LITIGATION SUBSEQUENT TO A MANDATED PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL SEMINAR FOR DIVORCING PARENTS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Brenda Sullivan Buckner, B.A., M.Ed.

Denton, Texas

May, 1997

Major Prof: JAN HOLDEN, PH.D.
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This study was designed to assess the difference in litigation between two courts: one mandating For Kids’ Sake, a psycho-educational seminar for divorcing parents, and the other not so mandating. The level of difficulty of children’s adjustment to divorce has been positively correlated with parental hostility. More hostile parents would have more contested cases, interim motions, and relitigations.

This research compared final dispositions, interim motions, and relitigation between parents in two courts in Collin County, Texas. The treatment group was from the 219th District Court which mandated all divorcing parents with minor children to attend the For Kids’ Sake Seminar and the control group was from the 199th District Court which did not so mandate. Archival data was collected from a computer generated list for the Total group data to assess final dispositions and directly from District Clerk files for the In-Depth group data to assess interim motions and relitigation.

The Total group was comprised of 679 research subjects with 330 cases in the treatment group and 349 cases in the control group. The In-Depth group
consisted of 182 cases from both courts with 84 cases in the treatment group and 98 cases in the control group.

Chi square analysis of the total group revealed significantly more parents in the treatment group who non suited the divorce suit and remained married (p.<.05), a significantly lower number of cases in the treatment group with interim motions (p.<.10), and a significantly lower amount of relitigation in the treatment group (p< .05).

The results showed that the court that mandated For Kids’ Sake evidenced a reduction in subsequent litigation which not only benefits the legal system but also hopefully reflects lower parental hostility and higher parental cooperation, thereby benefiting the children of divorce.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Chapter I  INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Literature</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of Divorce on Adults</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of Divorce on Children</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors in Post-Divorce Adjustment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Interventions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Session Psycho-Educational Seminars</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young 1978a</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping Children Cope with Divorce</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Kids’ Sake</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young (1978a &amp; 1978b)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping Children Cope</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Summary</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter II  PROCEDURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Subjects</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Procedures</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Analysis</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter III  RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Total Group Final Dispositions Distribution 38
Chi Square of the Final Dispositions of the Total Group 38
Standardized Residuals for the Total Group 39
Number of Cases Where Interim Motions Were Filed 40
Chi Square Comparison of Cases Where Interim Motions Were Filed 41
Relitigation Comparison of the In-Depth Group 42
Chi Square of Relitigation for the In-Depth Group 42
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Each divorce is the death of a small civilization" (Conroy, 1978, p. 43). Divorce impacts children and parents in different ways (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The litigation process of terminating a marital relationship includes both the dissolution of the marriage and a Suit Affecting Parent-Child Relationship. Almost one-half of all marriages will end in divorce or separation and two out of five children will grow up in divorced families (Wolman & Taylor, 1991).

A Suit Affecting Parent-Child Relationship (SAPCR) becomes a contested issue when parents are unable to mutually agree upon custody and, sadly, the only alternative to a negotiated agreement is the legal process. The family places its future in the hands of the legal system. A custody dispute represents "a failure in the process of completing a psychological divorce" (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1980, p. 917). Custody disputes have been referred to as the ugliest litigation possible. Therefore, the legal community and mental health professionals have sought guidance and counsel from each other.

Legal and mental health professionals' theoretical underpinnings have created "strange bedfellows." The marriage of the legal and mental health
communities, in the field of prevention of continuous litigation for divorcing couples with children, has encouraged each field to focus on the clients' and the children's well-being during divorce and custody litigation.

Divorcing spouses can present some of the most emotional or unreasonable clients that professionals have to deal with from legal, judicial, or mental health perspectives (Wallerstein, 1986). In cases involving children, whether the spouses agree to a particular custody arrangement or fail to agree and must comply with a court-mandated custody arrangement, emotional fallout for both parents and children is inevitable. Many people still continue to see "asking for help" as an unacceptable sign of weakness or fail to appreciate the benefits that are available in the mental health community.

The stress of divorce creates specific issues and situations for parents and children. Following divorce the quality of the parent-child relationship strongly correlates with the child's well being (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Divorce is a time when probably all families would benefit from mental health intervention. Many of the families involved in divorce or child custody disputes do not take advantage of the numerous interventions offered to help them during this transitional period.

