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Stephanie Harris

James Madison University

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**Identifying the Current State of Practice utilized by School Counselors and School
Psychologists in Facilitating Divorce Groups in Elementary Schools**

Stephanie Harris, MA

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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FACULTY COMMITTEE:

Committee Chair: Deborah Kipps-Vaughan

Committee Members/Readers:

Tammy Gilligan

Michele Kielty

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Abstract

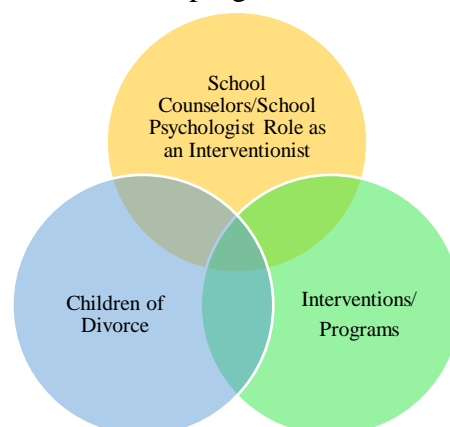
Divorce is considered an adverse childhood experience (ACE) and may lead to a number of negative outcomes for children involved. Research has demonstrated that these children may have higher amounts of internalizing difficulties, externalizing difficulties, as well as lower academic performance. The present study analyzes the current state of practice surrounding divorce groups for elementary aged children within a county of a Southeastern state. The researcher gathered data by providing an online, anonymous survey by attending department meetings for school counselors and school psychologists. The data revealed that several facets of how these groups are facilitated align with evidence-based practice; however, there are several components that have not met best practice including time of service delivery, engaging in progress monitoring, and utilizing programs specifically researched for children of divorce. Findings support the idea that there are several barriers that impede school-based mental health professionals, and advocacy for evidence-based practice among social-emotional interventions is warranted.

Introduction

Children of divorce experience higher levels of maladjustment compared to children of intact families. As this change in family structure can lead to difficulties with academic achievement, it is crucial for school-based professionals to identify children of divorce in need of support and provide them with effective interventions to ensure they are set up for success socially, emotionally, academically, and behaviorally. With the research demonstrating that these children tend to be at a disadvantage in these areas, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of identification of children in need of support and ensuring they are receiving beneficial interventions (Lansford, 2009).

Gathering information from school personnel, specifically school counselors and school psychologists, who provide divorce interventions for students will allow researchers to better understand the current state of practice of providing supports for this population of students while simultaneously informing future directions for helping this population. The theoretical framework in this study will consist of children impacted by divorce, the school counselors' and school psychologists' roles as interventionists, and interventions and programs for divorce. See *Figure 1* for a visual of this framework. The following articles, organized thematically to follow the theoretical framework, will cover the negative effects on divorce of children and the impact this has on their adjustment, the role school counselors and school psychologists play in assisting this population, and what is known about interventions and programs that have been shown to be effective.

Figure 1:



Literature Review

The Negative Impact of Divorce

According to the United States Census Bureau, the national refined divorce rate in 2019 was 7.6 out of one thousand women aged fifteen and over (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Although not every divorce or separation will involve a child, it is important to analyze its impact on a vulnerable population such as children. Research on divorce and its effects has been widely studied and has demonstrated the negative consequences for children (Lansford et. al, 2006; Lansford, 2009; Anderson, 2014). It should be noted that for the purpose of this literature review, the review will be limited to exploring such negative effects, though it is possible that positive outcomes also result from divorce.

For example, a longitudinal study conducted in 2006 by Lansford and colleagues assessed the trajectories of internalizing problems, externalizing problems, and grades for children of divorce and intact families (Lansford et al., 2006). The study utilized families that were participating in the Child Development Project, a longitudinal study of child development. Three-hundred and fifty-six children were followed from kindergarten to the eighth grade. The researchers utilized Child Behavior Checklists, as a source of data for teachers and mothers of the students, to track internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Additionally, researchers received consent from parents to pull grades from the children's school to identify changes in academic achievement.

The trajectories shown in the Lansford et al. (2006) study demonstrate that children who had experienced divorce at any age showed signs of maladjustment whether it be academically or via externalizing and internalizing difficulties. Children within intact families remained stable throughout time and showed higher academic

achievement with fewer internalizing or externalizing problems. Further, results of this study indicate that early parental divorce or separation is more negatively related to trajectories of internalizing and externalizing problems than later divorces. Additionally, divorce or separation at a later age is more negatively related to a decrease in academic achievement, represented by grades. Lansford et al. (2006) noted that “one implication of these findings is that children may benefit most from interventions focused on preventing internalizing and externalizing problems, whereas adolescents may benefit most from interventions focused on promoting academic achievement” (p. 292).

Following this longitudinal study, Lansford (2009) conducted a scoping review that investigated the literature revolving around divorce and its effects on children’s short-term and long-term adjustment. Her review of other literature on divorce confirmed the research conducted by the previous longitudinal study (Lansford et al., 2006) that children whose parents are divorced have higher levels of externalizing behaviors and internalizing problems, lower academic achievement, and more problems in social relationships compared to children of intact families. This demonstrates that early identification and intervention are beneficial for children in preschool and elementary school who are experiencing this change in family structure. An important idea that this review touches on is that the negative experiences associated with divorce are likely a “complex combination of parent, child, and contextual factors that precede and follow the divorce in conjunction with the divorce itself” (Lansford, 2009, p. 149). For example, children’s level of adjustment, behavioral difficulties, and academic struggles prior to the divorce are important to consider as well. This includes mediators such as socioeconomic status, parental conflict, and parental well-being. This is important for school-based

professionals to keep in mind as they are attempting to provide interventions for this specific population. The next section of this literature review will examine this more in depth.

Building off this information, Anderson (2014) wrote an American College of Pediatricians (ACP) position paper that evaluated literature, across three decades, focusing on the impact of family structure on the health of children with the goal of influencing public policy to promote intact families. Although some of this literature may be outdated, this background information is important in understanding that old and new literature agree upon the idea that divorce often causes maladjustment in children and families.

