Abstract

This study investigates if a divorce affects the attitudes and trust between parents and adolescents. Participants were 986 adolescents and their parents, taken from a Swedish longitudinal study, the “10 to 18” study. This study used 28 measures of parent-adolescent relationships, which created three areas: warmth, closeness and conflicts between parents and adolescents. The adolescents were divided into three groups, and one-way ANOVAs were made to test differences. The results showed that a divorce affects the father-adolescent relationship more than the mother-adolescent relationship. They also showed that the attitudes and the trust between parents and adolescents were affected by a divorce.

Key words: divorce, parent-adolescent relationships, attitudes, trust

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RELATIONEN MELLAN FÖRÄLDRAR OCH UNGDOMAR EFTER EN SKILSMÄSSA

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Sammanfattning


Nyckelord: Skilsmässa, föräldra- och ungdoms relation, attityder, tillit.

Today, divorce is a common incident that a lot of adolescents experience every year. In 2004, about 50,000 adolescents in Sweden experienced a divorce (Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB, 2004). A divorce is a difficult process for all involved and it might affect the adolescent in different ways. Earlier studies have shown that a divorce can lead to a lot of problems for the adolescent. Examples are criminality and aggressive behavior, distressing feelings and low self-esteem (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000; Booth & Amato, 2001; Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz & Miller, 2000; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Sun, 2001; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). Some studies have also focused on the parent’s economic situation after a divorce. A divorce can put parents in a bad economic situation, which through stress and lack of time for parent-adolescent interactions affects the adolescent in a negative way (Entwisle & Alexander, 1995; Sun & Li, 2001; Sun & Li, 2002). Few studies have focused on how the parent-adolescent relationship is affected by a divorce. If a divorce can affect previously mentioned areas in the adolescent’s life, it is likely that also the parent-adolescent relationship might be affected. The relationship with the parents is important for the adolescent, and that is why it is interesting to study this relationship before and after a divorce. If one is going to study how divorce can affect this relationship, though, one must first be aware of the natural changes in this relationship.

To have a person that one can trust and confide in could be a key to good health. Parents are very important for the young child, and they often have this confiding role for the child. It is a natural process that parents’ involvement in the child’s life decreases over time from early childhood to late adolescence, as the adolescent’s autonomy gradually increases. Still, there are situations and domains where parents are the most important persons in the adolescent’s life into emergent adulthood. Some situations can make the adolescent turn to the parents for help and support, and other situations can have the opposite effect. For example, if it is a lot of stressors, parents can be a great support for the adolescent. Stressors can in other situations make the adolescent turn away from the parents; a divorce for example may have this effect. Many things can affect adolescent’s trust in their parents; parents’ splitting up is one example (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). These emotional relationships after the divorce are still much unknown in research on divorce. It is possible that a divorce can affect both the parent’s attitudes towards the adolescent as well as the adolescent towards his or her parents, and can affect the adolescent’s trust in the parents in different ways. Therefore, it is surprising that so few researchers have studied how the emotional bounds change as a consequence from a divorce, in view of the fact that it is important for the adolescent to have a good relationship with their parents. I only found one scholar that mentioned this. Hetherington and Kelly (2002) showed that the parental affection and positive involvement in the adolescent were reduced by a divorce. Their study, however, focused only on the changes in parents’ attitudes towards the adolescent and not on the changes in the adolescent’s attitudes. For this reason it is interesting to include both parents’ and adolescents’ attitudes and investigate how they are affected by a divorce. Hetherington and Kelly also showed that adolescents tended to have less trust in their parents after a divorce. Trust has different areas, the adolescent’s confide in the parents is one example. Which person the adolescent turns to and confides in are topics that are still much unknown. To understand how the parent-adolescent relationship is affected by a divorce, this topic needs more research.

If one looks at a divorce as a process, one can see that it affects involved persons before, through and after. Parent-adolescent relationship can be affected to the worse and to the better. Adolescents from extra-marital relationships are one example of circumstances before the divorce that can affect the parent-adolescent relationship (Amato, Spencer-Loomis & Booth, 1995; Booth & Amato, 2001; Seltzer, 1991; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). This
could eventually affect the father-adolescent relationship more than the mother-adolescent relationship. Fathers who have adolescents outside a marriage have been found to be less involved with their adolescent after the divorce, for example paying support, visiting and decision-making, than those who have adolescents born within marriage (Seltzer, 1991). There are probably many more things before the divorce that could affect the parent-adolescent relationship thereafter. The attitudes and confidence between the parents and the adolescent can be such things. Overall, more research is needed to understand the factors that affect the parent-adolescent relationship.

