

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Deepening Wound in Schools: Adolescents with Divorced Parents and Their Psychological Adjustment*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the psychological adjustment of adolescents students aged 11-18 whose parents are divorced according to various variables. The study was conducted with 199 students whose parents are officially divorced and both parents are alive. Personality Assessment Scale (PAQ) Child Form and Personal Information Form were used as data collection tools in the study. In the analysis of the data: Independent t-test, one-way analysis of variance and correlation tests were used. The results showed that the psychological adjustment of middle school students decreases as the level of education of the mother and father and the number of siblings increase. According to the variables that occur after the divorce, it did not vary according to the frequency of seeing the parent who does not have custody and whether the mother and father married someone else after the divorce. The psychological adjustment of middle school students (except high school) increases as the time passed since the divorce. Among middle school students, the group with the healthiest adjustment is those living with their mothers; the highest psychological adjustment is in those living with their fathers. The positive thoughts of the mother and father about each other supports the psychological adjustment of middle school students (except high school). In middle school students (except high school), the more the father reflects his negative thoughts about his ex-wife to his child, the more unhealthy the adjustment develops. The results obtained were discussed within the framework of the literature.

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1. Introduction

This text focuses on the importance of the concept of family and the effects of structural changes on child development. The family is a fundamental unit that affects the participation of individuals in society and the development of personality. In particular, the increase in research on the effects of situations such as divorce or death on children's psychology helps us understand the role of single-parent families in society. The text aims to examine the spread of single-parent family structures

and the psychological adaptation processes of adolescents with such families. In this context, the relationship between the dynamics of the family and the psychological state of the individual stands out as an important research topic.

In the United States, studies on children whose parents divorced date back to the late 1960s, and it can be said that this was a need stemming from the high divorce rates in the United States since the 1960s (Amato & Boyd, 2013). Although European countries had lower divorce rates than the United

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States in these years, an increasing graph can be mentioned until 2005. In addition, it is seen that the divorce rates of some non-Western and developing countries (Mexico, South Korea, Japan, China, etc.) increased between 1970 and 2000 (Amato & Boyd, 2013). According to the data of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2024), our situation is not very different. For example, in 2023, there were 171,881 divorces in Turkey. While the divorce rate is increasing, it is impossible for children not to be affected by this. Again, according to the divorce data of TÜİK (2024), it is seen that the number of children affected by divorce cases in 2023 is 171,213. When we look at the data from 2010 to understand how much this increase has occurred, we see that the number of divorces is 118 thousand; and the number of children affected by divorce cases is 96 thousand (TÜİK, 2024). In this sense, it can be said based on the data that it is important to research the subject from different perspectives so that children and adolescents with divorced parents can get through this process with the least damage. In this way, a wealth of literature will be provided for students with divorced parents and/or their parents included in the School Risk Map created by the school guidance service, as well as for practitioners in other institutions such as family therapists, experts witness for family courts. The aim of this research is to examine the psychological adaptation of adolescent students between the ages of 11-18 whose parents are divorced according to different demographic variables.

Having a divorced family can be perceived as a threat for every age group. According to Karakuş (2003), one of the developmental periods most affected by parental divorce is adolescence. Failure of one or both parents to fulfill their responsibilities for their children after divorce can cause problematic behaviors, primarily adaptation problems, in adolescents. The underlying reason for this may be that the adolescent's varying psychological needs have not been met sufficiently. Adolescence can be tense for both the adolescent and his/her family (Gladding, 2011). A divorce process that occurs before or during this period can create a greater stress factor for the adolescent. Öngider-Gregory (2016), in her research with middle school students whose parents are divorced, concluded that parental divorce has a high effect on the psychological adjustment of adolescents in this age group. The biggest limitation of these studies is that they are based on Western culture. It is thought that it is important and necessary to repeat the limited studies in Turkey with the changing generation. At this stage, it would be appropriate to provide information about the major variable of our research, psychological adjustment.

Psychological adjustment is an important concept of the Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection theory developed by Ronald Rohner (2021). According to this theory, children need to experience being accepted by an important person (Significant Other). They experience this through warm relationships and regular and consistent fulfillment of all their

