HHS Public Access

Author manuscript

Am J Community Psychol. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2021 June 03.

Published in final edited form as:

Am J Community Psychol. 1989 August ; 17(4): 485–501. doi:10.1007/BF00931174.

Social Support of Children of Divorce: Direct and Stress Buffering Effects

Sharlene A. Wolchik, **Linda S. Ruehlman**, **Sanford L. Braver**, **Irwin N. Sandler**

Arizona State University

Abstract

This study examined the direct and stress-buffering effects of support from family adults, nonfamily adults, family children, and nonfamily children on the adjustment of 104 children of divorce. For children's reports of adjustment, significant stress-buffering (i.e., Stress × Support) interactions for support from family adults and support from nonfamily adults occurred. The lower the level of social support, the stronger the positive relation between stress and adjustment problems. In addition, at high levels of stress, children with high support from nonfamily and family adults reported fewer adjustment problems than did children with low support. However, at the lowest level of stress, children with high support from nonfamily adults were significantly more poorly adjusted than were children with low support. For parental reports of children's adjustment, support from family adults was marginally positively related to adjustment whereas support from nonfamily adults was inversely related to adjustment. Implications for intervention programs for children of divorce are discussed.

Although many children of divorce exhibit serious adjustment problems (e.g., Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, Perry, & McLoughlin, 1983; Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980), children differ widely in their reactions to this life transition (Felner, Farber, & Primavera, 1980, 1983; Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, 1988a). It is increasingly recognized that children's adjustment to divorce is influenced by many environmental and social factors (Felner et al., 1980, 1983; Hetherington, 1979; Kurdek, 1981; Sandler et al., 1988a) so that identifying these variables and how they operate is now a central task for divorce researchers (Felner, 1984). In this paper, we focus on two variables that have been given particular emphasis in models of divorce adjustment: divorce-related stressors (Felner et al., 1980, 1983; Sandler et al., 1988a) and social support (Felner et al., 1980, 1983; Felner, Terre, & Rowlinson, 1988).

There is growing consensus that divorce is best conceptualized as an ongoing process of multiple environmental changes rather than as a single, dichotomous event (Felner et al., 1980; Hetherington, 1979; Kurdek, 1981; Sandler et al., 1988a). Several researchers have found that the amount and quality of environmental changes that children experience after their parents separate are related to adjustment problems. For example, Kurdek and Blisk (1983) and Stolberg and his colleagues (Stolberg & Anker, 1984; Stolberg, Camplair,

All correspondence should be directed to Sharlene A. Wolchik, Department of Psychology, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85287.

Currier, & Wells, 1987) found that the total number of life change events was positively related to maladjustment. More recently, Sandler, Wolchik, Braver, and Fogas (1988b) assessed the stressfulness of postdivorce environments using a representative sample of divorce-related events and found that negative events correlated with maladjustment.

What is known about the influence of supportive relationships on children's adaptation to divorce? Researchers have examined several relationship factors such as the quality of the relationship with the custodial and non-custodial parents, degree of contact with nonparental care-givers, and the amount of social support (cf. Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, 1985). The data indicate that children of divorce with higher quality relationships with their parents fare better than do children with poorer relationships (e.g., Fogas, Wolchik, & Braver, 1987; Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, Perry, Nastasi, & Lightel, 1986; Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington et al., 1978; Santrock & Warshak, 1979). However, less is known about the impact of relationships with other, less central members of the social networks of children of divorce. Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1978) and Guidubaldi and Cleminshaw (1983) reported that contact with grandparents was associated with better social adjustment. More recently, Kurdek (in press) found that the number of people children reported that they felt attached to, whom they could trust and on whom they could rely in special ways was positively related to adjustment.

The importance of examining the relations between adjustment and support separately for different types of supporters has been demonstrated by researchers studying children in situations other than divorce. Whereas support from family and nonfamily adults is significantly positively related to emotional and school adjustment, support from peers has been found to be nonsignificantly or negatively related to school and emotional adjustment (Belle & Longfellow, 1983; Bryant, 1985; Cauce, Felner, Primavera, & Ginter, 1982; Cauce & Srebnik, in press). For children of divorce, the distinction between support from family versus nonfamily may be particularly important. Support from family may be important in facilitating one of the prime adaptive tasks of divorce, restructuring of family patterns (Felner et al., 1980). Alternatively, support from people outside of the family may be useful in a different way because these people are less personally involved in ongoing divorce stressors and thus may be able to provide an outside perspective or distraction from these stressors.

Although negative divorce-related events and supportive relationships each are significantly related to children's adjustment after divorce, little is known about their interaction. It may be that social support and stress have independent direct (i.e., main) effects on children's adjustment. Alternatively, stress and support may interact in their effects on adjustment such that support mitigates the impact of divorce stressors. According to the interactive or stress-buffer model, support has greater beneficial effects on the adjustment of children the greater the level of stress experienced and does not affect the adjustment of children who are exposed to lower levels of stress (cf. Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985). We assessed whether the relations between support from four categories of supporters (i.e., family adults, family children, nonfamily adults, and nonfamily children) and adjustment were consistent with a direct effect model or an interactive, stress-buffering model.