Negative effects of divorce covered by Anderson (2014) included loss of economic and emotional security, decreased social and psychological maturation, a decrease in cognitive and academic stimulation, and a higher risk for emotional distress for the children. Regarding parents, the research noted that married individuals may experience higher levels of economic security as well as better physical health. Additionally, divorce can have a long-term emotional impact on parents which can in turn affect their children (Anderson, 2014). Although divorce has shown widespread negative consequences, it is imperative to consider the child and family as individuals as well as all the factors that may affect the outcome. Some children and families may show signs of resilience in response to divorce; however, this is still a dramatic and life-changing transition for children and early prevention may help decrease the impact on adjustment difficulties.

Risk and Protective Factors

As previously stated, there are mediators or factors that can influence the level of adjustment in children of divorce. A few of these include income, parental conflict, and parental well-being. Wood et al. (2004) examined the impact of depressive and withdrawn parenting on adjustment difficulties at home and school. The longitudinal study utilized data from 35 divorced mothers, 174 two-parent families, teachers, and students from fourth grade to their sixth-grade year. The researchers measured levels of depression in the mothers and children, while teachers were provided with a questionnaire to assess externalizing and internalizing difficulties. Statistical data revealed that mothers and teachers rated higher internalizing and externalizing problems for children of divorce.

This data corroborates the longitudinal study conducted by Lansford et al. (2006) mentioned earlier in the literature review indicating that younger students display more internalizing and externalizing difficulties. While children of divorce rated themselves as experiencing higher levels of depression compared to students of intact families, these results were not statistically significant. Despite this, the research suggests that depressed and withdrawn mothers impact the level of internalizing and externalizing difficulties seen by parents and teachers. Therefore, parental mental health can serve as a risk factor for worsening the effects of divorce on children.

A narrative piece written by Pedro-Carroll (2005), the founder of an evidence-based divorce intervention later explored in this review, focused on fostering resilience in children of divorce touched on the concept of psychological well-being of parents being a protective factor as well as a risk factor. Additional family protective factors include

protection from interparental conflict, a supportive parent-child relationship, economic stability, and stability and structure in the home. Individual protective factors for children include effective coping skills, realistic appraisal of control, and hope for the future. An important topic that this article discusses is extrafamilial protective factors. This included evidence-based preventative interventions providing support and skills training.

A quasi-experimental, longitudinal study conducted by Weaver and Schofield (2015) utilized data from families recruited by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development to review factors that could worsen or improve adjustment for children after divorce. Results found that children that lived in homes with higher incomes had fewer internalizing problems. In addition, children with less supportive and stimulating home environments, as well as less sensitive and more depressed mothers were at risk for behavioral problems. Protective factors included maternal sensitivity and the child's overall intellectual functioning (Weaver & Schofield, 2015).

Interventions/Programs for Divorce

As previous literature has shown that children who experience divorce at an early age are at a higher risk of having more internalizing and externalizing difficulties that can be seen in the classroom (Lansford et al., 2006), finding ways to promote proper adjustment is necessary. The narrative piece written by Pedro-Carroll (2005) mentioned earlier dives into the idea of evidence-based programs serving as an extrafamilial protective factor for children going through divorce (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). Furthermore, Sandoval's *Crisis Counseling, Intervention and Prevention in the Schools* (2013) adds that group techniques have been found to be successful to meet the needs of students in

stressful situations. Students who have lived in conflict may even prefer this method to increase the feeling of universality (Sandoval, 2013).

As students spend most of their day at school, schools are an ideal place for this population to receive support because “school can offer children nurturance and continuity as well as a place where age-appropriate developmental tasks can be pursued” (Sandoval, 2013, p. 67). Theodore’s (2016) edited handbook describes several divorce programs that have been listed in the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices. These include *Children in Between*, *Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP)*, *New Beginnings Program*, *Parenting Through Change*, and *Two Families Now: Effective Parenting Through Separation and Divorce*, with the only one focusing on children specifically being CODIP: a school-based group prevention program for children undergoing family changes (Theodore, 2016). Theodore (2016) noted there are a number of divorce programs, but few have been well researched. In addition, more research is needed to assess long-term effects of child-only prevention programs and to determine the real-world effectiveness; however, the divorce intervention programs that have been studied have been shown to have positive effects on children and parents, with the premise of reducing risk factors and promoting protective factors.

It is important for school personnel to utilize evidence-based treatments to ensure children are receiving the proper services. Forman et al. (2009) defines evidence-based interventions as “those that are empirically supported and substantiated with research findings that demonstrate beneficial and predictable outcomes.” Evidence-based interventions fall under the umbrella of “evidence-based practice” which focuses on

utilizing results from high-quality research, but also taking clinical experience and the needs and characteristics of the clients into consideration (Reed et al., 2017).

In Pedro-Carroll's (2005) article on fostering resilience in the aftermath of divorce, she emphasizes the need to "to rigorously evaluate interventions and design programs to reflect the research knowledge base... [and that it is beneficial to use] an integration of research and practice to guide the development of interventions for separating parents and their children" (Pedro-Carroll, 2005). As CODIP has a substantial evidence base documenting its effectiveness with different ages and socio-demographic backgrounds, it serves as the gold standard for school-based prevention programs targeting children of family disruption.

Pedro-Carroll included a list of best practices when implementing children's programs that included utilizing an evidence-based program, keeping a narrow age range between students, considering developmental appropriateness of interventions. In addition, this list included ensuring a safe and supportive group environment, providing skills training (i.e., problem solving, coping skills, help seeking), providing training in child mental health and group facilitation to group leaders, balancing the group by age and gender, keeping the group around five to eight participants, as well as leading the group with a co-lead (preferably one male and one female) (Pedro-Carroll, 2005).

Sandoval (2013) came to similar conclusions about group size (i.e. – five to eight), balancing the mix of gender within the group, and went further to add that one-hour sessions across a ten-week period is the "general consensus across the literature" (p. 77).

As these researchers have found great success in divorce intervention, these best practices

should be considered when looking to systematize interventions and programs for this specific population.

School Counselors as Interventionists

The American School Counselor Association defines school counselors as “highly educated, professionally certified individuals who help students succeed in school and plan their career... [as well as] help students form healthy goals, mindsets, and behaviors” (ASCA, 2022). A national study conducted by Foster, Young, and Hermann (2005) focused on identifying school counselors’ perceptions of the importance of their different work activities and how often they were performing them. A survey was sent electronically to 2,400 nationally certified school counselors, with a total of 526 yielding a response. Twenty-five work activities were listed in this study that promote personal/social development of students. These were taken from a previous job analysis of school counselors done by the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC). Two work activities that are particularly important to this research include “facilitate group process” and “counsel students concerning divorce in the family” (Foster et al. 2005, p. 317). Both group facilitation and divorce counseling had frequencies of 3.8 out of 5, which the study indicated meant these activities were *occasionally performed*. Both work activities had a mean rating of 4.1 out of 5 for importance, which the study indicated meant the respondents rated these activities to be *very important* overall. As school counselors tend to take on this role as ‘group facilitator’, it is important to understand their current experiences and perceptions of how divorce groups are led to inform future practice.

