



5-5-51-57-Open  
Review.docx



Journal Website

**Article history:**

Received 21 July 2024

Revised 24 August 2024

Accepted 30 August 2024

Published online 01 October 2024

## Applied Family Therapy Journal

Volume 5, Issue 5, pp 51-57



E-ISSN: 3041-8798

# A Systematic Review of Educational Damages in Children of Divorce

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### Article Info

#### Article type:

Review Article

#### How to cite this article:

Hosseinzadeh Dashti, M., Salehi, K., Keshavarz Afshar, H., & Javadipour, M. (2024). A Systematic Review of Educational Damages in Children of Divorce. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 5(5), 51-57.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.5.5.6>



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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The primary objective of this study was to examine the educational damages faced by children of divorce. Divorce is a significant life event that imposes stress on the entire family, especially on children.

**Methods:** This study employed a systematic review of existing literature to identify key educational damages faced by children of divorce. A total of 3,296 articles were initially retrieved from databases, and through a rigorous selection process based on relevance, 27 studies were chosen for in-depth analysis. The indicators were categorized into 9 criteria using a coding framework, with each indicator representing a unique educational challenge or damage.

**Findings:** The review identified 72 educational indicators categorized into key themes such as academic decline, dropout rates, concentration and attention issues, cognitive development impairments, and reduced resources for education. The most frequent issues were poor academic performance, lack of concentration, and dropout rates. Children from divorced families exhibited significantly more challenges in school performance, motivation for achievement, and learning compared to those from intact families. The absence of a stable emotional and financial environment exacerbated these issues, further contributing to academic setbacks.

**Conclusion:** The findings highlight the severe impact of parental divorce on children's educational performance and mental well-being. Academic decline, lack of concentration, and emotional maladjustment are common issues, often leading to school dropout. Effective interventions, including parental education and structured support programs, are crucial to reducing the educational damages faced by children of divorce. Schools and counselors must be trained to address these

challenges and work collaboratively with parents to create a supportive learning environment.

**Keywords:** Divorce, Children of Divorce, Educational Damages, Academic Decline, School Performance, Systematic Review

## 1. Introduction

The family and its foundation represent the symbol of progress and prosperity, or the decline and deterioration, of society. No social harm can be understood without identifying the family's role. The stability of the family is the stability of society, and its damage can lead to a civilizational crisis (Saroukhani, 2020; Sarukhani, 2019). According to the statistics from the National Organization for Civil Registration, during the first five months of 2023, 199,727 marriages and 65,355 divorces were registered, showing a divorce rate of 32.7% compared to marriages (Zeraatkar et al., 2022). Although this statistic has not changed significantly compared to the same period last year, it remains high and concerning. A major concern in the issue of divorce is children. Children affected by parental divorce are at greater risk of emotional and behavioral disorders, poor school performance, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, distress, smoking, and substance abuse (Çaksen, 2022).

Research shows that children of divorce face educational challenges such as lack of textbooks, poor academic performance, and difficulty concentrating, and teachers are advised to provide more educational care to these students (Agusiobo & Agukwe-Oluoma, 2023). Another study found that the academic performance of students, regardless of their gender, declined after their parents' divorce (Ashenafi & Ayenew, 2021). Additionally, a study revealed that parental divorce reduces children's emotional well-being, social functioning, academic performance, and resilience (Wosowei, 2020). Findings on the educational and social status of children of divorce indicate that children facing financial difficulties were forced to drop out of school and were deprived of educational activities, making them innocent victims of parental divorce (Limbu, 2021).

Research has shown that parental divorce/separation is associated with an increased risk of child and adolescent adjustment problems, including academic difficulties (such as lower grades and dropout), disruptive behaviors (such as behavioral problems and substance abuse), and depressive moods (D'Onofrio & Emery, 2019). However, most children whose parents divorce are resilient and do not display obvious psychological problems. It is also important to note that even resilient young people from divorced families often

report painful feelings or experiences, such as concerns about events like graduation or weddings where both parents are present (D'Onofrio & Emery, 2019). A comparison of the average grades of adolescents from divorced families with those of parents with higher education levels and less educated parents revealed a greater decline in the grades of children of less educated parents (Nilsen et al., 2020).

