

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

Dilek BEZCİ¹, Hatice Zekavet KABASAKAL²

¹ Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Department of Family Education and Counseling, Izmir, Turkey

² Professor, Dokuz Eylül University, Buca Faculty of Education, Department of Family Education and Counseling, Izmir, Turkey

ABSTRACT: Although divorce fundamentally alters the structure of the family system, parental roles and responsibilities continue throughout this process. The purpose of this study is to systematically examine the relationship between co-parenting after divorce and children's psychosocial adjustment by reviewing empirical research. The study is based on a systematic literature review, a qualitative research method. Thirty key empirical articles published between 1990 and 2026 that were relevant to the study topic were analyzed. The findings indicate that children of divorced couples who practice collaborative co-parenting experience fewer psychological symptoms, that children exposed to parental alienation and triangulation struggle with low self-esteem and chronic depression in adulthood, that the end of the parents' marriage and high levels of conflict negatively affect academic achievement, and that parental conflict may manifest as attachment problems in the child's future interpersonal relationships.

KEYWORDS: Divorce, Co-parenting, Psychosocial Adjustment, Parental Alienation Syndrome

CHAPTER I—INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a complex network of relationships that forms the cornerstone of the family system, in which individuals come together on a foundation of trust to build a shared way of life aimed at fulfilling their emotional needs as well as their biological and social needs. Although the decision to divorce brings an end to individuals' roles as husband and wife—both legally and emotionally—their roles as parents must continue. However, a review of the literature reveals that unresolved marital conflicts often spill over into parenting roles, preventing individuals from establishing a healthy co-parenting system. In particular, a healthy co-parenting model cannot be established during highly conflictual divorce processes (Güngör, 2025). As a result of this situation, a dynamic known as “parental alienation”—in which parents position the child as an ally against the other parent—emerges (Dönmez and Avcı, 2023). Children exposed to this dynamic are found to experience various psychosocial difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, a decline in academic performance, and behavioral problems (Altın Üzer, 2024). Parents also face challenges on the other side of this issue. The devastation caused by highly conflictual processes also profoundly undermines the parents' own well-being (Karahan, 2012).

The primary objective of this study is to examine the effects of the types of co-parenting observed in families going through divorce and the phenomenon of parental alienation on children's psychological well-being and parents' own well-being. This study is significant in that it approaches divorce as a systemic restructuring process and serves as a guiding resource for professionals in the field aimed at protecting the best interests of the child in high-conflict divorces. Divorce is not merely the termination of a legal bond; it is a profound restructuring process involving the family system, roles, and emotional dynamics. During this transitional period, the co-parenting relationship—which defines how mothers and fathers share child-rearing responsibilities—directly determines the course of the process. In situations where conflicts between spouses deepen, parental alienation—which arises when one parent turns the child against the other—not only undermines bonds of trust within the family but also threatens the emotional well-being of individuals. Accordingly, the central research question is to determine the multidimensional effects of perceived co-parenting patterns and levels of parental alienation in families undergoing divorce on children's behavioral, emotional, and social development, as well as on parents' own psychological well-being and parenting satisfaction.

CHAPTER II—THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Family System and Marriage

The family is a dynamic and complex system in which members frequently interact with one another. Established through the union of marriage, this system consists of subsystems with distinct boundaries and roles (Nazlı, 2018). The first and most

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

fundamental of these is the “spousal subsystem,” formed as a result of the couple’s marriage contract. The “parental subsystem” is the system that emerges with the arrival of the first child into the family. While the “spousal subsystem” ends with divorce, the continued existence of the “parental subsystem” is crucial and essential for the child’s psychosocial adjustment (Ahrons, 1981). In all cases, the child’s best interests must be prioritized, and the parental subsystem must be maintained in a healthy manner (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992).

The Concept and Process of Divorce

Divorce is not a single event; it is a life crisis and a psychosocial transition that unfolds over time, comprising the pre-divorce phase, the legal process, and the post-divorce phase. Among the internal factors that erode the family system from within are infidelity, a breakdown in communication between spouses, unresolved conflicts, and physical and psychological abuse (Özgüven, 2001). External factors include economic hardships, early marriages, and low educational attainment.

According to Bohannon (1970), divorce occurs in six stages: “emotional,” “legal,” “economic,” “parental,” “social,” and “spiritual.” While individuals have the freedom to completely separate their lives at all other stages, a complete severing of ties does not occur during the parental divorce stage.

Statistics from recent years show that the crude divorce rate has been gradually increasing (TÜİK, 2024). In 2025, 34.0% of divorces occurred within the first 5 years of marriage. A total of 191,371 children were affected by divorces in the past year. Rising divorce rates make children’s psychosocial adjustment following divorce a topic that warrants further study.

