The Negative Effects of Divorce, and Interventions to Improve Well-being

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Abstract

Divorce can have negative emotional, behavioral, and physiological effects on individuals. The prevalence of divorce in today’s society makes it a public health concern due to long-term impact it can have. The focus of this review is to better understand the effect that divorce can have on depression and stress, and interventions to combat the negative outcomes of divorce. There is a link between divorce in depression in which secondary stressors may trigger depression, or worsen it. The more stressful the divorce is, the harder it is to adjust which can lead to many other negative consequences. Divorce interventions have shown to improve the emotional, behavioral, and physiological downfalls that come from experiencing a divorce.
The negative effects of divorce, and interventions to improve well-being

Divorce is very prevalent in today’s society. Researchers estimate that between 43 and 46 percent of marriages will end in divorce. Since divorce affects so many, it is important to understand the negative consequences in order to implement services to help those who are suffering. Divorce is not a single event due to its stressors that take place before and after the divorce. Divorce falls in second place on the scale of the top ten most stressful life events that can lead to illness (Segal et al., 2017). Research has found that children who come from divorced families have worse relationships with their parents, lower education, and are at a higher risk for internalizing and externalizing problems. There is an extensive list of associated problems that stem from divorce due to the disruption that it causes in individuals’ lives. Living arrangements, socioeconomic status, social, behavior and psychological changes can occur from a divorce, which can make it difficult for individuals to adapt (Christopher et al., 2017). Many studies have found that children who live in single parent households have worse mental health compared to families who have two parents living together. The way that divorce affects people is highly individualistic and some people have been found to be more vulnerable to the stressors compared to others (Bohman et al., 2017). Some studies have found an association between divorce and depression. The divorce itself is not necessarily the cause of depression, but the stressful events that occur because of it can trigger depression, or worsen it (Mirowsky, 1999). The aim of this review is to examine how divorce is related to depression and stress and to examine different interventions to help those who have suffered from divorce.

Depression is a very common in society and can vary from mild to severe. Some symptoms include intense sadness, sleeping difficulties, weight loss, lack of energy, feelings of guilt and thoughts about death. In order to for depression to be clinically significant, these
symptoms must occur for more than two weeks. Some risk factors for depression include biochemistry, genetics, personality and environmental aspects. People with naturally low-self esteem, who are highly reactive to stressful events, or are more pessimistic, may be at a higher risk for depression. Exposure to violence, neglect, abuse, or poverty can also make someone more vulnerable to depression (American Psychiatric Association, 2017).

Stress is not always bad for the body. Small amounts of stress can actually improve motivation, increase concentration and increase energy. Stress is your body’s way of reacting to a demand or threat. It is a way of protecting itself so you can react to emergency situations. There is a difference between short-term stress and long-term stress. Long-term stress can have cause serious health problems. Too much stress can suppress your immune, digestive and reproductive system and increase your risk for a heart attack. Long-term stress can also rewire circuits in the brain that can make you more vulnerable to depression and other mental health issues. Depression and anxiety can be worsened by chronic stress, which is why it is important to learn how to cope with stressful situations. There are many causes of stress and not all stress is caused by external factors, but instead some can be internal or self-generated. People differ in what they perceive as stressful. Whether you perceive events as stressful or not can play a role in vulnerability to stress related disorders. There are many things that can affect your stress level including social network, sense of control, outlook on life, coping with emotions and your knowledge (Segal et al., 2017).

Divorce can have a negative affect on individual’s emotional, behavioral and psychological well-being which is why it is crucial to come up with interventions to combat these issues (Graham, Enright, & Klatt, 2012). The prevalence of depression and stress associated with divorce makes divorce a mental health concern that needs to be taken seriously.
In this review, depression related to divorce and stress related to divorce will be discussed as well as different divorce interventions to improve well-being.