METHODS

Participants

Participants were 104 children of divorce and their primary residential parents. Participants were recruited primarily by random sampling of petitions for dissolutions in which there was a child between the ages of 8 and 15 years. This age range was chosen because of our interest in obtaining information on postdivorce adjustment of children across a broad age range. Eight was viewed as the lower limit for the cognitive capacity needed to provide accurate self-reports. In addition, a special effort was made to recruit families with joint custody by inviting the participation of families who had applied for joint custody. The sample also included volunteers who responded to a newspaper article about the study. Given these recruitment procedures, the sample is not likely to be representative of all divorced families. In families where there was more than one child between 8 and 15 years, one child was randomly selected to ensure independence of response.

The average time since the parents had separated physically was 14.4 months (range 0–30 months). The average age of the children at the time of the interview was 11.5 years (average age at time of the physical separation of the parents was 10.4 years). Sixteen percent of the sample experienced more than one parental divorce. Fifty-nine percent were girls. Custody arrangements were 68% maternal custody and 32% joint custody. Of the children, 93% were Caucasian, 2% were Black, 4% were Hispanic, and 1% were of some other ethnicity.

Procedure—Separate, individual interviews were conducted with the parent and the child. Interviews occurred in the family's home or at the university. Informed consent was obtained from parents and children prior to participation and parents were invited to attend a workshop on children's adjustment to divorce in exchange for their participation.

The inventories were administered as part of a larger battery of questionnaires. The measures of divorce events, social support, and adjustment were verbally administered to the children. The adjustment measures were given as paper-and-pencil questionnaires to the parents. The adjustment measures were given after the divorce events and social support inventories.

Measures

Divorce Events—Divorce-related events were measured using the Divorce Events Schedule for Children (DES-C; Sandler et al., 1988a, 1988b), a life events scale designed to assess a representative sample of stressors that children may experience after divorce. Events were obtained from knowledgeable key informants (e.g., parents and children who had experienced divorce, psychologists, lawyers who worked with divorcing families) who identified the experiences that have an important impact on children after their parents divorce.

Children reported whether an event occurred in the past 3 months and, if the event had occurred, whether it happened more than usual, less than usual, or about the same as usual. If an event did not occur, we asked whether the event used to occur but did not during the past 3 months or whether the event never occurred. If the event had ever occurred, children

were asked if the event was positive, neutral, or negative, and how positive (7-point scale) or negative (7-point scale) it was.

To minimize possible contamination of participants' adjustment and their assessment of the desirability of events (Monroe, 1982; Sandler & Guenther, 1985; Zimmerman, 1983), Sandler et al. (1988b) derived scores using consensually based classification of event desirability. Events were classified as consensually desirable or undesirable if 80% or more of the children who had experienced the event rated it in that direction. Sixteen events were classified as undesirable and 17 as desirable. Examples of positive events are: "Household routines get done smoothly" and "You get toys, clothes and other things you like." Examples of negative events are: "Mom and Dad argue in front of you" and "Dad tells you not to tell some things to Mom."

Divorce-related stress was assessed as the total number of changes for the worse (i.e., sum of decreases in desirable events and increases in undesirable events, with desirability defined using Sandler et al. [1988b] consensually based ratings).[2] This score was found to be the best predictor of children's adjustment in a sample of 131 children, of which the current sample is a subset. The 2-week test–retest reliability of this score is .67.

Social Support—Social support was assessed using the Children's Inventory of Social Support (Wolchik, Sandler, & Braver, 1987). The format and content of the CISS are similar to those of the Arizona Social Support Inventory Scale (Barrera, 1981). However, we adapted the content and format of the ASSIS to make the scale more appropriate for younger children. Based on previous conceptual work on the content of adults' and children's social support (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Cochran & Brassard, 1979), five kinds of supportive functions were measured: recreation, advice, goods/services, emotional support, and positive feedback. (A copy of this instrument can be obtained from the first author.)

Each kind of support was defined in a short paragraph. Children then listed all the people in their family and outside their family who provided this kind of support during the past couple of months. Children also listed people who made them feel "angry, bad, or upset" and provided the age, sex, and relationship (e.g., cousin) for each network member.

Four measures of social support were calculated by summing the number of support functions provided by family adults, family children, nonfamily adults, and nonfamily children[3] who were *not* also sources of negative feelings. Support from "conflicted" supporters was not included on the basis of research showing that support from people who are also sources of serious negative feelings is associated with poorer adjustment (Barrera, 1981; Sandler & Barrera, 1984; Wolchik, Sandler, & Braver, 1984).

[2]Scores were also derived using the individual's own rating of event desirability. The associations between adjustment and divorce event measures scored using consensual (i.e., nomothetic) and individual (i.e., idiographic) ratings of desirability did not differ in either magnitude nor pattern.