The Effects of Divorce on Parents

The divorce process has legal, psychological, physiological, social, and economic effects on individuals. Prolonged, contentious divorce proceedings take a toll on individuals and have negative psychological effects (Öngider, 2013). Divorce also brings with it economic hardships such as alimony, compensation, and the cost of establishing a new household (Amato and Keith, 1991).

A review of the relevant literature reveals that divorce is often defined as a “trauma,” “grief,” “life crisis,” and “life stressor.” Following divorce, individuals experience a loss of self-confidence, increased levels of depression and anxiety, and an emotional turmoil characterized by feelings of sadness, guilt, shame, loneliness, and anger. It has been observed that divorced individuals report higher blood pressure and sleep problems. Regardless of the nature of the relationship, entering a new relationship after divorce and having a higher level of education are among the factors that enhance adjustment to divorce (Symoens et al., 2014).

The Impact on Children According to Developmental Stages

The psychosocial repercussions of divorce on children vary significantly depending on the cognitive, emotional, and social dynamics of the developmental stage the individual is in. During infancy (ages 0–2), the earliest stage of life, although children lack the cognitive maturity to grasp the conceptual and legal implications of divorce, they are extremely sensitive to the emotional states, body language, and rising stress levels of their primary caregivers; during this critical period when a sense of basic trust is established, if parents become emotionally unavailable, excessively anxious, or inconsistent, this can directly hinder the child’s development of a secure attachment pattern (Bowlby, 1988). During the preschool and school-age stages, when cognitive and social awareness increase, one of the most commonly observed reactions in children is the belief that the separation stems from their own negative behavior—a result of intense guilt and egocentric thinking; indeed, failure to reassure children in this age group that they are not responsible for the separation sets the stage for them to encounter much more persistent emotional and behavioral problems in later developmental stages, while ongoing conflictual communication between parents leads the child to experience intense loyalty conflict, feeling caught in the middle and forced to choose a side (Amato, 2001; Türkaslan, 2007). During adolescence (ages 12–21), a period centered on identity formation and the pursuit of autonomy, the breakdown of family unity undermines the young person’s faith in the institution of the family and the concept of marriage, and, due to the blurring of boundaries, causes the adolescent to assume roles beyond their age—such as caring for siblings or providing emotional parenting (parenting behavior)—and all these stressful experiences create an environment in which the individual develops a chronic fear of abandonment and a fundamental sense of distrust in the romantic relationships they will form in adulthood (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). During this process, certain symptoms are observed in children. In the literature, these symptoms are categorized into two main groups: internalization and externalization symptoms. Internalization symptoms involve the child directing the stress they experience inward; following a divorce, children commonly exhibit generalized anxiety, depressive mood, psychosomatic symptoms, and social isolation (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Externalization symptoms, on the other hand, involve the child projecting the stress they experience outward. The most common issues include difficulty controlling anger, aggression, defiance toward authority figures, and disruptive behavior disorders (Öngider, 2013). Both groups of symptoms should essentially be viewed as manifestations of the child’s difficult psychosocial adjustment efforts in response to parental conflict.

Parenting After Divorce: Co-Parenting

“Co-parenting,” in its broadest definition, is a multidimensional and relational process concerning how parents responsible for the care and upbringing of a shared child share this process. The focus here is on the quality of the relationship that caregivers

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

establish with one another “through the child” (Ulucan Özkan, 2025). The greatest challenge of co-parenting is for individuals to set aside their former spousal roles and rebuild their parenting roles (Kalkan & Arica, 2019). This alliance formed after divorce serves as the most fundamental psychological safety net in preventing developmental crises, as well as internalizing and externalizing symptoms.

According to the conceptualization by Maccoby and Mnookin (1992)—one of the most widely accepted classifications in the literature—three primary types of co-parenting emerge in the post-divorce process: The collaborative model, which is the most functional structure in terms of children's psychosocial adjustment, refers to a system in which parents demonstrate flexibility in decisions regarding the child and engage in regular information sharing; children raised in this environment are found to exhibit significantly fewer behavioral problems (Amato et al., 2011). The parallel model, in which communication is kept to a minimum when tension between parents is high (Ahrons, 1981), serves a protective function by preventing the child from directly witnessing the conflict between parents in highly conflicted couples (Hetherington, 1999). In contrast, in the conflictual model—which poses the highest risk to children's mental health—parents tend to prolong unresolved marital crises through the child, frequently pushing the child into the role of a “messenger” (Buchanan et al., 1991), and among children exposed to this dynamic, the likelihood of developing both internalizing and externalizing problems increases significantly (Öngider, 2013).

