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ABSTRACT

It is not a surprise that non-traditional families are becoming more common. One of the increasingly prevalent forms of non-traditional families are blended families. Adolescents who have gone through parental divorce are faced with unique challenges as they must navigate a changing family structure, and possibly entering into a blended family. This research proposal aims to examine resilience within adolescents in different family systems, exploring if adolescents who have gone through a parental divorce yet not blended with any other family report more resilience than adolescents who have gone through a parental divorce but who have blended with another family.

Keywords: adolescents, resilience, blended families, stepfamilies, divorce, family structure.

INTRODUCTION

- As divorce rates, remarriage rates, and other changes in non-marital parental relationships are increasing, step- or blended families become a more prevalent family form (Olson & DeFrain, 1997; Braithwaite, 2001).
- Outcome research on children and adolescents who have experienced parental divorce shows that parental divorce has many negative impacts such as reduced psychological well-being, emotional and behavioral challenges, and reduced social and educational performance (Schaan & Voegel, 2016).
- A heightened awareness of the components of a blended family can help its members understand and communicate with each other (Purswell & Dillman, 2013; Kumar, 2017) and positive relationships among members of a blended family early on can be a critical factor in the longevity and durability of the unit (Kellas et al., 2014; Kumar, 2017).
- Community factors such as neighborhood livability, safety, and access to quality schooling have been shown to act as protective factors in adolescents' adjustment to parental separation as they increase opportunities for supportive social relationships and access to positive influences outside of the family (Rowe, Zimmer-Gembeck & Hood, 2016)
- A positive home environment and feelings of family belonging can promote positive adolescent development (Cavanaugh, 2008; King & Boyd, 2016).
- Research has also found that resilience and rejection sensitivity can mediate long-term effects of parental divorce. (Schann & Voegel, 2016).
- Research shows that family structure influences children's educational, behavioral, and emotional futures (Wolfinger, 2003; Halpern-Meekin & Tach, 2008).

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

- RQ1: Do adolescents who become part of a blended family report more resilience than adolescents with divorced parents who do not become part of a blended family?
- H1: Adolescents who become part of a blended family will present with lower resilience than adolescents who do not become part of a blended family.

METHODS

Participants

- The participants will be adolescents from thirteen years old to seventeen years old. All participants must be adolescents who have gone through a parental divorce during the duration of their life.
- Half of the participants must be adolescents who have gone through a parental divorce and who have become a part of a blended family.
- The defining characteristics of blended families are a new couple partnership is formed either through remarriage or cohabitation, and this includes children from previous relationships (Gonzales, 2009; Kumar, 2017).
- As this population is already specialized by two variables (age group and family structure), this population will be inclusive of gender identity, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.
- The target sample size will be 400 participants, finding 200 adolescents in each sample group.
- This population will be sampled from junior high and high schools, as well as referrals from other clinicians in the mental health profession who work with adolescents with divorced parents.

Procedures

- As this research study is a survey-based study, responses to all surveys completed by participants were collected online through a secure website.
- The data was collected at one time interval.
- A series of demographic questions were gathered online, prior to the measure of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale.
- The demographic information included information related to gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and family structure.
- After the data is collected, the results from each group will be averaged, and will be compared between groups.

MEASURES

Adolescence Resiliency

- To measure resilience, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale will be used.
- This measure is a validated and widely recognized scale with 2, 10, and 25 items which measure resilience as a function of five interrelated components: Personal Competence, Acceptance of Change and Secure Relationships, Trust/Tolerance/Strengthening Effects of Stress, Control, and Spiritual Influences.
- This measure will be used to measure resilience in each participant group.

RESULTS

- Participants will be grouped into one of the two groups: adolescents with divorced parents who haven't become a part of a blended family and adolescents with divorced parents who have become a part of a blended family.
- In order to meet the criteria of being a part of a blended family, this study will abide by the following definition of a blended family: a new parental couple partnership is formed either through remarriage or cohabitation, and this includes children from previous relationships (Gonzales, 2009; Kumar, 2017).
- A linear regression of averages in both participant groups will be conducted, comparing resilience levels in adolescents with divorced parents who haven't become a part of a blended family to resilience levels in adolescents with divorced parents who have become a part of a blended family.
- Results will be analyzed to determine which group presented with higher resilience.

DISCUSSION

Social Implications

- This research is important because there are a variety of outcome-based research studies on children and adolescents of divorced parents, but the research still needs to be expanded to look at how differing family structures after parental divorce may affect the children.
- Additionally, there is a necessity for researching which populations have higher resilience, and which populations perhaps may not adjust and exhibit as much resilience in order to focus our treatment and interventions

Potential Implications for Clinicians and Further Research

- As research explores the population of adolescents with divorced parents, it is also important to note that other age groups within the category of children of divorced parents are also important for further research to explore. Infants, young children, emerging adults, and even adult children are still all affected by parental divorce in similar, yet differing ways. This study will be limited in age, but it is still important to note that the age of children when their parents go through a divorce does have significant impacts.
- Additionally, this research may be limited in the restrictive definition of what constitutes a blended family. While this research used the criteria: " a new couple partnership is formed either through remarriage or cohabitation, and that this includes children from previous relationship" as a definition of a blended family, other blended family forms exist outside of this definition. This displays a narrowed approach of what defines a family as blended. Even the use of the terminology of "parents" in the research is limited because it may exclude blended families that include adoption, same-sex couples, as well as parents who have used a sperm or egg donor, and other blended family forms.
- Further research on blended families could be more inclusive by not requiring that a parental divorce must occur, but instead include other family structure circumstances such as being raised by single parents or even widowed parents. Furthermore, it is important to realize that the family structure of a blended family still can change. Half-siblings can be introduced into the family and this could affect resilience levels in other ways.
- The structures of families are continuing to expand and change, therefore further research should address a multitude of family structures. These circumstances are important to understand as part of why the effects on youth and adolescents may differ amongst the category of a "blended family."