Families in Crisis

Divorce and Cohabitation

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Abstract

The family structure is continuously evolving and the definition given to “family” has changed in response creating various family structures that are now found in the American society. The effects of these changes are widespread and impact both society as well as in the family unit as a whole. This paper deals with a few variations of the family unit and the effects they are having on today’s families. The two family structures that will be addressed in depth are divorce and cohabitation. For each of these structures, a discussion of the particular definition, prevalence of the family structure in society, and the effects experienced as a result of living in the specific family arrangements will be addressed.

Families in Crisis: Divorce and Cohabitation

Relationships are a central aspect of life as they are intertwined throughout various facets of daily living. The necessity for relationship is found in the fact that humans are undoubtedly social creatures. Thus, one of the most fundamental needs of human life is the need for intimacy with others (Lauer & Lauer, 2012). It is through intimacy that the close vital connections that are crucial for a fulfilling life are found. For a newborn baby, the first area of intimacy experienced takes place in the family in which they are born (Lauer & Lauer, 2012). This family is called the family of origin (Howe, 2012). The family can also be seen as a social institution due to the fact that within it, social life is organized and crucial and societal goals are assisted in being met (Basirico, Cashion, & Eshleman, 2012). The question has become what happens when this influential family structure is disrupted, unstable, or is non-existent? Children who grow up in these situations experience challenges of meeting this basic need. When this happens, a child may suffer consequences that last a lifetime.

The composition of the family has changed as individuals continue to pursue fulfillment for intimate relationships. Modern changes in the family structure are many times no longer based on a desperate need for roles to adjust during difficult times or unforeseen circumstances. This does not include things that are out of a person's control, such as the death of a loved one or the inability to have children. Many changes in the alteration of the family unit are based on choice, preference, or desires alone. This is reflected in "modernity" which is a trend that involves changes in laws and social expectations (Yenor, 2011, p. 2). The idea of a family has adapted in order to fit what people want. These modern individuals tend to view themselves as independent for

unchosen duties, including those in family life (Yenor, 2011). The concept of tolerance is being used to defend this disintegration of the family unit in order to ensure that people are content and happy. Unfortunately, the acceptance of these changes is often made without realizing the effects it is having on today's children.

Living Arrangements and Effects

The American family has evolved to include various family arrangements that now make up the modern family. Families and children undergo certain adjustment challenges when there is a shift in the family unit. Though families do not always include children, when children are present they make up a pivotal and instrumental part of that family. Unfortunately, children and their experiences during changes in the family structure tend to be overlooked or underestimated. Research that has been conducted on single-parent families indicate that focus tends to be given to problems and challenges faced by families. However, "the voices of the children who belong to these families have largely remained silent" (Spyrou, 2013, p. 64).

The assumption that children's voices and perspectives should be given a lower priority than adults is partly the result of attributing children with a lower ability to understand, comment, rationally think, and objectively evaluate their life circumstances (Spyrou, 2013). The contrary has been found to be the case. Children have a unique point of view that oftentimes adults either fail to see or simply ignore. A child's perspective presents a diverse, yet valuable, understanding of a family's situation (Spyrou, 2013). For this reason, children and the impact that changes in the family unit create for them, should not be overlooked. A few of the family arrangements discussed will include families that have suffered divorce and those who choose to cohabitate. The effects on

both the family and the children will also be described. The following chart (see Figure 1) compares the prevalence of various living arrangements with children that were found in 1960 and 2012 (Cohen, 2014). It is important to note that though cohabitation is listed in 2012, it is not listed in 1960. The percentage of married parent families is also drastically higher, making up a majority of the population, in 1960 as opposed to 2012.

