



# Review on the Opinions of College Students Raised in Divorced and Intact Families in Germany Regarding Starting a Family

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## Abstract

Divorce between spouses usually results in a way that one party wins and the individual who desires to get a divorce becomes the winner. However, children lose under any circumstances because they love both sides and they do not want to get separated from their parents. If parents are divorced, it is generally expected from children to adapt to this process. Even in most cases, parents are not even aware of the effects of a divorce on children. In fact, parents' divorce has long-term effects on children. Children and adolescents who have successfully get over the divorce of their parents during childhood and adolescence may have problems because they have witnessed their parents' divorce and do not believe in love in the future when they form their own family. The purpose of this study is to examine future family planning considerations of young and college-age adults and young and college-age adults who are growing up in divorced families. The main question of the study is to examine and compare the effects of parental divorce on children with the control group (teenagers who are full-grown) together with their influence on their future family-building thoughts. It was found that young and college-age adults who are raised in divorced families display more rejecting attitudes in the future than their young college adults in their own marriage mentality.

**Keywords:** Divorce, young adult, thinking, family, awareness.

## 1. Introduction

In the historical process, it is seen that the family structure has also been changing over time. Dreikurs (1968) thought that the main reason for spouses to have a decision about getting a divorce is related to women's attainment of status change and economic independence in society. In the past, divorce was seen as the end of the family structure, but nowadays it is seen as a fresh start. Fithenakis, Niesel & Kunze (1982) mentioned four main processes in defining the divorce process of spouses; these are described as complex, social, legal, psychological processes. At the same time, they attracted attention to the processes in which their parents are divorced, as four fundamental stages. The first stage is the child's dependent psychological state; the second stage is the family situation, the third stage is the social status, and the fourth stage is the cultural situation. Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989) after being married for 25-years and their longitudinal studies on their children, described the divorce process of spouses in three phases. They marked these three phases as inter-related. In the first phase, the emergency phase, problems begin, one of the spouses withdraws, the anger crisis occurs, and they become sexually distanced. As Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989), (2002) described in this phase that most of the partners experiencing this process indicate that they are also suffering from physical abuse or exposure and, unfortunately, this exposure occurs in front of

their children. And again at this time, one of the spouses leaves the house. In the emergency phase, the post-separation period can last for a couple of months, as well as two years. In the second phase, the transition phase, family members are faced with new roles. In this phase, new relations should be created; new environment, friends, school, as well as the separated individuals and parents in business life, it is obvious that this new beginning is very difficult, especially for children. Individuals and children live in the complexity of these new roles. This phase is also defined as the one requiring great effort from both parents and children. The third phase is defined as the strengthening and stabilizing phase, forming a new family after divorce, or a new life era. It is also explained as divorce process fatigue, formation of new life and passage (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, p.32). Friedrich (2004) noted that children perceive parental divorce more differently than their parents. It is a grief and a painful process for children as it may be a new life for parents (Friedrich, 2004, p. 188) Many experts (Klosinski, 2004; Schmidt, Denter & Beermann, 1995; Kardas & Langenmayr, 1996; Weiss, 1980; Langenmayr, 1987; Smith, 1998) pointed out that the effect of parental divorce on children is related to their parents' attitude during the divorce and post-divorce phase. They point out the importance of the support that parents will give their children in this process. They emphasize that the relationship with their children is linked to the degree of divorce's impact on their children (Klosinski, 2004: p. 17; Schmidt, Denter & Beermann,

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1995: p. 352; Kardas & Langenmayr, 1996: p. 147; Weiss, 1980: p. 330; Langenmayr, 1987: p. 253; Smith, 1998: p. 157).

