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Using a Risk Assessment to Predict Family Court Service Use in Custody Disputes

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Joi Michele Hollis

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Abstract

Using a Risk Assessment to Predict Family Court Service Use in Custody Disputes

by

Joi Michele Hollis

MEd, Boston University, 1994

BA, Pacific Lutheran University, 1991

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education Psychology

Walden University

August 2018

Abstract

Present research has offered few easy-to-administer, accurate, and psychometrically-tested screening tools. Additionally, a gap exists in peer-reviewed literature concerning effective utilization of a family risk assessment instrument to determine the appropriate services for families involved in high-conflict custody cases. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if the Child Risk Index for Divorced or Separating families (CRI-DS) can be used as an effective family risk assessment tool to identify specific family needs and refer families to relevant court-related family triage services and programs. This study was grounded by Kellam and Van Horn's life course/social field theory. This study was supported by archival data. Correlation and regression analyses of 5 research questions addressing the relationships between family risk, court use, and related court services. Correlation results indicated both gender and marital status were significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score and likewise conflict intensity also tended to increase. Study findings were consistent with previous findings that stress of divorce and separation was exacerbated by parental conflict and impacted the core relationships within the family; having long-term negative effects on the psychological well-being of the children involved. Using the CRI-DS as a triage instrument can facilitate the determination of which interventive services may be implemented for at-risk youth of high-conflict families, therefore promoting positive social change through the potential to improve the lives of at-risk youth and their families.

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Dedication

Thank you Lord for seeing me through every trial, lesson, and blessing. To my husband, Timothy William Hollis (b. 1965- d. 2011), thank you for a lifetime of love, support, and encouragement, my guardian angel in life and spirit. God's greatest gift to each other and us was, and will always be our sons. I will love you always and forever.

To my pride and joy, Alex and Erik. It is for you both that I endeavor to live a life worth remembering. I cannot promise that I will be here for the rest of your lives~ But I promise to love you for the rest of my life.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	5
Court-Mandated Parent Education Classes.....	8
Parenting Skills Training: New Beginnings Program (NBP)	9
Problem Statement	9
Purpose of the Study	10
Research Questions and Hypotheses	12
Theoretical Framework for the Study.....	15
Nature of the Study	15
Operational Definitions.....	16
Assumptions.....	18
Scope and Delimitations	18
Limitations of the Study.....	19
Significance of the Study	20
Summary	20
Chapter 2: Literature Review	22
Introduction.....	22
Literature Search Strategy.....	23
Theoretical Foundations.....	23
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts	27

Never Married and Divorcing Parents	27
Cohabiting Dynamics.....	28
Factors Impacting Children’s Adjustment of Divorce and Separation.....	29
Court-Mandated Parent Information Programs (PIP).....	30
Parenting Skills Training: New Beginnings Program (NBP)	31
Alternative Screening Instruments.....	35
Child Risk Index for Divorced or Separated Families (CRI-DS).....	35
Summary	38
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	39
Introduction.....	39
Research Design and Rationale	40
Research Questions.....	40
Methodology.....	42
Sampling and Sampling Procedure.....	42
Archival Data Recruitment and Data Collection	43
Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs	43
Data Analysis Plan.....	46
Threats to Validity	49
Ethical Procedures	49
Summary.....	49
Chapter 4: Results	51
Introduction.....	51

Data Collection	53
Sample Demographics	53
Descriptive Statistics.....	54
Statistical Analysis.....	54
Research Question 1	55
Research Question 2	57
Research Question 3	59
Research Question 4	60
Research Question 5	62
Summary	64
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	66
Introduction.....	66
Interpretation of the Findings.....	66
Interpretation of Research Question 1	67
Interpretation of Research Question 2	67
Interpretation of Research Question 3	68
Interpretation of Research Question 4	68
Interpretation of Research Question 5	68
Theoretical Implications	69
Limitations of the Study.....	71
Recommendations.....	71
Positive Social Change Implications	72

Conclusion	72
References.....	74
Appendix A: Child Risk Index for Divorced or Separated Families (CRI-DS)	86

List of Tables

Table 1. Categorical Variables Observed 54

Table 2. Logistic Regression Output/Analysis 56

Table 3. Observed Versus Predicted..... 57

Table 4. Correlations between CRI-DS and Conflict Intensity 58

Table 5. Correlations between posttest CRI-DS (10-month follow up) and Conflict
IntensityR..... 60

Table 6. Logistic Regression Output/Analysis 62

Table 7. Logistic Regression for Petitions Filed..... 63

Table 8. Logistic Regression for Court Ordered Supervision..... 64

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Parenting during separation and following divorce is often a traumatic experience for both parents and children (Austin, Pruett, Kirkpatrick, Flens, & Gould, 2013).

Although not every separation and/or divorce of parents will have a negative impact on children, research has indicated that children of divorce have been found to have greater than double the risk of lifelong emotional or behavioral problems in comparison to children whose parents remain married (Brandon, 2006; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). For a sizeable subgroup of children of divorce (or separation), the negative effects of the relationship breakup continues into adulthood (Wolchik et al., 2013).

Waldfogel, Craigie, and Brooks-Gunn (2010) note five key pathways through which family structure might influence child well-being: parental resources, parental mental health, parental relationship quality, parenting quality, and father involvement. Unmarried mothers who end their union with the biological father experience increased mental health problems, as do married mothers subsequent to their divorce and both (unmarried/divorcing mothers) suffer from lower income growth at this time (Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Study, 2010). Further, Hummer and Hamilton (2010) note that the prevalence of fragile families varies across racial and ethnic strata, where most parents of all racial and ethnic groups are romantically involved at the time of their child's birth. African American women are less likely to be in a cohabiting relationship than are White and Hispanic mothers. Overtime, African American mothers have the lowest rates of marriage and cohabitation and the highest breakup rates, versus Mexican immigrant mothers who have the highest rates of marriage and cohabitation and the

lowest breakup rates. Additionally, these fragile families have far fewer socioeconomic resources than married families, though resources vary within fragile families by race and ethnicity. White mothers, in general, have more socioeconomic resources than Black, Mexican American, and Mexican immigrant mothers; they are more likely to have incomes above the poverty limit (Hummer et al., 2010).

Historical data have further indicated that 10-25% of divorcing families remain conflicted long after separation compared to 40% of unmarried parents (Fragile Families & Child Wellbeing Study, 2010), and the children in these families are at greater risk for adjustment problems (Bonds, Braver, Goodman, & Sandler, 2004; Hetherington, 1999; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). This segment of the population tends to use a disproportionate amount of court dispute resolution resources (Goodman et. al., 2004; Kline Pruett, Nangle, & Bailey, 2000).

Family court systems in America have historically mandated that separating or divorcing parents participate in family dispute resolution services, which are typically offered in a tiered service model, with programs increasingly becoming more intrusive (Salem, 2009). Legal scholars have raised concerns with the tiered model of services, arguing a lack of evidence of the efficacy of this model (Salem, 2009). A more promising family court system service model for families involved in custody disputes is the triage model, also known as *differentiated case management* (Salem, 2009). In the triage model, results from family risk assessments completed by the parents are used to provide families with the dispute resolution services that best align with their risks and needs as indicated by a family risk screening tool (Salem, 2009).

Under the tiered, linear continuum of services, families begin with the service that is least intrusive and time consuming, where in the absence of resolution, the family moves to the what is typically a more intrusive process (Salem, Kulak, & Deutsch, 2007). Families with higher conflict tend to be at greater risk of their needs being inadequately addressed at the lower end of this continuum (Salem et al., 2007). Of increasing importance is the emotional and economic strain many families suffer through extensive court service use related to custody disputes. An exhaustive use of court resources by parents in high-conflict custody disputes often places an economic strain on families and causes case flow complications within the court system (Salem et. al., 2007). The resulting delays in the allocation of resources for parents and their children often exacerbate the existing emotional, mental, and behavioral problems many families in conflict are facing (Salem et. al., 2007). An assessment of family risk provided to parents at the earliest phase of their entering the court process in these cases is an alternate consideration in the provision of services (Salem et. al., 2007).

According to the U.S. National Research Council (2009), when potentially modifiable risk and protective factors have been identified through epidemiological and developmental research, preventive approaches can be developed to prevent the development of mental, emotional, and behavioral problems. As such, a system of early screening using a brief risk assessment may be an effective means of triaging an appropriate provision of services in lieu of the traditional tiered service model (Lande, 2012). In family law matters, the use of a family risk assessment instrument to determine the appropriate services for families involved in high-conflict custody cases can help to

expedite the court process while reducing financial and related burdens for families and the family court system (Stover, 2013). It may serve as an efficient, cost-effective method of identifying families who are most at risk for poorer outcomes, providing these families additional services designed to reduce these negative outcomes (Lande, 2012).

Results from the few studies on the benefits of the triage system have suggested that it has expedited the time spent in child custody litigation and has reduced family court costs (Salem, 2009). However, these same studies raised the concern that the triage system is predicated on the consistent use of an “accurate, easy to administer, [and] replicable” family risk assessment tool (Salem, 2009, p. 383). Two assessment tools have been developed for this purpose: the the National Center for State Courts’ (2014) Screening Tool for Divorce Case Triage and the Connecticut Judicial Branch’s (2007) Family Civil Intake Screen. However, both screening tools are extensive—the Family Civil Intake Screen is eight pages in length and the Screening Tool for Divorce Case Triage is three pages in length—and neither screening tool has undergone extensive psychometric testing.

One instrument that has shown promise as a triage instrument is the Child Risk Index for Divorced or Separated Families (CRI-DS; Tein, Braver, Sandler, & Wolchik, 2013). The 15-item CRI-DS was developed as a screening tool to identify children most at risk for experiencing long-term psychological and emotional problems as a result of their parents’ divorce (Tein et al., 2013). It is used as an assessment instrument for the NBP for children, ages 4 to 15 (Tein et al., 2013). The 15-item CRI-DS—which is comprised of six child behavior problem questions, three parent behavior problem

questions, three parent conflict questions regarding child discipline practices and parent visitation rights, and three parenting self-efficacy questions—has received extensive psychometric testing and has been found to have sound reliability and validity (Tein et al., 2013).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the study. The chapter opens with a background section on pertinent literature. The problem statement is then presented, followed by the purpose of the study and the research questions and hypotheses. The chapter then includes the theoretical framework that guides the study, Kellam's (1986) social theory of developmental epidemiology. The chapter continues with a nature of the study section and a section that provides operational definitions of study constructs. Methodological, sample, and data analysis considerations as they pertain to study assumptions, limitations, and significance are then presented. The chapter ends with a summary section.