**Divorce and Depression**

Past research has found a link between divorce and depression. Depression as a medical illness that can cause a number of emotional and physical problems that can interfere with daily life. Depression can negatively affect mood, which can cause feelings of sadness, lack of appetite, or loss of interest in daily activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Both divorce and depression are common in today’s society and it is important to understand why they co-occur. People react to divorce differently; some show little negative effects, while others are vulnerable and fall into depression. The separation of two individuals can set off a series of events that can sometimes cause more harm than the actual separation itself. Divorce can greatly affect finances due to separate housing, legal fees and child support or alimony. The family then has to adjust to their new way of life not just with their divorced parents, but with financial burdens as well. Parental conflict and maltreatment towards family members are other factors that are associated with divorce and depression. Gender can play a role in how the individual reacts to divorce and if they are at a higher risk of developing depression. There is a growing body of research focused on individuals who experienced divorce in childhood and well-being into adulthood. This section will examine how the secondary stressors of divorce such as socioeconomic status, conflict and maltreatment affect depression and if gender plays a role in depression among individuals who have suffered from divorce.

**Secondary Stressors**

Divorce has many secondary stressors that can worsen depression, such as socioeconomic status. There was a strong relationship found between economic hardship and adolescent
depression in that adolescents who had to worry about finances during their parents divorce showed higher rates of depression. Economic stress can greatly weigh on parents, which in turn affects the children. According to the life course disruption hypothesis, divorce in childhood can cause adult depression because it disrupts important aspects of life such as socioeconomic status and relationships that are both interpersonal and general (Aseltine, 1996). In a similar study, the association between divorce in childhood and adult depression was examined. This study found that individuals who experienced divorce in childhood were more likely to show depressive symptoms into adulthood due to the disruption of socioeconomic and interpersonal development. Those who experienced divorce reported having lower education levels, which can affect occupational status, income and finances. Those who have low levels of education and high levels of economic hardship both current and in the past are more likely to have depression. Divorced individuals were more likely to marry younger and have unstable relationships, which can lead to depression (Ross & Mirowsky, 1999). Another study assessed the relationship between divorce in childhood and adult well-being. The results suggested that individuals who came from divorced families had worse scores on education, social networks, depression and health habits compared to the individuals who did not come from a divorced family. Those individuals were more likely to smoke, not eat breakfast regularly and reported sleeping difficulties. There was an increased risk of mortality for individuals who had suffered divorce as children, especially deaths due to cardiovascular disease (Springer, 2017). Gilman et al. (2003) found that children whose parents divorced before the age of seven were more likely to experience depression into adulthood. The risk of depression into adulthood was highest in the individuals who reported high levels of parental conflict, which is another secondary stressor that may worsen depression. They also examined a link between depression and socioeconomic
status among individuals who experienced divorce in childhood. They found that children who came from families with a low socioeconomic status had a greater risk for depression into adulthood compared to those with a higher socioeconomic status. Bohman et al. (2017) found that children who came from divorced families and reported having depression before the age of 16 were more likely to show depressive symptoms into adulthood. It was also found that the more conflict between the parents, the higher the rates of depression among the previously depressed group. Another study examined the link between highly reactive individuals, childhood maltreatment, divorce and symptoms of depression. Highly reactive individuals showed a significant increase in heart rate when presented with a stressful stimulus. The researchers believed that reactivity could be a biological stress response that could account for individual differences in how people react to adversity. They found that individuals who were highly reactive and experienced childhood maltreatment showed more depressive symptoms and less positive affect. Divorce did not have a significant affect on whether the individual was highly reactive or not (Somers, Ibrahim, & Luecken, 2017). Overall, the secondary stressors that may worsen depression after a divorce include severe maltreatment and financial difficulties.

**Gender Differences**

Females who experienced divorce in childhood are more likely to show signs of depression and minor psychiatric disturbances into adulthood. Females also reported having a lower network of friends and important family members, which can be factors that lead to depression. Both males and females who came from divorced families reported lower rates of university degrees, higher rates of unemployment and they are more likely to heavily drink and smoke. They also scored higher on the negative life events questionnaire compared to those who did not come from a divorced family. The findings revealed that individuals who experienced
divorce before the age of 16 differed in well-being compared to individuals who did not experience a divorce. Particularly, the well-being of females was worse than males (Huurre, Junkkari, & Aro, 2006). Both males and females who have experienced a divorce show negative development in anxiety, depression, well-being, self-esteem and school problems compared to those who did not experience a divorce. There was an increase in the negative effects of divorce over time for both sexes. Boys of divorce showed more school related issues in a four-year period compared to those without divorce. Girls who experienced divorce showed more symptoms of anxiety, depression, well-being and school problems over time (Storks et al. 2005). When comparing divorce on relationships and depression it is seen again that girls show more signs of depression. They also had a harder time concentrating and were more indecisive. Boys only showed signs more agitation (Hadzikapetanovic, Babic, & Bjelosevic, 2016). The timing of divorce can have an effect on depression and well-being. Males who experienced divorce between the ages of seven and 12 had higher rates of depression compared to other ages. Girls who experienced divorce around the age of 16 had fewer symptoms and better self-esteem than if they were younger, but overall, girls showed higher rates of depression if they experienced divorce no matter what the timing (Palossaari et al., 1994). Overall, divorce can effect males and females differently, but research has found that both experience negative consequences.

