

Introduction:

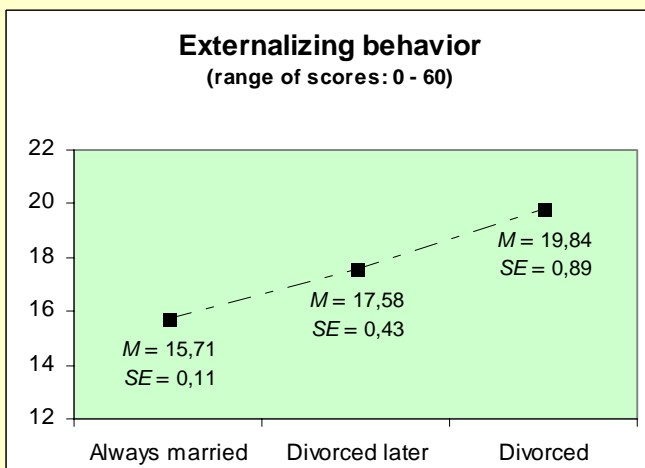
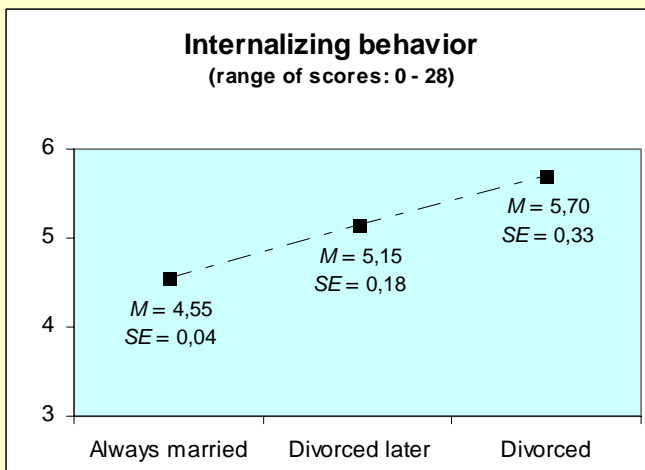
Each year 70.000 children in the Netherlands experience parental divorce. A general believe is that divorce has negative effects on the child's wellbeing. Cherlin et al. (1991) showed, however, that the effects of divorce on problem behavior were sharply reduced by considering behavior problems that were present before the family had broken up. The present study contributes to the sparse literature regarding whether the divorce itself is to blame for children's problem behaviors.

Aim:

To compare problem behavior in 3 groups of twins:

- I. twins with parents who are married
- II. twins with parents who are married at age 3 but who divorce when the twins are older
- III. twins with divorced parents

Results:



Sample:

The sample consists of 8290 3-year old twin pairs from the Netherlands Twin Register, of which:

- 7510 twin pairs did not experience parental divorce till the age of 12 (*always married*)
- 614 twin pairs experienced parental divorce later in childhood (*divorced later*)
- 166 twin pairs had already experienced parental divorce at age 3 (*divorced*)

Measures:

Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) data, we focus on:

- *Internalizing and externalizing behavior:*
Mother ratings at age 3.

Parental status:

- Two items about family situation and divorce at age 3, 7, 10 and 12.

Statistical analyses:

Estimation of means and chi-square difference tests in Mplus while controlling for dependency between twins.

Table 1: Chi-square difference tests for the means of internalizing behavior (blue) and externalizing behavior (green).

	Always married	Divorced later	Divorced
Always married		Chi ² = 13.873 df = 1 p < .01	Chi ² = 17.978 df = 1 p < .01
Divorced later	Chi ² = 21.195 df = 1 p < .01		Chi ² = 2.308 df = 1 p < .13
Divorced	Chi ² = 30.189 df = 1 p < .01	Chi ² = 6.159 df = 1 p < .05	

Conclusion:

Children who will experience parental divorce later in childhood, already show higher levels of externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors at age 3, as compared to children whose parents stay married during childhood. The results put causality into question.