Confusion and overwhelming emotions come as part of the divorce process, and most parents are totally unprepared to cope with such feelings. During and after divorce, children are particularly in need of effective parenting, yet this need comes at a time when parents are typically overwhelmed,
vulnerable, and emotionally unavailable to their children (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Parents are in critical need of assistance at this time. Therapeutic interventions include psycho-educational seminars about the effects of divorce on parents and children, support groups for children of parents who are divorcing, support groups for parents who are divorcing, and counseling at the group or individual level.

Statement of The Problem

Because most parents do not take advantage of the numerous interventions offered, and as legal and mental health professions have become increasingly allied, several courts across the nation have begun requiring parents with minor children to attend psycho-educational programs. These programs provide parents with information about the effects of divorce on children. "By focusing on the postdivorce needs of children and the consequences of parental conflict, these programs strive to reach parents before full-scale disputes emerge" (Braver, Salem, Pearson, & DeLuse, 1996, p. 134).

Surprisingly little research has been done on the effectiveness of these programs in improving the quality of life for parents and children in the aftermath of divorce. One such program that was developed to address divorce issues is For Kids' Sake, a court ordered one session psycho-educational seminar for divorcing parents. The purpose of this study was to measure the difference in litigation subsequent to filing for divorce and litigation after the divorce between
two groups: those randomly assigned to a court that mandated attendance at For Kids' Sake and those randomly assigned to a court that did not so mandate.

Review of Literature

The following review of literature addresses the effects of divorce on adults, the effects of divorce on children, the relationship between parents' and their children's post divorce adjustment, and various group interventions for divorcing parents. Also reviewed are three psycho-educational programs: a landmark program developed by Young (1978a), Helping Children Cope with Divorce, and For Kids' Sake. For Kids' Sake was a copyrighted curriculum of the Practical Parenting Education Department in Piano, Texas (Leslie-Johnston, 1995).

Effects of Divorce on Adults

The emotional impact of divorce on adults is well documented in the literature (Bloom, 1975; Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Bloom, Hodges, & Caldwell, 1983; Bohannan, 1971; Caldwell, Bloom, & Hodges, 1984; Hassall & Maddar, 1980; Kessler, 1975; Krantzles, 1973; Weiss, 1976). Common emotions for divorcing adults include loss and grief, isolation and loneliness, depression, guilt, anger, self-hatred, reduction in self-esteem, fear, anxiety, and regret. The adult loses a dream, a partner, a family, a history, a past, a future, a view of how they belong in the world, and their identity. Issues related to marital dissolution for parents could include: (a) transition to single parent status; (b) child care and discipline; (c) dating, remarriage, and step-children; (d) loneliness; (e)
establishing a different relationship with the former spouse, relatives, and children; (f) financial problems; (g) housing; (h) anger and unresolved feelings; (i) child-napping; (j) grieving loss of family, spouse, and children; (k) employment; (l) custody decisions and litigation; (m) communication problems; and (n) loss of generational boundaries (Cantor & Drake, 1983).

Bohannan (1971) described the divorcing adult as forced to cope simultaneously with six overlapping divorce experiences: (a) emotional divorce, (b) legal divorce, (c) economic divorce, (d) coparental divorce, (e) community divorce, and (f) psychic divorce. Emotionally drained adults who have children are faced with both dealing with their own feelings and dealing with the effects of divorce upon the children. Thus, "divorcing parents need to understand the impact of divorce on children so that they can develop strategies to help their children cope" (p. 607). Parents need to understand what to expect from the children during and after the divorce process. Children are more likely to be helped the more the children's parents understand what the children are experiencing.

Effects of Divorce on Children

Well documented emotional effects of divorce on children emphasize the need for the parents to understand these effects. Identified psychological effects of divorce on children include denial of separation; grief; sadness and depression; fear of abandonment; actual abandonment; running away from home; immaturity; hypermaturity; blame; guilt; reconciliation preoccupation;

Additionally, divorce affects all aspects of the child's life from school performance to relationships with friends and family to future hopes and dreams (Bisnaire, Firestone, & Rynard, 1990; Demo & Acock, 1988; Kalter, 1987; Keith & Finlay, 1988; Wallerstein, 1984, 1985). Cantor and Drake (1983) pointed out that the parent and the child must deal with and resolve specific issues. The child's issues include: (a) child's transition to child-of-divorce status; (b) adjustment to new schedules; (c) loss of family life and parent; (d) step-parent, step-siblings, and half siblings; (e) moving; (f) change of school and friends; (g) loyalty issues between parents; and (h) involvement in custody issues.

