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Research Paper

Pre-eminence of parental conflicts over parental divorce regarding the evolution of depressive and anxiety symptoms among children during adulthood

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. – The long-term consequences of divorce on adult children's mental health appear to be under-investigated. Specifically, the respective roles of parental separation and the level of perceived parental conflict are still controversial.

Objective. – This paper considers a model between depression and anxiety disorders (DAD) during the adulthood of children of divorced/married parents via the perceived level of parental conflict. We predicted that the level of perceived parental conflict that would account for the influence of divorce on the level of DAD during adulthood.

Method. – A sample of 121 adults ($M_{Age} = 26.14$, $SD = 1.74$, 91 women), consisting of 55 children of divorced parents, 66 children of parents who are still cohabiting, completed a questionnaire assessing DAD, and perceived level of parental conflict.

Results. – Although results do not provide evidence of differences between the two groups, the level of perceived conflict significantly predicted DAD during adulthood in both groups although with a small effect size.

Conclusion. – This could imply that it is not separation *per se* that predicts the long-term effects of divorce but rather the exposure to parental conflict. Moreover, consistently with previous findings, participants' perceived level of conflict in the family was not a significant predictor of divorce between the parents. Limitations of the study and its clinical and theoretical implications are discussed.

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In 2000, Ellis (2000) stated the common assertion that when parents divorce, children are the biggest losers. However, Emery (1982) wrote "the idea that marital turmoil is the cause of behavior problems in children is widely held both in the public and in the professional domain" (p. 310). Choosing between two evils is never an easy matter. This paper aims at disentangling the long-term role of divorce and perceived parental conflict on the level of anxiety and depression on children during their adulthood.

Depression can be depicted as a syndrome characterized by two major symptoms: sadness and anhedonia. Other associated symptoms range from weight loss, insomnia or hypersomnia, tiredness, loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, feelings of guilt, intrusive thoughts, trouble in decision-making, up to dark thoughts and suicidal attempts (American Psychiatric Association,

1994). According to Starcevic (2009), anxiety can be seen as a pathological stress that is not related to physical disease, substance abuse or psychotic disorder.

Depressive and Anxiety Disorders (DAD) have become a major public health problem in Western countries. In the USA, the lifetime prevalence of depressive and anxiety disorders are 28.8% and 20.8%, respectively. In Europe, DAD results in 6% of the burden of all diseases with respect to disability-adjusted life years (DALYs, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>). Therefore, an accurate understanding of the risk factors leading to DAD is of crucial importance for both medical and economic reasons.

Several Authors have emphasized several genetic, biological, societal and psychological components of DAD (see, for example, Beck & Alford, 2009; Kroenke, Spritzer, Williams, Monahan, & Lowe, 2007). Among the societal and psychological factors, several scholars have emphasized a link between the presence of a trauma or of multiple traumas during lifetime and DAD (Fossion et al., 2013; Veling, Hall, & Joosse, 2013).

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Among the possible causes of DAD, divorce stands as a major current societal concern (Aseltine Jr, 1996; Demir-Dagdas, Isik-Ercan, Intepe-Tingir, & Cava-Tadik, 2018). Indeed, if we look at the facts, since about the 1960s, the divorce rate has increased in all western countries, according to the theory of The Second Demographic Transition (Cruz & Ahmed, 2018). The proportion of marriages has decreased. The number of divorced and separate couples has risen.

This is essentially true for the US, a little less for European countries, although there is a discrepancy between countries, with the lowest divorce rate in Ireland and the highest in Belgium (Amato, 2014). The consequences of divorces for children have generated a large field of research that distinguishes short-term and long-term consequences.

With regard to short-term consequences of parental divorce for children, researchers (Lamela, Figueiredo, Bastos, & Feinberg, 2016; Weaver & Schofield, 2015) describes internalizing problems (characterized by an excessive control such as inhibition, withdrawal, DAD) and externalizing problems (characterized by a lack of control of emotions with behaviors problems such as acting out, noncompliance and conduct disorders), for a review, see Achenbach et al. (2016). Regarding the long-term negative effects of divorce on children, they include different dimensions such as decrease of well-being, emotional disorders or academic achievement problems (Sands, Thompson, & Gaysina, 2017) or other outcomes such as love achievement, sexual intimacy, commitment to marriage and parenthood on a period of 25 years (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004).

