

The Legacy of Parental Divorce: Social, economic and demographic experiences in adulthood

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Editorial Note

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Abstract

This study addresses three questions. Firstly, to what extent does divorce during childhood have long-term consequences for the educational attainment, economic situation, partnership formation and dissolution, and parenthood behaviour in adulthood? We show that in most of these domains children who experience parental divorce in childhood have more negative experiences than children reared by both their parents. However, in answering our second question, as to whether child and family characteristics preceding divorce attenuates the relationship between the divorce itself and adult outcomes, we show that for the non-demographic ones there is evidence of powerful selection effects operating, particularly to do with financial hardship. In other words, children who grow up with both biological parents may end up better off educationally and economically largely because they were advantaged to begin with, not necessarily because their parents stayed together. The third question was - if parents remain together until their children are grown up before separating does this lessen the legacy of divorce on their adult children's lives? The answer is in the affirmative for most of the adult outcomes, but the instability of partnerships and marriages was as high amongst those whose parents separated after they had grown up as those who experienced parental divorce during childhood.

Introduction

Amongst British children born since the 1950s divorce¹ has replaced death as the main cause of family disruption and the rate of divorce has increased such that 1 in 4 children born during the 1970s experienced the break up of their parents' marriage by the time they were aged 16 years (Kiernan and Hobcraft, 1997). The main objective of this study is to ascertain the extent to which the life experiences in adulthood of children who experienced parental marital disruption differ from those whose parents remained together.

Parental separation has been shown to impact on the lives of children both in the short and long-term (Amato and Keith, 1991a and b). Following their parents' separation, children frequently go through a crisis period, when behaviour problems at home and at school are more often reported, worries become more prevalent and anxiety levels increase. After divorce, families may have to move house through necessity rather than choice, which in turn leads to changes in schools, neighbourhood and social networks. Poverty or at least reduced economic circumstances are likely to be a prominent feature of these children's lives.

Later in life, a number of studies from a range of countries have shown, that as a group, children who experience the break-up of their parent's marriage relative to those who do not, have lower educational attainment, lower incomes, are more likely to be unemployed and to be in less prestigious occupations in adult life than their contemporaries brought up by both parents (Dronkers, 1995; Jonsson and Gahler, 1997; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Elliot and Richards, 1991; Maclean and Wadsworth, 1988; Greenberg and Wolf, 1982). Young women who have experienced parental divorce are more likely than their peers to commence sexual relations earlier, to cohabit or marry at young ages, to bear children in their teens and to conceive and bear children outside wedlock (Kiernan and Hobcraft, 1997; Kiernan, 1992; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994), to have less traditional marital values (Buchanan and Brinke, 1997), and men and women from disrupted families are in turn more likely to experience the break-up of their own marriage (Mueller and Pope, 1977; Kiernan, 1986; Glen and Kramer, 1987). A small minority of young adults also develop serious mental health problems associated with parental divorce (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin and Kiernan, 1995) and middle aged women who experienced parental divorce tend to report higher rates of psychiatric

1 Divorce is used throughout as an inclusive term to cover all parental separations.

symptoms with women who experienced parental divorce and then experienced a divorce themselves having noticeably high depression scores (Rogers, 1994).

After divorce and particularly after the crisis period has passed, which seems to last typically about two years, many children and families successfully adapt and adjust to their changed circumstances (Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1990). One would expect that the social, economic and emotional situation prior to and after the separation of parents may well affect a child's adjustment, the way they handle the divorce process, and its legacy. For example, British and American studies using longitudinal survey data have shown that long before parents separate, there are observable differences in the behaviour of their children as compared with children in marriages that do not break-up (Cherlin *et al.* 1991; Elliott and Richards, 1991). These studies suggest that divorce should be seen as a long-term process commencing prior to separation, that may include; marital conflict, family dysfunction, poor parenting, which regardless of whether or not parents separate are significant factors in children's behaviour problems (Rutter, 1981).

Why should the effects of divorce persist into adulthood? A number of broad theoretical and overlapping explanations have been posited including: loss of economic resources, loss of parental resources and family stress (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Amato and Booth, 1991).

With divorce there is frequently a loss of economic resources and for some severe economic deprivation (Jarvis and Jenkins, 1997). Even children from relatively advantaged backgrounds experience a loss of economic resources when their parents live apart. In Britain in the 1990s around 80 per cent of lone mothers rely on state benefits to support themselves and their children (Ford and Millar, 1997). Such limited finances may affect a child's school attainment in that many lone mothers may not be able to afford the toys, books, sports equipment, home computers and other goods that can aid school success (see Middleton and Ashworth, 1997 for detailed study on spending on children). Limited income may also mean that lone-mother families are more likely to be living in areas with poorer quality schools. Moreover, children living with lone mothers may leave school early to seek employment to assist with the family finances or even work long hours whilst still at school to compensate for lack of family finances to fund their own needs and social activities. Low educational attainment and early entry into the labour market in turn increases the likelihood of low occupational attainment, low incomes, unemployment and state dependency.

Divorce is also associated with a decline in the quantity and quality of contact between children and their non-residential parent, in the main their father, and the mother may also be constrained in the time and energy they can devote to their children, particularly if they have to take on paid employment or increase their hours of work. Reductions in parental resources, such as the amount of attention, supervision and support they can give to their children may increase the likelihood of academic failure and behaviour problems. The loss of parental role models may also reduce the learning of social skills required for the successful management of occupational and marital roles in later life.

Alongside these economic and sociological explanations are those from the psychological literature based on the concept of family stress which views divorce as a major strain for children. Many studies have shown that parental conflict prior to and during separation and post-separation (Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch, 1996) can have a negative impact on children's psychological well-being. Accompaniments to divorce such as moving house, changing schools, and loss of contact with paternal grandparents and other kin are also stressful for children. Nevertheless, children vary in their responses to stress and adversity: some children may be harmed and carry the legacy into adulthood, others may be more resilient, whilst others may show initial difficulties and subsequently adjust and recover (Rutter, 1989; Hetherington and Clingempeel, 1992; Garmezy, 1991).

One of the challenges in assessing the legacy of divorce is being able to sort out the conditions that lead couples to separate and the potential effects on children from the consequences of the dissolution itself. Divorce is more likely to occur among couples with personal, social and economic problems (White, 1990). Thus the non-random nature of the divorcing population implies that the effects of factors that existed prior to the divorce, for example poverty, could be confused with its consequences. The selective nature of the population of children who experience parental divorce may lead to an over-stated impression of the effects of divorce by conflating pre-existing differences amongst children from disrupted families as compared with those from non-disrupted ones, with the fallout from marital dissolution.

To begin to address this challenge we pursue three questions in this study. Firstly, to what extent does divorce during childhood have long-term consequences for the educational attainment, economic situation, partnership formation and dissolution, and parenthood behaviour in adulthood? Secondly, when child and family characteristics prior to divorce are taken into account is the relationship between the divorce itself and

adult outcomes attenuated? Thirdly, if parents remain together until their children are grown up before separating does this lessen the legacy of divorce on their adult children's lives?

Data and Methods

The National Child Development Study

Much of the British research to date on the outcomes of divorce has used data from the National Child Development Study to examine the sequelae of divorce. The longitudinal design of the NCDS that commenced in childhood and continued into adulthood has allowed the tracking of children from families disrupted by marital breakdown and permits the comparison of their experiences with children from non-disrupted families. The survey was originally designed to examine the social and obstetric factors associated with still birth and death in early infancy. A total of 17,414 mothers, representing 98 per cent of all births in the first week in March 1958, were interviewed for the original study. The children were subsequently followed up through their school years at ages 7 (n=15,468), 11(n=15,503) and 16(n=14,761) and were traced and interviewed on two occasions during adulthood at ages 23 (n=12,537) and 33 years (n=11,407). The available information covers a wide range of topics including medical, demographic, social and psychological, educational and economic aspects of their life histories.

Over the years there have been losses from the sample. There were losses arising from death or emigration and others from unwillingness to cooperate, or difficulties in tracing to meet an interview deadline. The long gaps between contacts are likely to have been a significant factor in sample attrition. Despite such difficulties between 70 and 90 per cent of the target samples have provided information at each contact, although the same individuals were not necessarily contacted on each occasion which can lead to substantial reductions in sample sizes when using data from several of the interview waves. Further information on the surveys can be found in Fogelman (1983); Shepherd (1985) and Ferri (1993).

In this study we restrict our analyses to the cohort members who provided information at age 33. It was not until this interview that direct questions were asked about whether their parents had ever permanently separated or divorced and, if so, how old they had been when the divorce occurred. Prior to the age 33 interview, parental separation had to be inferred from the relationship of the child to the mother and father figure in the household at the time of the interviews at ages 7, 11 and 16 years. Additionally, we have information on parental divorce that occurred when

children were older, from their teens into their early thirties, which allows us to examine whether there is any legacy arising from post-childhood divorce. Unfortunately no information on remarriage was collected at the age 33 interview, consequently we are unable to examine the different trajectories that children can follow on divorce such as length of time spent in lone parent families and time spent in step-families which may have differential impacts on the lives of children.

