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ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND DIVORCE

by
Christine M. Neilio

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division of Rowan
College of New Jersey
July 24, 1995

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved July 26, 1995

ABSTRACT

Christine M. Neilio
Academic Achievement and Divorce
1995
Dr. Stanley Urban, Thesis Advisor
Learning Disabilities

Divorce is a major crisis in the life of a child and can lead to a decline in academic achievement. Numerous studies indicate that children of divorce show lower academic achievement than those from intact families. Studies have shown that children from one parent families score lower on achievement tests but the reasons for the test scores vary based on the individual situation.

Educational systems can play an important role in helping children of divorce deal with their problems. Teachers and counselors are very important to the success or failure of children in coping with problems associated with divorce. Since divorce places the child's learning at risk, schools must become more aware of the potential needs of this population.

The purpose of this study was to gather descriptive information that compares the academic achievement of 60 randomly selected seventh grade, middle-school students from single-parent families versus two-parent families. The independent variable was the family structure. The dependent variables were the mean achievement test scores on the MAT6 and the second marking period letter grades taken from the students report cards. Sixty students were selected randomly.

Intraocular inspection of the mean achievement test scores and grades in Reading, Math, and English were not meaningfully different in Table I and Table II.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the grades of the intact group in English and Math, slightly exceeded the mean grade of students from the two-parent family. The students mean composite scores in Reading and English slightly exceeded the mean composite scores of students from two-parent families. However, the Math mean composite score of the students in the two-parent families slightly exceeded the mean composite score of students in single-parent families. The apparent contradictory results most likely reflect errors of measurement.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Christine M. Neilio
Academic Achievement and Divorce
1995
Dr. Stanley Urban, Thesis Advisor
Learning Disabilities

The primary purpose of this study was to gather descriptive information that compares the academic achievement of seventh grade, middle-school students from single-parent families versus two-parent families.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Background

More than ever before children are experiencing the negative effects of parental divorce and separation. The stresses associated with divorce and separation effect all aspects of their lives including their performance in classrooms. A literature review completed by Mary E. Strom (1983), revealed the following: since 1980, one million children have been affected by the divorce of their parents (Brown : 537); and according to the National Association of School Principal's Staff Report, the divorce rate increased by 80% between 1970 and 1980. The U.S. Census Bureau currently reported that half of all the children currently born in the United States will eventually live in single-parent homes. Twelve million children live in single-parent homes, and the trend towards a higher divorce rate is unsettling.

The changes in the structure of the family have led to considerable modifications in the definition of the term, "family". In the past, most families consisted of two natural parents and children. An evolving definition of the term "family" is a unit that consists of a single-parent (mother or father as custodian) and his or her children.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the primary cause of single-parent families is separation and divorce. These changes in the

structure of the family require that teachers become more aware of the unique needs of children from single-parent families in their classrooms. Creative ways must be found to enhance chances of success for these "at risk" children through specialized curriculums and personalized educational experiences. Educators must also devise plans to assist in meeting the needs of the single-parent. If the parent learns to cope with his or her stress, the child will also develop the means to cope with the stresses of living in a single-parent family.

Through acknowledgment of the source of children's difficulties and the use of specialized programs and services, the knowledge that has been acquired relating to children of divorce or separation can reduce their risk for failure. Hopefully, these children can be provided assistance so they will achieve at a level equal to the achievement of children from two-parent families.

Need for the Study

The incidence of children being reared in single-parent families, even in middle class environments and their achievement compared to children being reared in intact families must be documented. If the scope of this problem, is as widespread as the literature assumes it to be then current strategies and knowledge which ameliorate the impact of this family ecology must be applied.

Theory

There is an extensive body of empirically derived method for enhancing academic achievement, behavior and personal development. Implementation of programs, and strategies for intervention in our schools can be divided into three areas of responsibility (Strom 1983): the school's role, the classroom teacher's role, and the guidance counselor's role.