Moreover, it is relevant to notice that, since several years, there is an important debate on whether or not divorce *per se* can yield mental and/or physical problems for children (Amato, 2014). Following Amato (2014), available researches suggest that the link between divorce and psychological distress exhibited by children might be at least partly spurious, due to confounding factors such as selection effects, negative financial consequences of divorce, degradation of the living environment and parental conflict following the divorce. Note that the term *Parental conflict* refers to an open hostility between married, separated or divorced parents (Emery, 1982). Later, Authors distinguished between constructive and destructive conflict (McCoy, Cummings, & Davies, 2009; McCoy, George, Cummings, & Davies, 2013), the first one being conflicts that do not threaten emotional security (in the sense of the Emotional Security Theory of Davies and Cummings, 1994) whereas the latter does. In this paper, we will refer to parental conflict as the destructive conflict pictured by Emery (1982) and related to Emotional Security Theory by Cummings and Miller-Graff (2015). Two cross-sectional studies (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2003; Du Rocher Schudlich & Cummings, 2003) showed a relation between marital conflict and child anxiety on a trait versus a state level. They suggested that children's state anxiety could be explained by parental aggression towards each other during the conflict, whereas children's trait anxiety seemed to be a function of parents' lack of problem solving during the conflict. Besides, several studies show that depression and anxiety are likelier to occur following traumatic events than following mere negative life events (Hovens et al., 2010) and likelier to occur in case of multiple trauma during lifetime (Fossion et al., 2013). What remains unclear is whether parental conflict and/or divorce can be considered as trauma. Indeed, following the DSMV, trauma refers to exposure to actual or threatens death, serious injury, or sexual violence, which is not necessarily the case of parental conflict or divorce. Related to divorce, opinions diverge. For example, Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) show through a 25 years survey in the US (between the early 1970 and the late 1990) that divorce is lived as an acute stress from which the child recovers but always consider as a life-transforming experience (although they

do not measure anxiety and depression as outcome). On the other hand, Hovens et al. (2010) do not show any impact of divorce on anxiety during adulthood, but underline a strong effect of emotional neglect (linked to parental conflict and lack of parental attention) that they consider at the core of childhood trauma along with psychological, physical or sexual abuse. Indeed, emotional neglect is a main issue in the attachment theory that can yield severe psychological distress when jeopardized.

Related to parental conflict, Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001) emphasize that the pre-divorce experiences might have important consequences for the children's welfare, even more than the separation itself. According to these Authors, conflicts exhibited by parents are at the core of the impact of divorce on children. Furthermore, it is important to note that most of the time, children are not only confronted to conflict, they frequently become directly involved in interparental frictions and antagonism (Davies, Manning, & Cicchetti, 2013; Davies, Sturge-Apple, Boscoe, & Cummings, 2014). But the act of separation *per se* might not directly impact the well-being of the family members, or it may incur a smaller effect size than that which is currently described in the literature. Furthermore, children experience loyalty conflicts, they are constantly forced to take sides, this impacts their subjective well-being, more attention should be devoted to these issue by therapists and educators working with distressed couples (Amato & Affi, 2006).

The effects of parental divorce on children becoming adult, although not totally unexplored, remain understudied in the current literature (see the review paper of Morrison, Fife, & Hertlein, 2017). Gilman, Kawachi, Fitzmaurice, and Buka (2003) show that low socio-economic level and parental conflict can raise the likelihood of children developing DAD during adulthood. They also found a moderating effect of conflict on the relationship between divorce and DAD during adulthood. However, in this study, the level of conflict was high (e.g., the presence of physical aggression) and there was no distinction between conflicts that was related or not to divorce. The reasons why parental conflict could be an important mediator between divorce and the occurrence of DAD during the adulthood of children of divorced parents are numerous. Conflict is linked with several key variables, such as the quality of parent-child attachment (Kenny, 2006), loyalty conflict (that relies on the fact that conflict between parents tend to force the child to make a choice between one of the parents) that appears to be very painful for the child (Ahrns, 2006).