Background

The majority of child custody cases are resolved amicably between parents; however, approximately 10% of child custody cases are high conflict: these are the “frequent flyer” cases of the family court system (Altman & Treneff, 2014; Nichols, 2013). The major characteristics of high-conflict custody cases are (a) pervasive and intractable parental conflict despite previous court intervention and litigation; (b) resistance of compliance to previous court orders; (c) substantial losses of family and family court fiscal and human resources and time; and (d) parents' preoccupation with their own issues and concerns, often to the great detriment of the child (Altman &

Treney, 2014). High-conflict parents are those who have conflict across four important dimensions: topics (i.e., child custody), tactics (i.e. physical aggression), intensity (i.e., degree of hostility), and frequency (Goodman et.al 2004; Johnson, 1994). Although many children suffer the consequences of protracted child custody hearings, outcomes are often most severe among children involved in high-conflict custody cases, especially if the parents' relationship prior to divorce was fraught with financial stress, parental and family conflict and/or disengagement, verbal abuse, domestic violence, and substance abuse (Altman & Trenoff, 2014). This section provides background on existing educational and theory based parenting skills programming, therefore providing a framework in presenting a gap within the research as it applies to family risk. An assessment of family risk provided to parents at the earliest phase of their entering the court process can result in the receipt of services, including prevention services, which could help resolve family issues as well as potentially expedite the child custody court proceedings for these (United States National Research Council, 2009).

Though a smaller portion of the overall population of divorcing or separating parents, families engaged in high-conflict custody disputes are the most labor intensive, often using a disproportionate amount of court resources (Goodman et. al., 2004; Kline Pruett, Nangle, & Bailey, 2000). The children of these households are at greater risk for complications, including being two to three more times likely than children from intact families to experience clinically significant levels of mental health problems or to receive mental health services (Amato & Keith, 1991; Braver, Griffin, & Cookston, 2005; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). Further, these children are at greater risk of engaging in risk-

taking behaviors like drug and alcohol use, experience significant academic problems, and engage in sexual activities prior to the age of 18 (Braver et. al., 2005). Complicating the existing stress of divorce or separation on the children is the extent to which children are placed in the high-conflict of their parents, at times used as “pawns” in the custody war (Elrod, 2001; Nichols, 2013). Parents who express their rage toward their former spouse or significant other by asking children to carry hostile messages, by denigrating the other parent in front of the child, or by prohibiting mention of the other parent in their presence create stress and loyalty conflicts in their children, making these children more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety compared with children of continuously married families (Kelly & Emery, 2003). The level of stress experienced prior to, during, and after the high-conflict child custody case can be so severe that the child may develop clinical depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which in turn can cause serious academic, social, and medical problems at times continuing into adulthood (Nichols, 2013).

The family court child advocates recognize that children who are experiencing the chaos of divorce and custody disputes can better adapt to their circumstances if they and their parents participate in a family court triage system that provides services that address the needs of the families (Jaffe et al., 2008; Lande, 2012). A family-centered triage approach is also beneficial to the court system itself, as a confluence of legal and social factors (i.e., increases in divorce rates, changes in family law) have challenged the fiscal and human resources of the family court system (Jaffe et al., 2008; Lande, 2012). Moreover, a triage system that addresses the family’s specific needs can replace the less

effective tiered or linear approach to dispute resolution. Under this tiered approach, all families, regardless of need, first attend a parenting education program (Jaffe et al., 2008; Lande, 2012). If no resolution was met, they proceed on the mediation, and if the case remains unresolved, in some instances families then participate in a child custody evaluation (Ver Steegh, Davis, & Frederick, 2012), settlement conference, and potentially trial. On the national level, numerous family court advocacy organizational leaders and child mental health experts have pushed for the new triage system, providing recommendations for programming, including court-mandated parent education and skills-based parenting, which are discussed in the following section.

Court-Mandated Parent Education Classes

Since January 2, 1997, all new divorcing parents of minor children and unmarried parents with custody access disputes have been ordered by the courts to attend an educational program focused on their children's needs (Nichols, 2013). Court-affiliated parent education programs are predominantly information versus skills based. Further, the majority of the programs nationwide do not offer separate curriculums for divorcing parents and never married/unmarried parents. Court-affiliated never married/divorcing parent education programs exist in 46 states, with the level of mandate varying from state statute to county/district rules (Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008). Parent education programs teach divorcing, separating, or never married parents conflict resolution skills they need to minimize the impact of their separation on their children (National Center for State Courts, 2004). Participants are instructed regarding the merits of using effective coparenting skills. By definition, coparenting skills means open dialogue and cooperation

between parents in decision-making regarding raising children. Twenty-seven states mandate attendance by statute, whereas five states have some countywide or district based mandates; an additional six states have judicial rules and orders for program attendance (Fackrell, Hawkins, & Kay, 2011).

Parenting Skills Training: New Beginnings Program (NBP)

The New Beginnings Program (NBP) is a theory-based preventive intervention targeted at parenting skills to target the risk and protective factors impacting youth outcomes (Wolchik, 2009) including academic, emotional, and behavioral problems. The targeted risk and protective factors include parental warmth (i.e., positive parent-child interactions and active listening), effective discipline, and reducing interparental conflict. NBP takes a psycho-educational and skills-building approach to teach parents skills such as increasing warmth in the parent child relationship through regular positive interactions with their children; using clear, consistent and age-appropriate discipline strategies; and keeping children out of the middle of interparental conflict by reducing negative engagement with the other parent and discouraging negative talk about the other parent in the children's presence (Goodman et al., 2004).

Problem Statement

Despite the court system's increased recognition of the benefits of research-based interventions that align with the needs of families in comparison to the one-size-fits-all linear tiered approach, the actual implementation of interventions aligned with family needs has been stymied by the lack of valid assessment instruments that help identify family risk factors and resultant relevant services (Ostrom et al., 2014). Since 2005, the

percentage of intractable disputes concerning child custody has dramatically risen—as have the differing risks and needs of families—as a result of changing societal factors, including the increased rates of unmarried parents, single fathers, and grandparents as guardians of their grandchildren (Ostrom et al., 2014). The increases in high-conflict child custody cases coupled with the traditional linear or tiered court services has resulted in substantial financial and human resources costs to family court systems (Ostrom et al., 2014).

Family litigants also face a multitude of challenges, navigating the court system while participating in tiered services that are neither relevant nor beneficial and coping with the crisis of separation or divorce and the potential loss of custody of a child or children (Stover, 2013). The costs and implications of lengthy and contentious custody disputes without meaningful interventions that could greatly expedite the process place a financial, emotional, and mental burden on the parents and their children while exhausting an already overtaxed court system (Stover, 2013). The use of a family risk assessment instrument to determine the appropriate services for families involved in high-conflict custody cases can help to expedite the court process while reducing financial and related burdens for families and the family court system (Stover, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study with a nonexperimental design was to determine if the CRI-DS is an effective family risk assessment instrument that can be used to identify the specific needs of families to place families in appropriate court-connected programs. The independent variable in four of the five research questions is

the parent risk group, as classified by the CRI-DS (Tein et al, 2013), with parents grouped into low and high-risk parent groups. For the first research question, the independent (categorical) variables are gender, education level, and marital status, and the risk index is the dependent variable. The second research question includes one continuously-coded dependent variable that assesses court-related parent factors of interparental conflict. Court-related parent factors include existence of supervised parenting time and/or monitored exchange orders, protection/restraining orders, and alcohol/drug testing orders. Ten-month post-NBP attrition rate is the dependent variable for the third research question. Attrition is assessed via archival/follow up data where individual NBP participants indicate through self-report that despite completing the program, the parental conflict persists as determined by further court-affiliated service intervention. The fourth research question has as the dependent variable the number of court-affiliated family interventions in which the families participate. Number of court affiliated family interventions range from 1 being the *least intrusive* (mandatory mediation), 2 being *moderately intrusive* (mediation and court ordered child interview) to 3 or more being *highly intrusive* (either one or both of the preceding interventions in addition to a court ordered custodial evaluation and/or court-ordered parenting coordinator). The dependent variable for the fifth research question is the type court-affiliated family interventions in which the families participate: mediation, child interview, family evaluation, parenting coordination.

An assessment of family risk provided to parents at the earliest phase of their entering the court process can result in the receipt of services, including prevention

services, which could help resolve family issues as well as potentially expedite the child custody court proceedings for these (U.S. National Research Council, 2009). There is substantial evidence of the inter-item and test-retest reliability and validity of the CRI-DS with regard to child outcomes (Wolchik et al., 2013). A series of analyses using three data sets were conducted to identify and cross-validate a set of items representing parent report of child behavior problems and family level risk and protective factors, each of which contributed to the predictive accuracy of the index (Tein et al, 2013). As such, the CRI-DS can be used as an initial screen to be followed by a more in-depth interview about parental concerns in each area of postdivorce family functioning to assess what types of services might be most appropriate (Tein et al, 2013). Thus, a need exists to determine if the CRI-DS is an adequate triage assessment tool for family court-related custody cases. Using archival risk index data collected through the New Beginnings Program, this study involved taking a sampling of the individuals who expressed an interest in NBP. Tracking of these cases occurred by accessing available public record/court data. A comparison was drawn of those parties in terms of the extent of court involvement following court mandated parent education class who expressed an interest in NBP but opted not to participate in NBP, against those who voluntarily participated in either the 2-week or 10-week NBP psycho-educational program subsequent to completion of the court mandated parent education class.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions in this study pertain to differences between the high-risk parent group and the low- and moderate-risk parent groups on high-conflict child custody

parent factors, NBP, and court resources. As noted by Tein et al. (2013), the sum of 0/1 scores provides a clear indication of the number of problems across the 15 questions that occurred in the family and whether it is above or below the cutpoint of 6 or 7 problems (as the ROC analyses indicated). The research questions for the study were:

Research Question 1: Is gender, education level, and marital status significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score?

H_01 : Gender, education level, and marital status are not significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score.

H_a1 : Gender, education level, and marital status are significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score.

Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e., correlation) between pretest CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict?

H_02 : There is no statistically significant relationship between the *pretest* CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict.

H_a2 : There is a statistically significant relationship between the *pretest* CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict.

Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e., correlation) between the CRI-DS scores (at *10-month follow up*) and interparental conflict?

H_03 : There is no statistically significant relationship between the CRI-DS scores (at 10-month follow up) and interparental conflict.

H_{a3} : There is a statistically significant relationship between the CRI-DS scores (at 10-month follow up) and interparental conflict.

Research Question 4: Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *number* of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program)?

H_{o4} : Controlling for relationship status, there is no statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the number of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program).

H_{a4} : Controlling for relationship status, there is a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *number* of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program).

Research Question 5: Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program)?

H_{o5} : Controlling for relationship status, there is no statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program).