needs. As a result of this warm and accepting relationship, a personality pattern develops. This personality pattern is called psychological adjustment. The concept of psychological adjustment consists of seven components. Dependency, negative self-esteem, negative self-sufficiency, hostility, emotional unresponsiveness, emotional instability, and negative worldview. Of these characteristics, the dependency trait represents a positive personality trait. The child's caregivers' meeting his/her basic needs means that they provide attention, affection and support to the child. The opposite behaviors of caregiver figures may cause the child to develop the defensive independence trait, which is at the opposite pole of the dependency personality trait (Rohner et al., 2005). Negative self-esteem, on the other hand, refers to the child's intense feelings of inferiority, worthlessness and guilt as a result of feeling unworthy of being loved by caregiver figures (Rohner, 2005). Another personality trait of psychological adjustment is negative self-sufficiency. When the child perceives the behavior of their caregivers as rejecting, they intensely experience a sense of incompetence. These children do not make an effort in the face of difficult life events because they do not trust their skills (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002). Hostility is the internal feelings of anger and hatred experienced by the child who perceives rejection by his/her caregivers (Rohner, 1975). Emotional unresponsiveness is a personality trait in which the child develops himself/herself emotionally from rejecting behaviors. Children with emotional unresponsiveness have difficulty expressing both positive (love, interest, affection) and negative (hate, anger) emotions as well as expressing them to the other person. The emotions of children who perceive emotional inconsistency can change suddenly and easily compared to children who perceive acceptance (Rohner, 2005). Finally, children with a negative worldview perceive life as bad and hostile. According to Rohner (2005), the negative worldview personality trait is independent of the thoughts that the individual develops in the face of social, economic and political events and is shaped according to the relationship between the mother and father with the child during childhood.

As is the case worldwide, some social, economic and technological developments have caused changes in the institution of family and marriage in Turkey. However, despite these changes, marriage in Turkey still takes place as a result of some meetings and social rituals held by families (Akbaş, 2024). Although the Turkish family structure has undergone some changes over time, family and marriage are still approved and expected situations in society (Aluş, 2015). Although divorce is more accepted in Turkish society than before, children/adolescents whose parents divorce, just like adults who separate after divorce, are still affected by some reactions from society. In Turkish culture, which has a traditional family structure, it is thought that even the parent who leaves home after divorce is the mother or father has different effects on

children. For this reason, in this study, the psychological development of adolescents whose parents divorce was examined with questions such as the parent who has custody, the frequency of meeting with the parent who left home, whether the ex-spouses reflect their thoughts about each other to their children, and especially how much the adolescent is exposed to these negative thoughts about their parents. It is not possible to talk about divorce alone having a negative effect on the child's development. In fact, according to the widespread view in recent years, it may be more appropriate for a child to grow up peacefully with a single parent rather than in a conflicted family environment. Therefore, the best way for a child to have healthy psychological development is through conflict-free parenting even after divorce (Lamela et al., 2013; Öngider, 2006; Öngider-Gregory, 2016; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010; Van Dijk et al., 2020). However, it should be noted that the reactions of the adolescent during the divorce process and the adaptation process after may differ. For example, psychological adaptation and the accompanying reactions may differ according to demographic variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, as well as the time that has passed since the divorce, the age of the child when the parents divorce (Coşkuner, 2019; Leon, 2003).

In summary, the divorces are increasing in Turkey. The psychological adjustment of adolescents can be negatively affected by this experience. In order to prevent or intervene in this effect, it is necessary to know it with current data. For this purpose, in this study, the psychological adjustment of adolescents whose parents are divorced is discussed together with demographic characteristics as well as special situations related to divorce.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the psychological adjustment of adolescent students aged 11-18 whose parents are divorced according to different demographic variables. For this purpose, the following questions were answered:

1. Does the psychological adjustment of adolescents whose parents are divorced differ according to the adolescent's gender, age, perceived socio-economic status, number of siblings, education level of their parents, and employment status of their parents?

2. Does the psychological adjustment of adolescents whose parents are divorced differ according to;
 - 2.1. The time that has passed since the divorce,
 - 2.2. Who has custody of the adolescent,
 - 2.3. The frequency of seeing the parent who does not have custody of the adolescent,
 - 2.4. The remarriage of the parents after the divorce,
 - 2.5. The nature of the thoughts of the ex-spouses about each other and
 - 2.6. The frequency with which the ex-spouses reflect their negative thoughts on the adolescent?

2. Method

Study protocol was approved on 03 August 2021 by Gazi University Ethics Committee with the official letter numbered E-77082166-302.08.01-170647 (Research Code Number: 2021-856). Permission was obtained from the Ankara Provincial Directorate of National Education.

This research is a descriptive study examining the psychological adjustment of adolescents whose parents are divorced according to different demographic characteristics. As is known, in this model, the existence and/or degree of change between two or more variables is determined (Karasar, 2013).

2.1. Study Group

The study population of the research consists of adolescents between the ages of 11-18 whose parents are divorced and who are studying in all middle schools and secondary education institutions in Ankara province in the 2022-2023 Academic Year. The study group of the research consists of 200 students (106 girls, 94 boys) between the ages of 11-18, selected by the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is considered appropriate to be used in studies to be conducted with people who have restrictive and hard-to-reach characteristics (Erkuş, 2019). In this study, two criteria were used: (1) Both parents are alive, (2) The divorce is officially completed. Some information about the study group is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic features of the participants.

