

Young Children's Emotional Well-Being After Parental Divorce: Discrepancies Between "Resilient" and "Vulnerable" Children

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Abstract

The study examined young (4 to 7 years old) children's resilience under the stressors of parental divorce. Resilience was indirectly inferred based on constructs such as attention, emotional and behavioral regulation, ability to take initiatives, positive relationships with others and parents' sensitive response to child's needs. It was conducted with a representative sample of 130 divorced parents from different regions in Greece. Based on parents' perception concerning the level of competence and adversity that children had faced due to divorce the sample was divided into two groups (a) those families who considered the child of reference as more 'vulnerable' (38.5%) and those who considered the child as more 'resilient' (61.5%). Data showed that children who were considered as adaptive to divorce stressors exhibited more positive outcomes compared to children who considered by their parents as at risk. The gender of the child did not interact with the experience of transition with respect of the wellness components. This study also considered the possible discrepancies between the two groups of children in some factors that have been related to children's well-being after divorce. Thus, another important finding revealed that the parents of the 'more resilient' children experienced less parental stress, had more supportive relationships with their ex-spouses, felt more satisfied with their lives and quarreled less with their children. In agreement with previous studies this paper underlined the necessity of studying divorce under the concept of resilience rather than the risk, shedding light on some of the critical protective factors.

Keywords: resilience, divorce, protective and risk factors, early childhood

1. Introduction

The increases in divorced families have been among the most visible features of the recent decades of family change and thus it has aroused a considerable interest in the research literature. Greece follows the generalized long-standing trend of a rising divorce rate over the past 30 years (from 0.6 per 1000 persons in 1991 to 1.3 in 2014) even though a modest and stabilized decline at the last seven years is recorded (Eurostat, 2015), which may be related with the Greek economic crisis since 2009. An increase in the rate of children who grow up in divorced families is also observed, considering that at least on half of the divorce cases there is at least one child in the family. Furthermore, it has been estimated that about 40% of children worldwide will experience their parents' separation before adulthood (Amato, 2010).

A number of scholars view family transition following parental divorce as an adversity that disrupts parent-child relationship and exposes both parents and children to adaptive challenges and stressors (Hetherington, 2003; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Some of the major stressors children of divorced families experience are high inter-parental conflicts pre and post-divorce, the absence or the intermittent contact with one parent and the loss of intimate relationship with beloved ones (e.g., grandparents, friends), parent's impaired physical or/and mental health and non-authoritative parenting. In addition, decline in family income and instabilities in family environment (e.g., multiple moves, living in deprived neighborhoods with higher crime rates and fewer resources, high rates of unemployment, changing in daily routines and parent's availability) have been related to increased likelihoods of adverse outcomes, particularly for those children who are at high risk following their parents' separation (Amato, 2014; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007; Greef & Van Der Merwe, 2004; Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Karela & Petrogiannis, 2018). From a different position, other researchers perceive divorce as a legal condition that offers some families an alternative choice to an unsatisfying, conflictual or abusive marriage, legitimizes disagreement between spouses and enhances the opportunities to restructure a new, more fulfilling

family life for children (Demo, Allen, & Fine, 2000).

Not long has there been a shift in research literature from traditional deficit-based approach which focuses on risk and difficulties, to strengths-based approach which mainly focuses on potentialities and promotive conditions under which positive results can be produced. In that term, resilience is considered as an evolving concept for studying divorce experience and it generally encompasses three main usages in the related literature: a) good developmental outcomes despite the confronting risk, b) sustained competence under stress and c) readjustment from trauma (Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2018).

1.1 Resilience and Vulnerability After Parental Divorce

In spite of accumulating research findings, there has still remained an inconclusive debate about the impact of the family breakdown on children's long-term adjustment and general well-being. Extent literature concludes that not all children are similarly affected by the stressors of divorce and presents a mixture of reactions which range from vulnerability to resilience (Kelly, 2012). Indicatively, despite the considerable agreement that children in the immediate aftermath of divorce are at higher risk than their counterparts of non-divorced families for the development of externalizing disorders (e.g., aggression, conduct problems, noncompliance, delinquent behavior, low self-regulation) or internalizing problems including higher levels of depression, anxiety and lower levels of self-esteem, impairments in interpersonal skills (e.g., involvement with antisocial peers, negativity and conflicts), poorer learning motivations, lower school performance and engagement (Amato, 2010; Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Hipke, Wolchik, Sandler, & Braver, 2002), there is less consensus on the magnitude of the differences, especially taking into consideration more large-scale and methodologically or statistically more sophisticated studies (Amato, 2001). Furthermore, according to Amato (1994) there is great overlap between the two groups, with the majority of children of divorced families failing within the average range of adjustment on standardized measures.

