

Interventions To Support Adolescents Whose Parents Are Divorcing

Abstract

This literature review paper presents a synthesis and summary of the different literatures and research studies that have been previously conducted regarding the interventions used to support adolescents whose parents are divorcing. This paper also presents the primary goal and purpose for conducting the research on the said topic including specific recommendations that will guide future researchers in accomplishing further research related to divorce and the common interventions used on adolescents. Since this paper tackles in-depth information taken from previously conducted studies on the interventions applied on adolescents whose parents are divorcing, this literature review proves to be highly important as it aids readers to a better understanding about the subject matter on divorce. Moreover, the literature studies acquired for this research study has been selected carefully based on certain criteria which include the following: scope, background, researchers (expertise), theories, research designs applied, findings, consistencies & controversies, research limitations, research gaps, ethics, values, & diversity issues as well as implications for research & practice. All of these criteria were taken into consideration upon selection of each literature used in the study.

Introduction

There is no doubt that divorce is one of the most stressful, complex and psychologically-challenging crises and issue that many children and adolescents face at the present age. Given the sudden increase in the number of parents who undergo divorce and end their marriages with their spouses, it is proven that the children are the ones most negatively affected when these

circumstances occur in their family (Johnson & Wiechers, 2002; VanderValk, et al., 2005). This is because as parents undergo a tremendous amount of stress during the divorce process, they become incapable of providing the basic guidance and support needs of their children, most especially their adolescent children who also undergo significant levels of depression and anxiety along with them (Johnson & Wiechers, 2002). In the succeeding section of this literature review, more in-depth information and discussion will be presented with regard to the most popular interventions that are typically being applied to support adolescents whose parents are divorcing.

Review & Synthesis of the Literature

There are numerous intervention programs that may be adopted in order to handle and manage the increasing levels of anxiety and depression that many adolescents undergo upon the divorce of their parents. One of these intervention programs is the so-called “group intervention programme” which, according to Johnson & Wiechers (2002) serves as an avenue for the adolescents to express and share their feelings, thoughts and experiences with one another as they become submerged to the whole divorce process. It is believed that group intervention programmes are very effective for adolescents of divorce as this form of intervention most likely creates positive effect on these adolescents’ self-concepts, essentially lessening their anxiety levels and alleviating their feelings of depression (Johnson & Wiechers, 2002).

The reason why group intervention programmes have been associated with positive impacts is primarily because it creates a “supportive environment” wherein different adolescents from different parents who are divorcing are able to relate with one another while sharing, exploring and clarifying their experiences related to divorce (Johnson & Wiechers, 2002). According to Stathakos & Roehrle (2003), such special intervention programme, designed

especially for groups, are quite necessary as these programmes effectively offer preventative interventions which work best for children and adolescents who have undergone psychological crises and difficulties brought about by divorce. However, the level of effectiveness of each group intervention programme also varies depending on the number of sessions the children and adolescents underwent into, the group leaders who facilitated the programme, the set of participants and the given circumstances present in the divorce situation (Stathakos & Roehrle, 2003).

Wolchik, et al. (2002) also supports the idea that intervention programmes are highly important and highly beneficial in handling and managing cases of adolescents who have divorced parents. Apparently, previous research studies revealed that adolescents who have come from a family of divorced parents are most likely to suffer from various problems including substance/alcohol addiction, unwanted pregnancy, crime-related activities, mental health problems and the like. As such, intervention programs are important as they prevent the long-term negative effects of divorce from taking hold of these adolescents' lives. Indeed, the negative effects of parental divorce during adolescence will most likely persist until adulthood which is why intervention programmes are being greatly promoted and encouraged in order to curb such negative long-term effects (Wolchik, et al., 2002).

Freedman & Knupp (2003) believe that one of the most effective adolescent intervention programmes that would benefit these children of divorced parents is the so-called "educational intervention". Interestingly this educational intervention that is being proposed is a type wherein forgiveness is the goal of the intervention programme. In most cases, this type of intervention programme is usually implemented among at least five adolescents whose parents have divorced

and are undergoing different kinds of difficulties as a result of the divorce process. The primary purpose of this type of intervention is to allow the experimental participants to be able to forgive their own parents from the hurt the divorce has caused them(Freedman & Knupp, 2003).

