



BABE -BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

ILDIKÓ – TÜNDE NAGY (GIURGIUMAN)

**FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE STUDENT'S SCHOOL
ACHIEVEMENT:**
divorce and the implications of divorce's effects on school
achievement

Ph.D. THESIS SUMMARY

Scientific coordinator,
Prof. Univ. Dr. TRAIAN ROTARIU

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Key words: school achievement, student, family, divorce, effects of divorce, interpersonal relationship, adaptation, educational aspiration.

*I am the child.
You hold in your hands my destiny.
You determine largely whether
I shall succeed or fail.
Give me, I pray you,
those things that make for happiness.
Train me, I beg you,
that I may be a blessing to the world.*

(Mamie Gene Cole, the Child's Appeal)

Introduction

Contemporary society knowing the benefits of the classic educational model promotes school achievement, as success in this direction assures higher social placement of the individual.

Success, specifically school achievement – mostly is addressed as a recognition or social reward of a performance behavior in school, which is expressed by achieving maximum result in exams, competitions, contests, etc. In school, as well as in life, success is seen as following a scope, a self awareness, a valorization of self qualities and an attempt to overcome limits. In the context of informational development of recent years, the school learning has undergone transformation of objectives. It involves not only information assimilation but also forming some orientation capacities, divergent thinking, creativity, flexibility of cognitive and attitudinal structures that will later allow the optimal adaptation of the child to the contemporary changes. School success can be seen as the individual's ability to understand the rights and obligations in society, to exist and function as a member of a community, to collaborate and cooperate with others in carrying out tasks in the family, in the society, to take independent rational decisions based on facts, to assume responsibility for actions taken, etc.

For a long time, success or failure in school have been concentrated mainly on or even exclusively toward students, the factors related to their psycho-physical structure. Today we know that school success or failure is influenced by a number of internal and external factors that are interacting so that the proper functioning of school activities is determined by complex interplay of these factors and the quality of the teaching process is represented by the quality of their action.

School success is the result of all factors mentioning that each factor has a variable contribution depending on the nature and functional relations among them. In the first part of this thesis we tried to capture the factors that influence student school achievement while in the second part we have focused on a single factor with a negative impact on the studied phenomenon, namely we have considered the implications of parental divorce's effects on the students' school achievement.

Divorce is perceived as one of the most painful experiences endured by some individuals, in the United States alone more than a million people go through this process every year. In addition to relationship breakdown, divorce produces numerous changes, especially if children are involved. Divorce is never easy, even in the friendliest circumstances. The feeling of loss, loneliness, frustration and despair are common to adults and especially children or adolescents involved. For children, familiarity, continuity and parental model are very important so that the trauma of parental separation is hard to bear. A child who doesn't receives plausible answers to the uncertainties encountered in the new situation will likely become a student, later an adult, with behavioral problems. These include a diminished self-image, adjustment problems, emotional imbalances as well as less success in school, professional and social circumstances.

Thus, through this research carried out we wanted to identify factors that contribute to school success for students, of social and non-social factors of school achievement and parental divorce, specifically its effects (divorce being seen as a potential social factor with negative effects on student), their implications on subsequent student academic success. We wanted, based on data offered by this research, to be able to help mitigate the negative effects produced by parental divorce on children and by developing this study to counter the negative effects of divorce on their school achievement.

Synthesis of the research

Research strategy chosen was to make a cross-sectional study aimed to measure the effects of parental divorce on students at a specific time.

Hypothesis from which we started was that parental divorce affects the child/student and that these effects influence their academic achievement.

The aim was to identify the effects of divorce on students and determining to what extent these effects influence or not their academic success.

The objectives of the research were:

- Ø To identify whether after divorce the financial resources of parents (guardian parent) decreased and what were the living conditions of the child/student after divorce;
- Ø To see if parental supervision decreased after divorce;
- Ø To check if the parent-child interpersonal relationships, father-child, mother-father were strained after the divorce;
- Ø To analyze the head teacher's responses about the implications of the effects of divorce on student's school success: whether based on educational experience, they have established the implications of effects of divorce on school success of students from divorced families (divorce, which occurred at a certain time) and if there are differences between these students and those living with both biological parents married;
- Ø To observe the extent to which divorced parents are aware of the effects following a divorce and the implications of these effects on their children's school success;
- Ø To see if there are connections between the effects of divorce and school performance of the student.

The thesis comprises three parts.

