

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN'S  
SUPPORT NETWORKS AND THEIR  
ADJUSTMENT TO DIVORCE:  
THE PARENTS' PERCEPTION

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Divorce has become increasingly common in our society. Statistics reveal that between the years 1966 and 1976, divorce rates have risen over 100% (Plateris, 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1979). It is estimated that one out of every three marriages now results in divorce (Gardner, 1974; Hozman & Froiland, 1976). This suggests that the likelihood of children being involved in the divorce process will have increased correspondingly.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1979) estimated that 65% of all divorces involve children under eighteen years of age. Levitan (1979) stated that over one million children per year experience the divorce of their parents. Bane (1976) utilized survey research to estimate that 20 to 30% of the children born or growing up in the 1970's would have divorcing parents. Hetherington (1979) stated that this number was closer to 50%. It is thus clear that a significant number of children are involved in parental divorce.

Research studies have demonstrated that children are often adversely affected by divorce (Landis, 1960; Despert, 1962; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1979; Hetherington, 1979). Children between the ages of 6 and 12 have been found to be particularly at risk for developing adjustment problems in response to divorce (Despert, 1962; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; Hetherington, 1979; Drake, 1979). For this reason

studies focused on the school-aged child and his or her adjustment to divorce are especially needed if an understanding of the important parameters of this problem is to be obtained.

Each child's response to divorce is individualized (Gardner, 1978; Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Since researchers to date have not been able to reliably isolate any one or any combination of variables that can accurately identify the at-risk child, it is difficult to predict which children will experience difficulties in adjustment.

A child's adjustment to divorce is apparently related to a number of factors. The parent-child relationship is one factor that has received a great deal of attention. The nature and the stability of the continuing interactions between the parents and the child have been identified as having a major influence on the child's adjustment to divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Kurdek & Siesky, 1980). This parent-child relationship is considered of great importance because it is the child's main source of support (Jacobson, 1978; Hetherington, 1979). This suggests that the child's support system is an important ingredient for successful adjustment to divorce.

Some research has shown that there are children who can adjust to divorce without the benefit of a supporting parent-child relationship (Kapit, 1972; Anthony, 1974;



Hetherington, 1979). Many authors have suggested that the availability of alternative persons, other than parents, within the child's environment may assist in promoting healthy adjustment to divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; Jacobson, 1978; Hetherington, 1979). Little attention has been given however, to identifying alternative support persons who could also contribute to the child's successful adjustment. It is important to know in what ways the child's interactions with these support persons are significantly related to the child's adjustment. The availability of helping, significant persons and the quality of these relationships may then be assessed for their impact on the child's adjustment to divorce. By noting the absence of essential support variables it may then be possible to recognize those children who are at a higher risk for developing adjustment problems. The aim of the present study is to delineate the salient variables of the child's support system that may affect favourable adjustment.

The following review of the literature will explore the current research as it pertains to (1) the child's response to divorce, (2) the child's long term adjustment to divorce and (3) the child's support network.

### Review of the Literature

#### The Child's Response to Divorce

Children display a wide variety of reactions in

response to their parents' divorce. Most investigators agree that children of divorce cannot be viewed as a homogeneous group (Landis, 1960; Hetherington, 1979; Kurdek & Siesky, 1979). They are affected in accordance with their age, sex, developmental level and family situations (McDermott, 1968; Fulton, 1979; Kurdek & Siesky, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The child's age appears to be the most crucial factor.

Children of all ages are affected by their parents' divorce and all have their own specific, age related responses. In both numbers and impact however, school-aged children have been identified as being the largest single group of children that are affected by divorce (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977; Drake, 1979). Jacobson (1978) found that the most seriously affected children were between the ages of 7 and 13. These results were corroborated by Desimone-Luis, O'Mahoney and Hunt (1979) and Schoettle and Cantwell (1980).

The school-aged child's immediate response to divorce has been well documented in the literature. Landis (1960) reported a retrospective study in which university students were asked to describe the reactions they had experienced as children when their parents divorced. The major finding was that as children, these individuals had felt less secure and less happy after the divorce. This was found to be true even in those cases where the children had been

well aware of interparent hostilities. Feelings of unhappiness were also a predominant finding in McDermott's (1970) study. He found that 34.4% of the children of divorce in a clinical population displayed overt symptoms of depression in the first year following divorce. On further investigation, he found that an underlying depression was present in all of the 116 children studied. These feelings of unhappiness and insecurity are a common finding in most of the research studies completed to date (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; 1976; Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977; Brun, 1978; Kurdek & Siesky, 1979; Fulton, 1979; Hetherington, 1979).

Another commonly identified reaction of the school-aged child is that of shame (McDermott, 1968; Cantor, 1977; Brun, 1978). Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) found that feelings of shame emerged specifically in the 8 to 10 year old child. Kurdek and Siesky (1980) however found that 66.7% of the 132 children studied did not feel any shame. One possible explanation for this finding is that the sample was composed of children between the ages of 5 and 19 years and it is therefore difficult to know if the school-aged child has a greater tendency to feel shame and guilt than other age groups. The shame of the school-aged child may have been hidden by the range of responses due to the range of age.

The school-aged child also experiences anger about

the parental divorce. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) found that this anger is what distinguished the response of the 8 to 10 year old from any other age group. Hetherington (1979) found that anger persisted throughout the first year following the divorce.

From the literature it is apparent that divorce poses a stress for the child. Certain characteristic responses have been identified including sadness, shame, guilt and anger. These reactions, often combined with a misunderstanding of the situation, cause the child to be frightened by the changing family relationships (Blaine, 1969; Anthony, 1974; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). The quantity, intensity and recognition of these responses greatly influence the child's adjustment to divorce.

#### The Child's Adjustment to Divorce

Parental divorce demands that children adjust to a new family situation. Some children are able to make this transition and to adjust to the changed situation with little difficulty. Other children however experience major problems. Research studies have shown that there are a significant number of children who do experience adjustment problems.

McDermott (1968) found that 62% of the children studied presented as management problems. Rosen (1979) reported that 34% were negatively affected by the divorce process.

Brun (1978) in a large study (n=500) found that the same percentage of children became worse as improved. In a sample of similar size, Fulton (1979) discovered that 70% of the parents involved felt that the children had displayed obviously negative adjustment reactions as a result of the divorce. In a five year study completed in 1980, Wallerstein and Kelly found that 37% of the children studied had failed to recover from the divorce while 29% were adjusting but still unhappy and suffering from a lowered self-esteem. These figures clearly illustrate that for a significant number of children, divorce has a deleterious effect and that children do encounter problems in adjustment.

Adjustment problems are displayed in an individualized way by each child. Research however has determined that there are certain characteristic problems that indicate possible maladjustment. These are behaviour changes, psychosomatic disturbances, altered relationships with family members and peers and decreased school performance.

The majority of the school-aged child's adjustment problems are evident in his or her behaviour. In attempting to cope with and to defend against their immediate response of feelings of anger, guilt and fear, children become more active, hostile, aggressive and have a greater incidence of temper tantrums (Gardner, 1974; Weiss, 1975; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; 1977; Fulton, 1979). Researchers have also found that there is increased nail biting, enuresis, night-

mares and attention seeking behaviours (Anthony, 1974; Weiss, 1975; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; Kurdek & Siesky, 1979; Fulton, 1979). Many of these behaviours are a result of the child's anxieties and confusion about the family situation (Anthony, 1974; Fulton, 1979; Kurdek & Siesky, 1979). These feelings of anxiety may cause the child to feel powerless (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). Investigators have proposed that this powerlessness may be related to the increase in antisocial behaviours that are seen in some children (Anthony, 1974; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; 1977). Children have been found to display increased running away, acting-out and stealing behaviours following divorce (McDermott, 1970; Anthony, 1974; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; 1977).

In contrast to these overt problem behaviours that are indicative of possible adjustment problems, some children experience adjustment difficulties that are less easily identified. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) found that some children become less aggressive and better behaved after divorce. This was thought to be a result of the child's fear of being sent away like the absent parent, if he or she displayed any angry or disruptive behaviours (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977). Luepnitz (1979) and Kurdek and Siesky (1979) found that some children show withdrawn and moody behaviours to indicate that they are experiencing adjustment difficulties. Researchers have proposed that it may

be more difficult to identify maladjustment in children when they display these less obvious problem behaviours (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977; Drake, 1979).

Children of divorce have an increased frequency of somatic complaints (Anthony, 1974; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977; Fulton, 1979; Luepnitz, 1979). Children have been found to have many physical complaints with the most frequent ones being headaches and stomachaches (Fulton, 1979).

In their study of the adjustment problems that children experience researchers have further found that there are often changes in the child's relationships with family members and peers. The child is faced with the loss of one parent and may direct feelings of anger and resentment toward the parent that he or she perceives to have been the cause of the divorce and this loss (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; Brun, 1978). As a result there may be an increase or decrease in both the quality and the quantity of the interactions between the parent and the child.

