



**Ministry of Attorney General**  
Justice Services Branch  
Family Justice Services Division

# **The Family Justice System: A Review of the Metrics and Impacts of Separation and Divorce**

**March 2006**

# A Review of the Metrics and Impacts of Separation and Divorce

This research paper was developed for Justice Services Branch, Ministry of Attorney General by Focus Consulting pursuant to Recommendation #37 of the June 2005 report of the Family Justice Reform Working Group: **A New Justice system for Families and Children:**

*That, wherever possible, the implementation plan for any reform initiative provide that it be formally evaluated.*

*That efforts be made to improve data collection systems within the family justice system to capture data that will allow for better understanding of the progress of cases after they enter the justice system.*

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# Executive Summary

In May 2005 the BC Justice Reform Working Group to the Justice Review Task Force completed a report on the need and potential for reforms to the BC family justice system. The report, *A New Justice System for Families and Children*, recommended fundamental changes to the family justice system in BC, including a shift from a primarily adversarial framework to a system where mediation and other consensual processes are the norm. Specific recommendations made in the report include the establishment of “Family Justice Informational Hubs” throughout the province, mandatory exposure of parents to mediation, a unified court for cases that require a judge and the improvement and simplification of court forms.

This document provides background and contextual information related to some of the approaches recommended in the report of the Working Group. Specifically, the document addresses two main questions:

1. What are the “metrics” or the scope of separation and divorce in BC? How many children, adults and families are affected?
2. What does the family justice literature tell us about the impacts of separation and divorce on children, parents, families and society?

The document is divided into two sections. The first section presents the available data on the scope and statistical impact (metrics) of separation and divorce in B.C. Since existing statistics have some limitations, these limitations and gaps are also described.

The second section summarizes the key impacts and consequences of separation and divorce on children and parents and discusses the limitations of the literature in addressing overall societal impacts. This section also provides information on the risk and resilience factors that affect impact and on the programmatic factors that may help ameliorate negative consequences.

The sources of data used for this study included data from B.C. Statistics, Statistics Canada (including data specifically commissioned for this report), and the Department of Justice. Approximately seventy key documents from the English-speaking family justice literature were included in the review of impacts. A consultation was also held with Dr. Joan Kelly, a psychologist and researcher in the family justice/mediation field. In addition, several other key respondents from the Vanier Institute for the Family, B.C. Statistics and Statistics Canada were contacted to discuss and clarify statistical data.

Dramatically rising rates of separation and divorce have been one of the most profound social changes in Canada over the past 50 years. Between 1961 and 1987 the divorce rate in Canada increased ten-fold. The level of re-divorces is estimated to be approximately 16% and the number of cohabiting couples who later divorce is rising. Children are living in single parent families resulting from marriage dissolution at increasingly younger ages.

Statistics on separation and divorce are complex and much of the available published data is limited. Common methods calculate the rate of divorce as a portion of the general population or calculate the percentage of divorces from the same year’s marriage data. Neither of these methods provides an accurate picture of the likelihood a couple will divorce over their marriage

lifetime. These methods are often used, however, for international comparisons and because general population data is relatively easy to obtain.

The “gold standard” method for measuring divorce rates is reached by calculating the number of marriages ending in divorce over a thirty-year period. Using this method the rate of divorce in B.C. in 2003 was 39.8 divorces for 100 marriages, the fourth highest rate of divorce in Canada. Again, this data has limitations. Current statistics usually reflect only legal separations or marriages. They do not include separations of cohabiting couples or the number of divorces (a growing issue which is now estimated as applying to 16% of divorces).

It is difficult to determine the specific *number* of adults who have been affected by marital dissolution in the B.C. population. Data indicates that there were 297,120 legally divorced adults in B.C. in 2004 (8.54% of the population) and approximately 188,000 legally separated adults for a total of approximately 415,000 adults or 12% of the population. However, this is minimal figure because it does not include couples who informally separate or separate from a cohabiting relationship. The number of legally divorced adults has increased twice as fast as the growth in the adult population as a whole since 1991. Couples in BC who later divorce have the shortest duration of marriage in Canada, at 13.3 years

Calculating the number of lone parent families in B.C. could help describe the number of adults affected by separation and divorce. Most, but not all, lone parents become so because of marital dissolution. According to B.C. Census data there were 258,695 lone parents in B.C. in 2001. These families included 191,165 children. Specific data was commissioned from Statistics Canada to try to determine more accurately the number of children affected by separation or divorce in BC (Census years 1996 and 2001). This data indicates that in 1996 there were 228,340 children who were living in lone parent families affected by separation or divorce or living in couple families where one or both parents were separated or divorced (Table 9). This represented approximately 20% of the population of children between birth to age 19. This number grew to 247,495 children in 2001, a growth of 8%. In 2001, 21% of children birth to age 19 were living in homes affected by marital transition (Table 10). In both cases the age group 10-14 had the highest percentage of children affected (24% of all children in this age group in 2001). This data reflects the *minimal* number of children affected by separation and divorce; data on *informal* separations by legally married couples is not included.

There is consensus in the literature that separation and divorce can have profound short and long term negative consequences for many adults and children. Negative consequences for mothers include health impacts (distress, depression), decline in economic well-being, lowered parenting capacity and consequences resulting from economic impacts (e.g. re-location). Fathers may also suffer economically if mothers have made substantial economic contributions to the household. Fathers may suffer poorer health after divorce and are more likely to misuse alcohol. Fathers who have limited contact with their children show higher rates of depression.

Most research indicates that parental divorce has impacts on children’s well-being although these may be ameliorated by individual or familial protective factors. Poor school achievement, cognitive impacts, increased anxiety, depression, acting out or “externalizing behaviour,” fractured relationships with the non-residential parent, earlier sexual activity and increased distress are all associated with separation and divorce. Children of divorced parents may receive less consistent or authoritative parenting.

The consequences of separation and divorce for children extend into young adulthood and beyond. Children of separated/divorced parents may be less likely to finish school and may be less supported to continue their education. They may be more likely to marry earlier and are at increased risk for later divorce. They may have less contact with their parents and have negative relationships with the non-custodial parent, usually their fathers. They may have more psychological problems and a lower level of happiness and life satisfaction as young adults. Studies have found that adults have persisting levels of distress and sadness in relation to the divorce of their parents.

None of these impacts affect all people to the same degree. Some researchers suggest that about 20-25% of children suffer more dramatic, observable consequences of their parents' marital dissolution. The level of pre-divorce conflict in the family or other pre-divorce characteristics may increase the risks for children. There are many factors that contribute to resiliency including the level of an individual's coping skills, the quality of information given to the family, the degree of authoritative parenting being used, the standard of living of the parent and the degree to which a parent has a system of support.

While remarriage may improve the economic and personal well-being of parents, second and subsequent marriages are at higher risk of dissolution. There is evidence in the literature that multiple marital transitions affect children more negatively.

Given the interrelationships between the potential negative impacts of divorce, risk factors (including pre-marital disruption family characteristics), and resiliency there is no way to *accurately* estimate the effects of separation and divorce on specific populations or on the BC population as a whole. However, if it can be said with some confidence that approximately 20-25% of children are negatively impacted by separation and divorce, the impact on systems such as the criminal justice system (through increased juvenile crime), the school system (through decreased school performance or acting out behaviours), the health system (poorer adult health and increased alcohol misuse) or systems providing income support (related to the economic decline of the custodial parent), must be significant.

A number of programmatic interventions have been identified which ameliorate the negative impact of separation and divorce on children and adults. These include inclusion of children in the decision-making process at separation, education and support to parents to encourage communication with children and to decrease parental conflict. Other recommended interventions involve enhancing the post-divorce economic stability of either or both parents, support for non-custodial parent involvement with children and support and education to encourage authoritative and competent parenting during the pre and post separation phases.

## 1.0 Introduction

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In May 2005 the British Columbia Family Justice Reform Working Group to the Justice Review Task Force completed a report on the need and potential for reforms to the British Columbia family justice system (*A New Justice System for Families and Children*). The Working Group concluded that a fundamental shift in the British Columbia family justice system is required which would involve moving away from a primarily adversarial framework to a system where mediation and other consensual processes are the norm.

The Working Group used past studies, reports, and research documents relevant to the B.C. family justice system over the past three decades, as a basis from which to make thirty-seven recommendations for reform. These included recommendations for the establishment of “Family Justice Informational Hubs” to be situated throughout the province, mandatory exposure of parents to mediation, a unified court for cases that require a judge, and the improvement and simplification of court forms.

This document provides background and contextual information for the some of the approaches recommended in the report. The document is divided into two sections. The first section presents the available data on the scope and statistical impact (metrics) of separation and divorce in B.C. Since existing statistics have some limitations, these limitations and gaps are also described. The second section summarizes the key impacts and consequences of separation and divorce on children and parents and discusses the limitations of the literature in addressing overall societal impacts. This section also provides information on the risk and resiliency factors that affect potential impacts. Programmatic factors that ameliorate the negative consequences of separation and divorce are also described.

## 2.0 Key Questions and Sources of Data

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### 2.1 Key Questions

This research project considered four key questions related to the scope, impact and consequences of separation and divorce. The key questions are:

1. What can be said about the volume, scope or “metrics” of divorce in British Columbia? What data are available and what are the limitations of this data? To what degree does separation or divorce affect individuals, the family and society?
2. What are the documented consequences or impacts of separation and divorce on children, on parents, the family and the community over the short or long term? What can be said about the societal impacts of separation and divorce?
3. What are the risk or resiliency factors that affect, minimize or maximize the impacts of separation or divorce on parents and children?
4. In what ways can or do programmatic interventions ameliorate negative impacts?