[3]Adnlts were defined as supporters who were 18 years or older. Family included extended as well as nuclear family members. Stepparent, baby sitter, teacher, or other school adult and mental health professional were some of the nonfamily adult supporters listed by children.

The present index was selected over more traditional measures of support such as network size because of its ability to reflect both breadth and depth of social support. For example, using network size, a supporter who provides one function would be equated with a supporter who provides five functions, whereas using the present measure, the first supporter would receive a support score of 1 and the second of 5.

Empirical justification for summing across the five support functions is provided by the high internal consistency reliabilities (coefficient alphas: family adults = .83; family children = .90; nonfamily adults = .81; and nonfamily children = .79, in a sample of 117, of which the current sample is a subset). Two-week test–retest reliabilities ($n = 36$) are as follows: family adults: $r = .52$, nonfamily adults: $r = .53$; family children: $r = .63$; nonfamily children: $r = .85$.

Psychological Adjustment—Both parental and children's reports of children's psychological adjustment were obtained. Primary residential parents[4] completed the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). Because the sample spanned a broad age range and consisted of both boys and girls, the total behavior problems score was used, as recommended by Achenbach and Edelbrock. Test–retest reliability of .95 for this score has been reported by Achenbach and Edelbrock.

Children rated their depression (Children's Depression Inventory, CDI; Kovacs, 1981), anxiety (Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale, CMAS; Reynolds & Richmond, 1978), and aggressiveness (Braver Aggressiveness Dimension Scale, BADS; Braver, Fogas, Sandler, & Wolchik, 1986). This latter scale consisted of 14 items on the Child Behavior Checklist which were adapted into a self-report format. Items were selected because they loaded on each aggressiveness factor in the factor analyses computed separately for age and gender groupings (Achenbach, 1978; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1979). Internal consistency reliabilities are .83 for the BADS (Braver et al., 1986), .94 for the CDI (Saylor, Finch, Spirito, & Bennett, 1984) and mid-.80s for the CMAS (Reynolds & Richmond, 1978). Test–retest reliabilities of .72 (Friedman & Butler, 1979) and .68 (Reynolds & Richmond) have been reported for the CDI and CMAS, respectively. Because of the highly significant correlations between these measures (depression/aggressiveness, $r = .50$; depression/anxiety, $r = .63$; hostility/aggressiveness, $r = .60$), a composite measure was constructed by transforming the raw scores on each scale to z scores and summing these scores.

RESULTS

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

The means, standard deviations, and ranges for the variables are presented in Table I. Table II displays the intercorrelations among these variables.

[4]In joint custody families, the parent with whom the child lived most of the time completed the questionnaires. In cases where residential custody was split equally between parents, the parent with whom the child was residing when the interview occurred completed the questionnaire.

Change for the Worse, Support, and Adjustment

To test both the direct and stress-buffering effects of support, separate regression analyses were carried out for parental and children's reports of adjustment.[5] In both analyses, a set of the following control variables was entered into the equation first: time since physical separation, child's sex, child's age, custody arrangement, custodial parent's income, and number of years of education attained by the custodial parent.[6] The change for the worse score was entered next, followed by the block of support scores, and finally the block of the change for the Worse × Support product terms. Significant effects for the block of support terms and/or interaction terms were examined further to determine which variable(s) within the block accounted for the effects. Four separate regressions were conducted in which the block of control variables and the change for the worse score were entered first, followed by *one* of the four support measures (i.e., family adult, nonfamily adult, family children, nonfamily children) and that measure's product with change for the worse.

For parental report of adjustment, the block of control variables accounted for a nonsignificant 9% of the variance. Neither the change for the worse nor the block of interaction terms was significantly related to adjustment (Table III). The block of support variables accounted for a significant gain in variance (11%, $p < .05$). Follow-up tests revealed the gain in variance accounted for is due largely to the relations between adjustment and family adult support and nonfamily adult support. When each support measure was entered by itself after the control variables and change for the worse, family adult support accounted for an increase in variance of .03 ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .08$) and nonfamily adult support accounted for an increase in variance of .04 ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$). It should be noted that the positive sign of the latter beta indicates that after holding the other variables constant, nonfamily adult support and adjustment problems are *positively* related.

For children's reports of adjustment, the block of control variables accounted for a nonsignificant 4% of the variance. The main effects for change for the worse and the block of interaction terms accounted for significant gains in R^2. Change for the worse accounted for a gain of 15% and the block of interaction terms accounted for an additional 10% gain in R^2.

Follow-up analyses, in which the product terms for single support scores and change for the worse were examined, revealed a significant increase in R^2 for both the interaction of change for the worse and nonfamily adult support (7%) and change for the worse and family adult support (3%). Neither the Change for the Worse × Family Child Support nor the Change for the Worse × Nonfamily Child Support interaction terms accounted for significant gains in R^2.

[5]Omnibus tests of blocks of interaction terms were conducted to provide protection against the alpha inflation that would occur if each interaction term were tested separately. A significant R^2 change indicates that at least one of the interaction terms is significant (see Cohen & Cohen, 1975, p. 172).