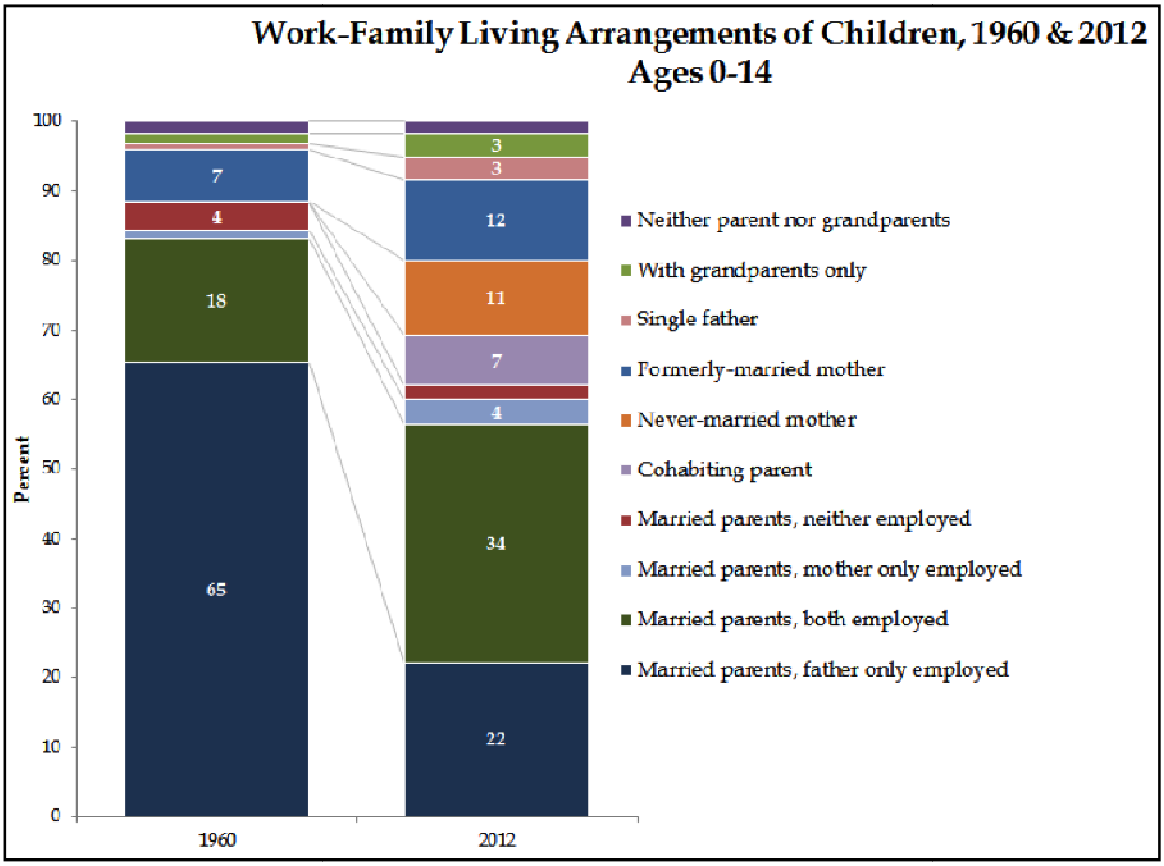

Figure 1. Illustrates the change in family arrangements in 1960 and 2012 according to the U.S. Census and American Community Survey respectively. Data from IPUMS.org is also included. In 1960, the married family with the father as the breadwinner made up a majority of the family arrangements. The figure illustrates, in 2012, the expansion from a dominate category to a wide variety of family arrangements. Note: the US Census data only identified one parent per child. Parent couples, married and cohabiting, are identified by the parent's relationship status. Single fathers represent men who are not currently cohabiting or married, regardless of whether they never-married or formerly-married. Adapted from "Family diversity is the new normal for America's children," by P. Cohen, 2014, Briefing report prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families, "The dramatic rearrangement of children's living situation since the 1950s," para. 2. Retrieved from https://contemporaryfamilies.org/the-new-normal/.

In the United States, the structure of adult family relationships has changed dramatically in the past 30 years as marriage rates have declined steadily while cohabitation rates have soared (Forrest, 2014). Thus, the presence of divorce and cohabitation as a family arrangement is undeniable. The shift in views on divorce and cohabitation has been greatly impacted by the sexual revolution of the 1960s (Jay, 2012). Before this time, both divorce and cohabitation were frowned upon by society. After this revolution, divorce became increasingly accepted than it had been in previous decades.

With the passing of the no-fault divorce by Governor Ronald Reagan in 1969, individuals could terminate marriage based on numerous reasons. Thus, divorce became more accessible as a result of fewer legal and economic barriers (Horner, 2013). Divorce rates peaked during the subsequent years (Horner, 2013). The early 1980s saw a fairly high stabilized divorce rate. However, these rates have declined since then (Price, Price, & McKenry, 2010). Some reports even indicate a drop in the divorce rates. It is important to note that this change is not because marriages have become more successful and fewer people are getting divorced. Instead, this is a result of the fact that less and less people are even choosing to marry. This is in large part due to the growing popularization of cohabitation which, as Settersten & Ray (2010) clarify, is becoming a more acceptable and normative union for young adults (as cited in Guzzo, 2014). Both divorce and cohabitation are present in society and the effects that they cause on the family and the children are not something that should be overlooked.

Divorce

Definition. The separation that divorce brings into a family is far more than just a physical separation that occurs when two parents decide to end their marriage. Families

and children experience separation that is also increasingly mental and emotional, making it a harsh reality to face. The term "divorce" is frequently viewed in a negative light though the disapproval has relaxed in today's society. This is because the word alone can invoke "images of divided families, vulnerable children, failed marriages, forgotten commitments, long and expensive legal battles, resentment, hostility, bitterness, and economic hardship" (Price, et al., 2010, p. 211).

Though divorce is rarely an aspiration for any couple, there are great proportions of American families that have or are currently experiencing divorce as its effects extend through various racial and ethnic groups (Price et al., 2010). Divorce can happen at various stages in the life cycle. The impacts of divorce partly depend on when in the life cycle that divorce takes place (Sumner, 2013). For example, when a younger couple divorce, children at home are affected. However, when a midlife couple divorce it is adult children who are impacted. The needs and intervention for children on both sides of the age spectrum are crucial to understand in order for healing to take place and to reach optimum function (Sumner, 2013). Regardless of when divorce takes place, fear of the unknown and what lies ahead is experienced by all of those affected. This fear is found at the beginning of a divorce in which "…most people are stymied by their fear and, as a result, are incapable of behaving rationally" (Felder & Victor, 2011, p. 90).Thus, responding properly is vital to help combat irrationality to make the transition easier on all that are involved.

Prevalence. The prevalence of divorce has varied throughout history. Divorce rates were initially low in the 1930s due to the Great Depression and World War II which placed a high value on family in order to survive. Following WWII, there was a rise in

divorce rates and marriages were found to be more vulnerable to divorce throughout the 1940s and 1950s (Price et al., 2010). The next several decades fostered in a prominence on individualism. This shift in focus drew attention to goals such as self-fulfillment and career advancement. These changes in perspective diminished individual's commitment to family and intimate relationship as a whole (Price et al., 2010).