### 2.2 Sources of Data

There were four sources of data used for this project, summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Sources of Data**

SOURCE OF DATA		DESCRIPTION
1.	General Document Review	■ Report of the Family Justice Reform Working Group to the Justice Review Task Force
2.	Review of the Literature on the Impacts and Consequences of Separation and Divorce	■ A selected review of the international English-speaking literature was carried out looking at the impacts and consequences of separation and divorce on children and parents. ■ Impacts and consequences were categorized by population group (e.g. very young children, adolescents, fathers and mothers) and key impact type (e.g. cognitive, academic performance and educational achievement, employment and income, general health, psychological/mental health, conduct/ behaviour, family, marital and social relationships. Approximately seventy key documents were included in the literature review.

SOURCE OF DATA		DESCRIPTION
3.	Review of Statistical Data on the Volume of Separation and Divorce *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A variety of statistical data from Statistics Canada, B.C. Statistics &amp; Department of Justice and other sources were reviewed. These included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statistics Canada: Divorces 2003</li> <li>• Department of Justice (Research Unit) Statistics on Canadian Families and Family Law</li> <li>• Department of Justice: Research and Statistics Division Reports</li> <li>• Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth</li> <li>• Statistics Canada (The Daily) Summaries of Divorces 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004</li> <li>• Statistics Canada Maintenance Enforcement Survey 2004-05</li> <li>• B.C. Census Profile 1996, 2001</li> <li>• Statistics Canada (2003) Divorces Shelf Tables</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Several key sources for statistical data were contacted for further information or clarification. Respondents from B.C. Stats, Stats Canada and The Vanier Institute (Anne-Marie Ambert) were contacted about specific data questions.</li> <li>■ Custom data on the characteristics of children in divorced and separated families was commissioned from Statistics Canada. This data describes the number of children in B.C. who are living in (legally) separated and divorced families or in lone parent, never-married families.</li> </ul>
4.	Key Respondent Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Joan Kelly, psychologist and researcher in the family justice and mediation field provided information on the impacts and consequences of separation and divorce and effective programmatic interventions.</li> </ul>

\* A complete list of statistical resources is included at the end of Section 3.0.

**Part I:**

**Describing the Metrics and Scope  
of Separation and Divorce in B.C.**

### **3.0 Describing the Metrics of Divorce**

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This section of the report addresses two questions:

1. What are the metrics, scope or volume of separation and divorce in B.C.?
2. How many parents and children in BC does marital disruption affect?

These questions are difficult to address because of the limitations and complexities of separation and divorce statistics and the fact that “they are often erroneously interpreted, even by scientists themselves” (Amato, 2005). A brief discussion of the limitations and gaps in current divorce statistics is presented below.

#### **3.1 Ways of Measuring and Interpreting Current Separation and Divorce Statistics**

Amato (2005) notes that the most frequent way of measuring divorce is a crude rate for a set unit of population (e.g. “X” number of divorces per 1,000 or 100,000 people). In Canada the rate of divorce for 2003 was 224/100,000 population (70,828 divorces). While useful for international comparisons this data includes the *total* population (including children). It does not restrict itself to those “eligible for divorce.” Even by including only those eligible for divorce the data gives only snapshot of divorce rates. It does not provide an overview of the actual rate of divorce for couples during the duration of their marriage. Other data limitations also apply.

Table 2 describes the most frequently used types of statistics, examples of data and the strengths and limitations of each method.

**Table 2: A Description of Methods Used to Measure Divorce Rates,  
Their Strengths and Limitations \***

	METHOD	FRAMEWORK OF DATA	DATA	STRENGTHS OF APPROACH	LIMITATIONS OF APPROACH
1.	Measures the rate of divorce: number of divorced people per unit of population. (100,000 people)	Canada	** Canada (2003) 224/100,000 or 2.2% of population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This method allows for international comparisons</li> <li>• This method allows for year by year comparisons (e.g. the rate of divorce in 1990 was 295.8/100,000 or 3%)</li> <li>• The peak year of divorce was 1987: 362.3/100,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total population (including children) is included</li> <li>• The measure does not take into account age distribution (e.g. seniors less likely to divorce but young people may still be divorcing at a higher rate)</li> <li>• Does not include dissolution of common-law relationships</li> </ul>
2.	Unit measure using only those <u>eligible</u> to divorce (not total population)	Canada	In 1995, there were 1,222 divorces per 100,000 married couples or a rate of 1.2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This method includes only those eligible to divorce, not children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describes only the rate of divorce in a specific year</li> <li>• Does not include lifetime risk</li> <li>• Does not include dissolution of common-law relationships</li> </ul>
3.	Comparison of the rate of divorce in one year with the rate of marriage in the same year	Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently used to conclude that "50%of marriages end in divorce," e.g. in 1994 there were 2.7 divorces per 1,000 population and 5.4 marriages per 1,000 population. The divorce rate is then calculated at 50%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This method is considered to be inaccurate because two different unrelated populations are used</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on one year's data</li> <li>• Applies to different populations (i.e. the same people who are married do not get divorced in the same year)</li> <li>• The two sets of data are not related, e.g. the number of marriages are decreasing (more couples are cohabiting) while the number of divorces are increasing</li> </ul>

METHOD		FRAMEWORK OF DATA	DATA	STRENGTHS OF APPROACH	LIMITATIONS OF APPROACH
4.	Measures the crude number of divorces	Canada	In 2003 there were 70,823 legal divorces in Canada.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describes the number of divorces in a given year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitive to population changes. Number of divorces may be going down in older populations while the young may still be divorcing at a high rate</li> <li>• Does not provide data on the total number of divorced people in B.C.</li> <li>• Measures only those legally divorced.</li> </ul>
5.	Measurement of the risk of divorce "over the lifetime"	British Columbia	In B.C. in 2003 the lifetime rate of divorce was 39.8/100 marriages. The overall rate of divorce in B.C. is the fourth highest in Canada but has shown a slight decrease in most recent years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measures the risk of divorce after 30 years of marriage to see what proportion of couples have divorced. (After 30 years of marriage relatively few divorces take place.)</li> <li>• Considered to be the most accurate method of measuring the rate divorce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Method requires complex calculations and is not used for international comparisons</li> <li>• Does not include those who have previously divorced</li> <li>• Does not include the dissolution of common-law relationships</li> </ul>

\* Data and examples for this table were derived from "Divorce: Facts, Causes and Consequence" by Dr. Anne-Marie Ambert (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2005). Data was clarified through personal correspondence with Dr. Ambert and Jenni Tipper (Vanier Institute).

\*\* Using this form of calculation Canada has the ninth leading divorce rate among selected western countries (2005) at 2.23/1,000. The US has the highest divorce rate in the western world (4.30/1,000).

All of the methods of calculating divorce rates described in Table 2 have three major limitations that affect their ability to provide an accurate picture of the number of people who have experienced separation or divorce:

- Re-divorces are not calculated in these statistics. Long-term divorce rates include people who may have been divorced more than once. Statistics Canada estimates that over 16% of divorces are re-divorces of one or both spouses. (In the US one-third of divorces each year are re-divorces.) The rate of divorce among those who remarry is higher than the baseline divorce rate. This data is important because research suggests that multiple marital transitions have a more negative effect on children.
- Cohabitation is a rising phenomenon and is not calculated in these divorce statistics which consist only of legally married couples. What constitutes a “cohabitation” has not been consistently established in the literature.
- Many couples separate but do not legally separate or divorce. While undergoing all the effects of marital disruption their statistics would never be calculated under divorce statistics which include only legal divorces.

### 3.2 Measuring the Lifetime Divorce Rate

As noted in Table 2, the most accurate method of measuring divorce is to look at the rate of divorce over a 30-year period of a couple’s marriage because this looks at divorce by couple rather than by the number of divorces in a specific year. The average duration of marriage for marriages ending in divorce in 2003 was 14.2 years, 1.4 years longer than a decade previously (Amato, 2005). Table 3 indicates that couples in B.C. had the shortest duration of marriage in Canada (13.3 years).

**Table 3: Average Duration of Marriage in Eight Selected Provinces (2003)\***

PROVINCE	AVERAGE DURATION OF MARRIAGE IN YEARS
New Brunswick	16.2
Quebec	15.9
Nova Scotia	15.1
Manitoba	14.2
Saskatchewan	14.0
Ontario	13.5
Alberta	13.4
British Columbia	13.3

\* Statistics Canada, 2005, as quoted in Amato, 2005.

British Columbia has the fourth highest rate of divorce in Canada although the rate of divorce has decreased since 2001 (Table 4). In B.C. in 2003 39.8/100 married couples will have divorced by their 30<sup>th</sup> year of marriage (Table 4).