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Girl	105	52.8%
	Boy	94	47.2%
Grade	Middleschool	100	50.3%
	Highschool	99	49.7%
School Type	Middle School	84	42.2%
	Religious Middleschool	14	7.0%
	Science Highschool	13	6.5%
	Anatolian Highschool	17	8.5%
	Anatolian Religious Highschool	23	11.6%
	Vocational Highschool	37	18.6%
	Private Middleschool	2	1.0%
	Private Highschool	1	0.5%
	Social Science Highschool	8	4.0%
Socioeconomic Status	Low	49	24.9%
	Middle	122	61.9%
	High	25	12.7%
Sibling Number	0 sibling	48	24.1%
	1 sibling and 2 siglings	111	55.8%
	3 siblings or more	40	20.1%
Mother's Education Status	Primaryschool	40	20.1%
	Middleschool	30	15.1%
	Highschool	91	45.7%
	Universty and postgraduate	36	18.1%
	Unknown	2	1.0%
Father's Education Status	Primaryschool	40	20.2%
	Middleschool	38	19.2%
	Highschool	90	45.5%
	Universty and postgraduate	26	13.1%
	Unknown	4	2.0%
Mother's Employment Status	Hasn't Job	82	41.8%
	Has Job	102	52.0%
	Unknown	12	6.1%
Father's Employment Status	Hasn't Job	17	10.2%
	Has Job	163	83.6%
	Unknown	14	7.2%

Some demographic variables emerged along with divorce: Time elapsed since the divorce, who has custody, frequency of contact with the other parent. The related characteristics of the study group are presented in Table 2.

2.2. Measures

In this study, data obtained from the Personal Information Form and Personality Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ) Child Form were used.

2.2.1. Personal information form

This form was compiled by the researcher. In addition to demographic information such as age, gender, education level, income level, employment status, the form also asked about special situations related to divorce: the time since the divorce, how old the parent was when they separated, who the adolescent's current caregiver was, the frequency of contact with the parent who did not have custody, the parents' opinions about each other and the frequency with which they reflected these opinions to the adolescent.

Table 2. Post-divorce variables.

		Frequency	Percent
Time Passed Since Divorce	0-11 Month (s)	14	7.0%
	1-4 Year (s)	59	29.6%
	5-10 Years	89	44.7%
	11-18 Years	37	18.6%
The Parent with Whom the Adolescent Lives	Mother	142	71.0%
	Father	41	20.5%
	Other (Grandparents, aunt, student dormitory etc.)	17	8.5%
Frequency of Meeting with the Non-Custody Parent	Never	63	31.8%
	Once a Year	16	8.1%
	A Few Times a Year	45	22.7%
	Once a month	19	9.6%
	Once a Week	28	14.1%
	A Few Times a Week	27	13.6%
Their Mother Married Status	Married	144	72.0%
	Not Married	56	28.0%
	Unknown	0	0.0%
The Quality of Their Mothers' Thoughts About Their Fathers	Positive	151	75.5%
	Negative	49	24.5%
	Unknown	0	0.0%
Their Father Married Status	Married	125	73.1%
	Not Married	45	26.3%
	Unknown	1	0.6%
The Quality of Their Fathers' Thoughts About Their Mothers	Positive	139	70.2%
	Negative	59	29.8%
	Unknown	0	0.0%
The Frequency of Mothers Reflecting Their Thoughts About Their Father to the Adolescents	Never	24	15.9%
	Few	54	35.8%
	Moderate Frequency	32	21.2%
	Continually	41	27.2%
The Frequency of Fathers Reflecting Their Thoughts About Their Mothers to the Adolescents	Never	30	21.3%
	Few	42	29.8%
	Moderate Frequency	34	24.1%
	Continually	31	22.0%

2.2.2. *Personality assessment questionnaire (PAQ) child form*

The scale consists of 7 sub-dimensions and 42 items and is a 4-point Likert-type measure. The sub-dimensions and sample questions are as follows: Dependency (I like it when my mother feels sad for me when I am ill), Negative Self-Esteem (I think I am useless and will never be of any use), Negative Self-Efficacy (I feel that I cannot do many things well), Hostility (I feel like hitting something or someone), Emotional Reactivity (I struggle to establish and maintain good friendships), Emotional Inconsistency (I feel upset when things go wrong), Negative Worldview (I see life as full of dangers).

The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 42, and the highest score is 168. As the score increases, psychological adjustment decreases. In the original scale, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to be 0.82. In the adaptation study into Turkish, this value was found to be 0.80 (Varan, 2003). In this research, the Cronbach α reliability coefficient for PAQ was found to be 0.91.