Other studies claimed that the adjustment and achievement problems children of divorce encounter can partly be explained by children's experiences within marriages (e.g., high-conflict marriage, inept parenting practices) that finally end up to divorce (Kelly, 2000). More specifically, according to research findings, when divorce is perceived as a shift to a more balanced and less anxious family life where authoritative parenting practices are experienced, children in divorced families are similar in adjustment to children in low-conflicted, non-divorced families and display better developmental outcomes than children in high-conflict, non-divorced families (Hetherington, 1999). Furthermore, Kim (2011) examining the impact of divorce on various areas of child development (e.g., reading skills, external reactions) before, during, and after parental separation, did not detect particularly harmful effects on children at any of the phases of divorce.

Recent evidence suggests that the intense emotional and behavioral problems children of divorce may meet diminish over time and that most of the children appear to 'bounce back' from adversity and adjust to their new family condition at the end of the second year after divorce and the third to the fifth year after the second marriage of one parent (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002; Rogers, 2004). Extent findings also show that a vast majority of children and adolescents (75-80%), despite confronting more adversities pre and post-divorce, seem capable to cope with them by building strengths and resources or even benefit from their new life situation and eventually thrive as reasonably competent adults (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Rushena, Prior, Sanson, & Smart, 2005).

It is thus underlined that in the absence of new stressors resilience is the normative outcome for children who cope with their parents' divorce. Cognitive skills, positive emotions, lack of behavioral problems, positive social relationships and high levels of self-esteem are among the key index represented positive outcomes to a psychosocial risk and are usually used to measure the dynamic concept of resilience (Motti-Stefanidi, 2014).

Being resilient to adaptive challenges associated with parents' marital transition signifies that some factors buffer children or reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes when coping with undesirable circumstances with respect to divorce. In the relevant literature protective effects are connected among others factors in an ontogenetic level, with easy temperament, internal locus of control, high self-esteem, mental capacities (e.g., normal or above-average intelligence), sense of humor, social competence, physical attractiveness and active coping styles (Buchanan & Ritchie, 2004; Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). Low conflicts, supportive relationships within the family members, authoritative parenting (e.g., warm, supportive and responsive to child's needs parent who exerts consistent control and firm supervision) and supportive social networks outside the family (e.g., school personnel, peers, mentors) have also been identified in the more proximal or distal contextual level as enhancing the well-being of the children beside divorce experience (Becher et al., 2019; Hetherington, 2003). Researchers also stress on the importance of the emotional presence of the non-custodial parent who is involved in the everyday activities of children's lives and the frequency of communication with him/her as an indicator of positive

adjustment (Bauserman, 2002). A few studies have shown that siblings may serve as a buffer from the adverse consequences associated with post-divorce family transition (Young & Ehrenberg, 2007). Another factor that has been found to contribute to children's positive adaptation is minimal conflict and supportive, cooperative parenting after divorce based on mutual trust and consent (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). This presupposes that divorced parents have resolved their own disagreements and avoid any conflicts that directly involve the child (Hawthorn, Jessop, Pryor, & Richards, 2003). Finally school based or parenting intervention programs seem to play an increasingly salient role in children's well-being aftermaths of divorce experience (Wyman, 2003).

1.2 Rationale and Aim of the Current Study

The focus of the paper was to better understand the diversity in the well-being of young children (4 to 7 years old) whose parents got divorced at least a year before the period of the study. Attention, emotional and behavioral regulation, ability to take initiatives, positive relationships with others and sensitivity of parents to child's needs have been set as criteria for judging children's affective wellness after divorce. The issue was addressed from a resilience oriented perspective examining the individual strengths and environmental factors that can contribute to positive outcomes. Moreover, there was a lack of in-depth attention to the developmental outcomes associated with parental divorce for preschool-aged children compared with school-aged children and adolescents (see, for example, McIntosh & Tan, 2017). Leon (2003) have mentioned that the developing social and cognitive abilities of preschoolers, the greater dependency of their parents, the possible feeling of responsibility for the separation and the greater fear of abandonment may lead to different responses to divorce than older children. It is of the interest of the current study to focus on early childhood, as it is argued by some researchers that it is a sensitive period when major family changes may have a greater influence on how early experience could affect the way to cope with later challenges (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000).

