



## BEHAVIORAL ADJUSTMENT AND THE RELATED FACTORS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN WITH DIVORCED PARENTS

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### ABSTRACT

Parent's divorce is one of the most unpleasant events in life that is stressful for children and couples it has long-term and short-term economic, social, emotional and behavioral problems for children and adults. How quickly children adapt to divorce depends on the stability of their environment after divorce and social support. The purpose of this study was to investigate the behavioral Adjustment and the related factors in children with divorced parents. This is a cross-sectional descriptive-analytic study. A total of 75 children with divorced parents (38 girls and 37 boys) were selected from primary schools in Rasht by census. The research tool was a researcher-made questionnaire on adaptation factors, an interview form with parents based on Kassal and Russell Children Behavioral Measurement Test. Regression coefficient was used for the related factors. The results of this study showed that there was a significant correlation among factors related to gender adjustment, educational level (age), child's supervisor education level, housing situation and overall Adjustment based on Mann-Whitney test ( $P < 0.05$ ). Adjustment score in adolescent girls who lived with their father were also more than the girls who lived with their mothers.

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### Introduction

Family is the most important social institution whose origin is marriage (1). Socialization, familiarity with the rules, roles and cultural values are naturally occurring in the family (2). Less social damage can be counted as having no effect on the institution of the family. Families face many challenges over time with many unpredictable ways such as losing jobs, displacement and migration, serious illness, divorce, and many other challenges which has a major impact on family life (3). Divorce is one of the most important phenomena of human life (4) and is one of the psychological stresses (5). It is among the injuries and problems that affect the health of the family (6), it also endangers the health of the community and prevents its progress. As statistics show, divorce rates in the country are on the upside (2). This phenomenon is also rising in many countries. In the United States, one marriages leads to divorce from two marriages and each year one million children experience divorce and separation of their parents (7, 8). According to the statistics of the whole country, the marriage rate to the divorce rate in Iran in 2015 is 4.2 (9, 10). Parents' divorce is the saddest event of life (11) which is stressful for children and wives (8). Since 60 percent of divorces are associated with the presence of children, one can see the harmful effects of this social phenomenon (8, 12). Divorce leaves long-term, short-term economic, social, emotional and behavioral problems in children and adults (13). The effects of divorce on children can be children's emotional deprivation, the extreme attention of a parent, the lack of proper gender identification, feelings of humiliation in children and behavioral problems (1). How quickly children adapt to divorce depends on the stability of their environment after divorce and social support (14). The effect of parents' divorce in childhood is associated with a decrease in the health and longevity of adulthood (15). It is associated with a decrease in children's mental

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well-being which contributes to lower educational achievement in children (16). Studies done by Potter, Anthony et al, ShanniYilagh et al. showed that the educational achievement of children with divorced parents was lower than that of ordinary children (18-16). Vulnerability is different in children when divorce occurs (19). Immediately after divorce, the level of incontinence in the behavior and emotions of children at any age rises (20). Younger children are more likely to suffer from this because they have less verbal and cognitive skills and, on the other hand, have a greater dependence on their parents, and it is harder to adapt to divorce (4). But Anthony et al. found in their study that parents' divorce had more negative effects on children who had experienced the parents' divorce in older ages (17). Most of the problems associated with divorce are often due to a lack of adjustment (21). Factors such as age and gender, parents' adjustment, cognitive, social and emotional development of the child (6), the family function or the quality of the parent-child relationship are effective in adjustment of children with parents' divorce. Family warming is the most important factor in adjustment (1). In families whose mental health is unhealthy and whose members are constantly struggling, children and teenagers are the main victims of such a situation (22). The existence of a continuous relationship between parents and children is usually the best way to go towards adjustment (3). Evidence suggests that factors such as parents' intimacy, family acceptance and support are associated with effective adjustment (23, 24). The purpose of this study was to investigate behavioral adjustment and its related factors in children with divorced parents.