Among the factors influencing co-parenting harmony, the parents' own psychological well-being ranks first (Feinberg, 2003). In particular, the mother's mental health appears to play a significant role in the functioning of the system (Türkaskan, 2007). In terms of relational factors, “maternal guardianship” and past marital problems affect co-parenting adjustment (Sullivan, 2004). Environmental factors, on the other hand, include one parent's remarriage and economic status (Bayraktar, 2021).

Parental Alienation

Defined by Richard Gardner (1985) as “Parental Alienation Syndrome,” this condition involves one parent systematically inciting and manipulating the child against the other parent. The critical distinction here is that there is no actual history of neglect or abuse that would cause the child to reject a parent; the rejection behavior is entirely unjustified and stems from manipulation (Bernet, 2010).

During this process, the alienating parent employs strategies such as disparaging the targeted parent, obstructing communication with the child, and drawing the child into a “coalition.” It is one of the most pathological examples of the concept of “triangulation” in family systems theory. Research conducted by Baker (2005) reveals that children who have been subjected to alienation most frequently struggle with low self-esteem and chronic depression in adulthood.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This section explains the research model, the data collection process, data analysis, validity and reliability, limitations, assumptions, and the researcher's role. This study is a systematic review that compares empirical findings examining the effect of co-parenting after divorce on children's psychosocial adjustment.

Research Model / Design

This study is a qualitative “systematic review” that comprehensively examines the literature on the relationship between co-parenting after divorce and child adjustment. A systematic review is a comprehensive research methodology that employs clear, reproducible, and systematic methods to identify, select, critically evaluate, and synthesize all empirical evidence meeting defined eligibility criteria in order to answer a predefined research question (Higgins et al., 2019; Page et al., 2021).

Data Collection Process

The study population consists of academic studies published worldwide in the fields of divorce, co-parenting, and parental alienation. The study sample consists of a total of 55 highly cited, literature-shaping academic sources published between 1990 and 2026; 30 of these are direct empirical research articles, while the remainder are reviews and foundational sources that support the conceptual and theoretical framework. Research data were collected by searching the Google Scholar, ResearchGate, PubMed, and DergiPark databases using the keywords “divorce,” “co-parenting,” “parental alienation syndrome,” and “postdivorce.” During the screening process, the following inclusion criteria were adopted: publication in peer-reviewed journals, direct relevance to the topic, being written in Turkish or English, and availability of the full text. In the initial stage, a preliminary screening was conducted based on titles and abstracts, and studies that did not meet the specified criteria were excluded.

Data Analysis

The titles, authors, scales, objectives, and findings of the included studies were examined through descriptive analysis in line with the research questions. The study data were tabulated in a comprehensive manner (code, title, author, year, and findings) so that readers could easily verify them.

A Review of Studies Examining the Child’s Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

Validity and Reliability of the Study

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the principles of the systematic review methodology were strictly adhered to. Accordingly, four different national and international databases were utilized to minimize data loss and bias; the stages of data collection, screening, pre-selection, and synthesis were structured transparently, and the entire process was detailed.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to thirty empirical articles published between 1990 and 2026; theses, conference abstracts, and reports were excluded. The fact that the majority of the analyzed articles present data based on cross-sectional designs and self-reports limits the generalizability of the results. Since a large portion of the existing literature is centered on Western culture, there are limitations in adapting it to the Turkish family structure.

Assumptions

It was assumed that the thirty empirical articles analyzed represented a diverse range of perspectives, that the keywords used were comprehensive and adequate, that the scales used in the studies were valid and reliable, and that the included studies adhered to ethical principles.

The Researcher’s Role

The researcher conducted the screening, compilation, and synthesis processes and adhered to systematic review guidelines to maintain objectivity.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

In this section of the study, the studies included in the review are presented in tabular form. The bibliographic information, study group, measurement tools used, data analysis methods, and brief results of the relevant studies are specified.