Other researchers have already emphasized the relationship between divorce, parental conflict and long-term consequences on the adult children (e.g. Ahrns, 2006; Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Aseltine Jr, 1996; Gilman et al., 2003; Kumar & Mattanah, 2018; Sandler, Miles, Cookston, & Braver, 2008; Strohschein, 2005). Strohschein (2005) has investigated pre-divorce familial characteristics and their influence on: (a) the occurrence of divorce and, (b) the consequences of these characteristics on the adult children's mental health. The Author shows that variables such as socio-economic level, marital satisfaction, parental mental health, or family dysfunction can impact adult children's mental health, even prior to divorce. Sandler et al. (2008) also reported an influence of parental conflict on the relationship between divorce and mental health of adult children. Nevertheless, they studied a sample of children with divorced parents without a control group (since their independent variables were related to the process of the divorce), which does not allow conclusions to be drawn specifically about divorce. Weldon (2016) has reviewed the negative effects of parental divorce on children's romantic relationships in adulthood.

Ahrns (2006) conducted a long-term study on the impact of parents' divorce on future stress and loyalty conflict related to the level of conflict between parents during the divorce. There again,

the cohort consisted of 173 children (20 years after the divorce), but without a control group, and without taking into account the pre-divorce level of conflict. In the same line of thinking, Amato et al. (1995) showed that children confronted with a high level of parental conflict, even when living with two parents, developed problems in their romantic relationships in adulthood. Other Authors (Kumar & Mattanah, 2018) showed a significant positive correlation between the perception of parental conflict and depression symptoms and feeling of loneliness and a negative correlation between perception of parental conflict and romantic competence in a sample of 188 emerging adult college students. Lastly, Amato and Sobolewski (2001) showed a negative correlation between the quality of children/parents' relationship during adulthood and DAD.

In order to contribute to increasing the comprehension of the effects of parental divorce on adult children, this paper aims at testing the hypothesis that parental conflict can be identified as a key factor explaining the long-term consequences of family dynamics on the occurrence of DAD among adult children. Moreover, we also postulate that, in the case of divorce, the level of parental conflict during the divorce period might also predict the consequences of divorce on children. Considering what precedes, four hypotheses emerge from our theoretical development:

- (H1) In accordance with Aseltine Jr (1996) and Demir-Dagdas et al. (2018), parental divorce (PD) will predict a higher level of DAD among adult children;
- (H2) In accordance with Ahrons (2006), PD will occur in families with a higher level of conflict between the parents in the nuclear family (CNF, i.e. parental conflict during the marriage);
- (H3) In accordance with Sandler et al. (2008), in the divorced parents group, there will be a positive correlation between the level of perceived parental conflict during the divorce (CDD) and the level of DAD among adult children;
- (H4) As an exploratory hypothesis, we postulate that a high level of conflict before divorcing will predict a high level of conflict during the divorce.

1. Materials and method

1.1. Participants

We recruited participants between 24 and 30 years old in order to reach young adults that have left the parental residence but who are comparable regarding the age range. Indeed, DAD are known to become more severe with age (Lebowitz et al., 1997). A sample of 121 ($M_{Age} = 26.14$, $SD = 1.74$, 91 women) participants was recruited through an URL posted on social networks, mainly on student's Facebook groups. The sample was composed of students in different fields such as architecture, engineering, psychology and sociology. Among this sample, 55 participants had divorced parents ("DP", $M_{Age} = 25.96$, $SD = 1.76$, 45 women), and 66 participants had parents who were still married or living together ("PT", $M_{Age} = 26.29$, $SD = 1.73$, 46 women). Table 1 shows the marital status of the participants.

Table 1
Participant marital status per condition.

	Divorced parents (DP), n (%)	Parents together (PT), n (%)
Single	14 (25.5)	15 (22.7)
Married	3 (5.4)	10 (15.2)
In a relationship	38 (69.1)	41 (62.1)

1.2. Measures

1.2.1. Conflict exposition in the nuclear family

Five 6-point Likert scale items were created to measure the conflict in the nuclear family. Three items captured the perception of the existence of parental conflict (i.e., "During my childhood and adolescence, tensions were uncommon between my parents"; "My parents often quarreled in front of me"; "My parents have always handled their conflicts cautiously and avoided involving me"); two items captured the repercussions of parental conflict on the child in line with Kenny (2006)'s idea that children feel disregarded when the conflict occurs ("In periods of conflict, I felt that my parents paid less attention to me") and with Ahrons (2006)'s argument that children may feel a conflict of loyalty ("During periods of conflict I was sometimes compelled to take the side of a parent"). An exploratory factor analysis revealed a one-factor structure explaining 61% of variance. The six-item indicator had very good reliability ($\alpha = .84$).