**Table 4: Total Divorce Rates, per 100 Marriages, by the 30<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary Since 1998 by Provinces and Territories**

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
<b>Canada</b>	<b>36.1</b>	<b>37.3</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>37.9</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>38.3</b>
Newfoundland & Labrador	23.2	22.5	22.9	19.6	21.8	17.1
Prince Edward Island	26.4	28.0	26.9	22.9	25.2	27.3
Nova Scotia	28.2	28.2	30.4	28.9	30.4	28.9
New Brunswick	26.9	30.4	31.9	29.1	27.2	27.6
Quebec	45.2	46.5	47.4	48.3	47.6	49.7
Ontario	33.0	34.4	34.6	35.3	34.9	37.0
Manitoba	30.1	31.9	34.6	31.1	30.3	30.2
Saskatchewan	31.5	31.7	31.4	28.4	28.7	29.0
Alberta	39.0	40.4	41.5	41.9	41.9	40.0
British Columbia	40.0	40.3	40.6	41.0	41.0	39.8
Yukon	55.2	51.8	33.6	44.1	43.4	40.0
Northwest Territories & Nunavut	37.5	34.0	40.7	37.1	31.2	27.0

Source: Ambert (2005) from Statistics Canada, 2005 and earlier

### 3.3 How Many *People* are Affected by Divorce in Canada

Divorce rates do not tell us how many separated or divorced *people* there are in the province of B.C. at any given time. This number would include *all* those adults who had been affected by marital disruption. This number is important because it could help identify the segment of the population who could be potentially affected by the negative impacts of divorce. Table 5 estimates the number of legally divorced people in B.C. in the years 1991, 2001 and 2004 and compares this to the proportion of divorced adults in the population as a whole. Population estimates indicate that there were almost 300,000 legally divorced adults in B.C. in 2004.

The proportion of divorced adults in the population has risen almost twice as fast as the population of adults 15 and over.\* The proportion of divorced adults in the population is estimated at 8.5%. These statistics do not take into account (1) re-divorces, (2) those who are separated and not divorced, and (3) the dissolution of cohabitating relationships.

\* Statistics Canada uses age 15 and over to designate adult status.

**Table 5: Estimated Percentage of Divorced Adults<sup>1</sup> in the British Columbia Population: 1990 to 2004**

DATE	ADULT <sup>2</sup> POPULATION	NUMBER OF LEGALLY DIVORCED ADULTS <sup>3</sup>	PERCENTAGE OF DIVORCED ADULTS IN POPULATION AGED 15+
1991	2,697,041	189,881	7.04%
2001	3,353,847	273,495	8.15%
2004	3,477,133	297,120	8.54%
Percentage Growth Rate (between 1991-2004)	29%	56%	

Sources:

1. Divorced Adults includes those divorced adults who have not remarried. It does not include divorced adults who have remarried or adults who have separated from common-law relationships.
2. Statistics Canada: Table 051-0010. Estimates of Population, by marital status, age group and sex, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (persons). Adult population is 15 and over.
3. Statistics Canada: Population Estimates Standard Age Groups 1990+2004 (B.C. Stats, Service B.C., Minister of Labour and Citizen's Services, Victoria).

B.C. census data\* (2001) suggests that there were 109,970 adults who were separated but still legally married. Combining this data with divorce statistics suggests that in 2001 there were at least 370,240 adults in B.C. who were separated or divorced, 11.56% of the population.

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\* Statistics Canada and B.C. Stats include both raw census data and estimated data. Estimated data is considered to be more accurate than raw census data but is sometimes not available for all years. Estimated data is produced by evaluating and adjusting raw census data.

**Table 6: Marital and Separated Status  
(B.C. Census Data 1996 & 2001) \***

	YEAR	
	2001	1996
Total population 15 years and older	3,201,665	2,989,325
Separated but still legally married	109,970 (3.4%)	102,435 (3.4%)
Divorced	260,270 (8.1%)	236,100 (7.9%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>370,240</b>	<b>338,535</b>

\* This table uses B.C. Stats Census Data rather than estimated data which accounts for differences in some of the data from Table 5.

Using estimates of the number of divorced adults in B.C. (see Table 4) combined with an estimate of separated adults determined from 2001 statistics, calculations suggest that there are a *minimum* of 415,000 adults in B.C. who are affected by the impacts of separation or divorce. This number does not include data on re-divorces or separation of cohabiting couples.

**Table 7: Number of Separated (no divorce) Adults in B.C. (2004)  
Estimated from Census and Estimated Data \***

STATUS	NUMBER
Total Adult Population	3,477,133
Number of divorced adults	297,120 (estimated data)
Estimated number of separated adults	118,222 ** (3.4%)
<b>Total number of adults who are separated or divorced in B.C.</b>	<b>415,342 (12% of population)</b>

\* Most of the data from this table is derived from Statistics Canada data described in Table 5.

\*\* Data is derived from calculations in Table 6.

In the statistical or research literature “common-law” status is usually self-reported and can refer to unions of varying duration. The General Social Survey\* found that, in 2001, close to 1.2 million couples in Canada were living in a common-law relationship, up from 20% in 1995. In that same period the number of married couples increased by only 3%.

\* The General Social Survey interviewed 24,310 individuals aged 15 and over from February to December 2001, living in private households.

The trend towards common-law unions among young people in Canada is increasing. According to Statistics Canada,

*More than 40% of men and women aged 30 to 39 in 2001 are expected to choose a common-law union as their first union; for those aged 20 to 29, the percentage is expected to reach 53% for women. (The Daily, Thursday, July 11, 2002)*

Common-law unions are generally not as stable as marriages. It is estimated, for example, that more than 30% of women and men now aged 40 to 59 who are married will eventually separate, the proportion may be twice as high among those who live common-law.

In 2001 there were 235,055\* adults living in a common-law relationship in B.C.. However, rates for the dissolution of these relationships are unknown.

### **3.4 Number of Children in British Columbia Affected by Divorce**

The impacts of separation and divorce on children (e.g. increased distress, poorer educational performance, behavioural problems) have been well documented in the literature (see Section 4.0). Estimates suggest that 20-25% of children in separated and divorced families may experience serious negative consequences.

Specific data identifying the *number* of children who are living in separated and divorced families is difficult to find. Limitations in the available data include:

- Data on family structure collected by Statistics Canada relates to legal separations or divorces. Informal separations of legal marriages are not included.\*
- Census data does provide data on the number of dependents who are covered by a custody order related to divorce by province. However, this would not include children for whom a custody order in divorce court was not granted.
- Data is not specifically collected on cohabiting couples, However, Statistics Canada does collect data on lone parent families where the parent has never been married which can be used as a proxy measure.
- Statistics Canada estimates that 16% of divorces are re-divorces, however, no data is available on the number of children who experience multiple parental separations/divorces or what these consist of. Ambert (2005) notes that in the US 15% of *all* children will see their custodial parent divorce more than once before age 18; and nearly 50% of children in divorced families (will) see their parents divorce again. The literature suggests that children are more negatively impacted by multiple transitions.
- Current data on the number of children enrolled in the B.C. Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP) is available. This includes children from a number of

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\* 2001 Census Profile in British Columbia (Total population 15 years and over in a common-law relationship).

\*\* Statistics Canada will be producing this data on a custom basis. This data will be included in the report when available.

divorce “years” but does not include children not enrolled in FMEP and therefore does not reflect all the children affected by divorce or separation.

A range of data from some of the sources described above and their specific limitations is summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8: Number of Children Involved in a Parental Separation or Divorce (Canadian and B.C. Data)**

DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA	DATA SOURCE	COMMENTS
36,252 dependent children in Canada were involved in a divorce in 1998	Ambert, 2005: Statistics Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is based on divorce data for one year and does not include <u>all</u> children affected by separation or divorce</li> <li>No B.C. breakdown is available</li> </ul>
Number of dependents in divorces involving custody orders in B.C. for whom custody was granted (in which the divorce court made a decision). 2003      3,219 2002      3,841 2001      4,058 2000 <u>3,826</u> <b>14,944</b> Children from divorces between 2000 - 2003	Divorces 2003: Shelf Tables; Statistics Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only applies to children where a formal custody order was granted in Divorce Court</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Average number of children enrolled in the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP) 36,066 (child beneficiaries only) in B.C.</li> <li>The median age of enrolled children is 13.</li> </ul>	Number of children only beneficiaries enrolled in FMEP in B.C. <i>Statistics Canada, Maintenance Enforcement Survey(2005)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited to those who are enrolled in FMEP</li> <li>Year of separation or divorce cannot be determined</li> <li>Reflects wider range of divorced children (divorced from many years)</li> <li>Data may not include cohabitations</li> </ul>

Specific data was commissioned from Statistics Canada to try to determine more accurately the number of children affected by separation or divorce in BC (Census years 1996 and 2001). This data indicates that in 1996 there were 228,340 children who were living in lone parent families affected by separation or divorce or living in couple families where one or both parents were separated or divorced. This represented approximately 20% of the population of children between birth to age 19. This number grew to 247,495 children in 2001, a growth of 8%. In 2001, 21% of children birth to age 19 were living in homes affected by marital transition. In both cases the age group 10-14 had the highest percentage of children affected (almost a quarter of children in this age group). This data reflects the *minimal* number of children affected by separation and divorce; data on informal separations by legally married couples is not included.