In addition to their relationships with parents, children may show changes in their interactions with peers. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) found that children had decreased interactions with their peers following divorce. This is thought to be the result of feelings of shame and guilt and the child's reluctance to share divorce information with peers (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). This finding was



also evident in other research (Cantor, 1977; Drake, 1979; Kurdek & Siesky, 1979). In contrast to these findings however, Luepnitz (1979) found that children increased the quality and quantity of their interactions with peers. This finding was proposed to be the result of the child's seeking support to help him or her to cope with the divorce. Luepnitz (1979) also found that the child had increased interactions with siblings, relatives and teachers following divorce.

A child's school performance has also been suggested to be a means by which adjustment problems can be identified. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) reported that 50% of their school-aged subjects showed a decrease in school performance. This was also a finding of Kurdek and Siesky (1979). They found that 37% of the children studied displayed decreased academic functioning. A decreased school performance is suggested to be the result of the child's anxieties about what is occurring in the home situation (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1977; Kurdek & Siesky, 1979).

The research clearly shows that children do face a period of adjustment following divorce. There are a significant number of children who encounter difficulties in making this adjustment. These adjustment problems are individualized for each child however researchers have identified certain characteristic symptoms that indicate possible maladjustment in children. These symptoms include



behaviour problems, somatic disturbances, altered relationships between the child, his or her family and peers and decreased school performance. However not all children experience these problems to the same extent. This has prompted researchers to suggest that there are some factors in the child's environment that promote or inhibit a healthy adjustment to divorce. One of the proposed factors is the child's support network.

#### The Child's Support Network

For the purposes of this study, discussion of the child's support network will be restricted to the child's immediate environment, including the custodial and non-custodial parents, siblings, extended family members, teachers, school counselors, and peers.

Parents provide the main component of the child's support network. The parents' ability to maintain a warm and supportive relationship with the child is a factor that is crucial in the child's adjustment to divorce (Jacobson, 1978; Rosen, 1977; 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Landis (1960) found that one of the major variables affecting the child's adjustment was the increased emotional distance that often occurred between the child and the non-custodial parent. Hetherington (1979) confirms these findings when she states that it is the quality of the child's continuing relationship with both parents that has

a substantial effect on the child's coping and subsequent adjustment. It is apparent that the child needs the continued support of both parents following divorce if he or she is to avoid adjustment problems.

It is not always easy for the parents to maintain this supportive relationship. The divorce precipitates a crisis for both the parent and the child (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1977; Luepnitz, 1979; Kurdek & Siesky, 1978; 1980). Parents may become preoccupied with their own concerns and emotions and thus become unable to meet the needs of the child. Parents are often less sensitive to their child's needs or problems as they attempt to reorganize their own lives (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977; Drake, 1979; Hetherington, 1979). Jacobson (1978) concluded that parents find it difficult to give individualized attention to their children at this time thus decreasing their availability to provide support for the child.

Divorce often necessitates the mother's employment and thus further compounds this loss of parental support that results from the parent's own concerns and needs. Research has suggested that the mother's return to or commencement of employment is viewed as an additional loss by the child (Anthony, 1974; Derdeyn, 1977; Fulton, 1979). This is especially true when the mother is the custodial parent. The child is faced with another new, insecurity-causing situation that further decreases the availability

of parental support. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) concluded that since parental support becomes less available to the child following divorce that the child must then seek support from other significant persons.

It has been proposed that children who have the benefit of siblings are less likely to have adjustment problems (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; Jacobson, 1978). In an additional study, Kelly and Wallerstein (1977) found that the "only" child appeared to be much more vulnerable to the stresses and conflicts of divorce than those children who had siblings. Rosen (1977) found that over 50% of the children studied felt that the presence of siblings had helped with their eventual adjustment to divorce.

In addition to siblings, it has been suggested that the presence of an extended family can ease the stress of divorce. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that grandparents were a good source of support. An earlier study by these authors however found that the presence of an extended family either provided support or else exacerbated the conflicts. It was found that family members who were in favour of the divorce were supportive while those who were hurt or angry about the separation tended to promote further conflict (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977). Thus although extended family members can be sources of support, they are not always available for or successful in this role.

The school-aged child is at a developmental stage in

which his or her peer group takes on more importance (Erikson, 1963). Peers are available to provide a great deal of support to the child of divorce but only if the child is able to utilize this resource (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977). Children who respond to the divorce with feelings of shame or guilt may be unable to discuss the situation with peers. Similarly, those children who are having difficulty in accepting the divorce may be unable to talk about it without increasing their own levels of anxiety (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977). Kurdek and Siesky (1980) found that the child's ability to discuss his or her parents' divorce varied with the age and sex of the child. Younger school-aged children and girls had greater difficulty in sharing this news with peers. The child's use of his or her peer group for support therefore does have some limitations. In general however, Kurdek and Siesky's study did suggest that children do have a peer support system that is utilized to neutralize some of the stressful effects of divorce.

Another extrafamilial support system available to the child of divorce is the school. McDermott (1968) found that teachers themselves felt that the school offered extra support and security at this time. This was corroborated by Kelly and Wallerstein (1977) who found that children viewed the teacher and/or the school counselor as supportive, stable figures in their lives. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976)

found that the school-aged child often used the school to express what they could not safely say at home.

It would appear that the school can provide some of the child's much needed support. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) however found that 66% of the children studied had moved at least once in the two to three years following the divorce. This would suggest that many children lose the familiarity of their usual school and the availability of familiar school personnel and peers for support. Some investigators propose that the change in residence and/or change of schools has a detrimental influence on the child's healthy adjustment to divorce (Sprey, 1969; Derdeyn, 1977; Fulton, 1979). This then suggests that the school may provide support but this may only occur if the child remains in his or her pre-divorce setting or if school personnel are sensitive to new students and their needs.

The child's support network would appear to contribute significantly to his or her adjustment to divorce. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) suggest that the child's sense of stability is dependent upon the availability of support persons. The child utilizes a variety of sources in seeking this support. The custodial and the non-custodial parents provide the primary component of the child's support network but they may not always be able to fulfill the child's needs due to their own problems in adjustment. Research studies suggest that siblings, extended family

members, peers and school personnel may be beneficial in providing the child with support. The availability of and the child's interactions with this support network has been proposed to be directly related to his or her adjustment.

### Summary

Parental divorce affects an increasing number of children each year. Divorce precipitates characteristic responses such as sadness, shame, guilt and anger in school-aged children. The intensity and duration of these responses greatly influences the child's adjustment to divorce. Although not all children experience adjustment problems, there are a significant number who do. These adjustment problems are individualized for each child but researchers have identified characteristic symptoms. These include behaviour problems, somatic disturbances, alterations in the child's relationships with his or her family members and peers and decreased school performance. Since not all children experience these adjustment problems to the same degree, researchers have also suggested that there are factors within the child's immediate environment that influence adjustment. The child's support network, composed of the custodial and non-custodial parents, siblings, extended family members, peers and school personnel, has been identified as one such factor. Researchers have attempted to link the child's support network with his or her subsequent adjustment.



### Statement of the Problem

From the review of the literature it is clear that parental divorce does have an effect on children. It is also apparent that a significant number of children encounter difficulties in their adjustment to the situation. The reasons explaining why some children experience problems while others do not have not been clearly identified. Several explanations have been proposed in the literature but have received limited research attention.

It is possible that the child's adjustment may be related to the availability of persons within his or her support network. Research findings in this area are inconclusive. To date this variable has received little reliable, research based study. Research has identified that the parent-child relationship has a great impact on the child's adjustment. However, since the parent may not always be available or able to provide the necessary support for the child, researchers have proposed that the child utilizes other support persons in achieving healthy adjustment.

Hetherington (1979) states that the major research emphasis has been directed toward support for parents rather than for children. This investigator also states that there is a lack of research to show how family functioning and the child's support network can facilitate adjustment to divorce. Hetherington strongly emphasizes the need for research on the subject of the child's

support network.

Factors contributing to the child's successful adjustment to divorce must be reliably identified if children and their families are going to receive appropriate guidance, counselling or treatment. Divorce constitutes a potential developmental interference for children which can lead to problems in the child's psychosocial health and interfere with his or her ability for healthy functioning (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977). It is thus imperative that the factors contributing to healthy adjustment to divorce be recognized.

The question that the present study will address is: Is there a relationship between the child's interactions with his or her support network and his or her subsequent adjustment to parental divorce.

### Hypotheses

Based on the previous review of the literature the following hypotheses are formulated:

1. Children who maintain or have increased involvement with the non-custodial parent will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who experience less involvement.
2. Children whose mothers return to, or commence employment following the divorce will have a less satisfactory adjustment than those children whose mothers did not change their employment patterns.