Measures

From the information collected on this cohort sample as they grew up we were able to examine a range of background characteristics some of which are not readily available in cross-sectional surveys and others that are difficult to collect retrospectively. The background information included in the analyses was taken from the age 7 and 16 year old interviews. The characteristics include: social group of the family at the time of the 7 year old interview; financial circumstances of the family at the time of the 7 and 16 year old interviews and measures of the child's educational performance and behaviour at the time of the 7 and 16 year old interviews.

At age 7, information from parents and teachers allowed us to construct, using confirmatory factor analysis, latent-variable measures (for more details see Cherlin, Kiernan and Chase-Lansdale, 1995). The first was class background, a combination of father's occupation (manual versus non-manual), whether the father stayed on at school beyond the minimum school-leaving age, and whether the mother stayed in school past the minimum age. The second was school achievement, a combination of a score on a standardised reading achievement test, a score on a standardised mathematics test, and a score on a 5-item scale of teacher's assessments of "oral ability", "awareness of the world around", "reading", "creativity", and "number work". In addition, at the age 7 interview, parents were asked to rate the children's behaviour problems using most of the items from the Rutter Home Behaviour Scale (Rutter, Tizard and Whitmore, 1970). The scale was designed to identify two broad groupings of behaviour problems in children: externalising disorders, in which the child exhibits under-controlled behaviour such as aggression or disobedience, and internalising disorders, which the child exhibits over-controlled behaviour such as anxiety or depression. A higher score indicated more behaviour problems.

At age 16, parents were again asked to rate behaviour problems using similar but not identical items; and school attainment information was again collected on mathematics, literacy and performance on a range of academic subjects. A 22-item scale of behaviour problems and a school attainment score was constructed. In addition, there was sufficient

economic information to determine at the age 7 and 16 interviews whether the cohort member's family had experienced financial hardship at either of these ages. The age 7 information was based on reports from health visitors on whether the family was experiencing financial difficulties and whether the child was in receipt of free school meals. The age 16 information was based on parents responses to the question as to whether the family had been " seriously troubled by financial hardship in the past 12 months".

Outcome Variables and Statistical Analysis

In the first part of the analysis which focuses on the legacy of childhood divorce for the groups of young people who did and did not experience parental separation by the time they were age 16 we examine whether they differ in their adult experiences in three main domains: educational outcomes as assessed by qualifications attained by age 23 and 33; economic situation, including income, experiences of unemployment and housing tenure; and partnership and parenthood experiences, including the timing and context of first birth and partnership breakdown. For each outcome we present a brief bi-variate description of the association between family type and the adult outcome and then provide estimates from a series of multi-variate models in which a range of background controls are introduced. In our multi-variate analysis we also address our second question, namely whether factors prior to divorce attenuate the relationship between parental divorce and adult outcomes. To this end the sample who experienced divorce during childhood were divided into two groups: those whose parents divorced when they were under age 7 years and those who experienced parental divorce when they were between 9 and 16 years of age. We chose this strategy for a number of reasons. Firstly, age 9 unambiguously post-dates the age 7 interview which allows us to assess whether attributes that chronologically precede parental separation are implicated in later life experiences. Only children who were living with both their parents at age nine were included in the analysis so that any changes in educational performance or behaviour that might be associated with parental separation should be excluded. However, we recognise that parental conflict prior to divorce may also have, for example, a dampening effect on cognitive scores or increase behavioural problems, but we have no measure that would allow us to control for this situation. Children who experienced parental divorce prior to age 7 are identified as a separate group to assess whether the attributes recorded at age 7 are implicated in subsequent behaviour. However, for this group we do not know whether differences are due to the aftermath of the separation or pre-disruption factors. In the second part of the analysis we examine the same adult

outcomes contrasting those who experienced divorce during childhood with those who experienced parental divorce when they were grown up. We use logistic regression or hazard models depending on the type of outcome being considered. All analyses were performed using STATA statistical software (StataCorp, 1995)

Educational Attainment

Earlier work using data from the age 23 interview (Elliott and Richards, 1991; Kiernan, 1992) showed that children in the NCDS sample that had experienced parental divorce during childhood were more likely to have left school at the minimum age; to have no qualifications and to be under-represented amongst those with degree level qualifications. After leaving full-time education people often enhance their qualification portfolio by taking additional courses leading to the award of further vocational or academic qualifications. The information on qualifications acquired at ages 23 and 33 was divided into five main groups of equivalent vocational and academic qualifications using Department of Education and Science conventions. As we see in Table 1, between ages 23 and 33 years, 12 per cent of the cohort improved on their position in the qualification hierarchy with children who had experienced parental divorce being as likely as those from non-divorced families to have done so. However, it was the young people who already had qualifications that were the most likely to improve their position. Children who experienced divorce during childhood were less likely than their peers to have any qualifications at age 23 (22 per cent compared with 13 per cent), and they continued to be over-represented amongst the unqualified at age 33. This suggests that remedial action with respect to educational underachievement amongst vulnerable groups may have greater returns if executed during the school years than in later years or that greater attention needs to be given to recruiting unqualified adults for further training and education.

Table 1 : Qualification changes between ages 23 and 33 according to family background

	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce 0-16 (%)	Total (%)
No change	76	68	75
Improved	12	12	12
No qualifications	12	21	13
Number in sample = 100%	8499	1060	9559
chi square 69.2 p=0.000			

As we see in Table 2, by the time they were aged 33 years children who experienced parental divorce were almost twice as likely to have no qualifications as those without such an experience and that 28 per cent of the non-divorce group had higher level qualifications (higher advanced qualifications plus degrees) as compared with 18 per cent of those who experienced parental divorce. There were some differences between the sexes with proportionately more of the women than the men who had experienced a parental divorce having no qualifications; 25 per cent as compared with 17 per cent.

Table 2: Level of highest qualification attained by age 33 according to family background

	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce 0-16 (%)	Total (%)
None	11	20	12
CSE 2-5	12	16	12
O-level	35	37	35
A-level	15	10	14
Higher -advanced	15	11	14
Degree	15	11	14
Total (n=100%)	9000	1138	10138
Chi square 126.8 p=0.000			

For the multi-variate analysis we focus on two groups from opposite ends of the qualification spectrum; those with no qualifications and the highly qualified with advanced and degree level qualifications and we present the results separately for men and women (Tables 3 and 4 respectively). Logistic regression models were fitted with the outcomes being unqualified or highly qualified, together with a set of controls. The analysis was carried out in a series of steps to clarify whether particular factors were more or less important in lowering the chances of having no qualifications or enhancing the chances of having high level qualifications. Thus, we entered the individual factors, financial hardship, cognitive scores, behavioural scores and social class at age 7 separately and then in combinations. The salient results from the analysis are presented for three separate groups: those who experienced parental divorce between the ages of 9 and 16; those who experienced parental divorce from birth to age 6; and a third group which includes all children who experienced parental divorce between birth and age 16. In all instances the comparison or reference group is those who had not experienced a parental divorce at or before age 16. We present the findings in terms of odds ratios derived from the logistic models. An odds ratio of greater than 1 indicates that the odds

of, for example, having no qualifications is greater in the divorced group than in the reference group whereas an odds ratio of less than 1 indicates the opposite. For example, the odds of having higher level qualifications is less in the divorced group than in the reference group.

As way of background it is worth noting that relative to off-spring from intact families women from divorced families have a greater tendency to have no qualifications and less markedly to have higher level qualifications than the analogous group of men. For example, a man who experienced parental divorce before age 17 compared with one who had not was, simplifying, 62 per cent more likely to have no qualifications and 55 per cent less likely to have high level qualifications whereas the analogous woman was 2.16 times more likely to be unqualified and 59 per cent less likely to have high level qualifications.

It is clear from Table 4 that financial hardship at age 7 and the level of behavioural problems exhibited by the child at this age were important factors behind the higher probabilities of daughters from divorced families having no qualifications and their lower chances of their having high level qualifications. The introduction of controls for scores on educational tests or social class at age 7 played a less prominent role in explaining differences in educational outcomes. A similar pattern (Table 3) can be seen for men with respect to their odds of having no qualifications. However, the lower odds of men from divorced families having higher level qualifications persists.