**Table 9: Children in Census Families (1996) Affected by Separation or Divorce<sup>1</sup>**

NUMBER OF CHILDREN	TOTAL <sup>2</sup>	AGE CATEGORIES						
		Less than 1	1 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 14	15 - 19	20 - 24	Over 25
<b>Lone Parent Families</b>								
Divorced	78,955	510	5,110	14,420	20,805	20,490	9,995	7,625
Married <sup>3</sup>	6,285	280	800	835	950	1,285	1,000	1,140
Separated	59,925	865	8,770	14,750	15,195	12,510	4,890	2,945
Never Married <sup>4</sup>	41,520	2,835	13,525	12,530	7,590	3,510	950	570
<b>Couple Families</b>								
Both parents divorced or separated	18,380	465	1,605	3,625	5,340	5,030	1,725	590
One parent divorced/separated	23,275	1,545	4,950	6,220	5,570	3,525	1,080	390
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>228,340</b>	<b>6,500</b>	<b>34,760</b>	<b>52,380</b>	<b>55,450</b>	<b>46,350</b>	<b>19,640</b>	<b>13,260</b>
Number of children in population (age group) ( <i>BC Census Profile</i> )		233,030		247,035	255,115	242,940	240,845	NA
Percentage of children affected by separation or divorce in population		18%		21%	22%	19%	5%	NA

SOURCE: 1996 CENSUS – STATISTICS CANADA

- 1 Applies to children living in the family. Percentages for fully adult children were not calculated
- 2 Totals in total column may not exactly reflect subcategory columns due to rounding of numbers in all categories
- 3 Only *legal* separations and divorces are tracked by Statistics Canada
- 4 *Never married* consists of people who have never been legally married or persons whose marriages have been annulled and who have not remarried. We are using this as a proxy measure for common-law couples

**Table 10: Children in Census Families (2001) Affected by Separation or Divorce <sup>1</sup>**

NUMBER OF CHILDREN	TOTAL <sup>2</sup>	AGE CATEGORIES						
		Less than 1	1 – 4	5 – 9	10 – 14	15 – 19	20 – 24	Over 25
<b>Lone Parent Families</b>								
Divorced	82,470	390	3,535	12,680	20,950	23,975	11,665	9,285
Married <sup>3</sup>	9,055	210	1,225	1,245	1,770	1,885	1,355	1,365
Separated	67,520	615	6,935	15,650	18,110	16,540	6,235	3,435
Never Married <sup>4</sup>	49,780	2,395	12,100	15,050	10,885	6,340	1,850	1,160
<b>Couple Families</b>								
Both parents divorced or separated	16,475	245	1,350	3,245	4,920	4,615	1,530	565
One parent divorced/separated	22,195	1,265	3,930	5,570	5,740	3,980	1,190	510
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>247,495</b>	<b>5,120</b>	<b>29,075</b>	<b>53,440</b>	<b>62,375</b>	<b>57,335</b>	<b>23,825</b>	<b>16,320</b>
Number of children in population (age group)		205,655		241,260	259,355	270,275	244,070	NA
Percentage of children in population (BC Census Profile)		17%		22%	24%	21%	10%	NA

SOURCE: 2001 CENSUS – STATISTICS CANADA

- 1 Applies to children living in the family. Percentages for fully adult children were not calculated
- 2 Totals in total column may not exactly reflect subcategory columns due to rounding of numbers in all categories
- 3 Only *legal* separations and divorces are tracked by Statistics Canada
- 4 Never married consists of people who have never been legally married or persons whose marriages have been annulled and who have not remarried. We are using this as a proxy measure for common-law couples.

Results from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth indicate that an increasing number of children are living in lone parent families *at an increasingly younger age*. (Lone parent families include widowed, divorced, and separated families, and those children born to unmarried mothers.) By the age of 15 years, almost 30% of children within a two parent family during the early 1980s had experienced their parents' separation, 25% of them before the age of 12 years. Children born only five years later, in 1988-89, reached this level (one-quarter with separated parents) three years earlier, at around the age of 9 years. (Department of Justice Canada, 2004:17). The increasing trend of exposure of children to multiple marital dissolutions at an increasingly younger age is a significant one and requires further study.

## Understanding the Metrics of Separation and Divorce: Data Sources

1.	Ambert, Anne-Marie (2002) One Parent Families, Part I: Characteristics and Consequences	
2.	BC Common-law Partnerships by Legal Marital Status	
3.	BC Statistics, 1996 Census Fast Facts	
4.	BC Statistics, 1996 Census Profile: British Columbia	
5.	BC Statistics, 1996 Legal Marital Status by Living Arrangements: Male and Female by 5 Year Age Groups	
6.	BC Statistics, BC Quarterly Population Estimates 1971-2005	
7.	BC Statistics: Children in Census Families in Private Households for Canada, Provinces, Territories and Federal Electoral Districts (2003)	
8.	BC Statistics: Focus on BC Families: Common-law partnership	
9.	BC Stats. 2001 Census Profile: British Columbia	
10.	Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (2006) Child and Spousal Support: Maintenance Enforcement Survey. Statistics, 2004/05	
11.	Child Support Team (Department of Justice, Canada) 2000 Selected Statistics on Canadian Families and Family Law: Second Edition	
12.	Department of Justice Canada. Justice Statistics. Divorce Data 2002	
13.	Department of Justice Canada (2004) When Parents Separate: Further findings from the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth: Research Report (2004-FCY-63)	
14.	Statistics Canada (CANSIMTABLE) Estimates of Population, by marital status, age group and sex, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (Persons) Table 051-0010	
15.	Statistics Canada. Population Estimates: Standard Age Group 1990, 1991, 2001	
16.	Statistics Canada. The Daily <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 4, 2004</li> <li>• March 9, 2005</li> <li>• December 2, 2002</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• September 28, 2000</li> <li>• July 11, 2002</li> </ul>
17.	Statistics Canada: Divorces. 2003 Shelf Tables	

**Part II:**

**Summary of the**

**Impacts and Consequences of Separation and Divorce**

## 4.0 A Summary of the Impacts of Separation and Divorce

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### 4.1 A Historical Perspective

There is no question that dramatically rising rates of separation and divorce in North America is one of the most significant social trends affecting the family and society over the past fifty years.

Divorce used to be considered rare and unacceptable in society up to the early part of the last century but in the United States, between the 1920s and 1990s, the number of women getting married decreased by 20% and the divorce rate increased by 300% (Ham, 2003). Between 1976 and 1996 the rate of divorce increased by 113% (Kelly, 2003).

According to Amato,

*Of all the changes in family life during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, perhaps the most dramatic – and the most far-reaching in its implications – was the increase in the rate of divorce ...*

*Observers have attributed this change to a number of factors, including the increasing economic independence of women, declining earnings among men without college degrees, rising expectations for personal fulfillment from marriage, and greater social acceptance of divorce. Cherlin (1992), Furstenberg (1994) and White (1991) quoted in Amato (2000:1269).*

In 1961, in Canada, the rate of divorce was 36/100,000 (population); by 1987, the peak year for divorces, this had increased to 362.3/100,000, a more than ten-fold increase within 26 years.

Canadian divorce rates have generally decreased since the peak year of 1987; however, since 2002 they have shown slight increases. As the child cohort from the peak divorce years (e.g. 1987) reaches marriage age the divorce rate is expected to rise.

The number of people who have divorced many times is also increasing. In Canada 16% of divorces are estimated to be re-divorces. In the United States 31% of women aged 40-44 were divorcing after a remarriage. Multiple transitions have been shown to have increased negative effects on children.

The number of cohabiting couples in the population is also rising. It is known that, in general, cohabiting couples have a higher rate of partnership dissolution.

*What are the documented personal, family and societal implications of this enormous social change? How and to what degree are children and parents and society at large affected by the negative consequences of marital dissolution?*

One of the most important points to note when considering the impacts of separation and divorce is that social, economic or other impacts are not time restricted but may “roll-out” long after the event has occurred. Specific negative outcomes (such as economic consequences, lower educational attainment, poorer support by divorced parents of their children in the transitional years towards work and a career) may have long lasting effects on future generations.

Another key point is that negative impacts may be affecting children or their parents long *before* the marriage dissolves. The level of parent conflict may already be affecting, for example, the educational achievement of children or the quality of parenting being provided.

This section reviews and summarizes some of the key findings in the literature which affect the interpretation of impacts and consequences of separation and divorce on specific population groups. An overview of the key impacts and consequences is given. This is followed by a summary table of key impacts and consequences by type and population group. This section also describes risk and resilience factors that affect adjustment and the programmatic interventions that may improve outcomes.

## **4.2 An Overview of the Findings on Impacts and Consequences of Separation and Divorce**

There is a very extensive English-speaking literature examining the impact of separation and divorce on children, adults and families. In 2000 Amato identified 9,232 scientific articles published between 1990 and 1999 addressing the topic of divorce.

*The authors of these works represent a variety of disciplines, including developmental psychology, clinical psychology, family therapy, sociology, demography, communication studies, family science, history, economics, social work, public health, social policy and law. The extent and diversity of divorce scholarship pose a sobering challenge to any reviewer attempting to synthesize current knowledge on this topic. (Amato, 2000:70)*

While this section of the report is focused on defining the most significant impacts, the review has been limited to key references and, therefore, may not address all the complexities or subtleties of the literature.

### 4.3 Broad Context of the Research Literature

Two broad themes have influenced the literature on separation and divorce over the past forty years.

1. The context within which research has been carried out and interpreted has often been highly ideological, reflecting differing values and assumptions about the family and the ultimate effects of marital dissolution.
2. Early research looking at the impacts and consequences of divorce was often short-term and simplistic, comparing “cross-sectional” samples or making simple cause and effect calculations without taking into account confounding variables or the pre-disruption characteristics of the family.