The research questions that guided the current study were the following: (a) "Did children considered by their parents as more 'resilient' to the stressors of divorce exhibit more positive outcomes (attention, self-regulation, positive relationships with others etc.) at least one year after divorce than the more 'vulnerable' children"? (b) "Is there an interaction between gender and children's ability to cope with divorce with respect to measures of affective wellness"? (c) "Were there any discrepancies between the two groups of children in some of the factors that are related in the relative literature to divorce, such as parent-child relationship, co-parenting, parental stress, satisfaction of life and availability of social sources"?

2. Method

2.1 Participants and Procedures

The sample consisted of 130 divorced parents (114 mothers and 26 fathers) with young children aged between 4 to 7 years old who lived in large or medium-sized town at various regions of Greece (Athens, Thessaloniki, Patra, Volos, Crete, and Corfu). Their age was ranged from 24 to 49 years ($M = 36.9$, $SD = 4.28$). The majority of the parents was well-educated or had an advanced training beyond high school (68%). They were employees (65.4%) and almost half of them declared an average income level. Of the participants 59.4% of the divorced parents had one child, 30.5% had two children, 7.8% had three children and 2.4% had four or more children.

Participants' recruitment was conducted through organizations for divorced families, advocacy club, early childhood educational and care institutions and related groups in the social media (e.g., facebook), following a type of snowball sampling procedure. All potential participants received a cover letter informing about the purpose and the procedure of the study, underlining parents' contribution to this attempt and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. If they were interested in participating they were requested to fill a consent form and complete their contact information. In turn an electronic or printed form of the questionnaire was distributed via the researches to them. Due to the sensitivity of the personal data and children's young age, parents were the main informants concerning the child, themselves and family transition. Only participants who had been divorced within at least one year before their recruitment to the study and, additionally were parents of children aged from 4 to 7 years old were retained for the study.

Concerning the inclusion criteria, participants had been married for an average of 7 years (range: 1–21 years, $SD = 4.47$ years) and divorced in an average of 3 years prior to the period of study (range: 11 months to 8 years, $SD = 23.86$ months). Sixty three percent of the divorce cases were by mutual consent while the rest were by dispute resolution. Regarding children (56 females and 74 males), their age ranged between 3.6 to 7.25 years, with a mean age of 5.7 years. Of the children, 43% were attending kindergarten schools or daycare centers, 31.5% were in the second year of primary school, 23.1% were in the first year of primary school and 2.3% were not attending any educational institution.

2.2 Measures

The questionnaire used to elicit data on the study was constituted by a cluster of scales chosen to provide a valid measure of the selected constructs and relative variables. Some scales were developed according to the needs of the current study, while others were adapted from former studies, modified appropriately (e.g., back translation method) and piloted. All scales were subjected to the necessary psychometric properties and procedures accordingly.

Child's attitude to marital transition was assessed by five related statements answered according to parents' perception: *'I think that divorce is the most stressful event my child have ever experienced so far'*, *'In general I believe that my child succeeds in coping with divorce stressors'*, *'I appreciate that divorce cause many problems to my child'*, *'My child gets in more troubles at school after the divorce'* and, *'My child blame him/ herself for the divorce'*. Evaluations of whether the statements held true for each individual were given on a three-point scale ranging from "hardly true" (1) to "definitely true" (3).

Children's emotional well-being was assessed by a modified version of the initial form of "Affective Wellness Scale for preschool children" (Petrogiannis & Bardos, 2011). This scale, which was appropriately adjusted to be completed by parents, consisted of 53 items following a 4-point rating scale from "never" to "always". The items fell into six domains: attention, emotional and behavioral regulation, ability to take initiatives, positive relationships with others, parents' sensitive response to child's needs and cooperation with school. Cronbach reliability indices for the six domains ranged from 0.76 to 0.93 (e.g., attention, $\alpha = 0.91$; emotional and behavioral regulation, $\alpha = 0.84$; ability to take initiatives, $\alpha = 0.76$; positive relationships with others, $\alpha = 0.91$; parents' sensitive response to child's needs, $\alpha = 0.93$; and cooperation with school, $\alpha = 0.85$).