The School's Role

The role of the school plays a vital part in the success of the child who is experiencing divorce (Strom 1983). Kathryn Black (1979) suggests that the most important thing educators can do to help children of divorce, is to help their parents function well, by being sympathetic to the parents' needs and suggesting books, organizations, and other supports that could help the parents adjust to their situation and manage their homes and children in a more organized manner. Damon Parker (1979) suggested that parents and faculties work together through discussion groups, self-help networks, and "awareness workshops" to focus attention on issues concerning divorce. Suggestions were made by Ellen Drake (1981) for the school administrator to deal with these problems and helping staff members become aware of the special needs of these young people, working with the school district to formulate policies for special family situations that find parents in conflict, and compiling information on the number of

children from the district who come from divorced and separated families. Drake also suggested that a divorce specific assessment be used to give the school a brief history of the child and his/her attitude and responses to the divorce. Direct and indirect intervention strategies can then be used to help the child. Direct intervention strategies discussed included work with psychologists or other social workers to counsel students and parents. Indirect strategies included consultation activities to help school personnel increase their knowledge and become more sensitive to the problems of these children, and provide ideas for teachers to use in the classroom.

The Classroom Teacher's Role

In helping children of divorce to adjust within the classroom, the role of the teacher is important to help the student achieve his maximum potential during this "stress" period (Strom 1983). Currently there are several programs being implemented within classrooms. Robert D. Allers, (1980) suggested that teachers include planning class discussions of divorce which take into account the class age and maturity level; identifying problems; holding parent conferences; talking to the child; keeping literature dealing with divorce available; using special help; and encouraging special programs. David Annis, and Robert Allers, (1979) suggested that teachers can learn to better help the child experiencing problems by attending inservice training conducted by skilled therapists in the community to develop basic therapy and empathy skills. They also suggested that colleges and

universities should increase course offerings in child development and psychology for students going into teaching and school administration. " The most important thing a teacher can do is to listen and encourage the student to rely on his or her own strengths and to realize that such a painful ordeal will come to an end, and he/she will survive." (Flosi, James, 1980). A study conducted by Elinor, Levine, (1982) indicated that most teachers had lower psycho-social and academic expectations for children from single-parent families. Parents, overall perceived that teachers would have lower expectations of children from one-parent families. According to Levine, this attitude can be detrimental to the child, since this study implied that teachers' negative expectations of pupil performance can cause that negative performance. Parker (1980) stated, that teachers should be sensitive to the needs of their students, and realize that though they may come from one-parent families, they are families nonetheless. Skeen, Patsy, and McKenry, Patrick (1980) gave suggestions for the teacher which included being a careful observer, provide opportunities for working through feelings, remain consistent in expectations, love the child, and work with the parents.

Guidance Counselor's Role

The third area to be taken into consideration to support students of divorce has implications for counselors (Strom,1983). Marjorie Bowker (1982) created a workshop for a group of student's experiencing poor academic achievement and changes in behavior. Filmstrips were used to help students examine and express their feelings

about being a child from a divorced family. Production of the filmstrip caused the children's self-esteem to rise greatly, and gave the children a sense that they could do something about their parents' divorce. It also opened up lines of communication between parents and children. Ellen Drake (1981) and Sylvie Shellenberger asserted that school psychologists play an important role in facilitating the adjustment of children to their parent's divorce by defining problems and making recommendations to teachers and parents. Training programs for teachers and other school personnel to promote understanding of the children's needs because of divorce and provide factual information regarding the effects of divorce on children, were indirect approaches discussed. Preventive approaches for the psychologist to implement included a program to help children from both one and two parent families learn to deal with any possible family changes which may cause stress. Janice Hammond (1979) completed a study and recommendations were made for counselors to talk to students about their feelings, since they talked to counselors most often. Hammond also found that children felt counselors could talk to their parents, initiate and lead communication and parenting skill workshops that would make the parents more aware of the child's need for attention and caring during the difficult period of divorce.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gather descriptive information that compares the academic achievement of seventh grade, middle-school students from single-parent families versus two-parent families.

Research Questions

The specific questions to be answered by this curriculum are:

Research Question #1: Will children from single-parent families achieve at a level equal to children from two-parent families?

Research Question #2: Are the Math gradepoint averages of 7th grade students from two-parent families the same as the Math gradepoint averages of children in single-parent families?

Research Question #3: Are the Reading gradepoint averages of 7th grade students from two-parent families the same as the Reading gradepoint averages of children in single-parent families?

Research Question #4: Are the English gradepoint averages of 7th grade students from two-parent families the same as the English gradepoint averages of children in single-parent families?