H_a5: Controlling for relationship status, there is a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

According to Kellam and Van Horn (1997), life course/social field theory maintains that at each stage of life and during major life transitions, individuals are involved in a few social fields (e.g., demands associated with being a parent, maintaining relationships, and/or separating families). An integration of three scientific perspectives underlies this developmental epidemiological prevention model: life course development, the focus being early risk factors and paths leading to health or disorder; community epidemiology, the focus being variation in risk factors and paths among individuals in a defined population in their environments; and preventive intervention trials directed at early hypothesized risk factors (Kellam et al., 1997). Kellam's (1986) social theory of developmental epidemiology refers to the integration of community epidemiology with life-course development, which entails defining total populations, or representative samples of populations and mapping developmental paths over significant portions of the life course (Kellam, 1994).

Nature of the Study

This study has five research questions. In four of the five research questions, the independent variable is parent risk group, as classified by the CRI-DS (Tein et al., 2013), with parents grouped into low, moderate, and/or high-risk parent groups. The dependent variables differ for each research question. For the first research question, the

independent variables are gender, education level, and marital status, which are all categorical variables. The second research question includes one continuously-coded dependent variable to assesses court-related parent factors of interparental conflict. Ten-month attrition rates is the dependent variable for the third research question. The fourth research question has as the dependent variable the number of court-affiliated family interventions in which the families participate while the dependent variable for the fifth research question is the type court-affiliated family interventions in which the families participate.

The sample for the study was all the parents who participated in the 2-week NBP, which is $N = 385$. This is a secondary data analysis of data collected as part of a larger study. Specific to this limited data set are two components where there is a 2-week “control group” of participants and a 10-week “treatment group” of participants. Limiting the sample for this study to the 2-week group was integral, as it is this population within the sample least influenced by their participation in the NBP. Conversely, there was a concern with using the 10-week treatment group; the outcomes may be skewed in terms of their subsequent court use given their extended participation in the NBP. The original project was funded by NIDA Grant R01DA026874: Multi-Court Trial of NBP to Prevent Substance Abuse and Mental Health Disorder.

Operational Definitions

Attitudinal conflict: This type of conflict refers to the parents’ anger and hostility toward their ex-spouse, ex-spouse’s new significant other, including their negative attitude toward their ex-spouse in the parenting role (Goodman et al., 2004).

Attrition rates: Attrition rates refer to the loss of participants, most often as a result of the participant dropping out of the study, in research studies where data is collected at two or more time points (Katz, 2009).

Court-affiliated family education interventions: Court-affiliated family education interventions are mandated programs for parents involved in high-conflict custody disputes (Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008). The intent of these interventions is to reduce the stress and psychological trauma experienced by the child by teaching parents skills to reduce inter-parent conflict and enhance parenting behaviors (Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008).

Court resources: This term includes resources used by individuals regarding custody and/or parenting time. For example, petitions filed for custody modification, mandatory mediation, court-ordered custody evaluation or child interview services, and court-appointed advisors and/or parent coordinators (Elrod, 2001).

Interparental conflict: This term is defined as legal, interpersonal, and/or attitudinal conflict (Salem, 2009).

High-conflict child custody court cases: High-conflict child custody court cases are custody cases characterized by lack of trust and considerable levels of anger between parents, which has led to their investment in prolonged and protracted litigation (Elrod, 2001).

High-conflict parents: High-conflict parents are those who have conflict across four important conflict dimensions: topics (i.e., child custody), tactics (i.e., physical

aggression), intensity (i.e., degree of hostility), and frequency (Goodman et al., 2004; Johnson, 1994).

Assumptions

I assumed that participants, in their completion of the CRI-DS pretest and posttest and in the follow up survey, honestly answered the questions. I further assumed that the participants were able to comprehend the nature of the questions asked on the CRI-DS and survey. This is a secondary data analysis of data collected as part of a larger study. The original project was funded by NIDA Grant R01DA026874: Multi-Court Trial of NBP to Prevent Substance Abuse and Mental Health Disorder. I assumed that the data were collected rigorously as described by Tein et al. (2013).

Scope and Delimitations

In this quantitative study, I used archival data to determine if the CRI-DS is an effective family risk assessment instrument that can be used to identify the specific needs of families and place them in appropriate court-connected programs. The scope of this study addresses the increased risk on children and alternative resources during custody disputes resulting from separation or divorce. This study does not cover the efficacy of family court services. The archival data consisted of a limited data set including family/participant ID, risk index items and summary scores from recruitment and pretest, general demographics (e.g., age, ethnicity, SES, family size), and items related to court service use at the 10-month follow up for 850 families. Excluded populations include non-English speaking individuals, parents pursuing divorce without minor aged children, parents with an active juvenile court dependency case, and those who did not have an

active family law case pending before the court.

Limitations of the Study

The data were limited to archival data. I did not participate in the administration of either the CRI-DS or survey, so I am not able to account for any unmeasured and/or unknown contextual variables that may have impacted the answers provided by the participants. A limitation regarding the CRI-DS is that it was developed for use with divorcing families. However, where the archival data was accumulated, unmarried couples with children were included as participants in the NBP study in Arizona. Additionally, as noted by Tein et al. (2013), high scores on the risk index can be obtained in different ways where multiple problems may be reflected within a single domain (e.g., child behavior problems or parenting) or moderate levels of problems in several domains. Given this, CRI-DS scores do not necessarily reflect cumulative risk across multiple domains, which would be reflected in a measure such as the adverse child experience study (Felitti et al., 1998). The sample did not include a wide diversity with respect to ethnicity, length of post-separation time, and different custody and parenting time arrangements. The participant pool consisted of individuals throughout Arizona who were primarily English-speaking or bilingual (Spanish) individuals with an active family law case involving legal decision-making and/or parenting time matters pending before the Court. The race and percentage breakdown within Arizona, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), are 57.8% White*, 29.6% Hispanic, 4% Native American*, 3.7% Black*, 2.8% Asian or Pacific Islander*, and 1.8% two or more races*

(* = non-Hispanic). One limitation of the current study is that the sample of the limited data set is primarily White (non-Hispanic), thereby not able to fully account for minority culture or ethnic implications concerning coparenting conflict.

Significance of the Study

This study can help to expedite the court process while reducing financial and related burdens for families and the family court system through the examination of an early screening risk assessment that may help determine appropriate services in high-conflict custody cases (see Stover, 2013). The examined risk assessment may be an efficient, cost-effective method of identifying families who are most at risk for poorer outcomes and resultantly providing these families additional services designed to ameliorate these negative outcomes (Lande, 2012). If the brief risk index is a significant predictor in the frequency of court service utilization, its use may serve as a preventative measure in the appropriate provision of court resources. Additionally, its potential use as a triage instrument can facilitate the determination of which interventive services should be implemented for at risk youth of high-conflict families. The ability to better target court resources that will best serve the needs of children will benefit families and the courts.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if the CRI-DS can be used as an effective family risk assessment tool to identify specific family needs and refer families to relevant court-related family triage services and programs. An assessment of family risk provided to parents at the earliest phase of their entering the court process may be an

effective means of identifying the specific needs and services for families. The study research questions have been developed to evaluate the efficacy of the CRI-DS in relation to the extent of families' use of court services. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature on parental conflict in custody disputes, coparenting dynamics for never married and divorcing parents, overview of court services in family cases, and the theoretical framework of Kellam's (1986) life-course development. Chapter 3 is an overview of the research design, particularly the data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 outlines the research findings. Chapter 5 is a discussion involving the findings and interpretation of the same, results, suggestions for further research study, recommendations for action, and the implications of positive social change within and outside of the court setting.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The increases in high-conflict child custody cases coupled with the traditional linear or tiered court services has resulted in substantial costs to family court systems (Ostrom et al., 2014). Family litigants also face a multitude of challenges, navigating the court system while participating in tiered services that are neither relevant nor beneficial while coping with the crisis of separation or divorce and the potential loss of custody of a child or children (Stover, 2013). The purpose of this study was to explore if the CRI-DS is an effective family risk assessment instrument that can be used to identify the specific needs of families to place families in appropriate court-connected programs. Parental conflict in many families is most frequent and intense during the first 2 years following separation (Sobolewski et al., 2005; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982). Several studies report little, or even a positive, association between levels of parental conflict and nonresident father involvement, though it is unclear under what conditions parental conflict does and does not undermine nonresident father involvement (Amato & Rezac, 1994; Arditti & Keith, 1993; Sobolewski, et al., 2005). Never/unmarried parents and divorcing parents seen in the family court setting are utilizing the court to resolve legal custody, parenting time, and/or financial matters (i.e., child support). Likewise, parents in each population are often struggling with emotional issues in conjunction with the end of the intimate partner relationship. The risk of heightened interparental conflict may be greater particularly during the early stages of the separation and ensuing legal proceedings. This chapter will address existing literature regarding the dynamics of

parental conflict, its associated impact on children, theoretical framework of life course development with associated implications on family risk, and family court-affiliated services typically used in custody litigation.

Literature Search Strategy

The library databases used were: PsycInfo, PsycArticles, Sage Premier, SocINDEX with full text, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest Central. Search engine used was GoogleScholar. Key search terms consisted of *family court services*, *high conflict custody litigation*, *impact of divorce on children*, and *fragile families*. The scope of literature review covered seminal, longitudinal research on children and divorce from 1977 to present, with a primary source as the *Family Court Review*, a research publication of the international Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, in addition to *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, a publication of the Association for Conflict Resolution. Numerous psychological and psychiatric journals on children, marriage, and family were the sources of literature. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Child Trends/Fragile Families study was used as a source of current research on child welfare.

Theoretical Foundations

Kellam's (1986) social theory of developmental epidemiology refers to the integration of community epidemiology with life-course development, which entails defining total populations, or representative samples of populations and mapping developmental paths over significant portions of the life course (Kellam, 1994). According to Kellam and Van Horn (1997), life course/social field theory maintains that

at each stage of life and across major transition periods in the life course, individuals are involved in a few social fields (e.g., demands associated with being a parent, maintaining relationships, and/or separating families). Sandler, Knox and Braver (2012) noted, from a prevention science perspective, that working with children whose parents divorce is an opportunity for selective preventive interventions with high public health impact (Braver et al., 2004; Haine et al., 2003). An integration of three scientific perspectives underlies this developmental epidemiological prevention model: life course development, with a focus on early risk factors for health or disorder; community epidemiology, with a focus on the variation in risk factors; and preventive intervention trials directed at early hypothesized risk factors (Kellam et al., 1997).

