same age group reported that they only lived with their minor children 21-25% of the time (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Dale (2014) advocated for a legal system that will allow for the child to be able to voice what they want when appropriate based on the child's age and overall well-being and safety.

Overnight stays can become a major issue in custody hearings. Cashmore, Parkinson, and Taylor (2008) indicated that, in post separation relationships, lack of trust and significant conflict between parents lower the chance of the father getting overnight stays with his children. However, the children who had more than 30 overnights per year reported significantly greater closeness to the noncustodial parent, father involvement, awareness of one another's interests and activities, and a higher quality of the relationship. Another benefit was that the noncustodial parent was more involved with the child and was more aware of the child's daily routine (Cashmore et al., 2008).

Financial Stressors

For separating or divorcing couples, money is a major issue and can have long-lasting effects on co-parenting the children. For example, Cohen and Levin (2012) reported that the father's income has a negative effect on co-parenting. Additionally, when the mother works full-time, the amount of communication with the father is more frequent. When the father gives more money, some of the tension between parents is lessened. The period when the father moves out before the court determines an amount of child support is exceptionally stressful for the mother. Men are not legally obligated to pay anything for spousal or child support during this period, meaning that the mother and children may not receive any child support, in addition to losing the income that the father was bringing into the previously shared household for an extended period (Cohen & Levin, 2012). A parental divorce can decrease the family's socioeconomic status and increase the family's stress, leading to more risk factors for negative outcomes (Troxel & Matthews, 2004). Father's rights groups often promote the idea that child support and contact with children are linked, meaning that fathers might be more inclined to pay their support in a promptly to see their children more (Flood, 2012).

Different fears typically emerge for older children of divorce, such as the availability of funding for college or car insurance. When parents remain married, it is often assumed in many families that the parents will pay for at least a portion of their children's higher education costs; however, a divorce greatly reduces the likelihood of tuition payments by either parent. Without help paying for college, many children of divorce skip college or accept full-time employment while attending classes part-time,

which can increase their stress levels. Compared with children from intact families, children of divorce are less likely to complete college, less likely to apply to graduate school, and, if they do begin graduate studies, they are less likely to complete them (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004).

Relationships

Postdivorce Parental Relationships

Baum (2004) identified three main types of parenting relationships: cooperative, parallel, and conflictual. Even if parents were cooperative and worked together before the separation or divorce, the stress from divorce and becoming a single parent may change the initial willingness to listen and work together with an ex-spouse. Roberson et al. (2011) described the fourth type of parenting, the disengaged co-parenting relationship. In this scenario, one parent may find it too difficult to interact with the ex-spouse, so he or she may keep a distance, even though that parent may miss out on seeing his or her children.

Cooperative parents, also called stable parents (Roberson et al., 2011), are the most positive of the four types of parents. These divorced parents try to share the responsibilities and burdens equally. They also compromise more often when potential disagreements arise (Baum, 2004). Amato, Kane, and James (2011) share that cooperative parents of pre-teens report fewer instances of behavior problems and exhibit positive relationships with their non-residential fathers. Parents in the parallel parenting group do compromise at times, although they also are more likely to start arguments with one another. The disengaged parents are the adults who remove themselves from their

child's life, possibly as an attempt to avoid the ex-spouse. It is noted that disengaged parents can start off as conflictual parents and over time disengage from the child and the situation (Roberson et al., 2011).

The most stressful and least-productive parenting type is conflictual parents. Child support conflicts between parents as well as anger and frustration by everyone involved can lead to less cooperative parenting (Hans, 2009). Conflictual parents often require the courts to intervene even on minor decisions. These parents experience various feelings, such as anger, revenge, vulnerability, jealousy, hurt, and progress through many stages of grief, which may instigate their desire to fight (Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007). Roberson et al. (2011) suggested that separating parents with a conflictual relationship may be continuing the conflict to stay close to the other person. Parents with a significant conflict issues may need a third party to assist them with transporting the child between one another to avoid the potential for conflict in front of the child (Main et al., 2011).

AT is often used in custody hearings that involve conflictual parents. Lowenstein (2010) reported that mothers use this research to 'prove' why the children need to remain with her, their primary caregiver, all the time. Possibly due to the general instinct to want babies and young children to be with their mothers, this often works; however, it creates a horrible situation for fathers. Because they are limited in getting to know and form attachment bonds with their young children, when they do get to visit, the children are not going to be comfortable with him and may become anxious, leading to increased stress for everyone involved (Lowenstein, 2010).

Regardless of the custody arrangements, parents should try to put aside their personal animosities toward one another and try to communicate politely to discuss the children and children's schedule or activities. In doing this, children should be able to witness a positive working relationship, even after a divorce (Amato et al., 2011). To accomplish this, parents need to possess effective parenting and interpersonal skills. Having a positive mutually agreed upon divorce arrangement has been found to be linked to one's postdivorce well-being (Baitar et al., 2012). The significant conflict between parents and a decline in relationships can lead to increased levels of stress, which is associated with poorer overall health (Fabricius & Luecken, 2007). A professional can help couples through a divorce and can have a large effect on the couples by teaching them positive problem-solving skills.

Roberson et al. (2011) matched up post-divorce parenting styles with the parents' attachment styles. Not surprisingly, those with a secure attachment style were the most likely to be cooperative or stable parents. These parents also were the most likely to protect their children from the potential negative outcomes for children of divorce. These parents identified as having an anxious-ambivalent attachment are more often those engaging in a conflictual parenting relationship while those with avoidant attachment styles were more often disengaged parents.

Effect of Parental Conflict on Children

Children whose parents are divorcing can often feel like they are being put in the middle of parental conflict, which negatively affects their well-being due to of increasing tension and stress. According to some studies, these children did in fact report lower

levels of well-being (Amato & Afifi, 2006) and the long-term, they learned to handle conflict ineffectively. These children often felt less close to their parents and reported a lower quality of relationship with their parents no matter when the fighting occurred (Yu et al., 2010). Researchers have also found that these children are less securely attached to their parents. Children who are caught in the middle of parental conflicts would avoid any topic they believed might start a fight to avoid parental conflict (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003) or they may try to mediate the arguments to be close to both parents (Amato & Afifi, 2006). When this occurred, internalizing behaviors in these children, such as anxiety, were exacerbated. Amato and Afifi (2006) found that children of any age could be put into the tension filled situation with their parents.

Children caught in the middle of conflict have three options; they can try to maintain a positive relationship with both parents, they can choose one parent, or lastly, they can reject both parents. Children reported that feeling caught in the middle of a conflict after divorce is not as bad as when they lived in the same house because it is physically easier to get away from the parental conflict. Daughters reported being caught in the middle of a conflict more frequently compared to sons (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Two main concerns have been identified regarding children being in conflicts. First, a child easily could be caught in the middle of their parents' fighting. Second, children may have chosen to be close to only one parent to avoid stress from being close to both parents separately (Sobolewski & Amato, 2007).

Feeling caught in the middle of parental conflict rather than the actual divorce was a greater predictor of child's stress. Tension could be created in children of divorce if

their parents asked them for information about the other parent after a child's visit (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003). A household filled with conflict and instability can be harmful to children's development.

Even if parents attempt to hide their conflicts and arguments, adolescents are often aware of the tension. During adolescents, long lasting viewpoints and opinions are formed, including those on marriage. Elevated levels of conflict between the parents, while the family is intact and following a separation or divorce, can cause adolescents to have negative opinions about all marriages (Dennison & Koerner, 2006). Sobolewski and Amato (2007) warned that children who experienced a divorce characterized by high conflict levels were likely to avoid being close to either parent. Without this conflict, children were closer to their mothers in most instances. Parents who had high conflict relationships are at a disadvantage because fighting takes energy that can be better used to parent their child. They were less likely to respond or even notice their child's emotional or physical needs, making the situation much worse for the child (Ruschena, Prior, Sanson, & Smart, 2005). As the children became adults, the feelings of being caught in the middle decreased; however, the damage to the parent-child relationship might not be completely repairable by that time (Amato & Afifi, 2006).

Postdivorce Mother-Child Relationships

A parent-child relationship is going to be more stable when there is support and love within the relationship (Wallerstein et al., 2013). Most custody agreements leave the children in the mother's care for a significant part of the week. The mother-daughter relationship is often complex and can be influenced by a discussion of certain topics. To

improve mother-child relationships, some topics of conversation could include discussing good things about the father, the mother's happiness, hobbies, and the mother's hope for the future. Topics that can worsen the mother-daughter relationship include discussing negative aspects of the father, other men, and mom dating, mother's sexual desires, financial worries, job problems, or child support (Luedemann, Ehrenberg, & Hunter, 2006). In one study, when mothers made negative disclosures to the daughter concerning money and their job, the teenage daughter reported feeling older than she was (Koerner, Kenyon, & Rankin, 2006). While it may seem that sharing with one another strengthens the mother-child relationship, being a distressed adult's trusted confidant can be overwhelming and stressful for a child, even an adolescent. Boys and girls reacted to negative disclosures about their noncustodial parent; however, girls were more likely to agree with the negative statement and worry about such statements (Kenyon & Koerner, 2008).

Regardless of the family dynamics, the mother-daughter relationship has a higher emotional closeness compared with mother-son relationships (Beelman & Schmidt-Denter, 2009). While having a great relationship with both parents is ideal, this is rarely the case following a parental divorce. A suggestion is for mothers to talk with friends, coworkers, or a support group, but not to their children about their ex. It is never appropriate to put the children in the middle of financial concerns and conflicts. This is not aged appropriate, and children will typically connect financial support to emotional involvement, meaning that this topic could greatly affect their relationship with the noncustodial parent (Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2008).

Following a divorce, more than 50% of mothers become less responsive and less available to kids. Mothers have the challenging task of attempting to separate their feelings about the failed marriage and their ex out of their parenting practices. After a divorce, only about half of the mothers can continue a positive relationship with their children. After an adjustment period, the mother may be able to get her personal issues under control and return to being a better mother without too much damage being done to the parent-child relationship. Wallerstein et al., (2013) stresses how important it is for mothers to remain 'good moms,' if they fail to do this, the children are more likely to be lonely, angry, and confused which can lead to them being more easily influenced by their peers.

The mother-child relationship typically has profound influence over the father-child relationship. When the father distances himself or disappears from the child's life, the mother has the difficult job of helping the child work through this rejection (Wallerstein et al., 2013). However, with increased conflicts, Harkvoort et al. (2011) found through conducting a multiple regression analysis that, when the children experienced a lot of conflict with their mother, they also had high reports of conflict with their father. This effect was found to be similar with positive relationships as well. When children reported higher feelings of being accepted by their mother, they also tended to report higher feelings of being accepted by their father.