Parent-child relationship quality was measured using the "Parent-Child Emotional Relationship" subscale from the "Home and Family Questionnaire" (HFQ) (Pierce, Alfonso, & Garrison, 1998). It is consisted of 16 items loaded on five factors: parent-child conflict, parental warmth vs. physical punishment, emotional openness, parental hostility and parent-child communications. Each item was measured using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "very often". The subscale demonstrated adequate reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.67$) and appropriate construct validity.

The quality of relation between divorced parents was assessed by the "Quality of Co-parental Communication Scale" (Ahrns, 1981). The scale is comprised by 10 items which were rated along a 5-point rating scale (1 = "never" to 5 = "always") and two subscales –labeled degree of inter-parental 'conflict' and 'support'. The conceptual framework of the scale refers to childrearing agreement, co-parental support/undermining and joint management of family dynamics. Items of inter-parental 'conflict' subscale reversed appropriately so that higher total scores in the full scale indicated greater co-parenting agreement, closeness and support. Cronbach's alphas for inter-parental 'support' and 'conflict' were 0.82 and 0.91, respectively.

Parental Stress was measured using a 7 item subscale of the section entitled "subjective parenting stress" in the "Nijmegen Child-Rearing Situation Questionnaire" (NCSQ) (see, for example, Veerman, De Kemp, Ten Brink, Slot, & Scholte, 2003). The answers are scored according to a Likert type scale with five alternatives ranging from 1 = "agree completely" to 5 = "disagree completely". Items were reversed appropriately so that higher scores indicate lower levels of parental stress. The Dutch psychometric testing of the NCSQ's subscale indicated good psychometric properties -internal consistency ranged from 0.68 to 0.92 and correlation coefficients for test-retest ranged from 0.60 to 0.94.

Social support and networks were assessed by the "Social Support Scale" of ELSPAC (see, for example, Petrogiannis, 1994). The constructs of the quality of social interactions and the extent of social networks were covered by a 10 items self-report measure. Reliability indices in Greek studies estimated as moderate (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.67$).

Parental subjective feeling of satisfaction of life was measured by the "Life Satisfaction Inventory" (LSI) (Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin, 1961) adapted in Greek by Fountoulakis, Iakovidis, Iakovidis, Xristofidis, and Ierodiakonou (1997). The 13 items of the scale covered the major aspects of individual's life (e.g., general well-being, family life, financial status and job, mental and general health) and were answered in a 5-level scale ranging from 1 = "very displeased" to 5 = "very pleased". The Greek adapted version of the scale presented high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$).

3. Results

3.1 The Allocation of Children Into Vulnerable and Resilient Groups

In order to find out those children that have been perceived by their parents as being at ‘greater risk and vulnerability’ as well as those that were considered as ‘resilient’ to adversity of divorce, participant-parents’ answers to the statements referring to child’s attitude to marital transition were further analyzed and recoded. Based on the level of competence (e.g., ‘*In general I believe that my child succeeds in coping with divorce stressors*’) and the degree of adversity (e.g., ‘*I appreciate that divorce cause many problems to my child*’) children experienced according to their parent’s perception, participants were subdivided into two groups: (a) parents who concerned about child’s adaptation to the stressors of divorce (“vulnerable group”) (38.5%) and (b) parents who agreed that the child seemed to do well after separation (“resilient group”) (61.5%) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Children’s allocation to resilient and vulnerable groups

Children characteristics	Vulnerable group (N=42)		Resilient group (N=67)		
	N	%	N	%	
School grade	preschool education (4-5 years old)	19	45	28	41.8
	primary education (6-7 years old)	23	55	39	58.2
Gender	boy	26	61.9	36	53.7
	girl	16	38.1	31	46.3

3.2 Comparison of Affective Wellness Between Groups

In order to illustrate possible differences between vulnerable and resilient group in the five dimensions related to young children’s affective wellness (e.g., attention, emotional and behavioral regulation, ability to take initiatives, positive relationships with others, parents’ sensitive response to child’s needs) an independent samples t-test was performed with SPSS Statistics 20.0. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparisons between the two groups along the five variables representing affective wellness