[6]Custody arrangement (joint vs. maternal) and child's sex were dichotomous variables; income was assessed using grouped intervals. The other control variables were continuous. Control variables were selected on the basis of previous findings which show significant associations between these variables and children's postdivorce adjustment.

To examine the nature of the significant interaction terms (cf. Cohen & Cohen, 1983, pp. 320–324), regression lines depicting the relations between change for the worse and children's reports of adjustment problems were plotted for lower (1 *SD* below the mean) and higher (1 *SD* above the mean) levels of social support from nonfamily adults and from family adults. As shown in Figure 1, the lower the level of support from family adults, the steeper the slope of the regression line implying a stronger positive relation between change for the worse and adjustment problems. In addition, at high levels of change for the worse, children with greater support report fewer adjustment problems than do children with low support. However, at the lowest level of change for the worse, children with more support exhibit more adjustment problems than do children with less support. The same patterns occurred for support from nonfamily adults.

Follow-up analyses of the association between support from adults and adjustment under low levels of change for the worse were conducted using a procedure similar to a "simple effects" test in a two-factor ANOVA (Aiken & West, 1988; Judd & McClelland, in press). Analyses revealed that when change for the worse is zero, a significant coefficient for nonfamily adult support occurred ($\beta = .43$, $t = 2.17$, $p < .05$), indicating that greater support is associated with more adjustment problems under conditions of no change for the worse. The coefficient for family adult support was nonsignificant ($\beta = .15$, $t = 1.02$, $p > .05$).

Analyses assessing the direct and buffering potential of various adult family members (i.e., mother, father, and extended family) were conducted.[7] In these analyses, children's reports of adjustment were regressed on the control variables, change for the worse, a single support term (e.g., maternal support), and that measure's product with change for the worse. These analyses revealed nonsignificant main effects and interactions terms for paternal and maternal support. For support from extended family a significant increment in R^2 (9%) occurred for the interaction term. The plot of this interaction is very similar to that depicted in Figure 1. When change for the worse is zero, the support coefficient is nonsignificant ($\beta = .25$, $t = 1.49$, $p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

These results suggest that the relations between support and adjustment among children of divorce are complex and depend on both level of stress and source of support. The findings on support from adults differed when parental versus children's report of children's adjustment problems was used as the criterion variable, with direct effects occurring for parental reports and interactive effects of stress and support occurring for children's reports. Support from children was not significantly associated with children's adjustment, as assessed by parents or children.

Support From Nonparental Adults

Children's Reports of Adjustment—How might support from nonparental adults buffer the negative impact of divorce events? First, these supportive interactions may allay fears of

[7]Follow-up of the significant interaction for nonfamily adult support was not possible because of the large number of different types of supporters within this category.

abandonment (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980) or concerns about who will take care of the child's basic needs now that one parent is no longer a part of the child's daily life. When many negative divorce-related changes occur, fears of abandonment may be particularly strong (Ramirez, Sandler, Balls, Wolchik, & West, 1988). It is also possible that by "filling in" the educational and recreational roles that were previously assumed by the parents (Hetherington & Camara, 1984), these adults provide positive experiences that enhance the child's self-esteem which may facilitate coping with divorce-related stressors. Third, these adults may help children accurately interpret aspects of the divorce such as who is responsible for the divorce or why their parents spend less time with them. These reinterpretations may lessen the threat of divorce-related stressors (Thoits, 1986) and thus may facilitate coping.

Unlike the classical stress buffer effect, under low stress, high support from *nonfamily* adults was associated with *more* adjustment problems. Although the degree of adjustment difficulties in children reporting high support and low change for the worse is not extreme, it is interesting to speculate about how support may lead to poorer adjustment.[8] The idea that aid can be threatening and thus lead to negative effects has been articulated by Fisher, Nadler, and Whitcher-Alagna (1982). When support represents a threat to autonomy, self-esteem may be diminished and aid can have negative effects. In the present sample, children who face few divorce-related stressors may perceive support from nonfamily adults as threatening to their sense of competence. In other words, children may view this aid as a message that they have problems and these perceptions of significant others may influence children's assessments of their functioning.

Parental Reports of Children's Adjustment—The *marginal* main effect for family adult support on parental perceptions of children's adjustment provides some evidence, although not strong, for the robustness of the relation between support for family adults and children's adjustment. Unlike support from family adults, support from nonfamily adults was positively related to parental reports of children's adjustment problems. One explanation for this somewhat surprising finding is similar to that advanced for the positive relation between support from nonfamily adults and children's reports of adjustment at the lowest level of stress. Parents may view the provision of support by adults outside the family as an indication that the children are experiencing psychological problems and this interpretation may influence their perceptions of children's adjustment problems.