TABLE: A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE ON CHILDREN’S PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND CO-PARENTING FOLLOWING DIVORCE

Authors and Year Article Title	Research Group	Data Collection Tools	Research Analysis Method	Data	Results
Amato et al. (2011) A1 Reconsidering the “Good Divorce	944 divorced parents and children	NSFH dataset	EM procedure Regression analysis		The findings contradict research results showing that positive family relationships after divorce have significant benefits for children.
Strohschein (2005) A2 Parental Divorce and Child Mental Health Trajectories	2,819 children aged 4–7	NLSCY dataset	Poisson analysis	regression	It was found that while there was an increase in anxiety and depression levels associated with parental divorce, there was no increase in antisocial behavior
Frisco (2007) A3 Parents’ Union Dissolution and Adolescents’ School Performance	2,629 adolescents	National Adolescent Health and Longitudinal Studies Adolescent Health and Academic Achievement Study	OLS analysis	regression	The findings indicate that the relationship between parental divorce and academic achievement is causal.
Lamela (2016)			K-means,		

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

A4 Typologies of Post-Divorce Co-parenting and Parental Well-being, Parenting Quality, and Children's Psychological Adjustment	314 divorced parents aged 24–65	PNSDE (Portuguese National Survey on the Experience of Divorce)	MANOVA, ANOVA, one-way analysis of variance, Turkey-Kramer post-hoc methods	It is emphasized that there is a positive and significant relationship between cooperative co-parenting after divorce and children's positive psychological adjustment.
Feinberg et al. (2007) A5 Associations Between Coparenting and Child Adjustment: Universality and Specificity Across Four Countries	1,588 parents of children aged 0–9 and 507 parents of adolescents aged 10–18	CRS (Coparenting Relationship Scale)	Mplus 8.8 Satorra-Bentler-scaled chi-square test	It has been found that stronger shared parenting is associated with a reduction in children's internalizing and externalizing problems. However, no significant association was found between internalizing problems in young children and externalizing problems in adolescents in Pakistan.
Beckmeyer et al. (2014) A6 Postdivorce Coparenting Typologies and Children's Adjustment	270 Divorced Parents and Their Children	SSRS (Social Skills Rating System)	Correlation Analysis, Ward's Method,	Although it was expected that developing collaborative parenting would have a more positive effect on children's post-divorce adjustment, it was found that there were no significant differences based on parenting styles.
Feinberg (2007) A7 The Longitudinal Influence of Coparenting Conflict on Parental Negativity and Adolescent Maladjustment	512 families with two parents and two adolescents	Data set from the "Unshared Environment in Adolescent Development" Project	Correlation and Analysis of Variance	It shows that parental conflict is associated with antisocial behavior and influences subsequent parental negativity.
Maccoby et al. (1990) A8 Coparenting in the Second Year After Divorce	Approximately 1,000 families with children under the age of 16	Qualitative data collection method	Chi-square test	Although parents with dual residences have higher levels of communication, their levels of conflict do not differ from those of parents with a primary residence.
Buchanan et al. (1991) A9	522 adolescents aged 10–18	Quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques	ANOVA, Regression and correlation analysis	It was found that adolescents living in dual-residence households are less likely to

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

Caught Between Parents: Adolescents' Experiences in Divorced Homes					feel trapped when their parents cooperate.
Elam et al. (2016) A10 Non-Residential Father-Child Involvement and Mental Health	240 divorced mothers and children	NBP (New Beginning Program) CRBPI (Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory)	Wald chi-square, Logistic regression, LCA, LPA		The findings indicate that parental conflict has a negative impact on children's levels of adjustment.
Marchand-Reilly & Yaure (2019) A11 The Role of Parents' Relationship Quality in Children's Behavioral Problems	507 divorced families	CBCL (Child Behavior Checklist)	Regression and correlation analysis		While the quality of the parent-child relationship, shared parenting, and the father's involvement are important for boys, only shared parenting is important for girls.
Reijan et al. (2021) A12 Postdivorce Coparenting Patterns and Their Relationship with Adolescent Adjustment	251 Dutch adolescents	Quantitative collection method	data Correlation and latent class analysis methods		Adolescents with cooperative parents exhibit fewer internalizing and externalizing problems.
Fergusson et al. (1994) A13 Parental Separation and Adolescent Psychopathology and Problem Behaviors	935 adolescents aged 15	Quantitative collection method	data Median (descriptive statistical method)		Parental separation experienced during childhood is associated with a small but detectable increase in the risk of certain disorders during adolescence.
Bonach (2005) A14 Factors Contributing to Quality Co-Parenting	135 divorced participants with young children	Quantitative collection method	data Regression and path analysis		The study found that satisfaction with financial arrangements, less hostile divorce, and forgiveness are the strongest predictors of quality coparenting
Choi et al. (2019) A15 Efficacy of Co-parenting for Successful Kids	155 divorced parents	Parenting Competence, Parental Anger, and Parenting Stress Scales	Pre-test – post-test, single-group design		After completing the program, participants showed a decrease in parental stress and anger and an increase in self-efficacy.
Camisasca (2019) A16	101 couples with school-	Joint Parenting Relationship Scale, Child Behavior Checklist,	Correlation analysis method,		Low levels of co-parenting have been shown to mediate the relationship between