   In conclusion, those who experienced a divorce in childhood were more likely to show signs of depression into adulthood compared to those who did not experienced a divorce. Specifically, poor socioeconomic status, parental conflict and maltreatment can worsen the effects of divorce and increase the risk of adult depression. Both genders show negative effects associated with divorce, but females who have experienced divorce are more likely to show signs
of anxiety and depression while males show more behavioral issues. Low socioeconomic status may cause more fighting between parents, which can have negative effects on their children. It is possible that the children take their parents fighting personally and believe that they are a financial burden. Parental maltreatment may also make children feel unwanted, or make them live in constant fear of upsetting the parents. Adolescence is a crucial time period to develop healthy behaviors such as recognizing when something is, or isn’t your fault. If a child grows up feeling like they are a burden, or unworthy then they may never develop a normal way of understanding. This backwards mindset may be a contributing factor to the long-term negative effects of divorce on depression.

**Stress and Divorce**

Divorce is ranked one of the most stressful experiences that can occur in a person’s life. Stress is an emotional experience that can lead to biochemical, physiological, or behavioral changes. It can be described as feeling overwhelmed, or worried and affects all ages (American Psychological Association, 2017). As mentioned earlier, divorce can set off a series of life stressors that can sometimes be more stressful than the divorce itself. Previous research has found that divorced individuals report higher stress levels compared to non-divorced individuals (Booth & Amato, 1991). This section examines how individual’s perception of the divorce and its timing can effect stress. The stress that comes from changes in family structure is also discussed in this section because divorce inevitably disrupts the structure.