2.3. Process

Students from divorced families were called to the guidance service one by one through the guidance counselors of 22 schools where application permission was obtained. The researcher and the guidance counselor informed the students

about the research. Afterwards, the students who volunteered to participate in the research were given parental consent forms in sealed envelopes in order to protect confidentiality. The Parental Consent Form includes the subject of the research, who conducted it, and the contact information of the researcher. The questions of the parents of the students who wanted to get more detailed information about the research by phone were answered by the researcher. The measurement tools were applied to the students whose parents gave their approval by the researcher in the classroom environment.

2.4. Data Analysis Method

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 29.0 package program was used in data analysis. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of data, t-test for independent groups for comparison of two independent groups, ANOVA test in case of more than two independent groups, and Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to look at the relationship between two numerical variables.

3. Results

3.1. Analysis of Psychological Adjustment of Adolescents with Divorced Parents According to Demographic Variables (RQ1)

In this section, the psychological adjustment of adolescents in middle and high school whose parents are divorced is examined according to their gender, age, perceived socio-economic status, education level of their parents, employment status of their parents and number of siblings.

After the analyses, neither for the adolescents in the middle school level nor in the high school level, psychological adjustment differed according to gender ($t_{\text{middleschool}}=-0.325$; $p=0.573$; $t_{\text{highschool}}=-1.210$, $p=0.215$), socio-economic status ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=2.134$; $p=0.124$, $F_{\text{highschool}}=0.900$; $p=0.444$) and the employment status of the mother ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=0.256$; $p=0.775$, $F_{\text{highschool}}=2.321$; $p=0.104$) and father ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=1.294$; $p=0.279$, $F_{\text{highschool}}=0.408$; $p=0.666$). Similarly, no relationship was found between psychological adjustment and age ($r_{\text{middleschool}}=0.154$; $p=0.127$, $r_{\text{highschool}}=0.026$; $p=0.799$). However, for the students in the middle school (but not for high school students) level, psychological adjustment differed according to the education status of the mother ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=3.24$; $p=0.025$, $F_{\text{highschool}}=2.321$; $p=0.104$) and father ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=5.368$; $p=0.002$, $F_{\text{highschool}}=2.321$; $p=0.104$).

Table 3. ANOVA results of psychological adjustment of adolescents whose parents are divorced, according to their mother's educational status.

Mother's Education Status		\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	N	F	p	Significant Difference
Middleschool	PAQ	(1)Primaryschool	100.77	13.85	18	3.24	0.025 2-4
		(2)Middleschool	89.22	13.54	22		
		(3)Highschool	101.07	22.42	40		
		(4)University and postgraduate	106.4	18.88	20		

* $p<0.05$. Due to the structure of the scale, an increase in the PAQ mean refers to a decrease in psychological adjustment.

In the analysis presented in Table 3, Dunnet C test, one of the post-hoc tests, was performed. According to the results of this analysis, the psychological adjustment of adolescents whose mothers are secondary school graduates ($\bar{x}=89.22$) is higher than those whose mothers have a university degree or higher ($\bar{x}=106.4$). However, no significant difference was observed in the psychological adjustment of high school

students according to the mother's educational status. As shown in the Table 4, psychological adjustment of middle school students whose fathers have a university degree or higher is the lowest compared to adolescents whose fathers have a lower educational status. No such difference was observed among high school students.

Table 4. ANOVA results of psychological adjustment of adolescents whose parents are divorced, according to their father's educational status.

Father' Educational Status		\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	N	F	p	Significant Difference
Middleschool	PAQ	(1)Primaryschool	93.31	16.03	19	5.368	0.002 1-4
		(2)Middleschool	94.86	19.92	23		2-4
		(3)Highschool	97.66	19.00	48		3-4
		(4)University and postgraduate	121.0	11.90	10		

* $p<0.05$. Due to the structure of the scale, an increase in the PAQ mean refers to a decrease in psychological adjustment.

For the overall participating students, those with three or more siblings had higher psychological adjustment than those

without siblings ($F=5.173$; $p=0.006$). The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. ANOVA results of psychological adjustment of adolescents whose parents are divorced, according to have to sibling number.

		Sibling Number	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	N	F	p	Significant Difference
Middleschool	PAQ	(1) 0 sibling	98.56	18.95	48	5.173	0.006**	1-3
		(2) 1 or 2 sibling(s)	98.14	18.28	111			2-3
		(3) 3 or more siblings	109.18	21.81	40			

* $p<0.05$. Due to the structure of the scale, an increase in the PAQ mean refers to a decrease in psychological adjustment.

According to Table 5, the psychological adjustment of adolescents with three or more siblings ($\bar{x}=109.18$) is lower than that of adolescents with one or two siblings ($\bar{x}=98.14$).