Postdivorce Father-Child Relationships

A major indicator of the father's relationship with his children is the type of relationship he had before the separation (Flood, 2012). Before a divorce or separation occurs, parents typically treat their children equally (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2007). Although there may be an obvious favorite, all children have both parents take care of their daily needs. After the divorce, the father, who usually has visitation rights rather than full custody, typically spends significantly less time with his children.

Although most fathers reported that they want to spend more time with their child, this is not always feasible. This reduction in time can damage the father-child relationship (Fabricius & Luecken, 2007). The more time children spend with their father, the better chance they will develop and maintain a positive relationship. On the contrary, when they spend less time with their father, the more stress and overall health concern the child will experience. Saini, Mishna, Barnes, and Polak (2013) presented research that shows promise for using technology to help the noncustodial parents maintain contact with their children using programs such as Skype or FaceTime. While there are still quite a few concerns with the child's privacy when communicating with their nonresidential parents in this fashion, it is an additional option for parents and children to stay connected.

Because divorced fathers typically move out of the family home, the effects of this move on father-child relationships remain in question. Spending less time with the father makes it more difficult for some families to remain close, especially when several days or sometimes weeks pass between visits. Scott, Booth, King, and Johnson (2007)

reported that children do benefit if they keep a good, close relationship with their fathers; however, this postdivorce relationship depends on the predivorce father-child relationship. In adolescence, children often attempt to distance themselves from their parents to spend time with friends. This, along with a parental divorce can complicate matters and make it difficult to maintain a close relationship (Scott et al., 2007). It is easier for younger children to maintain a relationship with their fathers because they have not yet begun to pull away to become more independent.

The noncustodial parent's involvement plays a key role in the children's adjustment. If the father does remain involved, it can reduce the number of misbehaviors exhibited by the boys. Following a divorce, fathers frequently have troubles switching from father/husband to father/ex-husband. Due to the necessary interaction with their ex-wives when arranging child visitations, some fathers may disengage from their children to avoid this discomfort (Baum, 2006).

With less time to spend with their children after a separation or divorce, fathers have fewer chances to invest (time or money) in their children (Kalmijn, 2007). It is estimated that by the time a child turns 16, the chance of being in contact with his or her father decreases by 50%, although the likelihood of parents remaining in frequent contact is influenced by the payment of child support (Hutson, 2007).

Maintaining a positive father-child relationship requires a significant effort after a separation. The fathers may not have a divorced dad role model to imitate so they must figure out situations for themselves. When the family lived together, it was easier monitor children's activities. With limited time, a father may only hear the main things going on

in his children's lives. His role has changed from being a full-time father to being a father for a few weekends per month and maybe a week or two during school breaks. A newly divorced father could benefit from a professional therapist or counselor to help him redefine his role in the lives of his children (Bokker, 2006).

Parents can work together by developing a civil or cordial relationship with another to help maintain a positive father-child relationship. Having a better relationship with an ex might awkward at first, but the children typically benefit from this scenario (Hakvoort et al., 2011). Custodial parents do have a great deal of influence on what the children think of the noncustodial parent (Menning, 2008). For many families that have divorced, the mother typically holds power and influence over her children's relationship with their father. Mothers can play an instrumental role in keeping the father-child relationship strong. No matter what the exact situation, it is important for the father to have a good relationship with his children because this is found to have an impact on the child's overall risk factors and with their chances for resiliency (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010).

Other things can change the father's willingness to visit his children or to have them stay at his new house. One major change can occur when one or both parents remarry. Because approximately 50% of divorced adults go on to remarry in less than four years after a divorced is finalized (Kreider & Ellis, 2011), it is likely that children will be in this scenario at some point in their childhood. The circumstances vary, depending on which parent remarries, but the outcome is often the same. The father spends less time with his children. When a stepfather enters the picture, especially one

who is well liked and successful, this can result in less time for the children with their biological father who may feel he is no longer needed. On the other hand, if the father remarries, his new wife can control his time and financial resources. If she comes to the marriage with children, she may require her new husband to spend time and money on her children rather than on his own children from a previous marriage (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2007).

Key Child Characteristics

While divorce research does tend to focus on the adult attributes and reasoning's behind the major decisions, the child's characteristics could play a role in the outcomes for their parents. The child's gender, for example, has been reported to result in a closer emotional relationship between daughters and mothers than that between sons and mothers (Beelmann & Schmidt-Denter, 2009). Since most custody cases result in the mother retaining custody of all the children (68-88%) (Braver et al., 2011), this leaves significant concern for the parent-child relationship that sons may have with their mother and the effects this may have on other aspects of their well-being. The boys that may have had a close relationship with their fathers may now be at a disadvantage when the father moves out and their time together in now limited (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003).

The child's age is another child characteristic that may influence the outcomes of a parental divorce. Children that are older, around ten years old, are given more freedom to explore socially (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). Parents may, for example, allow these children to go over to friends' houses after school without first talking to the parents to ensure supervision. In times of distress, children may not be receiving the

parental attention they need (Sutherland et al., 2012). Without attention from their parent, children that are given more social freedom may find themselves being more open to negative social interactions, such as engaging in delinquent acts or alcohol abuse (Wallerstein et al., 2013). Because research has indicated that both child age and gender are crucial factors that might impact the relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction in recently separated or divorced families, both child gender and age were examined as potential moderators of this relationship.

Benefits of Divorce

After discussing so many negative consequences that can occur because of a parental divorce, one might wonder if a divorce has any positive aspects. Many variables can influence the outcomes; however, researchers agree that divorce is always for the best when the marriage is filled with physical abuse (Brenner & Hyde, 2006). Even if the abuse was never directed toward the children, they have witnessed abuse that can leave them scared, afraid of going home, and even fearful of the parent who was the abuser.

Although it might sound like an oxymoron, can a couple have a 'good divorce?' The research indicates that it is possible. Ahrons (2007) reported that a good divorce is one in which the children are able and are comfortable talking to both parents as well as both sides of the extended family. Children of divorce usually spend less time with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, so maintaining frequent contact with extended family members can be positive for children, especially if they were a significant part of the child's life before the divorce.

Cooperative divorced parents can have a major influence on many areas of the children's lives while lowering their stress levels. The children can benefit from a more positive relationship with their grandparents, stepparents, and their siblings if they are not witnessing the tension between their parents. When this cooperation is not present, the tension that children feel follows them into adulthood, when they become concerned about parents getting along at their wedding, graduations, and events surrounding the birth of a baby. A child with uncooperative parents may feel like he or she must choose sides and align loyalties with one parent, which also causes stress well into person's adulthood (Ahrons, 2007).

According to Wallerstein and Lewis (2004), to survive a divorce unscathed requires three things. First, the parents need to reach a settlement without fighting. Second, the financial agreement needs to be fair to both adults. Last, children need to maintain contact with both parents. Every family and situation are different. Not every child sees parental divorce as a traumatic event and not every child needs professional help to successfully move past this event. Children do exhibit adjustment problems in diverse ways, which parents should be sensitive to because they know their children better than anyone else. These problems do need to be noticed and handled to ensure the children will succeed.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed account of current professional literature about families experiencing a divorce, the stress they may feel and how this stress may manifest itself. A considerable number of studies have focused on children of divorce, on

decreasing the trauma associated with divorce, and on preventing the occurrence of negative behaviors resulting from divorce. The stress the parents experience can have a serious and long-lasting effect on the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship but to what degree? Parental stress and a parent-child relationship satisfaction that has changed also can lead to an increase in fighting and more tension within the household (Taylor et al., 2011). When the family situation is chaotic and stressful, this is when the children need to know that their parents are there for them, even if the parents no longer live together. The concern, though, is that this is the time when parents often become self-centered and focus mainly on themselves, leaving the children with minimal emotional support (Sutherland et al., 2012). Dependent on how long it takes for the parent to return to the previous level of caregiving, this may have a lasting effect on the parent-child relationship.

Chapter 3 includes the detailed the research design and approach, which includes data collection, analysis, the instruments being utilized, a description of the setting and sample, and concludes with the threats validity and the protection of the participants' rights.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this nonexperimental quantitative study was to examine the relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship in recently separated or divorced mothers.

Based on consideration of the published, peer-reviewed scholarly research, it was hypothesized that parental stress levels play a key role in the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship and that it may be critical to examine this relationship within the first two years of a separation or divorce. The child's age and gender were also examined to see either or both influences parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction.

Included in this chapter is a detailed account of the proposed research methods for the study. It will provide details of the study, including the setting, sample, instruments, and procedures. Next, the data collection and statistical methods will be discussed. A review of the threats to the statistical validity, including the reliability of the instruments and data assumptions and sample size will be discussed. Finally, this chapter will end with a brief discussion of the ethical considerations taken to protect the participants' rights and well-being.

Research Design and Rationale

This quantitative study used a nonexperimental design in an online setting. The purpose of this study was to collect data using reliable and validly published instruments to determine if parental stress levels predicted the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. The parent's level of stress was measured by a score obtained from the PSI-

4-SF, which was developed by Richard R. Abidin (2012). The parent-child relationship satisfaction was measured by using the PCRI, which was developed by Anthony B. Gerard (1994). In addition to the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI, a brief demographic questionnaire was administered to obtain a sense of who the participant pool consists of regarding mother and child's age, mother and child's ethnicity, maternal education, number and ages of children in the household, gender of the children, and the father's involvement with the children.

To be more easily accessible and convenient for mothers, this study was conducted online so they could complete the surveys at their convenience rather than schedule a time to drive somewhere to meet and having to find child care for this time frame. Once mothers received the link and password, they could complete the surveys when they had approximately 30-40 minutes available on their computer or tablet with Internet access. It was expected that, when a mother reports an overall higher stress level, it would be associated with the mother's report of lower levels of parent-child relationship satisfaction, indicating that parental stress may have an influence on the parent-child relationship. Additionally, the child's age and gender were examined to see what influence, if any, these characteristics had over the mother's stress and the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. If this is found to be true with this population, it could lead to more research with larger sample sizes so interventions can be designed and implemented to help target families that have specific characteristics that make then more susceptible to the higher stress levels.

A quantitative method was used because of the availability of researched and published assessments that would provide information needed to determine the relationship between the variables. This is a more feasible and appropriate method rather than a qualitative or mixed-methods approach.

A nonexperimental research design was used because the variables were not being manipulated and no interventions or treatment were introduced. A survey design study has the advantage of being able to be administered to large numbers of participants in a brief time frame (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Another advantage was that it could be conducted online. A disadvantage of the survey type research was that the researcher was unable to further question areas of interest or concern or to make causal inferences. Participants' self-report also increased the chances of bias.