Parents splitting up can lead to a lot of conflicts in the family, which is painful for all family members (Amato et al., 1995; Booth & Amato, 2001; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). Conflicts make the adolescent and the parents less close to each other. If there is also a divorce, the relationship can be even worse. It is likely that the parent-adolescent relationship is affected if there are a lot of conflicts in the parents’ marriage. The conflicts between parents can be a way for the parents to get rid of their feelings. But marital conflicts often put the adolescent in a difficult situation, because the adolescent might be forced to choose between the parents. Parents’ splitting up leads to a single parent family, and hypothetically, parents in single-parents families have less time with their adolescents than do parents in two-parents families. A single parent has to work more to be able to handle the economic situation by him or her self. The less time spent with the adolescent, and the marital conflicts between the parents, can lead to less parent support for the adolescent. This might be damaging both for the adolescent and his or her relationship with the parent.

There are also circumstances after the divorce that can affect the parent-adolescent relationship. Family structure is one example of this. It is commonly assumed that the adolescent is better off if both parents are available. In that way, both relationships can continue to develop. In sole custody, the adolescent will have only one parent to get support and help from. The non-custodial parent might spend less time with the adolescent, and this may affect their relationship. There are few studies however, which have investigated how custody arrangement is affecting the relationship between the present parent and the adolescent. Therefore it is interesting to involve both parents when studying the relationships after a divorce. It is likely that also the relationship between the present parent and the adolescent is affected from a divorce. In joint custody the adolescent have the opportunity to see both parents and also have the chance to continue to build those two important relationships. But one should also be conscious of the fact that in some cases, a sole custody is the best alternative for the adolescent. For example, if there are a lot of stressors for the adolescent to live in a joint custody, sole custody could be a better alternative.

Mother and father’s role for the child have historically been viewed differently. Sigmund Freud and Margaret Mahler (according to Hwang, 2000) placed the mother’s role in focus. Freud believed that the relationship between the mother and the child was the most important relationship. Mahler also thought that this relationship was important. According to Mahler, the child and his or her mother create a symbiosis, and this relationship helps the child later in life. The fathers’ role was not studied as much then. In fact, the father’s role began to be in the focus for investigation first in the later parts of the 20th century. In 1970 there were only a few studies that investigated father’s role in the child’s and the adolescent’s life (Hwang, 2000). Nowadays the fathers’ role is well studied and the results shows that fathers indeed are very important for the child and also the adolescent (Amato, 1993; Daniels, 1998; Golombok, Tasker & Murray, 1997; Goulter & Minninger, 1994; Hwang, 2000). It is more common with maternal custody than paternal custody, and in many cases of maternal custody, the father will become more or less absent (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Seltzer,
That means that many adolescents lose their father as a result of a divorce. Examine some statistics concerning children in ages 1-17, of custody arrangements after a divorce; in 2004, there were more common with joint custody than sole custody. 90% of children that had been experienced a divorce was living in a sole custody. Of the remaining number, 9% consisted of maternal custody and 1% of paternal custody (SCB, 2004). Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000) showed that a divorce could affect the adolescent’s attitudes to the father, and that the adolescent is more likely to blame the absent parent for the trouble in the family.

In earlier studies, the focus has been on the relationship between the absent parent and the adolescent (Coley, 1998; Lindner-Gunnowe & Braver, 2001; Mott, Kowaleski-Jones & Menaghan, 1997; Peretti & Di Vitorrio, 1993). Very few studies have investigated how a divorce affects the relationship between the adolescent and the present parent. This will be in focus in the present study. Focus in previous studies has also been on the time parents spend with the adolescent, not on the emotional relationship. Definition of a good emotional relationship in this study is: two or more persons that love each other and that are showing warmth and trust towards each other. Warmth can be explained as talking and behaving nice to the other person. The emotional relationship is therefore interesting to investigate, and will therefore be in focus in the present study.

This short review shows that research on parent-adolescent relationship before and after a divorce still is limited. Research on divorce has mainly dealt with two issues: (a) how different circumstances around the divorce affect the parent-adolescent relationship after the divorce, and (b) how the relationship between the absent parent and the adolescent looks like after the divorce. To my knowledge, only one study has looked at the emotional relationship, and how a divorce can affect the emotional bonds between the parents and the adolescent. That is the study by Hetherington and Kelly, 2002. This is surprising in view of the high number of divorces in Sweden and in other Western countries.

The present study

It seems like it is a big knowledge gap on this issue and questions like, how a divorce affects the emotional bond between the parents and the adolescent, does the warmth between the parents and the adolescent change after a divorce, and does the adolescent have the same trust in their parents after a divorce, are still much unanswered. This study aim to bring some clarity into this. The area, which this study will investigate, is how a divorce affects the emotional bond between parents and adolescents. It is possible that the parents-adolescent relationship can change in time (before and after a divorce). Therefore it is important to follow subjects from the time that they lived together with two parents and over the time when there has been a divorce. This study has the possibility to follow the participants before and after a divorce occurred.