The research agenda of prevention science includes studies to identify risk and protective factors associated with child problem outcomes, the development and evaluation of preventive interventions to reduce child problem outcomes, and studies to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions when implemented by existing community agencies (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009; Sanders et al., 2012). The stress of parental divorce and/or separation (as one example of life course development), exacerbated by unremitting high conflict, impacts the core relationships within the family with the possibility of instilling long term negative effects on the psychological well-being of the children involved. As noted by Hita (2011), the family taxonomy that Kellam, Ensminger, and Turner (1977) developed using a community epidemiological framework has a focus on understanding which adults are present in the family environment. This theoretical framework serves as an integral

component in considering the elements of the child-rearing family, particularly its role as a primary socializer of the young (Kellam et al., 1977) and arguably a basis for social policy and institution of prevention measures for at-risk children and families. Further, McLanahan and Beck (2010)

highlight a number of predictors of low relationship quality and stability in these families, including low economic resources, government policies that discourage marriage, gender distrust and acceptance of single motherhood, sex ratios that favor men, children from previous unions, and psychological factors that make it difficult for parents to maintain healthy relationships. No single factor appears to have a dominant effect. (p. 17)

There are two important dimensions to consider when addressing the family environment: cooperative coparenting and conflict over childrearing and the associated levels of nonresident father involvement. In the first dimension, the extent of successful cooperative coparenting may be gauged by the parent's ability to engage in ongoing dialogue and interaction regarding the children and support each in their respective parenting role. However, even when nonresident fathers remain actively involved in their children's lives, many coparent relationships are disengaged and contentious, hindering the ability of nonresident fathers to be involved in their children's lives (Sobolewski & King, 2005), with custodial mothers playing an important role in either facilitation of or hindrance in the nonresident father's involvement (Arditti, 1995; Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 1996). Two factors are operating in the scenario: gatekeeping (often by the mother) and frustration or eventual disengagement by the father. Over time, the two

factors contribute to increasing parental conflict, which is played out within the family court.

With the second dimension, nonresident father involvement, it is important to consider not only the extent of father–child contact but also the complexity of the father–child relationship to include fathers’ involvement in responsive parenting or other authoritative practices, such as talking about problems or setting limits (e.g., father–child relationship quality). This is also true when considering the mother–child relationship. More recently, research has indicated that the quality of mother–child relationships can be improved by relatively brief parenting programs, with positive and dramatic effects to improve children’s long-term, post-divorce well-being (Sandler, Wolchik, Winslow, & Schenck, 2006). Research indicates that parents within the “new” millennial parents (aged 20 to 35 years) group recognize the merits of both mothers and fathers within the lives of their children. The degree to which coparenting skill-building can be incorporated within the earliest stages of court proceedings will spur greater emotional stability and improved coping for the child.

Though cooperative coparenting appears to foster father–child contact and promote higher quality father–child relationships, research suggests that cooperative parenting is relatively uncommon; given the important link between cooperative coparenting and nonresident father involvement, future studies would benefit from a greater understanding of how custodial mothers and nonresident fathers can establish and maintain cooperative coparenting arrangements (Sobolewski et al., 2005). The interrelationship between parents, parenting by the nonresident father, and the extent to

which the parental conflict influences parenting are significant factors when considering which targeted interventions best mediate the risk of children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Several programs have been found to reduce problem outcomes for children following divorce (Braver, Griffin, & Cookston, 2005; DeGarmo et al., 2004; Pedro-Carroll, 2005; Wolchik et al., 2002) so that the risk measure would be used by professionals working with divorced families to help them identify their need for such programs (Tein et al., 2013).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Never Married and Divorcing Parents

Although there are many perceived commonalities between divorcing parents and never married parents, several distinctions between the two populations exist. Hita (2011) noted that typically divorcing parents have entered the court system in light of at least one parent having initiated litigation. Never married parents more commonly enter into the family court environment involuntarily, in light of an administrative order of the Superior Court set forth in response to a custodial parent having sought public (welfare) assistance on behalf of the child. This action results in the court seeking the noncustodial parent in the establishment of child support. Given that these petitions (in Arizona) are filed by the Office of the Attorney General, never married parents may have little information regarding the process by which parties are mandated by the state to now address parenting time matters. This may be further complicated by the uncertainty of whether the noncustodial parent has up to this point had any contact with the child and

whether the parents have maintained any form of contact with each other. As a result, never married parents may mutually share in their impression of unwanted government intrusion into the management of their parenting responsibilities.

Other key variables existing between never married parents and divorcing parents include an exploration of the historical relationship between the parents as well the quality of parenting and quantity of time within the parent–child relationship. Hita & Braver (2012) distinguished the never married parent family dynamic as either “cohabiting, visiting, and non-visiting” (p. 479). Cohabiting families have been defined as couples in a romantic relationship, having and jointly parenting children. Despite research suggesting that roughly half of these couples marry over time, it also estimated that cohabiting parents are at greater risk of separating than married parents, and that cohabitation appeared to increase the likelihood of dissolution if the couple later married (Hita & Braver, 2012; McLanahan & Beck, 2010; Parke, 2004; Smock, 2000). Visiting relationship families involves parents who, though in a romantic relationship, are noncohabitating (Hita & Braver, 2012). Nonvisiting has been defined as parents who have no ongoing romantic relationship. Comparatively, the level of parent–child involvement within visiting versus nonvisiting families is often dependent upon the extent of contact, conflict, and cooperation between the parents.

Cohabiting Dynamics

Childbearing without marriage has historically been (in the United States) most common among lower income families and cohabitation previously primarily practiced among the poor (Cherlin, 2005, 2008). Research now indicates that there are not only

higher rates of cohabitation among the poor but also variations in cohabitation patterns (Cross-Barnet, Cherlin, & Burton, 2011). Where unmarried parents have been shown through research to frequently be cohabitating at the time of the child's birth, the parental relationship in many instances does not last beyond the child's first years. Despite this, the lasting reality is that parents remain bonded through the child. Legal and financial obligations necessitate that for unmarried parents, and in particular lower income families, child support enforcement is often a precipitating factor in unmarried parents navigating the family court system.

The dynamics of cohabitation and its subsequent impact on the co-parenting relationship and parent-child interaction varies greatly. Cross-Barnet et al. (2011) notes that because of the continued linking of marriage and cohabitation in the literature, researchers may miss patterns among cohabiting couples that have children but have no intentions of creating a sustainable marriage. Likewise, coupled with the instability of cohabiting relationships, circumstances may dictate that cohabitation is necessary rather than desired, such as when one partner has no other place to stay (Goffman, 2009) or when the couple must pool their resources together to make ends meet (Edin, 2000).

Factors Impacting Children's Adjustment of Divorce and Separation

Most parent education programs are designed to improve child well-being following (separation and/or) divorce by changing some aspect of parenting (Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, 2011). Additionally, attendance at a parent information program when combined with alternative dispute resolution (mediation) may serve as a preventative and interventive measure to future complications, as parents learn basic

conflict resolution skills (National Center for State Courts, 2004). Furthermore, consistent, effective utilization of learned conflict resolution skills in the co-parenting relationship might mitigate children's emotional adjustment to parental separation. Though these provisions alone may mediate divorce's impact on a good number of children and promote cooperative coparenting postdivorce, additional targeted intervention is needed for a sub-group of this population where parents and their children suffer from increased risk and reduced protective factors. In an updated review of divorce research, Amato (2010) noted that little information exists regarding the long-term benefit to children and further, existing studies on parent education program participation contain serious limitations. Further, although the divorce rate in the United States has declined since the 1980s, there has been an increase in the number of children born to unmarried, cohabiting parents, with little known how these two forms of union dissolution are similar or differ from one another with respect to adult and child adjustment (Amato, 2000). Further, public attention and social policies have focused on fathers living apart from their children because of rising concerns about the consequences of this arrangement for child well-being (Cabrera & Peters, 2000; Sobolewski et al., 2005).

Court-Mandated Parent Information Programs (PIP)

A meta-analytic study examining the effectiveness of court-affiliated divorcing parent education programs found that they were generally effective (Fackrell et al. 2011) in its provision of imparting information on the impact of divorce or separation on children. While the primary focus of mandatory parent information programs overall is to

reduce the negative impact of separation and/or divorce on children; and though there has been some association between participation in such programs with lower levels of post-separation/divorce conflict, it remains unclear what accounts for this association. Careful empirical research is needed to determine which content, instructional strategies, and programmatic characteristics produce desired changes and which do not (Kramer, Arbuthnot, Gordon, Rousis, & Hoza, 1998) as it applies to the never married parent population.

Parenting Skills Training: New Beginnings Program (NBP)

NBP is a theory-based preventive intervention targeting parenting skills to target the risk and protective factors impacting youth outcomes (Wolchik, 2009) including academic, emotional, and behavioral problems. The targeted risk and protective factors include parental warmth (i.e., positive parent-child interactions and active listening), effective discipline and reducing interparental conflict. NBP takes a psycho-educational and skills-building approach to teach parents skills such as increasing warmth in the parent child relationship through regular positive interactions with their children, using clear, consistent and age-appropriate discipline strategies, and keeping children out of the middle of interparental conflict by reducing negative engagement with the other parent and discouraging negative talk about the other parent in the children's presence (Goodman et al. 2004). The evaluation of the NBP suggests that families who were evaluated as being "high risk" benefited more from the program than families whose children were not at increased risk for conduct problems (Wolchik et al. 2013). Under the framework of an effectiveness trial, the NBP has been made available free of charge to

mothers and fathers via its community partners in four Arizona counties: Coconino, Maricopa, Pima, and Yuma. Parents who participate in court-mandated Parent Information Programs (PIP) were provided the opportunity to self-refer into the NBP. The parents were introduced to NBP through a 12-15 minute video shown during PIP and were asked to complete several short surveys including a 15-item brief family risk index and an invitation to be contacted by NBP staff for further details on how to participate. Those parents agreeing to participate were randomly assigned to either a 2- or 10-week version of the program.

Dawson-McClure, Sandler, Wolchik, and Millsap (2004), in a six-year longitudinal study of the NBP, examined childhood adjustment, environmental stressors, and child and family resources and vulnerabilities as candidates for a risk index for children from divorced families. This study found that six years after participation in the program, there was a 46% reduction in the prevalence of diagnosed mental disorders in the high-risk children whose mothers participated in the program as compared with the high-risk children whose mothers did not participate. As a result of the study, a risk index formed from childhood externalizing problems and environmental stressors was found to be highly predictive of multiple measures of adjustment. Both childhood factors emerged as significant predictors of adolescent externalizing behaviors with parental distress experienced indirectly by the child as a contributory element. The study acknowledges the great degree of variability in children's adjustment following divorce where some are at greater risk for long-term adjustment problems, while others are not. The families of those children at increased risk require services to prevent negative outcomes. Dawson-

McClure et al. (2004) supports the argument of the need for screening measures that would allow for the identification and provision of services to these families.

Wolchik et al. (2013), in their 15- year follow-up, assessed the effects of a preventative intervention for divorced families (NBP), versus a literature control condition (LC). The study outlined the public health significance in the development and evaluation of interventions for youth in divorced families, given the association between divorce and multiple problem outcomes for youth and adults. Wolchik et al. (2013) concluded that NBP reduced the incidence of internalizing disorders for females and males and substance-related disorders and substance use for males. Further, Wolchik et.al (2013) determined that NBP reduced the likelihood of onset of an internalizing disorder in the 9-year period between the previous and current follow-up spanning from mid-to-late adolescence to young adulthood and slowed the rate at which an internalizing disorder developed.