The difference in the pattern and magnitude of findings across reporters raises the possibility that the relations between children's self-reports of their adjustment and their social support reflect some unmeasured third variable such as negative mood. This is seen as an implausible interpretation because it is difficult to conceptualize how a common third variable would lead to interactive effects for support rather than main effects or why the significant relations between adjustment and support measures would occur for only two of the four support measures. However, the limitation that the obtained Stress × Support interactive effects are confined to children's reports of support and adjustment must be

[8]The average level of adjustment problems for children who reported low levels of stress and high levels of support (e.g., levels of support were 1 *SD* above the mean) was below the mean level of adjustment problems for the sample as a whole.

recognized. Understanding the reasons for these different perceptions of the relations between support and children's adjustment is clearly an important issue for future research.

Support From Children

In contrast to support from adults, support from other children (both family and nonfamily) was not significantly associated with adjustment, as measured from either parents' or children's perspective. This finding is consistent with those of several researchers who have studied children in other life situations. For example, Bryant (1985) reported that peer support significantly predicted only one of six dependent variables (attitudes toward individualism) and Belle and Longfellow (1983) found that children's adjustment problems were not significantly correlated with confiding in siblings or friends. Similarly, Hirsch and Reischl (1985) found that peer support and symptomatology were nonsignificantly related in samples of adolescents with depressed, arithritic, or disorder-free parents.

There are several possible explanations for the nonsignificant relation between support from children and adjustment. First, there may be a lack of congruence between the adaptive tasks engendered by the stress situation and the support children provide (Barrera, 1988; Wilcox & Vernberg, 1985). Specifically, given that a central adaptive task involves redefining relationships with central adult care-givers (Felner et al., 1983), support from adults rather than children may be particularly important. Second, the average age of our participants (11.5 years) may explain the lack of significant effects. Young children may be unable to provide effective social support for each other, but support from other children may be positively related to adjustment among older adolescents (e.g., Burke & Weir, 1978; Greenberg, Siegel, & Leitch, 1983; Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988). Finally, the lack of significant effects may be due to our focus on adjustment problems rather than domains of functioning such as social competence (Wolchik et al., 1987) or self-esteem (Wyman, Cowen, Hightower, & Pedro-Carroll, 1985).

Implications and Directions for Future Research

This study furthers our understanding of the relations between social support of children of divorce and their adjustment in several ways. First, the data indicate that divorce-related stressors and social support from adults operate in concert to influence children's reports of their own adjustment. The lower the level of social support from adults, the stronger the positive relation between stress and adjustment problems. However, at the lowest level of stress, children with high support from nonfamily adults were significantly more poorly adjusted than were children with low support. These data indicate that although support may be a protective resource, we need also be aware of potential negative effects of support. Second, the relations between adjustment and support differ for support provided by children and adults. Whereas support from other children does not appear to facilitate adjustment after divorce, support from adults, in particular extended family members, is related to fewer adjustment problems. Thus, in designing prevention programs for children of divorce, researchers should consider how to mobilize the effective use of support from the extended family.

Although the explanations given for the relations in this discussion have inferred a causal direction from support to adjustment, alternative causal directions are equally plausible, given the cross-sectional nature of the data. Whereas level of support may influence adjustment, it is also possible that level of adjustment determines the degree of support or that a bidirectional relation best describes the associations between support and children's adjustment (Berrera, 1986; Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986). Longitudinal assessment of the relations between psychological adjustment and social support among children of divorce is an important question for future research.

Acknowledgments

Support for this research was provided by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (#1R03MH38474-01) and by a Preventive Intervention Research Center grant (#1P50MH39246-01) from the Center for Prevention Research at the National Institute of Mental Health.

REFERENCES

Achenbach TM (1978). The child behavior profile: I. Boys aged 6–11. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 46, 478–489. [PubMed: 670491]

Achenbach TM, & Edelbrock CS (1979). The child behavior profile: II. Boys aged 12–16 and girls aged 6–11 and 12–16. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 47, 223–233. [PubMed: 469068]

Achenbach TM, & Edelbrock CS (1983). Manual for the child behavior profile and revised child behavior profile. Burlington: University of Vermont, Department of Psychiatry.

Aiken LS, & West SG (1988). Interactions and power polynomials in multiple regression analysis. Unpublished manuscript, Arizona State University.

Barrera M Jr. (1981). Social support in the adjustment of pregnant adolescents: Assessment issues. In Gottlieb BH (Ed.), Social networks and social support (pp. 69–96). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Barrera M Jr. (1988). Models of social support and life stress: Beyond the buffering hypothesis. In Cohen LH (Ed.), Research on stressful life events: Theoretical and methodological issues (pp. 211–236). Newbury Park, CA.: Sage.

Barrera M Jr. (1986). Distinctions between social support concepts, measures and models. American Journal of Community Psychology, 14, 413–441.

Barrera M Jr., & Ainlay SL (1983). The structure of social support: A conceptual and empirical analysis. Journal of Community Psychology, 11, 133–143. [PubMed: 10299305]

Belle D, & Longfellow C (1983, 4). Emotional support and children's well-being: An exploratory study of children's confidants. Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Children Development, Detroit.

