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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the potential mitigating effects of supportive sibling relationships on the attachment security of children from divorced families. Utilizing the Child Attachment Interview (CAI) and Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ), attachment security and sibling relationship quality will be assessed. We anticipate that supportive sibling relationships will alleviate the adverse impacts of parental divorce on children's attachment security. This study will involve a sample of 80 siblings (40 sibling pairs) aged 7-17 years from divorced families. Findings may inform interventions enhancing attachment and resilience in children during family transitions, emphasizing sibling relationships as a valuable resource for well-being.

INTRODUCTION

- ❑ For children, their parents' marital transitions can be traumatic and stressful, placing them at risk for academic, social, developmental, emotional, and behavioral problems (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010).
- ❑ Children from divorced families often exhibit lower levels of mental well-being, cognitive ability, self-efficacy, social well-being, and academic performance in comparison to those from intact families (Hu, 2020).
- ❑ Divorce-induced stress can disrupt caregiver availability and responsiveness, leading to insecure attachment in children, with potential effects on emotional regulation and working models (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010)
- ❑ Sibling relationships endure throughout life, involve substantial time together, influence family dynamics, and significantly impact psychosocial functioning, making them crucial yet often overlooked in psychological research and practice (Buist et al., 2013).
- ❑ Research shows that warmer and less conflictive sibling relationships are associated with significantly lower levels of problem behavior, indicating their crucial role in promoting mental well-being (Busit et al., 2013).
- ❑ Limited research exists on how sibling relationship processes may act as protective factors amid interparental conflict, despite evidence suggesting that various family characteristics buffer children's vulnerability to such conflict (Davies & Cummings, 2006; Amato & Keith, 1991).

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

Research Question:

- ❑ Does the presence of supportive sibling relationships alleviate the adverse impacts of parental divorce on children's attachment security?

Hypothesis:

- ❑ Supportive sibling relationships can mitigate the adverse impacts of parental divorce on children's attachment security.

METHODS

Participants

- ❑ The study aims to include 80 siblings (40 sibling pairs) aged 7-17 years from divorced families.
- ❑ Participants will be recruited from community mental health facilities, social service agencies, and divorce support groups in the King County WA area.
- ❑ To be eligible, siblings must have parents whose legal divorce proceedings have been finalized and who have experienced parental divorce within the past four years.
- ❑ Exclusion criteria were children with severe developmental psychological disorders, frequent changes in residence or parental figures, and domestic violence present in the family.

Procedures

- ❑ Eligible participants will be sent invitation letters or emails explaining the purpose of the study, procedures, and potential benefits. For those interested, informed consent from parents/legal guardians will be collected.
- ❑ Data collection sessions will be scheduled in person or virtually at mutually convenient times for participants and researchers.
- ❑ The Child Attachment Interview (CAI) will be administered to assess attachment security. Trained interviewers will conduct the CAI following standardized protocols.
- ❑ Participants will complete the Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ) independently to assess the quality of sibling relationships.
- ❑ Responses from the CAI will be recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis. The SRQ responses will be recorded electronically.

MEASURES

Child Attachment Interview (CAI)

- ❑ Semi-structured interviews designed to assess children's internal models of attachment relationships with caregivers.
- ❑ Responses to the CAI will be transcribed and coded according to established scoring criteria.
- ❑ These codes will be used to categorize participants into attachment security classifications, such as secure, avoidant, anxious, or disorganized.

Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ)

- ❑ Questionnaire measuring different dimensions of the sibling relationship, contributing to four scales: warmth/closeness, relative status/power, conflict, and rivalry.
- ❑ Participants will respond to SRQ items on a Likert-type scale (1=hardly at all to 5= extremely much).
- ❑ Responses will be scored and summed, higher scores indicate greater warmth and support and lower conflict in the sibling relationship.

RESULTS

- ❑ A multinomial logistic regression will be used to determine whether different levels of sibling relationship support (measured as a continuous independent variable) influence attachment security (categorized as secure, avoidant, anxious, and disorganized) in children from divorced families.

DISCUSSION

Social Implications

- ❑ This study emphasizes the positive and supportive role siblings can play in divorced families and draws attention to an under-researched population.
- ❑ The research can help inform policies and community programs that support children through family transitioning by encouraging a focus on fostering strong sibling bonds and healthy sibling interactions.

Clinical Implications

- ❑ Clinicians working with children from divorced families can employ strategies to enhance sibling relationships in their clinical work and seek opportunities to include siblings in therapy sessions.
- ❑ Findings from this research can encourage clinicians to include sibling relationship assessment tools in their therapeutic practice, helping them identify sibling support levels and tailor interventions to improve attachment security.

Future Research

- ❑ Future research should include participants from different cultural contexts and backgrounds to understand how differing family structures and cultural environments impact and shape sibling support.
- ❑ Future research should develop specific interventions to strengthen sibling support during parental divorce and assess the effectiveness of these interventions on attachment security in children.