There are two important dimensions worthy of consideration when addressing the family environment: cooperative co-parenting and conflict over childrearing and the associated levels of nonresident father involvement. In the first dimension, the extent of successful cooperative co-parenting may be gauged by the parent's ability to engage in ongoing dialogue and interaction regarding the children and support each in their respective parenting role. However, even when nonresident fathers remain actively involved in their children's lives, many co-parent relationships are disengaged and contentious, hindering the ability of nonresident fathers to be involved in their children's lives (Sobolewski & King, 2005); with custodial mothers playing an important role in

either facilitation of or hindrance in the nonresident father's involvement (Arditti, 1995; Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 1996). With the second dimension, nonresident father involvement, it is important to consider not only the extent of father-child contact, but also the complexity of the father-child relationship to include fathers' involvement in responsive parenting or other authoritative practices, such as talking about problems or setting limits (e.g. father-child relationship quality). Likewise, the converse holds true when considering the mother-child relationship. More recently, research has indicated that the quality of mother-child relationships can be improved by relatively brief parenting programs, with positive and dramatic effects to improve children's long-term, post-divorce well-being (Sandler, Wolchik, Winslow, & Schenck, 2006).

Though cooperative co-parenting appears to foster father-child contact and promote higher quality father-child relationships, research trends continue to suggest that cooperative parenting is relatively uncommon; and given the important link between cooperative co-parenting and nonresident father involvement, future studies would benefit from a greater understanding of how custodial mothers and nonresident fathers can establish and maintain cooperative co-parenting arrangements (Sobolewski, et al. 2005). The interrelationship between parents, parenting by the nonresident father, and the extent to which the parental conflict influences parenting are significant factors when considering which targeted interventions best mediate the risk of children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Research suggests there are benefits of parental participation to children of divorcing or separating parents. Dawson-McClure, Sandler, Wolchik, and Millsap (2004), in a six-year longitudinal study of the NBP, found that six years after

participation in the NBP, there was a 46% reduction in the prevalence of diagnosed mental disorders in the high-risk children whose mothers participated in the program as compared with the high-risk children whose mothers did not participate.

Alternative Screening Instruments

Two assessment tools have been developed for the purpose of effectively triaging court resources are the The National Center for State Courts' (2014) Screening Tool for Divorce Case Triage and The Connecticut Judicial Branch's (2007) Family Civil Intake Screen. However, both screening tools are extensive – the Family Civil Intake Screen is eight pages in length and the Screening Tool for Divorce Case Triage is three pages in length. Another primary drawback is that neither screening tool has undergone extensive psychometric testing.

Child Risk Index for Divorced or Separated Families (CRI-DS)

Using items identified as representing the domains in Dawson-McClure et al. (2004) index, a short (15-item) and easily administered risk measure of family dynamics (e.g., the parent's perception of the parent-child relationship, the child's affect within the home, extent of co-parent communication, and parent-child contact with the non-residential parent) was developed in order to help parents assess their family's need for preventative services for the NBP (Tein, et al. 2013). The brief, psychometrically adequate measure was developed as a tool to predict behavior outcomes of youth who have experienced parental divorce. In an evaluation of its predictive validity, predictive value, and cross-validation of the same, the CRI-DS was highly predictive of a wide range of children's problem outcomes over time, including competence and

internalizing and externalizing problems (Tein et al. 2013). The responses are categorized as low, moderate, or high risk. Tein et al. (2013) noted the six items assessing behavior problems that were selected had comparable validity to that of the full 32-item BPI in predicting child behavior problems several years later; and in addition, the predictive validity of the risk measure was substantially improved by adding items assessing divorce-related stressors and parenting quality. Furthermore, the short index had a comparable level of accuracy as Dawson-McClure et al. (2004) assessment of the same constructs, which included 181 items, for predicting multiple outcomes up to six years following the assessment. As noted by Tein et al. (2013), the most important question for practical utilization of this measure concerns the increased information obtained from knowing whether a score is above or below the cutpoint, compared with simply knowing the base rate of a problem outcome following divorce.

A specific aspect of the research problem is the consideration of using the CRI-DS versus other assessment tools that have not been psychometrically tested. The CRI-DS has been undergone reliability and validity testing. As noted by Tein et al. (2013), a rigorous three-part analysis was conducted. The first set of analyses (Study 1) develops and cross-validates the predictive validity of a brief parent-report measure of child behavior problems with children from divorced families, a key component of a risk index. For Study 1, researchers cross-validated 10 items using the sample from the Study of Separating Families to identify the fewest items that best predicted future child behavior problems from both mother and father reports (Tein et al., 2013).

The second set of analyses (Study 2) examines the predictive value of adding

items representing postdivorce risk and protective factors to the behavior problem items. In Study 2, the indicators of environmental stressors and resources were mother and father reports of interparental conflict, parent psychological problems, and missed scheduled visits plus mother report of parenting (Tein et al. 2013). Using a different data set, the final set of analyses (Study 3) cross-validates the predictive value of a composite risk index, which consists of the best set of items assessing child behavior problems and postdivorce risk and protective factors. Tein et al. (2013) evaluated the predictive validity of the CRI-DS by examining its associations with a broad range of behavior outcomes, including measures of mental health and substance use disorder diagnosis. Correlational (for continuous criterion variables) and logistic regression (for dichotomous criterion variables) analyses were conducted. The CRI-DS index scores were created by first rescaling each of the 15 items to 0 and 1 and then taking the sum of the rescaled items (M 4.80, SD 2.59, range 0–11). The CRI-DS correlated highly with Dawson-McClure et al. (2004) risk measure (r .56). Tein et al. (2013) notes the magnitude of the correlations of the CRI-DS with the outcomes was in general moderate to large. The odds ratios in predicting clinical or borderline clinical levels of behavior problems or mental health disorder diagnosis ranged from 1.41 (p .05) to 1.81 (p .001). Because the CRI-DS was the sum of 1's on the CRI-DS items, these odds ratios mean that for any increase of the score by one, the odds of having borderline clinical level of behavior problems/mental or substance use disorders were 41% to 81% higher. The correlations and odds ratios were comparable across child gender and age except that CRI-DS had larger correlations with short-term externalizing problems for boys than for girls (.67 vs. .36, .63 vs. .34, and .66

vs. .25 for pretest, 3-month follow-up, and 9-month follow-up, respectively; p .05).

Through the use of a brief risk index as a triage instrument for parents entering family court, this tool may serve as a targeted, efficient, and cost-effective method of identifying families who are most at risk for poorer outcomes and thus could benefit from additional services designed to ameliorate these negative outcomes.

Summary

This chapter is a review of the literature and relevant research relating to the existing delivery of family court services and their effectiveness for parents as they relate to the level of parental conflict, child risk factors, and dynamics of the parent–child relationship. The history and current research on existing family court interventions in addition to the impact of divorce and separation on children were examined. As indicated in the review of literature, cooperative co-parenting may mediate the level of child risk in cases of divorce or separation. A description of the dynamics existing regarding never-married parents and divorcing parents was discussed. Additionally, the premise of court mandated parent education classes were discussed in conjunction with a skill-based intervention. In Chapter 3, an in-depth analysis of the research and methodology was provided.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In family law matters involving custody disputes, a tiered service model often consisting of mandated programs has been the standard, moving along a graduated continuum of the least to most intrusive. As this model has raised concerns from legal scholars, particularly with questions over the lack of efficacy, a discussion of an alternative, triage model has been considered (Salem, 2009).

Results from the few studies on the benefits of the triage system have suggested that it has expedited the time spent in child custody litigation and has reduced family court costs; however, the triage system is predicated on the consistent use of an “accurate, easy to administer, [and] replicable” family risk assessment tool (Salem, 2009, p. 383). One instrument that has shown promise as a triage instrument is Tein et al. (2013) CRI-DS. The 15-item CRI-DS was developed as a screening tool to identify children most at risk for experiencing long-term psychological and emotional problems as a result of their parents’ divorce (Tein et al. 2013). It is used as an assessment instrument for the New Beginnings Divorce Prevention Program for children ages 4 to 15 (Tein et al. 2013). The 15-item CRI-DS—which is comprised of six child behavior problem questions, three parent behavior problem questions, three parent conflict questions regarding child discipline practices and parent visitation rights, and three parenting self-efficacy questions—has been found to have sound reliability and validity (Tein et al. 2013). The goal of this study was to determine if the CRI-DS is an effective triage tool for families involved in custody litigation.

Research Design and Rationale

In this quantitative study, using a nonexperimental design, I used archival private data set to address five questions to determine if the CRI-DS is an effective screening tool for families involved in custody litigation. Quantitative studies are deductive, as theory is used to inform study hypotheses (DeVon et al. 2007). This design is appropriate for the research questions in this study for two reasons: There is no random assignment used, nor are there multiple groups or multiple waves of measurement. The nonexperimental quantitative design was sufficient for this study because I did not seek a cause-effect relationship.

Research Questions

The research questions in this study pertain to differences between the high-risk parent group and the low- and moderate-risk parent groups on high-conflict child custody parent factors, NBP, and court resources.

Research Question 1: Is gender, education level, and marital status significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score?

H₀1: Gender, education level, and marital status are not significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score.

H_a1: Gender, education level, and marital status are significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score.

Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e., correlation) between pretest CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict?

H_02 : There is no statistically significant relationship between the *pretest* CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict.

H_a2 : There is a statistically significant relationship between the *pretest* CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict.

Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e., correlation) between the CRI-DS scores (at *10-month follow up*) and interparental conflict?

H_03 : There is no statistically significant relationship between the CRI-DS scores (at 10-month follow up) and interparental conflict.

H_a3 : There is a statistically significant relationship between the CRI-DS scores (at 10-month follow up) and interparental conflict.

Research Question 4: Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *number of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program)*?

H_04 : Controlling for relationship status, there is no statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the number of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program).

H_a4 : Controlling for relationship status, there is a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *number of court-*

affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program).

Research Question 5: Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program)?

H_05 : Controlling for relationship status, there is no statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program).

H_a5 : Controlling for relationship status, there is a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program).

Methodology

Sampling and Sampling Procedure

Descriptive statistics are available from the NBP of parents from cohorts 1 through 4. These parents, while participating in the parent information program, completed the risk index. The sample from cohorts 1 through 4 (the four waves of participants invited to attend NBP) and randomly placed in the 2-week program consisted of 385 individuals. The descriptive statistics include a breakdown of education level, race, and risk index. A power analysis was conducted for logistic regression while controlling for pretest scores. The CRI-DS is used as a categorical measure; parents are placed in low, moderate, and/or high-risk parent groups. For the power analysis, the

effect size was set to medium, Cohen's $f = .25$, power, or $1 - \beta$, was set to $.95$, and the significance (p) value was set to $p < .05$. The required sample size was determined to be $N = 280$. The actual sample size of $N = 385$ far exceeds this value. This result is confirmed by the procedure proposed by Demidenko (2007) with variance correction.