There is a strong relationship between stress and divorce. Divorce can cause family members a lot of unwanted stress, which can negatively effect their well-being. The crisis model of stress states that stress is low before a divorce, increases as the divorce occurs and then decreases afterwards. This model was compared to a study examining the relationship between
stress and divorce. The results suggested that there was a rise in stress around the time of divorce and then a return to normal levels afterwards. There was no evidence suggesting that a high level of stress before the divorce predicated a high level of stress indefinitely. Pre-divorce factors such as the amount of stressors, perception of the situation and resources available to help deal with the divorce had an effect on stress levels two years after the divorce. Income and education level effected the amount of stress after the divorce. Lastly, it was suggested that individuals who did not have many marital troubles and disagreed with the morals behind divorce had higher stress levels two years following the divorce. These individuals may not believe in divorce due to religion, or they may feel that they did not have a significant enough reason to get divorced (Booth & Amato, 1991). Children whose parents were going through a recent divorce were examined to better understand the individual differences in how children react to divorce. The mothers of the children were involved in the study as well to see if their mood had an effect on the child’s well-being and behavior. The study assessed the prevalence of illness in the children who were going through divorce to see if the stress physically manifested itself. Illness was measured by a child health questionnaire, which consists of a checklist of diseases and illnesses that a child could have obtained in the past three months. The most common illness among this group of children included headaches, stomachaches, colds and allergies. The results suggested that mothers who were angrier, hostile, confused and anxious had sons that were more likely to have behavior problems. Boys with illness showed more interaction with their mothers than boys who did not have illness. Girls who reported more guilt, lower cognitive competence and anger were more likely to have behavior problems. The girls with behavior problems also had mothers who were hostile, angry, confused and anxious. Girls who had more illness showed less interaction with their mothers compared to healthy girls (Copeland, 1985). A related study
examined the father-child relationship and the distress about divorce on children’s long-term health. The study was based off of the past findings and a life span model. This model proposed that parental conflict, distress and the time that children spent with their father has a negative effect on physical health. The study was in line with this model and found that the better the more time the child spent with their father, the better their relationship. The more parental conflict that occurred, the more distress the child felt and the worse their relationship with their father was. The combination of distress along with a poor father-child relationship predicted worse health in children (Fabricius & Luecken, 2007). Another study examined how divorce affected adolescents and if the most stress occurred between pre-divorce, the transition, or post divorce. The study suggested that 83 percent of the divorce group felt stressed during at least one phase of the divorce. Fifty percent of the participants felt that the pre-divorce was the most stressful, 25 percent claimed that the post-divorce was the most stressful and 8 percent said that the transition period caused the most stress. According to this study, the most stressful time during a divorce is before it occurs. Common stressors among the participants were found which could help explain why the pre-divorce stage was the most stressful. Participants reported being afraid of physical violence between their parents and with their parents, reported feeling worried to bring friends home because of their family dysfunction. They also found that the financial control and hardship was incredibly stressful, and they were envious of families who seemed cohesive. Another main stressor that was found among the participants was the temporary separations that occurred before the finalized event. In many cases, the final separation itself was a relief due to the amount of stress that came from their parents being together (Leupnitz, 1979). A study examined the link between divorce and stress in adults who had recently filed for a divorce. The ABCX model of family stress was used as a basis of the study. In this model, the
“A” involves family adjustment, “B” involves resources available, “C” involves the stressors associated with divorce and lastly X involves family functioning. This model helps to understand the differences in family’s reaction to stressful events and whether that event would lead to a crisis or disorganization. This model was also used to examine the variables associated with post-crisis adjustment. The results suggested that the perception of the severity of the divorce had an affect on post-divorce adjustment. Individuals who perceived the divorce to be more stressful had a harder time adjusting. Men in particular had a harder time adjusting due to the changes in social network size, income and other stressors that came along with the divorce (Plummer & Koch-Hattem, 1986). Another study examined how divorce and maternal warmth affected cortisol levels in children and young adults. Their cortisol levels were measured before a stressful task and after a stressful task. They answered questions based off of how they felt at the time and maternal warmth. The results found that if the children reported a high level of maternal warmth, then their cortisol levels were more likely to be lower. The mother-reported maternal warmth did not have an affect on adolescent cortisol levels (Luecken et al., 2017). The formation of stepfamilies after divorce may be a source of a lot of stress on the family. A study examined the affect that stepfamilies can have on young adults. The participants had to have experienced the formation of a stepfamily before turning eight. The results found that the stress of divorce was related to higher rates of depression among emerging adults. This finding shows a long-term negative effect in that the stressful transitions in childhood affect individuals into adulthood. It was also found that the more stressful the individual perceived the stepfamily, the greater the depressive symptoms. The transition between married parents, to divorce, to stepfamily is associated with negative educational outcomes, physical health and overall wellbeing. The formation of stepfamilies can add even more stress to children because they may have to play a
new role in the family that includes trying to figure out how to treat the new family member. Some stepfamilies may relocate to a new location, which can add stress due to a new environment with a new family. The formation of a new family may cause more biological co-parenting conflicts as well. Participants who perceived that their parents divorce and the formation of the stepfamily was stressful showed higher levels of depressive symptoms. Lower levels of depression were reported if the participant did not find the stepfamily to be stressful. This suggests that the perceived stress is an important factor that could possibly effect levels of depression (Shafer, Jensen, & Holmes, 2017). Overall, the divide between a couple is stressful, but the secondary stressors that accompany that are sometimes more harmful than the divorce itself.