3.2. Analysis of Psychological Adjustment of Adolescents with Divorced Parents According to Divorce-Related Specific Variables (RQ2)

In this section, the psychological adjustment of adolescents whose parents divorced was analyzed according to the variables that emerged after the divorce. These variables related to the post-divorce period were: the time that has passed since the divorce, the parent who has custody of the adolescent, the frequency of seeing the parent who does not have custody of the adolescent, whether the mother and father married someone else after the divorce, the thoughts of the parents about each

other, and finally, if these thoughts are negative, the frequency with which these negative thoughts are reflected on the adolescent. Analyses were conducted separately for middle school and high school. In this way, it was aimed to provide more specific information for preadolescence and adolescence.

The first of the findings is that for middle school students, their psychological adjustments differed according to the time that passed since their parents' divorce ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=4.855$; $p=0.003$). The psychological adjustment of middle school students whose parents' divorce dates back to 0-11 months ($\bar{x}=121.0$) is lower than those whose parents' divorce dates back to 1-4 years ($\bar{x}=98.26$), 5-10 years ($\bar{x}=99.39$) and 11-18 years ($\bar{x}=80.67$). This difference was not seen in high school students ($F_{\text{highschool}}=2.208$; $p=0.092$). The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. ANOVA results of psychological adjustment of adolescents with divorced parents, according to the time passed since their parents' divorce.

		Time Passed Since Divorce											
		0-11 months (1)		1-4 years (2)		5-10 years (3)		11-18 years (4)					
		\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	F	p	Significant Difference	
Middleschool	PAQ	116.78	19.66	98.26	17.76	99.39	19.08	80.67	6.35	4.855	0.003**	1-2	
													1-3
													1-4

* $p<0.05$. Due to the structure of the scale, an increase in the PAQ mean refers to a decrease in psychological adjustment.

The second important variable is who has custody. There was no significant difference in the psychological adjustment of the participants according to who has custody (mother, father, others). However, it was seen that the psychological adjustment of secondary school students were different according to the cut-off points of the PAQ used to measure psychological adjustment. Let's remind the cut-off points of the PAQ are as follows: Means between 42-62=excellent

psychological adjustment; means between 63-83=good psychological adjustment; means between 84-104=fair psychological adjustment; means between 105-125=minor psychological maladjustment; means between 126-146=significant psychological maladjustment, and means between 147-168=serious psychological maladjustment. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Average results of psychological adjustment scores of adolescents with divorced parents according to who has custody.

		The Parent Who Has Custody of The Adolescent					
		(1) Mother		(2) Father		(3) Other	
		\bar{x}	N	\bar{x}	N	\bar{x}	N
Middele School	PAQ	100.04	70	114.00	23	111.57	7
High School	PAQ	101.97	71	99.61	18	101.00	10

* $p<0.05$. Due to the structure of the scale, an increase in the PAQ mean refers to a decrease in psychological adjustment.

For secondary school students, those whose custody was with their mothers ($\bar{x}=100.04$) showed a tendency towards fair psychological adjustment, while those whose custody was with their fathers ($\bar{x}=114.00$) and those whose custody was with a dormitory or another relative ($\bar{x}=111.57$) showed a tendency towards minor psychological maladjustment.

The third important variable is the frequency of seeing the other parent. As a result of the analysis conducted in this section, it was concluded that the psychological adjustment levels of middle and high school students whose parents are divorced do not differ according to the frequency of seeing the parent who does not have custody ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=0.819$; $p=0.539$, $F_{\text{highschool}}=0.220$; $p=0.953$).

The fourth important variable is whether the parents remarry or not. It was concluded that the psychological

adjustment levels of middle and high school students whose parents divorced did not differ according to the remarriage status of both the mother ($t_{\text{middleschool}}=-0.769$; $p>0.05$, $t_{\text{highschool}}=1.218$; $p>0.05$) and father ($t_{\text{middleschool}}=-1.246$; $p>0.05$, $t_{\text{highschool}}=-1.151$; $p>0.05$).

The fifth important variable is the quality of the thoughts of the ex-spouses about each other. In high school students whose parents are divorced ($t_{\text{highschool}}=0.220$; $p=0.827$), the quality of the mother's thoughts about her ex-spouse does not differentiate the adolescent's psychological adjustment. However, in middle school students whose parents are divorced, the psychological adjustment differs according to the quality of the mother's thoughts about her father ($t_{\text{middleschool}}=4.654$; $p<0.001$). This difference is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. T-test results of the psychological adjustment of adolescents with divorced parents according to the quality of their mothers' thoughts about their fathers.

The Quality of Their Mothers' Thoughts About Their Fathers						
Negative			Positive			
	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	t	p
Middleschool PAQ	105.09	18.67	87.56	14.91	4.654	<0.001

* $p<0.05$. Due to the structure of the scale, an increase in the PAQ mean refers to a decrease in psychological adjustment.