Archival Data Recruitment and Data Collection

The procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection associated with the original study will be described in this section. Under the framework of an effectiveness trial, the NBP has been made available free of charge to mothers and fathers via its community partners in four Arizona counties: Coconino, Maricopa, Pima, and Yuma. Parents who participate in court-mandated parent information programs were provided the opportunity to self-refer into the NBP. The parents were introduced to NBP through a 12-15-minute video shown during PIP and were asked to complete several short surveys including a 15-item brief family risk index and an invitation to be contacted by NBP staff for further details on how to participate. Parents agreeing to participate were randomly assigned to either a 2- or 10-week version of the program. The NBP conducted a series of classes termed *cohorts* throughout Arizona over 2 years within the aforementioned counties.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Child risk index for divorced or separated families (CRI-DS). This study was conducted to determine the efficacy of the 15-item CRI-DS as a triage instrument for court services. There is substantial evidence of the inter-item and test-retest reliability and validity of the CRI-DS with regard to child outcomes (Wolchik et al. 2013). In the

original study, a series of analyses using three data sets were conducted that identified and cross-validated a parsimonious set of items representing parent report of child behavior problems and family level risk and protective factors, each of which contributed to the predictive accuracy of the index (Tein et al. 2013). The CRI-DS can be used as an interval- or categorical-coded variable. The interval score of the CRI-DS is computed by summing the 15 items, each of which are coded as 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3= always. The risk index is broken down into three categories (6 or below is considered “low risk”—coded as 1; and 7+ is considered “high-risk”—coded as 2). The total CRI-DS scale scores can range from 0 to 15, with a higher score indicating higher levels of post-divorce stress. The categorical CRI-DS is calculated by grouping scores, with 0-6 = low risk parent group, and 7-15 = high risk parent group (Tien et al. 2013).

The CRI-DS received extensive psychometric study by Tien et al. (2013), with their focus being on child problem behaviors. Tien et al. (2013) outlined three sets of analyses including a cross-validation of the predictive validity of a brief parent-report measure of child behavior problems with children from divorced families, a key component of a risk index. The second and third sets of analyses examines the predictive value of adding items representing postdivorce risk, protective factors to the behavior problem items and cross-validates the predictive value of a composite risk index which consists of the best set of items assessing child behavior problems and post-divorce risk and protective factors (Tien et al. 2013). The CRI-DS interval scale was significantly associated with child internalizing and externalizing behavior, r

= .45, $p < .001$, and $r = .57$, $p < .001$, respectively (Tien et al., 2013). The CRI-DS is used as both an independent and dependent variable in this study.

- **Attrition rate:** Attrition rate is determined by the number of attritions (number of those families who dropped out prior to completion of the 10-month study) divided by the total number of 850 families.
- **Education level:** Education level is coded as 1 = high school graduate, 2 = some college, and 3 = college graduate. Education level is an independent variable.
- **Employment status:** Employment status is coded as 0 = unemployed and 1 = employed. Employment status is an independent variable.
- **Gender:** Coded as 0 = male and 1 = female.
- **Household income range:** Income range is coded as 1 = lower (\$0 - \$25,000), 2 = lower middle (\$25,000 - \$50,000), 3 = middle (\$50,000 - \$75,000), 4 = upper middle (\$75,000 - \$100,000), and 5 = upper (\$100,000 and above). Household income range is an independent variable.
- **Interparental conflict:** Interparental conflict in the data is correlated with “conflict intensity.” The number of court ordered interventions to include return court appearances within family court determines the quantitative measure of interparental conflict over the 10-months following participation in the NBP.
- **Number of court-affiliated family interventions:** The number of court affiliated family interventions are outlined and coded as 1 = mediation, 2 =

mediation and child interview, 3 or more = mediation, child interview, family evaluation and/or parenting coordination.

- **Relationship status:** Relationship status is coded as 0 = married/cohabitating and 1 = single. Relationship status is an independent variable.
- **Type of court-affiliated family interventions:** The types of court affiliated family interventions are outlined and coded as 0=Mandatory mediation (low intervention), 1= child interview (moderate intervention), 2=family evaluation and/or parenting coordination (high intervention).

Data Analysis Plan

Descriptive statistics will be computed for all study variables. For categorical variables, the variable frequency and percentage will be computed; for continuous variables, means, variance, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores will be calculated.

For the first research question, a multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis will be conducted, with gender, education level, and relationship status entered on one regression model to predict pretest CRI-DS scores. The CRI-DS can be used as an interval- or categorical-coded variable. The interval score of the CRI-DS is computed by summing the 15 items, each of which are coded as 0 = no and 1 = yes. The total CRI-DS scale scores can range from 0 to 15, with a higher score indicating higher levels of post-divorce stress. The categorical CRI-DS is calculated by grouping scores, with 0-6 = low risk parent group, and 7-15 = high risk parent group (Tien et al., 2013). When doing a linear regression, the CRI-DS will be the dependent (continuous) variable.. The model F and

corresponding significance (p -value) will be reported. Model effect size will be determined by the R^2 . Individual variable significance will be determined by the standardized beta weight (β) and corresponding significance (p -value). The assumptions of multivariate normality, lack of multicollinearity, and independence of error terms will be tested. Normality will be determined by calculating skewness scores; a skewness value that is less than 2.00 indicates normality (Ramsey & Schafer, 2012). Variance inflation factor (VIFs) will be computed between the three independent variables to test for lack of multicollinearity; a VIF that is less than 4.00 indicates lack of multicollinearity (Ramsey & Schafer, 2012). Durbin-Watson values will be computed to determine if the assumption of independence of errors has been met, with values between 1.00 and 3.00 indicating support of this assumption (Ramsey & Schafer, 2012).

For research questions two through five, the independent variable is parent risk group, as measured by the categorical CRI-DS. The risk index is broken down into two categories (6 or below is considered “low risk”—coded as 1; 7 and above is considered “high-risk” --coded as 2). The total CRI-DS scale scores can range from 0 to 15, with a higher score indicating higher levels of post-divorce stress. The categorical CRI-DS is calculated by grouping scores, with 0-6= low risk parent group, 7-15 = high risk parent group. The dependent variable is interparental conflict. The frequency of court utilization to include return court appearances within family court in the 10 months following participation in NBP (3 or below is considered “low conflict” –coded as 1; 4 and above is considered “high-conflict” –coded as 2). The statistical technique to be used or method of analysis is a binomial logistic regression analysis.

For the third research question, the independent variable is parent risk group, as measured by the categorical CRI-DS. The dependent variable is interparental conflict. The statistical technique to be used or method of analysis is a binomial logistic regression analysis.

For the fourth research question, the independent variable is parent risk group, as measured by the categorical CRI-DS. The dependent variable is *number* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participated. The number of court affiliated family interventions are outlined and coded as 1 = mediation, 2 = mediation and child interview, 3 or more = mediation, child interview, family evaluation and/or parenting coordination. The statistical technique to be used or method of analysis is a binomial regression analysis, controlling for relationship status on the CRI-DS. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) will be computed to determine if the assumption of no multicollinearity has been met.

For the fifth research question, the independent variable is parent risk group, as measured by the categorical CRI-DS. The dependent variable is *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participated. The types of court affiliated family interventions are outlined and coded as 0 = mandatory mediation (low intervention), 1 = child interview (moderate intervention), 2 = family evaluation and/or parenting coordination (high intervention). The statistical analysis to test this is a binomial logistic regression analysis, controlling for relationship status on the CRI-DS. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) will be computed to determine if the assumption of no multicollinearity has been met.

Threats to Validity

Maturation is a threat to validity where changes could have occurred between the pre- and post-test of individuals who participate in the NBP program as well as in the 10-month follow up posttest. These changes may not necessarily be due to their participation in the program. Mortality may occur where participants may have opted to discontinue participation thereby contributing to attrition. In the event this occurs as a systemic result of one of the independent variables, this may or may not account for bias. Evaluation anxiety may exist, in addition to matching bias.

Ethical Procedures

A data use agreement was obtained in order to allow permission to access the archival data from the New Beginnings Program with Arizona State University (see Appendix A). The data is anonymous and confidential. The data will only be made available for the purposes of this study. IRB approval from Walden University will be obtained before collecting and analyzing the data. The data storage procedure will include maintaining the information on a flash drive and securing the drive in a locked cabinet within the researcher's locked office (at work). Only this researcher will have exclusive access to the data. The data will be destroyed upon successful completion of the dissertation/study.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the research methodology of this study, describe and explain the sample selection, describe the procedure used in utilizing the archival data, and provide an explanation of the statistical procedures used to analyze

the data. In Chapter 4, an in-depth overview of the data analysis is provided. The findings and factors that could limit the data are also addressed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if the CRI-DS is an effective family risk assessment instrument that may be used to identify the specific needs of families to place families in appropriate court-connected programs. This study was based upon the following five research questions and their related hypotheses:

- Research Question 1: Is gender, education level, and marital status significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score?
 - H_01 : Gender, education level, and marital status are not significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score.
 - H_a1 : Gender, education level, and marital status are significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score.
- Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e. correlation) between pretest CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict?
 - H_02 : There is no statistically significant relationship between the *pretest* CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict.
 - H_a2 : There is a statistically significant relationship between the *pretest* CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict.
- Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e., correlation) between the CRI-DS scores (at *10-month follow up*) and interparental conflict?

- H_{03} : There is no statistically significant relationship between the CRI-DS scores (at 10-month follow up) and interparental conflict.
- H_{a3} : There is a statistically significant relationship between the CRI-DS scores (at 10-month follow up) and interparental conflict.
- Research Question 4: Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *number* of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program)?
 - H_{04} : Controlling for relationship status, there is no statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the number of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program).
 - H_{a4} : Controlling for relationship status, there is a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *number* of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program).
- Research Question 5: Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program)?
 - H_{05} : Controlling for relationship status, there is no statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of

court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program).

- *H_a5*: Controlling for relationship status, there is a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program).

Data Collection

Under an effectiveness trial, the NBP was made available free of charge to mothers and fathers via its community partners in four Arizona counties: Coconino, Maricopa, Pima, and Yuma. These parents, while participating in the PIP, completed the risk index while given the option to self-refer for participation in the trial. Participants were randomly assigned to either a 2- or 10-week version of the NBP program. The NBP conducted a series of classes called cohorts throughout Arizona over two years within the aforementioned counties. The time frame for data collection was over a 2-year period. There were a total of four cohorts over the 2-year period. NBP recruited and interviewed both parents involved in the divorce or separation. Those who were interviewed first were determined by NBP as the primary parent and the parent who was interviewed second as the secondary parent—for example, NBP may have recruited mom in cohort 1 and dad in cohort 3, thereby NBP kept mom as primary and dad as secondary.

