

## Parental Experience after Separation / Divorce

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Received: 09 Dec 2020;

Received in revised form:

11 Feb 2021;

Accepted: 07 Mar 2021;

Available online: 27 Mar 2021

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**Keywords—** Parenting practices, Parental  
involvement, Divorce.

**Abstract—** This article examines the theoretical foundations that address the relationship between parents and children after marital separation, proposes to discuss the parenting practices of separated / divorced mothers and fathers with their children. For this purpose, 20 subjects (2 parents / 18 mothers) with school-age children were surveyed, who answered the Inventory of Parenting Practices. This instrument evaluated parental involvement in five areas: affective involvement, didactic involvement, social involvement, disciplinary involvement and responsibility. The results show greater maternal than paternal involvement with the children after the divorce, both direct (care, interaction) and indirect (monitoring, concern).

### I. INTRODUCTION

Data from the Brazilian Statistics Institute (IBGE 2000) comprovam that currently the number of divorced or separated people have become increasingly larger, recognizing that a new type of family organization arises when couples who have children disrupt conjugal union. At this time, the rights and duties of each member of the family must be respected and fulfilled, especially those that refer to the education of children and adolescents and the care for them, due to their peculiar condition as people in a special stage of development.

The promulgation of the Brazilian Federal Constitution in 1988 reflects the population's recognition of the changes observed in the concept of family and affiliation, also providing for gender equality in aspects of conjugal society. Within the scope of Family Law, the Judiciary is constantly asked to regulate the visitation and custody of children of couples who choose marital separation. It should be noted, however, that these causes involve issues related to Psychology, such as mental health, family relationships, parenting and child development - factors that justify and indicate the

contribution of this discipline in the study of the theme. After marital separation, parents may experience adverse moments in their relationship with their children, due to the distance that is imposed. Certainly, there is no precise roadmap for role-playing in the new scenario. It is understood, however, that the roles of father and mother cannot be changed when the curtains are opened, now bringing guardians and visitors to the scene. With the marital breakup, what will be changed is the relationship between husband and wife. Father and mother continue to exercise their rights and duties, changing only the context in which they perform their duties. It is noteworthy, however, that the way parents will relate to their children after separation cannot be explained only as a private matter. This will suffer interference from the social context which, in various ways, transmits messages on how to think, feel and behave as a result of separation. Since birth, the family is the only reference for the child, and based on this interaction, the first rules, values and beliefs are formed.

The relationship familiar is of great importance in the development of feelings of belonging and competence, environmental control (immunity), etc. As

children who perceive low levels of support and family tend to be more withdrawn and less active in their environments, more inattentive, offensive, in addition to having more hopelessness, which may reflect on their adult lives, increasing the chances of developing mental disorders, especially mood swings. The aim is to identify the relationship of parents and children by separating and the problems it can cause.

Schabbel (2005) described divorce as a state of legal discord between the couple. It sets up a dispute process and requires the creation of new structures for domestic coexistence, especially with regard to parents and children. In both clinical and forensic studies, studies show that the conflicts experienced by parents before and during the separation process cause adjustment problems in children who experience divorce as a mystery that needs to be explained clearly and objectively. All family members experience uncertainties and anxieties that threaten personal stability, requiring the elaboration of a loss. These events start to trigger failures in communication and erroneous interpretations permeated by hurt and resentment, thus generating numerous conflicts, directly affecting parental exercise. In view of this reality, the present study sought to recognize the effects that marital separation causes on parents and children. Likewise, clarifying the distinction between parenting and conjugality, given that in the face of the separation process, it is crucial to recognize the difference between parental and conjugal exercise so that the experience of this process is healthier for everyone involved. In this perspective, the role of Psychology as a science and profession is inclined to understand the challenges of the eminence of new family arrangements that institute the redefinition of roles and dynamics seen as traditional in the family.