Divorce has become a common cultural reality since the 1970s. Many people have utilized the "no-fault" divorce as a means of escaping unhappy and unfulfilling marriages, instead of trying to work things out (Root, 2010). The divorce rates have been so relatively high the past 35 years that a "divorce industry" has evolved. This industry is comprised of professions "from a variety of fields who make their living from divorce" (Price et al., 2010, p. 223).

The effects divorce has on an individual's well-being and mental health has been the focus of numerous studies. Kalmijn (2010) claims, that divorce negatively impacts both these areas. Further research by Stack and Eshleman (1998) discovered "that differences in well-being between marital status categories are fairly stable across countries" (as cited in Kalmijn, 2010, p. 475). However, in regards to divorce rates across countries there is considerable variation. Countries such as the United States as well as Eastern and Southern Europe have high divorce rates. Whereas, in South and Central America and in Southern Europe the divorce rates are generally lower (Kalmijn, 2010).

As prevalence varies across countries, it also varies due to the amount of barriers that are present. When barriers to divorce are high, couples who get divorced will make up a more selected group (Kalmijn, 2010). Research indicates that at times in which divorce barriers are high and the divorce rate is low, those who still get divorced are often

due to more serious personal and marital issues such as: psychiatric disorder, violent behaviors, and addictions. At times in which divorce is more common and fewer barriers are experienced, those who divorce make up a less selected group in these aspects (Kalmijn, 2010).

Effects. As with any issue, there is the existence of both pros and cons. The life experience of divorce is no different. Some families and children that go through divorce find that they are able to cope successfully with the event. However, there are others who are simply not able to adapt effectively (Price et al., 2010). Kim (2011) mentions that, "A majority of studies in literature on divorce find adverse effects of parental divorce and children's development" (p. 487). Research also indicates that though divorce has become more accepted by society, the negative consequences still remain the same (Kim, 2011). Fortunately, though adverse consequences are present there are certain factors that help to lessen these effects. Kalmijn (2010) noted from research on country differences on the experienced effects of divorce that, "the effects of divorce on well-being are weaker when the family is more central in a society" (p. 487).

Personal bias to the effects of divorce on children were found through a study conducted by Moon that "examined how self- and vested interests might affect perceptions of the effects of divorce on children" (Moon, 2011, p. 345). The research study concluded that the views of the impact of divorce on children vary by person in accordance to their particular situation. The study found that there was an influence on the perceptions of the effects of divorce on children based on "self-interests and personal experiences associated with marital status" (Moon, 2011, p. 347). Both individuals who

were married and those whose parents had remained married, were found to evaluate the impact of divorce more negatively for children.

On the other hand, individuals whose parents had divorced and parents who initiated the divorce themselves reported the effects of divorce in a less negative way (Moon, 2011). The study also revealed that the parents' perceptions also reflected their divorce history and personal choices. For example, Miles and Servaty-Seib (2010) found that young adults whose parents were divorced had more positive views toward divorce than children whose parents remained married (as cited in Moon, 2011).

When analyzing the consequences and the effects of divorce, there are at least three relationships that need to be taken into account: child and mother, child and father, and father and mother (Kalmijn, 2013). As King (2006) further explained, the quality of each of the three relationships is dependent on the quality and functioning of the other relationships in the triad (as cited in Kalmijn, 2013). The standard argument holds that the relationship with the father is the one affected by divorce. Many have held this view because fathers are less likely to invest in their children post-divorce and are rarely given custody (Kalmijn, 2013). Research has indicated otherwise. Previous studies on relationships following divorce discovered consistent patterns of evidence that revealed "relationships with fathers are negatively affected by a divorce and relationships with mothers are also affected, but less strongly" (Kalmijn, 2013, p. 896).

Kalmijn's research on the long-term effects of divorce concluded in three new insights to this subject. The first insight revealed that there is evidence for the existence of 'common effects' (Kalmijn, 2013, p. 896). The study revealed that it is more common to have a 'poor' relationship with not only the father, but the mother as well following

divorce. This label of "poor" is in regard to the support, contact, and perceived quality of the relationship (Kalmijn, 2013). There are several interpretations given as to why this relationship is viewed as such. Children may not be able to see their parents the same way as they did before the divorce. For many, their parent may seem like a completely new person, like someone they never knew. The parents may also be experiencing psychological problems following the divorce which limit the amount of time they have to dedicate to their children. Another interpretation rests on the fact that children may blame their parents which can lead into further detached feelings (Kalmijn, 2013).

The second insight concluded from the Kalmijn's study is that the inequality between parents is increased through divorce. This is when only one relationship is considered poor. It is inevitable that relationships will be strained following a divorce. This strain can cause many children to suffer from compensation effects and loyalty conflicts (Kalmijn, 2013). Many children will try to alleviate these by disengaging with one parent and more fully investing in the other. Overcompensation can also take place when a parent notices the relationship with the other parent is becoming poor, and they purposefully invest more to ensure the child received adequate support (Kalmijn, 2013). This implicates that for a child, compensation is possible for a poor relationship with one parent by a stronger bond with the other. Kalmijn (2013) summarizes that "for most children of divorce, there is no accumulation of poor intergenerational relationships" (p. 987).