The first part is represented by the **literature review** where the three chapters provide an analysis of written literature of school achievement (of factors with a decisive role in the education success) and parental divorce in order to identify its effects as it is

manifested in our society in order to establish the existence of some implications of this phenomenon on the school achievement of adolescents.

Chapter I deals with the issue of school achievement, of the social factors (family and school) and of the non-social factors of school achievement (psychological, medical and pedagogical factors). School achievement, school success or failure is influenced by a number of internal and external factors which are interacting, so that the proper functioning of school activities is determined by complex interplay of these factors and the quality of teaching process is represented by the quality of their action.

Factors can be: internal (concerning biophysical condition of the subjects) and external (referring to the frame of developing the instructional – learning activities). Internal factors are defining elements of the learning ability and they include biological determinants (age particularities, health, working potential) and also cognitive and non-cognitive psychological traits regarding the level of intellectual development, skills, interests, aspirations, attitudes.

External factors can be defined through psycho-pedagogical aspects regarding the organization of educational process (consistency between content and assimilative capacity of the students, applied methodology, training level of the teachers), aspects that could be also included in the category of internal factors, because the incidence of the educational process. Of great importance are the external factors that influence the efficiency of school activities such as: the conditions of family environment, socio-cultural, quality of teaching materials, school material resources and aesthetical condition of the school environment.

Chapter II refers to the family environment and its implications on school achievement. It includes a brief history of the family, definitions of family over the years, the main types, functions and also a perception of family in modern society. Further issues dealt with are: the social belonging, educational aspirations, socioeconomic status and social mobility.

Because in recent decades, families in the contemporary societies have suffered profound changes that at times have affected the very idea of "family" we wanted to capture aspects aimed at family between stability and change following the effects of transition on family and newly emerged values and family patterns. Today, the most important changes in the family occur due to changes in society's expectations from family, due to the appearance and establishment of new types of families (single parents, consensual couples, life-long celibacy,

homosexual couples), due to the change of status and role in nuclear families and not least due to the new vision on marriage.

Chapter III deals to the subject of parental divorce and its impact upon the student's school achievement. Here are documented stages and causes of separation or divorce, child/student adjustment to the new situation, the impact on school performance. Also in this chapter, we considered it imperative to achieve a synthesis of the main studies on the short and long term effects of divorce on child/adolescent.

The second part of the thesis refers to the methodology of the research.

In *Chapter IV* are described the domains of research and the topicality of the themes. Though in Romania, there were no significant increases in the rate of divorce (according to statistical data from 2006, the divorce rates recorded over the years, from 1975 and 2005 show that there were no significant fluctuations in the divorce rate. There were statistically between 1.5 and 2 divorces per thousand people, insignificant figures compared to other countries) we felt it would be interesting to study this phenomenon in our area because divorce may cause important effects on children and also may have implications on their school achievement,

And more than that, the topicality of this subject is determined by the fact that divorce phenomenon is little researched in our country, thus the effects of divorce are even less known along with the implications of these effects on school achievement.

In the first stage of studying the practical effects of divorce phenomenon on students and its implications on school achievement was achieved by using questionnaire-based survey that is considered the best method, both in terms of effectiveness and in terms of efficiency for the purpose in this work. The survey, used in our study as a method of gathering information was able to provide data on attitudes, motivations, opinions, intentions and behaviors of the target group through the questions for a number of people who could be in their whole a significant sample of the target population.

In the second stage was started using focus group technique, which had as a working tool: the interview guide. The purpose for which we have chosen this method was to clarify and to enrich the information previously collected. We wanted to combine a quantitative method with a qualitative method and to highlight any aspects not captured through data

collection from the application of questionnaires. This section also describes the methods used for the pilot survey, data collection, database analysis and data analysis.

In choosing the investigated sample, we started from the idea that adolescents are those who relive most acute the effects of divorce, so the sample comprised 548 students with ages between 14 and 22 years old, students enrolled in grades IX –XII of general and technical high schools from the city of Cluj-Napoca. From this sample, we wanted to identify the percentage represented by students who live with both biological parents married and the percentage of students whose parents divorced at a certain time.

Research also focused on 120 teachers, head teachers for grades IX-XII and 150 divorced parents (parents of students enrolled in the sample). Thus, we represented only a part of the research universe, which comprises a statistical collection of units. Sampling in this case consisted in removing a number of statistical units from the world of research, respecting very precisely certain conditions so that data could be extended, with certain variation limits to the set level of established probability. We set as our selective research purpose the estimation of parameters (mean, proportion) that characterize a particular feature of the population. Collectivity was chosen relatively homogeneous so that we can allow a smaller sample.