Coping

The transitional events model states that one stressful event can set off many smaller stressors that make it challenging for individuals to adapt to the change (Weyer & Sandler, 1998). Everyone is affected by divorce differently. In order to better understand why some people are more vulnerable to life stressors, it is important to examine coping mechanisms. A study examined stress and coping mechanisms and their effect on mental health in children who have recently experienced a divorce. The coping mechanisms included active, avoidance, distractions and support. The study found that the higher the stress levels were throughout the divorce, the more coping was necessary. The stress associated with the divorce also lead to higher rates of depression and anxiety. The coping mechanism that correlated highest with depression and anxiety was avoidant coping (Sandler, Tein, & West, 1994). Avoidant coping includes avoiding, denying, or minimizing stressful demands (Holahan, et al., 2011). Another study examined the coping styles in a group of divorced custodial mothers. The model that was
proposed was that the stress of divorce would lead to psychological stress, which in turn diminishes parenting. In order to participate in the study, the children of the mothers had to be between the ages of eight and 12. The results suggested that both small stressors and major stressors had an impact on the participant’s level of psychological distress. The data showed that the daily small stressors had a bigger impact on psychological distress compared to the major stressors. It was also found that mothers had diminished parenting behaviors when they were under stress and when they were in a negative emotional state. When it came to coping strategies, the mothers who used avoidance coping had greater distress than mothers who had different coping mechanisms (Tein, Sandler, & Zautra, 2000). Another study examined how stressors associated are related to coping and children’s ruminations. This study focused on event-related ruminations, which are intrusive or distressing thoughts about a stressful event that occurred. A stress and coping model was used as a basis to explain the factors that can lead to frequent ruminations. In this model, there are four classes that predict the severity of ruminations. They include stressful events, appraisal, coping efforts and coping efficacy. The results of the study found that children were experiencing frequent ruminations even one year after the divorce occurred. Forty percent of the children reported having them at least once a day. This shows that stress does not go away after a divorce, but continuous coping is necessary to deal with the abundance of stressors that occur following a divorce (Weyer & Sandler, 1998). Life stressors can affect people differently and manifest itself in different ways. For some, stress can result in diminished parenting and in others, it can be frequent and unwanted ruminations. Different coping mechanisms can affect how people deal with the stressful situations that occur from a divorce. Those who use the avoidant style of coping tend to struggle more than those who use a different style of coping.
Overall, divorce can cause families a large amount of stress, which can negatively affect their well-being. The parent-child relationship after the divorce was found to have a negative impact on children’s physical health. Each stage of divorce has its own obstacles that require adjustment, but the pre-divorce stage was reported to be the most stressful. Perception also played an important role in divorced individuals well-being. The more that an individual perceived their divorce or family reconstruction to be stressful, the harder it was for that individual to adjust. Continual coping was found to be important to well-being in divorced individuals because the stressful events can continue long after the divorce is finalized. Avoidant coping had a relationship with depression, which suggests individuals who use this style of coping will not adjust as well as others. Lastly, stress can manifest itself in individuals causing them to act differently than they normally would. This can negatively affect other family members especially if it is a stressed out parent with a young child.

**Divorce Interventions**

Since divorce is very prevalent in society, a lot of research has gone into different divorce intervention programs. Research has found that divorce interventions can help reduce the negative affects associated with divorce. Every divorce is different and people deal with divorce in their own way. There are many different intervention programs targeted at specific age groups and situations to help make the divorce have less of a negative effect on the individual’s well-being. This section examines different divorce interventions and their impact on people who have suffered from a divorce.

One divorce intervention program is named KIDS. This program aims to decrease emotional problems associated with divorce and improve parent-child communication. Children between the ages of seven and 13 who had experienced a divorce within five years were included
in the study as well as their parents. The program includes eight 1-hour meetings with a focus on social support, problem solving skills and feelings. The results suggested that the KIDS program was effective in decreasing emotional problems and improving parent-child communication. They found that children with noticeable emotional issues from the divorce showed the most improvement (Gunnink et al., 2015). An attachment based intervention program was set in place for separated and divorced parents. The aim of the study was to see if the divorce intervention would help with adjustment and change participants mindsets about themselves, their relationships and their ex-partner. The intervention also examined if the participant’s mood was higher and if they felt less lonely at the end of the process. The participants met once a week for two hours over a course of eight weeks. The study found that participants who were in the intervention group felt better, reported feeling less lonely and more secure (Yarnoz, Plazaola, & Etxeberria, 2008). Divorce can be very disruptive for all parties involved, but especially children.

Kid’s Turn is an intervention program aimed to help children who have experienced divorce deal with the disruptions in their lives. Some goals of the program aimed to improve parent-child communication, problem solving and coping mechanisms. The program also wanted to help the child understand the divorce, provide a safe place for them to express their feelings, develop relationships and to gain a healthier perspective on their situation. A study was conducted to examine the effects of Kid’s Turn. The study lasted six weeks and included children between the ages of seven and nine years old. The children listened to stories related to divorce and answered questions based off of the stories in order to improve their coping and problem solving skills. The results showed that the Kid’s Turn affected the attitudes, beliefs and the behavior of the children (Gilman, Schneider, & Shulak, 2005). Children who suffer from
impacts their children significantly.