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

Co-parenting Mediates the Influence of Marital Satisfaction on Child Adjustment	aged children	Interpersonal Scale, Externalizing Scale, Interpersonal Reactivity Index	Harmony Scale,		parental dissatisfaction and children's behavioral problems.
Morrison & Cherlin (1995) A17 The Divorce Process and Young Children's Well-being	1,123 children whose parents' marriage continued	NSLY BPI (Behavioral Problems Inventory) PIAT (Peabody Individual Achievement Test)	OLS regression analysis		The findings indicate that marital breakdown has a greater impact on boys than on girls.
Fabricius & Luecken (2007) A18 Postdivorce Living Arrangements and Parent-Child Relationships	266 college students whose parents divorced before they turned 16	PFAD, FC, and GFAD Scales	Factor Analysis Chi-square test SEM Model		The findings indicate that young adults' long-term relationships with their fathers and ongoing distress resulting from parental divorce are associated with impaired parenting and physical health.
Conti & Romano (2025) A19 Understanding the Role of Co-parenting Quality in Mediating the Effect of Parenting Stress on Child Adjustment	491 Italian parents	PSI-SF, SDQ, CRS Scales	SEM and correlation analysis,		The findings indicate that co-parenting quality acts as a buffer in the effect of parenting stress on children's psychological well-being.
Quicho et al. (2026) A20 Lived Experiences of Parents in Co-Parenting Relationships	9 parents in co-parenting relationships	Qualitative data collection method	Thematic analysis method,		The findings show that the experience of co-parenting is challenging and emotionally draining, and that it requires adaptability and emotional balance.
Yoleri & Uyumaz (2026) A21 Same or Different? What Are the Perceptions of Parents of Preschool Children Regarding Co-Parenting?	202 parents of preschool-aged children residing in Izmir	Co-Parenting Scale for Parents of Preschool Children	Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega calculated using the maximum likelihood method		The findings indicate that there are significant relationships between mothers' and fathers' reports of cooperation, conflict, and triangulation, and highlight the reciprocal nature of co-parenting interactions.
Pellón et al. (2024) A22 Physical and Psychological Symptoms, Co-Parenting, and	239 parents	Data set from Family Visitation Centers	Latent profile analysis, LPA model, Lo-Mendell-Rubin adjusted odds ratio test		The findings indicate that while fewer symptoms enhance emotional socialization, in high-conflict environments, health status is a more

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

Emotional Socialization in High-Conflict Divorces: A Profile Analysis				critical factor than resilience for parenting skills.
Yaşar & Yaman (2025) A23 The Role of Child Emotion Regulation, Parent Emotion Regulation, and Co-Parenting in the Behavioral Problems of Preschool Children	502 parents of children aged 3–6	Short Form of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale, Co-Parenting Scale, Preschool and Kindergarten Behavior Scale	Correlation analysis, simple regression analysis	The findings revealed that behavioral problems are significantly associated with the child's and parents' emotion regulation skills and joint parenting.
Riser (2025) A24 Joint Physical Custody and Children's Physical and Mental Health	170 mothers with sole custody, 240 mothers with joint custody	Wisconsin dataset	Probit regression models, Inverse Probability Weighting	High-quality co-parenting relationships, which are more common in joint custody scenarios, were not found to be clearly associated with these outcomes.
Dumitriu et al. (2023) A25 Intra- and Inparental Factors Influencing Post-Divorce Co-Parenting	169 participants aged 24–61 who were divorced or in the process of divorcing	Divorce Adjustment Inventory, Young Schema Questionnaire, Parenting Competence Questionnaire, Cognitive Emotional Regulation Questionnaire, Co-Parenting Relationships Scale	Correlation analysis, independent samples t-test, Bonferroni-Dunn post-hoc test, analysis of variance	The findings indicate that pre-divorce experiences of family interactions and poor adjustment to divorce are associated with dysfunctional aspects of co-parenting relationships that affect children after divorce.
Benini et al. (2025) A26 Personality, Co-parenting, and Psychological Symptoms in Adolescent Children	A total of 217 participants, adolescents aged 12–16, with one co-parent	Co-Parenting Inventory for Parents and Adolescents, Strengths and Challenges Questionnaire, and Sociodemographic Questionnaire	Structural Equation Modeling	The findings indicate that co-parenting collaboration plays a partial mediating role between parental personality factors and psychological symptoms in adolescents.
Saglak & Ozdemir (2024) A27 Experiences of Co-Parenting After Divorce in Turkey: A Qualitative Study	14 couples with children aged 0–18	Demographic Information Form and Semi-Structured Interview Form	Content analysis method	The findings indicate that participants attempted to act in unison and make joint decisions regarding child-rearing after divorce, but that this responsibility fell primarily on the mothers.
Riina et al. (2020) A28	Parents of children aged 10–17 and their	PROSPER dataset	Correlation analysis, chi-square test,	The findings indicate that there are significant associations between parental conflict and