Focusing on the group who experienced divorce after age 9 we see that financial hardship in the family at age 7 substantially attenuates the difference between children from divorced families and those from intact families with respect to having no qualifications in adulthood. For example, the baseline model odds ratio of 2.04 is reduced to 1.3 in the case of the women and in the case of the men from 1.44 to 0.91. Controlling for the other individual factors namely; the child's cognitive test scores at age 7 and level of behavioural problems led to some reduction in the odds of having no qualifications, but in the case of women controlling for these factors did not significantly attenuate the observed difference between women from intact and disrupted families.

Similarly, the chances of women who experienced a parental divorce at age 9 or later having high level qualifications were not statistically different from those who did not experience a parental divorce if their family did not report financial hardship prior to the divorce or if the girl did not exhibit behavioural problems at age 7. Controlling for both these factors increased the chances of a woman having high level qualifications from being only two-thirds as likely as a woman from an intact family (0.68)

to being over four-fifths as likely (0.86). Whereas, amongst the men (Table 3) the introduction of background information relating to age 7 or age 16 hardly changes the odds of a boy who experienced parental divorce having high level qualifications in adulthood. Why family disruption affects boys differentially in the cognitive domain, both in childhood (see Cherlin, 1991 et al, Elliott and Richards, 1991) and in adulthood remains an open question and a subject for further research. There is some evidence from a six-year follow-up of American children from disrupted families (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1985) that boys in lone-parent families continued to exhibit relatively high levels of conduct problems which in turn may affect their educational attainment.

Table 3: Odds ratios of effects of parental separation on qualifications in adulthood amongst men

	Parental divorce at ages:					
	9-16 years	0-6 years	0-16 years	9-16 years	0-6 years	0-16 years
	No qualifications	No qualifications	No qualifications	High level qualifications	High level qualifications	High level qualifications
Baseline	1.44*	2.11***	1.62***	0.51***	0.54**	0.55***
Financial hardship at age 7	0.91	1.80*	1.19	0.54***	0.65+	0.57***
Behavioural scores at age 7	1.20	1.38	1.20	0.55***	0.80	0.67***
Cognitive scores at age 7	1.34	1.71**	1.40**	0.52***	0.67*	0.60***
Social group at age 7	1.33	2.09***	1.53**	0.52***	0.57**	0.56***
Financial hardship and behavioural scores	0.82	1.33	0.97	0.55***	0.88	0.65**
All four age 7 factors	0.88	1.63	1.10	0.51**	0.83	0.61**
All age 7 and age 16 factors	0.63+	1.19	0.80	0.55**	1.00	0.69*

Notes: + = significant at the .10 level; * = significant at the .05 level; ** = significant at the .01 level; *** significant at the .001 level.

Table 4: Odds ratios for effects of parental separation on qualifications in adulthood amongst women

	Parental divorce at ages:					
	9-16 years	0-6 years	0-16 years	9-16 years	0-6 years	0-16 years
	No qualifications	No qualifications	No qualifications	High level qualifications	High level qualifications	High level qualifications
Baseline	2.04***	2.37***	2.16***	.68**	.52***	.59***
Financial hardship at age 7	1.30	1.53+	1.44**	.77	.70	.72*
Behavioural scores at age 7	1.83***	1.52	1.65***	.80	.81	.78*
Cognitive scores at age 7	1.89***	2.11***	1.88***	.75+	.59**	.68**
Social group at age 7	2.05***	2.41***	2.14***	.69*	.55**	.61***
Financial hardship and behavioural scores	1.23	1.06	1.18	.86	.98	.87
All four age 7 factors	1.27	1.16	1.24	.78	.83	.79
All age 7 and age 16 factors	1.12	1.04	1.11	.89	.90	.89

Notes: + = significant at the .10 level; * = significant at the .05 level; ** = significant at the .01 level; *** significant at the .001 level.

Turning to consider the children who experienced parental divorce prior to age 7 (Tables 3 and 4) we see amongst the women that the difference in their chances of having no qualifications or high level ones as compared with those who had not experienced a parental divorce by age 7 is much less when we control for financial well-being and behaviour scores at age 7. Amongst the men the differences between those from intact and disrupted families is also much less when we take into account level of behavioural problems at age 7. Where parental divorce occurred prior to age 7 we cannot disentangle whether differences in educational outcomes are due to parental separation or to selection or a combination of selection and amplification of financial problems and behavioural problems associated with the divorce. But the findings with respect to the post age-9 group suggest that selection may be an important element, but not an exclusive one, in the interplay between the divorce process and the

educational attainment of children. Undoubtedly, poverty and behavioural problems are important factors in reducing educational success and parental divorce can amplify both.

Economic Circumstances in Adulthood

There is evidence that the economic circumstances in adulthood of children from disrupted families differ from those of children reared by both parents. For example, Maclean and Wadsworth (1988) in their analysis of the National Survey of Health and Development, a longitudinal study of a British cohort born in 1946, found that adult men who had experienced parental divorce were more likely to be unemployed and to be in the lowest income group in their mid thirties as compared with their contemporaries from intact families. There have been similar findings from studies in the United States. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), in their analysis of a range of data sources found that children of divorce were more likely than those from two-parent families to be “idle”, the term they use for being neither in work nor in education. Greenberg and Wolf (1982) in their analysis of the US Panel Study of Income Dynamics found that the earnings of young men in their early twenties were significantly less amongst those who had experienced parental divorce than amongst those without such an experience. In our analysis we examine employment status, experiences of unemployment, labour market earnings, family income, and housing tenure for children who did and did not experience parental divorce during childhood. The basic bivariate data for the socio-economic measures are shown in Table 5.

Income and employment - Men

For income we present two measures one based on labour market earnings and the other a measure of net family income. Examination of the data shows that men who had experienced divorce during childhood had broadly similar incomes to their male contemporaries who had not experienced parental divorce. For example, the median incomes from earnings for the two groups of men were £230 (IQR 170-280) and £231 (IQR 171-300) respectively. Similarly, the median net family incomes of the two groups of men were not significantly different from one another. There was some differences in the family incomes of men who experienced parental divorce and those that did not in the extent to which they were clustered in the lowest quartile of the family income distribution: 27 per cent of the former and 22 per cent of the latter were to be found in the lowest quartile. However, the association between being in the lowest quartile of family

income and having experienced divorce in childhood was a relatively weak one. For example, the odds ratio amongst men who experienced parental divorce between birth and age 16 was 1.30, and amongst those who experienced parental divorce between 9 and 16 years and before age 7 the odds ratios were 1.24 and 1.19 respectively. Thus we would conclude that for this sample of men that the relationship between parental divorce in childhood and adult income at age 33 years is a fairly weak one.

Table 5: Economic circumstances in adulthood according to family background

Characteristic	Men		Women	
	No parental divorce	Parental divorce 0-16	No parental divorce	Parental divorce 0-16
<i>Income</i>				
Labour market earnings				
Median £	231	230	104	86
Inter-quartile range	(171-300)	(170-280)	(56-173)	(48-155)
% in lowest quartile	23	25	26	29
Net family income				
Median £	294	290	298	271
Inter-quartile range	(215-400)	(196-391)	(210-401)	(183-369)
% in lowest quartile	22	27	25	32
% on income support at age 33	5	6	8	11
<i>Economic activity</i>				
% unemployed at age 33	7	14	33	34
Unemployed since leaving school				
- never	64	54	71	71
- once	22	23	19	16
- more than once	14	23	10	13
<i>Housing</i>				
% in social housing	13	19	16	27
% ever homeless between age 23 and age 33				

With respect to the employment indices we see from Table 5 that men who experienced divorce during childhood were more likely to be unemployed at age 33 (14 per cent as compared with 7 per cent), and to have experienced more than one episode of unemployment since leaving school (23 per cent as compared with 14 per cent). A series of multi-variate

analyses were carried out and a summary of the results are shown in Table 6. Again we present data for all men who experienced their parents' divorce before age 17 and for the two groups who experienced parental divorce prior to age 7, and between the ages of 9 and 16 years.

Table 6: Odds ratios of effects of parental separation on men's employment patterns in adulthood

	Parental divorce at ages:					
	9-16 years Unem- ployed at age 33	0-6 years Unem- ployed at age 33	0-16 years Unem- ployed at age 33	9-16 years Unem- ployed more than once in adulthood	0-6 years Unem- ployed more than once in adulthood	0-16 years Unem- ployed more than once in adulthood
Baseline	1.70**	2.22***	1.94***	1.58**	2.04***	1.83***
Financial hardship at age 7	1.41	2.09**	1.74**	1.06	1.73*	1.40*
Behavioural scores at age 7	1.55*	1.76**	1.66***	1.51**	1.81**	1.70***
Cognitive scores at age 7	1.64**	1.97**	1.81***	1.56**	1.96***	1.79***
Social group at age 7	1.63**	2.17***	1.87***	1.55**	2.01***	1.80***
Financial hardship and behavioural scores	1.38	1.79*	1.61**	1.05	1.57+	1.33+
All four age 7 factors	1.43	1.91*	1.68**	1.07	1.65+	1.38+
All age 7 and age 16 factors	1.21	1.60+	1.43*	0.98	1.58+	1.30+

Notes: + = significant at the .10 level; * = significant at the .05 level; ** = significant at the .01 level; *** significant at the .001 level.