To a great questioning of the role of fathers and mothers in the education of children, due to changes in the relationships between parents and children due to the transformations that families have been going through. Responsibility and education requirement with the children are the responsibility of both, so that they acquire an individuality and self-affirmation through the support of parental coexistence. It is important to separate, the couple seeks all possible maturity to guide the children's reaction well, and knowing how to deal with the developmental phase in which the child is at the moment of separation. It is important that you take care not to practice acts of parental alienation. Parental alienation occurs when one parent (or whoever has custody of the child, such as grandparents, for example) tries to "program" the child to hate the other parent. One parent uses the child to attack the other indirectly, or tries to

control the child's feelings towards the other parent through emotional blackmail. The National Council of Justice (CNJ) launched in 2013 a campaign to warn about the dangers that parental alienation brings to the child. For the CNJ, the practice or act of parental alienation constitutes moral abuse against the child or adolescent, and violates the fundamental right to a healthy family life. The child is always the biggest victim of parental alienation. For a more detailed analysis, a survey of twenty (20) fathers / mothers was carried out through the application of a questionnaire in order to point out the points in which they affected or not affected the child's development.

Although, at present, paternity is seen as a process in constant construction that is established between the parent and the child, Muzio (1998) points to the influence of socio-cultural determinations in the performance of this role. Being tender, expressing feelings, having an empathetic and nutritious closeness to children are not characteristics usually attributed to men, due to the process of cultural construction. In turn, women have been valued, for many centuries, for the attributes related to motherhood, coming to think of a biological determinism, or, perhaps, a natural gift for the care of children.

Regarding the research developed, it referred to the collection of data with separate fathers and mothers, residing in Tarumirim, municipality of the State of Minas Gerais, trying to observe how they related to their children after the end of the conjugal union. It was thus, through research carried out with parents, that we developed this article.

Following the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, we find in France the example that, since 1993, legislation has received joint parental authority. The changes that occurred in that country lead to the understanding that father and mother must remain close to their children after the marriage separation. This fact becomes evident when the nomenclature "guardian" is no longer used, replaced by the expression "joint parental authority". In other words, the notion of possession of the child is removed, and the figure of the visitor also disappears. In the same direction, joint custody has become a possibility in several countries such as Portugal, the United States, England, Sweden, among others. In this custody model, parents remain responsible for raising their children with regard to the fundamental rights of these children and adolescents, such as, for example, education, health, food and leisure.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Twenty subjects participated in this study, being 02 fathers and 18 separated / divorced mothers (with

rupture of the marital bond, regardless of civil status), with at least one of the children of school age (6 to 12 years).

Parents and divorced mothers, who participated in the research, responded to a questionnaire which was adapted by the model proposed by the "Inventory Practices Parentais" (Benetti & Balbinotti, 2002), which is attached. This inventory (IPP) was built to evaluate parenting practices, considering affective involvement, didactics (education), discipline, social aspects and the responsibility of parental involvement. The complete Inventory has 29 evaluation items, which are constituted in affirmative sentences, however for our questionnaire only 22 items were made which would be sufficient for our analysis.

Those involved in the research participated spontaneously and were selected for publicly declaring that they were separated and / or divorced. Thus consenting to answer the proposed questionnaire.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By analyzing the data obtained through the questionnaire, Can Do's consider that the average time of separation or divorce became in four years, which can be considered a time suitable or sufficient to overcome the most difficult times post-divorce as indicate the researchers of the theme (Grzybowski, 2002). The average age of the mothers / fathers surveyed was 30 years old, working mothers, the majority with a high school degree only 2% with a college degree. All men reported receiving no financial support from their ex-spouse, while more than half of the women investigated receive it. Here too, something traditional about the post-divorce constellation is expressed, a reality in which, more commonly, it is the men who pay and not those who receive a pension from their ex-women. However, it must be considered that all women are the custodians of their children.

The average age of children is 8 years. All the eighteen (18) mothers participating in the study live with their children, reflecting a family arrangement more found among the reality of post-divorce families, however we observed a particular case that a father cohabits with his son even though he is divorced.