In a domestic study, Abbasi Nejad emphasized the impact of family disruption on the lack of success and dropout rates of students by comparing 42 children of divorce with children from intact families in terms of individual characteristics, health status, and academic grades. The results indicated that students from divorced families experienced greater academic decline compared to students from intact families (Abbas Nejad Kalat, 2021). Another study, based on documentary methods, found numerous effects and consequences of divorce on family dynamics and the academic performance of students (Padash et al., 2019).

In a documentary study examining the relationship between parental divorce and the academic decline of their children, the researcher concluded that children whose parents have divorced or live in families where parents are emotionally divorced, experience significantly more academic decline compared to students living in intact families (Fata'i Ini Alia, 2022). Regarding problematic behaviors, in all subscales and the total score, a significantly higher average was observed in children of divorce compared to children from intact families (Garavand et al., 2016). Another semi-experimental study trained problem-solving skills in children of divorce to reduce social maladjustment and improve self-regulation. The results showed that problem-solving training increased social adjustment and self-regulation strategies in children of divorce (Madhavi et al., 2019).

In conclusion, research indicates that divorce causes significant harm to family members, especially children. Given the importance of the elementary school years, which form the foundation of children's education and social character, and the fact that any disruption during this period can cause irreparable harm to a child's personality and future, and considering that the future of any country depends on having healthy, vibrant, thoughtful, and knowledge-driven children, we aimed to study the

educational damages experienced by children of divorce by reviewing relevant research and documents.

## 2. Methods

This study aimed to conduct a systematic review of research on the educational damages faced by children of divorce. To achieve this, we used the documentary method in a systematic review based on the guidelines of Okoli and Schabram (2010). For a more precise review and accurate article selection, we followed the article selection process in research by Silva (2015), which includes "planning, selection, extraction, and execution." The statistical population of this research comprised all journal articles, conference papers, and dissertations from Iranian databases such as SID, Magiran, Civilica, NoorMags, and IranDoc.

A) Search Strategies: The required data were collected using keyword searches for "divorce," "children," "children of divorce," and "educational damages" in databases such as Magiran, the Scientific Information Database (SID), Civilica, NoorMags, IranDoc, and the Comprehensive Humanities Portal (Ensani), covering the period from 2006 to 2022.

B) Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: For the present systematic review, articles containing the searched keywords and focusing on the educational damages of children of divorce were included. Articles were selected if they were original studies published after 2006 in reputable Iranian databases.

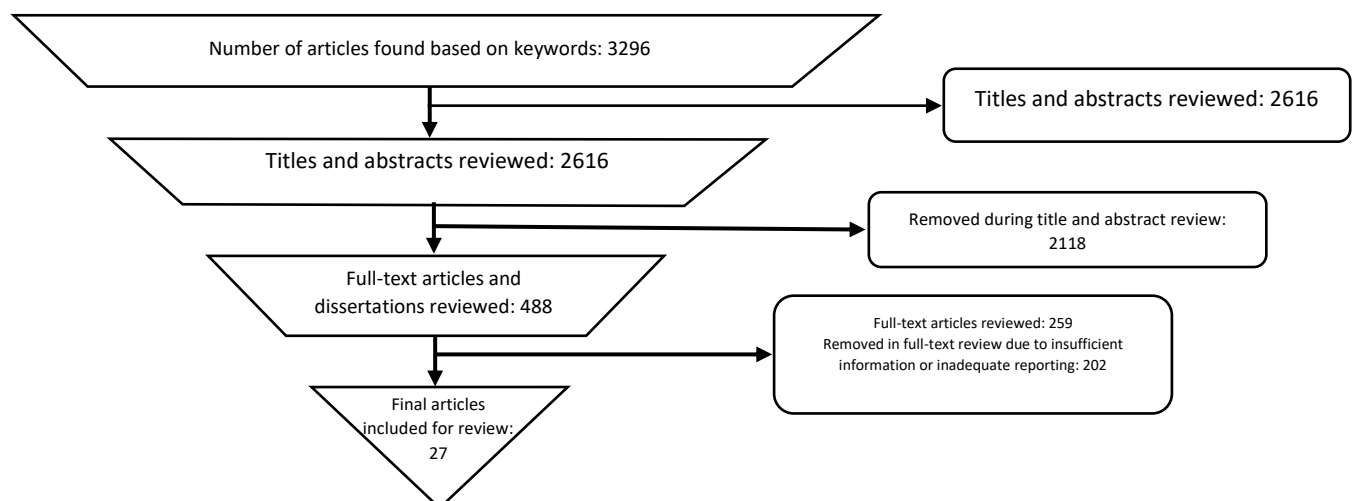
The document types included: all theories, approaches, field, theoretical, and review studies published in full-text articles or credible books.