If we consider the data for all men regardless of the timing of parental divorce we note that men who experienced parental divorce compared with those who did not had a significantly higher odds of being unemployed in their early thirties (1.94) or to have had more than one episode of unemployment since leaving school (1.83). Controls for the package of age 7 factors (financial hardship, social group, cognitive and behavioural scores) attenuates these differences to 1.68 and 1.38 respectively, and the introduction of the package of age 16 factors (financial

hardship, cognitive and behavioural scores) reduces it a little more, to 1.43 and 1.30 but these differences remain statistically significant. However, the breakdown according to timing of divorce suggests that these observed differences emanate in the main from the group of men who experienced parental divorce prior to age 7 years; who had the highest baseline odds of being unemployed at age 33 or having experienced more than one period of unemployment in adulthood.

Amongst the group who experienced parental divorce after age 9 we see that controlling for financial hardship at age 7 attenuates the relationship between parental divorce and being unemployed at age 33 (odds ratio reduced from 1.70 to 1.41) or having experienced more than one period of unemployment since leaving school (odds ratio reduced from 1.58-1.07). This suggests, as with our earlier findings on qualifications, that family circumstances prior to divorce may well be implicated in children having adverse employment experiences in adulthood.

Income and employment - Women

The income and employment situation of women is complicated by the advent of motherhood. Whether women are in employment and their level of earnings will be predicated on whether they are mothers or not, the timing of motherhood, and the time that has elapsed since the birth of their last child. There are additional complexities in looking at the relationship between income and employment status at this juncture in the life-histories of women, in that women who have older children, other things being equal, will be mothers who started having children at a younger age and therefore will be selected for lower educational attainment and less earning power.

Bearing these issues in mind, we note from Table 5 that there were some significant differences between the two groups of women on the economic indicators. Women who had experienced parental divorce during childhood had lower labour market earnings with median earnings of £86 as compared with £104 and were particularly under-represented amongst women in the uppermost quartile of the income distribution (18 per cent as compared with 24 per cent). Secondly, they were more likely to be in the lowest quartile of net family incomes (32 per cent as compared with 25 per cent), and thirdly were somewhat more likely than those that had not experienced parental divorce to be on income support (11 per cent as compared with 8 per cent).

Table 7: Odds ratios and confidence intervals for effects of parental separation on adult income amongst women

	Parental divorce:		
	Age 9-16	Age 0-6	Age 0-16
Upper quartile of earnings			
Baseline odds ratio	0.68*	0.67+	0.68**
<i>Controls</i>			
Age at first birth	0.78	0.82	0.87
Lowest quartile of family incomes			
Baseline odds ratio	1.43**	1.50**	1.47***
<i>Controls</i>			
Age at first birth	1.13	1.19	1.20
On income support			
Baseline odds ratio	1.27	1.44+	1.30*

We examined these three outcomes in more detail according to the timing of divorce. In Table 7 we provide the baseline odds ratios from the logistic analysis and see that in the case of the income variables that the odds are similar across all three groups of women. The introduction of a control for the timing of motherhood (which as we will see later tends to be earlier amongst women who experienced parental divorce) substantially reduces the differences between women who experienced parental divorce and those that did not, with respect to their own earnings and level of family income. Turning to receipt of income support, we see that women who experienced a parental divorce after age 9 were no more likely to be on income support at age 33 than their contemporaries who were brought up with both parents, whereas those who experienced a parental divorce in early childhood had a somewhat higher propensity than the intact group to be on income support. But the association was a relatively weak one.

Housing tenure

There have been major changes in the housing market over recent decades most noticeably the increasing move to owner occupation across all age groups. With the decline in the private rental sector, housing options have become increasingly restricted to either buying one's own home or renting social housing either from a local authority or a housing association. By age 33 most young people have set up home independently of their parents and have settled down into one of the two main housing sectors. For example at age 33: 79 per cent of the cohort members were buying or owned their own homes; 15 per cent were in social housing, either rented from a local

authority or housing association; and the remaining 6 per cent were a mixture, including renting in the private sector, accommodation supplied with their job etc.. Children who had experienced parental divorce were more likely than their contemporaries raised with both their parents to be in social housing; 24 per cent as compared with 14 per cent respectively. A relatively high proportion of women from divorced families were in social housing at age 33, 27 per cent as compared with 19 per cent of men from divorced families.

Table 8: Odds ratios of effects of parental separation on men and women’s housing tenure in adulthood

	Parental divorce at ages:					
	9-16 years	Men		Women		
		0-6 years	0-16 years	9-16 years	0-6 years	0-16 years
	In social housing at age 33					
Baseline	1.35+	2.00***	1.66***	2.10***	2.10***	2.00***
Financial hardship at age 7	1.13	1.71*	1.38*	1.50**	1.80**	1.60***
Behavioural scores at age 7	1.19	1.47*	1.34*	2.00***	1.50*	1.70***
Cognitive scores at age 7	1.29	1.71**	1.51**	2.00***	1.96***	1.79***
Social group at age 7	1.27	1.98***	1.59***	2.10***	2.10***	2.00***
Financial hardship and behavioural scores	1.08	1.39	1.23	1.49*	1.42+	1.40*
All four age 7 factors	1.14	1.56+	1.43+	1.56*	1.53*	1.48**
All age 7 and age 16 factors	0.96	1.27	1.13	1.33	1.40	1.31*

Notes: + = significant at the .10 level; * = significant at the .05 level; ** = significant at the .01 level; *** significant at the .001 level.

Again multivariate analysis showed that relationship between coming from a divorced family and being in social housing in adulthood was largely an indirect one, in that controls for financial adversity during childhood attenuated the odds of being in social housing at age 33. For example, amongst the men who experienced parental divorce at age 9 or later the odds ratio was reduced from 1.4 to 1.1 and amongst the women from 2.1 to 1.5. Amongst those who experienced parental divorce at age 6

or younger, level of behavioural problems was an important correlate of being in social housing. The importance of financial hardship and level of behavioural problems in accounting for why children who experience parental divorce being more likely to end up in social housing resonate with our earlier findings in relation to being unqualified. We also note that controlling for all the age 7 and age 16 factors reduces the differences between the two groups still further, but that the difference for all women who experienced parental divorce in childhood compared with those who did not with respect to being in social housing persists. Further examination showed that some of the residual difference between the two groups of women could be accounted for by early motherhood which is more prevalent amongst women who experienced parental divorce as well as being an important factor in precipitating entry into social housing (Murphy, 1984).

Homelessness

At the age 33 interview the cohort members were also asked whether at any time over the last ten years they had become homeless in the sense of “having to move out of a place and having nowhere permanent to live”. Going back to live with one’s parents did not count as homelessness. Fortunately only a minority, 4 per cent of the men and women, had had such an experience. However children who experienced a parental divorce during childhood were more likely to have had such an experience, 6.2 per cent as compared with 3.6 per cent (this difference was statistically significant chi squared 18.39 $p=0.000$).

As we see in Table 9 children who experienced parental divorce when they were very young, under age 6, were the most likely to have experienced homelessness. Amongst the women the chances of experiencing homelessness are attenuated when we take into account experience of financial hardship but amongst the men it persists even after controlling for both age 7 and age 16 experiences. Why young men who experienced parental divorce during early childhood should be noticeably more likely to experience homelessness in adulthood cannot be directly answered from these data. However, it may be associated with becoming a member of a step-family. Children who experience parental divorce in their early years are the most likely to become part of step-families, and there is some evidence from earlier work that children in step-families are more likely to leave home for reasons to do conflict than children living in other types of families (Kiernan, 1992). Such young adults may not be in a position to return home in times of need which enhances their risk of being homeless.

Table 9: Odds ratios of effects of parental separation on whether men and women have been homeless in adulthood

	Parental divorce at ages:					
	Men			Women		
	9-16 years	0-6 years	0-16 years	9-16 years	0-6 years	0-16 years
	Experienced homelessness					
Baseline	1.1	3.4***	1.8**	1.4	2.1**	1.7**
Financial hardship at age 7	0.95	3.5***	1.7*	1.0	1.6	1.3
Behavioural scores at age 7	1.1	3.3***	1.8**	1.3	2.02	1.7**
Cognitive scores at age 7	1.1	3.4***	1.8**	1.4	2.04**	1.7**
Social group at age 7	1.1	3.3***	1.8**	1.4	2.09**	1.7**
Financial hardship and behavioural scores	0.9	3.4**	1.7*	0.97	1.6	1.3
All four age 7 factors						
All age 7 and age 16 factors	0.9	3.2***	1.6+	0.9	1.4	1.2

Notes: + = significant at the .10 level; * = significant at the .05 level; ** = significant at the .01 level; *** significant at the .001 level.