1.2.2. Exposure to conflict related to divorce

Six 6-point Likert scale items were created, following the same logic than the previous measure (i.e. "There were a lot of quarrels between my parents before the divorce"; "My parents kept a good relationship after the divorce"; "My parents always kept their conflict aside when taking care of me"; "During the divorce and/or after, I was emotionally torn between my parents"; "After the divorce I felt uncomfortable evoking mentioning a parent in front of the other"; "After the divorce, I felt that the bond between me and one of my parent was weaker"). An exploratory factor analysis revealed a one-factor structure explaining 58% of variance. The six-item indicator had very good reliability ($\alpha = .86$).

1.2.3. Hopkins Symptom Checklist

To assess the prevalence of DAD, we used the HSC (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974), which is a brief, 25-item version of the Symptom Check List (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1973; Derogatis, 1983). This self-report questionnaire rates the presence of depression and anxiety symptoms (but does not diagnose the presence of a disorder) using a 4-point scale that ranges from 1 ("not at all") to 4 ("very much"). This scale contains 15 depression items ($\alpha = .90$) and 10 anxiety items ($\alpha = .80$). The HSC is highly reliable ($\alpha = .92$) and is a valid screening tool even across cultures. The French version of the HSC has been validated by previous studies (Bean, Derluyn, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Broekaert, & Spinhoven, 2007; Pichot, Wildelöcher, & Pull, 1989).

1.2.4. Procedure

A Limesurvey online questionnaire approved by the ethic committee of the faculty of psychological sciences (Université Libre de Bruxelles) was posted on social networks (namely Facebook). The questionnaire started by an informed consent form in which anonymity was ensured. We specified that participants should feel free to withdraw their participation at any time. All participants were asked the same questions, except for some questions that were specific to participants with divorced parents. We first collected socio-demographic data such as age, gender, marital status, number of children, parents' marital status (which was our main IV). Participants with divorced parents were asked at what age their parents divorced and what was the custody arrangement. They then filled the 5-item measure of the level of exposure to conflict in the nuclear family, the 6-item measure of exposure to conflict related to divorce (for participants with divorced parents), and, finally, the 25-item HSC scale assessing DAD. Participants were thanked and provided with the researcher's e-mail address and a debriefing text explaining the goal of the study.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics.

	Divorced Parents (DP) n = 55	Parents Together (PT) n = 66	t(119) (p-value)
HSC_Total	42.95 (12.64)	43.62 (12.44)	.30 (.77)
HSC_Depression	24.80 (8.71)	25.31 (8.49)	.33 (.74)
HSC_Anxiety	18.15 (4.98)	18.30 (4.97)	.17 (.86)
CNF	15.98 (7.40)	14.05 (6.24)	1.56 (.12)
CDD (n = 42)	20.74 (9.00)	N/A	N/A

M (SD); CDD: Conflict during divorce and is only for DP, but 13 participants did not answer these items; CNF: Conflict in Nuclear Family; HSC_Total: all 25 items of the scale assessing DAD symptoms; HSC_Depression: 15 items of HSC assessing Depression specifically; HSC_Anxiety: 10 items of HSC assessing Anxiety specifically.

2. Results

2.1. Preliminary analysis

As a preliminary, and exploratory, analysis, we checked the correlation between the time since the divorce ($M = 16.89$ years, $SD = 6.40$) and the main outcomes. All effects were of small size and not significant (Anxiety, $r = .23$, $p = .09$; Depression, $r = .17$, $p = .22$; Total score of HSC, $r = .21$, $p = .13$). Once the children have become adults, we do not see an effect of this predictor on the DAD symptoms.

2.2. Test of hypothesis

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of our main variables in both DP and PT groups. A t -test comparing the total score of HSC between DP and PT groups was not significant (Table 2) failing to confirm H1. Nor were there any differences in symptoms of anxiety and depression between the two groups.