Sample Demographics

The sample size was 830 overall with a breakdown of 385 participants in the 2-week group and 445 in the 10-week group. Of the 385 participants for the 2-week group

of which this study is based on, 179 were female (46%), 144 male (37%), with 62 (16%) where gender information was lacking. Limiting the sample for this study to the 2-week group was integral, as it was this population within the sample whose subsequent court use was least influenced by their participation in the NBP.

Descriptive Statistics

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the following categorical data or variables: gender, education, married, and divorced. The most frequently observed category of gender was female ($n = 216$, 56%). The most frequently observed category of education was “some college up to Associate degree” ($n = 186$, 48%). The most frequently observed category of married was “yes” ($n = 323$, 84%). The most frequently observed category of divorced was “no” ($n = 217$, 56%).

Table 1

Categorical Variables Observed

	N	Most frequently observed	n	Percentage
Education	385	Some college to associate degree	186	48
Gender	385	Female	216	56
Ever married	385	Yes	323	84
Legally divorced	385	No	217	56

Statistical Analysis

The statistical findings relative to each research question are incorporated in this section with their respective hypotheses. Methodology is provided along with an

exploratory analysis highlighting the interrelationship of the dependent and independent variables.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: Are gender, education level, or marital status significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score? Hypothesis 1 was tested using a binomial, forward conditional, logistic regression analysis to predict pretest CRI-DS scores from gender, education level, and relationship status. The dependent variable was pretest CRI-DS (0-6 = low risk parent group, and 7-15 = high risk parent group). The independent variables were gender (0 = male and 1 = female), educational level (1 = high school graduate, 2 = some college, and 3 = college graduate), and marital status (divorced or unmarried).

Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) were calculated to detect the presence of multicollinearity among the predictors. High VIFs indicate increased effects of multicollinearity in the model. VIFs greater than 5 are cause for concern, whereas VIFs of 10 should be considered the maximum upper limit (Menard, 2009). All predictors in the regression model have VIFs less than 10, meaning a low presence of multicollinearity with no assumptions violated.

Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test with a significance measure less than .05 indicate the model does not fit the data well. The significance measure was .914, indicating the model fit the data. Odds ratios (OR) compare the odds of two events. (OR) greater than 1 indicate the event is more likely to occur. (OR) less than 1 indicate the event is less likely to occur. The regression coefficient for gender was statistically

significant, $\beta = 0.47$, OR -1.59, $p = .042$, indicating that the odds observing the low category of pretest CRI-DS for the females would increase by approximately 59%. The regression coefficient for divorce (yes) was statistically significant, $\beta = 0.54$, OR = 1.71, $p = 0.026$, indicating that the odds of observing the low category of pretest CRI-DS for divorced participants would increase by approximately 71%. Educational level was not statistically significant (see Table 2).

Table 2

Logistic Regression Output/Analysis

	B	S.E.	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender	.465	.229	1	.042	1.593
Divorced	.539	.243	1	.026	1.714
Constant	-1.568	.586	1	.007	.208

a. Variable(s) entered on step 2: Gender.

Table 3 shows how the subjects were originally observed, based on the collected data, and how they were classified according to their obtained scores. Out of the 166 observed subjects to be in the high group on the risk index, 69 (41.57%) were properly classified whereas 97 (58.43%) were incorrectly classified. Similarly, of the 157 subjects in the low group on the risk index, 114 (72.61%) were properly classified whereas 43 (27.39%) were incorrectly classified.

Table 3

Observed Versus Predicted

Observed	Predicted		Percentage correct
	Low	High	
Risk Index recoded			
Low	114	43	72.6
High	97	69	41.6
Overall Percentage			56.7

a. The cut value is .500

Research Question 2

Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e., correlation) between pretest CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict?

The data consist of non-continuous variables. A Spearman correlation was used rather than a Pearson correlation as the data is not normally distributed. A Spearman correlation requires that the relationship between each pair of variables does not change direction (Conover & Iman, 1981). The assumption of homoscedasticity was tested. This assumption is violated if the points on the scatterplot between any pair of variables appear to shift from a positive to negative or negative to positive relationship. The assumption was not violated. The variables were measured at the nominal level.

Hypothesis 2 was tested using a nonparametric two-tailed Spearman correlational analysis. Results of the analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the pretest CRI-DS scores (conflict intensity) and interparental

conflict as determined by the computed Spearman correlation coefficient. Cohen's effect size value was used to evaluate the strength of the relationship, where coefficients between .10 and .29 represent a small effect size, coefficients between .30 and .49 represent a moderate effect size, and coefficients above .50 indicate a large effect size (Cohen, 1988).

There was a statistically significant positive correlation between pretest CRI-DS and conflict intensity ($\rho = 0.15$, $p = .003$), indicating a small effect size (0.15) where the correlation coefficient was the same as the effect size. This indicates that as pretest CRI-DS increases, conflict intensity also tends to increase (see Table 4).

Table 4

Correlations between CRI-DS and Conflict Intensity

			Risk Index recoded	Conflict Intensity
Spearman's Rho	Risk Index recoded	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.154**
		Sig. (2 tailed)		.003
		N	385	383
	Conflict Intensity	Correlation coefficient	.154**	1.000
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.003	.
		N	383	383

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Research Question 3

Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e. correlation) between the CRI-DS scores (at 10-month follow up) and interparental conflict?

The data consist of non-continuous variables. A Spearman correlation was used rather than a Pearson correlation as the data is not normally distributed. A Spearman correlation requires that the relationship between each pair of variables does not change direction (Conover & Iman, 1981). This assumption is violated if the points on the scatterplot between any pair of variables appear to shift from a positive to negative or negative to positive relationship. The assumption of homoscedasticity was tested. The assumption was not violated. The variables were measured at the nominal level.

Hypothesis 3 was tested using a Spearman correlation analysis between posttest CRI-DS (at 10-month follow up) and conflict intensityR. There was no statistically significant relationship between CRI-DS scores (at 10-month follow up) and interparental conflict as determined by Spearman correlation coefficient.

There was not a statistically significant correlation between posttest CRI-DS (at 10-month follow up) and conflict intensity ($\rho = 0.116$, $p = .071$), indicating a small effect size where the correlation coefficient was the same as the effect size. This indicates that, although the relationship is not statistically significant, as posttest CRI-DS (10-month follow up) increases, conflict intensity tends to also increase (see Table 5).

Table 5

Correlations Between Posttest CRI-DS (10-month follow up) and Conflict IntensityR

			Risk Index recoded	Conflict IntensityR
Spearman's Rho	Risk	Correlation	1.000	.116
	Index	coefficient		
	recoded	Sig. (2 tailed)		.071
		N	299	243
	Conflict	Correlation	.116	1.000
	IntensityR	coefficient		
		Sig. (2 tailed)	.071	.
		N	243	243

Research Question 4

Research Question 4: Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *number* of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program)? The dependent variable is interventions. The independent variables are: married, divorced, education, gender, and CRI-DS (posttest).

Hypothesis 4 was tested using binomial logistic regression analysis. Relationship status “ever legally married to” (i.e., unmarried) and/or “are you legally divorced from

(i.e., divorced) the other parent” was determined via the independent variables, “Married,” “Divorced,” and “Post-test CRI-DS,” coded as 1 = yes and 2 = no, respectively. Gender was coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. The question required a yes or no response to whether court ordered interventions such as counselor, mediator, parenting coordinator, or evaluator was utilized. Participants were asked, whether in the past year they had any disagreement with the other parent concerning child custody or parenting time for which they needed to use any professional (i.e., court-affiliated) services to help resolve these disagreements 0 = yes and 1 = no. Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) were calculated to detect the presence of multicollinearity between and among predictors. High VIFs indicate the presence of multicollinearity in the model.

Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test with a significance measure less than .05 indicate the model does not fit the data well. The significance measure was .284, indicating the model fit the data. Odds ratios (OR) compare the odds of two events. Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate the event is more likely to occur. Odds ratios less than 1 indicate the event is less likely to occur. The regression coefficient for PosttestR was statistically significant, $\beta = 0.651$, OR 1.917, $p = .033$, indicating that the odds observing the low category of posttest CRI-DS would increase by approximately 92%. Gender, education level, and divorced were not statistically significant (see Table 6).

Table 6

Logistic Regression Output/Analysis

	B	S.E.	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
PosttestR	.651	.304	1	.033	1.917
Gender	.488	.306	1	.111	1.629
Education	.050	.213	1	.813	1.052
Divorced	.173	.328	1	.598	1.189

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1. Gender, Education, PosttestR.

Research Question 5

Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program)?

I examined this regarding two types of interventions: petitions filed in the last year for change of custody and court ordered supervised visitation in the last year. The hypotheses were tested using binomial regression analysis. The hypotheses were designed to examine whether Gender, Education, Divorced, Married and posttestR (10 month) CRI-DS had a significant effect on the odds of observing petitions filed in last year for change in custody and on court ordered supervised visitation in the last year.

Results for petitions filed in the last year for change of custody were not statistically significant. Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test with a significance measure less than .05 indicate the model does not fit the data well. The significance measure was .026, indicating the model did not fit the data. Odds ratios (OR) compare the

odds of two events. Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate the event is more likely to occur. Odds ratios less than 1 indicate the event is less likely to occur. Gender, education level, married, divorce, and posttestR CRI-DS (at 10 months) were not statistically significant; therefore, they were not included in the final model.

Out of 58 cases included in the analysis, 27 of 58 cases were incorrectly predicted but did not file a petition and 31 out of 58 were correctly predicted and observed not to have filed a petition. Nearly 85% of the total 385 cases were missing and thus not included in the data analysis (see Table 7).

Table 7

Logistic Regression for Petitions Filed

Observed		Predicted		Percentage correct
		Petition court in last year to change custody or parenting time?		
		Yes	No	
Petition court in last year to change custody or parenting time?	Yes	0	27	0
	No	0	31	100
Overall Percentage				53.4

Results for court ordered supervision were not statistically significant. Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test with a significance measure less than .05 indicate the model does not fit the data well. The significance measure was .167, indicating the model fit the data. Odds ratios (OR) compare the odds of two events. Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate the event is more likely to occur. Odds ratios less than 1 indicate the event is less

likely to occur. Gender, education level, married, divorce, and posttest R CRI-DS (at 10 months) were not statistically significant; therefore, they were not included in the final model. Out of 254 cases included in the analysis, 18 of 254 cases were incorrectly predicted but were not court ordered to participate in supervised visitation. Two hundred thirty-six out of 254 cases were correctly predicted and observed as not having been court ordered to participate in supervised visitation. See Table 8.