3. Children who have one or more siblings will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who have no siblings.
4. Children who maintain the same or have improved relationships with extended family members will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who have deteriorated relationships with extended family members.
5. Children who maintain the same or have improved relationships with peers will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who have deteriorated relationships with peers.
6. (a) Children who do not experience a change in residence or in school following the divorce will have a more satisfactory adjustment than those children who experience a change in both residence and school.  
(b) Children who experience a change in residence but no change in school following the divorce will have a more satisfactory adjustment than those children who experience both a change in residence and a change in school.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### Subjects and Setting

The data utilized in the present study were drawn from information gathered in an earlier study entitled "The Impact of Divorce on Parents and Their Children".

The previous study was conducted in Clackamas County, Oregon in 1976 and was funded by the Law Enforcement Administration Agency through a Federal grant. Participants in that study were selected on the basis of the following criteria: They were parents who,

1. were terminating their first marriage.
2. had at least one minor child.
3. had filed for divorce in the period between July 1, 1975 and December 31, 1975.

The population was identified by reviewing the files of divorcing parents at Clackamas County Courthouse. From this population a random sample of parents was contacted and those who were willing to participate became the sample for the study. This selection yielded a sample of 98 parents. Data was collected six months to one year after the parents had filed for divorce.

The sampling selection for the present study imposed one further criteria. Each parent must have had at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12 years at the time

the divorce. This resulted in a sample size of 50 children representing 32 families. From these 50 children one child was randomly selected from each family in which there was more than one child within the desired age range, thus resulting in a sample size of 32 children. The present study utilized only the records of these previous participants. The identities of these subjects were known only by code numbers thus ensuring anonymity. Consent for utilization of these data was obtained from the previous investigator.

#### Data Collection Instruments

Data for the present study were derived from existing data collected through a structured interview schedule devised for the previous study. This instrument is an open-ended, standardized interview schedule which required the interviewer to code responses into predetermined categories. The investigators were given training prior to their contact with the participants in attempts to achieve consistency in the interviewing technique.

Attempts were made by the present investigator to identify the procedures utilized in establishing content validity and inter-interviewer reliability. This information however is not available.

For the purposes of the present study, 67 items were selected from the interview schedule (See Appendix).

The previously recorded responses were coded according to the following categories:

1. general information.
2. the child's support network.
3. the child's adjustment to divorce.

The items in these categories were selected based on the analysis of the current literature on children and divorce.

The general information category is composed of 15 questions regarding the parents' educational background, occupation, income, age and divorce status. (Questions 1 through 15 on the interview guide).

Information regarding the child's support network was gathered utilizing 45 questions (16 through 60, and 61c on the interview guide). This information was categorized according to six variables that have been suggested in the literature as having an influence on the child's adjustment to divorce. These variables are:

1. the nature of the child's post-divorce contact with the non-custodial parent.
2. the number of children in the family.
3. the nature of the child's post-divorce relationships with extended family members.
4. the nature of the child's post-divorce relationships with peers.
5. maternal post-divorce changes in employment patterns.

6. post-divorce changes in residence and/or school.

Responses to these 45 questions were coded according to the relationships under examination. Responses concerning variable 1 were coded as showing: (1) The same, (2) Increased, or (3) Decreased involvement (Questions 34 through 60). Involvement was measured by comparing the pre and post-divorce parenting patterns and the non-custodial parent's involvement in the child's activities. Responses relating to variables 3 and 4 were coded as showing: (1) A positive change, (2) A negative change, or (3) No change (Question 61c). Responses to variables 5 and 6 were coded in terms of the change or the lack of change that had occurred (Questions 16 through 25).

Data concerning the parental perception of the child's adjustment were gathered using 7 questions (items 60 through 67 on the interview guide). These included the parents' perceptions of changes in the following:

1. the child's health.
2. his or her school behaviours.
3. his or her relationships with family members and peers.
4. the child's adjustment to divorce.

Responses in areas 1, 2 and 3 were answered as showing:

(1) A positive change, (2) A negative change, or (3) No change. Responses concerning area 4 were answered in terms

of the child having made: (1) A satisfactory adjustment, (2) An unsatisfactory adjustment or (3) An undetermined adjustment.

### Independent Variables

The 6 through 12 year old child's support network within his or her immediate environment is defined as the primary independent variable of interest. The child's support network is defined by the present study as being composed of the custodial and non-custodial parents, siblings, extended family members, peers and school personnel.

Additional independent variables examined were:

1. the custodial and non-custodial parents' economic level.
2. the educational achievement of both the custodial and non-custodial parent.
3. the ages of both parents at the time of the marriage.
4. maternal versus paternal custody.

### Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is defined as the parent's perception of the 6 through 12 year old child's adjustment to divorce. The child's adjustment is described in terms of being satisfactory, unsatisfactory or undetermined.

A child was considered as having made a satisfactory adjustment based on the following criteria:

1. the parent(s) have stated that they are satisfied with the child's adjustment and,
2. there was no more than one negative change in each of the following: (a) the child's health, (b) his or her school behaviour and (c) his or her relationships with family members and peers.

A child was considered as having made an unsatisfactory adjustment when:

1. the parent(s) have stated that they are not satisfied with the child's adjustment or,
2. the parent(s) have stated that they are satisfied with the child's adjustment but there was more than one negative change in each of (a) the child's health, (b) his or her school behaviour and (c) his or her relationships with family members and peers.

A child's adjustment was said to be undetermined when there was insufficient data to make the above determinations.

### Research Design and Procedure

The present study is retrospective and is descriptive and correlational in nature. Relationships were examined to determine whether significant correlations could be identified between the independent variables and children's

adjustment to divorce.

The previous study followed an interview format. A random sampling of parents who had filed for divorce in Clackamas County were sent a letter by the Circuit Court Judge informing them of the study. Parents were then contacted by telephone by a member of the research team to set up an interview between an investigator and the parent(s). Interviews took place in a research office at Portland State University or within the parent's home depending on which was most convenient for the participant. The interview lasted approximately two hours.

#### Analysis of the Data

The data were analyzed using non-parametric statistics. Contingency tables were constructed for each independent variable to identify and analyze the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Due to the small sample size the relationships under investigation were examined for significance using Fisher's exact test. A probability of less than 0.05 indicated a statistically significant finding.



### CHAPTER III

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter findings regarding the characteristics of the sample will first be discussed. This will be followed by an analysis of the findings regarding the relationship between the child's adjustment to divorce and the major variables, including the child's involvement with the non-custodial parent, the changes in the maternal post-divorce employment pattern, the number of children in the family, the relationships with extended family members and peers, and changes in residence and/or school. Within each section evidence for and against each of the six hypotheses will be presented. Finally, a general discussion of the results and their implications to nursing will be presented.

##### Description of the Total Sample

Subjects for the present study were selected according to the criteria given in the previous chapter. For purposes of data analysis, one child was randomly selected from each family in which there was more than one child meeting the selection criteria. A sample of 32 children from 32 families was thus obtained. (See Table 1).

This sample was comprised of 18 males and 14 females ranging in age from 6 through 12 years with the median age being 8 years. The number of children in the family ranged from 1 to 5 children as described in Table 1. Custody was

TABLE 1

Selected Characteristics of the Sample of School-age  
Children Who Experienced Parental Divorce

Characteristics	Numbers of Children with		Total N=32
	Satisfactory Adjustment N=26	Unsatisfactory Adjustment N=6	
Sex			
Male	13	5	18
Female	13	1	14
Total	26	6	32
Age (years)			
6-8	18	3	21
9-12	8	3	11
Total	26	6	32
Number of Children in the Family			
1	0	1	1
2	15	3	18
3-5	11	2	13
6+	0	0	0
Total	26	6	32
Custody			
Maternal	24	5	29
Paternal	2	1	3
Total	26	6	32

primarily maternal with only 3 of the 32 children being in paternal custody.

#### Description of Children With Adjustment Problems

The characteristics of the children experiencing divorce related adjustment problems are shown in Table 1. The distribution of the adjustment problems experienced by the children is shown in Table 2. Problems were evenly distributed among the three major areas of interest.

From the total sample of children, 6 children met the criteria for maladjustment as described in the previous chapter. These children were predominantly male with only 1 of the 6 being female (See Table 1). This disparity in sexual representation did not prove to be statistically significant (Fisher's exact test= 0.4192,  $p > 0.05$ ). This corroborates the findings of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) who also found no statistical difference to exist between adjustment problems and the sex of the child.