Self-administered surveys were utilized for several reasons with the first being a consideration for the participant's time and scheduling. With these being online, participants could choose any time frame in which they had 30-40 minutes to get online and complete. They then did not have to coordinate schedules with me, find child care, and commute to the meeting spot. Self-administered surveys also reduced the effects of social desirability; there are no interviewer training costs to consider, and they also were cost effective for administering to large groups (Tourangeau & Yang, 2007). In this study, self-administered surveys were utilized also to help protect the participants' privacy in helping them to remain anonymous, which should have increased truthfulness

as is the case with self-reports surveys that were mailed to participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Methodology

Population

The target population for this study was mothers from a diverse town in the Midwest that had at least one child enrolled in the local public-school district. Participants were recently separated or divorced mothers that had at least one child that is 5-13 years old, which is approximately kindergarten to eighth grade. Participants were of various ages, ethnicities, and education levels which were reported on specifically in Chapter 4. This area appeared to be a typical suburban area which should have extended to typical rates of marriage and divorce among those that live here. This school district consists of approximately 2000 families. Due to difficulties reaching a minimum sample size within this school district, the recruitment extended to Walden University's Participant Pool, with IRB's approval. To help maintain consistency with the findings, this study limited participation to include mothers only. Braver et al. (2011) report that mothers are awarded custody of the children in approximately 68-88% of divorces that involve children while fathers only receive primary custody in 8-14% of cases, which is one reason why, for this study, mothers are being asked to participate instead of fathers. A second reason that mothers only are being asked to participate is that research has indicated that when fathers receive full custody, there are sometimes concerns as to the mother's ability and willingness to care for the children that could add unknown stressors

and complications to this family dynamic (Breivik & Olweus, 2006). Participants were those mothers who were currently not involved in a long-term or a live-in relationship with someone who could have influenced the stress levels in the home as well as the parent-child relationship (Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009).

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

A local school district in the Midwest agreed to allow a recruitment advertisement to be published in its electronic newsletter and on its district's Facebook page. Approximately 2000 families within the district received the newsletter once every other Friday along with close to 2000 Facebook followers. This school district included grade K-8, which aligned with the target child's age of this study. Those who read the advertisement and wished to participate were directed to e-mail me at an e-mail address set up for this study. A separate e-mail was set up because I am well known within the school community, and participation was set up to be confidential. Asking participants to e-mail for more information at the personal e-mail address could have immediately scared potential participants away. Once an e-mail was received by myself, potential participants were then e-mailed a response with the SurveyMonkey link and a password that allowed them to access the study, which included the informed consent, the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C), the PSI-4-SF, and the PCRI. The advertisement provided through the newsletter and Facebook outlined the criteria for inclusion and exclusion, which included: 1) being a mother of a child ages 5-13; 2) being separated or divorced within the past 24 months; 3) mothers must have retained custody

of the child or have the child live with them for at least 50% of the time. Exclusion criteria included mothers in a committed relationship or those that have a live-in relationship because this could greatly influence the overall household atmosphere. These criteria were like those proposed by Sigal et al. (2012) and Vélez et al. (2011). These inclusion and exclusion criteria were in the initial advertisement and were also in the informed consent that the participant signed electronically by clicking on a 'Next' icon. This was a voluntary study with no financial compensation offered.

The test publishers were gracious in allowing me to adapt the PSI-4-SF (see Appendix B for permission letter) and the PCRI (see Appendix A for permission letter) for online use. To protect the tests and control the number of people with access to the published surveys, the participants had to first e-mail me for the link and password for the study. This arrangement helped to relieve security concerns about the published materials.

A convenience sample was used because it provided access to the parent population. The recruitment procedure did not allow the researcher to determine how many potential participants noticed and read the study flyer, but only how many it was sent out to via e-mail. Due to the personal nature of divorce, it also was not possible to know how many families fit the criteria from the total number of families in the district, nor was it possible to know how many families read the newsletter that was e-mailed to them. It is also unknown how many Walden University students read the notice of current studies when this one was posted or randomly visited the cite to participate.

The sample size of a study was conducted before research began as an attempt to ensure enough responses (Kelley & Maxwell, 2003). Having a large enough sample size, given the statistical analysis before conducting research and including the number of variables involved, reduces the chances for a Type II error, which is accepting the null hypothesis, when, in fact, it should not be accepted. To determine the sample size for this study, a power analysis was conducted using G*Power3.1 software (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). This analysis demonstrated that with a power level .80, an alpha level of .05, and an effect size of .15, with four predictors the minimum required sample size is 85.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited to participate voluntarily by an advertisement in the local school district's electronic, e-mailed newsletter and through the district's Facebook page. No financial compensation was offered. Interested mothers contacted me via an e-mail address set up specifically for this study to help participants maintain a feeling of being anonymous. Potential participants were then e-mailed a password and a link to access the study set up in SurveyMonkey. This e-mailed password was set up to help maintain the security of the published test materials, at the request of the test publishers. Prospective participants were reminded within the log in process that this study would take approximately 30-40 minutes and that they needed to finish it all at one time. Once they exited out of the survey, they would not be able to finish later. In this study link, participants first read an electronic informed consent which laid out the criteria for

inclusion. The criteria for inclusion included: 1) being a mother to a child between the ages 5-13; 2) being separated or divorced from the father within the past 24 months; 3) have at minimum shared custody (living with the child at least 50% of the time); and 4) cannot be in a serious romantic relationship or have a new romantic partner living with the child. If the mother had more than one child in the 5-13-year-old age range, she was instructed to choose one child to think of while completing the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI and indicate this child's age and gender on the demographics questionnaire where indicated. This was so I could test to see if there are child age differences or child gender differences found; however, on the demographics questionnaire, it was important to share how many additional children were in the household and what their ages were. No personal identifying information was collected. The participants were reminded on the informed consent that this study would take approximately 30-40 minutes and they could not exit out and return later to finish what they already started. Once the participant clicked on the 'Next' icon on the informed consent, she was then taken to the demographics questionnaire, PSI-4-SF, and the PCRI. This survey was set up so that participants needed to provide an answer to a question before the next set of questions would be available to them, which eliminated missed or skipped questions that could have potentially disqualified the entire packet of the participant. On the demographics questionnaire, a response of N/A was included for those questions that might not pertain to everyone, such as providing the age and gender of a second or third child. The completed surveys were accessible only by the researcher and were downloaded onto a password-secured computer. Any data that was printed in hard copy format for scoring is

being be kept in a locked filing cabinet for five years which is the recommended time frame. Each data set was assigned a family number to ensure that the three assessments (demographics questionnaire, PSI-4-SF, and the PCRI) remain linked to one another; however, no identifying information was collected.

Within the informed consent, potential participants were advised that if they at any time felt that they did not want to continue with the survey, they could exit out of the survey and be done. They were also reminded that they had my e-mail address should they wish to make contact to ask questions or if they encountered a technical problem and needed the link and password reset. The offer was made to provide participants a summary of the overall findings after this project was approved if so requested. Unless the participant e-mails again or had requested the results in the initial e-mail, that would be the only time they were contacted.

Instrumentation

Parenting Stress Index, 4th ed., Short Form (PSI-4-SF)

The PSI-4-SF, created by Richard Abidin, was utilized to help measure the amount stress the parent has in her life that pertains to the child, herself, and overall life stressors. The original PSI (4th ed.) consists of 120 items and the PSI-4-SF consists of 36 items, which are adapted from the longer version. The PSI-4-SF consists of 36 questions that are answered by participants clicking SA (strongly agree), A (agree), NS (not sure), D (disagree), or SD (strongly disagree) (Abidin, 2012). Three of the 36 items ask respondents to answer in a different manner as indicated on the test. This assessment is

not timed, but it does take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The PSI-4-SF contains three main themes or domains: Parental Distress (PD), Parent-Child Dysfunction Interaction (P-CDI), and Difficult Child (DC) (Abidin, 2012).

The PD scale helps researchers and clinicians determine how much stress a parent may be feeling at that moment related to being a parent (Abidin, 2012). Some areas of interest within the scale include a damaged sense of being a competent parent, stress because one's role in their life, tension with the other parent, a significant lack of support, and depression.

The P-CDI scale examines the perception that parents report about their child and if that child has met their expectations. It also helps show researchers and clinicians if the parent-child interactions are not a positive experience. A high score on this scale could indicate that the bond between the parent and child is damaged or that it may have never been established (Abidin, 2012).

The third scale, the DC scale, measures characteristics that tend to make children easier or more difficult to manage. These characteristics include those that are more temperament and exhibit learned behaviors (Abidin, 2012).

The PSI-4-SF was created out of the PSI 4th edition updates. The authors used the full-length form to determine which items to retain for the short form. Those 12 items loaded the highest on each of the three scales were selected for the short form. The PSI has been updated to improve upon the psychometric limitations on some of the items

from the third edition. Additionally, several items needed to be updated in their language. One notable change that this author made was replacing all occurrences of the word 'spouse' and replacing it with 'spouse/parenting partner' (Abidin, 2012).

The PSI-4 was normed with 1056 adults, which included 534 mothers and 522 fathers. An attempt was made to make each of the groups equal about the children's ages and gender. Participants who completed the PSI-4 to help with this norming effort were from 17 different states in the south, northeast, west, and Midwest. The author also attempted to match the groups for education level and ethnicity. Parents had similar average ages as well, with moms being 33.24 years old, while dads were, on average 34 years old (Abidin, 2012).

To score the PSI-4-SF, the perforated strip on the right side of the Record/Profile Form packet needed to be torn off. The bottom sheet was where the scoring was computed (Abidin, 2012). The first step is to add the totals of items 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, and 11. These items were highlighted in light green, and, together they make up the Defensive Responsive Scale. The next steps were to add up the sums on items 1-12, which make up the Parental Distress Scale; items 13-24, which make up the Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction Scale; and, finally, add the totals for items 25-36 which make up the Difficult Child Scale (Abidin, 2012). These raw scores were to be totaled to determine the Total Stress score. Once this was completed, these numbers were transferred to the profile page. In each column, the appropriate raw score range were located and marked with an X. The far left and far right sides of the profile feature

percentiles that helped to enlighten researcher and clinicians as to what raw scores mean. Once all the X's were made, draw a line connecting the X's to complete the profile of the respondent. This study was set up as an online study for the convenience of the parents; however, scoring still had to be done by hand. Once the data was received, the researcher transferred the items to a scoring sheet to continue scoring and interpret the information as described. Since the PSI-4-SF is not usually intended for online use, the responses provided by participants needed to be transferred to the appropriate profile form/scoring sheets for scoring and interpretation. To ensure accuracy, a research assistant that was unaware of the research questions was double checking the number transfer. There were no mistakes found throughout this process. This research assistant had no access to the participants' e-mail addresses which was the only way in which to contact them. There was no identifying information on the data sheets the research assistant checked for accuracy. Permission to use this assessment tool was granted by PAR's Permission Specialist (Appendix B).

Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI)

The PCRI is a 78 item, self-report assessment. It can be given by hand or on a computer. The function of the PCRI is to help obtain a score of a parent's feelings or attitudes about being a parent to his or her children (Gerard, 1994). This assessment tool is meant to be given along with other tools and is not recommended to be the only factor when making important decisions about a family. The PCRI was normed with both

mothers and fathers and can be given to either or both parents. It was standardized with over 1100 parents in multiple areas in the United States.

This 78-question assessment is written at a fourth-grade reading level and takes approximately 15 minutes; however, there is no time limit. Respondents reply to questions by using a 4-point-Likert scale, clicking *strongly agree, agree, disagree,* or *strongly disagree* (Gerard, 1994). When a parent is asked to complete this inventory, he or she should be instructed to think of the relationship with only one child if he or she has more than one.

The PCRI contains seven content scales: Parental Support Scale (SUP), Satisfaction with Parenting Scale (SAT), Involvement (INV), Communication (COM), Limit Setting (LIM), Autonomy (AUT), and Role Orientation (ROL). Twenty-six questions are keyed in a positive way, which means that a participant response of *strongly agree* or *agree* will be scored as a higher number. Forty-seven questions are keyed negatively, meaning that a response of *disagree* or *strongly disagree* will result in a higher numerical score (Gerard, 1994). The Parental Support scale helps researchers determine the amount of physical or emotional support the parent should help them be a parent. The Satisfaction with Parenting scale helps to determine if the parent likes being a parent. The Involvement scale demonstrates if the parent seems to actively be a part of his or her child's interest and activities. The Communication scale measures how well the parent communicates with their child, in multiple settings and situations. The Limit Setting scale includes questions about the parent's discipline style with their child. The Autonomy scale measures how willing the parent is to assist their child to become

independent from them. Last, the Role Orientation scale measures how the parenting responsibilities might be shared with the other parent, and it also shares insight if the parent believes that mothers and fathers have specific gender roles when it comes to child care (Gerard, 1994).

The PCRI also contains two validity indicators: Social Desirability (SOC) and Inconsistency (INC). The SOC scale contains five questions that, when answered positively, could mean that the parent is trying to make his or her relationship with the child seem better than it may be. The INC scale consists of 10 pairs of questions that help the score discern if the parents are reading the questions or if they might be answering randomly (Gerard, 1994). If the responses in a data set indicated that a participant has responded in such a manner, her responses would have been separated out of the total responses and not included in any of the analyses. This did not occur in this current study.

This assessment is considered invalid if the parent leaves nine or more questions unanswered or if 8 or more questions have multiple answers indicated. When interpreting the results, low t-scores indicate poor parenting while high scores typically indicate good parenting practices (Gerard, 1994). This study was set up so that participants must answer all questions on a screen before the computer would allow them to move on to the next set of questions; thus, there were no skipped questions in this study. However, if the participant chose to quit the study early, it would have resulted in an incomplete data set and these would have not been included in the analyses. This occurred twice in this study.

The PCRI can be scored by hand or computerized system (Gerard, 1994). When scoring by hand, the perforation on the response sheet needs to be torn, and the scoring

page and PCRI Profile Form need to be removed. For each answered item, the number that has been selected or circled needs to be transferred to the box where indicated. There is a column for each scale; the numbers in each column must be added up and entered in the total box. Once the scores are computed, then the researcher or clinician can start to interpret the results. Since the PCRI is not usually intended for online use, the responses provided by participants were transferred to the appropriate profile form/scoring sheets for scoring and interpretation. To ensure accuracy, a research assistant that was unaware of the research questions double checked the number transfer. There were no inconsistencies found throughout this double check process.

For the purposes of this study, the Communication scale will be the focal scale for comparison of the parent-child relationship to the overall stress score from the PSI-4-SF. Several of the PCRI scales overlap in content with the PSI-4-SF; however, the Communication scale nicely encompasses the goal of the parent-child relationship satisfaction variable. The other scales within the PCRI were valuable in helping the researcher to know if the participants were answering truthfully and consistently throughout the assessment. Permission to use this assessment tool was provided the WPS Rights and Permission Assistant (Appendix A).

Demographic questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire included basic information about the mother: their age, separation status (separated, legally separated, divorced), education level (less than high school degree, high school degree or equivalent, some college, but no degree, bachelor's degree, or graduate degree), and ethnicity (American Indian or Alaskan

Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, White/Caucasian, or other). Along with separation status, participants were asked how much time has passed since the separation or divorce. Custody arrangement details were also asked about. Mothers were then asked to select the most appropriate way to describe their current custody arrangement: full custody, shared or joint custody, or if the father has no contact. Mothers were then asked to estimate the time percentage of where the child spends their time (70% with the mother and 30% with the father for example). Questions about children that the mother answered include ethnicity (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, White/Caucasian, or other), the number of children in the household, and age and gender of each child. Because they were asked to think of only one child when completing the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI, participants were asked to indicate the age and gender of the child in mind when completing the surveys.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study was conducted entirely on the online survey site, SurveyMonkey. Participants were recruited via advertising in the local school district's electronic newsletter and on the district's Facebook page. The study ran for approximately for six weeks. Every two weeks, an e-mail newsletter and a Facebook post was sent out to alert parents to this opportunity. When a participant received the study notice and e-mailed me to take part in it, she was provided a password and a link to access the study. Due to difficulties reaching an ideal sample size, recruitment also then expanded to the Walden

Universities Participant Pool, with IRB's approval. Once participants electronically agreed with the informed consent, they were presented with the demographics questionnaire, PSI-4-SF, and the PCRI.

Restatement of Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1: Is the stress level of recently separated or divorced custodial mothers associated with the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction?

$H_0$1: The parental stress of the recently separated or divorced custodial mother will not be associated with the parent-child relationship satisfaction, as measured by the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI.

H_a1: The parental stress of the recently separated/divorced custodial mother will be associated with a negative satisfaction level of the parent-child relationship, as measured by the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI.

Research Question 2: Does the child's gender moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction?

$H_0$2: The child's gender will not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction.

H_a2: An increased report of parental stress will be associated with a lower parent-child relationship satisfaction and this relationship will be greater when the child is male compared to female.

Research Question 3: Does the child's age moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship?

$H_0$3: The child's age will not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction.

H_a3: The relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction will be moderated by the child's age. It is hypothesized that as the child gets older, this effect will be greater.

A demographics questionnaire was first presented to each participant to better understand who the population was comprised of regarding age, ethnicity, education, and time since the separation or divorce to name a few areas of interest. The research explored the relationships between these characteristics. When a statistical relationship occurred, it was entered as a covariate in all analyses where appropriate and is reported on in Chapters 4 and 5.

Data Collection

This study was conducted entirely on the online survey site, SurveyMonkey.com. Participants were recruited using the local school district's electronic newsletter and Facebook page. The superintendent granted permission to recruit local families using the school's electronic resources (see Appendix A). The study was run for six weeks, which means that a recruitment flyer was distributed via electronic newsletter three times. Every

two weeks a reminder Facebook message was also posted. More participants were needed to try and reach the ideal sample size so Walden University's Participant was utilized with IRB's approval. When a participant received the study notice and e-mailed for more information, she was then e-mailed a password and a link to access the study. Once participants electronically agreed with the informed consent, they were then presented with a demographics questionnaire, the PSI-4-SF, and the PCRI.

Data Analysis

The data was screened to ensure that all surveys were completed before scoring began. When participant ended the study without completing it (N=2), that data set was not scored nor was it used included in any statistical analyses. The survey cite was set up so that all questions on each page had to be answered before the next set of questions would be presented. This was done intentionally so that the data sets would not come back with multiple unanswered questions scattered throughout the data set. Data was analyzed using SPSS 24.0 software application for Windows. For hypothesis 1, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine if there was a relationship between the custodial mothers' stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. For hypothesis 2, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to see if the child's gender moderated this relationship between parental stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. The child's gender was treated as an independent variable (M). By adding this variable M into the analysis, it was expected that the direction and the strength of the relationship between child's gender and parental stress would be

correlated (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In this case specifically, it was expected that the child being a boy would increase the mom's stress which might also result in a lower satisfaction of parent-child relationship. Hypothesis 3 was tested using multiple regression analyses. The child's age was the independent variable (M) in this case. This analysis provided the strength of the relationship between the child's age and parental stress. In addition to these analyses, all demographics were examined to see if any other unexpected trends and relationships would emerge. These statistical relationships will be reported on in Chapters 4 and 5 and have been entered as covariates in the appropriate analyses. Based on previous research, it was expected that there would be a relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction; however, this research examined the relationship further to demonstrate several things; 1) showed how strong this connection was between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction; 2) attempted to demonstrate that the child's gender influenced the strength or direction of this association between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction; and 3) examined the child's age as a moderator to show that the child's age influenced the strength or direction of the association between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction.

Threats to Statistical Conclusion and Validity

This study did not involve an experiment or manipulation of the participants, so the threat to internal validity was low. Published, previously normed instruments (PSI-4-SF and PCRI) were used to help control for this factor. The raw data collected was

analyzed using the computer software SPSS version 24.0 for Windows to help reduce the likelihood of statistical error. Additionally, as with many research results, blanket generalizations should not be made (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In this instance, parents who have recently divorced and who live in a large, expensive city may have experienced significantly more stress than those who have recently divorced that live in small, rural towns, which typically have much more neighbor support. It should also be noted that only mothers will be completing this study, eliminating the valuable input from fathers. It is unknown how responses may differ between mothers and fathers, so it is important to keep this in mind when examining the results and generalizing to other areas and populations. Generalizing the results to all recently divorced parents could result in an error in the conclusions of the study. Due to the difficulties obtaining an ideal sample size, mothers were recruited through two diverse sources; a local, Midwest school system and the Walden Universities Participant Pool. Fourteen of the 17 packets that were used in the analysis were from the Midwest school system recruitment. There is no way to appropriately make a generalization about these two diverse participant pools. However, the focus can remain on the family's dynamics for generalizations.

Reliability of Instruments

The PCRI has an internal consistency of .82 median, and no score was below .70. The test-retest reliability after one week had a mean correlation of .81. After five months, the test-retest reliability was .55, which is acceptable (Gerard, 1994). When the scales were examined individually for test-retest reliability, the scales exhibited acceptable

numbers. After one week and five months respectively, the Support scale test-retest reliability went from .81 to .71; Satisfaction went from .73 to .49; Involvement went from .87 to .51; Communication went from .68 to .52; Limit Setting went from .93 to .49 Autonomy went from .78 to .44; and Role Orientation went from .89 to .71 (Gerard, 1994).