A conceptual article by Pincus et al. (2020) discusses the importance of school counselors providing mental health services to children, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the effects of the pandemic are still occurring, this is an important consideration with all youth including those experiencing divorce. An important concept mentioned in this article is Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the authors state, “There is a concern among experts that many students will be reentering schools from the COVID-19 lockdowns with family, after experiencing or witnessing multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)...” (Pincus et al. 2020).

According to the Centers for Disease Control, divorce is classified as an ACE under the category of household challenge or household dysfunction (CDC, 2021). The pandemic has led to increased stress and anxiety for both parents and their children, with increased family dysfunction being a possibility. Pincus et al. (2020) continues by describing school counselors as the front line for children regarding the assessment of social-emotional needs and providing support at the school while also being able to refer students and families to outside services. As school counselors are trained in mental health services as well as individual crisis situations including divorce; this profession is the focus of this research.

School Psychologists Roles as Interventionists

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), the largest professional association of school psychologists worldwide, school psychologists are “uniquely qualified members of school teams that support students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach” (NASP, 2021). These professionals provide services across ten domains of practice created by NASP to ensure a safe, healthy, and supportive

learning environment for students. The fourth domain, which heavily pertains to this research, is to provide mental and behavioral health services and interventions while utilizing evidence-based practices to promote positive social-emotional functioning. Within this broad domain, there are several professional practices including “[providing] a continuum of developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services, including individual and group counseling, behavioral coaching, classroom and school-wide social–emotional learning programs, positive behavioral supports, and parent education and support” (NASP, 2020, p. 6).

Hanchon and Fernald (2013) examined school psychologists’ provision of school-based counseling services. The researchers distributed a 42-item online survey to a national sample of 771 school psychologists. The survey covered three broad topics including 1) if school psychologists provided counseling services 2) training in counseling and 3) their perceptions regarding the need/importance of school psychologists to provide counseling services. Hanchon and Fernald (2013) found that 92% of school psychologists in their sample had some type of formal training in counseling services while 86% had opportunities to provide counseling services during their training experiences. Despite this, 58% of the sample indicated that they provide counseling services as full time professionals working in their school buildings, with individual and group counseling being the most frequent forms of intervention (Hanchon & Fernald, 2013). Although many school psychologists are not providing counseling services, this survey indicates that some are, and they have received the training to do so. As school psychologists are school-based mental health professionals that are capable of

provide counseling services, they are being added to this sample to increase the amount of information allocated on divorce groups.

Other Ways School Professionals Support Children of Divorce

With limited time and resources, groups may not always be feasible for students of divorce. School based mental health professionals such as school counselors and school psychologist can support children of divorce in multiple ways. Ellington (2003) went through a plethora of literature for her thesis to identify ways to support children going through divorce. From the literature, she found that beginning a mentor relationship with a trusted adult in the school, having a positive relationship with a teacher, and individual counseling can be beneficial for students before, during and after a divorce (Ellington, 2003). Additionally, facilitating access to relevant resources for the families, creating resource hand-outs for families, and promoting home and school collaboration are other ways that we can reduce negative outcomes (Ellington, 2003). After an extensive search of the literature, limited information was found about ways for school counselors and school psychologists to support children of divorce, outside of groups, that is research based. The search revealed that there is a large amount of information on alternative ways for teachers to help children of divorce; however, these seem to be uninvestigated ways circulating among online resources. School counselors and school psychologist can use these resources as a source of information to provide consultation for teachers working with children of divorce. It is helpful to understand what other supports are in place to ensure that even if small groups are not feasible that these students are still receiving some level of support in their school buildings.

Purpose

After reviewing the literature, it has been demonstrated that divorce is a well-researched topic, and that divorce has been shown to have negative consequences for children. This has been fairly consistent across decades of research (Lansford, 2009; Anderson, 2014). While all children may respond differently to divorce, elementary aged students are more at risk for externalizing and internalizing difficulties following divorce and separation which can affect various aspects in their lives, including academics (Lansford et. al, 2006). It has also been found that evidence-based programs can serve as a protective factor for these students (Pedro-Carroll, 2005), with school being the most likely place they would receive these interventions (Sandoval, 2013; Pincus et al., 2020). Utilizing evidence-based interventions and programs is considered best practice, as these interventions have been documented to be effective. As seen through the literature, school counselors are the most likely to provide these services, with school psychologists being another profession capable of doing so.

Currently, there are few evidence-based programs specifically for children experiencing family disruption or divorce indicating that the current form of practice is not systemized or organized to ensure effective results. The purpose of this mixed-methods survey design was to identify, via school counselors and psychologists, the current state of practice for facilitating divorce groups to inform future direction and promote the utilization of evidence-based programs as well as the systematization of group interventions for children of divorce.

The research questions that will guide this research include:

1. What is the current practice of school counselors and school psychologists in providing divorce groups in elementary schools?
 1. How does this align with evidence-based practice?
2. What are the primary resources utilized to provide services?
3. What are similarities in the way divorce groups are facilitated?
4. What are variations in the way divorce groups are facilitated?
5. What are limitations to utilizing evidence-based programs or interventions?
6. What other ways do school counselors and school psychologists support children of divorce?

Methodology

Research Design

For this particular study, a cross-sectional nonexperimental mixed methods survey was shared with school counselors and psychologists. A cross-sectional design encompasses “collecting data from two or more different samples at one time point” with the goal of examining the differences across the sample regarding the variable being measured (Brown & Sleath, 2016, p.42). As both school counselors and school psychologists work at different schools with different students, this would be considered a cross-sectional design. This type of design allowed the researcher to gather information from individuals who have had different experiences. A survey was chosen for this research study because it can gather more information and data across a quicker time span. This allowed the sample size to be larger and provided more perspectives to be heard compared to interviews or focus groups.