The age range of the children with adjustment problems was from 6 through 12 years with a median age of 9 years. Statistical analysis revealed no significance between the child's age and the incidence of maladjustment (Fisher's exact test= 0.2422,  $p > 0.05$ ). Kelly and Wallerstein (1977), Jacobson (1978), and Schoettle and Cantwell (1980) have stated that adjustment problems most frequently occur in children aged 6 through 12 years. The results of this

TABLE 2

Characteristics of Adjustment Problems Among  
the Sample of School-Age Children  
Who Experienced Parental Divorce

Characteristics	Numbers of Children With		Total N=32
	Satisfactory Adjustment N=26	Unsatisfactory Adjustment N=6	
A. Changes in Health			
Positive or No Changes	18	2	20
Negative Changes	8	4	12
Total	26	6	32
B. Changes in School			
Positive or No Changes	19	2	21
Negative Changes	7	4	11
Total	26	6	32
C. Changes in Relations With Others			
Positive or No Changes	17	1	18
Negative Changes	9	5	14
Total	26	6	32

study lend support to the selection of this age group, since within this group there was no statistically significant difference between the younger school-aged children and the older school-aged children in terms of adjustment.

The majority of the children had one or more siblings as described in Table 1. Analysis of these data showed no statistically significant difference between the presence of siblings and the incidence of maladjustment (Fisher's exact test= 0.3336,  $p > 0.05$ ). This does not corroborate the findings of Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) and Jacobson (1978) who noted that children who had siblings experienced fewer adjustment problems.

With respect to custody, the majority of the children with adjustment problems were in the care of their mothers as described in Table 1. This factor was not found to be statistically significantly related to maladjustment (Fisher's exact test= 0.4104,  $p > 0.05$ ).

#### Characteristics of Parents

The data used in the present study were obtained from the responses of 61 parents. These parents represented 29 families in which both parents responded and 3 families in which only one parent responded. In each of the cases in which only one parent responded, demographic data concerning the non-responding parent were given by the respondent (See Table 3). Divorce had been finalized

TABLE 3

Selected Characteristics of the Parents Who Underwent Divorce  
and Their Childrens' Adjustment

Characteristic	Custodial Parent			Non-Custodial Parent			Total N=64
	Child's Adjustment Sat.    Unsat.    S/T*	Child's Adjustment Sat.    Unsat.    S/T*					
Age at Marriage (years)							
<18	3	0	3	0	0	0	3
18-20	17	1	18	7	1	8	26
21-25	5	3	8	17	3	20	28
26-30	1	2	3	2	0	2	5
31-35	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
35+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
(Median 21 yrs.)	(Median 19 yrs.)			(Median 22 yrs.)			
Educational Level							
<4 yrs. High School	4	1	5	3	2	5	10
4 yrs. High School	9	4	13	8	0	8	21
1-3 yrs. College	9	1	10	7	3	10	20
4 yrs. College	3	0	3	3	0	3	6
5+ yrs. College	1	0	1	5	1	6	7
Income Level (per month)							
<\$200	11	3	14	3	1	4	18
\$200-599	8	0	8	1	0	1	9
\$600-999	5	2	7	6	2	8	15
\$1000-1399	2	1	3	11	3	14	17
\$1400-1799	0	0	0	3	0	3	3
\$1800+	0	0	0	2	0	2	2
Working Status							
Working	17	3	20	23	6	29	49
Non-Working	9	3	12	3	0	3	15
Divorce Status							
Final	18	6	24	18	6	24	48
Not Final	8	0	8	8	0	8	16
Remarried							
Yes	3	0	3	1	0	1	4
No	29	0	29	31	0	31	60

\* Sub-Total

for 24 of the 32 marriages.

The age of the parents at the time of marriage ranged from 16 to 31 years with the median age being 19 years for the custodial parent and 22 years for the non-custodial parent. These data showed that most adjustment problems occurred in children whose custodial parents married between the ages of 21 to 31 (See Table 3). This was found to be statistically significant (Fisher's exact test= 0.0107,  $p < 0.05$ ). Although this finding is significant, the interpretation of its meaning is unclear without data concerning the parent's age at the time of the divorce as well. The literature does not offer any support for this relationship between the age of the custodial parent and the child's adjustment.

The educational backgrounds of the custodial and non-custodial parents ranged from less than 4 years of high school to 5 or more years of college (See Table 3). The mode for the custodial parent was 4 years of high school and 1 to 3 years of college for the non-custodial parent. Neither parents' educational achievement was found to be statistically significant in relation to the child's adjustment (Fisher's exact test= 0.1324,  $p > 0.05$  for custodial parent; Fisher's exact test= 0.3336,  $p > 0.05$  for non-custodial parent).

As shown in Table 3, the monthly income level of the parents ranged from less than \$200 to \$1800 with a mode

of less than \$200 for the custodial parent and \$1000-1399 for the non-custodial parent. The income level of these parents was not found to be statistically significant in relation to the child's post-divorce adjustment (Custodial parent: Fisher's exact test = 0.2039,  $p > 0.05$ ; Non-custodial parent: Fisher's exact test = 0.3058,  $p > 0.05$ ). However, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) have suggested that it is not the income level itself that influences a child's adjustment to divorce. These investigators found that the change in the economic situation that occurs post-divorce is the factor that exerts an influence on the child's adjustment. The present study found that 4 of the 6 children with adjustment problems experienced worsened economic situations as a result of the divorce. However, this finding was also statistically insignificant and thus not in agreement with the findings of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980). (Fisher's exact test = 0.2767,  $p > 0.05$ ).

#### Evidence For and Against the Hypotheses

##### Hypothesis I

This hypothesis states that children who maintain or have increased involvement with the non-custodial parent will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who experience less involvement.

The child's involvement with the non-custodial parent was found to be statistically significant in relation to



the child's post-divorce adjustment (Fisher's exact test = 0.0427,  $p < 0.05$ ). This hypothesis is therefore accepted.

All 6 children with adjustment difficulties experienced decreased involvement with their non-custodial parent, while only 14 of the 26 children with satisfactory adjustment showed this decreased involvement (See Table 4). These findings are supported by Landis (1960), Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) and Hetherington (1979) who found the emotional distance that often occurs between the child and the non-custodial parent to be a major variable affecting the child's adjustment to divorce.

Hetherington (1979) found that one of the most crucial factors in the child's adjustment was the ability of the parents to maintain their relationships with the child. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) suggest that the child's continued involvement with the non-custodial parent is closely related to the visitation patterns that are formed. These investigators found that the greatest changes in post-divorce relationships occurred between the visiting parent and the child. The most frequent sources of problems were the continued inter-parental conflicts that inhibited regular visitations and the non-custodial parent's lack of knowledge of what to do with his or her "part-time" child. These factors tend to discourage the maintenance of good parent-child relationships between the child and the non-custodial parent (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This in turn

TABLE 4

The Child's Post-Divorce Involvement with  
the Non-Custodial Parent and His or Her  
Adjustment to Divorce

Changes in Involvement	Numbers of Children Experiencing	
	Satisfactory Adjustment N=26	Unsatisfactory Adjustment N=6
No Change or Increased	12	0
Decreased	14	6
Total	26	6

decreases the parent's involvement with the child leading to potential adjustment problems. The present study however did not find the visitation patterns to be statistically significant in relation to the child's adjustment (Fisher's exact test = 0.3336,  $p > 0.05$ ) (See Table 5). Nor were visitation patterns statistically significant in relation to the non-custodial parent's involvement with the child (Fisher's exact test = 0.3191,  $p > 0.05$ ). It would thus appear that although visitation is an important factor in the child's continued interactions with the non-custodial parent, that there are other factors that must also be considered. The results of the present study would appear to indicate that the non-custodial parent's continued involvement in parenting and in the child's direct care have a significant influence on the child's post-divorce adjustment. However, in order for continued parenting to occur, these factors must be closely related.

#### Hypothesis II

This hypothesis states that children whose mothers return to, or commence employment following the divorce will have a less satisfactory adjustment than those children whose mothers did not change their employment pattern.

Changes in the mother's post-divorce employment pattern were not found to be statistically significant in relation to the child's adjustment (Fisher's exact test =

TABLE 5  
Patterns of Visitation with  
the Non-Custodial Parent and  
the Child's Adjustment

Frequency of Visitation	Numbers of Children Experiencing	
	Satisfactory Adjustment N=26	Unsatisfactory Adjustment N=6
Weekly	5	2
Twice a Month	10	2
Once a Month	5	2
Every Few Months	3	0
Special Occasions	2	0
Never	1	0
Total	26	6

0.3336,  $p > 0.05$ ). This hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Four of the 6 children experiencing adjustment problems were not exposed to any changes in the maternal employment pattern. In contrast, 11 of the 26 children with satisfactory adjustment had experienced post-divorce changes in the maternal employment pattern (See Table 6).

The findings of the present study do not corroborate the proposal by Anthony (1974), Derdeyn (1977), and Fulton (1979), that the mother's employment pattern does have an affect on the child's post-divorce adjustment. These investigators had suggested that the mother's commencement of, or return to work following divorce is viewed as an additional loss by the child and thus contributes to adjustment problems. One possible explanation for the findings of the present study is that 6 to 12 year old children are in school for most of the day and it is therefore possible that they may not experience a significant decrease in their contacts with their mothers if they should return to work after the divorce. Thus the school-aged child may not experience the problems that a younger child would when the mother's employment pattern undergoes a change in the post-divorce period.