A t -test comparing the total score of CNF between DP and PT groups was not significant (Table 2) failing to confirm H2. However, CNF significantly predicted global DAD, $r(119) = .21$, $p = .02$, although with a small effect size (4.30% of the explained variance). More specifically, CNF did not significantly predict anxiety, $r(119) = .14$, $p = .12$, but did predict depression $r(119) = .22$, $p = .02$, explaining 4.80% of the variance.

The intragroup analysis among DP revealed a significant link between DAD and the level of CDD $r(42) = .44$, $p = .003$, explaining 19.60% of the variance, supporting H3. More specifically, CDD did not significantly predict anxiety, $r(42) = .23$, $p = .14$, but it did significantly predict depression, $r(42) = .51$, $p = .001$, explaining 26.11% of the variance. Note that 13 people did not answer the CDD items, due to a Limesurvey system interference. We dealt with this issue using pairwise deletion, leaving us with 42 participants regarding this variable.

Lastly, supporting H4, there was a significant link between CDD and CNF, $r(42) = .79$, $p < .001$, explaining 61.62% of the variance. This shows that although the presence of conflict in the family does not predict divorce, when there is a high level of conflict before divorce, it is likely that the level of conflict during the divorce will be high as well, with the converse also being true

3. Discussion

The first unexpected finding of our study was that divorce had no visible effect on the level of DAD among adult children. Although this non-significant result does not mean that there is no effect, it is inconsistent with previous results such as those of Aseltine Jr (1996). One explanation for this discrepancy may be that our participants were older than those of Aseltine Jr's study and thus

had more time to cope with the parental divorce. Another explanation could be that, for some children, parental separation could have positive effects (Amato, 2014). Indeed, some divorced parents enhance their level of education (with the aim of increasing their social level or autonomy) and/or the number of social interactions after divorce, and some gain in autonomy and in accomplishments following a divorce (Amato, 2014). Those positive changes for the parents promote the speed of recovery of their children, which appears to be positively related to people's access to financial, social and psychological resources (Amato, 2014).

A second unexpected finding was that participants' perception of the level of conflict in the family is not a significant predictor of divorce between the parents. Although a non-significant result is difficult to interpret (e.g. lack of power, psychometric issues...), we propose two theoretical rationales that could account for these results. The first is that the children memories of adults might not reflect the actual level or the actual nature of conflict experienced by the parents at the time of the divorce (for example, what is perceived as destructive conflict by the child could as well be perceived as constructive conflict by the parents). The second is that the level of conflict is not the main reason to divorce, or to stay together. Further studies should take other key aspects into account, such as the socio-economic level of the family or the lack of support by other family members (e.g., grandparents, relatives). Amato and Previti (2003) showed that the main cause of divorce is infidelity, followed by drug or drinking use. Hence, although conflict management has been identified as an important factor in the incidence of divorce (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Gottman, 2018), it might not be sufficient for divorcing and even couples sustaining a high level of conflict might stay together in many situations.

However, the level of family conflict seems to have long-term consequences on adults' DAD, and more specifically on depressive symptoms, independently of divorce. As the data show, people having grown in conflicted families have significantly more chances of having higher level of depressive symptoms, although the effect size is quite small. The small effect size is not that surprising, indeed, it is likely that depressive symptoms mainly depends on other factors such as personality traits, situational aspects of the adult's current life, etc.

Another interesting conclusion is that the level of conflict before divorce strongly predicts the level of conflict during divorce. Let us not forget that some of the questions assessing the level of conflict during divorce related to the extent to which the subject was emotionally torn between the parents. Thus, having a high level of conflict in the family prior to divorce seems to increase the likelihood of involving children in conflicts during the divorce and to bring them into loyalty conflicts that will predict depression in adulthood. Note that, this correlation could also be partially spurious if participants had difficulties to separate the memories related to conflict before and during the divorce. But, at least, it suggests that the way parents handle conflicts before the divorce is perceived as relatively similar than the way the handle conflicts during the divorce.