Research Question #5: Are the MAT6 Reading Composite scores of 7th grade students from two-parent families the same as the MAT6 Reading Composite scores of students from single-parent families?

Research Question #6: Are the MAT6 Math Composite scores of 7th grade students from two-parent families the same as the MAT6 Math Composite scores of 7th grade students from single-parent families?

Research Question #7: Are the MAT6 English Composite scores of 7th grade students from two-parent families the same as the

MAT6 English Composite scores of 7th grade students from single-parent families?

Limitations

There are several limitations which must be taken into consideration when generalizing the results of this study. The sample for the study was drawn from a single school. This is not a longitudinal study and thus the long term affects on the children's achievement could not be assessed. Information is not available as to the grade and age of the student at the time of the parent's separation. Also, the population from which the sample was drawn is predominantly white and of middle socioeconomic status. Only 7th grade students were used in the studies and parents and students were not directly contacted for input into the research for this study.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of the study the following terms are defined:

1. **Single-Parent Family** - family resulting from a divorce or separations with one parent residing with a child or children.
2. **Two-Parent or Intact Family** - traditional family with two parents residing with a child or children.
3. **Academic Achievement** - measured by grades received on report cards and the Metropolitan Achievement Test composite scores.

Subjects of the Study

All of the participants will be adolescent girls and boys in grade 7. The students are from a selected suburban middle school in New Jersey that has a predominantly white student body. There is a total of 350 7th graders in the 7th grade. The school has an enrollment of 1,555 students. The identification of students from single-parent families and two-parent families will be gathered through student information files and the guidance of the 7th grade student counselor. The files are located in the guidance office of the middle school where the study will be conducted. Sixty students' files will be selected randomly to study from a total of 350, 7th graders. The information gathered will be recorded, reviewed and compared for the two groups of students.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The contents of this document presents an overview of literature related to divorce and academic achievement. Previous studies from a wide variety of sources, including research reports, journal articles, and general reviews related to the topic are included.

Unquestionably, contemporary children are experiencing stress related to divorcing families and unfortunately, more children than ever are living in single-parent households. It is our responsibility, as educators, to identify and implement programs to help children to learn methods for coping with the problems that they are bringing into classrooms, as a result of divorce. The areas that are mainly affected and discussed in relationship to children experiencing stress from divorce are academic achievement, socialization skills, and behavior.

A study of academic functioning was completed by Bryan, Neighbors, Rex Forehand, and Lisa Armistead (1992) which examined the pre and post divorce effects of adolescent boys and girls. There were 58 children involved in this study divided equally between boys and girls. Twenty nine of the children were from divorced families and the remainder were from families that had two parents. The results of this study indicated that boys from subsequently divorcing families demonstrated poorer academic functioning prior to parents' divorce

than boys from intact families and girls whose parents were divorced. Girls from subsequently divorcing families showed decline in academic functioning beginning prior to divorce and continuing beyond the time of divorce.

The review of literature completed by Neighbors, Forehand, and Armistead (1992) indicated that most of the work on victims of stress, which includes children of divorced parents, has examined functioning after the stress event has occurred. The literature they reviewed revealed that all of the studies completed on divorce research with children used the post event design, except one study completed by Block, Block, and Gejerde (1989), *a priori*, who studied boys whose parents were getting divorced. Block, Block, and Gejerde found that boys acted impulsively, were aggressive, and exhibited an excessive amount of energy prior to divorce. They also came to the conclusion that girls, whose parents were about to divorce were less dysfunctional than the boys studied. They believed that pre-marital conflict had an effect on the boys and was a variable that should be considered in the study.

An interesting analysis was completed using high school students by Herbert Zimiles and Valerie E. Lee (1991), who examined academic achievement, grades and the dropout rate. Students in remarried families, single-parent families, and intact families were studied. Differences in academic achievement and grades among the groups were slight, though statistically significant. The effects of family structure and student gender on achievement test performance at the sophomore year of high school are in Table I.

Mean achievement test scores for intact families exceed those for either step-or single-parent families by a small margin. The effect of family structure is statistically significant both before and after statistical adjustment. Gender differences in test scores, which significantly favor males, are small, except for the stepfamily group, where males show a superior edge.