Variables of affective wellness	Vulnerable group			Resilient group			t	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Attention	37	29.35	4.34	58	31.93	3.95	-2.98	.004
Emotional & behavioral regulation	40	20.48	4.52	63	23.27	3.63	-3.29	.002
Ability to take initiatives	39	26	3.60	56	28.13	3.57	-2.85	.005
Positive relationships with others	39	38.54	6.02	55	41.82	4.82	-2.93	.004
Parents’ sensitive response to child’s needs	42	19.69	2.93	63	19.94	2.36	-0.475	.636

The results in Table 2 showed that parents who had perceived their child as resilient reported significantly higher levels of attention representing a very strong effect ($d = 0.62$), higher emotional and behavioral regulation representing a very strong effect ($d = 0.68$), greater ability to take initiatives representing a strong effect ($d = 0.59$) and more positive relationships with others representing a strong effect ($d = 0.60$), than those parents who concerned about their child’s behavior and development. There were not revealed statistically significant differences with regard to parents’ sensitive response to child’s needs.

We then examined the five variables of child affective wellness in relation to parents’ report about transition to divorce (resilient or vulnerable) and gender (boy or girl) applying an independent two-way ANOVA (see Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for gender and parents' report about transition to divorce according to variables of affective wellness

Variables of affective wellness	Boys						Girls						F	p
	Vulnerable group			Resilient group			Vulnerable group			Resilient group				
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Attention	23	29.74	5.07	29	32.24	3.71	14	28.71	2.79	29	31.62	4.22	9.33	.003
Emotional & behavioral regulation	26	20.73	3.86	34	23.59	4.13	14	20	4.52	29	22.90	3.63	0.71	.003
Ability to take initiatives	25	26.84	3.42	27	28.30	3.48	14	24.50	3.53	29	27.97	3.70	10.55	.002
Positive relationships with others	24	39.38	6.47	28	41.79	5.15	15	37.20	5.16	27	41.85	4.56	9.57	.003
Parents' sensitive response to child's needs	26	19.54	3.18	33	19.82	2.28	16	19.94	2.54	30	20.07	2.48	3.44	.660

These results showed that there was a significant main effect for parents' perception about child's transition to divorce for attention ($d = 0.32$), for emotional and behavioral regulation ($d = 0.34$), for ability to take initiatives ($d = 0.34$) and for positive relationships with others ($d = 0.33$). No significant main effect was found for parents' sensitive response to child's needs. There was no main effect of gender suggesting no difference between boys and girls with regard to scores of attention, emotional and behavioral regulation, ability to take initiatives, positive relationships with others and parents' sensitive response to child's needs. There was no interaction effect between gender and transition to divorce in any of the above variables as well.

3.3 Comparison of Divorce Related Factors Between the Two Groups

Differences between the 'resilient' and the 'vulnerable' group were examined with respect to some of the major factors related to divorce, namely: parent-child relationship, quality of co-parenting, parental stress, available social support and parent's satisfaction of life. Because the data were not normally distributed concerning the parent-child relationship, quality of co-parenting, parental stress and available social support, the non-parametric of Mann-Whitney U test was used (see Table 4). In all other cases, independent t-test was run.

Table 4. Comparisons between the two groups in respect of divorce related factors

Divorced related factors	Vulnerable group			Resilient group			U	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Low level of parental stress	40	19.03	4.04	67	22.42	3.78	743.5	.000
parent-child conflict	42	8.17	2.02	67	7.39	1.89	1079	.038
parent-child relationship								
parental warmth vs. physical punishment	42	13.86	1.74	65	14.25	1.66	1182	.233
emotional openness	42	8.33	2.21	67	7.70	2.41	1176.5	.148
parental hostility	42	10.69	1.37	66	10.92	1.32	1229.5	.300
parent-child communications	42	4.95	1.39	65	4.49	1.34	1091	.070
Supportive co-parenting	41	21.15	5.6	62	25.10	6.4	832.5	.003
Social support	39	30.15	4.74	64	30.86	4.36	1190.7	.700

The results in Table 4 indicated that parents in resilient group had significantly lower levels of parental stress, less conflicts with the child, and more supportive co-parenting than those in vulnerable groups. With regard to parental warmth or hostility, emotional openness, communication between parent and child and the availability of social support, no significant differences had been found between the two groups.

Independent samples t-test was used to examine the outcome referring to parent's satisfaction of life. A statistically significant difference was indicated between the two groups [$t_{(79)} = -2.901, p = 0.005$]. It was revealed that parents in resilient group reported greater satisfaction of their lives (mean = 35.42, S.D. = 7.82) than those in the vulnerable group (mean = 30.52, S.D. = 6.63).