This study has some limitations that should be underlined. First, the measures were self-reported. Therefore, the levels of conflict assessed were perceived rather than actual; and the HSC scale measured perceived anxious and depressive symptoms rather than actual anxious and depressive symptoms (besides, as stated before, we assessed the symptoms but did not diagnose the disorder). However, subjective measures are often relevant regarding psychological well-being, and the HSC scale is conceived to be self-reported. Second, perceived conflict between parents and perceived conflict during divorce were not assessed through validated scales. Yet, we ensure that it was a one-factor solution and that the reliability was satisfying. Third, all variables were

measured rather than being manipulated (i.e., participants were obviously not randomly distributed between “parents divorced” and “parents together” condition). Therefore, the direction of causality does not rely on experimental evidence but rather on theoretical rationales. However, previous studies (e.g. Sandler et al., 2008) suggest that it is conflict that yields DAD and not DAD that changes the perception of conflict. Fourth, we measured the perception of conflict focusing on items that capture the way children could feel torn between parents, feel insecure and involved in the conflict. However, the study lacks of measure assessing how often the participant witnessed conflict resolution, in line with Cummings and Davies (2010) findings that resolved conflict can have positive outcomes for the children. Although we believe that we measured the negative side of the conflict, ensuring that there was a low level of conflict resolution would have strengthened the results. We suggest adding such a measure in further studies.

Nonetheless, the strength of this study compared to previous studies is threesome:

- we compared a group of participants with divorced parents to participants with still married parents;
- we addressed DAD (a disorder with a high impact on public health);
- we took the perception of the conflict during marriage and during the divorce into account.

Consequently, some conclusions can be drawn both at the theoretical and applied levels: First of all, the take-home message of this paper is that, based on a sample of 121 Belgian participants aged between 26 and 30 years, conflict does not predict divorce; and divorce *per se* does not seem to have a significant long-term influence on DAD among adult children. However, the level of exposure to parental conflict during childhood does predict the later appearance of depressive symptoms during adulthood, albeit to a limited extent, given the small effect size observed. It is also notable that a majority of children from divorced families do not present behavior problems, depression, and problems in academic achievement or in interpersonal relationships (Emery, 1999). Additionally, the effects of divorce on children can be time-limited (Amato, 2014; Masten, 2015) although conflict responses may be more durable (Fozard & Gubi, 2017). Therefore, therapists have to differentiate the short-term from the long-term effects of parental separation (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Clinically, our data suggest that divorce in itself should not be dramatized by therapists nor over-investigated during therapy sessions, as it might sometimes be the case (Warshak, 2002). Family dynamics, conflict management, children's conflict of loyalty regarding the parents, and related dimensions should be investigated, regardless of whether the parents are divorced or not, as these variables predict the incidence of DAD in adulthood. The family structure (Parents separated or staying together) seems less important than the quality of relationships between the two parents, before and after the separation. In this line of thinking, Amato et al. (1995) highlight that better outcomes occur when parents with a high level of conflicts divorce rather than stay together. Besides, although this situation has not been captured in our setting, in some cases, conflicts may have advantages (Gottman & Gottman, 2018). Indeed, major negative consequences for couple relationships can occur when the conflict is denied, compare to facing conflict and disagreements expression. Couples that exteriorize their feelings experience a subjective cathartic relief (Gottman & Gottman, 2018).

Moreover, the parental separation is often followed by the constitution of stepfamilies. Those stepfamilies allow the children to create affective relationships with a more extensive network of

parental figures (Jensen, Lippold, Mills-Koonce, & Fosco, 2017). Therefore, we invite therapists to also pay attention to the quality of relationships between the young adults and their stepparents. Bolstering these links might be of great help for children of divorced parents.

Lastly, Authors (Haynes, 1978; Roberts, 2016) suggested a new role for family therapists as divorce mediators. Usually, family therapists assist couples with the aim to resolve their problems and to stay together. However, helping parents to stay together in high conflictual relationships appears more deleterious for the children than to help parents to separate as harmoniously as possible. Therefore, the role of family therapist must change by attempting to make the separation as painless as possible and to reduce the level of conflicts (Haynes, 1978; Roberts, 2016). Considering this, divorce mediation appears to be a rational alternative to the adversary system that is generally proposed by the attorneys who are generally untrained to resolve the emotional aspects of divorce (Haynes, 1978; Roberts, 2016).

Disclosure of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

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