### Materials and Methods:

This cross-sectional study is descriptive-analytic. The statistical population of this study is the students with divorced parents in Rasht City who are selected by two-stage cluster sampling method in Rasht primary schools; each school is considered as a cluster. The clusters were selected through systematic random sampling. After determining the clusters, a list of the number of children with divorced parents in the school was prepared and selected by census method. Inclusion criteria include the parents of the child should have separated from each other, the age range between 7 to 12 years old of both sexes, having informed consent with parents, children with acute mental disorders not known to be asked from parents, teachers and principals. According to the student case and the opinion of the principal, divorced children were identified. Data were collected by two questionnaires. The first part, a researcher-made questionnaire on related factors on the adjustment of children after their parents' divorce including variables such as the age of child, gender, number of sisters and brothers, grade of the child in the family, the child's educational base, parents' age, parents' education, parents' occupation, child custody, the length of separation of parents from each other, the amount of contact and communication with both parents, the marital status of the father or mother with the child under his/her custody, type of housing, housing situation, average family income and available support systems. The second part is an interviewing form with parents based on Cassel and Russell Primary School Students Behavioral Measurement Test. After receiving the written consent, an interview was conducted with the parent (supervisor of the child). A part of questionnaire on the adjustment in the school was asked from the teacher. The interview form contains questions about the child's behavior that includes 78 questions with Likert scale (6 items from ever (1) to never (6)) including personal adjustment, adjustment at home, social adjustment, adjustment in school, physical fitness and overall personality adjustment. The final score of each child is the total score of each behavioral adjustment. After scoring, the scores are divided into weak and strong divisions according to the average and standard deviation of the scores in terms of the degree of adjustment. For the content validity, the adjustment tools were used for determining the CVR and CVI indices from a 10-person panel consisting of faculty members of the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery of Rasht and the senior psychology experts of the Shafa Hospital. CVR index of all questions was higher than the acceptable level of Lawisha table (0.62) except for questions 25 and 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 38, 40, 43, 53, 59 and 60. Therefore, the Impact Factor was used for these questions. Again, a panel with 10 people (the same group) was surveyed. Impact Factor the questions with lower CVR were more than 1.5. As a result, none of the above CVR questions were considered necessary for adjustment measurement.

In determining CVI index for examining the relevance, simplicity and clarity of sentences and phrases for measuring the adjustment in sample, one questionnaire was used for the survey from the same panel of 10 people. CVI index was obtained in three areas of relevancy, simplicity and clearness between 70 and 100 and none of the questions was removed.

Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of behavioral adjustment questionnaire. So, out of 20 samples, 10 children with divorced parents and 10 children of ordinary families were investigated twice a week. The result of t-test in two stages was not significant in terms of the domains ( $P < 0.05$ ). Also, Pearson correlation coefficient of adjustment score in domains was significant at two measurement times and R was obtained from 0.68 to 0.99. Data analysis will be performed using SPSS software. Mean and standard deviation and 95% confidence interval were used to in order to determine the consistency of two groups, independent test was used for comparison and in case of non-normality, Mann-Whitney test was used and the regression coefficient was used for the related factors. The significance level of the tests in this study was  $P < 0.05$ .

### Findings

75 divorced-family children were studied which 50% of them were girls and 50% were boys, 29.3 % of them, the father was the guardian and in 62.7% the mother was the guardian. Most of children were 8 years old and were in second grade of elementary school and the divorce duration was more than 4 years which can be concluded that they were married for around 5 years in average.

Table 1 shows the factors related to adjustment in terms of overall adjustment. According to this information, There was a significant relationship between the factors related to gender-based adjustment ( $P < 0.000$ ), academic grade ( $P < 0.025$ ) the level of education of the child's guardian ( $P < 0.018$ ), housing situation ( $P < 0.028$ ) and total adjustment based on the Mann-Whitney test ( $P < 0.05$ ).

According to the obtained data, the girls with divorced parents have a stronger and better adjustment status than the boys of divorce families (%100- 409/07), the children who were studying at the upper secondary school (older children) had a better overall adjustment status (%100- 396/38), children whose parents had higher education had a higher score and overall adjustment status (%100- 405/50) and children living in renting houses had a stronger physical fitness status (%97/6- 379/64).

Table 2 shows that the adjustment score of the studied areas using Kruskal Wallis test is significant only in the field of physical fitness among girls ( $P < 0.05$ ), so that the score of physical adjustment in girls who live with their father were more than girls who lived with their mother or other people.