The psychological adjustment levels of middle school students who have positive thoughts about their mothers and fathers ($\bar{X}=87.56$) are higher than the middle school students who have negative thoughts about their mothers and fathers ($\bar{X}=105.09$).

Similar results were obtained in the nature of the father's thoughts about his ex-wife. While the psychological adjustment of high school students ($t_{\text{highschool}}=0.094$; $p=0.925$) did not differ in this variable, it was observed that the psychological adjustment of middle school students ($t_{\text{middleschool}}=2.780$; $p<0.001$) differed. This difference is shown in Table 9.

Table 9. T-test results of the psychological adjustment of adolescents with divorced parents according to the quality of their fathers' thoughts about their mothers.

The Quality of Their Fathers' Thoughts About Their Mothers						
Negative			Positive			
	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	t	p
Middleschool PAQ	103.04	19.35	91.91	17.17	2.780	0.007**

* $p<0.05$. Due to the structure of the scale, an increase in the PAQ mean refers to a decrease in psychological adjustment.

The psychological adjustment of middle school students who stated that their fathers had positive thoughts about their mothers ($\bar{X}=91.91$) was higher than the middle school students who stated that their fathers had negative thoughts about their mothers ($\bar{X}=103.04$).

The sixth significant variable is the frequency with which ex-spouses reflect their negative thoughts about each other onto their adolescent children. The frequency with which mothers reflect their negative thoughts about their ex-spouses does not differentiate the psychological adjustment of both middle

school ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=0.442$; $p=0.724$) and high school students ($F_{\text{highschool}}=1.974$; $p=0.125$).

The frequency with which fathers reflect their negative thoughts about their ex-spouses onto their adolescents does not differentiate the psychological adjustment of high school students ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=1.412$; $p=0.240$). However, middle school students with divorced parents ($F_{\text{middleschool}}=9.283$; $p<0.001$) are affected by the frequency with which they are exposed to their fathers' negative thoughts about their mothers. The results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Results of the t-test on the psychological adjustment of adolescents with divorced parents and the frequency of fathers reflecting their thoughts about their mothers to the adolescents.

The Frequency of Fathers Reflecting Their Thoughts About Their Mothers to the Adolescents											
Never (1)		Few (2)		Moderate (3)		Continually (4)		F	p		Significant Difference
\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$	\bar{x}	$\sigma(s)$				
Middleschool PAQ	94.67	14.89	90.75	13.91	109.12	18.45	115.84	18.13	9.283	<0.001	1-4 2-3 2-4

* $p < 0.05$. Due to the structure of the scale, an increase in the PAQ mean refers to a decrease in psychological adjustment.

The result of the post-hoc analysis is as follows: The psychological adjustment of children of fathers who never reflect their thoughts is higher than the children of fathers who reflect their thoughts more. Similarly, a difference was seen between the groups who reflect with low and medium frequency and the groups who reflect with low and high frequency. As a result, the psychological adjustment of the students who were never exposed to their father's negative thoughts about their mother ($\bar{X}=94.67$) was higher than the students who were exposed to these negative thoughts more ($\bar{X}=115.84$). Similarly, the psychological adjustment of the group who was exposed to these negative thoughts less ($\bar{X}=94.67$) was healthier than the groups who were exposed to them with medium frequency ($\bar{X}=109.12$) and more ($\bar{X}=115.84$).

4. Discussion

4.1. Discussion of the Findings Regarding the Relationship Between Demographic Variables and Psychological Adjustment of Adolescents with Divorced Parents

The first result is that the psychological adjustment of adolescents with divorced parents does not differ according to their gender, age, perceived socio-economic status, and the employment status of their parents. There are studies supporting these results (e.g., Amato & Keith, 1991; Aydın, 2009; Coşkun, 2019). In order to make a comprehensive comment, more research is needed examining the adjustment of adolescents with divorced parents according to age and socio-economic status variables. Perhaps, it may be the mother's job satisfaction rather than the mother's employment that has an effect on the child's psychological adjustment. Because Bee and Bjorklund (2004) stated because some mothers who want to work but cannot work or who have low job satisfaction their children may have psychological adaptation problems. It can be said that the mother's well-being is reflected in the child rather than whether the mother works or not. In addition, the quality of the time they spend with their children has an effect on the child's development (Şendil & Kaya Balkan, 2005). Therefore, new studies can be designed by taking this explanation into account.

The second result is that the psychological adjustment of the adolescent at the middle school level increased as the educational level of the mother and father increased. Although there are few studies on this subject in the literature, Coşkun (2019)'s study with high school students whose parents are divorced supports this result. Bankir-İşler (2023) concluded in his study with children of divorced families between the ages of 13-18 that as the level of education of the mother and father decreases, the adolescent's active coping skills increase; and the negative coping skills increase as the level of education of the mother and father increases. It is known that the mother's educational status affects the child's well-being in the post-divorce period (Mandemakers & Kalmijn, 2014). As the level of education of the mother and father increases, their awareness increases and being a single parent may increase the mother's anxiety level. In addition, as the level of education of the parents increases, they may be more involved in working life and have more responsibilities both at home and outside the home, which may have caused the child to focus more on meeting their financial needs before their need for attention and love. Further studies are needed to generalize this finding.