C) Review and Selection Process of Relevant Articles: Based on the review of documents and research in this field, 3,296 domestic studies were found with the relevant keywords, and after screening, 27 final studies were selected for further review.

To assess the quality of the reviewed articles, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was used. This checklist helps researchers evaluate the validity, accuracy, and quality of the content under review. The checklist includes several questions, and the researcher scores each question. Based on the total score of each study, the quality of the articles is assessed and analyzed. Figure 1 shows the review and selection process of articles based on quality and the required information for the research.

**Figure 1**

*Article Review and Selection Process*



## 3. Findings and Results

In the data analysis, all codes related to the educational damages of children of divorce, as identified by the researchers, were extracted and shown in a table. In this

study, all factors extracted from the selected articles were initially considered as codes. Then, based on the meaning and concept of each code, they were categorized into similar concepts. Table 1 shows the categorization of the educational indicators for children of divorce. This study led

to the identification of 72 indicators, categorized under 9 criteria, to explain the educational damages of children of divorce, which are presented in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1**

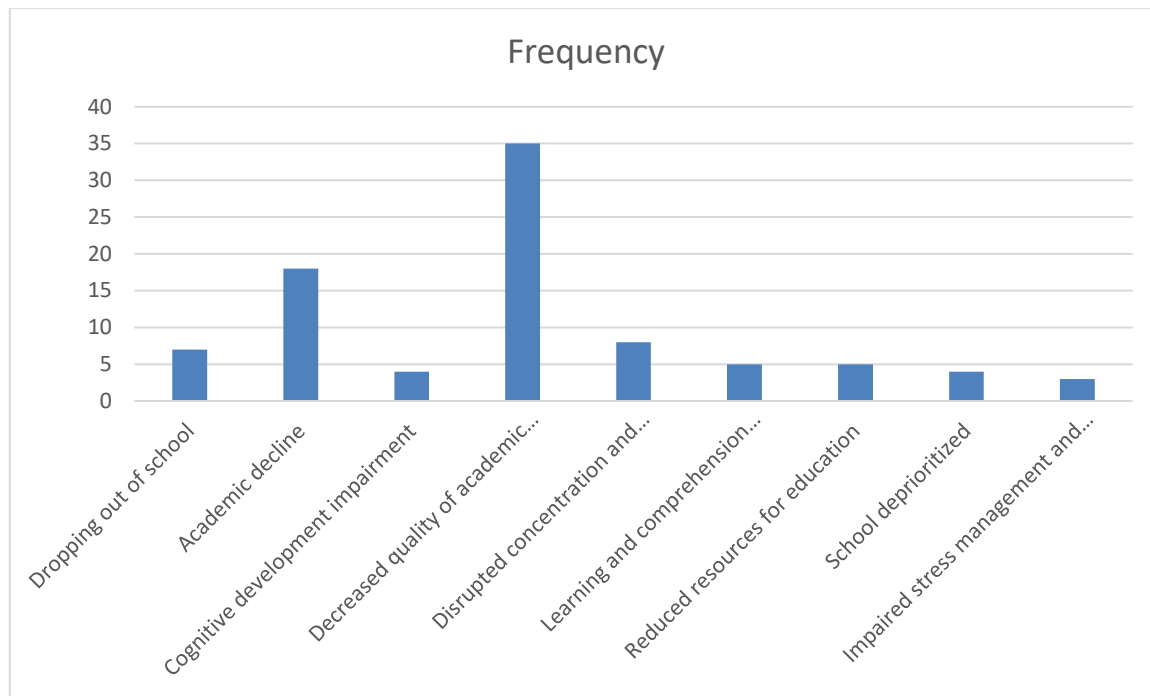
*Categorization of Concepts and Indicators*

