

## **ATTACHMENT DYNAMICS AT CHILDREN OF 9-12 YEARS OLD WITH DIVORCED PARENTS IN ELBASAN, ALBANIA**

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*Divorce is a world phenomenon that affects not only the two parents but children too. Divorce is a wound of Albanian society extended during this time of transition. Parents divorce with each other and sometimes they “divorce” from their children. For a child, losing one parent is the same thing with dying.*

*The aim of this study besides recognizing the phenomenon of divorce of parents and its importance for children of 9-12 years old to explore the effects of divorce of parents at attachment dynamics, self-esteem and shame and guilt.*

*The methodology of this study is: attachment questionnaire, self-esteem questionnaire (Rosenberg) and shame and guilt questionnaire applied at 100 children of divorced families and 100 children of non divorced families at 9-years system at 12 schools in the city of Elbasan.*

*This study proved all hypothesis and objectives and results that children of divorced families have more shame and guilt feelings than children of intact families. They feel guilty about the divorce of their parents. We, also, came to an end that children of divorced families have lower rates of self esteem than children of intact families. It was a very large number of children of intact families that had secure attachment compared to children of divorced families where non secure/anxious attachment. A characteristic of divorced children was the presence of avoidant and disorganized attachment among them.*

*It was recommended that parent should not discuss their divorce in the presence of their children, should explain that divorce is for parents and not for children and is not children fault about the divorce.*

**Key words:** *family, divorce, attachment, self- esteem, shame and guilt*

Divorce, as a public and personal event is dolorous and cause of crisis to most of those who experience that. Divorce represents a big transition at human life with problems and consequences.

At Elbasan Court are reported 550 divorce cases at 2010. According to statistics of Tirana Court everyday are reported about 2 requests for divorce. There is a divorce, a destroyed family, a scrappy couple every 24 hours.

Since in childhood, children can mentally represent their attachment figures. They create their ideas and expectations about relationships of this dyad, themselves and their caregivers.

Attachment theory was developed as an explanation of the existing connection between baby and primary caregiver, mother (Bowlby, 1988). This connection is not important only for general wellbeing (e.g. Kreppner & Ullrich, 1998), but it works also as a template for all relationships during human life (e.g. Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell,& Albershein, 2000). Attachment during childhood is conceptualized as a variety behaviors distinguished and integrated, that a child undertake as a response to his caregiver (mother) behaviors. There are three attachment behaviors that determinate the way attachment is seen during all life: proximity seeking, separation protest, secure base (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Segrin & Flora, 2005).

According to psychoanalytic theory, Freud has proposed that grief is a process where loss is resolved by hyperthexis and gradually followed by de-kathexis connected with internal attachment connections. Loss of a beloved person threatens to destroy psychic imaginary integrity of distressful person, imaginary because this self-image is hanged by external relationship of self. Threat explains why the grief person grasps the loss object, accepting loss can force the sad person to know the hole space of loss, naming, an unrecoverable attribute to self-need feeling of sad person for a coherent identity. (Clewel, T., 2005). At this point, at losing attachment object, subject feels he is abandoned.

The psychosocial theory emphasizes that human being pass through some phases where defined features are. If something happens during these development phases, instead of positive side child has negative development features. This theory of Erikson considers external factors impact, parents and society on developing human personality from childhood to grown person. According Erikson's theory, every person must pass through stages: 1- baby (hope) – base trust vs. mistrust; 2- baby (will) – autonomy vs. change, shame; 3- preschool (aim) – initiative vs. shame; 4- school age child (competence) – systematic worker vs. inferiority (Boeree, C. G, 2004)

The Kulber-Ross grief circle theory says that human being pass through some phases that are denial, grief, alliance, depression and acceptance (Petijohn, T. F, 1996)

Usually children lose one part of contact with one attachment figures when divorce occurs. This is a confused and stressful time to them, even though if divorce is peaceful or not.

Divorce effects on children are: 1- *psychological problems*: deny what is happening, weakness, unsecure and frightened from changes, frightened from abandonee, rejected, worried about the information, grief and hostile, depression, immaturity/hipermaturity, worry about parent resilience, blame and guilt, acting (Ferraris, A. O, 2000); 2- *Poor intellectual development*; 3- *Destroy of parent-child relationship*: triangulation, divided loyalty, projection (Nakonezny, P. A, Shull, R.D & Rodgers, J. L, 1995).

Child reaction to divorce correlates with his/her age and gender. Blakeslee & Wallerstein (1989), say that most children have the same beginning feelings. “When their family is separated, children feel vulnerable, weak, scared that their way of life is at danger to tear up” (p12). They saw at their survey that “Young children have difficulties at school concentration. Adolescents react with aggression and have conduct problems. Men and women become depressive ad frenetic. Some of them have sexual relationship with different people or immerse at their work” (p. xii).