This type of intervention is also typically conducted with a pretest and posttest exploratory design wherein all participants are encouraged to talk about and share their feelings and experiences related to divorce. However, the goal of the intervention programme should be to increase the hope of the participants towards moving on in life and decrease their anxiety and depressed traits due to their negative divorce related experiences. many verbal reports from experts and actual participants of this type of intervention programme attest to its effectiveness as a post-intervention plan as it encourages participants to release forgiveness to their parents and to themselves and adopt a more positive outlook on their psychological well-being(Freedman & Knupp, 2003).

Similar to Stathakos & Roehrl (2003) and Freedman & Knupp (2003), Gutzwiller (2008) also deems that group therapies or intervention programmes conducted in groups is one of the best treatment choices in cases of adolescents suffering the negative impacts of parental divorce. Based on some related articles and studied conducted on group therapies, this type of intervention programmes enable adolescents from divorced families to accurately get the right perception on the process of divorce and how they must deal with it. Also, group therapies work better compared to other intervention programmes given the fact that it helps adolescents “normalize” their divorce experiences and allows them to know and discover that they are not “alone” in the process and that like them, there are thousands of other adolescents who also go through the exact same experiences that they do because of parental divorce. In this way,

adolescents would be able to better appreciate such experiences and not think about totally destroying their life because of divorce (Gutzwiller, 2008). Certainly, every institution such as schools may be able to adopt their own group therapy programmes in order to successfully intervene with their students' views and experiences on parental divorce (Rich, et al., 2007). Also, through such group therapy programmes, they would be able to develop a more accurate and better understanding of these adolescents' emotions, their new family roles and structures and their daily experiences and thus be able to cater to their psychological needs better (Rich, et al., 2007).

Aside from group therapies as a common intervention strategy on adolescents with divorced parents, DeGarmo, Patterson & Forgatch (2004) claim that Parent Management Training (PMT) may also be used in order to induce positive changes and more effective parenting on the adolescents that experienced the negative effects of divorce. Through the PMT model, the adolescents would be able to primarily experience "protection" and easier transition towards completely moving on with their lives after the divorce of their parents. In essence, the parents who are part of the Parent Management Training would "positively" influence the behavior of adolescents with divorced parents by allowing them to experience effective parenting. The ultimate goal of this intervention model is to change the adolescents' problematic behaviors, decrease their stress levels and depression and allow them to experience love, care and protection from other parents (DeGarmo, Patterson & Forgatch, 2004; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007).

In addition to the use of parenting coordination as an intervention strategy, Pehrsson, et al. (2007) suggests "bibliotherapy" which pertains to the use of songs, literatures, books and

stories from the different mediums as a form of therapeutic intervention for adolescents undergoing parental divorce. Pehrsson et al. (2007) believes that this type of intervention strategy works for children of parents who have divorced as the information they would be able to gather from these mediums would open up their minds about the different interpretations on divorce and what others have also gone through because of divorce. Moreover, adolescents who undergo the bibliotherapy intervention would also be able to get a glimpse on how others have moved on after the divorce of their parents and give them an idea on what they can also do in order to move on in their lives(Pehrsson et al., 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion,the different types of intervention strategies that may be applied on adolescents whose parents have divorced include group intervention programmes which, primarily serve as an avenue for the adolescents to express and share their feelings, thoughts and experiences with one another as they become submerged to the whole divorce process and enable them to share with other adolescents their own experiences related to divorce and their own feelings towards it. Group therapy sessions are intended to allow the adolescents to “normalize” their divorce experiences and enable them to discover that they are not “alone” in the divorce process. Aside from group therapies, there is also the so-called “Parent Management Training” which is an intervention strategy that enables adolescents to experience “protection” and easier transition towards completely moving on with their lives after the divorce of their parents. Finally, there is the bibliotherapy strategy which pertains to the use of songs, literatures, books and stories from the different mediums as a form of therapeutic intervention for adolescents undergoing parental divorce. For researchers who intend to conduct further research on this

topic, an interesting angle would be identifying or determining the impact of each of these intervention strategies on the adolescents of parental divorce.

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