Partnership and Parenthood

As young people move into adulthood they begin make a number of demographic transitions they begin to cohabit, to marry and have children of their own. The extent to which young people form partnerships and become parents as well as the timing of these transitions in an individual's life course can have far-reaching implications for their own lives and the lives of their children. For example, early marriage and early parenthood are associated with lower economic well-being and an increased risk of divorce.

Some observers have argued that experiencing parental divorce may lead to anxiety and uncertainty about making long-term commitments to a partner in adulthood (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989). As we see in Table 4 there is little evidence from the experiences of the 1958 cohort sample that children who experienced parental divorce are any less likely to form

partnerships or to marry or to become parents when they grow-up. However, there were differences between the two groups with respect to the timing of entry into first union and whether their first union commenced with marriage or a cohabitation. There were also some differences between the two groups with respect to the timing of parenthood and the context within which their first child was born; in terms of whether the baby was born within marriage, whilst cohabiting, or outside a partnership. For the demographic outcomes we do not present data according to the timing of divorce in childhood as an extensive preview showed there to be little evidence of pre-disruption effects with respect to these outcomes and we have already shown this to be the case in our analysis of these events up to age 23 (Cherlin, Kiernan and Chase-Lansdale, 1995).

Table 10: Partnership and parenthood

	No parental divorce	Parents divorced 0-16 years
<i>Women</i>		
Ever married %	85	86
Ever in a partnership %	93	96
Ever a parent %	79	82
<i>Men</i>		
Ever married %	78	81
Ever in a partnership %	88	95
Ever a parent %	63	63

First partnership

Men and women who experienced parental divorce during childhood were more likely to form partnerships at a young age, for example, 19 per cent of the men who experienced parental divorce had entered their first union by age 20 as compared with 10 per cent of men whose parents had not divorced and the average ages at first partnership for these two groups of men were 22.6 (sd 3.37) and 23.5 (sd 3.45) respectively. Amongst the women 48 per cent of the women from disrupted families had entered their first co-residential partnership in their teens as compared with 29 per cent of women brought up with both parents and average ages at first partnership for these two groups of women were respectively 20.2 years (sd 3.1) and 21.6 (sd 3.4). In Table 11 we show the odds ratios from logistic regressions analyses of forming a partnership in the teenage years for young people who had and had not experienced a parental divorce (Model 1). We see that after the introduction of our age 7 and age 16 background factors (Model

2) that the odds of a young man forming a partnership in their teens remains almost unchanged and amongst the women there is a reduction in the odds from 2.2 to 1.7, but the higher odds of women from divorced families forming a partnership in their teens remains highly statistically significant.

Table 11: Teenage partnerships: Odds ratios

	Model 1	Model 2
Women	2.24 ***	1.66 ***
Men	1.72 ***	1.60 **

There is now a good deal of evidence for a range of countries that children who experienced parental divorce are more likely to form partnerships with the opposite sex at a younger age than their peers brought up with both parents. However, as part of this same research programme funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Kiernan and Hobcraft, 1997) we analysed data from the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles carried out in 1990/91 on a nationally representative sample of the British population. This analysis showed that early age at first sexual intercourse is more prevalent amongst children who experience parental divorce and that much of the earlier entry into first partnership among those whose parents had divorced derives from earlier sexual activity. If children with divorced parents delay becoming sexually active they are no more or less likely to form partnerships at a young age than their peers who did not experience parental divorce. No information on timing of first sexual intercourse was collected for the NCDS sample so we were not able to include this important variable in our multi-variate analysis.

Type of first partnership

By age 33, 91 per cent of the cohort members who were interviewed had entered a first partnership and sixty per cent of these partnerships began as marriages, and 40 per cent began as a cohabitation. For more recently born cohorts more first partnerships would have begun as a cohabitation than was the case for the 1958 cohort, who passed through their teens in late 1970s and their twenties during the 1980s which was a period when rates of cohabitation were increasing dramatically (Haskey and Kiernan, 1989).

We divided the sample into three groups: those whose first union was a marriage not preceded by a period of cohabitation (60 per cent of the cohort members who had entered a first union had married directly): those who cohabited and then married their partner so their first union was a marriage preceded by cohabitation (25 per cent of the cohort members), and the third group were those whose first union was a cohabitation that was still continuing at the time of the interview at age 33 or had dissolved (15 per cent of the cohort members). As we see from Table 12 men and women who experienced parental divorce during childhood were more likely to have cohabited either prior to marrying or instead of marrying and were the least likely to have married directly.

Table 12: Type of first partnership according to whether parental divorce had occurred by age 16.

	Women		Men	
	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce (%)	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce (%)
Married directly	65	52	58	43
Cohabited and married same partner	22	31	26	33
Cohabiting union continues or dissolved	12	17	16	24
Number in sample = 100%	4746	598	4390	514

Table 13 shows the relative risks computed from multinomial logistic regression analysis of men and women who experienced a parental divorce compared with those who had not for different types of first union. The reference group is those who married directly. We see that women who experienced parental divorce during childhood were 1.7 times more likely to have cohabited prior to marriage and 1.7 times as likely to have cohabited in a union that had not converted into a marriage, than to have married directly. The picture for the men is similar. The second column shows the relative risks after the introduction of controls for age at first partnership and our package of age 7 and 16 year old background factors. We see that even after the introduction of controls men and women who experienced parental divorce during childhood are much more likely to have entered their first partnership via cohabitation than marriage. This preference for cohabiting may represent a reluctance on the part of young

people who have experienced a parental divorce to make a permanent commitment such as that enshrined in legal marriage. Alternatively, given their experience they may want to be more certain about committing to a permanent relationship and may take longer in the search for their ideal partner or in testing the strength of the relationship via cohabitation before committing to marriage.

Table 13: Relative risks ratios for the effects of parental partnership breakdown on type of first union

	Model 1 Relative risk ratios	Model 2 Relative risk ratios
<i>Women</i>		
Married directly	1.00	1.00
Cohabitation followed by marriage	1.74 ***	1.71 ***
Cohabitation not followed by marriage	1.72 ***	1.79 ***
<i>Men</i>		
Married directly	1.00	1.00
Cohabitation followed by marriage	1.71 ***	1.80 ***
Cohabitation not followed by marriage	2.03 ***	2.03 ***

Transition to parenthood

Men and women who experienced parental divorce in childhood are also more likely than those who did not to become parents at earlier age. As we see in Table 14 women with divorced parents were almost twice as likely to become teenage mothers (25 per cent) as their contemporaries whose parents did not divorce (14 per cent). The average age at first birth amongst the former group of women was almost two years younger than that of the latter group: 22.6 years (sd 4.02) as compared with 24.3 years (sd 4.16). Men from divorced families were also more likely to become young fathers, 23 per cent became fathers at ages under 22 years as compared with 13 percent of those from non-divorced families. There was a nearly one year difference in the average age at becoming a father between the two groups of men: 25.0 years (sd 4.0) and 25.9 years (sd 3.8) respectively. In the multi-variate analysis we examine two outcomes: the probability of teenage motherhood and young fatherhood, defined as becoming a father before age 22.

Table 14: Age at first birth according to whether parental divorce had occurred by age 16.

	Women		Men	
	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce (%)	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce (%)
<i>Age</i>				
14-19 women/ 14-21 men	14	25	13	23
20-22 women/ 22-24 men	21	29	24	22
23-26 women/ 25-28 men	33	27	35	34
27-32 women/ 27-32 men	32	19	28	21
Number in sample = 100%	3699	497	3104	349

Table 15 shows that the odds of a young woman who experienced divorce in childhood becoming a teenage mother to be over two times those of woman who was brought up with both parents and that the odds of a man whose parents' divorced of becoming a father at age 21 or younger were just under 2 times those without such an experience. After the introduction of the age 7 and age 16 background factors into the model we see that the odds of a woman from a divorced family becoming a teenage mother are reduced from 2.2 to 1.4 and those for men from 1.9 to 1.4 . This attenuation in the odds ratios suggests that a substantial part, but not all, of the association between childhood divorce and early parenthood operates through differences in the childhood and adolescent experiences of the two groups of children. Other analyses showed that amongst the men differences in the timing of fatherhood as between men who had experienced parental divorce and those who had not was largely confined to young ages, as beyond age 21 there was little difference in the timing of fatherhood amongst these two groups of men. Amongst the women there was evidence that the propensity to enter motherhood at younger age persisted beyond the teenage years.

