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## **Child's emotional relationship to his or her father after the divorce of parents**

### **1. Introduction**

In upbringing, socialization and mental development of children's emotional relationships between parents and between parents and children are very important.

Proper, kind and friendly emotional relationships in the family community are the basis for the implementation of multilateral parental tasks and activities that lead to the satisfaction of social and mental needs of family members, especially children. For children parents constitute a model behaviour, develop a system of values, aspirations and goals that determine the attitude of life of old and young generations. A family environment in which a father and a mother properly function, is the group which prevents and eliminates the disintegration of the personality, by its primary biological and social nature, through a friendly dialogue with children, filling the roles of maternity and paternity, providing a positive emotional situation in the family.

Beside mother, a father performs a significant role in raising children, teaching emotional spheres in the family, creating social relations between family members. He provides an example for their children to follow, protects against family and beyond family difficulties, satisfies mental, social and material needs, is interested in the problems of his child.

Paternal love is usually conditional and learned during a close contact with a child. Kind dialogue of a father with his child brings him not only the emotional satisfaction, appreciation, understanding, but also the knowledge of the surrounding world, and particularly the social conditions of daily life. Through the father's emotional attitude to family members, as well as reflective and thoughtful treatment of a child he introduces the child to a system of social norms and values. A father in frequent intercourse with his child, answers his or

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her questions, gives him or her a variety of information, supporting his intellectual development. A physical and psychological closeness of the father to the child deepens the emotional bond between them.

A presence of the father in the educational process and in the life of every family is extremely important and necessary. A father's participation in care and educational activities from the first moments of child's life provides the child with love, a sense of security and stability and stimulates further development of the child. Emotional and social relationships of a father with the child are slightly different than of a mother. That is why, his or her active functioning, educational awareness and responsibility are essential for the correct, full and multi-lateral development of the child in all spheres of life.

Along with the macro-social changes also some changes in the functioning of the family and a father's role in family life are observed. Increasingly, a crisis of fatherhood may be perceived in a family as well as various contemporary family crisis situations. They are characterized by increasing internal atomization, disintegration, conflicts, a lack of internal agreement. Consequently, this condition entails the dissolution of marriages.

A child during a divorce of his or her parents loses one of parents, usually the father. Family courts granting a divorce in the vast majority (95,6%) allocate the parental care of a child to the mother, although fathers could with greater care, responsibility and reflection meet the challenges of teaching, socialization and childcare of the child (Cudak, 2005).

A family breakdown is a traumatic situation for a child and causes severe emotional disturbance in the social behaviour. The next phases before, during and after a divorce constitute the cause of conflicts, aggression, confusion and hostile attitudes among parents. (Sokal, 2005), The child resides in this negative family environment and has to adapt to it. Then, an indifferent, unfriendly and even hostile attitude to child's father is created, which is recognized by the mother as the person causing family dysfunction, contributing to the conflict, breakdown of marriage and family.

A similar view is expressed by M. Kalinowski (1990) stating that a child's feelings towards the father in case of parents' divorce can be extremely different, from the grief and longing for him to the hatred and the satisfaction that he is not at home anymore.

Each situation of a divorce of parents and abandonment by the father adversely affects the mental and social condition of the child. Negative emotional experiences lead to the form of mental imbalance. A family abandonment by the father due to divorce causes that a child misses a close relative - the father and he or she cannot understand the reasons for leaving or the absence of his or her father at home.

At younger school age an emotional relationship of a child to the father that leaves the family is often expressed in the form of fantasizing about the parent, idealizing him among his or her peers. These feelings are kept to themselves and they express them in order to sustain existing social position in the classroom or in a peer group (Cudak, 2000).

In the first after – divorce period, even if the father rejects the love of a child and breaks the dialogue and the physical and mental contact with his family, the child still believes in the father's love, his authority and emotional closeness. However, the child does not pass to his mother - as the closest person – an inside emotional feelings to the father who abandoned his family.