Larger differences in the drop-out behavior among the groups was found and are shown in Table 2. Students from intact families were least likely to drop out. Students from single-parent and remarried families showed approximately equal frequencies of drop-out behavior by different gender differences. Drop-out behavior was found to interact with the gender of the student in combination with the gender of the custodial parent, so that children living with like-gender custodial parents were less likely to drop out in single-parent families, but more likely to drop out in stepfamilies.

Edward R. Anderson, Marjorie S. Lindner, and Layne D. Bennion (1992), completed a study that gathered data concerning children's adjustment . The characteristics of family relationships that were associated with adaptive and with maladaptive child functioning in each type of family were studied. They concluded that a child's development (academic and social) was greatly affected by family relationships including, marital, brother-sister, and parent relationships.

TABLE 1

Mean Sophomore Achievement CAT Scores According to Gender of Student and Family Structure
(N=13,532)

Gender		Step-families	Intact Families	Single-parents
Male	Unadjusted M	52.33	53.60	51.56
	Adjusted M	52.26	53.42	52.96
Female	Unadjusted M	50.83	53.04	51.51
	Adjusted M	51.74	52.80	52.34

TABLE 2

Probability of Dropping Out of School Between Sophomore and Senior Year According to Student Gender and Family Structure
(N=13,532)

Gender		Step-families	Intact Families	Single-parents
Male	Unadjusted M	.16	.09	.22
	Adjusted M	.19	.09	.19
Female	Unadjusted M	.23	.06	.17
	Adjusted M	.21	.07	.17

In this study, they determined that the quality of the marital relationship was linked to the quality of the parent's relationship with their children. If the children were raised in an environment that was warm, parents were supportive, involved with their children, and monitored their children, then the children exhibited a high level of academic competence and were socially well-adjusted. If the children were living in an environment that was full of conflict and negativity, parents were not supportive, and did not monitor them, results indicated that these children exhibited lower levels of socialization and academic competence. Sibling relationships were associated with a child's adjustment. However, they felt further research into this area was needed with regards to brother-sister relationships during transition periods.

Transitions, such as those experienced in divorce, can change the level of stress that a child is feeling. An adolescent who is negative, aggressive, and disruptive can affect parenting in remarried families, single-parent families, and non-divorced families.

A study completed by Lynn M. Mulkey, Robert L. Crain, and Alexander J. C. Harrington (1992) analyzed the separate effects of father absence and mother absence on the grades and standardized test scores of high school students. Variables examined in their study included parents' and students' behavior and the family financial status. The finding from this study indicated that students from single-parent families were less willing or able to meet academic demands. Race, educational background, and the level of education of the parents were described in the study. In the review of literature completed by Mulky,

Crain, and Harrington (1992), test scores and grades were found to be considerably lower with students from single-parent households. Discussion was included, which argued that the effects of single-parent families can be explained by the educational disadvantage or low incomes of father absent families (Herzog and Sudia 1973). Consequently, if a single-parent (women) had a decent salary, it could be concluded that nothing could be wrong, that couldn't be cured with good economic resources. Crain and Weisman (1972); and Keith and Finlay (1978), felt that even children from affluent one-parent households felt stress. The single-parent's financial status did not make a difference. Standardized test scores of children are not greatly affected because a child lives in a single-parent family (Camara, Featherman, and Hetherington 1983). Milne et al. (1986) found that children from father absent households have lower test scores in vocabulary and reading. A study completed by Thompson, Alexander, and Entwisle (1988), revealed that the absence of a parent lowers the scores on verbal and quantitative achievement tests scores of black children in contrast to the same test results for white children. Ware and Lee (1988) reported there weren't any significant effects on the students' scores from one-parent families. Aimiles and Lee (1988) conducted a study with white-single parent families and families with a parent and step-parent living with them. They found that there was a small effect on grades and test scores. They believed that if a parent re-married, it didn't solve the problems associated with the disruptions in a marriage. According to Hetherington, Camara, and Featherman (1983), Fursenberg, Morgan, and Allison (1987), and Thompson, Alexander, and Entwisle (1988), the

breakup of a family has a moderate negative effect on students' grades.

Similar findings were reported by Keith and Finlay (1988) who concluded, that because a parent is absent, it places a strain on the ability of that parent to discipline their children. There is a breakdown in the communication lines and this variable had a negative effect on a child's ability to perform.