Table 15: Youthful parenthood: Odds ratios

	Model 1	Model 2
Women	2.16 ***	1.42 *
Men	1.86 ***	1.48 *

Partnership context of first birth

The other aspect of childbearing that we examined was the partnership context of the first birth. Table 16 shows the proportions of women and men who had their first child within marriage, within a cohabiting union and outside a partnership according to whether or not they had experienced a parental divorce. Being born outside a partnership means that the cohort member was not living with partner at the time the child was born, according to the reporting of dates of events. Overall, 15 per cent of the women and 13 per cent of the men had had their first child outside marriage. Women whose parents had been divorced were around twice as likely to have a child outside a partnership or in a cohabiting union than women from intact families. A similar but slightly weaker tendency is to be seen for the men. Having a child outside marriage was more common amongst men and women who became parents at a young age. For example, 35 per cent of the teenage mothers had a child outside marriage as compared with 12 per cent of those who had their first child in their late twenties (27-32 years) and the analogous proportions for young fathers (under age 22 years) was 25 per cent as compared with 13 per cent amongst those who became fathers in their late twenties (29-32 years)

Table 16: Partnership context of first birth according to whether parental divorce had occurred by age 16.

	Women		Men	
	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce (%)	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce (%)
Outside a union	6.6	12.6	4.0	7.1
In a cohabiting union	6.8	12.6	7.8	12.1
In marriage	86.7	74.8	88.2	80.8
Number in sample = 100%	3745	501	3176	354

In Table 17 we show the relative risks ratios, derived from multinomial logistic analysis, of a woman who experienced divorce in childhood having a child outside a union or within a cohabiting union relative to the reference group of women who had a child within marriage. We see that compared to women who had not experienced a parental divorce that the risks of having a child outside marriage are similar for having a child on one's own or in a cohabiting union. In model 2 a control for age at first child was introduced and we note that this barely affects the chances of having a child in a cohabiting union, but substantially attenuates the relative risk of having a child outside of a co-residential union. This

implies that part of the higher propensity to have child outside a union seen amongst women who experienced a parental divorce derives from their tendency to become mothers at a young age rather than necessarily an explicit preference to have a child on their own. The addition of the age 7 and 16 factors to model 2 (to form model 3) further attenuates the chances of a women who experienced parental divorce having a child on her own. With respect to having a baby in a cohabiting union we note that the differences as between women who experienced parental divorce and those that did not are attenuated by the introduction of age 7 and age 16 characteristics but the women who experienced parental divorce are still more likely than their peers who did not experience parental divorce to have a child within a cohabiting union. There are broadly parallel patterns with respect to having a child in a cohabiting to be observed amongst the men. This suggests that preference for cohabitation over marriage is an important engine behind the higher probabilities of children of divorce having extra-marital births. The volatility in the relative risk ratios of having a child outside a union that we see for the men may well be due to the small numbers of men who report having a child outside a union.

In contrast to the economic outcomes where childhood and adolescent factors substantially reduced the differences between children who experienced parental divorce and those that did not this is not so clearly the case with respect to demographic outcomes. Based on the experiences of the NCDS sample we note that men and women who experience parental divorce during childhood are more likely than those from intact families: to form partnerships at a young age (notwithstanding there is other evidence that this may be a by-product of an earlier onset of sexual activity which we were unable to control for); to have higher rates of cohabitation; and to become young parents, with heightened tendencies to have children outside marriage deriving to a large extent from their earlier entry into parenthood in the case of births outside a union, and their preference for cohabitation in the case of other extra-marital births.

Table 17: Partnership context of first birth

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Women</i>			
Married	1.0	1.0	1.0
Outside a union	2.20 ***	1.54 **	1.36
Cohabiting	2.14 ***	2.11 ***	1.68 **
<i>Men</i>			
Married	1.0	1.0	1.0
Outside a union	1.92 ***	1.38	1.70 +
Cohabiting	1.71 **	1.75 **	1.46+

Partnership Dissolution

As we noted in the introduction there is evidence that children who experienced the break up of their parents' marriage are themselves more likely to divorce than children whose parents' marriages remained intact throughout their childhood years. The mechanism behind this finding has not been unravelled and there is uncertainty as to whether there is a causal relationship between the divorces of parents and those of their children or whether it is an indirect effect mediated through other factors, such as lower educational attainment or proneness to marry at young ages which in turn are related to the risk of divorce. The detailed partnership histories collected from NCDS sample allows us to examine this issue in some detail.

The partnership histories collected when the cohort members were aged 33 years included dates of starting of and ending of all marriages and any co-residential cohabiting unions lasting longer than a month. Here we examine two aspects of union dissolution: firstly partnership dissolution amongst those who have had a first partnership and secondly marital dissolution amongst those who had married. By age 33, 30 per cent of first partnerships had been dissolved and 23 per cent of first marriages. Children who experienced a parental divorce in childhood were more likely than their peers to have experienced partnership and marital dissolutions: 43 per cent of them had experienced partnership dissolution as compared with 29 per cent of those from intact families and 34 per cent of the divorced group had experienced a marital dissolution as compared with 22 per cent of the intact group.

We used proportional hazard models to estimate the duration of first partnerships and marriages. These models are the appropriate ones to use when the outcome variable is the duration of time until an event occurs, in this case the dissolution of unions; and when there is censoring, namely the event had not occurred for everyone by the time they were interviewed. For example in the NCDS sample, 30 per cent of first partnerships had ended by the time the cohort members were aged 33, and the other 70 per cent were still at risk of dissolving at a later stage in their lives. The hazard models use two pieces of information to construct the outcome variable one: the duration of the partnership at the last time the person was observed to be still in a partnership and two: whether at the last observation the partnership had dissolved (which was true for 30 per cent of the cases) or had been intact when the study ended (which was true for 70 per cent). The results are presented in terms of relative risk ratios, namely the excess risk for a particular group compared with a reference group.

Table 18: Type of first union and partnership dissolution

	Childhood divorce					
	% dissolved			Relative risk of dissolution		
	Yes	No	All	Yes	No	All
Married directly#	35	22	23	1.00	1.00	1.00
Cohabited-married	33	21	23	0.89	0.93	0.95
Cohabiting union continues or dissolved	78	70	71	3.81 ***	4.94 ***	4.88 ***
Number in sample	1112	9138	10250			

Notes: *** p <.0001; # reference group.

Given that young people who experienced the break-up of their parents' marriage differed in their partnership formation patterns from those who did not the first factor we examined was whether there was different risks of dissolution according to type of first union for those who had and had not experienced parental divorce. As can be seen in Table 18 similar proportions of first unions that were direct marriages or were preceded by cohabitation had dissolved by age 33 (23 per cent in both cases) and that the relative risk for marriages preceded by a period of cohabitation having broken up by age 33 was similar to the reference group namely those who married directly. The group with the highest and significantly different risk of dissolution from either of the other two groups was not surprisingly the group who did not marry or had not

married by the time of interview their first partner. Those who experienced parental divorce during childhood were more likely to have experienced a partnership dissolution, 33 per cent as compared with 22 per cent of those children brought up with both parents, but these probabilities did not vary much according to whether their first union was a direct marriage or preceded by a period of cohabitation. Amongst both groups of adults the highest disruption rates were found for those whose first union was a cohabitation that did not convert into a marriage or had not done so by the interview date, with risks some 4-5 times higher than those found amongst those who had married.

Table 19: Partnership dissolution according to age first partnership

	Childhood divorce					
	% dissolved			Relative risk of dissolution		
	Yes	No	All	Yes	No	All
Age at first partnership						
Age 19 and younger	53	47	48	3.7	4.6	4.6
20-21 years	45	32	34	2.7	2.6	2.7
22-23 years	42	25	27	2.3	1.9	1.9
24-26 years	32	20	21	1.6+	1.5	1.5
27 or older#	21	15	15	1.0	1.0	1.0
Number in sample	1112	9138	10250			

Notes: All the relative risk ratios are significant at $p < .0001$ except +; # reference group.

In almost all studies of divorce age at marriage has been found to be a very important and frequently the most powerful correlate. Thus we would expect that age at first partnership would also be an important risk factor for partnership breakdown. As can be seen in Table 19 compared with the reference group, in this instance the oldest group, those who formed partnerships at younger ages were more prone to partnership breakdown. The groups who formed partnerships at late ages obviously will have had a shorter exposure time in which to have experienced a dissolution by the time of interview which is an intrinsic and difficult problem besetting many analyses of longitudinal surveys. However, a more stringent test limiting the analysis to those who had formed partnership under age 25 (80 per cent of the cohort) all of whom had a minimum exposure time of 8 years exhibited the same highly significant pattern as portrayed in Table 19. It is clearly apparent from Table 19 that the earlier a partnership is formed the higher the dissolution rate. However the risks within a particular age at partnership category are not consistently different

as between those who did and did not experience parental divorce during childhood.