In altering the PSI-4 to the PSI-4-SF, several statistical measures were taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the short form. The validity correlation between the 4th edition and the short form of the 4th edition is .98, which is 'exceptionally high.' In creating the short form, several scales were taken out or renamed. The Parental Distress scale correlated with the Parental Domain, $r = .94$. The Difficult Child scale correlated with the Child Domain, r=.95. The Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction scale correlated with the Child Domain (.91) and the Parent Domain (.82) (Abidin, 2012). The internal consistency of item correlation was: Parent Domain .61; Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction .61, and Difficult Child .57. The overall total item correlation for Total Stress was .57 (Abidin, 2012).

Data Assumptions

The collected data was self-reported. It was assumed that participants would answer truthfully. Because they have volunteered for this confidential study and could have quit the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable, there were no obvious reasons to misrepresent themselves on these measures; however, often a participant may have misremembered events. Many of the items being asked were about the recent past; this effect shouldn't be of too much concern.

Sample Size

In general, the larger the sample size, the better the results may be (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005); however, it was not feasible to survey everyone who fits the criteria in the area. A random selection was utilized in that all parents in the district received the newsletter via e-mail or those parents that follow the school district on Facebook should have been able to receive this notice. Every family that chose to read the newsletter or clicked on the Facebook link were given the opportunity to learn more about this study; those who chose to contact the researcher and followed through with all surveys were included provided they fit the inclusion criteria. Had the sample size has been reached quickly, the advertisements would have ceased to go out in the newsletters and on Facebook earlier than anticipated. An additional recruitment method was added with the ethic's board approval. When the school's advertisements did not result in enough participants, this study was then posted on the Walden University's Participant Pool page. Through this Participant Pool, every student and faculty member that had registered to learn about study opportunities received an e-mail about this study being posted. After many months, these methods still failed to result in the ideal number of participants. All results should be approached with caution due to this small sample size. In the process of recruiting participants, it was noticed that professionals that work with this population of recently separated or divorced mothers are very protective of them. Attorneys, therapists, and divorce support group leaders were interested in this study and agreed that there was a great need for this information, but were unwilling to ask their clients to participate for

fear of adding more stress to these women. While these women are not technically a protected population set by the ethic's board, they are treated as such within their communities.

The study sample size is conducted before research begins as an effort to ensure there will be enough responses (Kelley & Maxwell, 2003). Having a large enough sample size, given the statistical analysis being conducted and the number of variables involved, reduces the chances for a Type II error, which is accepting the null hypothesis when in fact, it should not be accepted. To determine the sample size for this study, a power analysis was conducted using G*Power3.1 software (Faul et al., 2007). This analysis showed that with an effect size of f^2 is .15, the power level .80, the number of predictors being 4, and the alpha level .05, the ideal minimum sample size was 85.

Protections of Participants' Rights

Ethical behaviors and protection of study participants are a serious matter for psychological studies. Every action in this study was done so with careful consideration of the participants' wellbeing and privacy protection.

Ethical Issues in the Research Problem

Due to the delicate nature of conducting research with children, this study asked for only the parent to complete the assessment tools even though the child's perspectives could have provided significantly different viewpoints. Divorce involving children is a fundamental problem in the United States as well as in many other countries. The

information gathered potentially could lead to an intervention to help parents better handle stress to protect the relationship with their children. This information can help future researchers plan an appropriate intervention.

The assumed risks for filling out the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI were minimal; however, some questions may have upset participants by asking them to recall tough times. In the informed consent, participants were told that they could quit for any reason at any time without repercussions by exiting out of the survey. Participants were also informed that they could contact me via e-mail if they had any questions or concerns.

Before data collection began, the approval from the Walden University IRB was received (approval number: 05-02-16-0027955, expired May 1, 2017). Before any recruitment methods were altered, the IRB was contacted and additional approvals were received. The data collected was downloaded and is being stored on a password-protected computer as well as a backup flash drive that is being kept locked in a filing cabinet. Anything that was printed for scoring purposes is also be kept locked in a filing cabinet for five years, at which time the paper will be shredded before discarding. The SurveyMonkey study page was also password protected. This data will be destroyed appropriately after five years.

Ethical Issues Pertaining to Research Questions and Purpose

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University. The American Psychological Association (APA) Ethics code 8.01 requires

truthful and complete information to be provided by the researcher to the review board for consideration (2010). The approved research must be followed exactly; any changes after the initial approval were approved before action was taken. Potential participants were instructed to carefully read through an informed consent document before beginning the study, which is by the APA's ethical code 8.02. The informed consent document included the time requirements of the study and its purpose. This study was estimated to take participants no longer than 40 minutes, and they had a written reminder at the beginning of the study that they can stop at any time they no longer felt they could nor wanted to continue. The informed consent provided at the beginning of the study let participants know that there were no penalties or repercussions for deciding to quit the study. The informed consent also included the limits of confidentiality and any incentives for participating. Further, included in the informed consent was my contact information and a plan for contacting someone if the participants felt they need to speak about concerns about the study. In two instances, incomplete data sets were submitted, it was assumed that the participant chose to quit the study and the questions that had been answered were not scored nor were they included in the data analysis.

The purpose of this study was to find out what the relationship was between parental stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship and if the child's age or gender influenced this relationship. There was no intended deception in this study. Participants were told truthfully, yet in general terms what the study was looking at before they began.

Ethical Issues in Data Analysis and Interpretation

The APA ethics code, 8.10 pertains to reporting research results (APA, 2010). The result of this study are accurate to the best of the researcher's knowledge and ability. The analyses were computed using a computer program (SPSS 24.0 for Windows) and were checked multiple times for inaccuracies regarding entering the data and giving the program the appropriate commands. If any items are later to be found incorrect, all reasonable steps will be taken to correct the concerning data.

Ethical Issues in Writing and Disseminating Research

The information and data collected are secured in a locked filing cabinet that only I have access to. The computer used for this project is password protected, and only I have access to this information. There was no identifying information collected, so the data is unable to be traced back to any individual; however, each data set, which includes the demographics questionnaire, the PSI-4-SF, and the PCRI, was assigned a specific family number to ensure that each document is from the same family. The information collected will only be used for educational research. After five years, all data collected will be destroyed appropriately.

Summary

This chapter presented the proposed research methods for this nonexperimental, quantitative study which examined the relationship between the stressors parent experiences during a separation or divorce and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. The child's gender and age were analyzed to test the strength of effect

they had on the relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction. The research design, setting, sample, and instrumentation were described in detail. A demographic questionnaire was given to all participants. Also, two published, standardized assessment tools were used, the PSI-4-SF, and the PCRI. The reliability of the instruments was discussed as were the ethical issues surrounding the research process and the protection of the participants' rights, ensuring this study to be ethical and safe for all participants' well-being.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative, nonexperimental study was to examine the predictive relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationships following a separation or divorce. Parental stress was measured by the PSI-4-SF and PCRI. Specifically, the research questions and hypotheses of the study were:

Research Question 1: Is the stress level of recently separated or divorced custodial mothers associated with the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction?

$H_0$1: The parental stress of the recently separated or divorced custodial mother will not be associated with the parent-child relationship satisfaction, as measured by the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI.

H_a1: The parental stress of the recently separated/divorced custodial mother will be associated with a negative satisfaction level of the parent-child relationship, as measured by the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI.

Research Question 2: Does the child's gender moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction?

$H_0$2: The child's gender will not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction.

H_a2: An increased report of parental stress will be associated with a lower parent-child relationship satisfaction and this relationship will be greater when the child is male compared to female.

Research Question 3: Does the child's age moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported satisfaction of the parent-child relationship?

$H_0$3: The child's age will not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction.

H_a3: The relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction will be moderated by the child's age. It is hypothesized that as the child gets older, this effect will be greater.

The first null hypothesis stated that there is no relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction. The second null hypothesis stated that child's gender would not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction. The third null hypothesis stated that child's age would not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction. These hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation and hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses. An alpha level of $\alpha = .05$ of was used to evaluate the significance of the findings. This section presents the method for collecting data and the results of the data analysis conducted to address the research questions and hypotheses. First, the details of the data collection will be presented, including descriptive statistics of the sample. Then the results of the analysis will be presented. Finally, this chapter will end with a summary of the findings.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected by working with a local school district to put an advertisement in their electronic newsletter. This newsletter goes out to about 2000 families every other week. This went out three times in a six-week period. Additionally, the school district also posted this study on their Facebook page which also has approximately 2000 followers. In both methods of recruitment, potential participants were given the instruction to e-mail me for the study link and password. Even after these flyers went out to parents, more participants were needed. The study was then posted to the Walden University Participant Pool with IRB's approval. After a lengthy time-frame, the ideal sample size was still not achieved. During this process, numerous professionals were contacted to try and get an additional community partner. Divorce attorneys, family therapists, and divorce support group leaders were contacted. What was found was that these professionals are very protective of their clients. They were unwilling to ask their clients to participate in something that could potentially add more stress. While divorcing mothers are not officially a protected population, they are treated as such by those that work closely with them.

The data was collected from a total of 22 respondents. Once the data collection process was complete, the raw data were inputted into SPSS version 24.0 for Windows. Two participants did not complete major sections of the questionnaire and were subsequently removed. Three of the participants did not meet the inclusion criteria for children's ages and time since the divorce. The final sample size consisted of 17

participants.

Demographic Characteristics

Of the 17 responses that did meet the study inclusion criteria, descriptive statistics were examined for the nominal and continuous level variables. The gender of children was distributed between 10 males and seven females. Most of the participants were 36-40 years old (n = 6, 35.3%). The largest proportion of the participants had obtained their Bachelor's degree (n = 7, 41.2%). Most of the participants had only one child (n = 8, 47.1%). Children's ages ranged from 5.00 years to 13.00 years, with an average age of 9.12 years (SD = 2.57). Household income ranged from $20,000.00 to $140,000.00, with an average of $58,875.00 ($SD$ = $32,626.93). The descriptive statistics of the respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Demographical Data

Demographic	*n*	%
Gender of child		
Male	10	58.8
Female	7	41.2
Age of parent		
26-30	2	11.8
31-35	3	17.6
36-40	6	35.3
41-45	1	5.9
46-50	5	29.4
Highest level of education		
High school degree or equivalent	1	5.9
Some college but not degree	3	17.6
Associate degree	2	11.8
Bachelor degree	7	41.2
Graduate degree	4	23.5
Number of children		
1	8	47.1
2	3	17.6
3	5	29.4
4	1	5.9

Note. Due to rounding error, percentages may not always sum to 100%.