Another literature review completed by Robert A. DiSibio (1981) identified the effects of the single parent family on the elementary school child's academic, social, and emotional achievement. He concluded that a disruption in home life, such as divorce, was enough to cause problems for students academically. He also discussed the importance of the need for educational intervention .

In a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association in 1984, the problems of a divorced family were discussed and along with reorganization or restructuring of the family. The term normal "nuclear" family was discussed. Since there have been so many changes in the definition throughout the past ten years, the meaning has changed and taken on a new definition. Psychologists discussed the fact that there are many variables that effect the child during the divorce which include, legal changes, social changes, psychological changes, and economic changes. The research the psychologists reviewed gave a good indication that the development of a child is an important factor in the child's adjustment to divorce.

In a study completed by Adams and Nancy (1989) hypothesized that the academic achievement, behavior, and school attendance of

students from divorced families would be different than students in intact families. In this study they found that there wasn't any significant difference in achievement and attendance of children in divorced families when compared to intact families. They did find, however, that a difference was found in the area of behavior.

Another study completed by Adams, Nancy; and others (1989) questioned single-parenthood and whether or not it has an effect on school achievement. They studied and administered the CAT, California Achievement Test, and they reviewed grade point averages for single-parent family students and students who had intact families. Their results suggested that single parenthood may be a critical factor in school success or failure.

Patricia Dawson (1981) completed a literature review that studied the effects of the single-parent family on academic achievement. Her review resulted in several findings including: (1) children from single-parent households have lower levels of social and academic achievement than children from two-parent families; (2) reading comprehension of children from single-parent families was lower reading than children from two-parent families; (3) the educational achievement of black children in single-parent families was lower than the academic achievement of white children in single parent families; (4) boys were more affected by the divorce than the girls studied; (5) low-income is a factor in girls dropping out of school; (6) women who are the head of a household, are usually less skilled and educated compared to a man who may have custody of his children; (7) the role of the father has an effect on children's behavior and

the effects can be negative or positive. The majority of the research reviewed support the generalization, that children who live in single-parent families, as a result of divorce, experience more academic difficulties than children from two-parent families. There are exceptions to this generalization and specific reasons have not been unequivocally identified. The variables associated with single-parent families that have been found to

influence children's academic achievement are the following:

1. Marital Discord (before the separation or divorce)
2. The Gender of the Child
3. The Education Level of the Parent
4. Number of Siblings in the Family
5. Adequacy of Child Care Arrangements
6. Support given from Family, Peers, and Religious groups
7. Age of the Child (at the time of parental separation)
8. Teacher's Attitudes Toward Student's in Divorced Families
9. Quality of Parenting
10. Finances Available to the Custodial Parent
11. Parental Ability to Cope with the Stresses of Divorce and Separation
12. Structure of the Child's Environment at Home and at School
13. If the Custodial Parent is the Mother or the Father
14. Educational Opportunities Available to the Custodial Parent

Summary

After reviewing the literature and studies related to divorce and academic achievement, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Children and adolescents, who have experienced stress, as a result of a divorce or separation in the family, have a greater number of school-related problems than children who live in two-parent families.
2. Children, who are "at risk" for lower achievement levels, have been found to live in divorced families, when compared to children, who are living in intact families.
3. Within the classroom, teachers had higher expectations from children in intact families than children in single-parent families.
4. Different behaviors and needs are brought to school by children who have experienced divorce in their families. These needs must be addressed in the classroom today.
5. Support systems are related to the divorced single-parents capability to interact with his or her children. There is an effect on the child's academic and social adjustment within the classroom depending on the support systems made available or for the parent and the child.
6. Successful academic achievement in father-absent children can be accounted for by the amount of father-child contact, the mother's attributions for the success of the child, and the child's attributions for success.
7. Academic achievement is affected by the contact of the non-custodial parent after separation. The child's sense of personal

control is also affected.

8. Academic achievement is adversely affected in a single-parent family. In these families, children have more emotional problems and misbehave more often at school.

9. When the academic achievement of black and white children from single-parent families were compared, black children were found to be more academically deficient than white children.

10. At the time of separation, the age of the child's separation from his father or mother is a significant indicator as to whether or not the child will experience future behavioral problems and academic problems.

11. While there have been several conflicting results the majority of studies concluded that children who experienced divorce showed lower academic achievement.