Cherlin (1999) and Amato (2001) note that the literature and debates surrounding the impact of marital disruption have frequently been polarized. The sheer size of the changes brought by separation and divorce (in the US at least 50% of children will now spend time in a single parent family) aroused growing concern in the 1970s and 1980s which was reflected in a growing research agenda and literature.

According to Amato the literature has often reflected two views of the family:

- That marriage and a two parent family is the fundamental institution in society and that marital dissolution or the expansion of single parent families contributes to many social and personal problems;
- That some children may be better off if a marriage dissolves, that children *can* develop successfully in a variety of other structures and that “poverty, abuse, neglect, poorly funded schools and a lack of government services” represent more serious threats to the well-being of the family”. (Amato, 2000:1270)

The research that concluded divorce was ultimately destructive (such as the initial study authored by Wallerstein and Blakesee) became interpreted in an ideological context and was used by conservative policy-makers to promote policy to,

*... turn back the “liberal” changes over the prior two decades in state laws, such as no-fault divorce statutes, that were erroneously believed to encourage divorce. Efforts to make divorce more adversarial and difficult to obtain and legislation to promote “covenant” marriages restricting reasons for seeking divorce have been championed in the past decade. (Kelly, 2003:240)*

According to Kelly (2003), however, the early divorce literature, that stressed children’s initial distress, behavioural problems and diminished parenting resulting from divorce, was often restricted because it,

*... used small, non-representative samples of children with widely varying ages and years since divorce, lacked comparison groups of non-divorced families, and did not use standardized, objective and multiple measures of adjustment. (Kelly, 2003:238)*

In the 1980s social scientists from other disciplines began to focus on the impact of divorce on children. Studies became more sophisticated and included longitudinal research. Individual and familial risk and resiliency factors were explored and pre-marital dissolution variables were factored in. Recent research has presented a more complex and variable picture of the consequences of divorce on children and adults.

## 4.4 An Overview of the Impacts of Separation and Divorce

### 4.4.1 General Conclusions of the Literature

There is a strong consensus in the literature that separation and divorce can have profound negative consequences for many children and adults over the short and long term. Researchers suggest that between 20-25% of children may experience negative impacts including problematic behaviour, as a consequence of divorce.\* However, these effects are variable and may be affected by pre-disruption characteristics, as well as individual and family risk and resiliency factors.

Pruett (2003) identifies two factors that negatively affect children of divorce: (1) parental conflict, and (2) destabilized parent-child relationships. The role of parent conflict after separation and lack of cooperation between parents is a constant predictor of poor outcomes among children.

It is also well-established that separation and divorce affects mothers and fathers in ways that have profound and often long-term consequences on their economic well-being, parenting quality and involvement, and mental and physical health.

Section 4.5 summarizes some of the key research findings that affect the interpretation of impacts on families and children while Section 4.6 provides a more concise list of the range of impacts that have been most frequently identified in the literature. When reviewing this table it should be noted that these descriptions do not apply to all family members undergoing separation or dissolution. Even when consequences may be marked both parents and children may have resiliency characteristics that mitigate the effects. As Kelly (2003) notes in relation to children,

*Three decades of US research has confirmed that divorce presents substantial stressors and increased risk of children in their short and long term adjustment in a number of dimensions. This evidence deserves our attention with respect to understanding what aspects of divorce create these risks, and what public policies may be indicated. There is general consensus, as well, that the majority of children and adolescents are not irretrievably harmed by divorce, but are resilient in the face of major changes and losses in their lives. (Kelly, 2003:251)*

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\* Personal communication, Dr. Joan Kelly

#### 4.4.2 The Importance of Considering Pre-Disruption Factors

Marital disruption is not a single, isolated event but is a part of a progressive multi-phase process. Even though families may still be intact during the pre-disruption stage they may already differ substantially from families that *remain* intact. Sun suggests that,

*(Research) clearly demonstrate(s) that both male and female students from pre-disrupted families show signs of maladjustment on every indicator of academic progress, psychological well-being and behaviour problems even after demographic controls are taken into consideration. (Sun, 2001:705)*

It is now understood that, to accurately identify the consequences or impacts of separation and divorce, these pre-disruption characteristics must be fully understood and considered.

#### 4.4.3 Understanding Separation/Divorce as a Crisis Event or Chronic Strain

On question still being addressed in the research literature is whether separation or divorce should be considered as: (1) a temporary crisis to which most individuals eventually adapt, or (2) a source of chronic strain that persists indefinitely. Some studies have found that the initial responses including unhappiness, distress, increased alcohol consumption or health problems generally subside 2-3 years after separation.

However, other literature suggests that long-term dysfunction results from marital disruption. Immediate crises resulting from economic impacts, health problems, re-location of the family, or diminishing contact by the non-custodial father may have long-term, even inter-generational consequences.

*Even in young adulthood, long after the divorce may have occurred, problems in the adjustment of offspring of divorced parents can be seen in their levels of achievement and attainment and the quality of close personal relationships. (Hetherington, 2003:131)*

The degree to which people adapt to the crisis generated by separation or divorce in a short period of time or experience long-term strain is not firmly established in the literature. Kitson (1992 as quoted in Amato, 2000) found that half of her study participants improved over time while one-fourth got worse.

#### 4.4.4 The Impact of Parental Conflict on Child Outcomes

The impacts of marital dissolution are profoundly affected by the level of conflict between the parents prior to and post dissolution. Kelly (1998) notes that,

*Frequent and intense marital conflict, and the child's psychological status at separation, are more important predictors of children's post-divorce adjustment than other variables related to the divorce such as loss of parent, post-divorce conflict and change. (Kelly, 1998:268)*

Pruett et al (2003) notes that the level of parental conflict is also an important predictor of father involvement. When faced with parental conflict fathers may be more likely to withdraw from the situation. Lack of father involvement is associated with the poorer outcomes for children, particularly for children who had positive relationships with the non-residential parent.

*Parental conflict predicts less father involvement, ultimately affecting young children's early socialization and acquisition of necessary life skills. (Pruett et al, 2003:118)*

Interpreting the impact of conflict may be complex. For children living in high conflict families divorce is frequently associated with positive outcomes which continue into young adulthood. Amato (2000) suggests that when marital conflict is low between parents prior to divorce children have *more* adjustment problems post-divorce. For these children divorce may come as an unwelcome shock and lead to the loss of significant resources and support from parents.

For a minority of children parental conflict may continue or intensify following separation and divorce. Children who feel "caught in the middle" of conflicting parents may have more severe adjustment problems after the separation has taken place.

#### 4.4.5 The Impact of Multiple Transitions

Multiple marital transitions are assessed as having significantly more negative impacts on children than being exposed to one marital dissolution. According to Hetherington,

*There is considerable agreement in the research literature in the USA that children in divorced and remarried families are at increased risk for the development of psychological, behavioural, social and academic problems in comparison to those in two-parent, non-divorced families, and that risk is greatest for children who have experienced multiple marital transitions. (Hetherington, 2003:220)*

Canadian data indicates that 16% of all divorces in Canada are re-divorces and that more children are being exposed to marriage dissolutions at earlier ages

#### 4.4.6 Young Children at Risk

There is some evidence in the literature to suggest that children whose parents divorce prior to their child turning age six may be at increased risk. These children appear to show more anxious behaviour, hyperactivity, fighting and oppositional behaviours at later stages in their lives.

This may be related to diminished parenting being provided to children when they are at a vulnerable age. Clarke-Stewart found that separated mothers were more depressed and provided their children with less stimulation than married mothers.

*... children with separated parents preferred more poorly than children in intact families in assessment of cognitive ability at 15 and 24 months, attachment to mother at 24 months, and positive interaction with mother at 15 and 36 months. (Hetherington, 2000:322)*

### 4.5 A Summary of the Key Impacts and Consequences\* of Separation and Divorce

#### 4.5.1 The Economic Impacts of Separation and Divorce

Separation/divorce research is consistent in showing that the economic consequences of divorce are greater for women than for men (Amato, 2000). Using the Canadian Longitudinal Administrative Database (LAD) constructed from tax files, Finnie (1993) looked at mothers' and fathers' income pre and post divorce. Finnie found that mothers' incomes drop roughly one-half and fathers' incomes drop about one-quarter in the first year after divorce. When income-to-needs ratios are measured, there is a smallish decrease in economic well-being for men, versus a drop of over 40% for women.

*... divorce is not only associated with relatively lower levels of well-being for women and their dependent children, but it is also characterized by absolute deprivation; for example, the poverty rate of mother-only families with children is around the 50% mark, versus 10% for two-parent families. Thus, marital splits are associated with (1) large differences in economic well-being between men and women, and (2) low-income levels for women, including a large proportion in poverty, and (3) associated and absolute economic deprivation of children. (Finnie, 1993:207)*

The literature also suggests that divorced women frequently have difficulty purchasing necessary goods and must work longer hours in order to make up economic shortfalls.

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\* See Table 11 for a detailed listing of all the major impacts and consequences.

Separation and divorce may also lead to other economic consequences. Erikson (1999) notes that research participants who were separated or divorced between 1990 and 1994 more frequently claimed long-term work disability in 1995 even after a series of confounding variables were considered.

In a more recent (US) study, Bartfeld (2000) found that custodial mothers and children fare dramatically worse than non-custodial fathers, and that poverty levels would be more severe without access to measures such as child support.