Factors in Post-Divorce Adjustment

Contrary to popular belief, parental conflict does not always dissipate with divorce and may, in fact, increase afterwards (Ahrons, 1994). A key stressor that contributes to long-term problems of children is parental hostility during the divorce process regardless of the type of custody/visitation arrangements.
A continuous hostile relationship between parents contributes more to children's difficulties than does the actual divorce, and the ongoing post-divorce parental conflict has serious long-term effects on the emotional development of children. Thus, the single most common cause of poor post-separation adjustment in children is unrelenting conflict between parents (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Parents may not be aware that their behaviors toward each other can affect the child's long-term adjustment to divorce (Amatro & Keith, 1991; Brown, Portes, & Christensen, 1989; Emery, 1982; Kelly, 1988; Wallerstein, 1986).

Parents must be made aware of "information and be educated about the divorce process in order to assist their children and themselves with the task of family reorganization" (Santrock & Sitterle, 1985, p. 202). Parents can facilitate adjustment to special needs and resolution of problem areas facing their children. Parents need information about the course of divorce and how their children may respond and behave during various points in the divorce process. Santrock and Sitterle (1985) identified several factors that facilitate a positive influence on children's post-divorce adjustment: a constructive co-parenting relationship, continued availability of the noncustodial parent to the child, and providing a predictable and stable home environment. Psycho-educational
seminar agendas include information and suggestions for how divorcing parents can accomplish these factors.

"The stress of a divorce greatly reduces the amount of time and energy focused on the child and each parent's emotional distress and reduced coping capacities significantly impair the quality of time spent with the child" (King, 1992, p.1009). An assumption of the psycho-educational divorce seminars was that the parent becomes more effective when aware of the effects of divorce on the child and when the parent learns what can be done to help the child. It was believed that an indication of "parental awareness" would be how the parent handled their divorce case after receiving information gained from a psycho-educational seminar. Armed with the knowledge that continuous conflict is harmful to the child, the conscientious parent might chose to be more amicable during the divorce process. If parents were more amicable, the result could be ascertained from divorce court records. The court records would indicate a difference in final dispositions, fewer cases with interim motions, and less relitigation among divorcing parents who had litigated through a court that required attendance at a psycho-educational seminar.

Group Interventions

Both individual and group interventions exist to assist parents and children of divorce. Most individual interventions are costly, and the individual must be extremely motivated to attend numerous sessions. Therefore, group intervention are used because they are a productive and a cost efficient method.

For the purposes of this study, psycho-educational groups were the focus. Hodges (1986) described the education model as being overlooked by mental health professionals in attempting to help others. “It is presumptuous to assume that every problem is due to unresolved childhood conflict” (p. 282). Many divorcing parents are often well meaning, interested in learning how children typically react to divorce, and eager to know what they can do to aid the children during and after the divorce. When parents feel safe rather than challenged they can be helped to develop effective interventions through an educational model (Hodges, 1986). Many parents have seen the damaging effects of spousal conflict on children as well as on themselves.

The educational model can provide the divorcing parent with specific strategies, approaches, and knowledge or skill in helping and handling children and the child’s other parent. Psycho-educational divorce groups should focus on adjustment rather than therapy designed to make changes in personality. “There seems to be a consensus that some skills training for parents in communication and negotiation and overall knowledge about divorce might have a salutary effect on children” (Zibbell, 1992, p. 191). However, few programs exist that direct such training to divorcing parents. One program evaluated participants’
immediate responses at the end of the seminar but none addressed specific changes in parents’ stress or children’s adjustment. The reviewed psycho-educational programs have recognized the importance and value of including mental health professionals among the facilitators. One session psycho-educational parent seminars for divorcing parents will be reviewed.

One Session Psycho-Educational Parent Seminars

Young, 1978a

Of 16 programs reviewed by Charping, Bell, & Strecker (1992), only one (Young, 1978a) used a one session educational workshop format and was required by the court. Only the filing party was required to attend and then only when a minor child was involved. Young’s workshops were structured with a series of lectures by several speakers who covered a variety of topics. The workshops were exclusively educational and presented in a four hour, one session format.