Child-Parent relationship therapy (CPRT) is designed for the parents of children between the ages of three and 10 who are experiencing emotional or behavioral issues. Each session lasts for two hours and is carried on for 10 weeks. The parent is the main participant in CPRT because the aim is for them to learn ways to respond to their child in order to improve parent-child relationships. The study found that CPRT reduced parental stress and improved child behavior issues. Parents reported feeling more connected to their child, which suggests that CPRT is a good tool for divorce intervention (Taylor et al., 2011).

Often times, divorce can lead to legal battles that create tense conflict between couples. A study called the Collaborative Divorce Project (CDP) includes psycho-educational parenting classes, clinical interventions and legal aid to divorced couples. The goal is to decrease conflict between parents, increase parental involvement with children and to reduce legal costs associated with divorce to promote child adjustment. The intervention lasted 18 months and included counseling, divorce orientation, psycho-educational classes, a feedback session, therapeutic resolution sessions, a settlement conference, and a follow up. The results suggested that the intervention group showed lower conflict, greater father involvement and the child was better off compared to the control group. The intervention group also showed more cooperation and had less legal battles (Pruett, Insabella, & Gustafson, 2005).

As mentioned in the depression and stress sections, the mechanism in which one copes can make the divorce more challenging, or more bearable. The children of divorce intervention program (CODPI) is designed for children between the ages of nine and 12, but includes parents to gain further information. The main goals of CODPI is to create group support, help the
children to accept and express divorce related feelings and promote understanding of divorce related concepts and misconceptions. Lastly, this program aims to teach communication and problem-solving skills to enhance the children’s perceptions of themselves and their families. The results found that CODPI was successful in helping young children of divorce with adjustment. The teachers, parents and group leaders saw positive effects when it came to the children tolerating frustration, getting along with classmates and asking for help. They also noticed that the children showed less anxiety and were not as withdrawn and disruptive than the children in the non-divorce program. (Pedro-Carroll & Alpert-Gillis, 1997).

Music has been used as a therapeutic tool in the past because it helps people to identify their feelings and practice new behaviors and coping skills. Music elicits emotion and is a universal way of communicating with others. DeLucia-Waack and Gellman (2007) examined children of divorce and the impact that music has on their anxiety, depression and irrational beliefs about their parents divorce compared to a traditional approach to therapy. The children were split into a traditional intervention group and into an intervention group that included music. The intervention lasted three months. The results suggested that both interventions decreased anxiety and irrational beliefs about divorce. Depression did not decrease in either condition, but there was a relationship between depression and irrational beliefs in that the more irrational beliefs, the greater symptoms of depression. Overall, divorce interventions are important due to the negative impact that divorce can have on individuals. Before implementing a divorce intervention, it is important to recognize which age group you are working with. Different interventions are tailored to both children and adolescents, or to the divorced couple themselves to help overall well-being. Improving parent-child relationships is a common theme throughout interventions because it can help family functioning which can reduce stress.
Forgiveness