The final insight that was gained from this study was that in regard to the effects of divorce on the parent-child conflict, there are no gender differences (Kalmijn, 2013). The life situations may make it appear that there are differences due to the parental

involvement in the child's life post-divorce. For example, there may seem to be conflict with the child's relationship with the father since he gives less support. However, a mother has an increased risk for conflict due to her greater involvement in the child's life (Kalmijn, 2013). Van Gaalen and Dykstra (2006) point out that some divorced mothers may be insensitive and conflictual which leads to an ambivalent relationship style (as cited in Kalmijn, 2013).

Research has been completed on the effects that parental divorce have on children. A considerable amount of this research shows that children who come from intact, never divorced families fair better. These children have been found to have greater psychological adjustment as well as exhibit fewer behavioral problems than children of divorce. Nonetheless, there is little agreement on the extent and severity of these problems due to the fact that children's responses are diverse (Moon, 2011). When children from a home with married biological parents were compared to those of divorced homes through two meta-analyses, children of divorced families were found to be disadvantaged in regards to diverse life outcomes. They were found more likely to drop out of high school and also displayed disadvantages in psychological well-being, social relations, and cognitive skills (Kim, 2011). It has not been concluded, through research, if children of divorce successfully overcome these disadvantages and catch up with the other children (Kim, 2011).

Parents who are divorcing are often absorbed in their own mourning. When this occurs, one of the great tragedies of divorce presents itself, which is an inability to "easily tune in to their children's emotional reactions to loss" (Ehrlich, 2014, p. x). It has been found that, "Children who have recently experienced divorce are children in a crisis

that generally last about 18 months" (Olsen & Fuller, 2012, p. 25). Divorce affects adult children in a different way. Parental divorce impacted adult children's view on romantic relationships. In a research study, adult children expressed a change in their view of relationships as a whole (South, 2013). The study revealed that adult children changed their view of marriage and divorce, learned from parents' mistakes, were unsure of how to have romantic relationships, wanted to work harder in their relationships, either chose partners alike or opposite of their parents, and tended to be harder on their partners in an effort not to turn out like their parents (South, 2013).

The fact that divorce has negative effects on many children is supported by research literature (Fagan, 2012). Though research suggests these negative outcomes, the source is not completely clear. This is due in part to the absence of appropriate data. Research has not explicitly addressed whether children's outcomes are the result of prior marital conflict before the divorce, or from the distinguishing effects of the dissolution process (Kim, 2011). The majority of the children experiencing divorce display difficulties in adjusting up to two years leading up to divorce and in the time immediately following (Price et al., 2010).

It has been suggested that divorce can be equated to death as the response resembles that of grief and loss of the parental union. Children may also experience grief and mourning for loss of a parent. The expression of grief is not the same for every child. Corr and Balk (2010) explain that children generate a "grief reaction" which is unique to the particular child and carries a specific meaning for their future development (p. 14). The way in which children respond is often dependent on their particular development situation. Some avenues of expression include: roller coaster emotions, self-blame,

turning within themselves, lashing out, and some regressive behaviors such as thumb sucking or bed wetting (Corr & Balk, 2010). Having trouble sleeping or losing interest in favorite activities is also common for grieving children (Corr & Balk, 2010).

The idea of whether children were able to mourn has also been brought into question. Due to recent research, the previous way of looking at mourning has been challenged. Worden (2009) suggested "that mourning involves active processes in the form of tasks in coping with loss and grief" (as cited in Corr & Balk, 2010, p. 15). Worden (1996) acknowledged four tasks of mourning that bereaved children experience. The first task is to accept the loss as reality. After acceptance, the next task is to allow oneself to experience the emotional aspects and the pain of the loss. This can be hard, yet it is a necessary part of the mourning process. Adjusting to the new environment with the deceased person is the third task. The final step is to relocate the decreases into one's life and to find means to memorialize that person (as cited in Corr & Balk, 2010).

Children also face other challenges following parental divorce. Children often experience reduced involvement by the parent they are not living with, changing residencies, and economic hardship. Family transitions prove to be emotionally stressful and to contain multiple disruptions for children. The more transitions that take place, the more harmful they may be on the children (Price et al., 2010). Fortunately, with the presence of certain protective factors, increases in successful adaption to post-divorce family life can be achieved (Price et al., 2010).

It is vital to note that though not all children react negatively to divorce, it is inevitable that they will be affected in some way. For those that do, adults need to be aware of the ways of coping with tasks (Corr & Balk, 2010). A common misconception is

that if a person purposely ignores the situation or avoids addressing the issue, that the child will not be affected. In reality, this misconception could not be further from the truth. Turning a blind eye to challenges is the equivalent to abandoning the children, denying them help and assistance at a very critical time (Corr & Balk, 2010). Denying the child needed help and assistance can be more detrimental to the child than addressing the issue by putting them at risk for harsher futures (Corr & Balk, 2010). Though not all children will respond negatively toward divorce, it is imperative that all children's responses are considered during divorce aftermath. Furthermore, the extent to which a child is functioning, or lack thereof, should not be passed on the parents' perception of whether their child experiences fewer negative effects (Moon, 2011). By recognizing that children are affected by divorce and taking the necessary steps to work with them through the process, the transition will be easier and more positive for all that are involved.