Each workshop was divided into three stages. During the first portion of the program, a judge from the Family Court gave a short presentation on the basic legal processes involved in a divorce action. Participants were encouraged to discuss this material with the judge serving as moderator. During the second portion of the workshop the participants explored issues of coping with children and divorce. Material for this section was adapted from Richard Gardner’s (1971) book The Boy’s and Girl’s Book About Divorce. A team consisting of a male and a female psychologist discussed problems in this area and asked for
input from the participants. The team also led the third and final phase of the workshop which directed the participants in an exploration of personal feelings, concerns, and expectations related to the impending divorce and their future.

Evaluation questions were asked before and after each workshop. Initial attitudes about having to come to the workshop were mixed: 15% were very positive, 27% were somewhat positive, 18% were neutral, 37% were somewhat negative, and 3% were very negative. Participants' initial attitudes toward the workshop correlated with how their attorneys felt about the workshop. In addition, more positive expectations were found the older a participant was, the more children the participant had, as well as when the participant had no divorce history. Negative expectations of the workshop were reported by participants who had filed for divorce previously from their present spouse.

Participants identified how personally troubled they were in three areas: (a) legal-financial, (b) coping with children, and (c) personal feelings. Most of the respondents were somewhat or very concerned about each area of adjustment. The amount of concern in each area was significantly and positively intercorrelated, indicating the level of a participant's concern in one area was similar to the level of concern in the other two areas.

Post workshop evaluation results indicated that "participants were pleased with the workshop as a whole and that they were pleased with each of the three major parts of the program" (Young, 1978a, p. 43). When asked if given the opportunity would they attend the workshop on their own, 93%
answered a strong yes. Ninety percent answered they would recommend the workshop to someone. When asked if in their opinion they believed they received long-term benefits from the workshop, 8% reported not anticipating future benefits, 34% were not sure about future benefits, and 58% reported they could see future benefits.

**Helping Children Cope With Divorce**

The Helping Children Cope with Divorce psycho-educational seminar was developed by the Families First staff of trained professionals who also present the seminar. The nature of their training and of their particular professions was not documented in the literature. The seminar consisted of four hours of information, role-playing, and discussion. Participants were provided handouts and a community resources list. The seminar emphasized how families can grow in a positive way through a divorce. Thus any negative impact felt by the children could be minimized. The impact of divorce on children and improvement of communication skills were topics presented (Coiro & Emery, 1995; Thorpe, 1994; Zirps, 1992).

The seminar outline format follows the manual’s didactic content of:

I. Introduction

II. Some Facts About Divorce

III. The Divorce Process (adaptation of Kubler-Ross’ 1969 grief model)

   A. Emotional Divorce
B. Co-parenting Divorce
C. Legal Divorce
D. Economic Divorce
E. Community Divorce
F. Psychic Divorce

IV. How Children React [to Divorce]
   A. Telling Children About Divorce
   B. Developmental Stages and Implications of Visitation
   C. Suggestions Regarding Visitation

V. What Children Need To Do To Adjust

VI. What Parents Can Do To Help
   A. Avoiding Common Pitfalls
   B. Develop Listening Skills

VII. New Family Structures

VIII. Children At Risk

IX. How To Get Help

X. Conclusion

For Kids' Sake

The For Kids' Sake: Nurturing Children Through the Transitions of Divorce program was developed in Collin County, Texas, by the Practical Parent Education Department in Plano, Texas. The purpose of the program was to "create an awareness in parents of how children experience divorce and to
provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to help them nurture their children successfully through this process" (p. iv). The program goals were (a) to help parents become aware of the damaging effects divorce can have on children, (b) to help parents focus on the needs of their children during the divorce process, (c) to provide parents with an awareness of how to ease the trauma of divorce on minor children, (d) to help parents develop the skills necessary to avoid placing children in the middle of their own conflict issues, (e) to increase parental involvement of non-custodial parents, (f) to make parents aware of community resources available to them, (g) to reduce court dockets by minimizing contested proceedings, (h) to improve compliance with court orders, (i) to increase the rate of consistency in child support payments, and (j) to reduce the time spent by courts and attorneys on conflict issues (Leslie-Johnson, 1995, p. ii).

Facilitators for the program were required to complete an approved For Kids' Sake training seminar. A male and a female co-leader were recommended. At least one facilitator was required to have a graduate degree in a mental health field, a minimum of two years of active experience in facilitating adult learners, and endorsement of their local court and/or bar association. The training encompassed a full eight hour day. During the first half of the day the facilitator trainees learned about the program. During the second half they assumed the role of divorcing parents while the training facilitators fully demonstrated the seminar.
For Kids' Sake consisted of one four hour session. For Kids' Sake taught divorcing parents about the potential harms to children of poor post-divorce co-parenting. Parents learned warning signs that indicated their child may be having a difficult time adjusting to the divorce and strategies to manage, in the least detrimental way for the child, their relationship with the other parent. Most participants were mandated to attend, and a facilitator’s responsibility was to create a comfortable environment without threats or judgmental attitudes. The format was interactive and experiential with a variety of teaching techniques used to facilitate learning.