Many mediators of divorce such as the decline in the standard of living of mothers frequently lead to additional outcomes in various domains such as decline in psychological well-being and higher rates of depression. Kelly & Emery (2003) also note that relocation after divorce is common for many custodial parents (typically mothers), and that this may lead to other consequences such as the reducing of contact between children and the non-residential parent or the loss of other supportive relationships.

Early research on the economic impacts of separation and divorce frequently saw “women’s losses as men’s gains”. More recent research has examined the economic interdependence of the parenting couple. The higher the father’s total economic contribution to the household, the more likely it is that he will make gains (of about 10%) in economic well-being after the marriage dissolves. Men who make less of a contribution to the household will suffer more economic losses when the marriage ends. (McManus et al, 2000).

#### **4.5.2 Psychological and Behavioural Consequences of Separation and Divorce**

There is a wealth of literature describing the psychological and behavioural consequences of marital dissolution on both adults and children. It is known that children and adults from divorced families score lower than their counterparts in married-couple families on a variety of indicators of well-being.

Children are often exposed to diminished parenting caused by parental stress (Hetherington, 2003) and this may result in increased aggression and behavioural problems. A proportion of children from divorced families will experience increased levels of worry, depression, anxiety, self-blame and adjustment problems. Acting out, aggressive or externalizing behaviour problems are also well documented.

Divorce is also associated with an increase in anxiety, depression and problems with social relationships. For many of these children problems diminish over time as the family re-establishes itself,

*... on average, children of divorced parents are less socially emotionally and academically well-adjusted than children in non-divorced families (as quoted in Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1999:131).*

Mothers frequently experience distress and increased rates of depression after separation and divorce. Fathers demonstrate poorer mental health and psychological well-being as well as higher rates of depression if they are the non-custodial father.

The initial period following separation is stressful for the vast majority of children and parents although this initial stress reaction normally diminishes over 2-3 years. (Kelly, 2002)

#### **4.5.3 Educational Achievement**

Children who have experienced separation or divorce have lower academic performance levels and may be less likely to attend college. As young adults they may be less well financially supported by parents and, consequently, may be unable to complete higher education which may result in reduced earning capacity. Research has also shown that children in separated or divorced families have poorer school attendance and a higher risk of dropping out of school.

According to Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) many children suffer a drop in school performance and exhibit more negative externalizing behaviours (angry, demanding, non-compliant and anti-social).

#### **4.5.4 Health Effects**

Research suggests that some children in separated or divorced families use drugs, alcohol and tobacco more frequently. They may engage in earlier sexual activity and marry at an earlier age. Women often have higher rates of depression and may use alcohol more frequently. Some data shows that men are at increased risk of mortality in the nine years following divorce. Other researchers note that men who have fewer contacts with their children perceive and experience poorer health. Men also use and abuse alcohol more frequently after divorce.

#### **4.5.5 Loss of Contact with Non-Custodial Parent**

Divorce has a profound effect, in most cases, on the post-divorce non-resident parent-child relationship (usually the father). According to Hetherington (2003), contact between many non-custodial parent and children declines rapidly following divorce. The frequent loss of the non-custodial parent (usually the father) may be a serious psychological blow to children and up to a quarter of fathers may end up by having no contact with their children 2-3 years after divorce. Shapiro (1999) notes that this declining contact may also lead to decreasing economic support of the children.

The child's relationship with the non-custodial parent can have a protective and positive effect, especially if the child has had a positive relationship in the past and the parent is competent and authoritative. However, when there is high spousal conflict after divorce frequent contact with the non-custodial parent may exacerbate the child's adjustment problems.

## **4.6 Impacts and Consequences of Separation and Divorce on Children and Parents: A Summary Table**

Table 10 provides a more detailed description of the impacts and consequences of separation and divorce as identified in a selected review of the literature. The descriptions are referenced with at least one literature source which may be a meta-analysis or survey of the literature. This list is not exhaustive but attempts to identify all key impacts and consequences.

**Table 11: A Summary of the Impacts of Separation and Divorce on Adults and Children as Reported in the Literature**

GROUP AFFECTED	IMPACTS	SELECTED REFERENCES
CHILDREN UNDER SIX YEARS OF AGE	<b>COGNITIVE EFFECTS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive effects and problems (e.g. at 15 months)</li> </ul>	Clarke-Stewart (2000)
	<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL/BEHAVIOURAL</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological problems (in very early childhood parental separation affects girls more emotionally and boys more intellectually)</li> </ul>	Kelly & Emery (2003); Clarke-Stewart (2000)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poorer adjustment</li> </ul>	Howell et al (1997)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower self-esteem</li> </ul>	Howell et al (1997)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental problems (2-3 fold increased risk of problems compared to children of two parent non-divorced families)</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The two year "crisis period" after divorce typically causes reactions such as confusion, sadness, distress and anxiety among young children</li> </ul>	Rogers (2004)
<b>SOCIAL &amp; FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of social ability; less positive interaction with mother (36 months)</li> </ul>	Clarke-Stewart (2000)	
CHILDREN (PRE-ADOLESCENCE)	<b>ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poorer academic performance (may be modest but does not decrease when income status is taken into account)</li> </ul>	Amato survey (2000); Kelly & Emery (2003); Hetherington (2003), Hetherington (1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower educational achievement levels</li> </ul>	Amato (2001); Howell (1997); Kelly (2000); Reifman (meta-analysis 2001); Ambert (2005)
	<b>ECONOMIC IMPACTS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic hardship/decline in standard of living, increased poverty (affecting children)</li> </ul>	Amato (2001), Carlson/Corcoran (2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced access to resources such as sports or lessons that provide meaning to children</li> </ul>	Kelly (2000; 2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease in contact time with father may have economic consequences → lessening of child support payments</li> </ul>	Amato (2001), Carlson/Corcoran (2001)
	<b>FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divorced mothers with custody may be less consistent in discipline</li> </ul>	Referenced in Pett et al (1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separated mothers provide less support and stimulation</li> </ul>	Clarke-Stewart (2000)

GROUP AFFECTED	IMPACTS	SELECTED REFERENCES	
CHILDREN (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More demands and responsibilities (may increase children's competence) *</li> </ul>	Pagani (1998)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diminished parenting (due to economic hardship and emotional distress)</li> </ul>	Hetherington (2003); Kelly (2003); Ambert (2005); Clarke-Stewart (2000)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundamental changes to relationships which need to be negotiated over years</li> </ul>	Ambert (2005)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More negative sibling relationships</li> </ul>	Hetherington (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreasing contact with non-custodial fathers over time. Studies indicate that between 18-25% of children have no contact with their non-custodial fathers 2-3 years after divorce</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003); Hetherington & Kelly (2002); Kelly & Emery (2003) Shapiro (1999)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased negative effects when the father does not reside with the child (especially for children in low conflict marriages)</li> </ul>	Hetherington (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternal strain which results in negative interaction with children and less support</li> </ul>	Shapiro (1999)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decline in quality of relationship with parents (if co-parent relationship does not improve)</li> </ul>	Carlson/Corcoran (2001); Ahrons (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less positive involvement with custodial parent including more anger and more erratic and harsh discipline</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents may be less supportive, more inconsistent, less warm, have fewer rules, dispense harsher discipline (especially true of mothers in high conflict relationships)</li> </ul>	Amato (survey) (2000) Kelly (2000) Noted in Hines (2001)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child may disengage from parents</li> </ul>	Carlson/Corcoran (2001)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After divorce there is no buffering effect provided by the non-residential parent</li> </ul>	Kelly (2000)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daughters may develop closer relationship with custodial mothers*</li> </ul>	Amato (2000)	
	<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL IMPACTS</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of loss and sadness that persist into adulthood</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased level of distress in the initial period after the divorce for a period of 1-2 years (vast majority of children)</li> </ul>	Kelly & Emery (2003)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in worry, distress /anxiety and depression</li> </ul>	Hetherington (1999); Ambert (2005); Government of Canada (2000)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poorer sense of well-being</li> </ul>	Amato (2001)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poorer self concept/ self-esteem</li> </ul>	Amato (survey) (2000); Reifman (meta-analysis:2001)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-traumatic stress disorder (when child has been repeatedly exposed to violence)</li> </ul>	Kelly (2000)		

\* Denotes potentially positive outcome.