Lastly, a mixed methods approach indicates that the survey had a mixture of quantitative and qualitative items embedded throughout it. Hott et al. (2021) describes mixed methods research as “elements from each of the mono-method forms...are systematically blended for the purpose of expanding the depth of understanding of the research topics” (p. 241). With mixed methods, the researcher was able to bolster the descriptive statistics with the actual voices of the participants to allow for a fuller understanding of the concept.

Participants

Participants in this study included school counselors and school psychologists who worked in elementary schools and were employed in a county with a mix of rural and suburban areas in the southeast United States. The survey QR code was provided to thirty-five school counselors and school psychologists. The total sample yielded responses from ten counselors and seven school psychologists, with varied years of work experience as well as a variety of demographic areas they work in. This was a 49% completion rate.

Procedure

Prior to distributing the locally developed survey, the researcher attended two separate meetings, one comprised of school counselors and the other of school psychologists. This allowed the researcher to present the topic, explain the purpose of the research study and encourage participation. At the end of the meeting, the researcher displayed a QR code for the counselors and psychologists to scan on their own devices. This allowed for anonymity of those who participated. The landing item of the survey had the consent form that allowed participants to understand the benefits, risks, and

purpose of the survey. The participants either checked “Yes, I consent to participating in this research” or “No, I do not consent to participating in this research.” If they marked that they did not consent, the survey automatically ended. Placing the consent form within the survey allowed for complete anonymity as no consent forms were collected. The recruitment process for the sample consisted of participants scanning the QR code and checking whether or not they wanted to participate and complete the survey. After the consent form was read and the check box was chosen, the survey was completed. The survey took participants an average of twelve minutes to complete.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a locally developed mixed methods survey created by the researcher through Question Pro software. The survey was piloted with a convenient sample of a few school professionals. The survey had separate questions for individuals who had facilitated divorce groups and those who had not. If a participant had not facilitated a divorce group, they had 4 quantitative survey items they answered. If they indicated they had facilitated a divorce group, then they had a 23-item survey including 20 quantitative items that the participants were able to expand on, if necessary, and 3 qualitative items.

The quantitative items consisted of the question, with several answers provided for the participant to choose from to indicate their different practices. The qualitative items consisted of open-ended questions that required a detailed response. The items were based on current literature and aligned with the research questions listed previously. The last section of the survey was a demographic section that covered the participants’ years of experience, the demographic area they work in, and how they felt about their

training and educational experience with facilitating groups and working with children of divorce.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were used for both the demographic information of the participants as well as the quantitative items to assess the current state of practice for school counselors and psychologists. The open-ended qualitative questions were explored for themes and coded through emergent thematic analysis. This consisted of the individual responses being typed verbatim into a document, specific to the individual, who was assigned a number to keep track of the different response sets.

Responses across individuals were combined for each question, re-read, and scanned to identify similarities and differences between responses as well as overall themes. Each response was given an overall conceptual framework to start, and then broader themes were identified later in the research process. This was accomplished through the cut and sort method, described by Ryan and Bernard (2003) with the goal of identifying a wide range of themes. This looked like cutting out each qualitative quote and pasting the cut out on a small index card. On the back of each index card, the researcher wrote down the number of the individual who wrote it and whether they were a counselor or a psychologist. Next, the researcher laid out the quotes randomly on a big table and sorted them into piles of similar quotes to identify major themes throughout the answers (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

To integrate the two types of data, the researcher chose to utilize a convergent mixed method design which is defined as a design that collects the quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, analyzes them separately, and then combines them at

the end for interpretation (Hott et al., 2021). A convergent design was chosen by the researcher to ensure that the findings were integrated at the same time with the same weight attributed to each type of item. This data was compared in a joint manner to ensure that the two types of analyses are working together to help the researcher understand the overall concept. Each of the survey items was used to answer one of the listed research questions. Refer to Table 1.

The data was kept for two months to allow the researcher to code and analyze the data. Once this research was complete, the survey and data were deleted. This research was conducted on the JMU approved Questions Pro software and was done on a password protected computer.

Table 1

Representation of Items that Correlate to each Research Question

| Research Question: | Items for individuals who answer “yes” to facilitating groups: | Items for individuals who answer “no” to facilitating groups: |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | 1-11 | 1-4 |
| 2 | 12-13 | - |
| 3 | 1-11, 16 | - |
| 4 | 1-11, 16 | - |
| 5 | 14-15 | - |
| 6 | - | 4 |

Rigor and Trustworthiness

To uphold the standards of qualitative trustworthiness, the researcher employed several strategies throughout the research process. Confirmability, a strategy utilized to ensure neutrality of the findings was the first employed. Neutrality is the “degree to which the findings are a function solely of the informants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations, or perspectives” (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). This was

achieved by piloting the survey with a convenience sample of a few school professionals. This allowed the researcher to enhance item reliability and eliminate or reword any items that are interpreted in a different way by individuals outside the sample population.

Findings/Results

Quantitative Findings

The researcher utilized descriptive statistics and a frequency analysis to better understand the research questions presented for this topic. Below is a breakdown of the different quantitative items used to answer the research questions and the response for each item (Note: One item used to answer Research Question (RQ) 1 is found in the qualitative findings section as it required a qualitative response from participants).

Description of items in tables have been abbreviated and are followed by the survey item number in parenthesis that it correlates to. For exact wording for the item, refer to Appendix A.

To address the first research question (RQ1), data from items 1 through 11 were collected. The goal of this first research question was to identify the current state of practice of how divorce groups are facilitated and how this aligns with best practice. The data revealed that, within the county where data were collected, about half of the sample ran divorce groups. Several of the participants that indicated they have not led a divorce group reported that there are no professionals in the building offering this kind of intervention. Additionally, when asked why no one is providing this type of support, respondents indicated that other job responsibilities reduce the amount of available time for small group counseling. The other half of participants who indicated they do facilitate divorce groups had a separate set of questions that went into more detail about the

facilitation of the group and its make-up. Respondents reported that on average their groups have 4.44 students. In regard to a co-lead, a majority of group facilitators responded that they do not utilize a co-lead due to small group sizes and being the only one of their position in the school building. Almost every group facilitator noted that they change the interventions they are using depending on the developmental age of the child. Additionally, a majority indicated they have a mix of students from different grades and sexes. In terms of progress monitoring, the sample was split between participants that progress monitor and those who do not. The 55.56% of participants who answered they do progress monitor provided information about what means they utilized to do so. Of these participants, 80% used a pre- and post- self-report feelings survey while 20% conducted interviews with key stakeholders to gauge the overall effect. The survey items (1-11) can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Items 1 through 11 utilized to answer RQ1