Multiple studies have seen that boys act different from girls to reduced contact of primary attachment figure. It looks like boys have difficulties on facing divorce, that cause them school problems, detain of social interactions or have altercation and ruction with their peers Blakeslee & Wallerstein (1989). At his early study Amato (2001) emphasized that differences of boys and girls are not unique.

## **Method**

The population was drawn from 12 secondary schools (“Adem Krasniqi”, “Abdyl Paralloi”, “Bardhyl Popa”, “Fadil Gurmani”, “Jeronim De Rada”, “Jorgji Dilo”, “Luigj Gurakuqi”, “Naim Frashëri”, “Ptoleme Xhuvani”, “Qamil Guranjaku”, “Sulë Harri”, “Sulë Misiri”) in Elbasan in Albania. It were excluded children that lived with their grandparents with emigrant parents at other states, children that lived with their grandparents and their parents were zealous to their career, children who lived with one parent and the other parent was emigrant at other states and children with one or both dead parents. There were identified children of divorced families and

children of good relationship families. Students of 9 – 12 years old from both groups were invited to participate. Population involved were 50 children of divorced parents and 50 children of non divorced parents. Parents received information on the study and could refuse to allow their child to participate. Children could also refuse to participate.

Children attachment was measured with Attachment Questionnaire <sup>1</sup> adapted in Albanian. This instrument is composed of 20 questions, 4 for each for the following four styles of attachment: secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized.

Self-esteem was measured by Rosenberg Questionnaire (1965) that was adapted in Albanian by Prof. Dr. Adem Tamo. It has 10 items and determines three categories of self-esteem: low self-esteem, high self-esteem and normal self-esteem. Students rated their self-esteem from 0 (totally disagree) to 3 (totally agree).

Shame and guilt was measured by Shame and Guilt Questionnaire<sup>2</sup> that was adapted in Albanian for children based from TOSCA-3S Questionnaire of Brené Brown (2007). It was adapted especially for this study. This questionnaire has 12 items where are described some situations and children chose one of alternatives to say the way they would think or react at that situation (e.g. while you are doing your homework, you hear your familiar (mother, father, sister, brother, grandmother, grandfather) yelling and arguing with each other you think a) they are arguing because of you, b) you think to go and resilience them, c) you think they are arguing for their stuff and continue doing your homework). It measures three categories of shame and guilt: shame, self blame, blaming others.

Questionnaires were self-completed in a separate class under the supervision of the teacher, at every school.

Results were analyzed separately for both groups in excel and SPSS than were compared.

## Findings

Population involved at this study was 100 children (50 of divorced families and 50 of non divorced families) of 8 – 12 years old at third to sixth grade. Total and dimensional scores in the whole population are presented in Table I.

*Table I – Descriptive results*

Tabel I		<i>Arithmetic average</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Std</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
<b>Children of divorced parents</b>	<b>Attachment</b>	2.1	2	2	1.01	1	4

	<b>Self-esteem</b>	1.78	2	2	.61	1	3
	<b>Shame and guilt</b>	5.72	6	7	1.37	3	7
<b>Children of intact families</b>	<b>Attachment</b>	1.38	1	1	.69	1	4
	<b>Self-esteem</b>	2.12	2	2	.47	1	3
	<b>Shame and guilt</b>	5.5	6	7	1.54	2	7

According to the result of questionnaires children with divorced parents have more attachment disorders compared with children of non divorced parents. Only 28% of divorced children have secure attachment (6 females) compared to children of intact families where 70% of them have secure attachment (44% females) (Table IV).

Most of children of intact families have secure attachment (70%) and the difference with children of divorced parents is very high (28%). Watching Table II we understand there are a lot of children that have attachment problems of both groups. Insecure attachment is equal for both groups explain some problems of our society. Disorganized attachment is higher at children with divorced parents (16%), but it is present at children of intact families (4%) even though it is lower. It is clear that children of divorced parents have attachment pathologies but these pathologies are present at children of intact families.

A total of 22% of children of divorced parents have low self-esteem (14% females). The total of normal self-esteem is 66% (25% females) and 12% e of them have high self-esteem (6% females) (Table V). At children of intact families 7% have low self-esteem (4% females); 69% have normal self-esteem (17% females) and high self-esteem have 24% (7% females) (Table V). There is a high differentia of low self-esteem at divorced children (22%) compared to children of intact families (7%). Normal self-esteem is higher at children of intact families (69%) compared with children of divorced parents; and high self-esteem is 24% at children of intact families and it is 12% at children of divorced parents.