**Table 1 comparing the score of adjustment status in the field of total adjustment based on individual and social variables:**

Factors related to adjustment		Total adjustment status				Total adjustment score			P
		Weak		Strong		Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent				
Gender	Girl	0	0%	114	100%	409.07	37.94	410	0.000
	Boy	2	1.8%	109	98.2%	385.36	47.77	397	
Educational level	1	0	0%	11	100%	380.18	29.83	391	0.025
	2	1	4.5%	21	95.5%	343.35	45.03	340.5	
	3	0	0%	15	100%	383.6	45.42	399	
	4	0	0%	16	100%	396.38	57.37	390.5	
	5	1	12.5%	7	87.5%	374.88	70.58	396	
	6	0	0%	3	100%	388.67	24.38	398	
Type of institute	Public	2	1.3%	157	98.7%	394.11	45.58	403	0.322
	Private	0	0%	66	100%	405.24	41.36	406	
Sibling number	Have sibling	0	0%	31	100%	370.81	43.9	375	0.647
	Only child	2	4.5%	42	95.5%	375.09	56.67	387	
Number of child in family	First child	2	3.2%	60	96.8%	373.47	52.59	380.5	0.989
	Not first child	0	0%	13	100%	372.62	48.33	375	
Who is the child guardian?	Father	1	4.5%	21	95.5%	373.59	44.56	383.5	0.725
	Mother	1	2.1%	46	97.9%	373.68	55.84	383	
	Grandfather or grandmother	0	0%	6	100%	369.5	47.99	358	
age of the child's guardian	Under 30 years	0	0%	11	100%	344.82	52.81	345	0.138
	30-40	2	4%	48	96%	379.88	50.59	388.5	
	Over 40	0	0%	14	100%	372	49.9	374.5	
Level of the child's guardian	Lower diploma or illiterate	0	0%	20	100%	357	42.23	358	0.018
	Diploma	2	5.1%	37	94.9%	368.49	50.63	381	
	Academic degree	0	0%	16	100%	405.5	53	403	
The child's guardian's job	Unemployed	0	0%	22	100%	359.36	February	371.5	0.254
	Housewife, employee	1	6.7%	14	93.3%	385.87	49.82	403	
	Free-lance occupation	1	2.6%	37	97.4%	376.45	50.77	378.5	

Factors related to adjustment		Total adjustment status				Total adjustment score			P
		Weak		Strong		Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent				
Housing type	Apartment	1	1.9%	51	98.1%	378.12	51.36	382	0.239
	House	1	4.3%	22	95.7%	362.48	51.48	373	
Housing situation	Renting	1	2.4%	41	97.6%	379.64	49.04	391.5	0.028
	Owning	1	3%	32	97%	365.27	54.29	362	
Is your child covered by insurance?	Yes	1	1.9%	52	98.1%	373.94	52.87	380	0.912
	No	1	4.5%	21	95.5%	371.82	49.44	379	
What is the average income level of your family?	Less than 600	0	0%	27	100%	370.37	49.02	391	0.959
	600- 1 million	1	4.8%	20	95.2%	370.9	54.33	381	
	More than a million	1	3.7%	26	96.3%	378.15	53.44	377	

Group		B	S.E.	Sig.	Odds ratio	95 % C.I.for EXP(B)	
						Lower	Upper
Initial model	Gender (1)	0.904	0.561	0.107	2.468	0.822	7.415
	Guardian education level	0.599	0.287	0.37	1.82	1.038	3.191
	Times of visit with non-guardian parent	0.488	0.191	0.10	0.614	0.423	0.892
	Housing situation	0.423	0.567	0.456	0.655	0.216	1.99
	Age	0.91	0.619	0.883	0.913	0.272	3.071
	Education level	0.463	0.641	0.470	1.588	0.452	5.581
	Constant	1.047	4.002	0.794	0.351		
Final model	Girls compared to boys	0.946	0.558	0.90	2.576	0.863	7.69
	Guardian education level	0.594	0.283	0.36	1.811	1.039	3.155
	Times of visit with non-guardian parent	0.497	0.188	0.8	0.608	0.421	0.879
	Increasing academic level	0.403	0.204	0.48	1.497	1.003	2.233
	Fixed amount	-2.273	1.224	0.63	0.103		

**Table 2: Comparing the mean and standard deviation of types of behavioral adjustment of the study subjects based on living with mother or father:**