The study has three focuses for investigation. First, to investigate if the attitudes between parents and adolescents change after a divorce. Second, to examine if the adolescent’s trust in the parents decreases as a result from the divorce. Third, to investigate time as a possible factor for changes in the relationships after the divorce.
Method

Participants

Participants were taken from the Swedish longitudinal study, the “10 to 18” study, at the Center for Developmental Research, at Örebro University. All the participants came from a middle sized town in Sweden. Data were used from years 2002 and 2004. At the first occasion in 2002, the subjects were 13 to 16 years old. There were totally 1430 adolescents registered at the schools and data were collected 1228 of them (86%). At the second data collection, two years later, the subjects were 15 to 18 years old. At that time, there were 1495 adolescents registered at the schools. Data were collected for 1219 subjects (82%). In this study we make use of data for the 986 subjects who had data both in 2002 and 2004. Of them, 473 were boys and 513 were girls.

Also the adolescents’ parents participated. It was decided that parents should report only one of their children, even if they had many. In 2002, there were totally 1430 families and of them data for individual children were collected for 934 (65%). At the second data collection only parents with children in grade 9 in the comprehensive school and the parents of children in the first class of the gymnasium responded to mailed questionnaires. There were totally 780 parents of the 15 and 16 year old children, and 474 (61%) responded the mailed questionnaire. Note that the figures 65 and 61% are an underestimation of responding parents, since the parents responded only on one child per family. Taking into account that many families had many children, the actual response rates were 75 and 73%.

Procedure

The same participants were studied at two time points in time, the first point in time in 2002 and the second in 2004. The first time point represents the first year in the “10 to 18” study, and the second time point took place two years later. The adolescents were divided in three groups:

(A) adolescents who were living with both their parents at both time points in time,

(B) adolescents who experienced a divorce between time point one and time point two, and

(C) adolescents who at the first time point already had been through a divorce.

Group A consisted of 548 adolescents, of them, 257 were boys and 291 were girls. Group B had 49 adolescents, 29 boys and 20 girls. And group C had 389 adolescents, and of them, 187 were boys and 202 were girls. All measures used were standardized by age, to avoid possible biases concerning age differences.

Measures

In the “10 to 18” study, all the participants were given different questions about their relationships to each other. Three main areas of parent-adolescent relationships were studied,
these were created with thoughts about the questions for this study: warmth, closeness and conflicts.

*Warmth.* The area warmth consisted of both parents and adolescent feelings and thoughts about each other: how nice the other person was perceived, both in words and behaviour. Three measures created this area, these were: adolescent’s judgments about (1) mother and (2) father’s warmth, and (3) the parents’ judgments about the adolescents’ warmth towards them.

The first measure concerned the adolescents’ thoughts about their mothers. The adolescents answered six statements about their mother’s warmth towards them. Example of the statements are: (a) shows that he/she cares for me with words and gestures, (b) do small things that makes you feel special (e.g. blink, smile), (c) praise you for no special reason, and (d) constantly shows how proud she/he is of you. They responded on Likert scales with three reply alternatives: (1) never, (2) sometimes and (3) most often. The alpha reliability of mother’s warmth to the adolescent at the first time point was .81 and at second time point .85.

The second measure concerned the father’s warmth towards the adolescent. The adolescents were given six statements to answer, concerning the perceived warmth from their fathers. Both the answer alternatives and the statements were similar to those for the mother’s warmth. Father’s warmth to the adolescent at the first time point had an alpha reliability of .84 and at the second time point .86.

The third measure in the warmth area concerned the parents’ perceptions about the adolescent’s warmth towards them. The parents answered four statements, which concerned how nice the adolescent was perceived. The four statements were: (a) often says or does something nice without an obvious reason, (b) does small things to show tenderness (e.g. hugs, smiles), (c) says that he/she is proud of us parents, and (d) shows that he/she likes us parents without a reason, almost irrespective of what we do. They had four reply alternatives: (1) does not apply at all, (2) does not apply well, (3) applies fairly well, and (4) applies exactly. The alpha reliability for the adolescent’s warmth to the parents at the first time point was .77 and at the second time point .80.

*Closeness.* This area refers to the closeness between the parents and the adolescent. It concerned both inner thoughts and more daily events. It dealt with how much trust one has in the other person and how much one chooses to tell that person. Five measures created this area and they were about: (1) how much the adolescent shared inner thoughts with parents, (2) how much the adolescent told things at home, and shared things with the (3) mother, the (4) father, and (5) the parents judgments about how much their adolescent told them things.

