

The Effect of Parental Divorce on Emotional Adjustment and Regulation

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Introduction

- The United States has one of the highest divorce rates in the world at 46% of marriages ending in divorce. This study examined how people cope with emotions and events in their lives, and how parental divorce can be a factor in emotional development.
- Besharat et al. (2018) found that children of divorce showed higher vulnerability to several psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression, social problems, violence, and attention problems, while also showing lower levels of self-efficiency, self-esteem, social support and tendency to use maladaptive problem-solving strategies.
- Time from divorce, birth order, and gender are separate factors that also affect emotion processing in children post-divorce; children who experience parental divorce during their formative years, one month – 8 years of age, are more likely to see long lasting effects on their emotional development (Schick, 2020).

Hypothesis

- The main study hypothesis is that children of divorce will have lower emotional adjustment and emotion regulation. Adults that did not experience parental divorce in childhood are the control group.
- It was also hypothesized that there are several outside factors that can also affect a child's emotional development such as birth order and gender.

Methods

- Participants were recruited from Indiana University – Purdue University Columbus (IUPUC) and Indiana University Bloomington campus and were asked to take a survey through Qualtrics. This survey consisted of 80 questions designed to measure emotion adjustment, emotional regulation and coping skills.
- Participants had to be 18 or older, as development of emotion regulations and emotional adjustment should be more pronounced. Out of 69 participants, 8 were excluded due to incomplete survey answers (N=61).
- Of the 61 participants, there was 47 females, 12 males and 2 preferred not to answer. 25 were between the ages of 18-24, 13 were between the ages of 25-34, 18 were between the ages of 35-50 and then 5 were 51+. Out of 61 participants 34 had divorced parents and 27 had married parents. 24 were the Oldest Child, 11 were the Middle Child, 18 were the Youngest Child and 8 had no siblings.