Generally these conclusions indicate that teachers must be sensitive to the needs of these "at risk" children so that he or she may help a child cope with his stresses and problems brought into the classroom. The teacher must provide the student with materials and resources. Teachers should examine their own feelings on divorced families before they set out to help these children. Schools and counselors must become aware of many problems that confront children of divorce and be sensitive to their needs and the needs of their parents. They must develop and implement programs for teachers, parents, and children.

The question in one study was, "Is single-parentness harmful to a child's academic or behavioral development?" The answer according

to this study was, "It depends." This particular study concluded that circumstances surrounding the separation and divorce helped to answer the question. There were many variables that could affect the child experiencing a divorce within his family. Children experience stress from a divorce; therefore, their learning is "at risk". There must be more recognition in the curriculum and programs to meet the needs of these children in our classrooms. These variables and their relationship to the academic achievement of children in divorced families are in need of further research.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Method

The independent variable is the family structure, i.e., intact or single-parent family. Dependent variables for the study were composite achievement test scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test, sixth edition which is a standardized, norm referenced test and second marking period grades taken from student report cards.

Sample

The basis for sample selection in this study consisted of all the seventh grade students at Chestnut Ridge Middle School in Washington Township, New Jersey. The total school population is 1,155 students. The seventh grade population within the middle school was 360 students. Students were chosen randomly by selecting every 6th student file from a total of 360, 7th grade files. A total random sample of 60 students were used in the study. The students were then divided into two groups. There were 39 students in Group I, from intact families. Group II consisted of 21 seventh grade students from single parent families.

Students in Group I were assigned the numbers 1 through 39 for identification in the study. Students in Group II were assigned letters for identification in the study.

Procedures

Descriptive information for the sample including sex, grade, and family status were taken from permanent record folders, and the 7th grade guidance counselor's input. Washington Township demographic information was provided by the secretary in the Washington Township's Municipal building. A school administrator and guidance counselor provided permission to review student files.

The first method used to collect data involved recording Composite test scores in Reading, Math, and English taken from the randomly selected 7th grade student's cumulative record folders. The composite scores were taken from the Spring 1994 MAT6 (sixth edition) results for each of the 60 individual students. The student's scores were then recorded in a chart labeled either Group I, which represented scores from students from two-parent families, or the scores were recorded on the chart labeled Group II, which represented the scores for students from single-parent families. The columns on the chart were designated Reading, Math, and English. After recording the scores for both groups, the total scores in each subject area for Group I and Group II were totaled and averaged. This resulted in composite score averages in Reading, Math, and English for Group I and Group II. The averages between Group I and Group two compared for Reading Composite test scores, Math Composite test scores, and English Composite test scores. The results were placed on a chart and were compared for each group.

The second method used to collect data involved the recording of the first marking period report card grades for the 1994-1995 school

year. The report card grades in Reading, Math, and English were recorded for Group I and Group II from the sample of 60 students. The grades on the report card reflected the letters, "A", "B", "C", "D", and "F". Grades were not designated by a number value; therefore, for the purposes of this study, an "A" grade was assigned a value of 4 points. A "B" grade was assigned the value of 3 points. A "C" grade was assigned the value of 3 points. A "D" grade was assigned the value of 1 point. An "F" grade was assigned the value of 0 points. The student's numbers assigned to each letter grade were then recorded in tabular form and labeled, either Group I, representing student's living in two-parent families, or Group II, representing student's living in single-parent families. The columns on the Table were designated, Reading, Math, or English. After recording the scores for both Group I and Group II for each individual student, the total scores in each subject area for both groups were totaled and averaged. This gave a separate grade point average for Group I and Group II in each subject area. The results were then placed on a Table to compare the difference between Group I and Group II.

Demographic Information

Sex, grade, and family structure will be recorded for each child. Based on the demographic information in the community there are approximately 46,000 people living in Washington Township. The median household income is \$55,000. There is an average of 3.5 people per household. In terms of educational attainment, 50% of the population attended college and 49% are high school graduates. One-third of the

population is employed. Seventy-five percent of the population is white, 10% is black, 10% are Asian/Pacific Islanders and 4% are Hispanic .

SOURCES OF DATA

The results of the composite scores in Reading, Math, and English were recorded and taken from the, Metropolitan Achievement Test, sixth edition, that was administered to the students in the Spring of 1994. Student grades in Reading, Math, and English were taken from the Washington Township report card used within the school district for the first marking period of the 1994-1995 school year.