Table 8

Logistic Regression for Court Ordered Supervision

Observed		Predicted		Percentage correct
		Yes	No	
At any time during the last year, was there court ordered supervised visitation?	Yes	0	18	0
	No	0	236	100
Overall Percentage				92.9

a. The cut value is .500

Summary

The results of the analysis pertaining to Research Question 1 were statistically significant for both Gender and Divorce. Gender was statistically significant, indicating that the odds observing the low category of pretest CRI-DS for the females would increase by approximately 59%. Divorce (yes) was statistically significant, indicating that the odds of observing the low category of pretest CRI-DS for divorced participants would

increase by approximately 71%. The results of the analysis pertaining to Research Question 2 were statistically significant as there was a positive correlation between pretest CRI-DS and conflict intensity; indicating a small effect size where the correlation coefficient was the same as the effect size. This indicated that as pretest CRI-DS increased, conflict intensity also tended to increase. The result of the analysis pertaining to Research Question 3 was not statistically significant; there was no statistically significant correlation between posttest CRI-DS (at 10-month follow up) and conflict intensity; indicating a small effect size where the correlation coefficient was the same as the effect size. Although the relationship is not statistically significant, as posttest CRI-DS (10-month follow up) increases, conflict intensity tends to also increase. The results of the analysis pertaining to Research Question 4 were statistically significant. The regression coefficient for the posttest CRI-DS was statistically significant; indicating that the odds observing the low category of posttest CRI-DS would increase by approximately 92%. Gender, education level, and divorce were not statistically significant. The results of the analysis pertaining to Research Question 5 were not statistically significant. Gender, education level, married, divorce, and posttestR CRI-DS (at 10 months) were not statistically significant. I will discuss these results in terms of the relevant literature. Further, I will provide a discussion concerning the strengths and limitations of the study. Lastly, I will offer recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

A gap exists in peer-reviewed literature concerning effective use of a family risk assessment instrument to determine the appropriate services for families involved in high-conflict custody cases. However, present research has warranted little in terms of easy to administer, accurate, and psychometrically-tested screening tools. As family court cases have become increasingly contentious and costly for litigants, it was of interest to explore the relationship between family risk, court utilization, and related services. Therefore, the purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if the CRI-DS can be used as an effective family risk assessment tool to identify family needs and refer them to relevant court-related family triage services and programs.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study was driven by primary data resulting from the NBP. Through archival data analysis, this study addressed five research questions:

1. Is gender, education level, or marital status significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e., correlation) between pretest CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship (i.e. correlation) between the CRI-DS scores (at 10-month follow up) and interparental conflict?
4. Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *number of*

court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program)? and,

5. Controlling for relationship status, is there a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *type* of court-affiliated family interventions in which they participate (not including the NBP program)? The following address the findings relative to each research question.

Interpretation of Research Question 1

Final data analysis was conducted on 385 archival cases. The hypothesis was supported for Research Question 1, meaning gender and marital status were significantly associated with an elevated pretest CRI-DS score. However, the results of this hypothesis were not supported regarding education level, thus nonsignificant, although the outcome may have been influenced during data collection. Of the 385 cases, there was data missing in 62 cases. Because the data was archived, there was no way of knowing if the person collecting the data failed to capture the information consistently.

Interpretation of Research Question 2

The hypothesis for Research Question 2 was supported, meaning there was a statistically significant relationship between pretest CRI-DS scores and interparental conflict. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between pretest CRI-DS and conflict intensity; indicating that as pretest CRI-DS increases, conflict intensity also tended to increase.

Interpretation of Research Question 3

The hypothesis for Research Question 3 was not supported, meaning there was not a statistically significant correlation between posttest CRI-DS (at 10-month follow up) and conflict intensity. Although the relationship was not statistically significant, it was noted that as posttest CRI-DS (10-month follow up) increases, conflict intensity tended to also increase.

Interpretation of Research Question 4

Research Question 4's hypothesis was partly supported, meaning there was a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the CRI-DS on the *number* of court-affiliated family interventions in which parents participate (not including the NBP program). The finding regarding PosttestR was statistically significant, indicating that the odds observing the low category of posttest CRI-DS would increase by approximately 92%. Findings regarding gender, education level, and divorced was not supported, as they were not statistically significant.

Interpretation of Research Question 5

The hypothesis for Research Question 5 regarding petitions filed in the last year was not supported, meaning controlling for relationship status, there was not a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the posttest (10-month) CRI-DS on petitions filed in the last year for change of custody. This outcome may have been influenced by a number of factors. Nearly 85% of the total 385 cases were missing, with only 58 cases included in the analysis. Further, 27 of 58 cases were incorrectly predicted but did not file a petition. Thirty-one out of 58 were correctly

predicted and observed not to have filed a petition. The hypothesis regarding court ordered supervision was not supported, meaning there was not a statistically significant relationship between parent risk as classified by the posttest (10 month) CRI-DS on court ordered supervised visitation in the last year. Gender, education level, married, divorce, and posttestR CRI-DS (at 10 months) were not statistically significant. However, the outcome may have been influenced given that of the 385 cases, 254 were included in the analysis. Eighteen of 254 cases were incorrectly predicted but were not court ordered to participate in supervised visitation. Two hundred thirty-six out of 254 cases were correctly predicted and observed as not having been court ordered to participate in supervised visitation.

Theoretical Implications

How are these findings consistent or different from the findings of previous work? According to Tein et al. (2013) several of the risk factors that were included in the measure are particularly salient following divorce (e.g., interparental conflict, parent visitation). As noted in Chapter 2, the stress of parental divorce and/or separation exacerbated by unremitting high conflict, impacts the core relationships within the family with the possibility of instilling long term negative effects on the psychological well-being of the children involved. Likewise, Dube et al. (2001) point to findings of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, noting that childhood stressors such as abuse, witnessing domestic violence, and other forms of household dysfunction (i.e. parental separation and divorce) are highly interrelated. Kellam, Ensminger, and Turner (1977) developed a community epidemiological framework with a specific focus on

understanding which adults are present in the family environment. An extension of this theoretical framework is the ethical responsibility of family law professionals in advocating and serving as agents of change for at risk children and families involved in custody disputes. Dawson-McClure et al. (2004) determined a program by risk interaction in which families with higher scores on a lengthy risk measure benefitted most from participating in a prevention program. Promoting interventions in the form of the CRI-DS at the earliest stages of court involvement could positively impact children and families by reducing co-parenting conflict while bringing cooperative resolution regarding legal decision making and parenting time matters. Tein et al. (2013) writes,

Because it (CRI-DS) is a brief index it does not provide sufficient data on problems or concerns in any domain so that it cannot be used to advise parents as to what service might best fit their needs and concerns. Rather it could be used as an initial screen to be followed by a more in-depth interview about parental concerns in each area of postdivorce family functioning to assess what types of services might be most appropriate. (p. 933)

With respect to this study, a primary intent is for family law professionals to review the study outcomes and subsequently explore the existing barriers within the judicial arena that may inadvertently inhibit effective resolution of parenting conflict. Identifying such barriers can facilitate change by way of utilizing the CRI-DS as a triage measure when assisting families. Additionally, this study has added to the existing body of knowledge by measuring other risk and protective factors following parental divorce

or separation, such as divorce related stressful events pertaining to court proceedings and coparenting.

Limitations of the Study

As noted in chapter 1, the CRI-DS was specifically developed for use with divorcing families. However, in practice where the archival data was accumulated, unmarried couples with children were included as participants. Likewise, the sample did not represent a wide diversity with respect to ethnicity, length of post-separation time, and different custody and parenting time arrangements. Further, the participant pool, though consisting of individuals throughout Arizona who were primarily English- and/or bilingual (Spanish) speaking individuals with an active family law case involving legal decision-making and/or parenting time matters pending before the Court, were primarily White (non-Hispanic). This specific study therefore did not fully account for minority culture and/or ethnic implications concerning co-parenting conflict.

Recommendations

This research was conducted using archival data. A benefit of this study was the use of the CRI-DS to assist in data collection and address the research questions. Had the data been collected personally rather than by other professionals, it may have warranted different results. A suggestion for further study is the examination of cultural factors, relationship dynamics of unmarried parents, and socio-economic considerations related to custody disputes as suggested by the literature review, which could be done by quantitative study. Additional suggestion for further study would be to survey family law professionals regarding their training and experience in working specifically with parents

involved in high-conflict custody disputes. Lastly, further study would be of merit regarding the exploration and implementation of judiciary as they are assigned to complex family law cases.

Positive Social Change Implications

The potential impact for positive social change is significant at multiple levels including family and organizational (i.e. judicial). Further, this study has potential for several reasons. The risk index, if found to be a significant predictor in the frequency of family court service utilization, may serve as a preventative measure in the provision of such resources. Additionally, with the significant increase in self-represented litigants within the family law arena disputing custody matters, use of the risk index will promote greater efficiency and timeliness in resolving such disputes at a reduced financial cost. Lastly, its potential use as a triage instrument can facilitate the determination of which interventive services may be implemented for at risk youth of high-conflict families. The ability to better target court resources that will best serve the needs of children will be a great benefit for families and the courts.

Conclusion

The choice in focusing on this study area was primarily based upon my professional observations of the dynamics of co-parenting conflict within the family court setting and the impact of such conflict on children. The observed problem of children's development being placed at greater risk in the presence of protracted parental conflict sparked a desire to explore the potential for preventative intervention through triage assessment. My hope is that this study contributes to the need for more efficient

resolution of co-parenting conflict within the family court setting. Additionally, it is hoped that this study will provoke further exploration of skills interventions in order to educate parents on effective co-parent communication, as well as promoting healthy parent/child relationships. The results in the study were significant with respect to the CRI-DS as an effective tool in measuring risk in relation to parental conflict. This, coupled with the literature has shown numerous reasons to continue in the exploration of this important area, particularly given the consequence of not doing so lends itself to increased societal risk to children and families.

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Appendix A: Child Risk Index for Divorced or Separated Families (CRI-DS)

Please answer each of the following questions by checking one box.

		Never	Sometimes	Always
		1	2	3
1.	Your child has difficulty concentrating.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Your child bullies or is cruel or mean to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Your child is disobedient at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Your child feels that others are out to get him/her.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Your child feels worthless or inferior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Your child lies or cheats.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	You and your Ex argued about child discipline practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	You and your Ex argued about visitation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	You have poor appetite	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	You feel lonely	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	You worry too much	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	The parent who does not live with the child misses many scheduled visits.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	You seem to see your child's faults more than his/her good points.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	You don't seem to know what your child needs or wants.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	You don't have a good time at home with your child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Total score = Sum of number of checks of the shaded boxes. The cut-point for predicting behavior problems is a total score of 6 or greater.