In addition to changes in working patterns, analysis was conducted on the variable of working versus non-working mothers. Again there was no statistically significant relationship between the mother's working and the child's

TABLE 6

Changes in Maternal Post-Divorce Employment  
Patterns and the Child's Adjustment to Divorce

Changes in Employment Pattern	Numbers of Children Experiencing	
	Satisfactory Adjustment N=26	Unsatisfactory Adjustment N=6
Commenced Employment	5	0
Part-time to Full- time Employment	5	1
Terminated Employment	1	1
No Change	15	4
Total	26	6

adjustment (Fisher's exact test = 0.2767,  $p > 0.05$ ).

### Hypothesis III

This hypothesis states that children who have one or more siblings will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than the only child.

Testing of this hypothesis revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the numbers of siblings in the family and the child's adjustment (Fisher's exact test = 0.3336,  $p > 0.05$ ). The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

The literature has suggested that the number of children in the family has an influence on the child's adjustment (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976; Jacobson, 1978). The findings of the present study did not corroborate this statement.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that the "only" child was exposed to greater parental conflicts and pressures than the child with siblings. In addition these investigators found that the presence of siblings decreased feelings of loneliness and vulnerability in the child. Although the present study did not find a strong relationship between the number of siblings and post-divorce adjustment, the sample was small, and thus may have not allowed for such a relationship to be evident. There was only one child who was an "only" child, with 18 of the 32 children studied having one sibling, and 13 children having 2 to

4 siblings (See Table 7). Interestingly the "only" child was among those who were categorized as having unsatisfactory adjustment. Three of the remaining 5 maladjusted children had only one sibling.

#### Hypothesis IV

This hypothesis states that children who maintain or have improved relationships with extended family members will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who have deteriorated relationships.

A significant relationship was found to exist between the child's relationships with extended family members and his or her adjustment to divorce (Fisher's exact test = 0.0323,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus this hypothesis is accepted. There was a higher incidence of adjustment problems when children experienced a negative change in their relationships with grandparents and other relatives (See Table 8). Three of the 6 children with adjustment problems experienced negative changes in their relationships with grandparents and other relatives. In contrast only 2 of the 26 children with satisfactory adjustment showed evidence of these deteriorated relationships. This finding is supported by Wallerstein and Kelly (1976; 1977; 1980). In a 5 year longitudinal study these investigators found that extended family members made a significant contribution to the child's support system. For many children these family



TABLE 7

The Number of Children in the Family  
and the Child's Adjustment to Divorce

Number of Children in Family	Numbers of Children Experiencing	
	Satisfactory Adjustment N=26	Unsatisfactory Adjustment N=6
1	0	1
2	15	3
3-5	11	2
6+	0	0
Total	26	6

TABLE 8

The Child's Post-Divorce Relationships with  
Extended Family Members and His or Her  
Adjustment to Divorce

Changes in Relationships	Numbers of Children Experiencing	
	Satisfactory Adjustment N=26	Unsatisfactory Adjustment N=6
No Change or a Positive Change	24	3
Negative Change	2	3
Total	26	6

members were able to provide continued interest and stability at a time when the child's life was in turmoil (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

#### Hypothesis V

This hypothesis states that children who maintain the same or have improved relationships with peers will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who have deteriorated relationships.

The child's post-divorce relationships with his or her peers was found to be statistically significant in relation to the child's adjustment to divorce (Fisher's exact test = 0.0004,  $p < 0.05$ ). The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Children who experienced negative changes in their relationships with peers had a higher incidence of adjustment problems than those children who maintained the same or had improved relationships with their peers (See Table 9). Four of the maladjusted children experienced negative changes in their relationships with peers while none of the children with satisfactory adjustment experienced these same negative changes. These findings agree with those of Kelly and Wallerstein (1977) and Kurdek and Siesky (1980) who found that the child's peer group was able to provide a great deal of support if the child was able to utilize this resource. These investigators also

TABLE 9

The Child's Post-Divorce Relationships With  
Peers and His or Her Adjustment to Divorce

Change in Relationships	Numbers of Children Experiencing	
	Satisfactory Adjustment N=26	Unsatisfactory Adjustment N=6
No Change or a Positive Change	26	2
Negative Change	0	4
Total	26	6

found that, as a rule, those children who were well adjusted had good friends and were able to maintain these relationships. In addition, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that children who were experiencing problems in adjusting to their parents' divorce had great difficulty in maintaining their roles in friendship and play groups.

#### Hypothesis VI

The final hypothesis states that:

(a) Children who do not experience a change in residence or in school following the divorce will have a more satisfactory adjustment than those children who experienced a change in both residence and school, and that

(b) Children who experience a change in residence but no change in school following the divorce will have a more satisfactory adjustment than those children who experienced both a change in residence and a change in school.

A change in residence and school was not found to be statistically significant in relation to the child's post-divorce adjustment (Fisher's exact test = 0.1423,  $p > 0.05$ ). Nor was a statistically significant difference found if the child changed residence but not school (Fisher's exact test = 0.4073,  $p > 0.05$ ). Thus both components of this hypothesis are rejected.

It is interesting to note however that 5 of the 6 children with adjustment problems had experienced a change

in residence and/or school while only 12 of the 26 children with satisfactory adjustment had made the same change (See Table 10). Thus, although these findings are not statistically significant, they do suggest support for statements in the literature by Sprey (1969), Derdeyn (1977), and Fulton (1979) who propose that changes in residence and/or school do have a detrimental influence on the child's healthy adjustment to divorce. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) also found that the school setting was used as a support in different ways by children of different ages, with older children being better able to utilize this resource. Support was available to children as a result of the structure and routine of the school program, the presence of a friendly teacher and/or because it was a place where the child could experience success and thus maintain his or her self-esteem. These support factors may continue to be available to a child irregardless of whether or not a move has been made. Thus although the present study found no significant relationship between a change in residence and/or school and the child's adjustment, the school cannot be disregarded as a potential source of support for the child of divorce. It is possible that a larger sample may indeed show this factor to be significant.

TABLE 10

Post-Divorce Changes in the Child's  
Residence and/or School and the  
Child's Adjustment to Divorce

Type of Change	Numbers of Children Experiencing	
	Satisfactory Adjustment N=26	Unsatisfactory Adjustment N=6
No Change	14	1
Change in Residence, No Change in School	7	3
Change in Residence and in School	5	2
No Change in Residence, Change in School	0	0
Total	26	6

### Additional Analysis

One of the criteria for determining maladjustment was that a child must have experienced a minimum of 2 negative changes in each of health and school behaviours and in relationships with others. Only 6 children met this criteria. However 16 additional children had a maximum of only one negative change in each of the above areas. Additional analysis showed that there was no statistical difference between the children with only one negative change per category and those with no negative changes in relation to adjustment. In addition there was no statistically significant difference found between those children with only one negative change per category and those with 2 or more negative changes in relation to adjustment. The only statistically significant finding was that two or more negative changes per category was related to maladjustment when compared to less than 2 negative changes per category. Thus, this finding lends support for the use of the stated criteria as one indicator of maladjustment in children.

### General Discussion of Findings

The results of the present study confirm that statistically significant relationships do exist between some of the components of children's support networks and their adjustment to parental divorce. These findings support the



proposals in the literature which suggest that children utilize a variety of support persons in their efforts to adjust to divorce (Hetherington, 1979; Kurdek & Siesky, 1980; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Specifically, the present study found that the child's maintained or improved interactions with the non-custodial parent, extended family members and/or peers was positively related to satisfactory adjustment in the post-divorce period.

The selection of the sample for the present study was based on criteria that were established for the previous study plus additional criteria that were established by the present investigator. These criteria limited the number of extraneous variables and yielded a population from within which a random sample could be drawn. Thus the findings of the present study can be generalized within the boundaries of these criteria.

Although the findings of the present study can be generalized within the limits of the established criteria it must be recognized that the results cannot be generalized to include all divorcing families. Each child in the present study was from a family that was experiencing its first divorce. This may reflect a less complex home situation than might be found in other divorces. The first divorce may also reflect a different level of trauma than would be found if families had experienced a previous divorce.

The further generalizability and implications of the

findings of the present study are dependent upon a number of factors. One such factor is that there were only 6 children who could be categorized as having adjustment problems thus yielding a small sample for study. This was an appropriate group to study since the criteria used in the determination of maladjustment proved to be valid. Only those children meeting the established criteria for maladjustment were found to show statistically significant relationships when compared with the children who displayed one or no negative changes. The group of children displaying one negative change showed no statistically significant difference from those children with no negative changes. Despite the small sample size, it was still possible to obtain statistical significance in the areas previously mentioned. It is possible that a larger sample may provide further evidence of significance between maladjustment and the independent variables and would allow for stronger relationships to be seen.