## **2. Long Term Effects of Divorce and Its Effects on Young Adults Coming from a Divorced Family**

Several studies have shown that divorce has long-term effects on children (cf. Wallerstein & Blakeslee 1989: p. 87f. - 348; Wallerstein, Levis & Blakeslee, 2002: p. 60; Napp-Peters, 1988; Napp-Peters, 1995: p. 144f.; Hetherington & Kelly, 2003: p. 323f.). The authors here also pointed out the differences between the sexes. The cross-sectional studies of Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989), Napp-Peters (1988) and Napp-Peters (1995) presented that divorce-related problems occur earlier among male children. Negative effects among girls are less evident while they are growing up. In contrast to the boys experience greater problems in their personal and marital relationships like adults (cf. Napp-Peters 1995: p. 144; Wallerstein & Blakeslee 1989: p. 94f). As a result of this, a disproportional number of women whose parents divorced while they were young reject marriage and motherhood (cf. Wallerstein, Levis & Blakeslee 2002: p. 296). In their long-term study, Hetherington and Kelly (2003) confirmed that young people from families with divorced parents find it harder to form personal bonds and tend not to see a solution to their relationship problems in divorce (cf. Hetherinton & Kelly 2003, p. 323).

These grown-up children have difficulties in matters of trust and security, two terms which emerged as central issues (cf. Hetherinton & Kelly 2003, p. 323). It was also demonstrated that children of divorced parents are insecure in their relationships and are afraid of forming long-term bonds (cf. Hetherinton & Kelly 2003, p. 323).

Children take their parents' positive or negative characteristics as they are. This identity formation can also be achieved without being aware of it. In addition to internalizing their behaviors, children record marital relationships of their parents (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989: p.135). These children record their parents' marital relationships many times in an informal way for their future lives. This leads to their inability to function in the family-building process. Parents, especially after the divorce and divorce process, behave in a way that affects their children's future perspective about establishing a family. If the divorce process is concluded in a concerted way, the child is more positive than the process of separation and divorce by the idea of future family formation and a processions process (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989: p.135). In another study, the parent's stance after divorce seems to indicate short or long-term effects on the child. Parents in divorce who are working together after childbirth for solving problems lessens the long term effects over the child (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1993). Young adults from divorced families reflect the identity they have received from their parents in their future marriage communications. Young adult girls, especially from divorced families, display this more often; because they identify themselves with their mother (Wallerstein / Blakeslee, 1989: p.135). Young adults grown up in divorced families miss their own childhood life when they are busy with their parents' problems during divorce. They forget that they are children while they are trying to make their parents happy. They express their sadness in their adulthood (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989: p. 304). In the study of Amato & Deboer, 2001, it was concluded that when divorced family children have their own families in the future, they will have the concern about not having a long-term relationship. The reasons are that they do not have

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long-term beliefs about marriage. They are not sure of their own marriage because they have witnessed the end of their parents' marriage (Amato & Deboer, 2001). In the study by Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989), it was observed that these young people have problems in their marriage. These young people also appeared to think that they do have the ability to live together for a long time. They are afraid of being in a commitment for a long time. They expressed their fear of loving (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989: p. 84). After a meta-analysis, it was found that the negative effects of the divorce on the children is related to negative mental state of the parents, low socioeconomic level, limited family communication and mental health status (Amato & Keith, 1991B: p.54).

Another long-term study shows that if children grown up in divorced families is educated only by mother for many years, they will be suffering from sexual identity problems in older ages. Girls who engage in a similar process exhibit excessive feminine or seductive behavior at an older age, or vice versa can express excessive masculine behavior. It has been found that these girls either extrude their genders or show the opposite of this situation by being overly euphoric to men (Figdor, 1997: p. 81). The same study shows that these young people also have problems when choosing a spouse or family. Young people are either over-dependent on their spouses or vice versa. They refuse family and spouse relationships and escape. In the process of living with their spouses, it was observed that they generally displayed very dominant masculine behavior. The same radical communication of relations are seen in male adults as well. In the same way, they are either overly feminine or vice versa overly masculine dominant behavior (Figdor, 1997: p. 81). In the study conducted by Tas & Balay (2017), it was determined that students who grown up in their family without experiencing a divorce are stronger than the ones who grown up in a divorced family in terms of planning a marriage in the future. When the average monthly income change of undivorced families of university students is examined, the average monthly income of the family is calculated as 1500 TL or below, then 1501 - 3000 TL, and finally the average monthly income of the family is between 3001-4500 TL. These university students who were educated in the intact family had a positive increase in family-building thoughts; but when the average monthly income of the family was 4501 and higher, it was seen that the university students who were educated in the intact family had a negative decrease in family-building thoughts (Tas & Balay, 2017). It has been found that the college students raised in divorced families differ in their statistically meaningful way of thinking about family formation according to sibling numbers. It was seen that university students with two siblings who were raised in divorced families had an average score of family formation points ( $M = 48.33$ ,  $SD = 7.19$ ) and college students with four brothers and sisters are in between ( $M = 56.40$ ,  $SD = 7.67$ ). When these results are evaluated, it can be said that the ideas of family formation of university students who are raised in divorced families and whose number of siblings is four and above is higher than the university students with divorced parents and two siblings. This can be a sign that the tendency to build a family has improved positively as the number of siblings increases (Tas & Balay, 2017). The result of the idea of marrying a young person coming from a divorced family is as follows. It can be argued that male university students who grow up in an intact family have a lower score in terms of marriage-mindedness than a male college-educated student who comes from a divorced family.