There are 31% (10% females) of children with divorced parents that have shame personality which is very high compared with children of intact families. The other dimension of shame and guilt is self blame which is higher at children of intact families (59% - 34% females) and at children with divorced parents is 37% (11% females); blaming others it is 32% (22% females) at children divorced parents and 26% (22% females) of children of intact families.

**Table II – Correlations of main data of children of divorced parents**

**Table III – Correlations of main data of children of non- divorced parents**

**Table II – Correlations of children of divorced parents**

**Table III Correlations of children of intact families**

		Self-esteem	Shame and guilt	Attachment
<b>Self-esteem</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.138	-.780
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.339	.590
	N	50	50	50
<b>Shame and guilt</b>	Pearson Correlation	.138	1	.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.339		.646
	N	50	50	50
<b>Attachment</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.780	.066	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.590	.646	
	N	50	50	50

		Self-esteem	Shame and guilt	Attachment
<b>Self-esteem</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.710	.566
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.626	.248
	N	50	50	50
<b>Shame and guilt</b>	Pearson Correlation	.710	1	-.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.626		.571
	N	50	50	50
<b>Attachment</b>	Pearson Correlation	.566	-.082	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.248	.571	
	N	50	50	50

**Table IV – Attachment style of children of divorced parents and children of non divorced parents**

**Table V – Self-esteem of children with divorced parents and children of non divorced parents**

	Table V Self-esteem		
	Low	Normal	High
M. divorced parents	17%	41%	6%
F. divorced parents	15%	25%	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>12%</b>
M. non divorced parents	3%	20%	17%
F. non divorced parents	4%	49%	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>24%</b>

	Table IV Attachment			
	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant	Dis-organized
M. divorced parents	22%	26%	4%	8%
F. divorced parents	6%	20%	6%	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>16%</b>
M. non divorced parents	26%	12%	0%	2%
F. non divorced parents	44%	14%	0%	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>4%</b>

	Table VI Shame and guilt		
	Shame	Self blame	Blaming others
M. divorced parents	21%	26%	10%
F. divorced parent	10%	11%	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>32%</b>
M. non divorced parents	11%	25%	4%
F. non divorced parents	4%	34%	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>26%</b>

**Table VI – Shame and guilt of children divorced parents and children of non divorced parents**

## Recommendations

### **Recommendations for custodian parent**

- 1- You must encourage continuously your child for what they feel inside.
- 2- Make clear to them that divorce didn't happen because of their fault.
- 3- Try to understand your child behavior which might manifest with strong grief, hate and fear
- 4- Be honest about familiar situation, relationships and communication with your child
- 5- Try to inform your child about the changes that will happen at your life
- 6- Continue to respect the rules that you had before about your child and don't try to be tolerant because this situation will confuse him/her more.
- 7- Try to have more effective time with your child, at this way he won't feel abandoned
- 8- It is very important to create a stable, safe and warm environment after divorce
- 9- Try to help your child to have a stable contact with the other parent.

If your child has serious problems during divorce process and after it, it would be necessary to contact with a specialist of this field.

### **Recommendations for noncustodial parent**

- 1- Try to have contact with your ex without arguing or blaming your ex for the acting of your child
- 2- Try to discuss about actual problems with your child, not for problems of the past
- 3- If you have difficulties at contacting with your child or your ex then you try to ask for help to a third person such as friends, relatives, cousins first. If it doesn't work you can ask legal help.
- 4- If your child doesn't want to see you because of your problematic behavior, ask professional help.
- 5- When you see your child try to don't say bad things about your ex but focus on the relationship with your child
- 6- Try to be present at every important event of your child and don't miss the appointments with him/her.

### **Recommendations for grandparents**

- 1- If the child doesn't stay with your child, it is not his/her fault of what happened

- 2- Don't attack the custodial parent if you see him/her. This will force his/her protection.
- 3- If you want see your grandchild who lives with the ex of your child but you are scared from the reaction of your child, you discuss this with him/her. Your child might be happy if you decide to contact with your grandchild.
- 4- If you see your grandchild sporadically, don't transform your time together in a judge time for the other parent. Child might feel parted between two parents and will not appreciate your praying or your accuses, will be your hostile.
- 5- Try to don't make your grandchild to don't feel guilty for not seeing noncustodial parent. This is harmful to the child.
- 6- Don't speak bad things about custodial parent, the ex of your child, or for your child. This doesn't help self-esteem of your grandchild.
- 7- Be at your border, you are the grandparent and not the parent of your grandchild and you don't have to transmit hate for the ex of your child.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Osmani, Sh. & Sylva, A. (2010)

<sup>2</sup>Xhaferri, I. (2011)

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