Descriptive Statistics of Continuous Variables

Parental stress scores ranged from 53.00 to 137.00, with an average of 83.24 (*SD* = 21.24). Parent-child relationship satisfaction scores were based on the Communication subscale of the PCRI and ranged from 25.00 to 50.00, with an average of 39.76 (*SD* = 8.12). Descriptive statistics for the continuous variables of interest are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean, Standard Deviation, Range, Skewness, and Kurtosis for Continuous Variables (N = 17)

Continuous Variables	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
Parental stress	53.00	137.00	83.24	21.24	0.92	1.07
Parent-child relationship satisfaction	25.00	50.00	39.76	8.12	-0.41	-1.23

Data Screening

Once the data collection process was complete, the raw data were inputted into SPSS version 24.0 for Windows. Two participants did not complete major sections of the questionnaire and were subsequently removed. Three of the participants did not meet the inclusion criteria for children's ages or the time since the divorce. The final sample size consisted of 17 participants.

Preliminary Data Analysis

Prior to the analysis of the research questions, Spearman bivariate correlations were computed to determine if there were any significant relationships between the demographic and study variables. The correlation coefficients are presented in Table 3. Parent age was significantly positively correlated with child's age ($r = .62$, $p = .009$). No

other correlations were significant. Therefore, parent age was included as a covariate in the main analyses.

Table 3

Correlations Between Demographic and Study Variables

Demographic Variable	Child's age	Child gender	Parental stress	Parent-child relationship satisfaction
Parent age	.62*	-.24	.09	-.26
Number of children	.48	-.05	.32	-.17
Education	.00	-.12	-.32	.12
Household income	-.21	-.32	-.04	-.23

Note. *$p < .05$. Spearman correlations reported for ordinal variables (parent age and education).

Assumptions Testing

Before Pearson correlation analysis for research question 1, the linearity assumption was tested by examination of a scatterplot. The relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction appeared to follow a negative linear trend. Therefore, the assumption of linearity was met. Before the regression analysis for research question 1, the parametric assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity were assessed. The normality assumption was examined by visual inspection of a normal P-P plot between the observed cumulative probability and the expected cumulative probability. The data closely followed the trend line, suggesting that the assumption of normality was met. The homoscedasticity assumption was tested by visual inspection of a residual scatterplot. The homoscedasticity assumption was met

due to there not being a recurring pattern in the scatterplot of the data. The absence of multicollinearity assumption was tested by variance inflation factors (VIFs). Due to all VIF values being below 10 (highest VIF = 1.05), it can be assumed that the predictor variables were not too highly associated (Stevens, 2009).

Before the regression analysis for research question 2, the parametric assumptions were assessed. The data closely followed the trend line, suggesting that the assumption of normality was met. The homoscedasticity assumption was met due to there not being a recurring pattern in the scatterplot of the data. Due to all VIF values being below 10 (highest VIF = 1.95), it can be assumed that the predictor variables were not too highly associated (Stevens, 2009).

Before the regression analysis for research question 3, the parametric assumptions were assessed. The data closely followed the trend line, suggesting that the assumption of normality was met. The homoscedasticity assumption was met due to there not being a recurring pattern in the scatterplot of the data. Due to all VIF values being below 10 (highest VIF = 1.69), it can be assumed that the predictor variables were not highly associated (Stevens, 2009).

Results

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 24.0 for Windows. The first analysis examined the relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction using the scores from the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI. The null and alternative hypotheses for this analysis were as follows:

$H_0$1: The parental stress of the recently separated or divorced custodial mother will not be associated with the parent-child relationship satisfaction, as measured by the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI.

H_a1: The parental stress of the recently separated or divorced custodial mother will be associated with a negative satisfaction level of the parent-child relationship, as measured by the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI.

A Pearson correlation and a hierarchical linear regression were conducted to examine the relationship between parental stress and the quality of the parent-child relationship. A Pearson correlation is an appropriate statistical analysis when assessing the strength of association between two continuous level variables (Pagano, 2009). A hierarchical linear regression is an appropriate statistical analysis when assessing the predictive relationship between a group of predictors and a continuous criterion variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Cohen's standard (Cohen, 1988) was used to interpret the strength of the correlation coefficients, where coefficients between .10 and .29 represented a small association; coefficients between .30 and .49 represent a medium association, and coefficients above .50 represent a large association. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated that there was a statistically significant negative relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction ($r = -.76$, $p < .001$). By using Cohen's standard, the relationship between the variables represented a strong negative association.

This means that participants with higher parental stress scores tended to have lower scores for parent-child relationship satisfaction.

A hierarchical linear regression was conducted to examine the predictive relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction while controlling for parent age. Using the hierarchical linear regression method, the control variables were entered as the first step of the model. In the second step, the predictor (parental stress) was inputted. The change in R^2 between the two steps was noted.

Results of the first step of the regression model indicated that the demographic control variable did not have an effect on parent-child relationship satisfaction, ($F(1, 15) = 0.90$, $p = .358$, $R^2 = .057$). The R^2 value indicates that approximately 5.7% of the variance in parent-child relationship satisfaction scores can be explained by the control variable. Parent age was not a significant predictor in the model.

Results of the second step of the regression model indicated that the demographic variable and parental stress have a significant collective effect on parent-child relationship satisfaction, ($F(2, 14) = 9.92$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .586$). The R^2 value indicates that approximately 58.6% of the variance in parent-child relationship satisfaction scores can be explained by the control variables and the inclusion of parental stress in the model. An additional 52.9% of the variance could be explained by the inclusion of parental stress in the model beyond what is accounted for by the demographic factors alone. Parental stress ($B = -0.29$, $t = -4.23$, $p = .001$) was a significant predictor in the model, such that with every one-unit increase in parental stress, parental-child relationship satisfaction decreased by 0.29 units. The null hypothesis (H_01) for research question one could be

rejected. The results for the hierarchical linear regression are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Results for Regression with Parental Stress Predicting Parent-Child Relationship Satisfaction, While Controlling for Demographics

Source	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*	*VIF*
Step 1						
Parent age	-1.39	1.46	-0.24	-0.95	.358	1.00
Step 2						
Parent age	-0.46	1.03	-0.08	-0.45	.661	1.05
Parental stress	-0.29	0.07	-0.75	-4.23	.001	1.05

Note. Step One: $F(1, 15) = 0.90$, $p = .358$, $R^2 = .057$
Step Two: $F(2, 14) = 9.92$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .586$

The second analysis examined the moderating effect that the child's gender has on the relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction using the scores from the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI. The null and alternative hypotheses for this analysis were as follows:

$H_0$2: The child's gender will not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction.

H_a2: An increased report of parental stress will be associated with a lower parent-child relationship satisfaction and this relationship will be greater when the child is male compared to female.

A hierarchical linear regression was conducted to examine the moderating effect that the child's gender has on the relationship between parental stress and parent-child

relationship satisfaction. In this analysis, child gender was a dummy coded variable with 0 = female and 1 = male. Parental stress score was mean-centered to aid in interpretation of the analysis. Using the hierarchical linear regression method, the control variables were entered as the first step of the model. In the second step, the predictor and interaction term were inputted into the model. The interaction term was created by multiplying the mean-centered parental stress score by the dummy-coded gender variable for each participant. The change in R^2 between the two steps was noted.

Results of the first step of the regression model indicated that the demographic control variable did not have an effect on parent-child relationship satisfaction, ($F(1, 15) = 0.90$, $p = .358$, $R^2 = .057$). The R^2 value indicates that approximately 5.7% of the variance in parent-child relationship satisfaction scores can be explained by the control variable. Parent age was not a significant predictor in the model.

Results of the second step of the regression model indicated that the demographic variable, parental stress, and parental stress*gender have a significant collective effect on parent-child relationship satisfaction, ($F(4, 12) = 7.84$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .723$). The R^2 value indicates that approximately 72.3% of the variance in parent-child relationship satisfaction scores can be explained by the control variable and the inclusion of parental stress, gender, and the interaction term in the model. An additional 66.6% of the variance could be explained by the inclusion of parental stress in the model beyond what is accounted for by the demographic factors alone. Parental stress ($B = -0.24$, $t = -2.97$, $p = .012$) was a significant predictor in the model, such that with every one-unit increase in parental stress, parental-child relationship satisfaction decreased by 0.24 units. Child

gender (B = 6.16, t = 2.42, p = .032) was a significant predictor in the model, such that the child's gender being male (compared to female) increased parental-child relationship satisfaction by 6.16 units. The interaction term, parental stress*gender (B = -0.03, t = -0.26, p = .802), was not significant in the model, suggesting that gender was not a moderating factor in the relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction. The null hypothesis (H_02) for research question two could not be rejected. The results for the hierarchical linear regression are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Results for Regression with the Child's Gender Moderating the Relationship between Parental Stress and Parent-Child Relationship Satisfaction

Source	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*	*VIF*
Step 1						
Parent age	-1.39	1.46	-0.24	-0.95	.358	1.00
Step 2						
Parent age	-0.12	0.92	-0.02	-0.13	.902	1.09
Parental stress	-0.24	0.08	-0.63	-2.97	.012	1.95
Gender	6.16	2.54	0.39	2.42	.032	1.09
Parental stress*Gender	-0.03	0.12	-0.05	-0.26	.802	1.82

Note. Step One: $F(1, 15) = 0.90$, $p = .358$, $R^2 = .057$
Step Two: $F(4, 12) = 7.84$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .723$

The third analysis examined the moderating effect that the child's age has on the relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction using the scores from the PSI-4-SF and the PCRI. The null and alternative hypotheses for this analysis were as follows:

$H_0$3: The child's age will not moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction.

H_a3: The relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction will be moderated by the child's age. It is hypothesized that as the child gets older, this effect will be greater.

A hierarchical linear regression was conducted to examine the moderating effect that the child's age has on the relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction. Parental stress score and child's age were mean-centered to aid in interpretation of the analysis. Using the hierarchical linear regression method, the control variables were entered as the first step of the model. In the second step, the predictor and interaction term were inputted into the model. The interaction term was created by multiplying the mean-centered parental stress score by the mean-centered child's age variable for each participant. The change in R^2 between the two steps was noted.

Results of the first step of the regression model indicated that the demographic control variable did not have an effect on parent-child relationship satisfaction, ($F(1, 15) = 0.90$, $p = .358$, $R^2 = .057$). The R^2 value indicates that approximately 5.7% of the variance in parent-child relationship satisfaction scores can be explained by the control variable. Parent age was not a significant predictor in the model.