## **3. Material and Method**

**Design of the Study**

It was decided to choose a quantitative research method according to the plan of the pilot study. The empirical study was carried out in the form of a written questionnaire which consisted of open and closed questions and was developed by the researcher. The majority of the test participants were German students. 84% of the adults from divorce-families were German students. The control group also contained a high percentage (82 %) of German students. The remaining questionnaires were filled in by students of various nationalities from the University of Duisburg Essen. The questionnaires were distributed in seminars, lectures and university cafes and later collected back. Some subjects took them home and returned them at the next opportunity.

**Total Number of Participants**

200 students from the University of Duisburg Essen took part in this pilot study. The test subjects were selected and questioned according to the guidelines of the experiment design. The sample consisted of N = 100 students from a background of divorce (experimental group) and N = 100 students who grew up in stable families (control group).

**Period of the Study**

The test with the experimental group took place from 2008 till the beginning of 2010. The majority of the questionnaires were distributed and collected back in in 2009. The test with the control group was conducted in 2009 and 2010; the majority of their papers were processed in 2010.

**Data Management**

As a first step, when the papers had been collected in they underwent a descriptive analysis. After this, according to the level of the variables, contingency tables, variance analyses and correlations, or T-tests, were drawn up and carried out.

**Hypothesis**

**Thoughts of Marriage**

- 1- Young adults who grow up in divorced families show a rejective attitude towards young adults who grow up in intact marriage.
- 2- Female young adults who grow up in divorced families are more likely to show rejective attitude compared to male young adults who grow up in divorced families.
- 3- Female young adults who grow up in intact family are more likely to refuse marriage mentality than male young adults who grow up in intact family.

**Self-Divorce Thoughts**

- 1- Young adults who grow up in divorced families tend to divorce more quickly compared to young adults who come from intact families if their families have problems with their relationships in the future even if they have kids.
- 2- Female young adults who grow up in divorced families tend to divorce more quickly compared to male young adults who come from intact families if their families have problems with their relationships in the future even if they have kids.
- 3- Female young adults who grow up in intact families tend to divorce more quickly compared to young

male adults who come from intact families if their families have problems with their relationships in the future even if they have kids.

**Thoughts about Searching Endless Love**

- 1- Young adults who grow up in divorced families are looking for more endless love not to repeat their parents' mistakes compared to young adults who grow up in intact families.
- 2- Female young adults who grow up in divorced families are looking for more endless love not to repeat their parents' mistakes compared to male young adults who grow up in intact families.
- 3- Female young adults who grow up in intact families are looking for more endless love not to repeat their parents' mistakes compared to male young adults who grow up in intact families.

**Thoughts about Getting Custody of Their Children in Their Future Divorce**

- 1- When considering future divorce situations young adults who grow up in divorced families are more willing to receive custody of their children than young adults who grow up in intact families.
- 2- When considering future divorce situations female young adults who grow up in divorced families are more willing to receive custody of their children than male young adults who grow up in intact families.
- 3- When considering future divorce situations female young adults who grow up in intact families are more willing to receive custody of their children than male young adults who grow up in intact families.