A Parents' Handbook was provided during the seminar for later use as a reference. The parents were invited to relax, listen, and participate. Everything covered in the seminar was also contained in the handbook, so there was no need to take notes. An outline of the parent handbook follows:

I. Welcome
   A. Introduction of Facilitators
   B. Purpose and Objectives of Seminar
   C. Agenda and Housekeeping Items
II. Brief Overview of Divorce Studies and Statistics
III. Far Reaching Effects of Divorce on Families
   A. Emotional Adjustments
   B. Changes in Identity
C. Separation of Family
D. Financial Stresses
E. Social Responses
F. Legal Issues

IV. Taking Care of Yourself: Children’s Need for Healthy Parents

V. How Divorce Affects Children
   A. Developmental Responses for Coping with Divorce
   B. Talking with Children About Divorce
   C. Helping Children Express Feelings and Emotions
   D. Keeping the Lines of Communication Open
   E. Assuring Children That They are Loved by Both Parents
   F. Reestablishing a Sense of Security
   G. Recognizing Stages of Grief in Children
   H. Dealing with Anger in Children

VI. Recognizing Children At Risk
   A. Warning Signs of Abnormal Grief in Children
   B. When to Seek Help
   C. Community Resources

VII. Avoiding Adult Behaviors Which Are Destructive to Children
   A. Sabotaging Children’s Relationship with the Other Parent
   B. Criticizing and Blaming the Other Parent
C. Using Children to Carry Messages Back and Forth

D. Using Children to Resolve Money Issues

E. Creating Inconsistencies Regarding Children’s Rules, Guidelines, and Expectations

F. Pumping Children About the Other Parent’s Personal Life

G. Using Children as a Surrogate Partner

VIII. Common Areas of Conflict in Divorced Families

A. Visitation Guidelines and Suggestions

B. Holidays and Special Events

C. Accessibility to Both Parents and Extended Families

D. Parental Involvement

E. Dating Again

F. Remarriage

IX. Building a Co-Parenting Relationship

X. Concluding Remarks

A. Evaluations

B. Certificates of Completion

There is a consensus in the professional literature that some training of the divorcing parents would be beneficial. At least after the parents have attended the training, the Court would know the parents had been exposed to the most recent facts about divorce, some guidelines for dealing with children,
an introduction to co-parenting (possibly a new concept to some parents), and some new communication skills to use with their former spouse.

Research

Research about the effectiveness of short-term divorce psycho-educational groups was meager. In the literature short-term intervention was described as groups that meet continuously from one to sixteen weeks. For the purpose of this study, the primary focus and definition of short term intervention was a one session psycho-educational intervention group.

Because of their comparability to the model involved in this research, this review discusses studies completed on four hour court ordered interventions. Some of these four hour interventions were divided into two two-hour sessions.

Young (1978a & 1978b)

Young (1978a) reported parents were immediately satisfied with a "one-shot" divorce workshop (Young, 1978b). "Most participants felt very positive about the program and believed they were better equipped to handle the many legal, social, and emotional problems related to the experience of divorce" (Young, 1978b, p. 50). Each parent who completed an initial evaluation questionnaire became part of the study and became eligible to be part of the follow-up study.

A three-month follow-up survey was conducted to discover the results of consumer satisfaction with Young's (1978a) predivorce workshop. Results from the follow-up survey indicated the consumers were still satisfied although their
perception of the value of the workshop had somewhat declined. In answer to the question, "Considering the past few months what would you say about the value of the workshop?" respondents answered, of great value (34%), of some value (50%), of little value (8%), and of very little or no value (8%). When participants were asked if they had "experienced any long-term benefits from the workshop", 61% said they had and 39% indicated they had not. Interestingly, over half of the follow-up respondents stated they would attend additional meetings.

**Helping Children Cope with Divorce Program**

The Helping Children Cope with Divorce Program consisted of two two-hour sessions taught by trained presenters. The program taught “divorced parents about the potential harms to children of poor post-divorce co-parenting” (p. 1). Topics included warning signs a child may display that indicate difficulty adjusting to the divorce and strategies for getting along with the former spouse in a way that will be least injurious for the child.