As the place of research we have chosen the city of Cluj-Napoca, the fourth largest city by population in Romania. Being a metropolitan city, we thought that it will respect the desired characteristics.

The first stage of research, namely that of quantitative research took place from February 10 to March 18, 2011. The schools where we conducted research for carrying out questionnaire-based surveys were:

A. for students: we applied 548 questionnaires, from which 548 were completed. We chose five schools from Cluj-Napoca as follows: "Napoca" Technical College, (120 questionnaires), "Eugen-Pora" High School, (100 questionnaires), "Onisifor Ghibu" High School, (180 questionnaires), Economic College Iulian-Pop (100 questionnaires), Choreography School (48 questionnaires).

B. for parents: we applied 150 questionnaires, from which 94 were completed. These were applied to divorced parents (parents of the students from our sample and one more school) from six schools from Cluj: "Napoca" Technical College, "Eugen - Pora" High School,

"Onisifor Ghibu" High School, Iulian Pop Economic College, "Apáczai Csere Janos" High School, Choreography School.

C. for head teachers: we applied 120 questionnaires, from which 107 were completed. Because we have chosen for the sample students to be only part of grades IX - XII, it was necessary to include in our study eleven schools as follows: "Napoca" Technical College, "Eugen - Pora" High School, "Onisifor Ghibu" High School, Iulian Pop Economic College, Choreography School, "Balcescu" High School, "Apáczai Csere Janos" High School, "Romulus Ladea" School of Fine Arts, "Raluca Ripan" Technical College, "Anghel Saligny" Technical College of construction, "Emil Racovita" National College, all from Cluj-Napoca.

The second stage of research, the qualitative one consisted in organizing two focus groups. To achieve this research two schools were chosen, namely: "Eugene Pora" High School and "Napoca" Technical College, both from Cluj-Napoca. This part of the research took place in May, 2011. Also in this chapter we describe the stages of research; the development of research tools, the training of focus groups and the development of an interview guide.

In the research undertaken by us in the first stage we used the sociological inquiry. Thus three types of questionnaires were developed in order to know the factual realities of the effects of divorce and its implications on school achievement of students as well as the opinions and attitudes of those involved (students, head teachers, divorced parents).

The questions from the questionnaires corresponded to indicators identified for the concepts that we wanted to measure (in line with those used in similar studies in the U.S., Western Europe and in England). All questions from our questionnaires had a goal, derived from a set of assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation. Questions in our questionnaires were designed for self-administration.

After applying the questionnaire-based survey and after statistical processing of data (made electronically on the program SPSS) the two focus groups were prepared. We continued with interviews and data recording. We decided on the application of a qualitative research method to improve and to clarify interpretations of the results previously obtained. Concerning divorce, we assumed that answers from both divorced parents and from students contain a certain amount of subjectivity and that the most objective responses could be obtained from experienced teachers.

The third part of the thesis is: **Presentation and interpretation of data. Results and discussion.** In *Chapter V* we presented, analyzed and interpreted the data obtained after statistical processing of the data from three types of questionnaires: those for students (students living with both biological parents married and students whose biological parents have divorced), those for divorced parents and those for head teachers.

We also presented, analyzed and interpreted the data resulting from application of focus group technique. The survey data was presented in tables, which allowed optimal concentration of information. Data was placed in summary tables, which contained information collected by all variables and for each individual. Then, data from summary tables were taken for analysis and included in the tables with a single variable or two variables. Using tables with a single variable, rank scores were presented, the average frequencies and percentages. Examination of frequency distribution provided an overview of the data. By calculating percentages, dividing the number of cases from one category to the total number of cases and multiplying the result by 100, the phenomenon was identified. Using the tables with two variables, the tables of "contingency", showed the relationship between two variables, expressing the dependence of a variable upon another.

In the sample represented by students, we wanted to identify from the investigated population, the percentages of students whose parents have divorced and those living in families with both biological parents married. After statistical processing it was noticed that 78% of students live in families with both biological parents married, while 18% live in divorced families. Regarding the parent's education level, we found out that on average 40% of mothers have graduated high school, 24% of mothers have graduated university and 17% of them attended vocational schools. Only 0.18% of the mothers were unschooled. Regarding father's level of education, 34% of the fathers were found to be high school graduates, while 26% attended a vocational school and 21% are graduates of a university.