These vast differences in outcomes of divorce are related to certain aspects in an individual's life that directly affect a person's ability to overcome adverse circumstances. Risk factors work to increase the probability of the negative outcomes, whereas, protective factors are characteristics that promote positive adaption (Parritz & Troy, 2014). Regardless of the factors present in a given situation, in order for a child to continue living as normally as possible, it is vital that in the crisis period children of divorce receive sensitivity, understanding, and emotional support (Olsen & Fuller, 2012). Research has grasped varying conclusions of the extent to which families and children are affected by divorce ranging from severe and long-term, to short and moderate adjustment problems (Price et al., 2010). Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that children are affected and are faced with the reality of having to adapt to divorce.

Cohabitation

Definition. Simply put, cohabitation is "living with someone in an intimate, sexual relationship without being legally married" (Lauer & Lauer, 2012, p. 11). The concept of cohabitation rose quickly in the 1960s and 1970s and was "the third development of the feminist brain trust" (Stanton, 2011, p. 112). Early feminist thinking believed that marriage oppressed women and forced them to overlook their goals and dreams. Thus, cohabitation was developed as an attempt to fix this oppression (Stanton, 2011). The U.S. Census Bureau coined a new term to represent this sexual and domestic relationship. The term coined was POSSLQ—to stand for Person of Opposite Sex Sharing Living Quarters (Stanton, 2011).

This type of family relationship is becoming increasingly popular and accepted and is now seen as "the model first union for young adults" (Guzzo, 2014, p. 826). Many people opt for cohabitation as a way to fulfill intimacy needs without commitment. Others believe the common misperception that cohabitation is a good way to see if they are compatible enough for marriage before ever taking that step (Jay, 2012). Other reasons include spending more time with the other person and convenience (Lauer & Lauer, 2012). When cohabitation is utilized as a test for marriage couples either cohabitate before or after becoming engaged. The intention for marriage was found in "nearly half of those who cohabit" (Lauer & Lauer, 2012, p.150). Many people choose to cohabitate as it provides the benefits of intimacy and economies with less expectation in regards to traditional gender roles (Sassler & Miller, 2011).

Cohabitation may be favored over marriage as a means of avoiding divorce. In response to this misconception, Stanton (2011) bluntly shares,

> If a couple wants to increase to a near-certainty their likelihood of divorcing once they do marry, then live together before marriage. And to improve dramatically their chances of avoiding divorce, all they have to do is **not** do something. (p. 56)

Cohabitors do not have the same level of commitment as is necessary for marriage. Cohabitors who decide that it is not going to work out experience separation that is "much easier in terms of responsibilities toward each other, and the possibility of such a separation, in contrast to marriage, is part of the relationship from the very beginning: (Möller, 2013, p. 3). Marriage requires full commitment, dedication, and sacrifices in an effort to make it work (Möller, 2013). Living together is a "trial run" that is built on judgment and achievement which determines whether or not the relationship will develop (Möller, 2013). For this reason, cohabitors lack the motivation that marriages have to make a relationship work. If the partner does not live up to the standards, then the relationship will end. The lack of determination to their partner also leads to short-term relationships as most cohabiting relationships have been found to last no longer than two years (Möller, 2013).

Research further reveals that though most marriages are preceded by cohabitation, the rate of cohabitations that lead to marriage is decreasing. According to research, only 30 to 40 percent of cohabitors will eventually marry (Möller, 2013). Vespa (2014) suggests that at the start of cohabitation, the commitment to marriage also seems to be waning (as cited in Guzzo, 2014). This insinuates that cohabitation is actually becoming de-linked from marriage itself (Guzzo, 2014). It is important to note that though cohabitation may not replace marriage entirely, it has delayed marriage (Forrest, 2014). Research indicates that cohabitation "now represents a precursor to marriage that has

helped increase the age of first marriage and substantially reduced its prevalence among young adults" (Forrest, 2014, p. 539).

With the increase in delayed marriages, it must not be overlooked that the formation of romantic unions among young adults are not being delayed (Guzzo, 2014). As Raley (2001) revealed, romantic unions are still being formed during that time through coresidential unions, where their first union is likely to be through cohabitation (as cited in Guzzo, 2014). Though fewer cohabitors are leading to marriage, the ones that do are at an increased risk for divorce. Research shows that individuals who cohabitate prior to marriage are at 80 percent more likely to divorce than those who do not (Möller, 2013). In fact, sociologists have concluded "that premarital cohabitation dramatically increases the risk for divorce, as well as the overall unhealthiness of the relationships, has become so consistent, it has been given a name: *the cohabitation effect*" [emphasis in org] (Stanton, 2011, p. 62). This research is so consistent that scholars no longer debate 'if' but 'why' there is a close relationship between premarital cohabitation and marital divorce (Stanton, 2011).

Cohabitors can be categorized into four distinct groups based on styles of relating, motives, and purposes. According to Casper and Sayer (as reported in Brown [2005]), these four types were identified through a national sample (as cited in Lauer & Lauer, 2012). The first type is "precursor to marriage." This group consisted of people who exemplified a commitment to the relationship. They also "had definite plans to marry and expressed a high degree of satisfaction" (Lauer & Lauer, 2012, p. 150). The second group is called "coresidential daters." This group is less committed to the relationship and was uncertain of its ability to last. Their main purpose of moving in with someone was due to

a dislike of the single life (p. 150). The third group was termed "trial cohabitors" who intend to marry in their future. However, they do not necessarily expect their current partner to be the one they marry (p. 150). The final group of cohabitors the "alternative to marriage" group expressed a greater commitment to their cohabitating partner than to marriage itself (Lauer & Lauer, 2012, p. 151).