			Who does the child live with?						P
			Father		Mother		Other		
			Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Individual Adjustment Score	Girl	102.67	10.11	98.46	27.96	93.13	17.13	0.369	
	Boy	87.09	20.43	81.65	22.98	83.22	21.45	0.906	
adjustment score at home	Girl	99.67	7.79	98.54	9.94	102.38	12.33	0.898	
	Boy	91.45	13.19	92.47	15.13	93.78	10.54	0.972	
Social adjustment score	Girl	105.67	3.88	99.58	9	98	11.7	0.212	
	Boy	96	13.17	95.12	14.75	92.89	14.23	0.805	
School Adjustment Score	Girl	62.17	9.43	58.63	10.64	57.88	13.79	0.536	
	Boy	50.18	14.87	54.18	10.68	48.78	15.84	0.686	
Physical adjustment score	Girl	36	0.0	34.71	1.33	32.88	5.51	0.047	
	Boy	32.82	2.56	33.47	3.16	29.11	7.49	0.110	
Adjustment Score of total gender	Girl	406.17	23.21	389.92	47.58	384.25	46.6	0.287	
	Boy	357.55	48.52	356.88	58.56	347.78	51.41	0.829	
Adjustment score of Gender total character	Girl	466.83	38.73	452.63	73.04	348.88	59.07	0.492	
	Boy	407.27	66.63	402.41	79.01	402.78	70.27	0.994	

**Table 3: Multiple analysis factors related to total personality adjustment:**

Analyzing the multiple factors related to the overall character in this study, the logistic regression model using Backward LR with the probability of variables enter and exit from the model was 0.5 and 0.1, respectively.

The study method was to enter all the variables in single-variable analysis that had relationship at significant level ( $P < 0.05$ ). Gender and child age (educational level), the guardian level of education, the number of contacts with the not-guardian parent and the housing situation into the primary model.

Table 3 shows that in the final model, girls had 2.6 times stronger adjustment than boys. It should be noted that the significant level of gender is at the board line level.  $P = 0.09$

(Odds Ratio=(2.58,95%,863-7.69)

By increasing the level of education of the child's guardian, the odds of adjustment of total personality are 1.8 times higher. (Odds Ratio=(1.8, 95%, 1.04-3.16)

When number of relationships with non-guardian parents increases the chances of a strong adjustment will decrease.

(Odds Ratio=(0.608, 95%,0.421-0.879)

By increasing the academic base (children age) increases the chance of strong adjustment.

(Odds Ratio =(1.49, 95%,1.003-2.233)

Housing status was not significant in multiple analysis. In this study, due to the low number of cases in the physical and social areas, multiple analysis was not performed.

#### **Discussion:**

It must be accepted that the divorce is not the end of life, but the end of unsuccessful marriage and the beginning of new days of life. While, the main victims of the divorce are children who are faced with the problems of the parents who are suffering from the family collapse. The findings of this study indicate that parent divorce has harmful effects on children.

The statistical findings of this study showed that 50.7% of the children (38 persons) of the divorced children were girls and 49.3% (37 persons) were boys. In which 70.7 % of them were studying in public schools and 29.3% in private school, most research cases were 8 years (second grade) and most of them were only child, first child, under mother custody, the parent education level was diploma and parents had free-lance occupations. The divorce duration was more than 4 years and the child did not have contact with their other parent and the housing type was renting.

Wallerstein found that divorce had negative consequences for children, and that most divorce children were depressed, and that their educational success was lower and that drug and alcohol abuse was higher (25). Stekoll in his study found that children with divorced parents have more internalized and extraverted problems than other children (26). Weaver et al in their study found that divorced children had more behavioral problems than ordinary children (24).

Halligan et al.'s studied the positive effects of parent divorce on students and shows that divorce does not always have negative effects, and even there are positive outcomes in the worst divorces, positive outcomes of divorce include the escape from parenting swearing, improving communication with one or both parents, avoiding exposure to a chronic conflict between parents and having a happy parent (8).

The negative effects of divorce on boys are much higher, since during the separation, boys are often forced to separate from their role modelers with same gender. In this study, the girls' adjustment scores were higher mean and standard deviation compared to boys, which is consistent with Habibi et al., Halligan et al. Habibi et al. in their study found that the average score of girls' adjustment was higher than that of boys. Boys, in comparison with girls, show a low level of abilities and are often demanding, incompatible, aggressive, immature and have more internal problems (12).

Halligan et al., found in their study that girls were more satisfied with their lives than boys, reporting more standard life (8). After divorce, children are better suited to their same-sex parent. In their study, Habibi et al. found that the adjustment score of girls who lived with the mother was more than those who lived with their father (12).

ShanniYaylaq et al. in a study that showed that the anxiety symptoms of girls with divorced parents were not higher than that of ordinary families, which was attributed to living with their same-sex parent (daughter with mother) and the emotional relationship with her has been able to compensate for this loss (18). The reason for this contradiction of this research with other studies, according to Freud, can be argued that girls usually girl have a better relationship with their father than boys. Fathers are a positive asset for their children. If there is a strong emotional bond between father and child, the father can play an active role in a child's life.