In response to the question: "Who do you live with?" those students whose parents are divorced, 52.6% said that they live with their mother, 20.6% live with the mother and her boyfriend, 4.1%, live with the father and his girlfriend, 4.1% live with both parents even though they are divorced and 14.4% live with someone else. While those students whose parents are not divorced responded that 92.2% live with both parents, 1.9% live with the

mother, 0.2% live with the father, 0.2% live with the father and his girlfriend and 4.75% live with someone else:

Table 1. Noticed frequency regarding the parent with whom the student lives (students whose parents are married and those with divorced parents).

You are living with your...? Your parents are...?

		Your parents are...?				Total
		Married (or just together)	Divorced (or just separated)	Other Situation	No answer	
You are living with...	Two of your parents	92.9%	4.1%		66.7%	73.2%
	Your mother	1.9%	52.6%	52.2%		13.0%
	Your father	0.2%	4.1%	4.3%		1.1%
	With mother and her boy friend		20.6%	8.7%	33.3%	4.2%
	With father and his girl friend	0.2%	4.1%			0.9%
	With somebody else	4.7%	14.4%	34.8%		7.7%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

To make a comparative analysis between the two categories of students we continued the questionnaire with a series of questions that concerned only those students whose parents have divorced. Because studies on the effects of divorce have shown that these effects are more acute immediately after divorce and that they reduce over time, we considered it important to determine how much time had passed since the parents' divorce to the time of our study. Data revealed that only 8% of parents were divorced under 2 years, while 92% were divorced for more than three years:

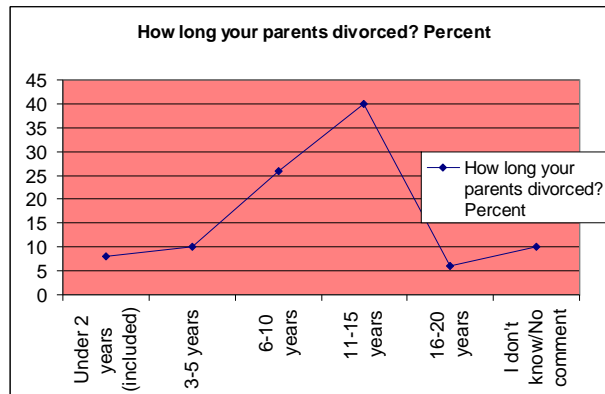


Figure 1. Time from when parents divorce has occurred

Regarding the question: whether it has changed their lives in some way, after parents' divorce? 51% of students said yes, their lives changed and only 23% said no, their lives had not changed.

Starting from the idea that one of the effects of divorce is strained relations after the divorce, both between custodial parents and between child and the other parent, we wanted to capture aspects of this subject. Thus, the student was asked if their relationship changed with their mother or with their father, after the divorce and if so, in what sense?

The data showed that at least the mother's relationship with the student after divorce has changed and changed for the better. The situation is interesting for the father, where again most of those asked said yes, their relationship changed. However, when the students were asked in what sense has changed, percentages of those who responded positively and those who respond negatively are equal. Knowing that another effect of divorce is the reduction of parental supervision, we wanted to see if this may be extended to our study. We also analyzed in parallel the situation of those students whose parents are married, thinking to better capture any differences. Thus the answers to the question: "How long do you spend with your mother during the day?" showed for the entire sample of students that on average students spend very little time per day with their parents. The responses of those who confirmed they spend no time at all with their mother were 1%, while those who confirmed they spend no time at all with their father rose to 5%.

Then we compared the situation of pupils whose parents have divorced with those whose parents are married, to detect whether there are differences in terms of time spent with parents. Regarding the time spent with the mother, the differences were not significant, what seemed interesting was that while for students with married parents the percentage of those who do not spend time at all with mother was only 0.5% for divorced children this percentage was 3.1%. In the fathers case there are significant differences. In comparison of the students whose parents have divorced, with those whose parents are married students whose parents have divorced spend less time with their father, and the percentage of those who are spending no time at all, is 23 times higher than the students whose parents are married.

When we asked: what links do you keep with the other parent? Spend time together? Our study showed that 41% of students from divorced family spend time with the other parent, 23% do not spend time, and a large percentage, 29%, refused to answer.