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

Bidirectional Associations between Youth Adjustment and Mothers' and Fathers' Coparenting Conflict	children, 757 participants					children's adjustment problems.
Rejaan et al. (2024) A29 Parenting, Coparenting, and Adolescents' Sense of Autonomy and Belonging After Divorce	191 Dutch adolescents and 227 divorced parents	Coparenting Scale	Behavior	RI-CLPM correlation analysis method	model, analysis	The findings indicate that changes in parent-child behaviors do not predict adolescents' experiences of autonomy and belonging, nor is the reverse true.
Karberg et al. (2020) A30 Children's Adjustment to Parents' Breakup: The Mediation Effects of Parenting and Co-parenting	3,387 9-year-old children living with their mothers	Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL),		Path analysis method,		The findings indicate that supporting co-parenting relationships among divorced parents is a priority.

Among the studies examined, those conducted in the 1990s—including Maccoby et al. (1990), Buchanan et al. (1991), Fergusson et al. (1994), and Morrison and Cherlin (1995)—stand out regarding children's psychosocial adjustment and co-parenting following divorce. In the 2000s, Bonach (2005), Strohschein (2005), Feinberg (2007), Fabricius and Lucken (2007), Frisco (2007), Amato et al. (2011), Beckmeyer et al. (2014), Lamela (2016), Elam et al. (2016), Marchand-Reilly and Yaure (2019), Choi et al. (2019), Camisasca (2019), Riina et al. (2020), Karberg et al. (2020), Reijan et al. (2021), Dumitriu et al. (2023), Pellón et al. (2024), Sağkal and Özdemir (2024), Reijaan et al. (2024), Conti and Romano (2025), Yaşar and Yaman (2025), Riser (2025), Benini et al. (2025), Quicho et al. (2026), and Yoleri and Uyumaz (2026).

Study groups: adolescents of divorced parents (Frisco, 2007; Buchanan, 1991; Fergusson, 1994), children (Strohschein, 2005; Fabricius, 2007; Karberg, 2020), divorced parents participating with their children (Amato et al., 2011; Beckmeyer et al., 2014; Feinberg et al., 2007; Maccoby et al., 2016; Elam et al., 2016; Marchand-Reilly and Yaure, 2019; Camisasca, 2019; Riina, 2020; Reijaan et al., 2024), parents alone (Lamela, 2016; Feinberg et al., 2007; Bonach, 2005; Choi et al., 2019; Conti and Romano, 2025; Quicho et al., 2026; Yoleri and Uyumaz, 2026; Pellón et al., 2024; Yaşar and Yaman, 2025; Riser, 2025; Dumitriu et al., 2023; Benini et al., 2025; Sağkal and Özdemir, 2024), college students whose parents are divorced (Fabricius and Lucken, 2007), and children from families in which the parents remain married (Morrison and Cherlin, 1995). Pre-existing datasets or various scales were used for data collection.

The findings from the 30 empirical studies examined reveal that the divorce process and the co-parenting patterns established after divorce have multidimensional effects on children's psychosocial, academic, and behavioral adjustment, as well as on parents' own well-being. When the data in the literature are evaluated as a whole, it is evident that a constructive and collaborative co-parenting relationship reduces children's internalizing and externalizing problems, plays a mediating role by buffering the destructive effects of parenting stress on children's adjustment, minimizes adolescents' feelings of being caught between both parents, and significantly protects children's mental health in shared custody arrangements with alternating residence (67.9% vs. 79.8%) (A4, A5, A8, A9, A12, A19, A24, A26). In contrast, high conflict, hostility, maladaptive cognitive schemas, negative involvement, and triangulation dynamics trigger aggression, antisocial behaviors, and difficulties with emotional regulation in children, while significantly reducing parental satisfaction and life satisfaction (A4, A7, A10, A21, A23, A25, A28, A30). Furthermore, the findings indicate that the effects of divorce and co-parenting may vary depending on gender, cultural context, pre-separation family factors, and the parent's individual psychosocial well-being; indeed, while it was found that boys are more vulnerable to the effects of the separation process in terms of behavioral problems and have a greater need for father involvement, it was determined that the quality of co-parenting itself is the decisive factor for girls (A5, A11, A13, A17, A18, A22). Finally, while parenting interventions were found to reduce parenting stress and increase self-efficacy, and financial settlement satisfaction, low hostility, forgiveness, and mutual attachment were identified as the most critical determinants in building quality co-parenting,

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

it is understood that divorce—regardless of the method—continues to have direct negative effects on adolescents' academic performance, anxiety, and depression levels (A1, A2, A3, A6, A14, A15, A20, A27, A29).