Results of the second step of the regression model indicated that the demographic variable, parental stress, and parental stress*age have a significant collective effect on parent-child relationship satisfaction, ($F(4, 12) = 6.25$, $p = .006$, $R^2 = .676$). The R^2 value indicates that approximately 67.6% of the variance in parent-child relationship

satisfaction scores can be explained by the control variables and the inclusion of parental stress, age, and the interaction term in the model. An additional 61.9% of the variance could be explained by the inclusion of parental stress in the model beyond what is accounted for by the demographic factors alone. Parental stress (B = -0.29, t = -4.43, p = .001) was a significant predictor in the model, such that with every one-unit increase in parental stress, parental-child relationship satisfaction decreased by 0.29 units. The interaction term, parental stress*age (B = -0.06, t = -1.73, p = .110), was not significant in the model, suggesting that child's age was not a moderating factor in the relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction. The null hypothesis (H_03) for research question three could not be rejected. The results for the hierarchical linear regression are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Results for Regression with the Child's Age Moderating the Relationship between Parental Stress and Parent-Child Relationship Satisfaction

Source	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*	*VIF*
Step 1						
Parent age	-1.39	1.46	-0.24	-0.95	.358	1.00
Step 2						
Parent age	-0.80	1.18	-0.14	-0.68	.511	1.52
Parental stress	-0.29	0.06	-0.75	-4.43	.001	1.05
Child's Age	-0.05	0.68	-0.02	-0.08	.940	1.69
Parental stress*Age	-0.06	0.03	-0.31	-1.73	.110	1.20

Note. Step One: $F(1, 15) = 0.90$, $p = .358$, $R^2 = .057$
Step Two: $F(4, 12) = 6.25$, $p = .006$, $R^2 = .676$

Summary

Based on the results of the Pearson correlation and regression performed for research question 1, the null hypothesis (H_01) was rejected as there was a statistically

significant relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction. Concerning the second research question, the null hypothesis (H_02) was not rejected as the interaction term, parental stress*gender, was not significant in the model. This suggests that gender was not a moderating factor in the relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction. For the third research question, the null hypothesis (H_03) was not rejected as the interaction term, parental stress*age, was not significant in the model. This suggests that age was not a moderating factor in the relationship between parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction.

In Chapter 5, a summary of this study and an explanation of why and how the study was conducted is presented, as well as conclusions based on the results and the impact of these conclusions. Implications of this study are discussed, along with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this non-experimental, quantitative study was to examine the relationship between a mother's stress and her reported relationship satisfaction she shares with her child shortly following a separation or divorce. Additionally, this study specifically focused on the child's gender and age to determine if either of these would show influence over the interaction between the mother's stress and her reported parent-child relationship satisfaction. This study sought to start addressing a gap in the literature by demonstrating the measurable interaction between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction as reported by the recently separated or divorced, custodial mother.

There were three research questions guiding this research. Question 1: Does the stress level of recently separated or divorced custodial mothers predict the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction? Question two is does the child's gender moderate the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction? Moreover, lastly, question three, does the child's age moderate the relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction?

Researchers have found that stress is often linked to negative feelings within the household, which could include the parent-child relationship (Hakvoort et al., 2012; Kristjansson et al., 2009; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004); however, no published studies have aimed to show a statistically significant effect and identify family types might be

more vulnerable to this effect. I was motivated to create this study due to the lack of scholarly research on parental stress in recently separated or divorced families. A parental divorce will affect a child at any age; however, how children exhibit their feelings will vary according to their actual and developmental age (Lansford et al., 2006). Trying to target families that may be most at risk, based on child's age and gender is one way to determine where to begin on this significant concern. According to earlier findings, some younger children of divorce might act out or have 'temper tantrums.' School-aged children may begin having academic difficulty or defy their parents (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). As a child reaches the preadolescent-adolescent years, these acting out behaviors may have longer lasting consequences. These children may begin experimenting with drugs and alcohol, sexual behaviors, and delinquent behaviors. Parents may pay less attention to their child due to stress; thus, less parental supervision gives the child more freedom, and it might prevent them from finding innovative ways to deal with their feelings, which can be problematic (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003).

Beelmann and Schmidt-Denter (2009) had indicated that daughters tend to have a closer emotional relationship with their mothers than sons do, meaning that the sons may be at a disadvantage when in the full custody of the mother. Around the age of 10 children, both boys and girls, tend to begin to insist on more independence from their parents (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). This need for more independence at a time of family disruption could add more stress to the family dynamics.

The parent-child relationship is one of the most important relationships a child can experience in his or her lifetime (Bowlby, 1979). From birth, most children have their mother caring for them, feeding them, and comforting them in times of distress (Bowlby, 1979), but during a separation or divorce, the mother may be distracted with her feelings and not able to comfort his or her child, which can be very upsetting to the child (Sutherland et al., 2012). Currently, in the United States, mothers are still awarded primary custody of the children approximately 68 to 88% of the time (Braver et al., 2011). This study focused on the mother-child relationship due to this more prevalent placement of the children. This study does not aim to diminish the feelings or the stress of the fathers who have been awarded full custody of their children; however, research shows that when a father is granted full custody, other family dynamics may have influenced the court's decision for custody which could affect the amount of parental stress as well as the child's stress (Breivik & Olweus, 2006)

This chapter includes the purpose of this study, reviews the research questions, provides interpretation of the findings as they relate to the literature review, and discusses the theoretical framework previously presented in Chapters 1 and 2. It addresses the limitations of this study, provides the recommendations for future research, and finally presents the implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

The first analysis resulted in the null hypothesis being rejected, since parental stress, as measured by the PSI-4-SF, was a significant predictor of a decrease in the

parental-child relationship satisfaction, as measured by the Communication scale on the PCRI, among recently separated or divorced custodial mothers. When the mother reported higher stress, she also reported having a significantly lower satisfaction with the parent-child relationship. To help ensure that other factors had no influence on this relationship, the mother's age, the number of children in the house, mother's education, and household income were first analyzed to see what effect they may have on the mother's stress or the parent-child relationship satisfaction. The mother's age was the only significant effect found, so this was then used as a control variable. This is overall finding was consistent with what has been an assumption in the literature. Throughout the literature there has been an assumption that a mother's stress during a separation or divorce would affect the parent-child relationship (Luedemann et al., 2006; Harkvoort et al., 2011; & Wallerstein et al., 2013); however, no research demonstrated the actual link to this relationship, nor was the statistical significance of this relationship known. This study is the first step is knowing the severity of the relationship between a mother's stress during a divorce and the effect it has on the parent-child relationship satisfaction.

The second data analysis demonstrated that the null hypothesis could not be rejected. The child's gender was not found to be a moderating factor in the relationship between parental stress and the reported parent-child relationship satisfaction. However, when just examining the effect of gender on parent-child relationship satisfaction, there was an unexpected finding. When the child was male, the level of parental satisfaction rose by 6.16 units. This finding was surprising based on the previous literature that

indicated that boys would be at a disadvantage being placed in their mother's custody because boys are not as emotionally close to their mothers as are the girls in the family (Beelmann & Schmidt-Denter, 2009). Since the children are still more likely to live with their mothers most of the time (Braver et al., 2011), it was thought that boys might not fare as well as their sisters being away from their fathers more. It is unclear why this difference was found to favor the mother-son relationship. It is also unknown what the son thinks of the parent-child relationship. Replicating this study with a larger sample size may help clarify this finding.

In the final data analysis, the null hypothesis could be not rejected. The child's age was not found to be a moderating factor in the relationship between parental stress and the reported quality of the parent-child relationship. It had been expected that around the age of 10 years old, children begin to assert their need for independence from their parents, which sometimes can cause some tension (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 2003). In a household that is going through a separation or divorce, it was expected that the child's age would be a factor in the relationship between mom's stress level and the subsequent satisfaction with the parent-child relationship, but this was not the case in this study.

Literature Review and Research Findings

This study does confirm prior assumptions that shortly following a parental separation or divorce, a mother's stress does negatively affect the parent-child relationship (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). With an estimated one million actual divorces occurring each year just in the United States (not including couples that separate

that had never legally married or the five states that do not keep records of divorces) (Center for Disease Control, 2015), more research needs to be conducted. Moreover, additional programs should be developed to help these families. This study begins to explain the immediate need for a stress management intervention. Following a separation or divorce, more than 50% of mothers have been found to be less responsive to their child's needs as well as being less physically available (Wallerstein et al., 2013). Hence, children who are also experiencing the trauma of their parents' separation often must deal with their feelings by themselves which can impact the parent-child relationship on a permanent basis (Wallerstein et al., 2013) as well as have a negative effect on the child's attachment style (Faber & Whittenborn, 2010).

The child's gender has been proposed to affect the parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction. Mothers and daughters are reported to have a closer emotional relationship with one another compared to mother and son relationships (Beelmann & Schmidt-Denter, 2009). Since most mothers are still being awarded custody of all children (Braver et al., 2011), this could place the boys at a slight disadvantage. Nevertheless, this study found no influence of the child's gender on the interaction of parental stress and parent-child relationship satisfaction. However, it was found that those mothers that had sons reported higher satisfaction with the parent-child relationship than those mother's that had daughters. This finding was unexpected and is currently unexplainable. Further research into this finding could help researchers to know if this was a onetime occurrence or if this would be a consistent finding.

The goal of this study was twofold. The first aim was to establish that parental stress has a negative impact on the parent-child relationship. The second goal was to try and determine child characteristics that may play a key role in the relationship between the mother's stress and the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship. The results support the hypothesis of a relationship between parental stress and the quality of the parent-child relationship; however, the age nor gender of the child influenced the relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction in this sample. Maybe with a larger sample size, findings may be different. This is the first known study to specifically study this interaction between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction. Attempting to determine if any child characteristics, such as age or gender, increases this stress and the parent-child relationship interaction is also a first.

Theoretical Framework and Research Findings

AT helps describe the relationships between children and their caregivers (parents usually) (Bowlby, 1979). These relationships can change over time based on the child's age and events going on within the family (Bowlby, 1979). The type of attachment a child possesses, whether secure, anxious-resistant, anxious avoidant, or disorganized, can change following a significant life event (Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011). This study showed that the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship diminishes with higher parental stress. In this study, the child's age did not show any significant results as originally expected. As children get older, their attachment behaviors change. Instead of crying and asking to

be held, as a toddler would do, an older child may have trouble exhibiting attachment behaviors that he or she has not done in a while (Ludolph, 2009). Parents, in times of stress, may not notice that their child has a heightened need for attachment type behaviors (Faber & Whittenborn, 2010), which is of concern. If a parent is over-stressed for a long time and the child's attachment needs are not being met, regardless of age, the parent-child relationship could suffer in the long-term. Something needs to be done quickly to prevent this from occurring in families going through a separation or divorce.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was that it was difficult to get access to recently separated or divorced mothers. The professionals who work closely with recently separated mothers are protective of these women. Many professionals reported that they see a real need for this study, but they were unwilling to ask these women to participate to avoid adding more stress to their day. To recruit more participants this researcher contacted schools, divorce and family lawyers, mediators, therapists specializing in divorce, and leaders of divorce support groups. Due to changes in recruitment methods, all of which were approved by IRB, it is not appropriate to generalize the findings to the originally proposed sample. Only 14 of the 17 respondents in the final sample were from a mid-west school system; therefore, it is not appropriate to generalize the findings to any specific geographic location.