GROUP AFFECTED	IMPACTS	SELECTED REFERENCES	
CHILDREN (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High rates of child abuse and sibling violence in high conflict relationship</li> </ul>	Kelly (2000)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher level of emotional malaise post divorce (may be more pronounced in better adjusted children)</li> </ul>	Chase-Lansdale (1995); Amato (2001)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher levels of anxiety and depression prior to the break-up (i.e. psychosocial reserves in children may be diminished prior to break-up)</li> </ul>	Strohschein (2005)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Behavioural problems</li> </ul>	Harland (2002); Carlson/Corcoran (2001); Amato (survey) (2000); Kelly (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher scores on the Behavioural Problems Scale</li> </ul>	Emery, Waldon et al (1999)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in anxiety at age 12 if children experienced divorce before the age of 6</li> </ul>	Pagani (1997)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased fighting and oppositional hyperactivity in children of parents divorced before age 8</li> </ul>	Pagani (1997)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased levels of aggression, conduct disorders, non-compliance, disobedience and decreased self-regulation</li> </ul>	Hetherington (2003); Kelly & Emery (2003); Reifman (meta-analysis: 2001); Ambert (2005); Kelly (2000, 2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-blame leading to depression, externalizing problems and lowered feelings of self-competence</li> </ul>	Hetherington (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delinquent behaviour; impulsivity, disobedience</li> </ul>	Kelly (2000; 2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psychological difficulties and psychological adjustment problems/social problems (20-25% of children from divorced families)</li> </ul>	Amato (survey) 2000; Harland (2002); Hetherington (2003); Reifman (meta-analysis:2001) As quoted in Emery & Kelly (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transfer of negative emotions from mother</li> </ul>	Amato (survey) 2000	
	<b>RESIDENTIAL IMPACTS</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level of relocation especially for low income mothers; downward movement in residence (55% move to less desirable housing) = loss of neighbourhood and social supports</li> </ul>	Kelly & Emery (2003); Kelly (2003)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residential mobility may increase risk to children's well-being and remove contact with important social relationships</li> </ul>	Hetherington & Kelly (2002)		
<b>SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Problems with social relationships</li> </ul>	Hetherington (1999); Kelly (2000)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children may experience changes in other significant (adult and non-adults) relationships after divorce</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003); Kelly & Emery (2003)		

GROUP AFFECTED	IMPACTS	SELECTED REFERENCES
ADOLESCENTS	<b>ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower academic performance and achievement test scores (e.g. children in marital disruption process scored lower in four academic tests and in educational aspiration through 2 pre and 2 post disruption time points)</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003); Reifman (meta-analysis: 2001); Sun (2002); Ambert (2005)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less parental support to complete higher education</li> </ul>	Aquilano (2005); Ross (1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less likely to attend college</li> </ul>	Amato (2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher risk of dropping out of school</li> </ul>	Hetherington (2003, 1999); Kelly (2003); Kelly & Emery (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower grades/poor academic performance</li> </ul>	Ham (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorer school attendance</li> </ul>	Ham (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents less involved in their child's education</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased level of suspensions from school</li> </ul>	Kelly & Emery (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic, psychological and behavioural problems, due primarily to pre-disruption factors</li> </ul>	Sun (2001)
	<b>ECONOMIC IMPACTS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decreasing child support (if non-residential father contact with children decreases)</li> </ul>	Amato (2001); Carlson/Corcoran (2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents less likely to support transition of adolescents to adulthood through financial means</li> </ul>	Aquilano (2005)
	<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL IMPACTS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative effects irrespective of gender</li> </ul>	Reifman (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boys 12-15 in divorced, soon to be remarried families showed increases in delinquency, physical violence (e.g. gang fights) and theft. These reduced to normal levels at age 15.</li> </ul>	Pagani (1998)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Normative developmental tasks delayed (e.g. success at attaining intimate relationships)</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delayed autonomy</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased risk of conduct or oppositional problems</li> </ul>	Fergusson (1994)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower self-esteem</li> </ul>	Reifman (meta-analysis:2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involvement in anti-social peer groups</li> </ul>	Frederick (1998); Kelly (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trouble with the law – delinquency associated with residential separation of child from same-sex parent with whom child has a positive relationship</li> </ul>	Hetherington (2003); Videon (2002)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disobedience, aggression and anti-social behaviour (externalizing behavior)</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher rate of delinquency (both genders)</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003)

GROUP AFFECTED	IMPACTS	SELECTED REFERENCES
ADOLESCENTS (continued)	<b>HEALTH</b>	
	• Increased anxiety/depression	Fergusson (1994)
	• Increased use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco	Kelly (2000; 2003); Fergusson (1994)
	• Earlier sexual activity	Hetherington (2003)
	<b>FAMILY IMPACTS</b>	
	• Earlier marriage (risk factor for later divorce)	Kelly (2000)
	• Poorer relationships with parents and less contact with them	Kelly (2000)
	<b>OTHER IMPACTS</b>	
	• May leave home earlier (as young adults)	Ambert (2005); Hetherington (1999, 2003)
• May find it more difficult to continue with education	Ambert (2005); Frederick & Boyd (1998)	
ADOLESCENT BOYS	<b>ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT</b>	
	• Significant link between family structure transitions and boy's academic achievement	Kelly (2003); Reifman (2001); Sun (2002); Ambert (2005)
	• Less likely to attend college	Wallerstein & Blake (1988); Wallerstein reported as Fabricus (2003)
	• Higher rate of suspension or expulsion from school	Kelly (2000)
	<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL/ BEHAVIOURAL</b>	
	• Adjustment difficulties at remarriage	Hines (1997)
	• Increased externalizing behaviour (e.g. being suspended from school, substance abuse, alcoholism and troubles with the law)	Kelly (2000); Hetherington (2003)
	• Decreased social competence	Hetherington (1999)
	<b>HEALTH</b>	
	• Increased risk of suicide when mediated through other factors (e.g. exposure to parental psychopathology)	Hetherington (1999)
	<b>FAMILY IMPACTS</b>	
	• Decreasing contact with non-resident fathers	Shapiro (1999); Kelly (2003)
	• Boys, 12-15 in soon to be remarried families, less well supervised	Pagani (1998)
	• One-third of boys disengage from family	Hetherington (2003)
	• Negative relationships with father	Dunlop (2001); Reifman (meta-analysis: 2001)
	• Boys more affected by divorce than girls (especially social adjustment and mother-child relations)	Zaslow (1988)
• More contentious relationships with custodial mothers	Kelly & Emery (2003);	

GROUP AFFECTED	IMPACTS	SELECTED REFERENCES
ADOLESCENT GIRLS	<b>FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More likely to have a child out of wedlock</li> </ul>	Ambert (2005); Hetherington (1999); Kelly (2000; 2003)
	<b>HEALTH</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased risk of exposure to sexual abuse by mother's new partners or fathers following separation and divorce</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003)
	<b>ACADEMIC</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affected by lower grades and attendance problems</li> </ul>	Ham (2003)
	<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL/BEHAVIOURAL</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some studies show a greater incidence of behavioural problems for girls. Delinquency is associated with residential separation from the same sex parent who child assesses positively.</li> </ul>	Hetherington (1999); Videon (2002)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased social competence (while positive, this may be coupled with increased depression and poorer self-esteem)</li> </ul>	Hetherington (1999)	
IMPACTS OF DIVORCE ON ADULTS	<b>ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower educational level, less formal education achieved</li> </ul>	Ross (1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less financial support during early adulthood transition (ages 18-33) especially with educational achievement</li> </ul>	Aquilano (2005)
	<b>ECONOMIC IMPACTS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small decrease in income and earnings of men (3%) from divorced families</li> </ul>	Corak (1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower occupational status and accumulated assets</li> </ul>	Quoted in Amato (2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher incidence of unemployment</li> </ul>	Hetherington (1999); Ambert (2005)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower financial achievement</li> </ul>	Hetherington (2003, 1999); Ambert (2005)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower standard of living</li> </ul>	Amato (2000); Kelly (2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rely more frequently on income assistance</li> </ul>	Hetherington (2003, 1999); Corak (1999)
	<b>FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marry at an earlier age</li> </ul>	Corak (1999) Canadian data; Kelly & Emery (2003); Ross (1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased number of marital problems (i.e. lack of trust)</li> </ul>	Amato (2003); Ross (1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher incidence of separation/divorce (especially when linked to multiple marital transitions)</li> </ul>	Kelly & Emery (2003); Statistics Canada; Corak (1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High incidence of marital discord in adult relationship (if parents had marital discord)</li> </ul>	Amato (2001b) as quoted in Richardson (2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorer relationships with fathers</li> </ul>	Ambert (2005)

GROUP AFFECTED	IMPACTS	SELECTED REFERENCES	
<b>ADULTS (continued)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty forming stable and intimate relationships (may apply to children from low conflict marriages who divorce)</li> </ul>	Amato (2003); Kelly & Emery (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower satisfaction with marriage</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weaker or less affectionate ties with parents</li> </ul>	Amato (2003); Kelly (2003); Amato & Sobolewski (2001)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems in relationships with parents or siblings</li> </ul>	Hetherington (1999)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blaming fathers/continuing anger at father</li> </ul>	Laumann-Billings (2000)	
	<b>HEALTH ISSUES</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased health problems (highest level of chronic health concerns and incidence of illness)</li> </ul>	Amato (summary) (2000) Wyket Ford (1992)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased risk of mortality</li> </ul>	Amato (summary) (2000)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of psychosomatic complaints</li> </ul>	Kelly (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher risk of depression</li> </ul>	Amato (summary) (2000); Ross (1999) Kelly (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divorced/widowed spend more time in hospital (may reflect lack of support system)</li> </ul>	Prior (2001)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased use of alcohol and drugs</li> </ul>	Neher & Short in Kelly (2000); Kelly (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health consequences or emotional problems for some adults</li> </ul>	Chase-Lansdale et al (1995); Cherlin (1999)	
	<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL IMPACTS</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower life satisfaction</li> </ul>	Amato (2003, 2000)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More incidence of psychological problems early adulthood to age 33</li> </ul>	Amato (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower happiness/life satisfaction (in young adults: may be accounted for by a drop in the standard of living)</li> </ul>	Amato (summary) (2000); Richardson (2001)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower self-esteem</li> </ul>	Amato (summary) (2000)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social isolation</li> </ul>	Amato (summary) (2000)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More negative events in life</li> </ul>	Amato (summary) (2000)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower level of well-being (international study)</li> </ul>	Amato (2000)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher levels of distrust</li> </ul>	Ross (1999)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistent higher level of distress and sadness in relation to divorce</li> </ul>	Laumann-Billings (2000); Kelly & Emery (2003); Kelly (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher levels of anxiety</li> </ul>	Richardson (2001)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased psychological distress (self-esteem, distress) or poor self-concept</li> </ul>	Amato & Sobolewski (2001) As quoted in Richardson 92002)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher levels of autonomy and personal growth (often coupled with increased depression)* *</li> </ul>	Kitson et al reported in Amato (2000) *	

\* \* Some aspects may have positive consequences.