The frequency of visits by parents to their children was quite distributed among the intervals presented. However, it is observed that the intervals that refer to the highest frequency of visits (once a week, biweekly, once a month) concentrated the highest response rates of parents. This fact can represent, in isolation, a greater involvement of parents, although we know that the frequency of visits is not enough to assess the content and quality of the parental relationship that is established. The majority of parents had no other children

from other relationships. Both fathers and mothers reported having social support to care for their children. Mothers showed greater involvement with their children in all dimensions of the inventory, as well as in most items, when analyzed individually.

Regarding the conversation with the child, fathers and mothers demonstrated that they do not have significant differences between them, having similar averages, which shows that both are managing to dialogue in an equal way in relation to religion, their work, school and friendly conversations. Cohabitation, which seems to be associated with greater involvement of the mother in the emotional and didactic sense (affective support and school support), here does not seem to be decisive for a dialogue and conversation between parents and children.

In involvement with discipline, mothers show less significant results than fathers. However, as all sentences have a negative connotation or problems with educational practices (I scream, slap, argue, threaten, have difficulties), it is necessary to carefully analyze the difference between fathers and mothers. The mothers' higher averages show that they are more involved with the discipline of their children, but they can also demonstrate that they have difficulties in this function, perhaps due to the daily and immediate educational requirements. Regarding indirect responsibility, that is, involvement related to the concern, supervision and zeal for the child's well-being, mothers also had averages significantly higher than those of fathers. Both men and women reported being able to talk to their ex-partners about the future of their children, which perhaps indicates the preservation of this nuance of the coparental function, even after the marital breakup. And both showed that they are attentive to their children's routines (I know where my son is), available (he knows where to find me if he needs anything) and zealous (me to the doctor).

Emotional involvement (affective support) and didactic involvement (school / knowledge) were significantly higher in the group of mothers. However, in relation to talking with the children, both showed balance in carrying out this educational practice. In addition to the issue related to cohabitation, it can be thought that the greater affective and didactic involvement of mothers is also due to the female gender prerogatives, which historically have determined that mothers were the main caregivers and responsible for the education of their children. In addition, it can be assumed that the fact that they relapse less frequently than men favors this greater dedication to their children, although this is not decisive.

The results also showed that parents have greater social involvement with respect to activities in

the public space (park, cinema), while mothers become more involved with this in private area (TV, music), which shows the performance a classic function of women in the domestic space and an affirmation of paternal parenting in the social / public space. Involvement with discipline also proved to be a significantly greater prerogative for mothers, however, the results of both fathers and mothers confirm that this educational task is arduous and with inherent difficulties, although fathers / men have shown fewer problems than mothers with such an aspect. The exercise of authority becomes exhausting for women due to the intensity of the daily demand imposed by cohabitation with their children. Massive female cohabitation stands out here.

Thus, we can observe that the characteristics of the social context (combinations of visits, housing arrangements) and of the parents (occupation, education, issues of conjugality) seem to be important in determining parental educational practices. The cohabitation and visitation arrangements reflect on parenting and parental involvement, evidencing the maintenance of traditional patterns of divorced parenting, in which there is a greater global involvement of mothers with their children, except for the social / public involvement of parents.

#### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

We conclude that it is important even with the separation \ divorce, the coexistence between father \ mother before the child, whether it be of harmony, mutual help and understanding, thus providing a warm and welcoming home for the son \ daughter who in this dilemma will always be the most affected part. Therefore, considering the Belsky Model (1984), we think that it would be important to hear the opinion of the children about this phenomenon, in order to broaden the understanding of it and not to centralize the evaluation of parenting only in parents. In addition, it is also necessary to understand this phenomenon in a qualitative way, seeking to deepen the understanding and perception of how the variables associated with parental involvement are manifested in the daily lives of families and what are the justifications for the greater or lesser involvement with the children after the advent of divorce.

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