The third result is that adolescents with a large number of siblings have lower psychological adjustment. Erden-Çınar (2015) concluded that the anxiety of children between the ages of 9-12 whose parents are in the process of divorce increases depending on the number of siblings. In broken families formed by the divorce of parents, the departure of one of the parents may have caused one of the siblings to take on the responsibility of the mother or father of the house, and since there is also a possibility that the siblings may be separated from each other, it may have an effect on the psychological adjustment of middle school students. For this reason, it can be interpreted that as the number of siblings increases, the responsibility assumed also increases, and psychological adjustment decreases.

According to these results, it can be said that in the psychological adjustment of adolescents, it is important for them to share the responsibility assumed by their mothers with their ex-partners, and also for the father to support the mother in the care of the child and not to leave the responsibility of the sibling to the adolescents. In this context, mothers can be taught about the difficulties of raising a single-parent child and what their resources are in coping with these. Otherwise, the risk of

putting the responsibility of the absent parent on the adolescent may damage their psychological adjustment.

4.2. Discussion of the Findings Regarding the Relationship Between the Psychological Adjustment of Adolescents with Divorced Parents and Their Special Situations Related to Divorce

According to the first result of this section, the psychological adaptation levels of middle school students who have been divorced for 0-11 months are lower compared to the groups who have been divorced for 1 year or more. According to Çağlar (2018), adaptation problems may arise during the separation and divorce process. Children begin to overcome the problems caused by divorce over time (Morrison & Cherlin, 1995). This means that the psychological maladjustment of adolescents after divorce is high, which is an expected result. However, it is hoped that this will decrease over time. For this reason, it would be appropriate to emphasize that the school guidance service provides the necessary guidance services and the necessary support from the family.

The second outcome is who the adolescent lives with and the frequency of seeing the other parent. Although there is no difference in terms of who has custody, the psychological adjustment scores can be grouped according to the cut-off points of the scale (PAQ). Accordingly, for all high school students, the score of PAQ was positioned in the psychological adjustment area. Among middle school students, the group with the highest psychological adjustment is that custody of the mother. Also, psychological adjustment of those who stay in a dormitory or with others is high. However, the highest psychological maladjustment is in groups where custody of the father. It is thought that cultural characteristics as well as the psychological bond between the mother and child may have an effect on this result. For example, although gender roles have changed over time in Turkish society, it is known that mothers are still largely involved in household chores and child care, while fathers are more involved in chores outside the home. Based on this, the support that middle school adolescents living with their mothers receive from their mothers in terms of care and attention has a positive effect on their psychological adjustment. In addition, when divorced mothers in Turkey receive custody of their children, they generally live with their children; divorced fathers, even if they have custody of their children, mostly receive support from their own mothers or sisters. In other words, in adolescents whose custody is with the father, fathers leave the responsibilities of their children to a third person such as grandmothers or aunts. Parmar (2022) concluded in his research that paternal acceptance and grandmother/grandmother acceptance have the same effect on psychological adjustment, while maternal acceptance has a greater effect on psychological adjustment. When the literature is examined, the limited number of studies on this subject makes it difficult to interpret the results. Despite this, there are

studies in the literature showing that the psychological adjustment of the adolescent changes according to the frequency of meeting with the parent who does not live in the same house and the quality of the bond established (Dunn et al., 2004; Güler, 2014; Maccoby et al., 1993).

The third result is that the psychological adjustment of middle and high school students did not differ according to the remarriage of their mothers and fathers. This result is consistent with a similar study (e.g., Coşkuner, 2019). The quality of the relationship with the stepparent, rather than the remarriage of the mother and father, may be more important than the outcome (Aydın, 2009). There is also an opinion that the remarriage of the parent may lead to a healthier adjustment than living with a single parent (e.g., Amato, 2005).

The fourth result is that the adolescent's positive thoughts about the other parent of the mother or father increase the adolescent's psychological adjustment. Similarly, when looking at the existing literature, Çağlar (2018) showed that the mothers of children with negative attitudes towards their fathers, who say "My child can see his father whenever he wants, but he doesn't want to see his father because he is a bad father", negatively affect the child's well-being when their ex-partner is disparaged through their relationship with the child. In other words, it is seen that both the mother and the father's positive attitude towards their ex-partner supports the development of the child.