GROUP AFFECTED	IMPACTS	SELECTED REFERENCES
	<b>POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offspring may develop close relationships with mother</li> </ul>	Amato (summary) (2000)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children in high-conflict families are better off psychologically *</li> </ul>	Amato (summary) (2000)
	<b>ECONOMIC IMPACTS *</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decreased financial status/power/income (e.g mothers and children experience median losses of 35-45% of needs adjusted income during first year after separation)</li> </ul>	Clark-Stewart (2000); Amato (2000); Bartfeld (2000); Ambert (2005)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drops in income for women are long lasting (e.g. at three years women's income remains far below previous income)</li> </ul>	Ambert (2005)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steep decline in economic well-being for women</li> </ul>	Finnie (1993)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drop in income to needs ratio for women by 40%</li> </ul>	Finnie (1993)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More hours of work required to replace income (may result in diminished parenting)</li> </ul>	Clarke-Stewart (2000)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved career opportunities, social life and happiness (this may quality of parenting)</li> </ul>	Clarke-Stewart (2000); Kitson et al. as quoted in Amato (2000)
	<b>HEALTH</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher levels of depression, distress, lack of control, loneliness</li> </ul>	Clarke-Stewart (2000); Ambert (2005)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorer sense of well-being</li> </ul>	Carlson/Corcoran (2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased distress (anticipatory and post separation). Increased stress coupled with decline in parental responsibilities may be long lasting</li> </ul>	Carlson/Corcoran (2001); Hope (1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in alcohol abuse, depression and anxiety</li> </ul>	Richards (1997)
	<b>RESIDENCE</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The majority of women relocate; 55% move to less desirable dwelling in poorer neighbourhoods (with poorer schools). Thirty percent of custodial parents moved out of one study area within 2 years after separation. Women moved an average of four times in the first 6 years</li> </ul>	Referenced in Kelly (2003); Kelly & Emery (2003)
	<b>CHILD-REARING</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mothers may be less able to provide stimulating and supportive home environment to children</li> </ul>	Clark-Stewart (2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of social support while raising a family</li> </ul>	Ambert (2005)
<b>FATHERS</b>	<b>ECONOMIC IMPACTS</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decreased income</li> </ul>	Henman/Mitchell (2001)

\* Socio-economic status is associated with psychological well-being.

GROUP AFFECTED	IMPACTS	SELECTED REFERENCES	
FATHERS continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate increases in economic well-being in some situations</li> </ul>	Finnie (1993)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slower economic recovery</li> </ul>	Finnie (2003)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decreased household income for men where mother's income had made a significant contribution. Fathers that contributed 80% were better off after separation</li> </ul>	McManus (2001)	
	<b>HEALTH</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poorer mental health and psychological well-being. Increased likelihood of mental illness and/or maladaptive coping methods</li> </ul>	Quoted in Spillman (2004)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased alcohol abuse</li> </ul>	Ambert (2005)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased risk of mortality (total and cardiovascular) during nine years post-divorce follow-up</li> </ul>	Matthews (2002)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased physical health problems</li> </ul>	Grill (2001)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased risk of mental health problems</li> </ul>	Richards (1997)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher rates of depression especially if non- resident father</li> </ul>	Shapiro (1999)	
	<b>FAMILY</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of perceived sense of control over child's life</li> </ul>	Shapiro (1999)	

## 4.7 Can the Impacts of Separation and Divorce be Applied to General or Specific Populations?

To what degree do the specific impacts of separation and divorce affect society as a whole or specific populations, for example, the youth criminal justice population (through increased juvenile crime), schools (through decreased academic performance, distress or the acting out behaviour of children), or the health system (through poorer health, increased substance abuse or increased rates of depression)? Although research on these types of interrelationships would help address questions related to the scope and impact of separation and divorce the application of these data to population groups as a whole has not been done.

There is consensus in the literature that separation and divorce does not affect all adults or children to the same degree. Research suggests that some children (around 10%) from intact families have serious social problems compared to 25% of the children from divorced families. However, negative impacts can vary widely depending on the pre-existing characteristics of the family. Without taking into account these variables, which vary from family to family, the impact of separation and divorce is difficult to establish.

The *degree* to which children or adults are negatively affected by separation and divorce is often counterbalanced by personal and protective resiliency factors. Many resiliency factors have been identified in the literature. They include:

- The level of an individual's coping skills;
- The level of an individual's social support;
- Access to therapeutic or program support (e.g. school support);
- The child having a positive relationship with one parent;
- The quality of information given to families;
- Children living in the custody of a competent, adequately functioning, actively involved and authoritative parent;
- Timely and appropriate parenting by the non-custodial residential parent (especially where there is low inter-parental conflict);
- The level of psychological adjustment of the custodial parent (post divorce);
- Low parental conflict (post divorce). (Studies indicate that between 8-12% of parents continue to have high conflict 2-3 years after divorce);
- Involvement of children in decision-making around arrangement arising from the separation.

Factors such as the socio-economic status of the family, gender and age of children, and symptoms of psychopathology of the mother were found to affect the impacts of separation and divorce on children.

Amato (2000) identifies some of the protective factors for adults that assist adults in improved adjustment post-divorce:

- The level of education of the parent;
- The employment status of parent;
- The degree of support from family and friends (although this was not a uniformly positive factor);
- Support from a new partner;
- Remarriage (usually also leads to an improvement in the standard of living);
- Standard of living/wealth;
- The adult's sense of well-being prior to divorce;
- How the adult cognitively appraises the divorce (people who believe marriage is a lifelong commitment tend to be more distressed);
- Being the divorce initiator (initiators tend to experience less distress).

Because the interrelationships between protective and risk factors cannot be clearly established, it is impossible to accurately identify the impacts and costs of separation and divorce on society as a whole.

However, the potential for these impacts cannot be dismissed. Even if only one-quarter of all children were seriously harmed by separation and divorce these would result in tens of thousands of children in B.C. suffering effects which would inevitably result in impacts on schools, the community at large, the criminal justice system, income support and the health care systems. While not quantifiable at this point of time, there is no doubt that the effects of separation and divorce result in real costs to society and specific components within it.

#### **4.8 Programmatic Interventions that Ameliorate the Negative Impacts of Separation and Divorce**

There is an extensive literature identifying programmatic interventions that can ameliorate the effects of separation and divorce on children and adults. Some of these key programmatic interventions are:

- Inclusion of a grief model in educational or post-adjustment divorce programs. (Spillman (2004) indicates that working with those fathers from a grief counselling perspective is often more beneficial to all parties involved than the legal and litigious methods currently being used).
- Programs or approaches that more fully inform children about separation and divorce. This may be through the direct inclusion of children in decision-making proceedings as well as through increased parent education that would help them involve children more effectively. (Kelly & Emery describe a survey by Dunn et al (2001) which indicates that only 5% of children had been fully informed and encouraged to ask questions about the separation and divorce; 23% of the children said that no-one had told them anything).

- Programmatic interventions that seek to reduce or eliminate parental conflict and improve parent communication and contact. Continuing parental conflict is a predictor of negative outcomes for children.
- Interventions that would encourage authoritative and competent parenting through the pre and post divorce period. Parents often provide diminished parenting while experiencing their own distress.
- System interventions that would enhance the post-divorce economic stability of the family through income support or related programs. Women are economically disadvantaged by separation and divorce and this may have negative consequences for children.
- Preventative interventions to help maintain non-residential parent involvement with children.

Included in the range of current programmatic interventions that strive towards some of these ends are parent education programs, children of divorce programs, divorce mediation, collaborative lawyering, judicial settlement conferences, parenting coordination or arbitration programs for chronically litigating parents and family and group therapy for litigating parents.

The potential benefits of mediation are substantial and show reduced parent conflict, improved parental communication and improved parent-child relationships. While mediation assists in reducing parental conflict and improving communication between parents, it may not directly improve the psychological impacts of divorce on children,

*... although divorce mediation in comparison to litigation encourages initial settlements, reduces conflict and re-litigation, and increases father involvement in child-rearing, it has not been found to promote the mental health of children or parents. (Emery (then in press.) quoted in Hetherington, 1999:137)*

According to Kelly quoted in Kelly and Emery (2002) divorce education programs that are research-based and that promote skill development show more promise in educating parents than those that are didactic or effort based.

Hetherington (2003) notes that children and adults from divorced families are two to three times as likely to receive psychological treatment and that many children are exposed to school-based educational and therapeutic activities. She states, however, that “child interventions for divorce produce effect sizes considerably smaller than those found for psychotherapy in general.” Studies that show improvement in child adjustment find that they are mediated by parental competence and the quality of the parental child relationships. She concludes that more systematic investigations of programmatic interventions are required.

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