The first measure dealt with the adolescent’s inner thoughts and feelings. The adolescents responded to six questions, for example: (a) do you tell your mother or father how you really feel within?, (b) if you are worried about something, do you talk to any of your parent’s about it?, (c) do you talk with your mother or father about personal things (e.g. boyfriend or girlfriend)?, and (d) can you talk as freely with your parents as with your friends about most things? Here, they also got five reply alternatives and they were: (1) yes, absolutely, (2) yes, pretty much, (3) it depends, (4) only partly, and (5) no, not at all. The alpha reliability for the adolescent’s sharing inner thoughts and feelings with the parents was .85 at the first time point and .82 at the second time point.

The second measure dealt with how many other things the adolescent chooses to tell the parents. The participants answered five questions, and examples are: (a) do you tell, at home, how you are doing in the different classes in school?, (b) do you have a lot of secrets from your parents about what you do on your spare time?, (c) do you hide a lot from your parents about what you do during nights and weekends?, and (d) how often do you usual want
to tell your parents about school (how you are doing in different subjects, the relationship with teachers, etc.). They replied on scale with five answer options (depending on the question): (1) tell almost everything / very much / very often, (2) quite a lot / quite much / quite often, (3) partly / some / a part / now and then, (4) keeps a lot to myself / only a little / just a little / seldom, and (5) keeps almost everything to myself / not at all / almost never. For the measure of how much the adolescent tells things to the parents, the alpha reliability was .77 at the first time point and .74 at the second time point.

The third measure had the mother in focus. The adolescents answered five statements, which dealt with how much the adolescent’s shared things specifically with their mothers. Example of the statements are: (a) I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feeling with my mother, (b) I feel that I can try new things, because my mother supports me, (c) when I am angry or sad, my mother can make me feel better, and (d) I know that my mother is there when I need her. They responded on a scale ranging from one to seven, where one was disagree strongly and seven was agree strongly. The alpha reliability on how much the adolescent share things with the mother, was .86 at the first time point and .88 at the second.

The same measure was also answered using the Father as a target. The questions and the response alternatives were identical to the Mother scale reported above. The alpha reliability on how much the adolescent shares things with the father was .90 at the first time point and .90 at the second.

The last measure, answered by the parents, concerned how much the adolescent disclosed things to their parents. Parents answered five questions, example of these are: (a) does the child keep a lot secret about what happens on the free time? (b) do you think that the child hides a lot about what he/she does on evenings and weekends? (c) does the child usually want to tell about how it is going in school (how he/she is doing in different subjects, relations with teacher, etc.)? and (d) when the child has been out one night, does he/she want to tell what he/she has experienced? There were five reply alternatives for each question. These were different depending on the questions: (1) very much / yes, always, (2) quite much / quite often / yes, most of the time, (3) some / yes, sometimes, (4) just a little / no, seldom, (5) not at all / no, never. Parents’ judgments about how much the adolescent was telling them things had an alpha reliability on .81 at the first time point and .78 at the second.

Conflicts. Here, measures that tapped the parent’s behavior during a conflict with the adolescent were used. The focus was to investigate how parents chose to handle a conflict with the adolescent. Six measures created this area and they were: if the mother (1) talked, (2) yelled or (3) ignored the adolescent during a conflict and if the father (4) talked, (5) yelled or (6) ignored the adolescent during a conflict.

Three typical ways of handling a conflict was measured for each parent figure: Attempted understanding, Angry outbursts and Cold and silence. The reply alternatives for each question were: (1) never, (2) sometimes, and (3) most often.

The first measure dealt with if the mother attempted to talk to the adolescent during a conflict. Here, the adolescent answered whether their mother after the adolescent had done something against parents wishes: (a) talks to you at once, (b) honestly, wants to understand why you did what you did, (c) tries to understand how you thought and felt, and (d) tries to talk to through it without creating new conflicts. The alpha reliability the mother’s attempted understanding was .71 at the first and .77 at the second time point.

The second measure dealt with if the mother was yelling at the adolescent during a conflict. The adolescents were asked if their mother after a conflict: (a) became very angry and have an outburst, (b) had outbursts of anger and told you off, (c) had a hard time controlling their irritation, and (d) quarrelled and complained loudly. This measure had an
alpha reliability of .87 the first time point and .91 the second.

The third measure concerned if the mother tended to ignore the adolescent during a conflict. Here, the adolescents were asked if their mothers: (a) doesn’t talk to you until after a long while, (b) is silent and cold towards you, (c) does not listen to your point of view or ideas, and (d) avoids you. The alpha reliability was .76 at the first time and .82 at the second.