We then wanted to know: how long divorced parent financially support the child after divorce, if she/he gives money to the student, if they support him/her by giving advice, if they asked about school performance. In response to question, “if the school activities are supported?” the results did not show major differences between the two categories of students. The only visible difference was at: do not support school activities too much or at all, where the proportion of those with divorced parents is almost three times higher than the others (of course, this can be explained by the fact that for students with divorced parents also the absence of the father is higher too).

Comparative analysis showed that in the interest of students' educational achievement, there are no important differences between students with divorced parents and those with married parents.

Concerning self confidence, probably because we are questioning teenagers, the percentages are fairly high. Related question: “Do your parents check your school's performance?”, comparative analysis shows quite large differences in the two categories of students such as: while for students with married parents the school results are verified by both parents 56.2%, in divorced families the rate is only 30.9%. In divorced families the student's school results are verified by the mother 52.6% and only in 5.2% by the father. In order to capture aspects of students self-esteem by how they perceive themselves as compared with others, students were asked – “if I had to think about how well I learn compared with classmates, where would I position myself?” The proportion of students who positioned themselves as part of the first third was in a smaller proportion for those whose parents have divorced. These students generally tend to position themselves in the middle, in terms of their academics.

The vast majority of surveyed students want to pursue a college degree. For this question there were no differences between the two categories of students.

Concerning the question about - the support of parents for students to pursue a college degree, comparative data shows differences between the two groups of students: students with biological married parents are more supported in pursuing a college degree than the others.

After we interpreted and analyzed the results of student responses from the questionnaire, observing the frequencies between variables, we wanted to also capture other aspects which would explain the phenomenon of divorce's effects on students (only those with divorced parents) and the implications of these effects on their school success.

Regarding the parent's educational level and student's school results (overall average, during the year of graduating) we could see that there is a tendency between the higher educational level of parents and better school results of students.

It was found that where the family (the divorced one) can provide only a little or very little financial support to attend university, as well as student interest is lower, although there is a general trend, which became fashionable for youth to attend college.

We also wanted to see if there are differences in terms of educational achievement (overall average in the last grade graduated) and type of family which the students live in (married parents or divorced). Thus, according to data we observed differences between these results are not very significant. But if we consider the classification of environments and noting that they are generally large and very large, we believe that we refer to this aspect. Regarding divorced parents, it was difficult to co-opt parents into answering questions. In many cases, the divorced parent feel guilty in their mind for what the child has suffered from divorce, and it is difficult to recognize this fact to others.

From questionnaires filled by parents, 87% were filled by mothers and 13% by fathers.

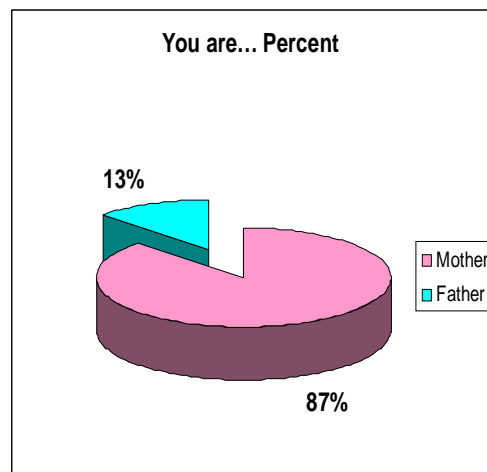


Figure 2. (The report answers to questionnaires according to the gender of respondents)

The age of parents who filled questionnaire was: under 35 years - 9%, between 36-40 years - 28%, between 41-45 years - 44%, between 46-50 years - 13%, over 51 years - 3% and 4% refused to answer. Regarding the parent's educational level, we observed they are generally high school college or professional school graduates with 9% post university graduates. In regards to parent's occupation we show that 41% are employees providing manual or unskilled labor, 33% are employees providing specialized or intellectual work and 12% hold management positions. On average, parents spend 8 hours at work.

Assuming that one of the effects produced by divorce can be the reduction of financial resources, we wanted to see how many family members are in each of the families which entered in the study, how many children they have and what income is available to them. Thus, we could see that the average number of members per family is three, and in the number of children, families generally have one or two children. In regards to the question of family income, we found that 12% of parents have a monthly family income ranged from 1-750 Ron, 50% have incomes between 751-1500 Ron, 15% between 1501-2500 Ron. Regarding housing conditions, data showed a rate of 63% of divorced parents live in private housing, 13% live in rent and 18% live with their parents. Then, parents were asked to assess the relationship with her former husband / former wife and the relationship with the child. Following the data collected, we could establish that the relationship with the former husband/former wife, for 37% of parents was very good or good, for 31% bad or very bad relationship, for 19% not the case (those who do not keep in touch with former husband / former wife for some reason) and 7% refused to answer.