Braver SL, Fogas B, Sandler I, & Wolchik S, (1986, 4). Development of a self-report aggressiveness scale for children: The Braver Aggressive Dimension Scale. Paper presented at the Western Psychological Association Convention, Seattle, WA.

Bryant B (1985). The neighborhood walk: A study of source of support in middle childhood from the child's perspective. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 50 (3, Serial No. 210).

Burke RJ, & Weir T (1978). Benefits to adolescents of informal helping relationships with their parents and peers. Psychological Reports, 42, 417–428.

Cauce AM, Felner RD, Primavera J, & Ginter MA (1982). Social support in high risk adolescents: Structural components and adaptive impact. American Journal of Community Psychology, 10, 417–428. [PubMed: 7137129]

Cauce AM, & Srebnik CS (in press). Peer network and social support: A focus for preventive efforts with youths. In Bond L, Compas B, & Swift C (Eds.), Primary prevention of psychopathology: Prevention in the schools. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Cochran MM, & Brassard JA (1979). Child development and personal social networks. Child Development, 50, 601–616.

Cohen J, & Cohen P (1983). Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences. Hillsdale, N J: Erlbaum.

Cohen S, & Wills TA (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. Psychological Bulltein, 98, 310–317.

Compas BE, Wagner BM, Slavin LA, & Vannatta K (1986). A prospective study of life events, social support, and psychological symptomatology during the transition from high school to college. American Journal of Community Psychology, 14, 241–258. [PubMed: 3739977]

Felner RD (1984). Vulnerability in childhood: A preventive framework for understanding children's efforts to cope with life stress and transitions. In Roberts MC & Peterson L (Eds.), Prevention of problems in childhood: Psychological research and applications (pp. 133–169). New York: Wiley.

Felner RD, Farber SS, & Primavera J (1980). Children of divorce, stressful life events, and life transitions: A framework for preventive efforts. In Price RH, Ketterer RF, Bader BC, & Monahan J (Eds.), Prevention in mental health: Research, policy and practice (pp. 81–108). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Felner RD, Farber SS, & Primavera J (1983). Transitions and stressful life events: A model for primary prevention. In Felner RD, Jason LA, Moritsugu JN, & Farber SS (Eds.), Preventive psychology: Theory, research and practice (pp. 199–215). New York: Pergamon.

Felner RD, Terre L, & Rowlison RT (1988). A life transition framework for understanding marital dissolution and family reorganization. In Wolchik SA & Karoly P (Eds.), Children of divorce: Empirical perspectives on adjustment. New York: Gardner.

Fisher JD, Nadler A, & Witcher-Alagna SJ (1982). Recipient's reaction to aid. Psychological Bulletin, 91, 27–54.

Fogas BS, Wolchik SA, & Braver SL (1987, 8). Parenting behavior and psychopathology in children of divorce: Buffering effects. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association, New York.

Friedman DJ, & Butler LF (1979). Development and evaluation of a test battery to assess childhood depression. Final report to Health and Welfare, Canada, for project No. 606-1533-44.

Greenberg MT, Siegel JM, & Leitch CJ (1983). The nature and importance of attachment relationships to parents and peers during adolescence. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 12, 373–386. [PubMed: 24306358]

Guidubaldi J, & Cleminshaw H (1983, 8). Impact of family support system on children's academic and social functioning after parental divorce. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association, Anaheim, CA.

Guidubaldi J, Cleminshaw HK, Perry JD, Nastasi BK, & Lightel J (1986). The role of selected family environment factors in children's post-divorce adjustment. Family Relations, 35, 141–151.

Guidnbaldi J, Cleminshaw HK, Perry JD, & McLoughlin CS (1983). The impact of parental divorce on children: Report of the nationwide NASP study. School Psychology Review, 12, 300–323.

Hess RD, & Camara KA (1979). Post-divorce family relations as mediating factors in the consequences of divorce for children. Journal of Social Issues, 35, 79–96.

Hetherington EM (1979). Divorce: A child's perspective. American Psychologist, 34, 851–858.

Hetherington EM, & Camara KA (1984). Families in transition: The process of dissolution and reconstitution. In Parke R (Ed.), Review of child development research (Vol. 7, pp. 398–439). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hetherington EM, Cox M, & Cox R (1978). The aftermath of divorce. In Steven JH Jr. & Matthews M (Ed.), Mother-child, father-child relations (pp. 233–288). Hillsdaie, NJ: Erlbaum.

Hirsch BJ, & Reischl TM (1985). Social networks and developmental psychopathology: A comparison of adolescent children of depressed, arthritic or normal parents. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 94, 272–281. [PubMed: 4031224]

Judd CM, & McClelland GH (in press). Data analysis: A model comparison approach. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich.

Kovacs M (1981). Rating scales to assess depression in school-aged children. Acta Paedopsychiatrica, 46, 305–315. [PubMed: 7025571]

Kurdek LA (1981). An integrative perspective on children's divorce adjustment. American Psychologist, 36, 856–866.