| Item | Descriptive Statistics |
|---|--|
| Has facilitated a divorce group (Item 1) | 54.55% - Yes 45.45% - No |
| Who does? (Item 2 – If answered No) | 80% - No one |
| If answered, “No One” – asked why? (Item 3 – if answered No) | 50% - Other counselor/psychologist roles reduce availability of time |
| Number of students in group (Item 3) | 4.44 students on average |
| Have a co-lead (Item 4) | 77.78% - No 22.22% - Yes |
| Change intervention(s) for developmental level of students (Item 5) | 88.89% - Yes 11.11% - No |
| Grade and sex/gender make up (Items 6 & 7) | 66.67% - Mix of grades 57.14% - Mix of sexes |
| Progress Monitoring (Item 9) | 55.56% - Yes 44.44% - No |
| Total number of intervention periods (Item 10) | 5.62 on average |
| Number of weeks (Item 11) | 6.89 on average |

After reviewing this data, it was found that the psychologists and counselors who are leading groups have been able to implement some things that are considered best practice, despite barriers that may impede them from doing so. This included considering the developmental age of the students participating in the group, having a relatively small group, and attempting to balance the group by age and/or gender. There were several areas where these practitioners were unable to follow best practice and this was largely due to barriers discussed in RQ5. These included not leading a group with a co-lead, not conducting hour long sessions across ten weeks, and not utilizing evidence-based programs and interventions specific to divorce.

The second research question focused on the primary resources utilized to provide services to students experiencing family separation or divorce. To answer this question, data were collected from items 12 and 13. The participants were asked what type of interventions they utilize to provide support and were given several different options. 66.67% of group facilitators indicated they utilize a program with supplemented material from other interventions while the remaining participants reported they use an intervention or program that they created themselves. The participants were then asked how they go about choosing the interventions they use for this particular topic. Many indicated they either heard about the effectiveness of the intervention through word of mouth or learned about the intervention through a professional development opportunity. A few reported they utilized information they learned from their formal education. To investigate how mental health professionals are finding funds for these interventions, the participants were asked to “choose all that apply” for how they fund their resources. Many professionals indicated they used both their own personal funds and the school

budget, while one participant only utilized her own personal funds. The survey items (12-13) can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Items 12 and 13 utilized to answer RQ2

| Item | Descriptive Statistics |
|------------------------|--|
| Interventions utilized | 66.67% - Program that is supplemented material from other interventions 33.33% - Intervention/program they created themselves |
| Choosing interventions | 33.33% - Heard the intervention worked for others 33.33% - Through professional development opportunities 16.67% - Learned through education |
| Funding sources | 53.85% - Personal funds 46.15% - School budget |

The third and fourth research questions explored the similarities and differences in the way these divorce groups are facilitated. With the data provided by the school counselors and school psychologists, it has been found that there are more similarities than variations of how the majority of these participants are leading divorce groups. Many of the school counselors, due to COVID-19 budget cuts, are the only counselors in their buildings, with school psychologist's splitting schools and having much of their time occupied by special education testing. Similarities include: altering their interventions based on the developmental age of the child, leading groups independently, utilizing parent and teacher referrals to recruit participants, having groups that are not homogenous by sex or grade, and using a program that is supplemented with different intervention materials.

When analyzing the data, it was found that there were not many differences in the way these groups are being facilitated. The only exception found in the data included the number of individuals that progress monitor the interventions being provided to students.

The final research question aimed to identify alternative interventions used by school counselors and school psychologists to support children of divorce. The purpose of this particular research question was to better understand the entirety of supports mental health professionals are offering to students experiencing divorce. This question was posed to participants that had answered they do not provide divorce groups. From this data, it was found that a majority of individuals who are not providing groups will offer individual counseling and attempt to connect parents to outside resources. Several of the participants indicated that they provide teacher consultation to manage the student's needs within the classroom. This data can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Item 4 (of participants who answered no) utilized to answer RQ6

| Item | Percentages |
|---|--|
| Other ways to support children of divorce (Item 4 – if answered no) | 31.82% - Individual counseling 31.82% - Providing and connect parents to resources 27.27% - Teacher consultation |

Qualitative Findings

As previously mentioned, one of the items designed to answer RQ1 was a qualitative item. This item explored how participants recruit and/or choose participants for their divorce groups.

Through thematic analysis it was found that many participants utilize referrals as the way to identify students in need of support during a family disruption. Out of all the participants that lead divorce groups, it was found that 88% utilize parent/teacher referrals while 22% are proactive and reach out to offer the group by asking parents and teachers for students that may benefit from this kind of small-group intervention.

In addition, Research Question 5 utilized a qualitative item to explore what the participants believe to be limitations to utilizing evidence-based programs or interventions. To answer this research question, the participants were asked to provide a qualitative answer to gather information and personal thoughts from the professionals. The participants were first asked “What are the barriers to using evidence-based programs? Please list below.” After conducting a thematic analysis of the participants responses, the major themes that emerged included: cost of the programs and time it takes to implement/lack of time in the school day. Additional themes that were mentioned less frequently included: lack of training in these specific programs and teacher buy-in. To allow the voices of participants to be heard, a specific quote has been pulled from the anonymous responses:

“Timing is always difficult. Evidence-based programs are specifically designed to run through the entirety of their program. In schools, we don’t always have the luxury of time, so sometimes what was determined to be a 45-minute lesson (per the program or lesson plan) has to be cut into a 30-minute window that the school schedule allows. Then the school counselor has to prioritize what materials get covered vs. what gets “cut”. With so many school counselors doing this, I would think the validity of ‘evidence-based’ decreases” (Anonymous, 2023).

After being asked for the limitations, the participants were asked, “In your opinion, what are the advantages to using evidence-based programs? Please indicate below.” The following themes emerged from the participants responses: the content is already created and therefore requires less preparation, the programs are research/evidence based which leads to more effective results when done with fidelity,

and it is easier to evaluate the outcome and progress monitor. To allow the voices of participants to be heard, specific quotes have been pulled from the anonymous responses. One participant responded, “The ability to evaluate those interventions and show the impact of school counseling interventions on student outcomes can create a dialogue between educational stakeholders” (Anonymous, 2023). Another participant indicated, “The content is already created. We are not ‘reinventing the wheel’” (Anonymous, 2023). Lastly, a participant wrote, “Things are planned out, already researched, and ready to go – which is very beneficial in a busy school” (Anonymous, 2023).