Zirps (1992) analyzed surveys of participants of the Helping Children Cope with Divorce program. One thousand surveys were mailed and 279 (28%) were completed and returned. Retrospective information was requested from the participants, who may have completed the seminar as long as two years before. The questions used in the survey were not published. Most respondents felt the seminar was helpful: extremely helpful (11%), very helpful (14%), and helpful (35%). Parental perception of positive child adjustment was strongly related to
the report of (a) satisfactory custody arrangements and visitation, (b) good communication with the parents and among the parents, (c) resolution of parental conflict, (d) parental adjustment to the divorce, (e) co-parenting, and (f) a return to normal age-appropriate activities. Eighty five percent of the respondents stated there had been no court action since the seminar. Zirps did not assess a control group or offer overall statistics about the number of divorcing parents who engage in court action after the divorce, so whether this 85% was higher, lower, or equal to the average cannot be known. Of the 15% who had subsequent court action, 11% of the original court cases had been contested divorces, and, therefore, further court action was highly likely. Zirps reported that parents who were in custody disputes tended to remain angry even after the seminar.

Zirps (1992) reported positive child adjustment was significantly correlated (p<.05) to satisfactory custody arrangements and visitation, good communication between parent and child and among parents, resolution of parental conflict, parental adjustment to the divorce, co-parenting, and the child's return to normal age-appropriate activities. Variables found to be significantly (p<.01) predictive of child adjustment over time were return to normalcy in the home, a satisfactory custody arrangement, good parent-child communication, and an ability to resolve conflicts. Communication among parents was strongly but not significantly related to a cooperative co-parenting attitude, positive
relationship with the ex-spouse, refusal to use children as messengers, ability to resolve conflict, and resolution regarding custody issues.

VanHoy and Pitts (1995) used an immediate survey and a review of the archival records after the court mandated the Helping Children Cope with Divorce seminar. Participants completed a "Parent Satisfaction Survey" at the end of the seminar. Questions used on the survey were unavailable. VanHoy and Pitts reported responses from 97% of the 14,000 parents who had attend the seminar. These parents reported an overall approval rating of 88%.

The archival data was gathered through a review of the court records of all divorce filings. Although the data was not analyzed statistically, researchers noted an apparently more rapid movement through the legal system among parents who had attended the seminar. The average elapsed time from filing to final decree decreased from 7.7 months when one or no parent attended the seminar to 6.2 months when both parents attended the seminar within four months of filing. Also, results indicated 25% less subsequent litigation among parents who attended the seminar when the attendance was within four months of filing for divorce. The average length of time from the beginning of relitigation until a final disposition was reached decreased: if neither parent had attended the average was 8.3 months; if one parent had attended the average was 2.9 months, and if both parents attended the average was 3.3 months. Eighty percent of mandated cases that were followed for a period of two years after filing were not involved in subsequent litigation, though the absence of a control
group of non mandated cases renders the meaning of this finding uncertain. Additionally, increased rates from 15% to 20% of an occurrence of joint custody was reported when January, 1991, was compared to January, 1993.

Coiro and Emery (1995) surveyed participants from October to December, 1994, from The Helping Children Cope with Divorce program. They administered a confidential researcher-constructed survey during two different time periods. Prior to the first session, the researchers collected sociodemographic information and baseline information of the post-divorce relationship. Following the second session the researchers administered a survey that examined the post-divorce spousal relationship, children’s adjustment, and the participants’ impressions of the program.

Based on the results of the baseline information, researchers divided the participants into two groups: high or low reported conflict between parents. In the second survey, both the high and the low conflict respondents reported that their understanding of topics covered in the seminar had improved or improved greatly. Additionally, the parents generally rated the quality of the program as high and found it helpful. Nevertheless, parents in the high conflict group reported that their children were adjusting more poorly to the divorce than did parents in the low conflict group. This result indicated that parent self reports mirror their perception of their children’s adjustment to divorce.
Research Summary

Immediate results of the seminars have primarily been measured by the use of researcher generated questionnaires. These questionnaires have not been determined to be reliable or valid. In most cases, researchers assessed parents upon immediate completion of the seminar. Results of the questionnaires indicate that a mandated seminar for divorcing parents has been considered effective and beneficial as reported by the parents upon immediate completion of the seminar. A majority of the parents who have participated in immediate surveys have reported feeling very positive about the program, have believed they were better equipped because of the workshop, and/or have rendered high overall approval ratings (VanHoy & Pitts, 1995).