**Findings**

*Table 1. Thoughts of Marriage (Young People from Divorced and Intact Families)*

	<b>Exp.</b>	<b>Control</b>
<b>Strong / Too Strong</b>	<b>54 %</b>	<b>69 %</b>
<i>Too Strong</i>	28 %	43 %
<i>Strong</i>	26 %	26 %
<b>Partially Strong / Halfway</b>	<b>28 %</b>	<b>19 %</b>
<b>Strong / Much Less Strong</b>		
<i>Partially Strong</i>	7 %	9 %
<i>Halfway Strong</i>	12 %	5 %
<i>Much Less Strong</i>	9 %	5 %
<b>Less / None</b>	<b>12 %</b>	<b>8 %</b>

Less	6 %	5 %
None	6 %	3 %

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that 28.0% of the young people who get divorced feel very strong, 26.0% strong, 7.0% partially strong, and 12.0% halfway strong about thinking about marriage in the future. Much Less strong rate is found as 9.0%, while 6.0% are less and 6.0% are not interested at all.

In the control group, 43.0% of the participants think too strong about marriage, 26.0% strong, 9.0% partially strong, 5.0% much less strong, 5.0% less and 3.0% of them say they do not think about getting married at all.

In the control group, 43.0% of the participants think about marriage more than twice the research group (young people from divorced families). 28.0% of young people from divorced families consider marriage in the future. This shows that young people from divorced families look more suspicious at marriage. The reason for this may be related to the fact that they experiences their parents' divorce.

Table 2. Self-Divorce Thoughts

	Exp.	Control
<b>Strong / Too Strong</b>	<b>24 %</b>	<b>28 %</b>
<i>Too Strong</i>	11 %	11 %
<i>Strong</i>	13 %	17 %
<b>Partially Strong / Halfway Strong / Much Less Strong</b>	<b>61 %</b>	<b>50 %</b>
<i>Partially Strong</i>	16 %	10 %
<i>Halfway Strong</i>	33 %	26 %
<i>Much Less Strong</i>	12 %	14 %
<b>Less / None</b>	<b>9 %</b>	<b>18 %</b>
<i>Less</i>	3 %	13 %
<i>None</i>	6 %	5 %

When results of Table 2 is examined, 11.0% of the study group is very prone to divorce in the future when they consider the divorce thoughts, even if they have children in their own marriage. 13.0% of them have strong, 16.0% partially strong, 33.0% halfway strong, 12.0% much less strong, 3.0% less and 6.0% none, respectively.

In the control group, while 28.0% of them think about divorce possibility to be too strong, 11.0%, 17.0% strong, 10.0% partially strong, 26.0% halfway strong, 14.0% much less strong, 13.0%

less and 5.0% none, respectively. As the hypotheses in this area have been prepared, young adults coming from divorced families, as emphasized by Hetherington and Kelly (2003) in their theory, if young adults witness their parents' divorce, they will see solution in divorce when they have problems at their marriage in the future. That is why, in this study, the hypothesis of "Young people who have grown up in divorced families prefer to divorce more when they experience problems, even if they have children" was rejected.

Table 3. Searches of Endless Love

	Exp.	Contr.
<b>Strong / Too Strong</b>	<b>45 %</b>	<b>55 %</b>
<i>Too Strong</i>	24 %	34 %
<i>Strong</i>	21 %	21 %
<b>Partially Strong / Halfway Strong / Much Less Strong</b>	<b>32 %</b>	<b>25 %</b>
<i>Partially Strong</i>	11 %	10 %
<i>Halfway Strong</i>	14 %	12 %
<i>Much Less Strong</i>	7 %	3 %
<b>Less / None</b>	<b>22 %</b>	<b>17 %</b>
<i>Less</i>	8 %	7 %
<i>None</i>	14 %	10 %

When results of Table 3 is examined, 24,0% of the study group is very prone to search for endless love. 21.0% strong, 11.0% partially strong, 14.0% halfway strong, 7.0% much less strong, 8.0% less and 14.0% none, respectively.