Demographics

The following section was presented at the end of the survey to gather information about the participants and their feelings about their training in this particular area. It was found that 58.82% of the sample were school counselors while 41.18% were school psychologists. The school counselors had an average of five years of experience in their role while school psychologists had 16.86 years on average. A majority of the respondents worked in a school in the suburbs (52.94%), with a few located in rural (35.29%) or urban (5.88%) areas.

The last set of questions measured the participants beliefs on their training and their ability to support children of divorce. Many of the participants indicated that they have received formal education on the effects of divorce and that they have sought education informally as well. Despite this, there was a wide variety of answers about whether they were trained to lead divorce groups. It should be noted that a majority of counseling and school psychology programs provide training in facilitating small groups; however, this item focused on a specific type of group which may have negatively

skewed the answers. Lastly, there appeared to be a wide spread amongst the participants about their confidence in supporting children of divorce. 41.14% felt they could offer this support; however, 29.41% answered neutral and 29.41% answered disagree. Refer to Table 5 for Items 21 through 24.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics found in the Demographics Section

| Item | Responses |
|---|--|
| Position held (Item 21) | 58.82% - School Counselor 41.18% - School Psychologist |
| Years in position (Item 22) | School counselors: 5 years (average) School psychologists: 16.86 years (average) |
| Type of school area (Item 23) | 52.94% - Suburban 35.29% - Rural 5.88% - Urban 5.88% - No answer |
| Formal education on effects on divorce (Item 24) | 5.88% - Strongly Agree 47.06% - Agree 5.88% - Neutral 35.29% - Disagree 5.88% - Strongly Disagree |
| Sought informal education (Item 24) | 23.53% - Strongly Agree 64.71% - Agree 0% - Neutral 5.88% - Disagree 5.88% - Strongly Disagree |
| Trained to facilitate divorce groups (Item 24) | 5.88% - Strongly Agree 23.53% - Agree 23.53% - Neutral 41.18% - Disagree 5.88% - Strongly Disagree |
| Feels they can support every child of divorce in their building (Item 24) | 0% - Strongly Agree 41.18% - Agree 29.41% - Neutral 29.41% - Disagree 0% - Strongly Disagree |

Discussion

Implications

The aim of this study was to investigate the current state of practice among school counselors and school psychologists in how they facilitate small-group interventions for

children experiencing divorce or family separation. As divorce is considered an adverse childhood experience, it is important to gain further insight on how school-based mental health professionals are serving these children and how this aligns with best practice.

There are few programs specifically focusing on supporting school aged children experiencing divorce. Consequently, this means that there are not many evidence-based options for school-based professionals to use that are specifically, and heavily, researched in their use for divorce. The current study exemplified that there are barriers to utilizing these programs, despite their high rate of success for children. With the current situation of the county where the research was completed, budget cuts have reduced the number of mental-health professionals in elementary buildings, with the few psychologists already being split between two buildings. Consequently, about half of this study's sample indicated their other job responsibilities interfere with time available for counseling during the school day.

In regard to Research Question 1, it has been found that out of the total sample, about half of the professionals have conducted divorce groups in their school buildings. The professionals that answered 'no' indicated that at many of those schools, no one is facilitating groups to support children of divorce. When asked the question of 'why', participants responded that their other job responsibilities interfere with the availability to counsel during the school day. Out of the participants that do lead groups, 88% utilize parent and teacher referrals to recruit participants, typically having a mix of age and sex at an average of four students. It is important to recognize that several things that are being done by school-based professionals are consistent with best practice. The group make-up is especially important for service delivery as small groups, composed of

different individuals, allow for the feeling of universality and connection. There was about a 50/50 split between group facilitators on their use of progress monitoring. At this point in time, in this particular county, it appears that the main incongruencies with best practice are the time of service delivery and the materials utilized.

Concerning resources (RQ2), the data revealed that many participants are utilizing a mix of different interventions that they either learned from professional development opportunities or through word of mouth; however, none of the participants indicated utilizing an evidence-based program specifically researched on its use for children of divorce. Additionally, participants indicated that they utilize both their own personal funds and the school budget to fund these intervention materials.

In regard to similarities (RQ3) and differences (RQ4), this study has revealed that many of the professionals in the school buildings, that are able to conduct divorce groups, are leading them in a similar manner. They are following several components of best practice including matching the interventions to the developmental age of the children, attempting to balance the make-up of the group by age and sex/gender, and keeping their groups relatively small. Although participants had a wide range of responses about their training to facilitate a divorce group, it is known that many school counselor and school psychologist programs in the United States train their professionals about child mental health and group facilitation. This is considered best practice, even if it is not specific to working with children of divorce.

A key difference in the sample was their use of progress monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions. The professionals who did indicate that they

progress monitor primarily used a pre- and post- feelings survey, with a few utilizing follow up interviews with key stakeholders.

In this study it was found that only half, 55.56%, of the participants who lead divorce groups are utilizing this strategy to gauge the effectiveness of the intervention material they are using. Years of research support the importance of progress monitoring for academic interventions to allow for ample growth towards grade level expectations. This is something that is followed with for more fidelity, especially with the rise of Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) being used for academic concerns. Therefore, the utilization of progress monitoring should be weighted with equal importance in the use of socio-emotional and behavioral interventions. As difficulties with mental health and home situations can likely affect academic performance, school-based mental health professionals should ensure that what they are doing is effective for the students they work with.

Diana Joyce-Beaulieu and Michael L. Sulkowski (2020) provide many excellent examples of progress monitoring tools that can be used when providing socio-emotional or behavioral interventions. A few listed include: naturally occurring school data, observational data, knowledge/skills testing, daily behavioral report cards, subjective units of distress (SUDs), behavioral rating scales, and DSM-5 cross-cutting symptomology measures. The authors note that progress monitoring is a “key factor” in a well-implemented intervention model. Additionally, they mention other benefits to progress monitoring for socio-emotional and behavioral interventions that include deciding when a student no longer requires counseling or if a student requires more

intensive or multifaceted intervention plans (Joyce-Beaulieu & Sulkowski, 2020, p. 15-25).