The same questions and response alternatives as for the mother were used to measure father’s attempted understanding, angry outbursts, and cold silence. The alpha reliability for father’s attempted understanding was .76 at the first time point and .78 at the second. The alpha reliability for father’s angry outbursts was .87 the first time point and .90 at the second. Finally, the alpha reliability for father’s cold silence was .76 the first time point and .82 the second.

Analyses

A series of one-way ANOVAs were performed to differentiate between the three groups. Contrast test were performed on every effect which had a significant result on p<.10 or smaller in Tables 1 and 2. This is because of the few participants in group C, and will hopefully decrease possible type two errors. Finally, there were five variable from each time points tested in the contrast test. Contrast test were calculated for each of the comparisons, differentiating first between participants in groups A and C, and subsequently between participants in the groups A and B.

Results

The parent-adolescent relationship

An ANOVA showed significant differences for five measures in the areas warmth, closeness and conflicts at the first time point and two at the second. The results, testing if there were differences between the three groups, are shown in Tables 1 and 2 (closer results between which groups the differences are, is shown in Table 3 and 4). Four of the significant differences at the first time point concerned the father-adolescent relationship. The groups differed on: the father’s warmth to the adolescent, (F = 10.78, p < .01) if the father talked with the adolescent during conflict (F = 6.50, p < .01) and if the father ignored the adolescent during a conflict (F = 3.33, p < .05). How much the adolescent share things with the father differed at both time point one (F = 21.84, p < .01) and time point two (F = 9.09, p < .01.). The other significant differences at the first and the second time point concerned how much the adolescent shared things with both parents. No significant differences were found in the relationship between the mother and the adolescent. Focus will therefore be on the father-adolescent relationship, but the mother-adolescent relationship will be discussed later.
Table 1

Testing differences in warmth, closeness, and conflicts between the three groups at the first
time point

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>η</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s warmth to the adolescent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s warmth to the adolescent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother talks with the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother yells at the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother ignores the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father talks with the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father yells at the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father ignores the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent’s warmth to the parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>.499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent share inner thoughts with the parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent tell things to the parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents judgments about the adolescent telling them things</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent share things with the mother</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>.276</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescent share things with the father</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21.84</td>
<td>15.43</td>
<td>.000</td>
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</table>
Table 2

Testing of differences in warmth, closeness, and conflicts between the three groups at the second time point

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Source</th>
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<th>η</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s warmth to the adolescent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s warmth to the adolescent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.078</td>
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<td>Mother talks with the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother yells at the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother ignores the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>.742</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.063</td>
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<td>Father yells at the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>.409</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father ignores the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent’s warmth to the parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.169</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescent share inner thoughts with the parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>.902</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolescent tell things to the parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents judgments about the adolescent telling them things</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent share things with the mother</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.216</td>
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<td>Adolescent share things with the father</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.09</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>.000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The contrast tests showed that the father-adolescent relationship was the area that differed mostly between the three groups at both time points. At the first time point, group C was the only group that had been through a divorce. Comparing group A with the other groups, one can see that the strongest differences are between groups A and C, (that is to say, between the divorced and the group of youths in intact families). Adolescents who lived with both their parents thought that their fathers showed more warmth (M = 0.11) compared with those who been through a divorce (M = -0.15). Also how much the adolescent shared things with the father, adolescents in intact families shared more things with their fathers (M = 0.14) than did their divorced peers (M = -0.27). Father’s who were going to divorce between time point one and time point two were those who talked most with their adolescent during a conflict (M = 0.13). The significant difference on this measure, however, was between those fathers who had been through a divorce (M = -0.11) and those who had not (M = 0.08). Adolescents from intact families were telling more things to their parents (M = 0.09) than those who came from divorced families (M = -0.07). Adolescents from divorced families thought that their fathers were ignoring them during a conflict in higher extent (M = 0.08) than adolescents in intact families (M = -0.06).

### Table 3

Significant mean differences between the three groups, at the first point in time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Groups A</th>
<th></th>
<th>Groups B</th>
<th></th>
<th>Groups C</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s warmth to the adolescent</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father talks with the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent tell things to the parents</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent share things with the father</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father ignores the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High mean values on one variable represent a high value on what the variable is measuring.

Note. In this table *a* stands for a significant difference between group A and C.
Second time point

At the second time point, adolescents from both group B and group C had been through a divorce. The contrast tests showed that four significant differences between the groups were similar at time point one and time point two. The fifth significant difference between the groups at the second time point was about the parents’ judgments about how much things the adolescent told them. Almost all means on the variables have been lowered from time point one to time point two (see Tables 3 and 4). This means that fathers showed less warmth to the adolescent, talked less with the adolescent during a conflict and the adolescent told less things to both parents at the second time point, in all groups.