Divorce is harmful to children of all ages, lower-aged children in separated families are more incongruent than those of ordinary families and even families whose parents have a large disparity, and have more immature behavior. In this study, children with higher education (older age) had a higher degree of adjustment and better match with Fagan, Weaver & Schofield, Loucks Greenwood, who found that young children due to their low age and inefficient skills suffered the most (13, 24, 27). Among the results of the research, Anthony et al, showed that children who had experienced parent divorce at older ages had more harm than divorce (17).

Divorce is not just the separation of parents, but the separation of children and disconnection from one parent, the parent-child relationship can affect the level of adjustment of the child after divorce. An appropriate emotional bond between parents is important and promotes the development of children with high mental health (28). McCally's study shows that there is a relationship between adjustment in children with quality of communication with parents after divorce (29). The quality of communication between parents and children after divorce is an effective factor in child welfare and predicts child adjustment (30). In this study, children who had a weak relationship with their non-guardian parent had a higher degree of adjustment, which could be argued that due to cultural and moral issues and problems that exist for most couples when divorcing, and couples are separating with hatred and controversy, it is obvious that, until they reach the standard of living after separation, they will humiliate each other, and this hatred and neglect are in the presence of the child, and this feeling will pass to the child unconsciously and the child will suffer from this dichotomy.

Divorce has many economic, social and psychological problems. Weaver et al., in their study mentioned that children in low family income, are more likely to experience behavioral and compatible problems, and children in higher family income had lower internalized behavioral problems (24).

In this study, children in rental housing had a higher score of adjustment and status. Considering that the level of adjustment increase with the improvement of the socioeconomic situation, in this study it can be argued that in families with high marital conflicts, even after controlling variables such as socioeconomic status and family, children are more vulnerable to problems. Another variables that affect adjustment is parent education, educated parents have friendly and free attitude toward their children. The level of parents' education, especially the mother, as the one who has the most interaction with the child, affects the child's social behaviors, including social skills, effective and successful social interactions, and increasing their performance. Therefore, the effect of increasing the level of parents' education on academic performance and social skills development of children is remarkable (31). In this study, findings from parents' level of education show that the higher the level of parents' education, the higher the level of adjustment in children. The results of Rostami and Ahmadnia study showed that there is a significant relationship between the parents' education of students with their social adjustment level (32). . In a research conducted by Denham et al., the results indicated that there is a significant relationship between the family characteristics of the child, including the social class and the level of parents' education, with the social interactions of the child (33).

### **Conclusion**

Children are the huge capital of any society that will be fruitful in contributing to the future development and the community progress, thus helping the mental health of any society's children will contribute to the future health of this society. Since there many psychiatric disorders in children which can cause wider disturbances in adulthood. Helping these children develop their environment and prevent many problems and disorders in adulthood.

The personality formation and the way of children's mental development is most relevant to the performance of the home and the school. Currently, the situation is due to the fact that many families are not familiar with mental health issues and the growth of their children, a significant number of children entering school are experiencing significant mental or behavioral problems. High school attendance, multiple school attendance, lack of appropriate educational material and facilities, low access to education and psychology experts and counselors are all among the factors that make it impossible to eliminate the mental health problems of children and realize the growth of the body, behavior, thinking and their characteristic.

If the school fails to provide a proper and scientific response to such problems and there are no opportunities to reduce these difficulties, mental health and child development will be at risk.

The quality of life, work and personality of teachers and schools' council and educational and material and facilities should be considered in order to improve programs and methods and education management. In-service training and retraining of teachers and schools' council and their familiarization with psychology and education of children, the use of educational and health facilities and counseling can be very fruitful.

Health systems of counseling, including community health nurses, can play an important role in reducing the social harm of parents, children and society through timely interventions and involvements. Public health nurses can reduce the effects of divorce by providing proper health information for parents, explaining unusual behaviors of children and dealing with them correctly, creating positive relationships between the child and the non-guardian parent for self-confidence, identifying the social and emotional problems of children as the link between school and home, and giving explanations about their behavioral changes to parents and teachers. These complications and severe effects on children make it clear that this research and other studies that are being carried out in this direction can hope to take a small step towards paying attention to divorce children or even preventing divorce in society, and it recommends young people to marry with insight and deep awareness of the characteristics and personalities of their parties. School officials can also hold courses for managing anger, enhancing life skills, and so on for such students.

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