Yet another cohabitation category could be the relationships that bring children in the home. In 2009, there were 2,558,000 couples cohabitating with children under the age of 18 in the home. The ways in which children were incorporated into the home vary. Some couples begin cohabiting as a practical way to parent the child that the woman was currently carrying. Some children, like that of some blended families, are brought into the relationship. Other children are physically conceived while cohabitating. When this occurs the relationship tends to strengthen and stabilize (Lauer & Lauer, 2012). Gay and lesbian cohabitating couples were found to have "similar levels of psychological adjustment and that their relationships were similar in many ways" to that of heterosexual couples (Lauer & Lauer, 2012, p. 151).

Prevalence. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of couples who are cohabitating over the past decades. Cohabitation is not only centralized in the United States but has been found to be "common across racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic statuses, prior parenthood and union experiences, and so on" (Guzzo, 2014, p. 827). Among American adults cohabitation has become a normative part of courtship (Sassler & Miller, 2011). The prevalence of cohabitation in the United States has seen more than a 1,500 percent increase over the past 50 years (Jay, 2012). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were more than 6.1 million unmarried couples living together in 2008. Of

this amount 754,000 were same-sex couples. This shows an increase of 5,346,000 cohabitating couples since 1960 (as cited in Lauer & Lauer, 2012). Growth has been particularly drastic over the past two decades where cohabitating couples increased over 50 percent. This has more than doubled the real numbers (Stanton, 2011). It is estimated that 40 percent of children in the United States will live in a cohabitating relationship at some point before reaching the age of 16 (Möller, 2013). The sexual revolution, availability of birth control, and economics of young adulthood has been largely attributed to the drastic increase of cohabitation (Jay, 2012).

There is no doubt that this number will continue to grow. Research has estimated that "more than two thirds of American women lived with a partner by their mid-20s, and the majority of individuals who married lived with their spouses before the wedding day" (Sassler & Miller, 2011, p. 483). Adolescents reported that, though they did not see cohabitation as a substitute for marriage, they expected to engage in cohabitation in their future with goal of marriage at some point (Lauer & Lauer, 2012).

The prevalence of cohabitation also depends on class distinctions as not all couples cohabitate at the same rate (Stanton, 2011). In 2010, the National Marriage Project reported that 75 percent of women 25 to 44 years old, who did not complete high school, claimed to have cohabitated. This number is compared to the 50 percent of college graduates who reported being in a cohabitating relationship (Stanton, 2011). Certain characteristics were also found in cohabitors including: less religious, previously divorced, experienced parental divorce, fatherless, or having a childhood that exposed them to high levels of marital discord (Stanton, 2011). Furthermore, research examined the outcomes of cohabitation over time found that cohabitations displayed an association

between age and outcomes "with younger cohabitors more likely to experience dissolution and less likely to transition to marriage than their older counterparts" (Guzzo, 2014, p. 828).

A representative nationwide survey of twenty-somethings revealed that nearly half of those surveyed agreed that "You would only marry someone if he or she agreed to live with you first, so that you could find out whether you really got along" (Jay, 2012, p. 91). Of those surveyed, two-thirds also agreed that a good way to avoid divorce was to live together before marriage (Jay, 2012). U.S. high school seniors were also found to prefer premarital cohabitation. Thus, it should not be shocking that cohabitation "is an increasingly normative stage in transition to adulthood" (Forrest, 2014, p. 539). However, cohabitation is also seen with those who have largely made the transition to adulthood (Guzzo, 2014). Couples that cohabitate tend to be younger, more likely unemployed, and less educated. However, there are older cohabitors. These individuals tend to view cohabitation as a substitute to marriage (Lauer & Lauer, 2012).

With the increase in the prevalence of cohabitation as a whole, there has also been an increase in the prevalence of serial cohabitation. This means that individuals are experiencing and engaging in multiple cohabitations. Over the late 1990s and early 2000s, serial cohabitation saw an increase of roughly 40 percent (Guzzo, 2014). Research also found that those who were serial cohabitors are "more disadvantaged than single-instance cohabitors" (Guzzo, 2014, p. 828).

Effects. Cohabitating couples experience, in large, the same challenges and difficulties as married couples such as "money, sex, division of labor in the home, and so forth" (Lauer & Lauer, 2012, p. 151). Research indicates that when comparing marriage

to cohabitation, marriage has the advantage. Cohabitating couples are more likely to experience violence from their partner, with “a woman being nine times more likely to be killed by a partner in a cohabitating than in a married relationship” (Lauer & Lauer, 2012, p. 151). Premarital cohabitors were also found to have higher rates of premarital and marital violence (as cited in Möller, 2013). Married individuals were found to be less likely to commit crimes, even for those who had histories of crime (Forrest, 2014).

According to Fuller, those who cohabit experience poorer health and an increase in health problems (as cited in Lauer & Lauer, 2012). Children born to cohabitating parents are more probable to experience parental separation, according to Osborne, Manning, and Smock (as cited in Lauer & Lauer, 2012). Depression and instability are also found in cohabiting relationships. These factors have been found to increase within the presence of children. Reports of instability are 25 percent higher than those of married couples (Lauer & Lauer, 2012).