If one continues to compare group A with the two other groups, there are similar results as those from the first time point. As reported in Table 4 the strongest differences are between group A and C. The only significant difference between group A and group B was on how much parents thought that their adolescents were sharing things with them. Parents who hadn’t been through a divorce thought that their adolescent was telling them more things (M = 0.04), compared with the groups that had divorced recently (M = -0.36). The other four variables showed stronger and significant differences between the intact families and those who had been divorced for longest time (A and C). Adolescents who had been through a divorce valued less warmth from the father (M = -0.11) than those from intact families (M = 0.04). This result continued to the other variables. Divorced fathers talked less to their adolescents during a conflict (M = -0.09) than the not divorced fathers (M = 0.06) and adolescents from divorced families told less things to both parents (M = -0.07) than those from intact families (M = 0.06). Adolescents from divorced families also shared fewer things specifically with fathers (M = -0.20), compared with those adolescents who live with both their parents (M = 0.09).
Table 4

Significant mean differences between the three groups, at the second point in time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s warmth to the adolescent</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>509</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-0.11(^a)</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father talks with the adolescent during a conflict</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>501</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-0.09(^a)</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent tell things to the parents</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>532</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-0.07(^a)</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent share things with the father</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>524</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-0.20(^a)</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents judgments about the adolescent telling them things</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>228</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-0.01(^b)</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High mean values on one variable represent a high value on what the variable is measuring.

Note. In this table \(^a\) stands for a significant difference between group A and C, and \(^b\) stand for a significant difference between group A and B.

**Effects in time**

Time could have a role in the result of fathers’ warmth to the adolescent, which increased over time. These results are shown in Table 1 and 2. Adolescents in the group that had divorced parents at the first time point thought that their father showed them more warmth at the second time point (M = -0.11) than at the first time point (M = -0.15). The group of adolescents that experienced a divorced between the two time points thought that their father showed them more warmth at the first time point (M = 0.05) than at the second (M = 0.00). This result shows that the father’s warmth can increase a time after the divorce. How much the adolescent share things with both parents had the opposite direction. The adolescent shared fewer things with the parents at the second time point than at the first. All means on the variables, which concerns adolescents in intact families, decreased from time point one to time point two.
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate some unanswered questions about how the relationship between parents and adolescents change as a function of a divorce. The results show both new findings and some results that support earlier studies. Three main findings add new knowledge to research on divorce. First, the results showed that both the attitudes, like warmth for example, and the trust were affected by a divorce. Second, they showed that the father-adolescent relationship was changing more from a divorce than the mother-adolescent relationship. And third, they showed that time can affect the relationship after a divorce.

One question asked in this study was if the attitudes between parents and adolescents and the adolescent’s trust in the parents could be affected by a divorce. The results showed that both these areas could be affected in a negative way by a divorce. The adolescent’s trust to the parents was one thing that differed between the three groups in this study. The adolescents who hadn’t been through a divorce had the highest trust in their parents, and they told their parents most things. The adolescents who had been through a divorce before the first time point had the lowest trust in their parents. This shows that a divorce can affect the adolescent’s trust in the parents and the adolescent’s choice which person they will turn to in different situations. This study had not the opportunity to investigate what person the adolescent chose to turn to instead, but the results suggests that another person can have this role after a divorce. The lowered trust to the parents can be an effect of changes in the attitudes to each other, but can also be the other way around. It can also be the case that both these areas can be affected by a divorce. The attitudes between the adolescent and the father were more affected than those between the adolescent and the mother. Divorced fathers showed less warmth to their adolescents and chose more often to ignore the adolescent during a conflict, rather than talk with him or her, compared with those fathers that were not divorced. There were no significant differences between mothers who were divorced and those who were not in this respect. This is a very interesting result and it is hard to say why it is like that. One can speculate about the parents’ importance for the adolescent and parents’ different priorities. The fact is, there can be many reasons why the father-adolescent relationship is affected as much as it is by a divorce.