4. Discussion

Referring to the international and Greek literature on the psychological health of children from divorced families most recent evidence indicates a clear turn of interest towards the study of resilience rather than risk factors (see, for example, Greene, Anderson, Forgatch, DeGarmo, & Hetherington, 2011; Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Rushen et al., 2005). Subsequently, the researches have oriented to revealing features and capabilities that allow children to recover from adversity and grow up without significant deficits.

This study attempted to contribute to the research literature on the well-being of children who have experienced their parents' divorce by: (a) comparing affective wellness in groups of young children who, according to their parents' perception, showed different level of competence and adversity at least one year after marriage dissolution, (b) examining the possible interaction with gender and, (c) studying some of the major individual and environmental factors in divorce process that have been appointed in the relative literature to impact the development of children.

According to the current findings, the majority of parents indicated that the child was, in general, able or almost capable of coping with the stressors raised by the divorce process (61.5%), while noticeable lower was the percentage of parents who questioned the adequacy of the child to face it (38.5%). Of the divorcees the 30.7% of the parents expressed the need to consult a mental health specialist with reference to divorce management issues, while only 7.2% of them reported psychological or behavioral difficulties in the child (e.g., anger, aggression, phobias). The majority of divorced parents did not associate divorce with problems related to school (68%) and did not believe that the child might have felt responsible for their separation (77%).

In a former longitudinal study conducted by Hetherington et al. (1979) they similarly concluded that most preschoolers who have experienced their parents' separation have managed to achieve a new adjustment the years following divorce, although some problems may remain especially among boys. More specifically, their data of clinical interviews with 96 children that took place two years after divorce showed that 34% of children were considered "well-adjusted and competent", 29% indicated moderate levels of well-being, and 33% continued to express pain and dissatisfaction for the divorce.

Recent research findings also reinforced the argument that a satisfactory proportion of children are estimated to adequately respond to the developmental challenges and disruptions posed by their parents' divorce and do not exhibit severe or enduring emotional or behavioral problems long after the period following the initial crisis (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Kim, 2011; Masten & Obradović, 2006). Kurdek and Siesky (1981) supported that positive adjustment to parental divorced is achieved by those children who (a) positively interpret the causes of separation, (b) have close relations with peers with whom can share their feelings and concerns, (c) receive affective responses and support from their parents and, (d) believe they have discovered their abilities or acquired new skills through divorce process. Hence, it seems that a resiliency approach could orient researchers and practitioner to consider how promotive factors may operate for encouraging positive development for children.

The results of the current study showed a number of considerable differences in affective wellness between the children who were characterized as more 'resilient' by their parents and their counterparts that were considered as having greater likelihood for developing difficulties. In particular, children in 'resilient' group exhibited greater levels of attention, higher emotional and behavioral regulation, took more initiatives and had better social interactions than children in 'vulnerable' group. It could be argued that they were equipped with greater capacities and had the individual potentials that seemed to play a crucial role in the way they experienced the adversities of divorce. Wallerstein, Lewis, and Packer-Rosenthal (2013) supported that the most "resilient" children become gradually more independent, mature, and competent individuals over the years following divorce. Existing studies have, in addition, shown that among the individual factors that soften children's negative reactions after divorce were intelligence, easy-going temperament, various talents, physical attractiveness, and effective coping abilities to stressful events (McIntosh, 2003).

No significant interaction effects were found between gender and child's attitude towards transition to divorce (resilience and vulnerable group) with regard to affective wellness. A main effect regarding parental perception about child's attitude to family transition was revealed, with those children who were perceived as more resilient to receive higher score in all the variables representing affective wellness (e.g., attention, emotional and behavioral regulation, ability to take initiatives, positive social interactions) than their more 'vulnerable' counterparts, after controlling for gender. This result is accordance with previous studies wherein it was highlighted that among individual child's resources, the ability to deal effectively with the risk was emerged as a primary factor of positive adaptation for children after divorce than gender or age (Lengua, Wolchik, & Braver, 1995). Furthermore, recent studies concluded that gender differences were less likely to be obtained (Amato, 2001).