Most interviewed parents considered the relationship with the child to be as good and very good. The same can be seen in parent's satisfaction in regards to the child's behavior. The percentages of those who are satisfied or very satisfied are again suspiciously high compared with those who are dissatisfied.

We wanted to find out to what extent in divorced families child-related decisions are taken by both biological parents. According to the data, only in 19% of cases these decisions are taken by both parents, 30% of cases the decisions are taken by one parent (mother, usually the guardian parent of the child's), 2% of these decisions are taken by the father, 13% of cases decisions are taken by children (adolescents in our study) and 36% of these decisions are taken by the family. According to the educational expectations of parents for their child,

of course the most significant percentage is for those who want as their child to attend college, enrolling in this option being the current trend of Romanian society.

In the attainment of the child, only 14% of parents mentioned being dissatisfied, the rest considered their children as having good and very good school results. A significant percentage of parents, 90% are considering that they know their children's group of friend. When they are asked – “what would they like to change about their child?” 38% say they would not change anything, 38% would change their school performance, and the rest say they would change something else.

A 95% of surveyed parents believe that the child's school results are important and very important for success in life, while only 5% of them believe they are not important.

Through another set of questions we wanted to determine whether divorced parents are aware of the implications of the effects of divorce on children, student. So they were asked if they believe that the lack of a parent can affect children's school performance, or lack of material resources, lack of a model in child's life or lack of a harmonious family environment may influence their children's school success. The responses showed that most parents think that a lack of material resources or a lack of a model in a child' life would affect student success and that only the lack of a harmonious family environment would have implications in school performance.

Divorced parents when asked - if they believe that the lack of a parent may affect the child's school success 41% responded positively and 46% believe that the lack of a parent is not a negative factor in the children achievement and of those who responded positively to the question, the highest percentage of responses indicated that lack of both parents could affect school performance and ultimately a student's school success. Based on the responses of divorced parents, we wanted to make some frequencies between variables before drawing conclusions. So we wanted to see if there is a direct link between guardian parent relationship with ex-husband/ex-wife and it's relation with the child. Data processing showed that where the relationship between former spouses is good or very good there are no bad or very bad relationships with the child, but where the relationship between parents, former spouses is bad or very, bad relations or worse appear to the child. Thus, we can say that there is a parallel between the two variables.

Further, we wanted to see if the quality of the relationship between former spouses could influence the degree of guardian parent satisfaction to the child. We have seen that in cases where the relationship between former spouses is very good or good, as the degree of satisfaction with the child is very good or good, however for those who declare that they have a bad or very bad relationship with former spouses/ex-wife the percentages appear to indicate degree of dissatisfaction for the child's behavior.

One of the objectives of the research was to analyze the responses of head teachers about the effects of divorce on children, namely the implications of these effects on school achievement of students. In our analysis, we wanted to capture - in which ways over the years, having had the opportunity to work with students, teachers have observed implications of the effects of divorce on the school achievement of their students (students from divorced families), as well as whether they have noticed there are differences between students living in divorced families or students living with biological married parents.

We have seen that 40% of teachers are faced with: poor school performance, high numbers of absences, problems such as improper behavior of students, alcohol, drugs, violence, aggression, lack of self-confidence are only limited phenomena as scope problematic in schools. The question that was concerned with how students relate with others, a rate of 51.4% of head teachers believe that there are no differences between students, while an almost equally high percentage, 48%, believe that these students face relationship problems.

Head teachers, based on their past experiences with the students, were asked to specify if they have found whether parents divorce can lead to changes in students' academic results. On this question, the answer was perfectly conclusive, because a proportion of 79% responded positively, 26% negatively. We also wanted to know from teachers, if these effects were temporary or are permanent. 77% of them said that changes in students' school results were temporary. 86% of teachers say that divorce affects school achievement of students and only 13% say the opposite. With the questions inserted in the questionnaire we tried to see if the teachers found that students from divorced families have behavior or adjustment problems. Figures show that 73% of teachers say these students sometimes appeared to have behavioral problems and 58% of teachers indicated also adjustment problems. Regarding cooperation from parents, 66% of teachers are considering that it is satisfactory and said that

there are no differences between parents (married or divorced). We asked teachers about the “problem student” (where we include behavioral problems, school results) and from what type of family are these children? 53% of teachers said that they have such students but about which type of family these students come from, head teachers said that there is no difference between students with divorced parents and those whose parents are married.