The result shows that a divorce affects both the attitudes between the father and the adolescent and his or her trust to the father. Earlier studies have shown that many fathers spend less time with their adolescent after a divorce; in many cases the father is completely absent. The result in this study does in some ways support this, but also goes further. The purpose was not to examine how much time the father spends with the adolescent after a divorce, but to investigate how the emotional relationship with the adolescent was affected. The result from this study suggests that a divorce makes the father less available for the adolescent, compared with the mother. If one is going to find a conception for this phenomenon, perhaps one can say that the divorced fathers in this study are more emotionally absent in the relationship with their adolescent. This is a new finding on this topic. Earlier studies have concentrated on either father’s time spent with the adolescent or both parents relationship with the adolescent. This study used a separation of the parents to investigate if mother and father’s relationship with the adolescent differs after a divorce. This separation showed that the father-adolescent relationship was more affected by a divorce than the mother-adolescent relationship. The speculations about reasons for this are manifold. As said before, fathers often become less involved in the adolescent after a divorce, and it is likely that this should affect the father-adolescent relationship. Why the father is less involved in the adolescent’s life is an interesting question. One answer to that can be that the father is simply
giving priority to other things instead of the adolescent. This can be drawn back to the earliest studies on parent’s importance for the adolescent. Those showed that, mothers had a more important role for the adolescent compared with the father. Is it possible that those theories still have an unconscious role in our way of looking at father and mother’s relationship with the adolescent? Another explanation is that the father in fact are forced to spend less time with the adolescent, even if he would want to, and, as a consequence, looses the ties with the developing adolescent. This is, three possible explanations for one problem that are in need of a solution for the adolescent’s sake.

Things can change over time, and it is a natural process that time can affect things in different directions. Time can be an explanation of some questions in the result. On the basis of the results, one can look at time (as an abstract concept) in two different ways: as a natural process that creates things that should have happened anyway, and as a process, which “heals all wounds”. The latter involve the fact that time is a process, which make things change to the normal for that event. In this study, this means that things that happened in the parent-adolescent relationship after the divorce may have happen anyway. Adolescents in the two divorced groups were, at time point two telling less things to their parents, compared with time point one. This can of course have different explanations. However, if one looks at the direction in the group of adolescents in intact families, one can see that also these adolescents told fewer things to their parents the second time point. Therefore, the time between the two time points in this study could have had a similar effect on the parent-adolescent relationships for all three groups of adolescents. As said in the Introduction, parent’s involvement in the adolescent’s life decreases, as the adolescent gets older, and it is a big chance that it is the same here. This means that the adolescent could have told their parents fewer things at time point two than at time point one, even if the divorce hadn’t occurred. Divorce makes adolescents trust their parents less, but time is a possible additional explanation of why the adolescent’s trust to the parents decreases even more a time after the divorce.

The group, which experienced a divorce between the two time points, thought that their fathers showed them more warmth at the first time point than at the second. The group, which already had been through a divorce at the first time point, thought that their fathers showed them more warmth at the second time point than at the first. The other way of looking at time can be a possible explanation of this phenomenon. At time point two, parents from the first group had recently divorced, while parents in the second group had been divorced for at least two years. The results indicate that the divorce itself affects the fathers-adolescent relationship to the worse right after, but after a couple of years, the relationship might be going for the better. The fact that wounds can heal in time could be an explanation for this result. Both the father and the adolescent are emotionally hurt after the divorce. They may not, because of this, be able to show each other warmth and care as they did before. But over time, the hurt will lessen and they could give each other emotional support. Time can, as said, be an explanation of some results in this study. Other problems in the adolescent’s life can be another.

A divorce can lead to behavioral problems, like criminality and aggressiveness, and psychological problems, for example distressing feelings and low self-esteem, in the adolescent (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000; Booth & Amato, 2001; Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz & Miller, 2000; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Sun, 2001; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998). A combination of these problems can be a possible explanation for some of the results found in this study. In a relationship, problems like these can be demanding and frustrating, and can lead to a lot of conflicts between the parents and the adolescent. Hetherington and Kelly (2002) believed that it is twice as difficult to maintain
a good parent-adolescent relationship after a divorce if the adolescent also has behavioral problems, as if there were no such problems, as an effect from the divorce. Behavioral problems in the adolescent can therefore make the parent-adolescent relationship even worse after the divorce. It is also possible that the bad parent-adolescent relationship from a divorce can lead to these problems in the adolescent. Could it be that the different outcomes from a divorce are reciprocally affecting each other over time? We can be almost sure that these problems don’t make the relationship between the parents and the adolescent better after a divorce. How are these problems affecting the adolescent in early adulthood? Stattin and Magnusson (1996) showed in their study that even if these problems occur in childhood, right after a divorce, it is possible that they are gone in adulthood (Stattin & Magnusson, 1996). This means that if the relationship with the parents in adolescence becomes bad because of these problems, there is still a chance that this relationship can better later in life.