Kurdek LA (in press). Social support of divorced single mothers and their children. Journal of Divorce.

Kurdek LA, & Blisk D (1983). Dimensions and correlates of mothers' divorce experiences. Journal of Divorce, 6, 1–24.

Kurdek LA, & Sinclair RJ (1988). Adjustment of young adolescents in two-parent nuclear, step father, and mother-custody families. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 56, 91–96. [PubMed: 3346456]

Monroe SJ (1982). Life events assessment: Current practices, emerging trends. ClinicalPsychology Review, 2, 435–453.

Ramirez R, Sandler IN, Balls P, Wolchik SA, & West S (1988). Children's attitudes about divorce: Their relationship to divorce-related events and children's adjustment in an inner-city sample of children of divorce. Unpublished manuscript, Arizona State University.

Reynolds CR, & Richmond BO (1978). What I think and feel: A revised measure of children's manifest anxiety. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 6, 271–280. [PubMed: 670592]

Sandler IN, & Barrera M Jr. (1984). Toward a multimethod approach to assessing the effects of social support. American Journal of Community Psychology, 12, 37–52. [PubMed: 6711491]

Sandler IN, & Guenther RR (1985). Assessment of life stress events. In Karoly P (Ed.), Measurement strategies in health psychology (pp. 555–600). New York: Wiley.

Sandler IN, Wolchik SA, & Braver SL (1985). Social support and children of divorce. In Sarason IG & Sarason BR (Eds.), Social support: Theory, research and applications. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

Sandler IN, Wolehik SA, & Braver SL (1988a). The stressors of children's post-divorce environments. In Wolchik SA & Karoly P (Eds.), Children of divorce: Empiricalperspectives on adjustment. New York: Gardner.

Sandler IN, Wolchik SA, Braver SL, & Fogas BS (1988b). Stability and quality of life events and psychological symptomatology in children of divorce. Unpublished manuscript, Arizona State University, Tempe.

Santrock JW, & Warshak R (1979). Father custody and social development in boys and girls. Journal of Social Issues, 35, 233–240.

Saylor CF, Finch AJ, Spirito A, & Bennett B (1984). The children's depression inventory: A systematic evaluation of psychometric properties. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 52, 955–967. [PubMed: 6520288]

Stolberg AL, & Anker TM (1984). Cognitive and behavioral changes in children resulting from parental divorce and consequent environmental changes. Journal of Divorce, 7, 23–41.

Stolberg AL, Camplair C, Currier K, & Wells MJ (1987). Individual familial and environmental predictors of children's post-divorce adjustment and maladjustment. Journal of Divorce, 11, 51–70. [PubMed: 12342447]

Thoits PA (1986). Social support as coping assistance. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 54, 416–423. [PubMed: 3745593]

Wallerstein JS, & Kelly JB (1980). Surviving the breakup: How children and parents cope with divorce. New York: Basic Books.

Wilcox BL, & Vernberg EM (1985). Conceptual and theoretical dilemmas facing social support. In Sarason IG & Sarason BR (Eds.), Soeialsupport: Theory, research and applications (pp. 3–20). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

Wolchik SA, Sandler IN, & Braver SL (1984, 8). The social support networks of children of divorce. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada.

Wolchik SA, Sandler IN, & Braver SL (1987). Social support: Its assessment and relation to children's adjustment. In Eisenberg N (Ed.), Contemporary topics in developmental psyehology (pp. 319–349). New York: Wiley.

Wyman RA, Cowen EL, Hightower AD, & Pedro-Carroll JL (1985). Perceived competence, self-esteem, and anxiety in latency-aged children of divorce. Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 14, 20–26.

Zimmerman M (1983). Methodological issues in the assessment of life events: A review of issues and research. Clinical Psychology Review, 3, 339–370.