Past research has found that forgiveness can help heal those who have been hurt and it can decrease anger, anxiety, depression and guilt. A forgiveness intervention was implemented for junior high school students to help them forgive their parents for their divorce. There was an intervention group and a control group who were measured before and after the intervention. The intervention group met in a group once a week for an hour over a course of eight weeks. Researchers believed that a benefit of this intervention program was that adolescents are able to safely share their experiences of divorce. This way the participants were not alone with their feelings and their peers could validate their emotions and cognitive reactions. The post-test results indicated that the intervention group showed an increase in forgiveness. Verbal reports from the intervention group suggested that their increase in forgiveness had a positive influence on their psychological well-being. The results also found that the intervention group had more hope, and less trait anxiety compared to the control group. The hope was related to positive feelings about the future and their future relationships with their parents. Less trait anxiety suggested that the intervention group learned helpful coping mechanisms, which could help them manage their stress leading to less anxiety (Freedman & Knupp, 2003). Another study used a process model of forgiveness that claims that forgiveness is not just a behavior, but it is a process that involves many internal and external factors. Forgiveness of self and of others was evaluated to see if forgiveness has an effect on divorce adjustment. Past research has found that the first two years of divorce are the most difficult and that people do not tend to find a state of equilibrium until after two years. Participants consisted of individuals who had been divorced up to 30 months. The results found that individuals who showed forgiveness towards their former partner had improved self worth and better adjustment. This finding was especially strong with
those who were able to forgive themselves for the past. The individuals who were separated longer than 18 months who did not forgive had higher reports of anger. The findings also suggested that the higher levels of depression, the lower levels of self forgiveness and forgiveness of others. Overall, this study emphasized how it is crucial for self forgiveness and the forgiveness of others to occur before the divorce has reached 18 months (Rhode-Brown & Rudestam, 2011). Forgiveness can have many internal and external benefits. Often times, there is a lot of blame and resentment that is associated with divorce that can lead to broken relationships. Forgiveness can play a huge role in mending relationships as well as creating peace within hurt individuals. The forgiveness intervention model focuses on forgiveness between divorced couples to improve the quality of co-parenting. In this model, forgiveness is when former partners are civil between one another, there is low conflict and high support for one another as parents. There are three stages in this model in which the individuals pass through and build upon the stages. Each stage has a cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspect. First is the crisis stage in which the most important aspect is damage control and self-care. The second is a transition stage where the focus is on cognitive restructuring and making meaning of what has occurred. Lastly, the readjustment stage emphasizes letting go and forgiving one another in order to improve co-parenting. The cognitive dimension of forgiveness had the biggest impact on co-parenting quality. If the negative cognitions were improved, then the behavioral aspects improved as well, which improved the co-parenting relationship (Bonach, 2009).

Overall, it is important to help individuals who have experienced divorce due to the negative impact that divorce can have. The interventions should take place sooner than later so issues do not pile up and get worse over time. School-based interventions make it easy for the individual to participate without it interfering with their daily lives. Parent-child interventions are
found to be crucial because of the role that parents play in successful child development. Adjustment based interventions are important because of the drastic changes that come after a divorce. Adjustment is also important because it helps give individuals the tools they need to deal with the continuous stressors that come with divorce. Another intervention that has found to be successful is the forgiveness model. In order to move on, the forgiveness of oneself and others can help reduce guilt and negative feelings.

**Discussion**

Past research has found that individuals who have suffered from a divorce have higher rates of depression. The depression can be worsened by factors that stem from the divorce such as socioeconomic status, parental conflict and maltreatment. Those suffered from divorce and reported depression in childhood were more likely to show symptoms of depression into adulthood. Negative affects of divorce were found in both males in females. Females showed more symptoms of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem compared to males. Males showed more behavioral issues from divorce and were more negatively impacted if they did not have a father figure.

There is no denying that stress is associated with divorce. There are many stressors of divorce that can affect an individual’s well-being. The more stressful that the divorce was perceived, the harder it is to adjust. The stressors do not disappear after the divorce is over, but they are prevalent before, during and after a divorce. The period of divorce that was found to be the most stressful was the period before the divorce occurred. Coping and stress are linked together because stress requires different coping mechanisms in order to deal with the issue. The coping style that showed the greatest amount of depression and anxiety was avoidant coping.
Successful coping mechanisms are important to learn in order to adjust to the stressors associated with divorce.

Since divorce can have such a negative affects such as increased stress and depression, it is important to have interventions to improve well-being. There are many different interventions that can help individuals who are suffering from divorce. Factors that come into play when deciding on an intervention include age, time of divorce and the main areas that need to be worked on. Problems can build up over time and cause even more issues, which is why divorce interventions are an important step to improve well-being, especially in the beginning of the divorce process. Many people have difficulty with adjusting to their new lifestyle, have resentment towards their parents and find it difficult to forgive those who have wronged them. The interventions are specifically designed to help with those issues. Another difficulty associated with divorce is trying to understand ones feelings, which was the aim of the music therapy intervention. Although there was no significant difference between the music group and the regular therapy group, improved with an intervention, which shows that help does improve well-being.