In Table 20 we present the hazard ratios or relative risks of partnership disruption separately for men and women. The first row shows that the risk of partnership breakdown amongst men who experienced a parental divorce during childhood was 1.9 times higher than those who had not experienced a parental divorce and amongst the women the analogous rate was 1.5 times higher. In the second model we include the childhood and adolescent background factors from the age 7 and 16 interviews and we see that the relative risks of partnership disruption amongst men and women who experienced parental divorce are marginally reduced to 1.7 in the case of the men and to 1.5 in the case of the women. However, when age at first partnership and type of first partnership are introduced in Model 3 on their own, and in Model 4 with the other background factors we see a noticeable reduction in the relative risk of partnership breakdown amongst adults who experienced parental divorce. After controlling for childhood and adolescent factors as well as the partnership formation variables, men from divorced families still have a 40 per cent excess risk of partnership dissolution and women a statistically insignificant 9 per cent excess risk.

Table 20: Relative risk ratios of partnership dissolution amongst children who experienced parental divorce 0-16 years

	Men	Women
Baseline model	1.88 ***	1.58 ***
<i>Model 2</i>		
Controls for age 7 and 16 factors	1.75 ***	1.40 ***
<i>Model 3</i>		
Controls for age at first partnership and type of first partnership	1.32 ***	1.10
<i>Model 4</i>		
Controls for age 7 and 16 factors plus age first partnership and type of first partnership	1.41 ***	1.09

In Table 21 we focus in on marriage dissolution and perform the same kind of analysis as we did for partnership dissolution. The sample only includes the men and women who have had a first marriage. Amongst men

who had experienced childhood divorce, 33 per cent had dissolved their first marriage either via separation or divorce as compared with 18 per cent of men who had not experienced childhood divorce. The analogous proportions for the women were 36 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. We see that after the introduction of all the background factors that the excess risk of marital dissolution falls from 91 per cent to 63 per cent in the case of the men, and from 51 to 27 per cent in the case of the women. Thus, differences in the backgrounds of children from different types of families attenuates the relationship between divorce in childhood and marital breakdown in adulthood but adults from divorced families still carry an excess risk.

Table 21: Relative risk ratios of marital dissolution amongst children who experienced parental divorce 0-16 years

	Men	Women
Baseline model	1.91 ***	1.51 ***
<i>Model 2</i>		
Controls for age 7 and 16 factors	1.76 ***	1.39 ***
<i>Model 3</i>		
Controls for age at first partnership and type of first partnership	1.71 ***	1.26 **
<i>Model 4</i>		
Controls for age 7 and 16 factors plus age first partnership and type of first partnership	1.63 ***	1.27 *

Handling the Divorce Process

At the 33 year old interview, for each marriage and cohabitation that had dissolved information was collected on: the level of conflict prior to break up and who provided emotional and financial support during the process of separation. The question posed is whether the process of marital breakdown differs for adults who had experienced divorce as children compared with their contemporaries who did not? Is there, for example, a legacy arising from childhood experience that facilitates or hinders one's own handling of the divorce process?

In Table 22 we present some of the reported findings given by the men and women in the sample with respect the break-up of their first partnership according to whether they had experienced divorce during

childhood. There were only a few noticeable differences between the responses of adults who had experienced divorce during childhood and those who had been brought up with their both their parents. Women who had experienced parental divorce were less likely to report relying on their parents for emotional and financial support at around the time of their own separation and were more likely to report reliance on the Department of Social Security for financial support than their peers who had not experienced parental divorce. Men who had experienced parental divorce were more likely to report relying on “no one” for emotional support compared with men who had not experienced a parental divorce.

Table 22: Handling the divorce process

	Women		Men		Total
	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce (%)	No divorce (%)	Parental divorce (%)	
<i>In the last year before you separated how often did you argue?</i>					
% reporting at least once a day	26	28	17	18	22
% reporting arguments ever ending up in physical violence	38	41	12	14	26
<i>At the time you separated who did you mainly rely on for emotional support?</i>					
No one	8	8	19	26	14
Girlfriend/boyfriend	9	12	11	9	10
Friends	31	36	31	29	331
Parents	45	36	32	31	38
Other	7	7	6	5	7
Total = 100%	1330	234	1104	216	2884
<i>Who if anyone provided you with financial assistance during this time (time of break-up)?</i>					
No one	42	40	78	77	50
Former partner	7	9	-	-	4
Girlfriend/boyfriend	3	5	1	2	2
Friends	1	2	2	3	2
Parents	26	19	14	10	20
DSS	18	24	4	7	12
Other	1	1	1	1	1
Total = 100%	1361	247	1120	221	2949

Post-Childhood Divorce

Little is known about the effects of a parental divorce that occurs after childhood. Yet this is an increasingly common experience that could well be disturbing, even if the young adult no longer lives in the parental home at the time of the disruption. Information on the timing of parental divorce collected from the NCDS sample at the age 33 interview allowed us to examine these issues.

For this part of our analysis we divided the sample into three groups: those who experienced divorce from birth to age 16, (n=1519) which we will refer to as the childhood-divorce group; those who experienced parental divorce at ages 17-20 years (n=229), the transitional-group; and those whose parents' divorced when they were age 21 or older (n=341), the post-childhood group.

For the groups of young people who did and did not experience parental separation we examined whether they differed in their adult experiences in the three main areas we have already covered in the section on childhood divorce namely: demographic, educational and economic outcomes. More specifically, in the demographic domain: we examined the timing of first partnership in terms of whether the cohort member had cohabited before age 21 and type of first union; and parenthood in terms of whether women had had a child in their teens and whether men became fathers before age 22 or whether they had had their first child outside of marriage. Partnership breakdown was again assessed in terms of whether the men and women in the sample had ever-experienced a partnership dissolution either via the break-up of a cohabiting union or a marriage, and second, whether they had experienced a marital breakdown. Educational outcomes were assessed by whether the cohort member had obtained any qualifications by age 33 or had attained any high level qualifications. To examine the economic situation at age 33, we included a measure of household income and income from earnings; namely whether the cohort member was in the lowest quartile of the family income distribution or not, or with respect to earnings whether they were in the top quartile of the male or female earnings distribution. The other economic outcomes were: whether the men in the sample were unemployed at age 33; whether the men and women in the sample were on income support at age 33; and whether they were in social housing at this age.

Results

In Table 23 and Table 24 for men and women respectively we present the odds ratios (and relative risks and hazard ratios) comparing each of the

Table 23: Odds ratios (unless otherwise specified) for effects of timing of parental partnership breakdown on outcomes in adult life - Men

Outcomes	Age at parental separation					
	0-16 years		17-20 years		21-33 years	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Demographic outcomes</i>						
First partnership in teens	1.62 ***	1.36 ***	0.97	0.82	1.14	0.95
Type of first partnership++						
- Pre-marital cohabitation	1.75 ***	1.77 ***	2.05 **	2.12 **	1.38	1.26
- Cohabitation not followed by marriage	2.09 ***	1.89 ***	1.64 +	1.54	1.64 *	1.67 *
Father before age 22	1.76 ***	1.20	0.89	0.71	0.82	0.71
First child born outside marriage	1.82 ***	1.67 ***	2.05 ***	1.86 +	1.12	1.02
First partnership ended (Hazards Ratios)	1.93 ***	1.81 ***	1.62 **	1.64 **	1.34 +	1.48 *
First marriage ended (Hazards Ratios)	1.96 ***	1.84 ***	1.77 **	1.99 **	1.31	1.71 **
<i>Educational and economic situation at age 33</i>						
No qualifications	1.67 ***	0.78	1.34	0.73	1.68 *	1.59
High level qualifications	0.53 ***	0.71 *	0.85	1.00	0.49 ***	0.54 *
Unemployed	2.03 ***	1.46 *	1.48	1.48	2.18 ***	1.62 +
On income support	1.26	0.73	1.38	1.66	2.42 **	1.91 +
Household income in lowest quartile	1.31 *	1.08	0.94	0.72	1.48 +	1.54 +
In top earnings quartile	0.83	1.02	0.94	0.88	0.70	0.84
In social housing	1.71 ***	1.09	1.11	0.66	1.93 **	1.77 *

Notes: Model 1 is with no controls; Model 2 is with the age 7 and age 16 controls; ++results from multinomial logistic model; + p<0.10&>0.05; * p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01; *** p<=0.0001

Table 24: Odds ratios (unless otherwise specified) for effects of timing of parental partnership breakdown on outcomes in adult life - Women