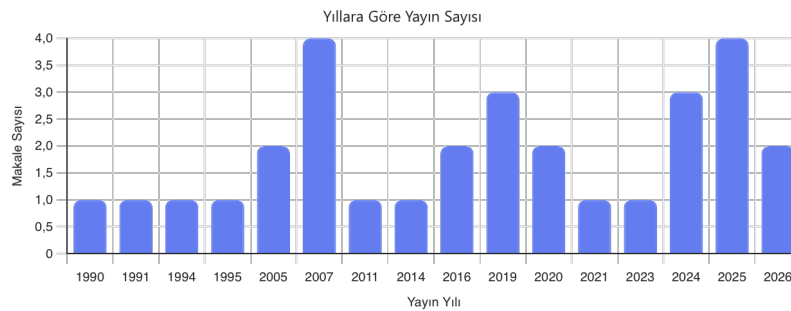


Figure 1: Number of Publications by Year

The bar chart in Figure 1 shows the distribution by year of the thirty studies examining children's psychosocial adjustment after divorce and the impact of co-parenting. The highest number of studies was observed in 2007 and 2025. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in research emphasizing the importance of children's psychosocial adjustment after divorce and co-parenting.

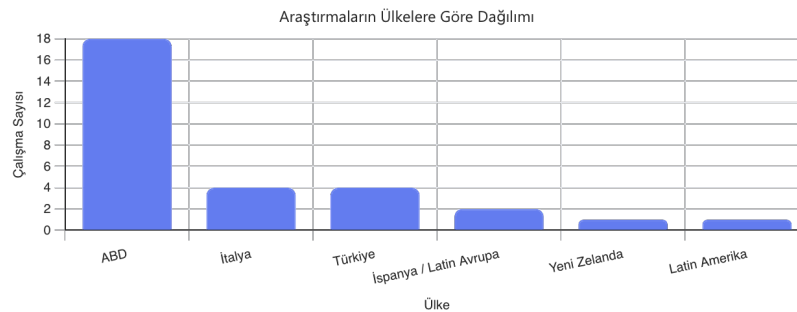


Figure 2: Distribution of Studies by Country

The bar chart in Figure 2 shows the distribution of the thirty studies examined by country. This graph, which shows that the United States is by far the leader in the literature on children's adjustment after divorce and co-parenting, clearly reveals a gap in the literature regarding the Turkish context. This distribution indicates a need for more research in the field of post-divorce co-parenting that takes cultural context into account.

DISCUSSION

When the findings from the 30 empirical studies examined are evaluated alongside the studies that form the theoretical and conceptual framework of this review, it becomes evident that divorce is not merely a legal dissolution but a multi-stage transitional crisis involving a profound restructuring of the family in its emotional, economic, social, and parenting dimensions (Bohannon, 1970; Karahan, 2012; Nazlı, 2018; Özgüven, 2001). The primary mechanism that maintains the family's psychosocial balance during this crisis process is the patterns of co-parenting (collaborative, parallel, and conflictual) conceptualized by Maccoby and Mnookin (1990, 1992) (Ahrons, 1981; Feinberg, 2003; Kalkan & Arıca, 2019; Ulucan Özkan, 2025). Findings from the studies examined—indicating that cooperative co-parenting reduces internalizing and externalizing problems in children and serves as a protective buffer against parenting stress—are fully consistent with both classic and current data in the literature (Amato et al., 2011; Conti & Romano, 2025; Hetherington, 1999; Lamela et al., 2016; Riser, 2025).

However, there is no absolute consensus in the literature regarding the direct effect of co-parenting on child adjustment. While some findings highlight the protective power of a collaborative structure, Beckmeyer et al. (2014) found that co-parenting models did not create as pronounced a difference in child adjustment as expected, and Riina et al. (2020) determined that co-parenting conflict does not always directly predict future adjustment problems. This variation stems from the fact that the parents' individual psychosocial well-being and emotion regulation skills play a more dominant role than the quality of co-parenting (Pellón et al., 2024; Yaşar & Yaman, 2025) and the different meanings that cultural norms ascribe to parenting roles (Feinberg et al., 2007; Quicho et al., 2026; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2024).