These discussions about the results contain some surprising and some expected findings. The fact that the father-adolescent relationship was more affected by the divorce than the mother-adolescent relationship was, was a surprise. My thoughts were that the adolescent’s emotional relationships with both their parents were going to get affected negatively by a divorce. Even if earlier studies have shown differences between mother and father’s relationships with the adolescent after a divorce, my thoughts stayed the same. And it is even today a mystery why the mother-adolescent relationship is not affected in similar manner as the father-adolescent relationship. As said before, there can be many explanations for this phenomenon, and that is why it is so interesting to study. More differences were also expected between the intact families (A) and the recently divorced group (B). One result that was not surprising was that about attitudes and trust between parents and adolescents after a divorce. With my own thoughts and support from the study by Hetherington and Kelly (2002), the findings were almost completely expected.

Divorce is a complicated process, and the outcomes may also depend on other things and circumstances around the divorce. This study looked at two divorced groups, but only group B controlled for pre-divorce factors that could affect the results. This means that it is possible that other things, over and above the divorce, could have affected the parent-adolescent relationship in the other group (group C). Example of this is how the parent-adolescent relationship looked like before the divorce. I had access to this information about the persons in the group which divorced between the time points, but not about the persons in the group which divorced before time point one. This is, of course, a limitation for this study. One can see that the results in the present study are following the same direction. The findings about father-adolescent relationship and the differences between the early divorced group and the recently divorced group are two examples of this. Because of this, one can to some extent put more trust in the results reported in this study. One thing that could have affected the results is the few participants in the group of adolescents that experienced a divorce between the two time points. Few subjects in this group means less power to detect differences from the other two groups investigated. There are few reasons to believe that the pattern of results would have been much different from that reported here if a larger sample of youths who went from living in two-parent to one-parent families were used. However, undoubtedly with a larger sample more definite conclusions could be drawn.

Concerning the psychometric characteristics, the measures used had satisfactory reliabilities. The measures in this study have been used in other studies and have been tested out carefully. Another thing that is a strength in this study is the use of two time points to measure the divorce process. By using two time points instead of one, one has a stronger chance to avoid biases, for example other factors that could affect the result. It is also
interesting to investigate this phenomenon at more than one time because of a possible sleeper effect. Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield (according to Capon and Hulbert, 1973) came up with this idea, which propose that some effects from an event can be delayed. If one has access to information only one time point one may miss important findings that may happen a time after the divorce.

This study used participants from one Swedish town. Because of the small population in this town, this study has had the opportunity to capture a big number of them. Therefore, the present sample represents the lion part of the target population (all 13 to 16 years old in this community) very well. This, in turn, leads to good possibilities for generalization. At the same time, I cannot say whether the same findings would turn up in the major urban or rural areas in Sweden or communities with a large proportion of immigrants.

The fact that this study used three groups is another strength. This means that I had the possibility to investigate divorce from three different angles. Those children that had not been through a divorce, those who had been through a divorce for a long time and those who recently been through a divorce. It is a great benefit for this study to have information about the parent-adolescent relationship from these children that have been through different events in their life. The children in the three groups are in different situations in life and can maybe therefore give us different information about these relationships.

This study has brought new findings to research on the effects on adolescents of a divorce in the family. The results also support other studies in this literature, even if this study had another starting point. The three main results were that (a) the father-adolescent relationship was more affected than the mother-adolescent relationship, (b) the attitudes and trust between the adolescent and the parents were changing to the worse, and (c) time could affect the parent-adolescent relationship even more after a divorce.

It's strange that this area of research is not more examined in Sweden. There are a lot of adolescents that experience a divorce in Sweden every year, and I think that this should be a reason to investigate this. According to the SCB (2004), adolescents who have parents in a cohabiting relationship are in greater risk of experiencing a divorce, compared with those who have parents that are married. In cases of new relationships between a parent and his or her new partner after a prior divorce, there are a high number of separations. This means that those adolescents where one (or maybe even both) parent is beginning a new relationship after the divorce are at greater risk for experiencing more separations. This is another reason to study separations between parents.

As said before, many results in this study was not expected. These results are difficult to explain without further studies. One example of this is why the father-adolescent relationship is more affected than the mother-adolescent. In future research it would be good to have more information about the living arrangements after a divorce. It is possible that there could be differences in father-adolescent relationships depending on the living arrangements after a divorce. One could think that maternal custody will make the father-adolescent relationship worse than before the divorce. Another interesting area to study is which person the adolescent chooses to turn to instead of the parents, after a divorce.

More research on the emotional parent-adolescent relationship makes us understand how relationships are affected by a divorce. It also gives us insight in how the involved persons feel, which gives us the chance to help those people to handle these problems.
References


Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB. Register over children and their families year 2004. Collected the fifth of March, from [https://www.scb.se](https://www.scb.se)