With regard to familial and extra-familial factors related to divorce process the comparisons revealed that parents who were not worried about child's adjustment to divorce (resilient group) more slightly reported that upbringing in single-parenting is a burden, maintained more supportive relationships with their ex-husband, felt more satisfied with their lives and had been involved in fewer conflicts with their children than parents who considered their children as more vulnerable. This is consistent with the factors that have been found in previous studies to promote resilience in divorced families and predict positive outcomes for children, including parental emotional well-being and parenting quality, interparental communication and relationship with the non-residential parent (see, for example, Dreman, 2000; Kelly, 2000; Leon, 2003). In contrast, there was no difference between the two groups in social support. Under considerable assumptions, the adjustment of the divorced family was positively related to the degree of their perceived social support and to the size of their social support network during the initial crisis period, but their long-term effect was under discussion. In addition, it can be construed that when the use of the supportive networks is perceived as a threat to parents' self-reliance and/or self-esteem, it may not serve as a buffer to child's development (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006).

A further notable finding is that there were no significant differences between the two groups in dimensions of parent-child relationship such as affinity, emotional proximity and parent-child communication. The results lead to similar conclusion where no differences were found as concerns parental sensitivity to child's need. This evidence suggests that parents in both groups perceived themselves as responding affectively to the child and answering its needs. The period that the study was conducted- at least one year after divorce- may provide an explanation for this considering that Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) had suggested that changes in the affective nature of the parent-child relationship were diminishing the years following divorce. Even if this finding should be examined with caution because of the self-reporting of the statements, it verified that divorce did not always disrupt the child's bonding with the parents and that emotional ties continued to associate all members of the family even after marriage dissolution (Amato & Keith, 1991). In addition, there was consistent evidence that parental warmth and discipline serve to protect children from the effects of divorce. It is thus important to note that children need to be loved and safe during the post-divorced period, as they did before (McIntosh, 2005). They also need help to solve the various problems, encouragement to learn, stable routines that help them feel in control, firm and loving limits to be safely independent and a trusted parent who can provide protection from the trauma (McIntosh, Burke, Dour, & Gridley, 2009).

5. Conclusions

The results overall demonstrated that in the absence of new stressful events (e.g., conflicted relationships among the family members) and with the presence of protective condition, such as close and warmth relations with both parents, low levels of parental stress, supportive co-parenting, and parental adjustment or well-being, the majority of young children seemed competent to cope with the new family form (see also, Amato, 2001; Hetherington & Elmore, 2003). It seems that the provided data could contribute to our knowledge on children's ability to confront with a family crisis at early ages.

Other studies have further highlighted the benefits children can receive from the divorce experience, specifically when they enter in a positive context. For example, it is argued that divorce can strengthen children's ability to seek support from parents, peers or other, develop their social skills (independence, empathy, understanding, etc.), strengthen the bond with their mother or their siblings and stimulate their resilience in other cases of family inconvenience (Tashiro, Frazier, & Berman, 2006).

Understanding divorce through a resilience perspective facilitates the shift from a pathogenic model to the use of positive psychological terms. This may be considered a promising aspect of the de-stigmatization of divorce, especially when it serves to reduce the psychological burden children experiencing. Lastly, shedding more light on the factors that could boost young children's resilience and studying the differences in the level of well-being might enable both educators and psychologists to design and implement intervention programs addressed to the needs of

the divorced families. More explicitly, the results call for parental awareness and counseling to target on children's skills to cope with stressful divorce-related events, interpersonal resources (e.g., parent-child relationship quality), interparental conflict and quality of co-parenting. Evidence-based practices for children of divorced families might prevent the unfavorable long-term effect of parental separation and improve children's well-being on the long run.

Despite the contribution of this study to the related literature potential limitations exist. First, the resultant number of participants was estimated relatively small, -even considering that we turned to a focused and targeted population group-, which may restrict the generalization of the results to the general population. Enlarging sample size in a future research effort would give safer place for more advanced statistical analysis studying the effects of individual and familial resources and how they influence each other. In addition, a different way to collect primary data (such as focus groups or key informant interviews) and the usage of multiple informants like both the parents, teachers or specialists, are also recommended. It is also suggested that a number of other divorced related factors referring to custody arrangements, remmariage or temperament of the child, might be on the future researches' interest, in order to advance our understanding of successful coping with the experience of parental divorce. Finally, we believe that, our insight about children wellness after divorce experiences would benefit from longitudinal research designs.

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