After the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data obtained from the three types of questionnaires, at the end of each type we included conclusions.

We continue with the description of the analysis and interpretation of data collected from the application of two focus groups.

At the end of the paper general conclusions were drawn.

Conclusions

Our findings primarily concern the head teachers, where we discovered that in their position they do not know the exact the number of those students whose parents are divorced, because there is no clear evidence of this fact. Thus, they are placed too often in the situation of losing large amounts of time to discover and identify the source causes of mistakes and school failures. Based on data collected and from discussions with head teachers we found that following parental divorce (from incident to around 1.5 - 2 years) students have worse school performance, experience behavioral problems, adjustment problems, diminished self-image and various emotional imbalances. Meeting with these situations teachers often cannot cope because they do not have special training to know what and how to do and when these situations occur, they must handle them using their "instinct" (to use the words of one of the teachers who agreed to be part of the study). Only in serious cases do they direct students to the school psychologist. Not all head teachers know all the effects that divorce can have on the child/student and do not know all the implications of these effects on educational achievement of students and usually they do not have physical time to manage these kinds of problems. Based on data collected by head masters these effects can also observed and implications of them are usually short term ones and they do not see too much difference between students regarding to the marital status of parents.

Regarding parents, what we have observed and found after processing data obtained from parent's questionnaires was that after parents' divorce students, children, in most cases remain in the care of the mothers who are receiving the guardian parent role. The guardian parents on average spend 8 hours a day at work and have an income between 751-1500 Ron. Most parents (63%) said they own their home property and the rest either rent, are living with parents or are in other situations. Regarding to the relationship with her/his former husband/wife, 37% appreciated these relations as being good, the rest thought it is bad or mentioned other cases (no longer in contact, left, died, etc.). In relation to the child, the degree of satisfaction with school results or his/her behavior, the percentages of parents whose answers are positive are extreme high. What we have found after processing data from divorced parents is that parents generally are not aware of or do not recognize the effects arising from a divorce and understand even less the implications of the effects of divorce on students' school success. The data show that divorced parents do not consider that the lack of material resources or lack of a model in child's life, the absence of a parent, may affect the school achievement but only consider that the lack of family atmosphere would deprive the child.

After interpretation and analysis of data collected from student surveys we found that 18% of the student's parents are divorced. In the majority of respondents the divorce occurred two years ago or longer. From students' responses there was no decrease in financial resources of the guardian parent, at least not at the time of the study. It was noted that student-child remained in most cases in the mother's care. There were not seen significant differences in the living conditions of these students compared with others. However, concerning the parental supervision, the father presence in a child's life shows differences between children. In rather large percentages, students do not spend time with their father, or if they do in many cases, this only happens a few times a year.

The average time spent with children is short, between 2 and 4 hours. Students said that after the divorce, relationships with parents have changed, at least with the mother these relations have improved. Asking about father – the proportion of the students who refused to answer and those who said the change for the worse, were quite high. Relations with parents apparently did not influence students' relationships with classmates. Over time, students seem not to agree with parent's divorce. From students' responses we have not identified cases of

students with emotional disorders, adjustment problems or behavioral problems due to the effects of divorce. However, differences emerged when comparing results of two categories of students. It was also noted that in terms of self-image, of how they perceive themselves in comparison with other students, students with divorced parents do not generally see themselves as part of the first third of the class in terms of their academic ranking. Rather they are declared as part of the second third. Data from student surveys show minor differences between students with married parents and divorced parents, but the effects of divorce are visible, as also are the implications of the effects on school achievement.

Regarding to psychologists, we saw that they intervene only in very difficult situations (usually when serious misconduct appears: theft, extreme violence, depression, drop-out attempts, suicide attempts, etc.), when the student voluntarily turns for help or when they are sent by the head teacher or by the council staff.

Although figures from our study are not alarming they do not indicate strong effects recorded on students after parent's divorce and therefore not too obvious implications on their school achievement (this is because only in 8% of the cases we studied parents' divorces occurred less than two years prior, otherwise it occurred five, ten and even fifteen years ago, during which these effects were diminished). We found that: these effects exist, they are manifest and have implications in educational achievement and a better knowledge of them as well as proper management of those involved, can help the student more easily overcome the effects without affecting his/her academic and social achievement.