In the control group, 34.0% of the participants think strongly about searching for endless love, 21.0% strong, 10.0% partially strong, 12.0% halfway strong, 3.0% much less strong, 7.0% less and 10.0% none, respectively.

As hypotheses of young adults from divorced families who witnessed their parents' divorce, the search for endless love was concluded in reverse, because of the anticipation of not making the same mistake with their parents. More precisely, intact family



youngsters are more determined in their search for endless love, which can be interpreted to be the case when young people from divorced families in their past have actually no plans to search for eternal love to begin with because they do not believe in love. The intact family youngsters can be in search of endless love, because they also believe in it.

**Table 4.** Thoughts About Getting Custody of Their Children in Their Future Divorce

	Exp.	Contr.
<b>Strong / Too Strong</b>	<b>64 %</b>	<b>69 %</b>
<i>Too Strong</i>	43 %	57 %
<i>Strong</i>	21 %	12 %
<b>Partially Strong / Halfway Strong /</b>	<b>29 %</b>	<b>23 %</b>
<i>Partially Strong</i>	7 %	6 %
<i>Halfway Strong</i>	19 %	16 %
<i>Much Less Strong</i>	3 %	1 %
<b>Less / None</b>	<b>1 %</b>	<b>4 %</b>
<i>Less</i>	1 %	1 %
<i>None</i>	0 %	3 %

When results of Table 4 is examined, 43,0% of the study group thinks very strong about getting custody of their children in their future divorce. 21.0% feels strong, 7.0% partially strong, 19.0% halfway strong, 3.0% much less strong, 1.0% less and 14.0% none, respectively. In the control group, 57.0% of the participants think too strongly about getting custody of their children in their future divorce, 12.0% strong, 6.0% partially strong, 16.0% halfway strong, 1.0% much less strong, 1.0% less and 3.0% none, respectively.

**Table 5.** Results of Hypotheses Analysis with the Control Group

Hypothesis	Sig. Niveau	eta	r	Mittelwerts - differenz (t-test)
<b>Marriage</b>				
H1	*	0.173		
H2	-	0.126		
H3	-	0.193		
<b>Self Divorce Thoughts</b>				
H4	-	0.056		
H5	**	0.275		
H6	*	0.232		
<b>Searches of Endless Love</b>				
H7	-	0.119		
H8	-	0.034		
H9	**	0.269		
<b>Thoughts about getting custody of their children</b>				
H10	-	0.045		
H11	*	0.209		
H12	***	0.471		

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001

In the study it is concluded that university students from divorced families seem to have a more rejecting attitude compared to the ones coming from intact families. Female young adults who have grown up in divorced families are more likely to reject marriage in their future compared to male adults from divorced families. There is no significant difference in the hypothesis when gender differences are examined. There is no statistically significant difference examined in the hypothesis that female young adults who grow up in intact families are more likely to refuse marriage compared to male young adults who grow up in full family. The hypothesis that young adults who grow up in divorced families prefer to divorce, even if they have children in their families, and children when they have problems, have not been found statistically significant. Significant difference was found in the field by gender variable. A high level significant difference was found among females grown up in divorced families and men grown up in divorced families. In this part of the findings, the females who grow up in the divorced family compared to the males from divorced families, show that there is a significant difference at a high level for when family partners have problems in the future and even if they have children, they prefer to divorce. At the same time, female young adults who grow up in intact family also have a statistically significant difference than male young adults who grow up in intact family, if they have problems in the future, prefer to divorce even if they have children. In general, it is shown that in the case of partnering, women prefer to divorce in the future even if they have children. For the hypothesis about the search for endless love, no difference has been found in the hypothesis that young adults who are raised in divorced families are looking for more endless love compared to young adults from intact families. At the same time, no statistically significant difference was found between gender variables. In the same way, no statistically significant difference was found in the gender variable in the male adults coming from intact family. No statistically significant difference was found in the adult group coming from intact family for gender variability field. In the future, in the case of their own divorce, no statistically significant difference was found between the young adults coming from the divorced family and the young adults growing up in the intact family. Differences were found in the gender variability field. Female young adults who have grown up in divorced families are found to be more willing in the future, compared to male adults who have grown up in divorced families if they have children of their own. At the same time, for the females in the intact family group, statistically meaningful differences have been reached. In general, this field shows that if the females have children in the future and if divorce occurs, they want to claim custody of their children.