TREATMENT OF THE DATA

The mean grades of the children from the intact versus single-parent families will be visually inspected. Similarly, the mean achievement test scores of these two groups will be visually inspected. If a meaningful difference appears to exist a statistical test for a difference in means will be applied; however, if the scores are similar, then it will be assumed that no meaningful difference exists.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Divorce is a major crisis in the life of a child. Divorce can lead to a decline in academic achievement. Numerous studies indicate that children of divorce show lower academic achievement than those from intact families. Studies have shown that children from one parent families score lower on achievement tests but the reasons for this variation are based on the individual situation.

Educational systems can play an important role in helping children of divorce deal with their problems. Teachers and counselors are very important to these children's success or failure in coping with problems associated with divorce. Since, divorce places the child's learning at risk our schools must become more aware of who they are going to help.

The purpose of this study was to gather descriptive information that compares the academic achievement of 60 randomly selected seventh grade, middle-school students from single-parent families versus two-parent families. The independent variable was the family structure. The dependent variables were the mean achievement test scores on the MAT6 and the second marking period letter grades

taken from the students report cards. Sixty students were selected randomly.

Intraocular inspection of the mean achievement test scores and grades in Reading, Math, and English are contained in Table I and Table II and are not meaningfully different.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the grades of the intact group in English and Math, slightly exceeded the mean grade of students from the two-parent family. The students mean composite scores in Reading and English slightly exceeded the mean composite scores of students from two-parent families. However, the Math mean composite score of the students in the two-parent families slightly exceeded the mean composite score of students in single-parent families. The apparent contradictory results most likely reflect errors of measurement.

TABLE I

Mean Grades for 7th Grade Sample

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>English</u>
Intact Family	3.00	3.23	3.26
Single-parent Family	3.10	3.10	2.90

Note: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, F=0

TABLE II

MAT6 Composite Standard Score Averages for 7th Grade Sample

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>English</u>
Intact Family	76.60	85.72	81.41
Single-parent Family	77.62	83.24	86.62

CHAPTER V

Findings

The results of this study support the conclusion that among the children in this sample there doesn't seem to be a negative affect on achievement which is related to family status. However, academic achievement was determined by examining group averages and individual children may suffer harm which masked in the averaging process. In addition, children reared in middle class environments which include middle class parents, may be less prone to the economic stress experienced by less educated single parents.

Discussion

After the visual inspection of the mean achievement test scores and grades, it was assumed that no meaningful difference existed. However, there are studies that show evidence that a meaningful difference can occur in the achievement of students from intact families compared to students from single-parent families. There are also studies that are contradictory to these findings. There are variables that have been found to influence children's academic achievement. Several of these variables are the gender of the child, the education

level of the parent, the number of siblings in the family, adequacy of child care arrangements, support given from family, peers, and religious groups, the age of the child, the teacher's attitude, the quality of parenting, finances available to the custodial parent, the parent's ability to cope with the divorce, structure of the child's environment, sex of the custodial parent, and the educational opportunities available to the custodial parent.

School achievement is affected by separation and divorce. The school is a setting in which children can cope with external events which separation and divorce bring to their lives. Today there are a number of intervention programs in the research literature for counseling children affected by divorce.

Further research is needed in parent-child interaction, sex of the custodial parent, time spend during visitation and the non-custodial parent, gender differences, the effects of the church, peer and community supports, evaluation of program effectiveness and classroom environment, the time of separation, and the effects of parental absence on sex role development and intellectual functioning. These are several variables that can affect the achievement of the child experiencing the effects of divorce.

If I were to complete this study again, I would interview parents and students through the use of questionnaires to gather more information regarding variables discussed above that can effect a student's academic achievement during a divorce. There would be a larger study sample used to get more accurate results and the study

would be longitudinal. I would follow student's academic achievement through the eighth grade.

There are many implications from this study for educators and parents. They will see changes in students achievement because of divorce. Administrators should continuously keep track of student's who are experiencing the effects of divorce within their home. Through their awareness, teachers and counselors can then choose materials that reflect families that are not the stereotype. Parents and educators must work together to make the transition for students easier to cope with if they are to reach their maximum potential during this time of crisis.

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