The determination of the child's adjustment was based on the parents' perception of the child and his or her behaviours. There is some disagreement in the literature as to whether or not the parents' perception is an accurate determinant of the child's adjustment.

Kurdek and Siesky (1978; 1979) compared the parents' perception of the child and the child's actual behaviours and found that the majority of the parents did have an

accurate view of the child's adjustment. Klatskin (1972), Westman (1972), and Kelly and Wallerstein (1977) however, suggested that the parents' own adjustment problems may occupy the parent to such a degree that they may be unable to accurately perceive how the child is adjusting.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that parental perceptions regarding the child were often inaccurate and strongly influenced by the divorce events. These investigators noted that the parent who was eager for the divorce tended to perceive the child as being well adjusted, while the parent who opposed the divorce action saw the same child as having severe adjustment problems. In addition, it has also been suggested that the child's own coping mechanisms may mask the child's true adjustment and thus cause the parents to make errors in assessing how well the child is adjusting to the divorce (Klatskin, 1972).

It is thus apparent that parental perception may be accurate, although it cannot always be depended upon as being a truly reliable method for determining the child's adjustment to divorce. Thus the parents' perception is considered to be one factor that is a possible limitation of the present study.

One further potential limitation of the present study is that the reliability and validity of the interview schedule, as well as inter-interviewer reliability have not been determined. However since the questions used in the

present study were structured and since the previous interviewers were given training to administer the interview schedule in a standardized way, one would expect reliability to be at an acceptable level.

Other possible limitations may be the fact that 8 of the 32 divorces were not final and that the time period between the divorce and the data collection ranged from six months to one year. In cases where the divorce was not final the children may not have had to acknowledge the reality of the situation or to adjust to the permanent departure of one of the parents from the home.

The time difference between parental divorce and data collection may also be reflected in the child's adjustment behaviours. Children have been found to experience fewer difficulties toward the end of the first year following parental divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). However it is known that all parents had filed for divorce and that all data were collected within the one year of filing for divorce. Thus generalizations are limited to within this framework.

Although several limitations of the present study have been identified, the results do have implications in the field of nursing. Since it is known that some children do experience problems in adjusting to their parents' divorce it is important to recognize any factors that may inhibit the child's healthy adjustment. By isolating and describing

these significant factors, health professionals will be better able to identify the at-risk child and thus be able to provide appropriate services and/or to initiate the necessary referrals. Early screening for and identification of potential divorce-related adjustment problems may prevent long-term difficulties and may be of great assistance to both the child and the family as they make the transition from marriage to divorce.

Although the child of divorce may first encounter psychological problems, these will often be translated into and be displayed as physical symptoms. Thus, nurses in all areas of family-child nursing involving the school-aged child can benefit from the knowledge obtained through research such as that presented in the present study. The pediatric nurse practitioner, public health and/or school nurse may first become aware of a child's adjustment problems when he or she presents with vague physical complaints, or when a parent or a teacher comments on a change in the child's behaviour. Knowledge of the factors that contribute to adjustment problems can aid nursing personnel in determining which children are indeed experiencing adjustment problems and who may need assistance in coping with parental divorce.

The knowledge of the relationships between the child's support network and adjustment can also be used by nurses who are in contact with the divorcing parents. Nursing

personnel in these positions can offer counselling and guidance which will help the parents in their dealings with the children. By helping the children to make a smoother adjustment to the changed family, the parents will also benefit and may possibly decrease some of their own adjustment problems.

The key to having children make a satisfactory adjustment to parental divorce is to prevent as many problems as possible. The findings of the present study do contribute to the knowledge of the factors that are related to adjustment and thus can be useful in promoting a child's healthy transition into a changed family life.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary

A significant number of children are exposed to parental divorce and have been found to experience adjustment problems in the post-divorce period. Because of these findings the present study focused on some of the available supports which have been suggested as being related to adjustment. The purpose of this investigation was to determine those variables within the child's support system that correlate with favourable adjustment to divorce.

The data used in the present study were derived from the records of parents who had participated in a 1976 study entitled "The Impact of Divorce on Parents and Their Children". Data for this previous study were collected through the use of a structured interview schedule that was administered by the researchers. The selection criteria for the present study yielded a sample of 32 children ranging in age from 6 through 12 years.

Twenty-six of the 32 children studied were determined to have satisfactory adjustment according to the criteria established in the present study. The remaining six children were determined to have unsatisfactory adjustment.

The data on the 32 children were analyzed according to the following six hypotheses: (1) Children who maintain

or have increased involvement with the non-custodial parent will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who experience less involvement, (2) Children whose mothers return to or commence employment following the divorce will have a less satisfactory adjustment than those children whose mothers did not change their employment patterns, (3) Children who have one or more siblings will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than the only child, (4) Children who maintain the same or have improved relationships with extended family members will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who have deteriorated relationships, (5) Children who maintain the same or have improved relationships with peers will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who have deteriorated relationships, (6) Children who do not experience a change in residence and/or school following the divorce will have a more satisfactory adjustment than those children who do experience such changes.

Hypotheses 2,3 and 6 were rejected. There was no relationship between changes in the mother's post-divorce employment pattern and the child's adjustment. The relationship between the number of children in the family and the child's adjustment also failed to achieve statistical significance. Finally there was no statistically significant relationship found between the child's adjustment and his



or her change in residence and/or school.

Hypotheses 1, 4 and 5 were found to be statistically significant and were therefore accepted. Children who maintained the same or had increased involvement with their non-custodial parent did have fewer adjustment problems than those children who experienced decreased involvement. Statistically significant results were also found between the child's post-divorce adjustment and his or her relationships with extended family members and peers. Those children who were able to maintain the same or to have improved relationships with extended family members and/or peers experienced more satisfactory adjustment than those children who had deteriorated relationships.

It may thus be concluded that school-aged children of divorce do benefit from the use of a support network comprised of the non-custodial parent, extended family members and peers. It would appear that this network can provide the child with much of the support that is necessary if the child is to achieve healthy adjustment to divorce. When the support network is not available or is not utilized, the child may fail to properly adjust to the parental divorce.

#### Recommendations

The findings of the present study suggest a number of recommendations for further research.

First, the study should be repeated with the children themselves being interviewed. This would allow for a more objective measurement of the child's adjustment with less reliance being placed on the accuracy of the parents' perceptions.

Second, a study utilizing a larger sample might produce a different distribution of scores on each of the support variables. This may then allow for more accurate testing and may permit further significant relationships to be seen.

Third, additional support variables should be examined for significance. These would include such factors as children's groups and clubs, professional counselling and specific divorce oriented services. Such a study would provide an indication of those referral services that would be beneficial for children of divorce.

Fourth, a study should be conducted on other age groups, for example pre-school and adolescence, to identify the support variables that influence the adjustment of children with these age ranges. The results could then be compared to those of the school-aged child to determine whether certain supports are more significant for different ages. This would assist in the accurate identification of the at-risk children.

Fifth, a final recommendation is made for further research in the areas that were found to be significant in the present study. Additional research is needed focusing

on the support variables of the non-custodial parent, extended family members and peers in order to determine how these supports are utilized by children to achieve healthy adjustment.

### Conclusion

It would appear that children could indeed benefit from support in their efforts to make an adjustment to their parents' divorce. One way to encourage healthy adjustment would be to ensure that this support is made available and is being utilized by the child. By noting the absence of significant support variables it may thus be possible to recognize those children who are at a higher risk for developing adjustment problems. As a result, nursing resources can be more efficiently and effectively channelled to provide interventions for these identifiable high risk children.

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## REFERENCES

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APPENDIX  
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## Interview Schedule

I. General Information

1. Tell me those people NOW living with you:  
\_\_\_\_ No one, \_\_\_\_ Children, \_\_\_\_ Mother and/or Father,  
\_\_\_\_ Divorcing Spouse, \_\_\_\_ Mother-in-law and/or  
\_\_\_\_ Father-in-law, \_\_\_\_ Other Relatives, \_\_\_\_ Housekeeper,  
\_\_\_\_ Friends, \_\_\_\_ Other (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_
2. (a) How many years of school have you attended?  
\_\_\_\_ Less than 4 years of high school  
\_\_\_\_ Four years of high school  
\_\_\_\_ 1-3 years of college  
\_\_\_\_ 4 years of college  
\_\_\_\_ 5 or more years of college  
  
(b) What is the highest degree you have attained?  
\_\_\_\_ No degree  
\_\_\_\_ High school degree or equivalent  
\_\_\_\_ Post high school technical or trade school degree  
\_\_\_\_ or certificate  
\_\_\_\_ 2 year college degree (Associate, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_ 4 year college degree (Bachelors, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_ Advanced degree (Masters, Doctorate, Medical, Law, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_ None of the above: \_\_\_\_\_
3. (a) How many years of school has your divorcing spouse attended?  
\_\_\_\_ Less than 4 years of high school  
\_\_\_\_ Four years high school  
\_\_\_\_ 1-3 years of college  
\_\_\_\_ 4 years of college  
\_\_\_\_ 5 or more years of college  
\_\_\_\_ Don't know  
  