Other negative effects that have been found in cohabitors include: poorer marital problem-solving skills, lessened support for each other, higher infidelity rates, lesser quality of marriage, more likely to perceive divorce as a possibility, and higher divorce rates (Lauer & Lauer, 2012). Cohabitating relationships have also been found to be “less likely to be committed, supportive, and characterized by emotional interdependence” (Forrest, 2014, p. 550). Ambert (2005) addressed some of the dangers in cohabitation (as cited in Möller, 2013). Married couples who cohabited before marriage were found to be less faithful in their sexual lives and were less supportive of each other.

Cohabitating, in and of itself, does not require commitment and “those who cohabit may be more unconventional and less inclined to view marriage as a sacred institution” (Lauer

& Lauer, 2012, p.153). This may cause a lessened commitment and heightened acceptance of divorce. The effects of cohabitation are not favorable. To put it bluntly, "At best, then, cohabitation brings no advantage to those who desire marriage. At worse, cohabitors are at a higher risk for problems and breakups" (Lauer & Lauer, 2012, p. 152).

Due to the large number of children who are born in cohabitating relationships, research that focuses on the effects of cohabitation on children is vital. Cherlin (2010) reveals that there is a high rate of separation related to cohabitating couples (as cited in Fagan, 2012). Having children creates added strain on the cohabiting relationship. Osborne, Manning, and Smock (2007) found when compared to married couples, cohabiting couples were 5 times more likely to separate within 3 years following the birth of their child (as cited in Fagan, 2012).

Stanton (2011) indicates that "Children born to cohabitating parents see the breakup of their home at dramatically higher levels than those in married homes" (p. 84). The percentages of children with cohabitating parents were far more likely to see home dissolution than those of married parents. This percentage also increased with the age of the child. At ages 1, 5, and 10, children of cohabiting families were 15 percent, 50 percent, and 66 percent respectively likely to see dissolution. Children of married parents at the same ages were far less likely to experience dissolution at 4 percent, 15 percent, and 29 percent (Stanton, 2011). Overall, when compared to children of married parents, children of cohabitors were 292 percent more likely to experience parental breakup (Stanton, 2011).

When cohabitations involve children, there is an increase in the challenges faced. Sweeny (2010) explains that when cohabitations include children from previous

relationships and form step families, there is an increased risk of instability (as cited in Guzzo, 2014). Research clearly demonstrates the fact that children are hurt by weak relationships. Family experts consistently find that children are greatly impacted by family stability (Stanton, 2011). In essence the more stable a home is, the better the children are going to do. Though relatively stable cohabiting or single-parent homes is better for parents and children alike, they might not have the ability to provide the same benefits of a "stable, first-time married home provides" (Stanton, 2011, p. 84). Stanton (2011) reveals that the instability of cohabitating homes make them less ideal for meeting children's developmental needs than married homes.

Children who find themselves in cohabitating relationship also experience effects of this type of union. Children often experience greater risk of living in an unstable family structure, more behavioral problems, and lower school performance. Children may also experience levels of neglect. This is from their parent who is now giving attention to the new partner and the new partner's lack of attachment to the child (Möller, 2013). The existence of physical abuse has also been found to be more likely for children in cohabitating relationships. Girls are also at an increased risk for sexual abuse than when they remained in a married home with biological parents (Möller, 2013). The human need for intimate relationships is a basic need for children as well as adults. Möller (2013) explains that "commitment and stability are at the core of children's needs" (p. 8). Unfortunately, many times in cohabitations these two needs are left unmet (Möller, 2013).

The family structure in which a child grows up has effects in regards to success in their educational lives. Emerging literacy for younger children depends heavily on the

parents' nurturance, intellectual, and language stimulation. These needs may be negatively affected by both the dissolution of a cohabitating relationship and divorce (Fagan, 2012). Research on the effects that divorce and cohabitation have on preschool children's literacy revealed that both divorce and cohabitation dissolution are likely to have negative impacts on a child's literacy. However, this is only the case when "residential mothers transition into new cohabiting relationships shortly following the breakup of their previous relationship" (Fagan, 2012, p. 479).

The following chart from the U.S. Census Bureau displays how a child's education coincides with the type of family arrangement (see Figure 2). There are drastic differences associated with the education attained and whether the child was raised by married heterosexuals, cohabitating adults, or parents with no partner (Thompson, 2013). Figure 2 illustrates the effects that divorce, cohabitation, and single parent homes can have on children's achievement in education. For children who resided in a home with married parents, roughly 49.4 million would achieve high school graduation or higher. Of children of single parent homes 10.7 million were depicted to have completed a high school education or higher. The lowest amount of children illustrated to complete education was those of cohabiting relationships. Children who resided with cohabitors had a significantly lower amount depicted to complete high school education or higher at only 4,690,000 (see Figure 2). This chart depicts that children will fare better living in a single parent home than with cohabitors. This is consistent with research by Fagan (2012) which found that children whose parents divorced and remain single did not see major negative effects on children's literacy. However, the cohabiting children were negatively affected and performance declined.