Research Question 5 provided information and personal thoughts on the limitations, but also benefits, of utilizing evidence-based programs for children of divorce. Many of the participants mentioned that the cost of these programs along with the time they take is hindering their use in schools. Best practice encourages weekly one-hour sessions across a ten-week period. One participant noted in their qualitative response that these professionals are typically only given a thirty-minute window to work with students. Another participant made the point that, with this limited time, professionals would have to pick and choose what to present which reduces the fidelity of the program. Other participants mentioned that lack of training in specific programs and teacher buy-in can be limitations as well. Despite these limitations, these participants indicated that there are many benefits to utilizing these programs. These benefits included: easier preparation as the content is already created, higher rates of efficacy as the programs are heavily researched, and allows for easier progress monitoring that can be used to spark discussions among key stakeholders. There appears to be a gap in the positive view of evidence-based programs and their actual use. As a school psychologist by training, the use and promotion of evidence-based interventions/programs is heavily discussed throughout our training; however, the discussion of feasibility of said interventions/programs is something that is always brought up. This gap will be discussed in the Future Research section.

The goal of the final research question was to better understand what other ways school-based mental-health professionals are providing supports to children experiencing

divorce or family disruption, if small-group intervention is not entirely an option. To answer this question, an item was placed at the end of the survey for individuals who indicated they do not provide divorce groups in their school buildings. The data from the survey revealed that the three main means of support included: individual counseling, connecting families with outside resources, and consulting with teachers to manage the needs of the student. It is pertinent to provide interventions or support to these students, as research has demonstrated many of the negative consequences children of divorce experience. For current and future practice, practitioners may also want to consider having these students establish a relationship with a trusted adult in the building, create pamphlets or resource handouts for families, and promote home-school collaboration. These are means of supporting children of divorce that are supported by current literature (Ellington, 2003). Providing support in multiple ways for a student may allow these students to thrive and it allows for professionals to promote a safe and supportive school environment.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations including having a relatively small sample. The study gathered only seventeen participants which may not be indicative of the current state of universal practice. Similarly, this sample size was collected from the same county within a southeastern state in the United States. The current state of practice in operating small-group intervention may look different across regions or even counties, so this is not representative of a collective experience. Future studies may want to consider utilizing a more expansive sample to gather information from more professionals from a wider range of geographic areas to better understand the overall practice.

Additionally, the survey style of gathering data limits the amount of follow up that can be done after the data is collected. The researcher could not probe deeper and gain additional insight or ask for clarification. This means that the answers provided are the only information and deeper exploration was not feasible.

Future Research

At this point in time, there are several directions for future research in this area. To begin, future researchers could attempt to gather a more expansive sample as previously mentioned to explore more of a collective experience and possibly discover the current state of practice among states or even geographical regions. More importantly, this researcher feels that a more pertinent area of research is to be explored. In this survey, it was discovered that the individuals that facilitated divorce groups saw the benefit to utilizing evidence-based programs; however, the ratio of participants seeing the benefit and actually implementing this into practice was non-existent. This is due to the many barriers faced by school-based professionals including the cost of programs, the time it takes to implement them, student's schedules, teacher buy-in, and/or having the necessary resources and man power. Unfortunately, along with these barriers, professionals do not have many options available to them in terms of programs specifically for children. Future researchers interested in this topic could begin to create new programs and interventions to provide mental-health professionals with more options to serve this population.

Additionally, it may be important and beneficial to begin having evidence-based practice meet school-based practice in the middle. With the current state of public education, it appears the feasibility of evidence-based programs is next to none. Future

research could dive into creating evidence-based programs that are able to be implemented with fidelity in the current school system. For example, conducting research on the difference between a divorce group that is conducted for an hour a week for ten weeks with a group that is conducted for thirty minutes a week across eight weeks. If evidence-based practices can begin to fit the expectations of public education and what will be easier, but still effective for practitioners, then we may see a rise in these practitioners being able to provide these practices and programs to students.

Additionally, conducting research on the impact of providing group intervention in the school setting while also supporting the family system. Divorce impacts an entire family unit; therefore, it would be beneficial to see if providing support in multiple areas would prove to be even more beneficial for the students.

Lastly, it would be beneficial for future research in this area to hear from the students living this experience and investigate their perspectives. Focus groups or interviews with students of divorce or family disruption may provide insightful information on what students in schools need from staff in the building or what they would find to be helpful within an intervention.

Conclusion

In conclusion, children of divorce and family disruption are at-risk for experiencing a number of negative outcomes including internalizing difficulties, lower academic achievement, difficulty with socialization, and more. As children spend a majority of their time in school, schools can play a major role in providing them with the supports to cope with this significant change. That being said, these supports should be evidence-based to ensure the best outcomes for students. School systems attempt to

ensure that all academic instruction and interventions are evidence-based with different programs and curriculums; however, this is not pushed in the realm of behavioral or socio-emotional interventions as much. If evidence-based programs can become a more feasible option, then we may see a shift towards utilizing these supports such as divorce groups.

For future practice, it may be beneficial to have research and the reality of education meet in the middle. Research may want to understand the barriers and constraints placed on school-based practitioners and begin to consider these when designing interventions; however, there may be ways for school-based professionals to find ways to promote evidence-based practice in the realm of socio-emotional interventions. When planning a divorce group, practitioners may want to advocate for time needed to provide intervention, using evidence-based programs, and assessing outcomes for these students through progress monitoring. Over the years, research has found that a child's mental health and well-being has significant impacts on their ability to learn and perform in the classroom. Therefore, if school-based professionals know a child is going through an adverse childhood experience, the goal should be to provide the best possible support for them and their families to ensure they succeed in not only their academics, but also their overall well-being.

Appendix 1.1 – Survey Items

Current Practice

1. In your role as a school counselor or school psychologist, have you ever run a divorce group, in an elementary school?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 1. Who does?
 1. No one
 1. Why? Choose all that apply:
 1. Other counseling or psychology roles take up the time
 2. Not enough need from students
 3. Not enough need/support from families
 4. Lack of support from teachers/administrators to pull children from class
 5. Limited human resources
 6. Limited fiscal resources
 7. Other: Please Explain _____
 2. Another school psychologist
 3. Another school counselor
 4. Another employee (please indicate their role): _____
 2. What other ways do you support children in your schools that either are going through or have gone through divorce? Please check all that apply.
 1. Starting a mentor relationship with the student and a trusted adult in the building
 2. Individual counseling
 3. Providing and connecting parents to resources
 4. Promoting home-school collaboration
 5. Consultation with teachers
 6. Other (Please Explain): _____
2. Please describe how you recruit and/or choose participants for your divorce groups.
 1. _____
3. On average, how many students do you typically have in a divorce group?
 1. Sliding scale: 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 10+
4. Do you have a co-lead with whom you co-facilitate group?
 1. Yes
 2. No
 1. Please indicate the reason: _____
5. Do you change your intervention/program materials based on the developmental level of students?