| Criteria                                  | Indicators  | Freq. |
|---|---|-------|
| Dropping out of school                    | Likelihood of dropping out, actual dropout, tendency to drop out, school avoidance, increased failure, likelihood of expulsion  | 7     |
| Academic decline                          | Increased academic decline, academic underperformance, lower grades, decreased GPA, scoring lower in academic progress tests, lower academic ranks, having lower grades compared to children from intact families, negative outcomes in academic achievements   | 18    |
| Cognitive development impairment          | Cognitive developmental impairment, lower cognitive abilities, mental development issues, thinking difficulties   | 4     |
| Decreased quality of academic performance | Experiencing unfavorable academic conditions, negative impact of divorce on academic status, lower academic performance, weaker academic performance, being affected in educational matters, lower academic achievements, negative outcomes in academic achievements, educational problems (school avoidance, dropout), problems in academic performance, school failure, lack of academic success, significant challenges in school, academic setbacks, negative impact on academic performance, impairment in academic progress, academic challenges related to divorce | 35    |
| Disrupted concentration and attention     | Lack of concentration, lack of focus and attention in school and during academic activities, insufficient focus on school activities, attention issues, lack of mental presence in class, inadequate attention, reduced attention and focus in learning, decreased curiosity  | 8     |
| Learning and comprehension difficulties   | Difficulty understanding and retaining lessons, inability to recall lessons, improper understanding of material, lack of readiness for learning and comprehension, inadequate teaching  | 5     |
| Reduced resources for education           | Deprivation of educational resources, reduced family educational budget   | 5     |
| School deprioritized                      | Lack of participation in school social activities, perceiving school as a place to spend time with friends to escape life problems and loneliness, shifting focus from academics to family issues, for some, school becomes a way to solve personal and family problems (lack of motivation for academic success)   | 4     |
| Impaired stress management and adaptation | Poor coping with school-related stress, destructive impact of divorce on children's adaptation to school  | 3     |

[Figure 2](#) illustrates the frequency of the overarching themes regarding educational damages among children of divorce.

**Figure 2**

*The Frequency of all Criteria*



#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

Divorce is a highly stressful life event for the entire family. During divorce, children are dependent on their parents and, since they cannot prevent separation from the family, changes in school, or lifestyle changes, they are harmed. Due to a lack of skills and adequate information to cope with these changes, they experience depression, anxiety, anger, reduced self-esteem, aggression, academic decline, and other issues. These reactions vary depending on the child's gender and age (Spremo, 2020). According to the findings of Chegini-Nejad, children from families with high emotional relationships have better academic behavior and motivation for achievement. In contrast, students from dysfunctional families, despite having above-average IQs and good living conditions, did not achieve academic success due to unstable and lacking emotional relationships within the family, often due to parental divorce, leading to a decline in academic performance (Chegni Nejad, 2021). A qualitative study by Amani and colleagues identified insecurity in social interactions, economic problems, family structural issues, developmental and growth problems, depressive symptoms, ineffective coping patterns, and academic problems as the consequences of parental divorce for children (Amani et al., 2019).