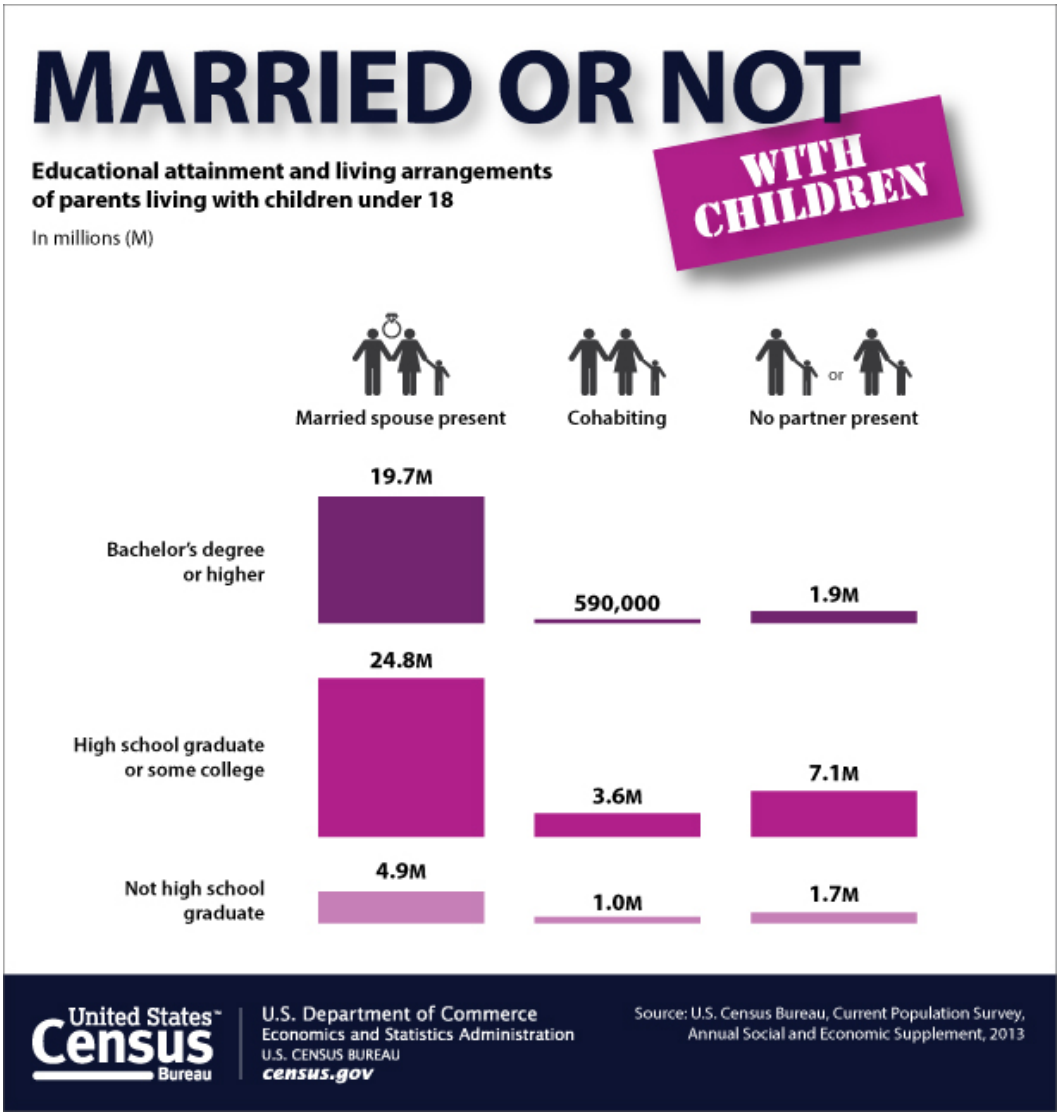

Figure 2. Illustrates the educational attainment of children in three different living arrangements. The highest level of educational achievement is attained when the married spouse is present. Adapted from "The slow death of 'traditional' families in America," by D. Thompson, *The Atlantic*, para. 2. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/11/the-slow-death-of-traditional-families-in-america/281904/. This image is in the public domain.

Conclusion

The effects of various living arrangements and the amount to which individuals can cope with changing family structures vary. As divorce and cohabitation are prevalent in today's society, it is imperative to understand the effects that these family structures

have on families and children. As divorce has lessened in previous years due to the increasing popularity of cohabitation, children have continued to grow up in families that are more likely to be unstable. Fortunately, not all the effects experienced are negative, but many have been found to be.

Research is clear that, "Being brought up by married and resident biological parents is still widely regarded as the best option for children, and other family forms are seen as disadvantaged" (Zartler, 2014, p. 605). This is the ideal family unit, anything other than this puts children at a disadvantage. The amount of disadvantage is based on a variety of factors, but the fact remains the same that children are at a disadvantage. Research further pointed "to the fact that children also seem to be oriented toward an idealized nuclear family and that those growing up with a single parent may experience negative connotations with regard to their families" (Zartler, 2014, p. 605).

Stanton (2011) said, "Children are best set to thrive, grow, and live a happy life when their mom and dad give them the lifelong gift of committing themselves to one another in their marriage—as well as the effort and self-denial it takes to make that marriage grow" (p. 86). It is important to note that the key to successful family structure is not on the number of parents in the home, nor on the love that is shared and provided. The key is in the nature of the relationship between them (Stanton, 2011). It should not be surprising that the ideal family, which works best and is optimal for all involved, agrees with God's design. There is a definite need to work toward returning to God's original design because it is the one that, when done correctly, has been proven to work.

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