(b) What is the highest degree your divorcing spouse has attained?  
\_\_\_\_ No degree  
\_\_\_\_ High school degree or equivalent  
\_\_\_\_ Post high school technical or trade school degree  
\_\_\_\_ or certificate  
\_\_\_\_ 2 year college degree (Associate, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_ 4 year college degree (Bachelors, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_ Advanced degree (Masters, Doctorate, Medical, Law, etc.)  
\_\_\_\_ None of the above: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ Don't know

4. (a) What was your age at the time of your marriage? \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) What was the age of your divorcing spouse at the time of your marriage? \_\_\_\_\_  
Don't know \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
6. IF YOU ARE WORKING, what is your monthly income before anything is taken out?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Less than \$200, \_\_\_\_\_ \$200-399, \_\_\_\_\_ \$400-599, \_\_\_\_\_ \$600-799,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ \$800-999, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1000-1199, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1200-1399, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1400-1599,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ \$1600-1799, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1800 & up
7. (a) Is your divorcing spouse currently working?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ no, \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know
- (b) IF YES: Is your divorcing spouse working \_\_\_\_\_ Full time,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Part time, \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_
8. What is the occupation of your divorcing spouse? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is the monthly income of your divorcing spouse before anything is taken out?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Less than \$200, \_\_\_\_\_ \$200-399, \_\_\_\_\_ \$400-599, \_\_\_\_\_ \$600-799,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ \$800-999, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1000-1199, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1200-1399, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1400-1599,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ \$1600-1799, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1800 & up
10. When the divorce was filed what was your total family income?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Less than \$200, \_\_\_\_\_ \$200-399, \_\_\_\_\_ \$400-599, \_\_\_\_\_ \$600-799,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ \$800-999, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1000-1199, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1200-1399, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1400-1599,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ \$1600-1799, \_\_\_\_\_ \$1800 & up
11. What is the present situation regarding your divorce?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ The divorce is not final, and is continuing through the court.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ The divorce is final and I have gone to court and picked up the decree.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ The divorce is final and my ex-spouse has gone to court and picked up the decree.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ My spouse and I have reconciled, and the divorce action has been dismissed.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ My spouse and I have reconciled, but the divorce has not been dismissed.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_
12. Are you and your divorcing spouse now living in the same house?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ No

13. How many times have you and your divorcing spouse lived apart since the divorce was filed?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ None, \_\_\_\_\_ One, \_\_\_\_\_ Two, \_\_\_\_\_ Three, \_\_\_\_\_ Four or more.
14. IF THE DIVORCE IS FINAL: Have you remarried?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ No, \_\_\_\_\_ Living with someone.
15. IF THE DIVORCE IS FINAL: Has your ex-spouse remarried?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ No, \_\_\_\_\_ Living with someone.

## II. Support Network

16. How many times have you moved since the divorce was filed?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ None, \_\_\_\_\_ One, \_\_\_\_\_ Two, \_\_\_\_\_ Three, \_\_\_\_\_ Four or more.
17. How many times have your children changed school as a result of your moving?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ None, \_\_\_\_\_ One, \_\_\_\_\_ Two, \_\_\_\_\_ Three, \_\_\_\_\_ Four or more.
18. IF A CHANGE OCCURED TAKE EACH CHILD SEPARATELY FROM YOUNGEST TO OLDEST AND ASK: How would you describe the reasons for the change?

	AGE OF CHILD	SEX OF CHILD	CHANGE IN RESIDENCE	ELEMENTARY TO SECOND- ARY SCHOOL	OTHER PLEASE DESCRIBE
1					
2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

19. Are you currently working? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ No
20. If you are now working, who takes care of your children on a regular basis?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other parent, \_\_\_\_\_ Relatives, \_\_\_\_\_ Child care center,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Babysitter, \_\_\_\_\_ Take care of themselves, \_\_\_\_\_ Other
21. What was the work pattern of you and your divorcing spouse when the divorce was filed?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Both worked full time, \_\_\_\_\_ Both worked part time,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Husband worked full time, wife worked part time,  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Husband worked part time, wife worked full time  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Husband worked full time, wife did not work  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Husband did not work, wife worked full time  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Both of us were not working

22. How would you describe your economic situation as compared to before the divorce was filed?  
\_\_\_\_ No change  
\_\_\_\_ Worse than before  
\_\_\_\_ Better than before  
\_\_\_\_ Other
23. If you are not working, how long have you been out of work?  
\_\_\_\_ Less than 1 month, \_\_\_\_ Between 1-6 months,  
\_\_\_\_ Between 7-12 months, \_\_\_\_ Over 1 year, \_\_\_\_ Never worked.
24. How many job changes have you made since the divorce was filed?  
\_\_\_\_ None, \_\_\_\_ One, \_\_\_\_ Two, \_\_\_\_ Three, \_\_\_\_ Four or more
25. How many job changes has your divorcing spouse made since the divorce was filed?  
\_\_\_\_ None, \_\_\_\_ One, \_\_\_\_ Two, \_\_\_\_ Three, \_\_\_\_ Four or more,  
\_\_\_\_ Not working, \_\_\_\_ Don't know
26. Has a decision been reached regarding permanent custody of the children?  
\_\_\_\_ Yes, \_\_\_\_ No, \_\_\_\_ Don't know
27. IF YES TO #26: Who has custody of the children?  
\_\_\_\_ Mother  
\_\_\_\_ Father  
\_\_\_\_ Other  
\_\_\_\_ Not decided (Still in process)  
\_\_\_\_ Not decided (contested)
28. With whom are the children now living?  
\_\_\_\_ Me  
\_\_\_\_ Divorcing Spouse  
\_\_\_\_ Both of us  
\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
29. Who was involved in arriving at the decision about who will have custody of the children?  
\_\_\_\_ Discussion with spouse  
\_\_\_\_ Discussion with relatives  
\_\_\_\_ Professional counseling  
\_\_\_\_ Discussion with children  
\_\_\_\_ Consultation with my attorney  
\_\_\_\_ Court decision  
\_\_\_\_ Other (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ Has not been decided

30. Are you satisfied with the present custody arrangement?

- (a) ☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Have not decided on custody arrangement

(b) RECORD ANY COMMENTS OR EXAMPLES IF RESPONSE IS QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

31. Do you think your divorcing spouse is satisfied with the present custody arrangement?

- (a) ☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Don't know

(b) RECORD ANY COMMENTS OR EXAMPLES IF RESPONSE IS QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

32. Do you think the children are satisfied with custody arrangement? TAKE EACH CHILD SEPARATELY YOUNGEST TO OLDEST:

CHILD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Yes	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
No	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Don't know	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Children considered too young	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

33. Overall how would you describe the relationship on custody?

- (a) Would you say that you and your divorcing spouse generally share the same attitude towards custody?  
☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified

RECORD COMMENTS IF THE ANSWER IS QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Would you say that you and your divorcing spouse generally act together or cooperate in carrying out or dealing with custody?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Don't know

RECORD COMMENTS IF THE ANSWER IS QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

34. Has a decision been reached regarding the permanent visitation arrangements?  
☐ Yes, ☐ No, ☐ Don't know
35. IF YES TO #34:  
(a) What are the visitation arrangements? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(b) Are there any limitations on visitations?  
☐ Yes, ☐ No, ☐ Don't know  
IF YES: What are the limitations? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
36. Were the visitation arrangements outlined in the divorce with regard to frequency and length of visits?  
☐ Yes, ☐ No, ☐ Don't know
37. Who was involved in arriving at the decision regarding visitation arrangements?  
☐ Discussion with spouse  
☐ Discussion with relatives  
☐ Court decision  
☐ Consultation with my attorney  
☐ Professional counseling  
☐ Children's wishes  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Have not decided
38. How frequently do you think visitation should take place?  
☐ Anytime  
☐ About once a week  
☐ More than once a week  
☐ Twice a month  
☐ Once a month  
☐ Every few months  
☐ On special occasions or vacations only  
☐ Never  
☐ Don't know

39. How often do you think divorcing spouse thinks visitation should take place?

☐ Anytime  
☐ About once a week  
☐ More than once a week  
☐ Twice a month  
☐ Once a month  
☐ Every few months  
☐ On special occasions or vacations only  
☐ Never  
☐ Don't know

40. How often does the non-custodial parent see the children? TAKE EACH CHILD SEPARATELY YOUNGEST TO OLDEST:

Children	1	2	3	4	5	6
Daily	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Twice a month	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once a month	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special occasions/ vacations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

41. Are you satisfied with present visitation arrangement?

(a) ☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Have not decided on visitation arrangement

(b) RECORD ANY COMMENTS IF RESPONSE IS QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

42. Do you think your divorcing spouse is satisfied with the present visitation arrangement?

(a) ☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Don't know

(b) RECORD COMMENTS IS RESPONSE IS QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



43. Do you think your children are satisfied with the visitation arrangements?

☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Don't know  
☐ Children considered too young

44. (a) Would say that you and your divorcing spouse generally share the same attitudes towards visitation?

☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Don't know

RECORD COMMENTS IF ANSWER IS QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- (b) Would you say that you and your divorcing spouse generally act together or cooperate in carrying out or dealing with visitation?

☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Don't know

RECORD COMMENTS IF ANSWER IS QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

45. When you were married generally who was most responsible for the children?

	Mother	Father	Shared	N/A
a. discipline	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. health matters	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. money for child expenses	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. dress and grooming	_____	_____	_____	_____
e. religious training (if any)	_____	_____	_____	_____
f. chores at home	_____	_____	_____	_____
g. other _____	_____	_____	_____	_____

SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN ONLY

	Mother	Father	Shared	N/A
h. school matters	_____	_____	_____	_____
i. social activities	_____	_____	_____	_____
j. driving	_____	_____	_____	_____
k. school involvement of parents	_____	_____	_____	_____
l. allowance	_____	_____	_____	_____
m. other	_____	_____	_____	_____

46. Were you satisfied with the prior parenting pattern?

☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Don't know

RECORD ANY COMMENTS IF QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

47. Do you think your divorcing spouse was satisfied with the prior parenting pattern?
- ☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Don't know
- RECORD COMMENTS IF QUALIFIED:
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

48. Do you think your children were satisfied with the prior parenting pattern? TAKE EACH CHILD SEPARATELY YOUNGEST TO OLDEST

CHILD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Yes						
No	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Don't know	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Children considered too young	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

49. We would like to get some information on the parenting relationship since the divorce was filed. Since the divorce was filed who is most responsible for rearing the children?

AREA	MOTHER	FATHER	STEP-PARENT(S)		SHARED
			M	F	
a. discipline	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. health matters	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. money for child expense	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. dress and grooming	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
e. Religious training	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
f. chores around the house	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
g. other	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
<u>SCHOOLAGE CHILDREN ONLY</u>					
h. school matters	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
i. social activities	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
j. driving	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
k. school involvement of parents	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
l. allowance	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
m. other	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

50. Does your child (children) ask you to attend school functions like PTA, school programs or other school-related activities?
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Not applicable

51. Has this pattern changed since filing for the divorce?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Not applicable
52. Do you attend school functions or participate in school related activities with or for your child?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Not applicable
53. Has this pattern changed since the divorce was filed?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Not applicable

Now we will go through a similiar set of questions regarding the non-custodial parent.

54. Does your child (children) ask the non-custodial parent to attend school functions like PTA, school programs, or school related activities?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Not applicable
55. Has this pattern changed since filing for the divorce?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Not applicable
56. Does the non-custodial spouse attend school functions or participate in school-related activities with or for your child?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Not applicable
57. Has this pattern changed since the divorce was filed?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Not applicable
58. Are you satisfied with the present parenting pattern?  
☐ Yes  
☐ Yes qualified  
☐ No  
☐ No qualified  
☐ Don't know

RECORD COMMENTS IF RESPONSE  
IS QUALIFIED: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

59. Do you think your divorcing spouse is satisfied with the present parenting pattern?
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes           | RECORD COMMENTS IF RESPONSE QUALIFIED: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes qualified |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No            |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No qualified  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know    |  |
60. TAKE EACH CHILD SEPARATELY YOUNGEST TO OLDEST: Do you thing the children are satisfied with the parenting pattern?
- | <u>CHILD</u>               | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Yes                        | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| No                         | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Don't know                 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Child considered too young | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

### III. Adjustment

61. USE THIS FORMAT FOR EACH CHILD IN THE AREAS OF HEALTH, SCHOOL, RELATIONS WITH OTHERS. IF THERE WAS NO CHANGE PUT AN S, A POSITIVE CHANGE PUT P, AND IF A NEGATIVE CHANGE PUT AN N. IF ITEM IS NOT APPROPRIATE PUT AN X.

I would now like to talk with you about any changes in the children's health, school, or relations with others since the divorce was filed.

I understand you have \_\_\_\_\_ children, who are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ years old. Starting with the youngest (No information on children over 18) could you tell me about any changes in:

#### A. HEALTH:

NUMBER CHILDREN FROM YOUNGEST TO OLDEST

	1	2	3	4	5	6
AGE:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
SEX:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

CHANGE IN:

Eating	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sleeping	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Complaints of	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Feeling sick	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Fearfulness	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

B. SCHOOL:

NUMBER CHILDREN FROM YOUNGEST TO OLDEST

	1	2	3	4	5	6
AGE:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
SEX:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

CHANGE IN:

Attendance	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Grades	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Classroom Behaviour	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Relations with School Friends	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

C. RELATIONS:

NUMBER CHILDREN FROM YOUNGEST TO OLDEST

	1	2	3	4	5	6
AGE:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
SEX:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

CHANGE IN:

Brothers/Sisters	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Myself	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Other parent	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Playmates/friends	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Neighbours	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Grandparents	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Parent's friend	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
or new spouse	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Other relatives	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

62. Are any of your children in trouble with the police or other juvenile authorities? (AGES 7-17 ONLY)

☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Don't know

63. Have any of your children been in trouble with the police or juvenile authorities in the past? (AGES 7-17 ONLY)

☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Don't know

64. Have any of your children been in any trouble that would ordinarily lead to contact with police or juvenile authorities? (AGES 7-17 ONLY)
- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Don't know
65. Taking each of your children separately are you satisfied with their adjustment and behaviour since the divorce was filed?

NUMBER CHILDREN YOUNGEST TO OLDEST	YES	NO	NOT SURE	DON'T KNOW
1	_____	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____	_____
5	_____	_____	_____	_____
6	_____	_____	_____	_____

66. Taking each child separately do you think your divorcing spouse is satisfied with the adjustment and behaviour of the children since the divorce has been filed?

NUMBER CHILDREN YOUNGEST TO OLDEST	YES	NO	NOT SURE	DON'T KNOW
1	_____	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____	_____
5	_____	_____	_____	_____
6	_____	_____	_____	_____

67. Taking each child separately do you think they are satisfied with their situation at this time?

NUMBER CHILDREN YOUNGEST TO OLDEST	YES	NO	NOT SURE	DON'T KNOW
1	_____	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____	_____
5	_____	_____	_____	_____
6	_____	_____	_____	_____

## ABSTRACT

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Janice E. Cambruzzi

For the MASTER OF NURSING

Date of Receiving this Degree: June 12, 1981

Title: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN'S SUPPORT  
NETWORKS AND THEIR ADJUSTMENT TO DIVORCE: THE  
PARENTS' PERCEPTION

Approved:

May Rawlinson, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor

The purpose of this research was to identify the relationships between selected support systems that are available to the school-aged children of divorce, and the child's subsequent post-divorce adjustment as perceived by the parent(s). The support network was defined by the present study as consisting of the non-custodial parent, siblings, extended family members, peers, and school personnel.

The data used in the present study were derived from the records of parents who had participated in a 1976 study entitled "The Impact of Divorce on Parents and Their Children". Data for this previous study were collected through the use of an interview schedule that was administered by the previous researchers. The selection criteria for the present study yielded a sample of 32 children



ranging in age from 6 through 12 years.

Six of the 32 children were determined to have unsatisfactory adjustment. The remaining 26 children were deemed to have satisfactory adjustment.

Based on past research, the following hypotheses were generated: (1) Children who maintain or have increased involvement with the non-custodial parent will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who experience less involvement, (2) Children whose mothers return to or commence employment following the divorce will have a less satisfactory adjustment than those children whose mothers did not change their employment patterns, (3) Children who have one or more siblings will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than the "only" child, (4) Children who maintain the same or have improved relationships with extended family members will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who have deteriorated relationships, (5) Children who maintain the same or have improved relationships with peers will have a more satisfactory adjustment to divorce than those children who have deteriorated relationships, (6) Children who do not experience any change in residence and school following the divorce will have a more satisfactory adjustment than those children who experience a change in residence and/or school. Statistical analysis of the data indicated that only hypotheses 1, 4 and 5 could be accepted. Children

who maintained or who had increased interactions with non-custodial parents, extended family members and/or peers experienced more satisfactory adjustment than children who experienced deteriorated interactions.

A statistically significant difference was found between the maladjusted children and those children who did not meet the maladjustment criteria. No statistically significant difference was noted between the child's maladjustment and his or her sex, age, and the parents' income or educational level. The custodial parent's age at the time of marriage was found to be significantly related to the child's post-divorce adjustment however this was not evident with the non-custodial parent.

Implications for the field of nursing were suggested and recommendations were made for further research.