Outcomes	Age at parental separation					
	0-16 years		17-20 years		21-33 years	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Demographic outcomes</i>						
First partnership in teens	1.89 ***	1.42 ***	1.58 *	1.27	1.06	1.05
Type of first partnership++						
- Pre-marital cohabitation	1.80 ***	1.64 ***	1.87 **	1.97 *	1.49 *	1.50 +
- Cohabitation not followed by marriage	1.81 ***	1.60 *	2.65 +	2.02 *	1.88 **	1.66 +
Teenage mother	2.10 ***	1.37 *	1.79 *	1.61	1.35	1.18
First child born outside marriage	2.33 ***	1.65 ***	3.48 ***	1.99 *	2.15 ***	1.90 *
First partnership ended (Hazards Ratios)	1.63 ***	1.44 ***	1.86 ***	1.67 **	1.47 **	1.37 +
First marriage ended (Hazards Ratios)	1.55 ***	1.42 ***	1.72 **	1.51 +	1.33 +	1.33 +
<i>Educational and economic situation at age 33</i>						
No qualifications	2.17 ***	1.05	1.28	1.19	0.95	0.61
High level qualifications	0.59 ***	0.99	0.77	1.06	0.99	1.27
On income support	1.33 *	0.88	1.32	1.27	1.36	1.15
Household income in lowest quartile	1.49 ***	1.15	1.27	0.50	1.33	1.23
In top earnings quartile	0.67 **	0.87	0.91	0.88	0.82	0.53
In social housing	2.09 ***	1.25	1.61 +	1.22	1.55 *	1.21

Notes: Model 1 is with no controls; Model 2 is with the age 7 and age 16 controls; ++Results from multinomial logistic model; + p<0.10&>0.05; * p<=0.05; ** p<=0.01; *** p<=0.0001

three groups (childhood-divorce, transitional and post-childhood) with the those from families that had remained intact. This allows us to compare the

relative size of the differences for the demographic, educational and economic outcomes amongst youth from divorcing versus intact families depending on the age of the child when their parents stopped living together. The first column presents the odds ratios without any controls and the second after the package of age 7 and age 16 factors were introduced.

Several findings stand out from these comparisons. It is clear that there is no single and distinct pattern with respect to type of outcome or across the sexes, such as an attenuation of the chances of particular outcomes the later the parental divorce. The picture is complex with commonalities and differences between the sexes. Amongst both the men and women, there is clear evidence that those who experienced parental divorce after age 20 did not differ from those in intact families with respect to becoming parents or forming partnerships at a young age. However, with respect to the other demographic outcomes, particularly the extent to which the men and women cohabited or experienced the break-up of partnerships or marriages, those who saw their parents' divorce in adulthood still had significantly higher probabilities of having these experiences compared with the intact group. In some instances there was also evidence of a gradient of effects depending on the age at which the divorce occurred in the child's life, for example union dissolution amongst the men. It is also worth noting that these findings hold after controls for age 7 and age 16 background variables.

Turning to the educational and economic outcomes. The picture with respect to the women is consistent. Only amongst those who experienced parental divorce in childhood are there statistically significant differences in educational attainment and economic position as compared with children brought up with both their parents. But as our earlier analysis also showed most of these differences largely disappear when we take account of background differences. Such a pattern is consistent with our previous findings and those of others that point to economic disadvantage as an important predictor of both divorce and low attainment. Turning to the men we see an intriguing and perplexing pattern with respect to educational and economic outcomes and the timing of parental divorce. Men who experienced parental divorce in the transitional period ages 17-20 were no different in terms of educational qualifications and economic situation than those brought up with both their parents. But men who experienced childhood divorce or later adult divorce were more likely to be educationally and economically disadvantaged than their peers from intact families. We have no explanation for this finding and resist making too much of it unless it is replicated in future studies. However, one might

speculate that adult children may also go through a crisis period when their parents divorce and this may find expression in the economic domain (via unemployment, dependency on income support etc..) particularly amongst men, as women at this stage of their lives are more likely to be engaged in the domestic sphere. Coping or not with post-childhood parental divorce may find expression in some other way amongst the women. It may also be that men have greater vulnerability to parental divorce regardless of when it occurs.

Discussion

The results of our analysis of the legacy of parental divorce on educational, economic, social and demographic outcomes in adulthood suggest that we cannot draw any simple or singular conclusions about how parental divorce is linked to behaviour in adulthood. The connection, when it exists, depends on the realm of behaviour, the gender of the child and to some extent when parental separation occurs in a child's life.

At the outset we posed three questions. Firstly, to what extent does divorce during childhood have long-term consequences for the educational attainment, economic situation, partnership formation and dissolution, and parenthood behaviour in adulthood? We have shown that in most of these domains that children who experience parental divorce in childhood have more negative experiences than children reared by both their parents. However, in answering our second question as to whether child and family characteristics preceding divorce attenuates the relationship between the divorce itself and adult outcome, we have shown that for many of the non-demographic outcomes there is evidence of powerful selection effects operating, particularly to do with experience of family hardship. Thirdly, we have shown if parents remain together until their children are grown up before separating this lessens the legacy of divorce for their adult children in some domains but not others.

We cannot directly answer how much of the legacy of parental is due to pre-divorce selection and how much is due to the circumstances post-divorce but the results point to a complex blend between the two. First, we discovered that many of the seeming effects of childhood divorce disappear when we control for pre-divorce circumstances including background characteristics of the family and measures of how the child was doing at age 7 before parents separated. Whether the family was suffering financial hardship as a solo factor or in combination with level of the child's behavioural problems at age 7 accounted for much of the differences in adult outcomes in the social and economic arenas as between children from

non-disrupted and disrupted families. Adults whose parents divorced when they were between the ages of 9 and 16 were more likely to have no qualifications and to have more adverse economic situations in adulthood, but these differences were largely attenuated when we controlled for pre-divorce differences. In other words, children who grow up with both biological parents, may end up better off largely because they are advantaged to begin with not necessarily because their parents remain together. In this instance, lower status attainment may be more of a cause of divorce than a consequence. Because such controls were lacking for divorces that occurred when the child was younger than seven, we cannot separate out selection effects, from post-divorce effects but we note that controls for poverty and behavioural problems at age 7 for this group also attenuated many of the negative outcomes for this group.

The significance of selection was much less evident when we examined the demographic outcomes. Early partnership and parenthood was more common among the children whose parents divorced whilst they were children. Given the robustness of this finding across time and space it suggests that these outcomes may well be directly linked to parental divorce in childhood.

Another pattern of results emerged when we looked at cohabitation and the dissolution of both informal and matrimonial unions by age 33. Men and women whose parents divorced regardless of whether it occurred earlier or later in life appeared to form partnerships via cohabitation more readily and dissolve them and marital unions more quickly. The fact that the timing of parental divorce had no significant effect on the incidence of these outcomes could be interpreted in several different ways. We cannot fully rule out selection because the results are similar for all of the groups. Perhaps, unobserved differences amongst the families that divorced could account for these findings. For example, the set of background factors did not include measures of, for example, moral beliefs or the extent of conservative values, both of which could be linked to the propensity of parents to divorce and their children to cohabit. Nor did we have a measure of the extent of conflict between the parents or its persistency that could produce the same result. It is also conceivable that parents who divorced after their children were adults still exerted influence on these events as the divorce or, at least, marital troubles may have created doubt and instability in the young adults' relationships. We simply lack the information to resolve this issue although it would be a promising topic for future inquiry.

Despite the strengths of this study, obvious problems exist in extrapolating its findings. We are uncertain as to the nature of the effects of very early childhood divorce; the impact of spending periods of varying

durations in lone-mother families; or the legacy of living in step-families or of experiencing a number of family settings throughout childhood might have on adult outcomes. Additionally, this cohort grew up under a more restrictive legal divorce regime than those born later. Still, the analysis on post-childhood divorce is more up-to-date and speaks to the question of whether and how much children may gain when their parents remain together, assuming all other things are equal.

To the extent to which we can generalise from this single analysis, the results provide some insights into the legacy of divorce for children's chances in later life. We have shown that some of the presumed effects of divorce arise from pre-existing differences amongst parents and children that are eliminated or much reduced when family background and child behaviour and performance are taken into account. Our findings suggest that avoiding divorce, no doubt, confers benefits on children, but the magnitude of these benefits are not so large if the conditions that may lead people to divorce in the first place are taken into account.

Significant and importance differences do remain, however, in family formation and the instability of partnerships formed. Of course, it cannot be assumed that all of the remaining differences are attributable to divorce and its aftermath as our set of pre-divorce measures is not complete enough to give us confidence that we have measured all relevant pre-divorce differences. However, some of these behaviours were as high among the youth whose parents separated after they had grown up as those who experienced a divorce in their childhood. Thus, young people whose parents postponed divorce did not gain in regard to the stability of their own unions.

Undoubtedly, children benefit from being raised in an emotionally and economically secure two-parent family but if this is not possible the evidence from this study suggests that in the context of the long-term welfare of children we should be as concerned about the conditions that precede divorce and sometimes lead to divorce, such as poverty and economic uncertainty, as well as with the consequences of marital breakup.

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