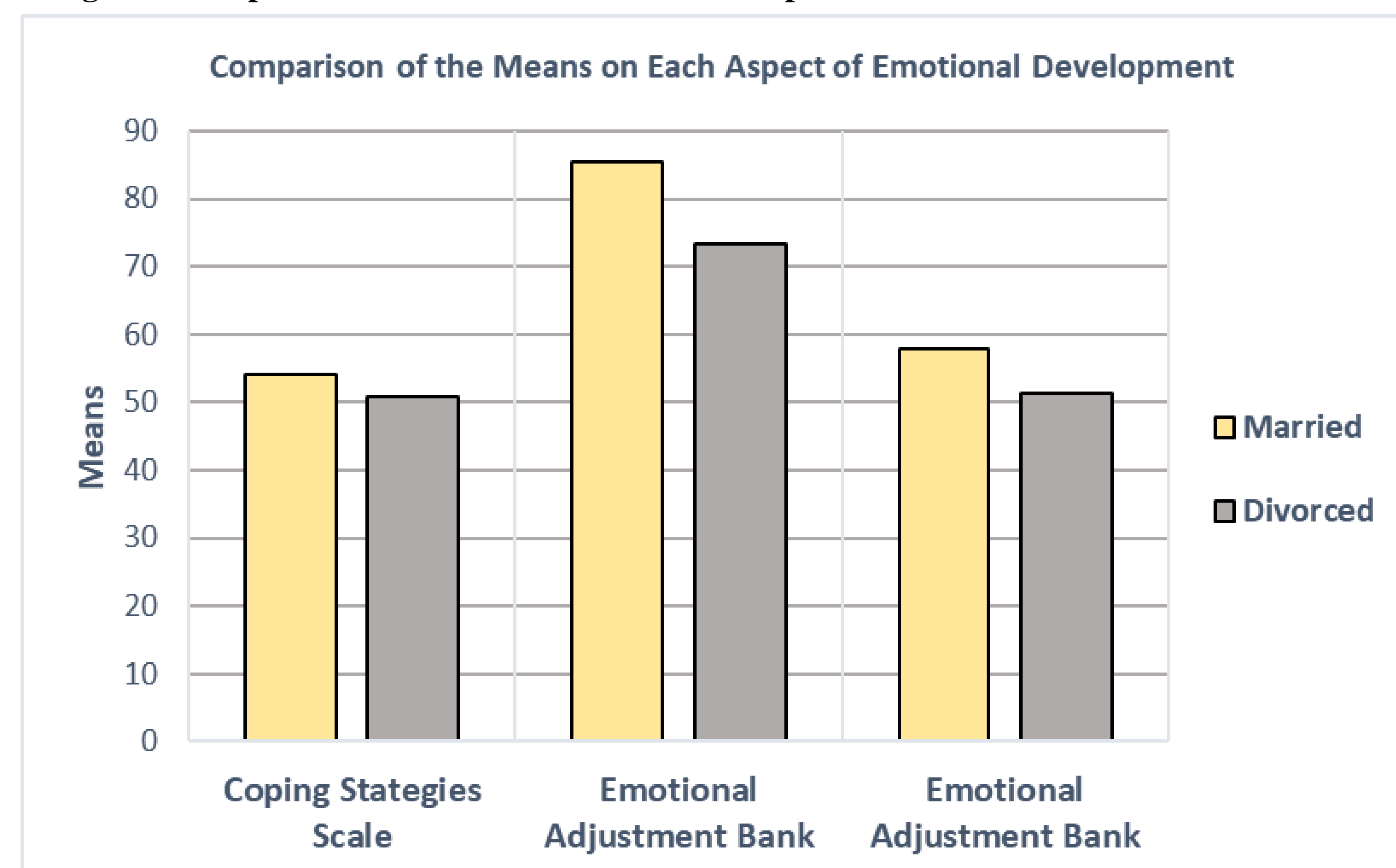
Measures

- Emotional Adjustment was measured using the Emotional Adjustment Bank (EAB). It consists of 28 items using a five-point Likert scale which ranges from 5 (strongly disagree) to 1 (strongly agree) (Aguado et al. p. 40, 2007). The Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = 0.89$, with $M = 78.51$ and $SD = 19.49$.
- Emotion regulation was measured using the Emotion Regulation Knowledge Scale (ERKS). This test is a dichotomous scale consisting of 19 true or false questions with a third option of neither true nor false acting as a baseline (Brown & Natoli, 2022, p. 90). The Cronbach's alpha for the ERKS is $\alpha = 0.96$, with $M = 54.28$ and $SD = 17.55$.
- Coping Skills were measured using the Coping Strategies Scale (CSS). It consists of 30 specific strategies/items, with participants asked to rate how frequently they use the strategies listed using a five-point frequency rating scale (Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, Often = 4, Always = 5) (Zhao et al., 2022, p.3). The Cronbach's alpha for the CSS is $\alpha = 0.70$, With $M = 53.21$ and $SD = 8.591$.

Results

- To test the hypothesis that children of divorce have lower emotional adjustment and emotion regulation an independent sample t-test was conducted in SPSS, EAB: $t(60) = -2.469$, $p = .016$, ERKS: $t(60) = -1.444$, $p = .154$ and CSS: $t(60) = -1.43$, $p = .158$. (see Figure 1).
- To test the effect of other outside factors also affect a child's emotional development an independent sample t-test was conducted on SPSS (see Table 1).

Figure 1 Comparison of means on emotional development



		N	t value	p value (2-tailed)
Gender	EAB	60	1.428	0.159
	ERKS	60	-0.679	0.5
	CSS	60	-0.349	0.729
Siblings	EAB	60	1.711	0.092
	ERKS	60	1.432	0.157
	CSS	60	1.425	0.159

Discussion

- The results show that divorce does have a significant effect on emotional adjustment; emotional adjustment was measured thoroughly by giving the participant a wider variation of responses to ensure the most accurate representation of the participant. Divorce did not have a significant effect on emotion regulation and coping skills. This means the main hypothesis is partially supported as there is a significant effect on emotional adjustment and not on emotion regulation. The results did not support the secondary hypothesis that gender and having sibling affects emotion regulation and emotional adjustment.
- These findings show the importance of giving children resources to help navigate through the emotional effects parental divorce has on emotional development. Future research should focus on how parental involvement post divorce and time of divorce, during formative years or not, affects emotional processes in children of divorce.

Limitations

- The limitations of this study revolved around sample size and skewed demographic. Previous studies have found significant results in larger sample sizes. The demographics being primarily female limited the significance analysis on gender.

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