1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Unsure
6. Please indicate which answer describes the grade level make up of your average group.
1. All students are in the same grade
 2. The students are a mix of grades
7. Please choose all that apply regarding the sex and gender make up of your average group.
1. All same sex
 2. All same gender
 3. Mix of sexes
 4. Mix of genders
8. From your experience, what do you think are the most beneficial type of group make ups for the students? Please choose your top three answers.
1. Students all from the same grade and same gender or sex
 2. Students from different grades and the same gender or sex
 3. Students from the same grade with a combination of gender or sex
 4. Students from different grades and a combination of gender or sex
 5. Students with similar years of experience with divorce (For example, all the students' parents have separated/divorced recently)
 6. Students with different years of experience with divorce (For example, some students are going through recent family change, and some have already experienced the family change)
 7. Other (Please indicate your response): -

9. Do you progress monitor the students in your group (pre-interview/data and post-interview/data)?
1. Yes
 1. How? Please list: _____
 2. No
 3. Unsure
10. On average, what is your total number of intervention periods for a divorce group?
1. Sliding scale: 1 ----- 40
11. How many weeks do you typically hold your group?
1. Sliding scale: 1 week ----- 20 weeks

Primary Resources

12. What type of intervention do you use in your group?
1. Specific Program: Please List _____
 2. Program with supplemented material from other interventions
 3. Intervention/Program you've created
 1. How do you choose what you use? Choose all that apply.
 1. From the literature

2. Things learned from your school counseling education
3. Heard it worked from others
4. Professional development opportunities
5. Other (Please indicate): _____

13. How are the resources you use funded? Choose all that apply:

2. Your personal funds
3. Through the school budget
4. Through the state budget
5. Parental support
6. Other (Please indicate): _____

14. What are barriers to using evidence-based programs? Please list below:

15. In your opinion, what are the advantages to using evidence-based programs? Please indicate below.

16. From your experience, please indicate the top three skills that you think are the most important for your students in the groups to work on:

1. Identification of feelings
2. Expressing feelings
3. Enhancing coping skills surrounding the divorce
4. Social problem-solving skills
5. Interpersonal skills
6. Building self-esteem
7. Other (Please indicate): _____

17. In your experience, what do you consider to be protective factors for elementary aged students experiencing divorce?

1. Select all that apply:
 1. Effective coping skills
 2. Realistic appraisal of control (Not blaming themselves)
 3. Supportive parent-child relationship
 4. Economic Stability
 5. Structure and stability in the home
 6. Social support
 7. Protection from interparental conflict
 8. Intelligence
 9. Other (Please List: _____)

18. In your experience, what have you seen to be the **most salient** protective factors for elementary aged students experiencing divorce?

1. Please Rank:
 1. Effective coping skills
 2. Realistic appraisal of control (Not blaming themselves)
 3. Supportive parent-child relationship
 4. Economic Stability

5. Structure and stability in the home
6. Social support
7. Protection from interparental conflict
8. Intelligence
9. Other (Please List: _____)

19. In your experience, what do you consider to be risk factors for elementary aged students experiencing divorce?

1. High parental conflict
2. Maternal mental health
3. Unsupportive home environment
4. Non-stimulating home environment
5. Socio-Economic Status
6. Lack of social support
7. Other (Please List): _____

20. In your experience, what have you seen to be the **most salient** risk factors for elementary aged students experiencing divorce?

1. High parental conflict
2. Maternal mental health
3. Unsupportive home environment
4. Non-stimulating home environment
5. Socio-Economic Status
6. Lack of social support
7. Other (Please List): _____

Demographics

21. Are you a...

- a. School counselor
- b. School psychologist
- c. Prefer not to answer

22. How many years have you been working as a school counselor or school psychologist?

1. Sliding Scale (Less than 1 year → 50 years)

23. What type of school area do you work in?

- i. Urban
- ii. Rural
- iii. Suburban
- iv. No answer

24. For the following four questions, indicate the extent to which you disagree or agree with the following statements:

- a. I have received formal education (e.g., graduate course work, continued education units) on the effects of divorce on children
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree

- b. I have sought informal education (e.g., reading, web searches) on the effects of divorce on children
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree
- c. I have been trained to facilitate divorce groups with children
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strong Disagree
- d. Do you feel that you are able to support every child of divorce or separation in your school building?
 - i. Strongly Disagree
 - ii. Disagree
 - iii. Neutral
 - iv. Agree
 - v. Strongly Agree

Appendix 1.2 – Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Stephanie Harris, M.A. from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to identify the current state of practice of divorce groups run in elementary schools. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of her master's thesis.

Research Procedures

This study consists of an online survey that will be administered to individual participants through Question Pro. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to the way you run divorce groups.

Time Required

Participation in this study will require twenty minutes of your time.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

Benefits

Potential benefits from participation in this study include providing information that will benefit the future direction of providing evidence-based services for students struggling with family disruption and divorce.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented at the 2023 JMU graduate symposium. While individual responses are anonymously obtained and recorded online through the Question Pro software, data is kept in the strictest confidence. No identifiable information will be collected from the participant and no identifiable responses will be presented in the final form of this study. All data will be stored in a secure location only accessible to the researcher. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. At the end of the study, all records will be destroyed. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. However, once your responses have been submitted and anonymously recorded you will not be able to withdraw from the study.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Stephanie Harris
Graduate Psychology
James Madison University
Harri9sn@dukes.jmu.edu

Debi Kipps-Vaughan
Graduate Psychology
James Madison University
Kippsvdx@jmu.edu

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Dr. Lindsey Harvell-Bowman
Chair, Institutional Review Board
James Madison University
(540) 568-2611
harve2la@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about this study. I have read this consent and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age. By clicking on the link below, and completing and submitting this anonymous survey, I am consenting to participate in this research.

Name of Participant (Printed)

Date

This study has been approved by the IRB, protocol # _____.

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