Another limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reports. Self-reports can vary depending on the mood and the overall focus of the participant. This study was also

limited since this study could be taken anywhere. If the participants had an Internet connection, the environment (noise level and distractions) in which they completed the surveys is unknown.

Recommendations for Action

This study has demonstrated that there is still a lot we do not know about families going through a divorce. Until this area of inquiry officially expands it is recommended that professionals that work with these families begin teaching the importance of both stress management and the importance of maintaining the parent-child relationship. This information will be shared with the participants, the school district, and with some of the professionals that were asked to be community partners. They will be encouraged to use this information as they deem appropriate in their daily workings with students, clients, and groups members.

Recommendations for Future Research

Researchers with a greater number of professional contacts who could break down some of the barriers to reaching these mothers to obtain an adequate sample size should replicate this study to increase its generalizability. For now, it is being recommended that all parents who are involved in a separation or divorce need to be warned about the effects of their stress on their child. Some tips for stress management should be provided to all parents, not just the custodial parents. Additionally, research involving attachment styles could provide valuable insights. The parent-child relationship is one of the most important relationships a person will have in their lifetime (Bowlby,

1979) so it needs to be protected in any way we can. These results, along with previous research indicate that larger studies need to be conducted in various geographic location. Additionally, these families of divorce could benefit from this study being replicated with custodial fathers to see what if any differences exist between the parental stress with mothers versus fathers. Fathers who are awarded custody of their children are likely to have very different experiences regarding the parent-child relationship compared to mothers (Breivik & Olweus, 2006). Comparing custodial mothers' stress and its effect on father-child relationship to custodial fathers' stress and effects on their parent-child relationships could help determine the differences between mothers and fathers.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change include beginning a new area of inquiry with families of divorce and increasing what is already known. With approximately 2 million adults going through a divorce each year (Center for Disease Control, 2015), these findings have the potential to affect many of those in need. This study is the first one known of its kind to attempt to measure the severity of the impact of parental stress on the parent-child relationship satisfaction. By beginning this inquiry and showing that a connection does exist, this may have opened the door for additional studies that will add to the literature to help inform professionals how to better serve their clients.

Implications for social change within the community will be promoted in various ways. The first way is that the results will be shared with the school district that allowed the recruitment of their parents. Social workers and school psychologists in this district

will be given the results, which they may be able to incorporate their work with students, as they see appropriate. These results may make them more aware of some of the effects of parental stress, and they then might influence the way in which they interact with the children whose parents are separating. This school district is quite large, with seven schools and approximately 4000 students from approximately 2000 families, if the social workers and psychologists work together they can reach all the families this research pertains to, it could make an impact on the community.

Additionally, the community may benefit from this research is that while calling local attorneys, therapists, and support group leaders to attempt to reach more participants, three professionals requested the results of this study once all approvals have been given so they can learn and possibly implement this data into their approach in helping numerous families deal with divorce. As more professional know of these results, hopefully, the more interest there will be for further research.

Implications for societal social change will be promoted in two ways, through future research and by professionals using this new knowledge to inform their daily practices in working with families. Researchers can use this information to help expand the research to a much larger sample size to add to this research. Although the results of the current study showed promise of helping researchers to have a measurable strength of the relations between parental stress and the parent-child satisfaction as well as being able to identify characteristics of the child that may exacerbate this effect, there is still much to learn. These results, along with previous research indicate that families going

through a divorce need help. Many divorcing families have children of various ages who also experience this family transition (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). With so many separations or divorces, innovative programs need to be developed and implemented to give parents the tools and education they need to protect their children from the stressors and long-lasting damage associated with divorce. This study is the first step at working towards a stress management intervention or training for parents experiencing a divorce.

Conclusion

In this current study, a sample ($N = 17$) of recently separated or divorced moms who have their children living with them at least 50% of the time. This research was designed to examine these mothers' stress as well as satisfaction with their parent-child relationship through an online survey. The PSI-4-SF was used to measure stress and the PCRI was used to assess the satisfaction with the parent-child relationship. Additionally, several demographics questions were asked to assess the family dynamics of each participant. A Pearson's correlation was used to analyze the relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction. This relationship was significant and negative related, indicating that higher stress is associated with lower satisfaction with parent-child relationship. A hierarchical linear regression was conducted to see the effect of the child's gender on the relationship between parental stress and the parent-child relationship satisfaction. Gender did influence the parent-child satisfaction level, but not the parental stress. In those families with a boy, the parent-child satisfaction level was significantly higher. Additional hierarchical regression was conducted to examine the

moderating effect of the child's age on the parental stress and parental-child relationship satisfaction, although no significant effects were found.

One of the three proposed hypotheses were confirmed by using various analyses. The results add to the existing body of knowledge by showing that custodial mothers need some training or information on stress management and reduction to help ensure that they have the tools needed to effectively care for their children, especially in those critical first months of a separation when things may be very chaotic.

Through this study, social change is being promoted by adding to the available literature. Additionally, families and community partners from the study will learn about the results soon and can learn from the findings and begin to share this new knowledge when appropriate.

Moreover, the information provided by this study, along with decades of published research, has shown that there is still a lot to learn about families of divorce. Families' dynamics are never identical, making this area of research more challenging. This study presents only a snapshot of divorce in the United States; however, divorce is a worldwide phenomenon that affects not only the separating adults but also their children.

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Appendix A: WPS Licensing Agreement

Hello Kelly,

It is now my pleasure on behalf of WPS to wrap-up your licensing arrangements for the use of the PCRI within your registered project. This email confirms WPS's receipt of your licensed prepayment for 100 adapted/online uses of the PCRI within your scholarly project.

Attached you'll now find our reprint authorization for the indicated use, including the copyright notice that must appear on each reprint/viewing of the PCRI. Your payment was processed, and your paid-in-full receipt will be emailed to you.

If the project requires you to make additional uses of the PCRI beyond those licensed, please contact me directly, with your license number (70098580), to make the supplemental licensing arrangements and receive a quote for the additional per-use fees.

Also, looking ahead to the end of your study, see the attached document for our policy on the inclusion of test material within research papers, reports, and articles. All best wishes in launching the project, and thank you again for your interest in the PCRI. On behalf of WPS, I appreciate your interest in using this instrument as part of your research investigation, and look forward to learning in due course about the results of the study.

Have a wonderful day!

Arianna de Lara
Rights & Permissions Assistant

d 424.201.8838
t 800.648.8857 or 424.201.8800
f 424.201.8938

625 Alaska Avenue, Torrance, CA 90503

Appendix B: PAR Permission to use PSI-4-SF

Vicki McFadden 3:23 PM (22 hours ago)

to me

Please find attached your fully executed License Agreement.

When you have your survey ready for administration, please forward a print screen that displays the required PAR Copyright Notice to comply with Section 8 of your License Agreement. You can begin administering the PSI-4-SF online as soon as your website is ready.

Your License Agreement will expire on March 30, 2016. Please contact me if you need an extension for your research or any additional administrations.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Vicki McFadden
Permissions Specialist

Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc., 16204 N. Florida Avenue, Lutz, FL 33549, www.parinc.com
Telephone: (888) 799-6082; Fax: (800) 727-9329; Intl Fax: (813) 449-4109; e-mail: vmark@parinc.com

Kelly Murphy <kelly.murphy@waldenu.edu> Mar 10 (4 days ago)

to
Vicki

Vicki,
It looks like I will be needing an extension for the License agreement. This one is set to expire March 30th. I am defending my proposal this Saturday and will get my IRB material submitted by Monday. Best case scenario is that IRB will approve by mid-April and I will need six weeks for data collection. If I can get the license agreement to go until the end of May this should be perfect.

If you need any additional forms signed, please let me know.
Thank you,
Kelly Murphy

By way of this e-mail, PAR is extending your License Agreement until May 30, 2016.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Have a great day!

Vicki McFadden
Permissions Specialist

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to help me get a better understanding of who is completing this study. No identifying information will be asked. If a question does not pertain to you, select N/A or other.

1. What is your age?
    - 25 or under
    - 26-30
    - 31-35
    - 36-40
    - 41-45
    - 46-50
    - over 50

2. What is your ethnicity? (Please select all that apply.)

    - American Indian or Alaskan Native
    - Asian or Pacific Islander
    - Black or African American
    - Hispanic or Latino
    - White / Caucasian
    - Prefer not to answer
    - Other (please specify)

3. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

    - Less than high school degree
    - High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
    - Some college but no degree
    - Associate degree
    - Bachelor degree
    - Graduate degree

4. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

- o Divorced
- o Separated
- o In a domestic partnership or civil union
- o Single, but cohabiting with a significant other
- o Other (please specify)

5. How many children are you parent or guardian for (aged 17 or younger only)? None

- o 1
- o 2
- o 3
- o 4
- o More than 4

6. What is your oldest child's age?

- o 5
- o 6
- o 7
- o 8
- o 9
- o 10
- o 11
- o 12
- o 13
- o 14 or older
- o 4 or younger

7. What is this child's gender?

- o Boy
- o Girl

8. What is your next oldest child's age?

- o 5
- o 6
- o 7
- o 8
- o 9
- o 10
- o 11
- o 12
- o 13
- o 14 or older
- o 4 or younger
- o N/A (only have one child)

9. What is this child's gender?

- o Boy
- o Girl
- o N/A (only have one child)

10. What is your next oldest child's age?

- o 5
- o 6
- o 7
- o 8
- o 9
- o 10
- o 11
- o 12
- o 13
- o 14 or older
- o 4 or younger
- o N/A (only have one or two children)

11. What is this child's gender?

- o Boy
- o Girl

- N/A (only have one or two children)

12. If you have more than three children, please list their gender and ages below. If you do not have more than four children please enter 'no' or 'n/a' in the box.

13. What is the legal status of child custody?

- Mom has full custody
- Dad has full custody
- Mom and Dad have joint custody
- Still figuring it out...

14. Estimate how much time your children live with you.

- 25%
- 50%
- 75%
- 100%
- Other (please specify)

15. How much time has passed since the separation/ divorce?

- 1-3 months
- 4-6 months
- 7-9 months
- 10-12 months
- 13-16 months
- 17-20 months
- 21-24 months
- Other (please specify)

16. What was the length of this marriage? (From time of wedding to time of separation).

17. Do you work outside of the home?

- No
- Part-time

- Full-time
- More than full-time

18. What is the current household income? (Please estimate all income from work, child, support, and alimony).

19. Enter the number of hours dad spends with the children each week. You can enter hours if easy to calculate or estimate a percentage, such as 50% if there is joint custody. Please specify hours or percentages.

20. For the remainder of this study, please think of only one of your children, between the ages of 5 and 13, when answering questions. Please indicate the age and gender of this child you will think of.

21. What is the ethnicity of this child?

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- White / Caucasian
- Prefer not to answer
- Other (please specify)