A child's hope for the return of the father to the family home after parents' divorce after a certain time passes away. The older a child, the faster and in less time child's awareness raises that a divorce is an irreversible fact and must remain in isolation in single-parent family with the mother as the sole custodian parent. The consciousness of being only with the mother causes with increasing emotional strength an emotional insecurity, lack of paternal love, loneliness, abandonment, lower value, and even verbal aggression against the father.

## **2. Methodological remarks**

A divorce often causes disintegration of the social structure, a community of people and the emotional ties of family members. It causes traumatic situations for parents and a child. He or she experiences internal conflicts, aggression between parents as well as physical or mental violence. An emotional dysfunction in marriage leads to the disturbances in family atmosphere and psychological functioning of children in the family during a divorce or already broken.

After a divorce, courts grant legal custody to mothers in vast majority. Fathers often leave their wives and children, leaving their family home. Then, they lose the physical and mental contact with the child. A situation of parents during a divorce and after a divorce causes disturbances of emotional relationships between a child and the biological father.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to diagnose the child's emotional relationship rejected by his father as a result of the parental divorce and the destruction of community and family environment. A problem in the research procedure was formulated as: what is the emotional relationship of the child to the father after parents' divorce?

In the course of the study the following research techniques were used: a questionnaire, an interview and an unfinished sentence test. Taking into account the fact that the survey was constructed with high strength of standardization, the interview was unconstrained, included open-ended questions for obtaining

information on a variety of multilateral emotional and social information as a result of the mental rejection of the child by the father after a family breakdown.

The study was conducted in the second half of 2009 in selected primary schools (classes V and VI) and secondary schools in Piotrkow Trybunalski. The research process was attended by 136 children and adolescents from divorced families. For the analysis, 112 respondents entered the research, including 49 boys, ie 43,7%, while the remaining 63 respondents were girls (56,3%).

### **3. Analysis of test results**

A development of different spheres of the child's personality depends largely on family functioning. The father and the mother are these people in the family that form emotional, social and cultural community in the family environment. Beside mother, the father is required in the functioning of the family, especially for social and emotional development of children. The absence of the father, breaking the emotional ties or rejection of the child after the divorce have the effect of economic, structural, social, and educational dysfunction. Most often, however, an emotional dysfunction in a child with a parent - the father leaving the house where the mother stays with the children or the child follows above mentioned disturbances in family life.

A lack of physical contact of the father with the child, lack of love, satisfaction of emotional needs, including safety, kindness and acceptance, lack of dialogue, rewarding, punishing and assistance in difficult school and life situations of parent-father causes mental instability.

In the research procedure the question of emotional relationship of the child to the father after the divorce of their parents was examined. The results of different expression forms of the emotional states of children to their father are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Emotional relationships of girls and boys to their father leaving the family home as a result of the divorce of parents.

item	Emotional behaviour to the father after the divorce of parents	Boys		Girls		In total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Love	0	-	1	1,6	1	0,9
2.	Kindness	1	2,0	2	3,2	3	2,7
3.	Emotional instability	2	4,1	2	3,2	4	3,6
4.	Indifference	4	8,2	7	11,1	11	9,8
5.	Grudge against father	8	16,4	11	17,5	19	17,0
6.	Unwillingness	7	14,3	12	19,0	19	17,0
7.	Verbal aggression	8	16,4	9	14,3	17	15,2
8.	Hostility	10	20,4	11	17,5	21	18,7
9.	Hatred	9	18,7	8	12,7	17	15,2
10.	In total	49	100,0	63	100,0	112	100,0

An analysis of the results submitted in Table 1 indicates that a positive emotional relationship of the children and adolescents towards their father leaving the family due to the parental divorce is expressed by a very small number of respondents – 4 persons which constitutes only 3,6%. Only one examined boy showed kindness to his absent father, whereas three girls had a warm, friendly and positive emotional relationship to his father. Love and affection expressed to the father leaving the mother and children after divorce constitutes a proof of the functioning the strong emotional relationships with parents and with the father especially then when the family before the divorce was a close community of its members. These emotional ties between the children and the father, despite the family conflict, physical abandonment by his father and trauma experienced by children and the mother during and after the divorce of the parents.