#### **4- Discussions of Results**

When young adults who have grown up in divorced and intact family look at the idea of forming a family, it is found that the young people from divorced family are more refusing than those of the group who have grown up in the intact family. This can be interpreted like that because it may be linked to the fact that they witness their parents' divorce. In order not to repeat the same experience, they may refuse marriage to protect themselves. Hence, as a result of 25 years of longitudinal study on divorced families Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989) found that young adults who came from divorced families had problems when their time comes to form their own family. These young people were seen to have problems about connecting with their partners / spouses. They stated that they felt themselves inadequate in relationships.

At the same time, in their studies it was found that they were afraid of long-term attachments. For this reason they indicated that they force themselves in relationships (Wallerstein / Blakeslee, 1989: p. 87). In this study too, it showed that the young college students coming from the divorced family are more refusing against marriage compared to the ones coming from intact families. As a result of this work, it may be interpreted as these young people are trying to avoid long-term attachments. As a matter of fact, marriage is also seen and defined a long-term attachment. This area of the study can be interpreted as the long-term study by Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1989) which supports the part where adults who came from divorced families feel insufficient in long-term relationships. Hetherington & Kelly (2003) obtained similar interesting results. It was determined that the young people who came from divorced family in their studies had problems with their partners, spouses and that they solved the problem by ending relationship or divorce instead of solving the actual problem. On the part of their stance against divorce, 70% of the ones who come from divorced families believe that when problems are experienced in their relationships their problem is resolved by divorce. Only 40% of the adults who do not come from the divorced families have this idea. In their long-term study, these people was also been found to have problems of trusting and believing in their relationships (Hetherington & Kelly, 2003, p. 323). As a result of this study, there was no significant difference between the two groups for the hypothesis of the young adults who were born in divorced and intact families, in the future when they have formed a family, have thoughts of divorce when they have problems. The interesting results of this study in this area appeared in the section on gender variables; young female adults grown up in divorced families were found to be more willing to divorce compared to male adults who have grown up in divorced families, even if they have children of their own. At the same time, a significant difference was noticed statistically, even among the females in this control group that grown up in the intact family. This shows that, in general for this area, females want to get custody of their children if they have children and divorce occurs in the future. Of course, when these results are evaluated, it is seen that as the female whom the question was asked is a future college graduate and because of that she has more self confidence in herself, she considers that she can stand on her own when she has problems from her family, so they can take the chance for divorce even if they have children. If the same questions were asked to the females who have a lower education level, there could be other consequences. Interesting results have been obtained in the taking children's custody in their own divorce. Here, it is also found that the hypothesis of young adults who grow up in the divorced family are more prone to take custody of their children in a future divorce than the ones who grow up in intact families does not show significant meaningful difference, while it was determined that the genders section shows statistical significant difference. Here, young female adults who have grown up in divorced families and young male adults who have grown up in divorced families was found to be more willing to take more custody of their children in their future thoughts of divorce. The same is true of young females and males who have been grown up intact families. In fact, there was a significant, meaningful difference for the females there. So, in general females' divorce situations show that they are willing to take custody of their children. This can be explained by their self confidence that these women are future university graduates. Even in the case of divorce, they can be interpreted in this area as since they are self-sufficient as a result of not having economic dependencies and can take care of their children because they can stand on their own feet. However, the

same hypotheses are known to produce different results with females who have lower levels of education. When the overall evaluation of the work is done, even though some hypotheses do not show significant differences, in general evaluation it seems that parental divorce has negative effects over children about thoughts of building their own families.

## 5- Suggestions

Even though some of the hypotheses are rejected, looking at the overall outcome of the study, parental divorce has negative impacts on young adults over the part of the thoughts of forming a family. It is advisable to do the same study with individuals with a low level of education. Thus, if the same study is made with individuals with a low level of education, a different outcome may occur.

### Bilgi /Teşekkür

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