The fifth result is that a relationship was between the frequency of the father's reflection of negative thoughts to his children and the psychological adjustment of middle school students (not high school students). It should also be taken into account that approximately 71% of the adolescents participating in the study have custody with their mothers. Based on this, it is seen that middle school adolescents who do not live with their fathers may be more affected by their fathers' negative attitudes. In fact, this result was one of the results predicted at the beginning of the study. In the current study, it was concluded that the mother's positive or negative thoughts about her ex-partner were more adopted by middle school students. Similar results were obtained regarding the effect of fathers' thoughts about their ex-partners on adolescents. This situation can be interpreted as the fact that the social circles of adolescents studying in high school are more prominent and that they are more aware of their own emotions compared to middle school students.

When the results in this section are evaluated, it is seen that middle school students' well-being adopts the thoughts of divorced mothers about their fathers, but in the same group, it is seen that they develop unhealthy psychological adaptation as the frequency of exposure to fathers' negative thoughts about their mothers increases. Considering that the vast majority of adolescents participating in the study live with their mothers, it is seen that adolescents reflect the limited time they spend with

their fathers and their negative thoughts about their ex-partners to their children.

When the results obtained from the study are examined in general, it is seen that middle school students are the most affected by the divorce of their parents. This situation may be due to the fact that the time of divorce is closer, the importance of friends increases in the high school group, and the adolescent receives social support from their friends.

5. Conclusion

The prominent results of this research can be summarized as follows. As the level of education of the parents and the number of siblings of middle school students increase, their psychological adjustment decreases. The psychological adjustment of middle school students (except high school) increases as the time passed since the divorce. While the group with the high psychological adjustment among middle school students is those living with their mothers, the highest psychological maladjustment is among those living with their fathers. The positive thoughts of the mother and father about each other supports the psychological adjustment of middle school students (except high school). In middle school students (except high school), the more the father reflects his negative thoughts about his ex-wife to his child, the more the child develops a psychological maladjustment.

In the light of this information, some suggestions are given. Divorced parents, especially those whose children are in middle school, can be guided in terms of sharing responsibilities and spending quality time with their children. In addition, parents who are anxious about their children's future can be supported in order to increase their well-being. It was concluded that as the number of siblings increases in adolescents who continue to middle school, psychological adjustment decreases. The fear of separation between siblings and assuming responsibility for the parent who leaves home may have an impact on the outcome. For this reason, it can be emphasized to parents during the divorce process that the psychology of their children is important before their own wishes regarding the sharing of custody. In addition, guidance services in schools can conduct boundary setting studies with middle school students whose parents are divorced. In future studies, this finding can be further elaborated by including the acceptance of siblings by students whose parents are divorced and other factors that may be related to acceptance of siblings (birth order, age difference, etc.). According to the results obtained from the effects of parents' thoughts about each other after divorce on the adolescent's psychological adaptation, guidance studies can be carried out for parents regarding the psychological adaptation of their children by the Ministry of Justice, by pedagogues who follow the divorce case process, and by guidance services in schools during and after the divorce process.

It has been observed that in middle school students, at least one year must pass after divorce for psychological adjustment to increase. In schools, guidance services can conduct psychological adjustment-enhancing activities for adolescents, especially in the year following the divorce of their parents. Adolescents who think that their mothers have positive thoughts about their fathers have healthier psychological adjustment. Fathers' positive thoughts about their ex-spouses also increase their children's psychological adjustment. Parents should be informed about exhibiting positive behaviors towards each other in front of their children from the beginning of the divorce process.

In general, the results have shown that more intensive work needs to be done in the middle school group. The characteristics of students with divorced parents can be further detailed in the school risk map created by the school guidance service in November of each academic year together with the branch guidance teachers. Thus, the work to be carried out during the year to increase the psychological adaptation of these students can be customized for adolescents. For students in schools without guidance teachers, family guidance offices can be established in the Public Education Centers or Guidance Research Centers within the Ministry of National Education, and the scope and effectiveness of guidance work for students with divorced parents can be increased. Consultancy services can be provided to parents.

5.1. Limitations

The current study has some limitations. The most important limitation is that the results are only valid for the study group and cannot be generalized. Since the study group is a difficult group to reach, the study group was preferred instead of a sample. However, this limitation can be eliminated in large-scale projects. Another limitation is that the study was conducted with children of officially separated parents. A similar study can be conducted with adolescents whose parents are in the process of divorce. The effect of the absence of a parent at home on the child's psychological adjustment can be examined through psychological difficulties (internal and external difficulties, depression, anxiety, etc.). Despite these limitations, it is thought that the study will be an important scientific reference for practitioners and researchers.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Study protocol was approved on 03 August 2021 by Gazi University Ethics Committee with the official letter numbered E-77082166-302.08.01-170647 (Research Code Number: 2021-856). Permission was obtained from the Ankara Provincial Directorate of National Education.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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