Few of the children also expressed emotional instability, and indifference to their father after the divorce. An emotional instability in the form of negative emotions in some family and beyond family situations, at different times exhibit a positive attitude to the father who caused the incompleteness of their family. This state is experienced by four of the children, that is 3.6%. An emotional instability, as reflected in the behaviour of children after divorce and abandonment by their father, may result from a major mental experiences that affect children – the victims of parental divorce, before and after the divorce. These children as a result of traumatic emotional experiences are emotionally disturbed. Therefore, they may react completely differently emotionally in everyday behaviour in similar situations, also towards the biological father. A slightly larger number of examined children whose fathers left them after the divorce is emotionally indifferent to

him. Nearly one in ten children (9,8%), including 8,2% boys and 11,1% girls, reveals indifference to his father.

A negative emotional attitude of the children and adolescents to their father leaving the family home after a divorce is expressed by 83,1% of the children. A difference in results between the positive attitude of children and negative emotional attitude towards the father leaving the family home after the divorce is statistically significant and is  $\chi^2$  [chi-square value] = 20,67,  $df$  [degrees of freedom] = 9,  $p$  [significance level]  $\leq 0,05$ ,  $T_c$  [critical value] = 0,38. It should be noted that the examined boys showed a negative emotional relationship to their father after the divorce of parents to a greater extent (86,2%) than girls (81,0%). On the other hand, the statistical calculations in the form of chi-square test do not differentiate boys and girls in a statistically significant way, since  $\chi^2$  [chi-square value] = 4,27,  $df$  [degrees of freedom] = 3,  $p$ .i.  $\geq$  ni. [significance level unimportant].

Grudge against the father that abandoned the family is expressed more by girls (17,5%) than boys (16,9%). Interviewees indicate that so far the love for the father was replaced by grudge against his conduct, against family abandonment in difficult life situations. Statement by the boy with initials JK, 12 years old: "When I was 11, my dad told me that he has to go to work and he will not be at home for long. At first I missed my father and I asked mom when he returned home. My mother eventually told me that my dad never went away, but he left us and therefore, she was forced to divorce him. I feel sorry for the dad, that he did not love us, that he left me, even though we were together. I regret that he does not communicate with us or with my mother, nor with me; though, he knows that I have loved him and miss him".

Grudge against the father expressed by the examined children is caused by the child's abandonment, lack of love, lack of physical and mental contact. Children experience the feeling of insecurity, a lack of psychological and social needs. They feel regret that their father failed their expectations and hopes, failed as a father. This form of emotional behaviour of children is a direct cause of expressing resentment towards the father who left the family due to the divorce. Girls examined in the research more significantly manifest reluctance as a negative emotional state in their behaviour to the father (19,0%) than boys (14,3%). An example of an emotional relationship in the form of resentment against the father who severed ties with his family after the divorce is a case of Jacek - 14 years old. For a long time he could not reconcile himself with the divorce of his parents. He always thought that both parents had loved him - and showed him their feelings. He blames his father for the divorce and the family breakdown. After the divorce, he had no desire to see and converse with his father. He did not feel comfortable in his company. The father becomes more and more a stranger to Jacek.

The examined children who expressed distaste for their fathers ceased to meet their father, were annoyed by his presence, did not want to talk about and remember their father, blamed him for causing the divorce, exhibited pain and mental suffering.

Aggression is another negative emotional attitude of children toward the father after the divorce.

Aggression against the father is manifested in a greater degree by male respondents (16,4%) than female respondents (14,3%). Children who express this form of emotional behaviour in relation to their father after the divorce, most often blame him for difficult economic, emotional, life, and educational situations. These situations trigger anger towards the father, a sharp exchange of views, conflicts and misunderstandings, and even insults that humiliate his dignity.

Hostility was the most often an emotionally negative attitude among the respondents, expressed by children in relation to fathers after the divorce. As many as 18,7% of respondents manifested such emotional state.