When it comes to divorce, we cannot mention another important aspect, which, although related to this phenomenon, is not directly the subject of our research, namely the student, the child in many situations, lives deeper drama prior to the legal divorce of parents, divorce which may or may not occur later. During emotional divorce, which begins long before legal divorce is carrying out, the child is under emotional stress, conflict, physical or verbal aggression between parents, episodic abandonment, attempts to attract one or another parts, etc. In sociological terms it is known that the most important place for a studying child is with his/her family, so that we can affirm that insufficient parental control, mismanaged education, family disorganization, criticism, hostility, family abandonment are the main causes of school and social failure. Affective disorders of parents directly cause psychological disorders to children while family difficulties, lack of cohesion and lack of

emotional feelings will cause inadequate moral development, some late emotional and functional deficiencies of an immature moral personality with nonconformist events and inadequacy.

In Romanian society after 1989, causes such as inflation, economic restructuring, privatization of enterprises, development of market economy, etc., were the favorable conditions which led to increased violent behavior in the family. Poverty, the number of children, women dependence of male, unemployment, alcohol consumption have boosted intra-familial disputes and violence, whose victims are mainly children. Abuse, whether physical or emotional, a tense life lived under the sign of fear and terror, lead to depression, anxiety, loss of confidence in the natural world, social isolation, etc. All these have an immediate effect especially on long-term development of the child, on their school and social achievement.

So, we can say that not only divorce but also the unhealthy family climates have negative effects on children/students. Divorce as a psycho-social complex phenomenon - involve tensions, conflicts, frustrations, dissatisfactions with multiple effects, however in today's society has come to be regarded rather as a common phenomenon and if we consider interparental conflict, physical or verbal aggression, tension affection between marriage partners perhaps only in pragmatic terms, in this case we can say that parental divorce may be the solution to saving the child. Our conclusion in this research is that everyone involved in a divorce are suffering, both the mother and father but especially child/student, whose school performance may be affected. The mission of a teacher and of parents must be to solve the child /student's problems arising from the unfortunate event as well as they can.

Personal contributions

In Romania, the topic of divorce has not been the subject of very much research, so we believe this paper could be used as a starting point for studies to come. We proposed through our research to capture aspects of parents' divorce, to identify in what extent the effects of divorce are known by parents and head teachers, to what extent can be identified on the students such effects or signs of these effects and in what extent they may affect the student's school achievement.

We wanted, based on data collected in research to determine the percentage of those students living in divorced families, to know with whom they live with after the divorce, the living conditions, what kind of relationships develop further with the guardian parent but also with other biological parent, the evolving future relations between parents and how these factors come to change and in what direction – a student’s academic success.

We also wanted to achieve a comparison between students from divorced families and those living with both biological parents to better capture any eventual changes. From the choosing of the theme we decided that based on available research we can help mitigate the negative effects of parents divorce and that by developing of this study we can counter the negative effects of divorce on student’s school achievement.

Thus, for the future we suggest:

- Ø Development of trainings, workshops held in schools about divorce, in order to prepare head teachers to know the effects that parental divorce may have on student life and especially the implications that these effects may have on their school achievement and success, as well as to help head teachers to provide appropriate intervention measures in such cases;
- Ø Development of round tables, debates in schools, universities with divorced parents or those undergoing divorce, with the theme being divorce, its effects and its implications on educational achievement of students;
- Ø Based on data provided by the research, we propose to identify ways to ensure a link between: divorced parent – head teacher - school psychologist, so that before taking action to help the student all will have an insight into the cause of problems;
- Ø Closer involvement of the school psychologist not only for students where problems, deviations, failures are already serious issues, but also for students whose parents are divorced. To achieve this solution, first we propose: to identify students with divorced parents (through discussions with head teachers or with parents when their child enters into school) then to organize informal meetings on the topic of divorce with those students, where students are prepared to accept parents' divorce or at least to deal with it as a natural state of affairs, to cope as best as possible.

Perspectives

Finally, we propose the study presented in this research as a guide for head teachers, school psychologists, parents and students, all those how are wishing to pursue a teaching career. In the future, beginning with the data offered by this research, we want to continue our study with a longitudinal research through divorce, where the group of students chosen for study to be selected from among those whose parents are undergoing divorce or recently divorced (less than three months). We would like to continue such a study to track the progress of the effects over time, changes in school performance of students and their subsequent development.

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