In another study comparing self-regulated learning between students from intact and divorced families, researchers found that self-regulated learning was lower among students from divorced families, with a significant

difference between the two groups. This finding can be explained by the important variable related to learning—academic motivation. Without the motivation to achieve academic success and learning, no success will be achieved. The presence of both parents can play a positive role in the cognitive development of the child, moral development, gender role development, and the prevention of psychological and psychosomatic issues. Parental divorce and the absence of one parent can disrupt these dimensions (Moghadami et al., 2017).

Furthermore, researchers comparing the academic achievement of children from intact families and children of divorce found that educated divorced mothers, compared to less-educated mothers from intact families, were less able to transfer academic benefits to their children. This may be due to the "double burden" of work pressure and child-rearing responsibilities, hindering academic progress. Among adolescents whose parents have low educational attainment, parental divorce was not related to academic achievement. Further studies are needed to elaborate on the underlying mechanisms of this finding (Nilsen et al., 2020).

The findings of the present study are consistent with the results of many previous studies. In this study, the impact of divorce on the academic status and performance of children was identified as one of the most significant educational damages. These children experience academic decline and face difficulties in maintaining concentration and focus during the learning process. The goal of this research was to explore the educational damages experienced by children of

divorce through a systematic review. Based on the findings, divorce has the most significant impact on the academic performance of children, contributing heavily to their academic decline. Additionally, parental divorce can reduce children's concentration and focus, and in some cases, lead to school dropout.

Given the high level of mental engagement in these children, learning difficulties and comprehension problems were also noted in the research, as was the reduction in financial resources, which is one of the consequences of the absence of one parent. Furthermore, deprioritization of education can also be part of this issue. Stress and maladaptation in the educational environment were also found in the studies reviewed. All of these damages have a substantial impact on the well-being and mental health of these children. These damages pave the way for hopelessness about the future, reduced self-esteem, and psychological problems.

Considering that children are the future of the country, it is crucial to address and resolve their problems for a better, prosperous, and dynamic society. Therefore, planning to reduce and prevent educational damages is necessary. School counselors should be well acquainted with these damages and educate parents and teachers on how to address them. This can lead to better, more calculated, and scientific interventions, reducing these damages and improving the situation.

It is also important to note that parental divorce is not always necessarily negative, especially when parents and others behave appropriately. This highlights the need for further exploration of educational programs for parents on how to behave appropriately after divorce. Supporting the findings of this research, D'Onofrio and colleagues, through their study on mental health interventions and known risk mediators such as parental problems or family conflicts, demonstrated that structured interventions providing parental support and education can reduce the psychological and educational problems of these children. Unfortunately, there has been little research on the mental health of families going through divorce (D'Onofrio et al., 2019). We hope that future research pays special attention to the mental health and education of divorced families to reduce damages.

## 5. Suggestions and Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the systematic review was limited to articles published in specific Iranian databases, which may restrict the

generalizability of the findings to a broader international context. Additionally, the focus on educational damages primarily emphasizes academic performance and does not encompass other potential areas of impact, such as emotional and social development, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of divorce. Furthermore, the varying methodologies and sample sizes of the included studies may lead to inconsistencies in the reported outcomes, affecting the reliability of the findings.

Future research should aim to explore the long-term effects of parental divorce on various dimensions of children's lives, including emotional, social, and psychological development. Longitudinal studies that follow children over time would provide valuable insights into how educational damages evolve and potentially improve as children transition into adolescence and adulthood. Additionally, examining the role of cultural and socioeconomic factors in moderating the impacts of divorce could enhance our understanding of how different environments influence children's educational outcomes. Research should also focus on the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to support children of divorce in academic settings.

The implications of this research underscore the need for comprehensive support systems for children of divorce within educational environments. Schools should implement targeted programs to identify and assist students experiencing academic decline or emotional distress due to parental separation. Training for teachers and counselors on the unique challenges faced by these children can foster a more supportive atmosphere that encourages resilience and academic achievement. Furthermore, increasing parental involvement and providing resources for effective co-parenting strategies can help mitigate the adverse effects of divorce on children's education, promoting a more stable and nurturing learning environment.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

## Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

## Transparency Statement



Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

## Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

## Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

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