As mentioned earlier, parental conflict and low socioeconomic status can increase symptoms of depression. Both of those factors can be seen as major stressors associated with divorce. Conflict between parents can create a toxic environment that can make family members feel guilty and isolated. Parents may isolate themselves by not coming home to avoid conflict, which can lead to depression. Children may isolate themselves as well because they do not want to see their parents argue. Children may also take unnecessary responsibility for their parent’s arguments and feel like they are the root of the problem. This false belief can lead them feeling guilty, which may manifest itself into depression. Low socioeconomic status is another stressful
factor that is associated with divorce. Divorce can be incredibly expensive due to having to pay for two mortgages, child support, alimony and legal fees. The stress that the parent is under can have a negative affect on parenting. If the parent has to pick up a second job, they may not have as much time to take care of the child, which can lead to depression. The legal aspect could greatly affect the child as well. In some divorce situations, parents get joint custody of the child. If the child does not want to spend the night at that one parent's house but does not have the heart to say so, it can negatively affect their well-being. On the other hand, if only one parent gets custody of the child, it can make that child feel guilty for not spending as much time with the other parent. Both the Collaborative Divorce Project (CDP) and Child-Parent relationship therapy (CPRT) could be good interventions to use in case scenario’s with high parental conflict and low socioeconomic status. Through this, parent-child communication can be improved which can allow the child to express their beliefs so that the parent knows how the child is feeling. CDP could be helpful with the legal issues associated with divorce and minimizing the financial impact that it has. CDP could also be helpful when deciding custody.

There may be biological mechanisms behind the increase in stress and depression that is associated with divorce. As mentioned earlier, the stress hormone cortisol can be associated with well-being. Children that reported their mother as being warm and affectionate had lower cortisol levels which means that they were less likely to be stressed (Luecken et al., 2017). It was found that individuals who are highly reactive show more signs of depression and less positive affect (Somers, Ibrahim, & Luecken, 2017). The affect of cortisol and reactivity suggest that there is a biological sensitivity that may make some people more vulnerable to life stressors such as divorce compared to others. Another biological mechanism that could have an effect vulnerability to stress and depression are ruminations. If someone is presented with a stressful
situation and they are biologically made up to have more obtrusive and negative thoughts, then they may be at risk to develop depression. It is important to study biological mechanisms in order to understand individual differences in how individuals react to divorce. Childhood and adolescence is a crucial time for development and if a stressful life event such as divorce occurs, it can have life-long consequences.

There are notable gender differences in how individuals of different sex cope with divorce. Females who had suffered from divorce in childhood show more signs of depression, anxiety, guilt and low-self esteem. Males show more behavioral issues, especially if they do not have a father figure. This can be explained because females may tend internalize problems and males may tend to externalize their problems. There may be a genetic component behind how males and females adjust to stressful situations as well. During adolescence, both males and females go through dramatic body changes. This time can be anxiety provoking and bring upon new emotions even without a stressful event like divorce. Males may show more behavioral problems because of the increase in testosterone during this developmental period. It is more socially appropriate for males to roughhouse, or take their aggression out in a physical form than it is for females. Females can become highly emotional during adolescence, which could be why they show more internal problems. During this time, it is important to have a female role model to help understand these changes. If the mother is distracted by the divorce, it can make this time more stressful and confusing for the female, which could lead to depression.

The ability to cope with stress that is associated with divorce is crucial. Divorce creates many secondary stressors that can lead to depression if it is not properly dealt with. The coping mechanism that was associated with depression and anxiety was avoidant coping. Avoidant coping can cause the individual to become isolated from others, which could lead to depression.
They may hold back their feelings and let them boil which could lead to long-term negative psychosocial effects. The stressors do not stop once the divorce is finalized, but instead they continue throughout the years, which is why it is crucial to learn how to properly cope. As previously mentioned, mothers who use avoidant coping tend to be more distressed. Mothers who are under a lot of stress tend to show diminished parenting which can negatively affect their child (Tein, Sandler, Zautra, 2000). Diminished parenting could be a symptom of depression as well. The more stress that the parent is under, the harder it could be to cope which could lead to symptoms of depression. In this case, an adjustment-based intervention may be needed to help with coping and problem solving.

Overall, it is important to understand the negative effects of divorce due to its prevalence in society. Continued research is needed in this field to better understand the long-term behavioral, emotional and psychological affects of divorce. The more research that is put into this topic, the better we will be able to help combat those issues and improve well-being.
References