More than one - fifth of respondent boys (20,4%) and slightly fewer girls (17,5%) formed in their personality a hostile, unfriendly and unpleasant relationship to their father. The hostility stems from the fact that children, as alleged in the research, are devoid of dialogue with both parents, love of the father, help in a difficult situation, safety, material resources. These children often misjudge their father, issue him a negative opinion, have bad memories, do not want to talk about him. They express the view that their father hurt them and is not worth of having a family.

Hatred is the last in categories of negative emotional relationship expressed by children to the father leaving the family home after the divorce. This feeling is extremely negative which can be met by the biological father from their children. Too large proportion of the examined children (15,2%) expressing the strong negative emotions toward their father who hurt them in the pathological family before the divorce of parents is a disturbing social and psychological phenomenon. In such families, as the surveyed respondents state, physical and psychological violence, negligence of children, father's alcoholism, aggression, continuing conflicts, disagreements were present and social and emotional relationships in the family were disturbed. For them a family house was a place full of trauma, struggle with their father. Parents' divorce freed the mother and children from these difficult situations and dysfunctional family life; however, hatred to the father as the perpetrator of this social pathology, as the man who led to the disruption of family life and family breakdown remained in the children's personalities. Hatred to the father after the divorce is compounded in children under the age of puberty, especially in boys (18,7%) in single-parent family with material poverty, because single mothers are not able to satisfy the material, educational, cultural and development needs of these children.

#### 4. Conslusions

A breakdown of family due to various reasons, leaving her by the father causes disturbances of socialization, educational, economic, and emotional spheres in the family group as an incomplete social structure. Children's behaviours in relation to their father after the divorce of parents generally become even more difficult. Children cannot manage the conflict problems in the family. A breakdown of the family has a negative effect on the functioning of children. They often express rebellion, aggression towards parents and especially to the father who is blamed by the mother for the breakup of the family, for difficulties of life. This situation intensifies the disturbance of emotional relations between children and the father leaving the family after parents' divorce. Children feel unloved, alone, abandoned by their father. Children feel a lack of safety, anger, indifference, resentment and blame on the father for the breakdown of family and leaving it in difficult situations.

Children's emotional relationship to their fathers after parents' divorce has been different depending on the age of the children. In a place of the child's love expressed to the father at the younger school age, although the feeling of love was often concealed, by emotional instability and indifference of children in upper classes of primary school up to the resentment, hostility, aggression and hatred of secondary schools' students to their father – as the perpetrator of family breakdown and social, economic and emotional dysfunction in family environment.

### Stosunek emocjonalny dziecka do ojca po rozwodzie rodziców

#### Streszczenie

Obecność ojca w procesie wychowania i w życiu każdej rodziny jest niezwykle ważna i potrzebna. Udział ojca w czynnościach opiekuńczych i wychowawczych już od pierwszych chwil życia zapewnia dziecku miłość, poczucie bezpieczeństwa i stabilności oraz stymuluje do dalszego rozwoju. Relacje emocjonalne i społeczne ojca z dzieckiem są nieco inne niż z matką, dlatego jego aktywne funkcjonowanie, świadomość wychowawcza i odpowiedzialność jest niezbędna do prawidłowego, pełnego i wielostronnego rozwoju dziecka we wszystkich sferach życia.

Rozpad rodziny stanowi dla dziecka sytuację traumatyczną powodującą silne zaburzenie w emocjonalnej sferze zachowań społecznych. Kolejne fazy procesu przedrozwodowego, rozwodowego i porozwodowego stają się przyczyną konfliktów, agresji, nieporozumień, wrogich postaw między rodzicami. W tym negatywnym środowisku rodzinnym przebywa dziecko i musi się do niego przystosować. Tworzy się wówczas u dziecka obojętny, nieżyczliwy, a nawet wrogi stosunek do ojca, który uznawany jest przez matkę za osobę powodującą dysfunkcje rodzinne, przyczyniającą się do konfliktowości i rozbitcia związku małżeńskiego i rodziny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ojciec, rozwód, emocjonalny stosunek dziecka.

**Keywords:** Father, divorce, child's emotional relationship.

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