FACTORS PREDICTING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN YOUNG CHILDREN FOLLOWING PARENTAL DIVORCE

Karela C, Petrogiannis K.

School of Humanities, Hellenic Open University, Greece

Keywords: divorce, young children, well-being, resilience

It is suggested that in the absence of new stresses and adaptive challenges associated with their parents’ separation most children can cope with their new life situation. This study aimed to explore divorce-related factors that could predict young children’s (4 to 7 years old) positive developmental outcomes such as attention, self-regulation, ability to take initiatives and positive relationships with others. It was conducted with a representative sample of 130 parents from different regions in Greece who had been divorced for at least a year before the period of study. Based on parents’ perception concerning the level of competence and the adversity that children had faced due to divorce process, the sample was divided into two groups (a) those families who considered the child of reference as more “vulnerable” (38.5%), and (b) those who considered the child as more “resilient” (61.5%). Regression analyses showed that among the factors which predicted emotional well-being for children of the former group, who were considered as at risk of coping with the stressors of divorce, were: i) emotional proximity in parent-child relationships, ii) supportive relationship between ex-spouses, iii) absence of parental stress, iv) parents’ life satisfaction, and v) family supportive groups. On the other side, i) stressful life events and ii) feelings of rejection predicted higher risk. For the other group of children, i.e. those who were considered as adaptive to divorce stressors it was revealed that i) life-changing events and ii) parents’ life satisfaction contributed to better developmental outcomes, whereas i) feelings of rejection, ii) confrontational parent-child relationship, and iii) parents’ hostility before divorce could negatively affect children’s emotional well-being. The findings are discussed through the prism of the crucial role that divorce-related factors play on the developmental process as well as their implications to divorce intervention programs.