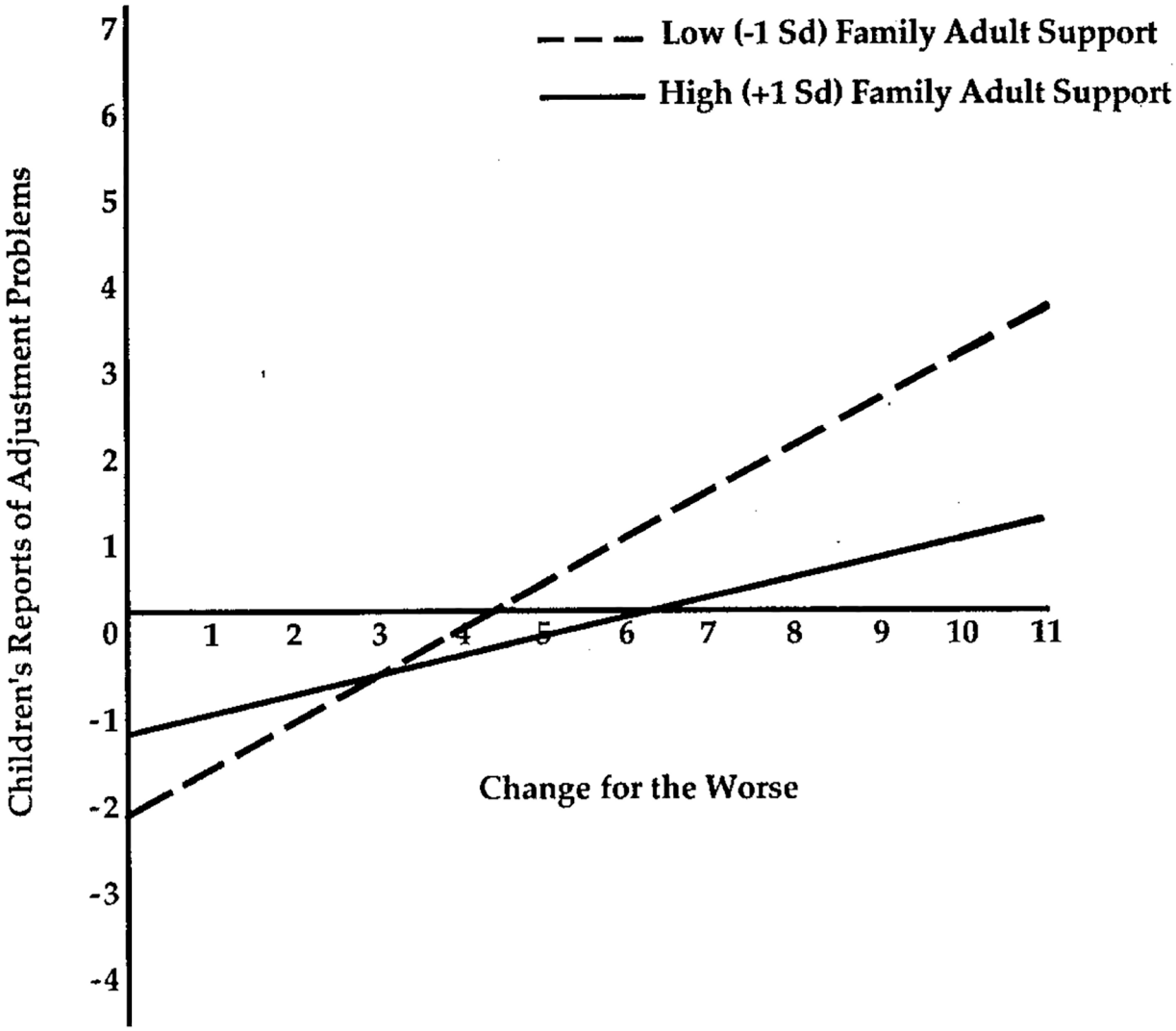

Fig. 1.

Regression of children's reports of adjustment problems on change for the worse for high and low levels of family adult support. (Children's report adjustment problems is the sum of three *z* scores.)

Table I.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for the Study Variables[a]

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Range
Parental report of adjustment problems	36.92	28.98	1–225
Children's report of adjustment problems	−0.09	2.47	−4.24–6.2
Family adult support	13.41	8.28	0–40
Family child support	3.54	6.49	0–56
Nonfamily adult support	4.27	5.47	0–32
Nonfamily child support	15.90	14.54	0–85
Change for the worse	4.16	2.69	0–12

[a]N = 104. Children's report of adjustment problems is the sum of three *z* scores. Thus, except for rounding, the mean is zero.

Table II.

Intercorrelations ($N = 104$)

	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Parental report of adjustment problems	.09	−.20[a]	.08	.13	.06	.09
2. Children's report of adjustment problems	–	−.12	.14	−.07	−.08	.40[c]
3. Family adult support		–	.13	.24[a]	.21[a]	−.13
4. Family child support			–	−.04	.48[c]	−.03
5. Nonfamily adult support				–	.25[b]	.10
6. Nonfamily child support					–	.07
7. Change for the worse						

[a] $p < .05$.

[b] $p < .01$.

[c] $p < .001$.

Table III.

Regression of Children's Adjustment Problems on Control Variables, Change for the Worse, Block of Support Terms, and Their Interaction[a]

Variable	Parental report of adjustment problems			Children's report of adjustment problems		
	Cumulative R^2	R^2 change	F change	Cumulative R^2	R^2 change	F change
Block of control variables	.09			.04		
Change for the worse	.10	.01	1.31	.19[b]	.15	17.80[c]
Block of support scores	.21[b]	.11	3.17[b]	.25[b]	.06	1.69
Block of change for the worse × support interaction terms	.23	.02	0.51	.35[c]	.10	3.56[c]

[a] $N = 104$. The block of support scores consists of family adult support, nonfamily adult support, family child support, and nonfamily child support. The block of interaction terms consists of the four Change for the Worse × Category of Supporter product terms.

[b] $p < .05$.

[c] $p < .001$.