Research on the impact of divorce on behavioral problems and psychopathology in children and adolescents also highlights two distinct perspectives. Although the findings suggest that while divorce increases anxiety and depression, it does not directly lead to antisocial behavior, the literature—including studies by Fergusson et al. (1994) and Kelly and Emery (2003)—emphasizes that the conflictual process directly triggers antisocial risks. In this divergence, gender and the nature of parental involvement serve

A Review of Studies Examining the Child's Psychosocial Adjustment After Divorce and the Impact of Co-Parenting

as decisive filters: While father involvement and a quality father-child bond serve as vital protective factors in boys' adjustment process (Elam et al., 2016; Marchand-Reilly & Yaure, 2019), for girls, directly perceived support from both parents and a sense of autonomy take center stage (Rejaan et al., 2024). Indeed, empirical findings indicating that shared living arrangements and joint custody arrangements protect mental health (Fabricius & Luecken, 2007; Riser, 2025) are undermined by systemic bottlenecks that occur when the mother restricts the father's role (maternal gatekeeping) (Sullivan, 2004; Yoleri & Uyumaz, 2026).

Finally, whether academic failure and psychological symptoms in children stem from the post-divorce process or from chronic pre-divorce problems is one of the most fundamental points of debate in the literature. In the studies examined, it is evident that conflicted co-parenting and parental alienation dynamics (Altın Üzer, 2024; Bernet, 2010; Gardner, 1985; Güngör, 2025), and the positioning of the child as a messenger directly undermine academic achievement and adjustment (Amato, 2001; Buchanan et al., 1991; Frisco et al., 2007; Öngider, 2013). In contrast, Morrison and Cherlin (1995) and Strohschein (2005) argue that the root causes of these problems lie in marital conflicts prior to divorce, low socioeconomic status, and parenting deficiencies (Amato & Keith, 1991; Symoens et al., 2014). This situation is closely related to marital dissatisfaction (Camisasca et al., 2019; Karberg et al., 2020), parents' maladaptive cognitive schemas (Dumitriu et al., 2023), and their personality structures (Benini et al., 2025).

High-conflict and alienation-prone processes undermine the dynamics of basic trust and secure attachment that are established from infancy onward (Bowlby, 1988), leading to chronic distrust in romantic relationships during adolescence and adulthood (Baker, 2005; Dönmez & Avcı, 2023; Türkaslan, 2007; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). However, fair financial arrangements, forgiveness, low hostility (Bonach, 2005), and evidence-based psychoeducational parenting interventions (Choi et al., 2019) serve as the strongest buffer in maintaining the psychosocial well-being of children and the family by strengthening cooperative co-parenting.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review study highlights the importance of the quality of co-parenting after divorce for children and adolescents in terms of psychosocial, academic, developmental, and psychological well-being. A review of the literature reveals that over the past two decades, research has shifted from a general assessment of "divorce and its effects" to more specific evaluations of "intrafamilial processes, subsystem interactions, and co-parenting." The majority of current studies are based on the model proposed by Feinberg (2003), who introduced the concept of co-parenting to the literature. These studies have generally employed parent-report scales and cross-sectional designs. While there is a significant body of research on this topic in Western literature, it is noteworthy that studies on co-parenting in Turkey remain limited.

The findings of this study indicate that children of divorced couples who practice collaborative co-parenting exhibit fewer psychological symptoms; children exposed to parental alienation and triangulation struggle with low self-esteem and chronic depression in adulthood; the end of the parents' marriage and high levels of conflict negatively affect academic achievement; and that parental conflict may manifest as attachment issues in the child's future interpersonal relationships.

Future studies are encouraged to examine the impact of co-parenting on children not only in terms of the frequency of contact but also by thoroughly investigating the dimension of relationship quality. The role of parents' psychological adjustment in children's psychopathology needs to be addressed more comprehensively. One area where a gap is felt in the literature is longitudinal studies. It is important to increase these studies to gain a clearer understanding of how romantic relationships in adulthood are influenced by the quality of co-parenting during childhood.

The concept of co-parenting is not merely an academic term. It is the most fundamental mechanism for protecting a child's mental health and enhancing their psychosocial adjustment following divorce. Co-parenting after divorce should not be viewed as the end of a legal process, but rather as a transition from a nuclear family to a dual-nuclear family and the beginning of a new family system. Families must be educated on this topic, and it is of great importance to implement programs aimed at promoting this concept at the societal level.

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