To summarize, follow-up studies on the mandated seminars yielded mostly positive results. Parents reported at three months they were still satisfied although their perception of the value of the seminar had declined somewhat. Participants of psycho-educational seminars appeared to move through the legal system more rapidly with less subsequent litigation when they attended the seminar early in the process. A majority of participants who had completed the seminar within the previous two years reported that the seminar had been helpful and that they had not been involved in subsequent court action.

The reviewed studies report encouraging findings about the effectiveness of psycho-educational seminars for divorcing parents. The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of a psycho-educational seminar by assessing
actual court records of two District Courts in Collin County, Texas. The 219th District Judge mandated both parties in every divorce case involving minor children to attend the For Kids' Sake Seminar, and the 199th District Judge did not mandate or suggest parties of divorce cases should attend For Kids' Sake or any other psycho-educational seminar. If the seminar was effective the Court that mandated For Kids’ Sake and the Court that did not mandate the seminar would evidence differences in the disposition and relitigation of their cases. The differences could reflect the effectiveness of the For Kids’ Sake Seminar in reducing the intensity of existing litigation, in detering relitigation, and in providing a more amicable manner of settlement. The more amicable divorce settlement could reflect reduced parent hostility which has been shown to enhance childrens' adjustment to divorce.

Previous research studies on litigation did not use two independent groups nor were litigation data analyzed statistically. By contrast, this study statistically compared two independent groups to answer specific questions about differences in litigation between parents litigating in courts that did or did not mandate attendance at a psycho-educational seminar.

Purpose of the Study

With knowledge of the effects of divorce on children, it appears that parents can learn to help their children cope with the divorce process. Parents may realize that the healthy development of their children can be facilitated if they learn to establish a non hostile relationship with each other and use a non
The adversarial approach to the child custody decision making process. Therefore, parental litigation in a court that mandates attendance at a psycho-educational seminar may translate into a more amicable divorce and emotionally healthier children.

The purpose of the present study was to measure the difference in litigation subsequent to filing for divorce and litigation after the divorce between two groups: those court-mandated to attend For Kids' Sake and those not so mandated. It was the first study in the professional literature on psycho-educational seminars that statistically compared frequency of three types of divorce-related litigation using data drawn from the court records of two randomly assigned groups: the treatment group assigned to a court that mandated the psycho-educational seminar and the control group assigned to a court that did not so mandate.

Research Questions

Questions addressed in this study were: Will there be a difference in the number of types of final dispositions between the treatment and the control group? Will there be a difference in the number of cases involving interim motions between the treatment and the control group? Will there be a difference in the number of cases involving relitigation between the treatment group and the control group?
CHAPTER 2

PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to measure the difference in litigation subsequent to filing for divorce between two groups: those court-mandated to attend For Kids' Sake and those not so mandated. The goal of the For Kids' Sake Seminar was to increase divorcing parents' willingness to settle in an amicable manner and to improve the relationship between the parents, thereby resulting in emotionally healthier children. The studies reviewed in Chapter One used archival data and surveys of parents to answer the question of the effectiveness of psycho-educational seminars.

The archival records used in this study consisted of files from two District Courts in Collin County, Texas. These files were maintained by the Clerk of the District Courts. The court files were extremely accurate public records created for legal purposes for the primary use of clerks, courts, and attorneys. Accurate archival records did not easily lend themselves to non legal statistical analyses; therefore data collection was time consuming. Each file required separate review by an individual sufficiently familiar with the legal system to recognize and analyze the specific import of the various documents.
While many interesting human variables were not available with this method, the data quality and record keeping accuracy was exemplary and thus extremely credible. This study measured activity and dispositions of divorce cases from the 219th Court in which the Judge mandated For Kids' Sake and from the 199th Court in which the Judge did not mandate For Kids' Sake. By comparing the identified treatment and control groups post hoc through archival records, the differences between litigation subsequent to filing for divorce and litigation after the divorce was compared between two groups: those court-mandated to attend the For Kids' Sake and those not so mandated. Thus, differences between litigation in the two courts was scientifically researched.

Research Questions

In previous research, parents reported that the mandated psycho-educational seminars for divorcing parents were effective and helped them gain an awareness of the effects of divorce upon their children. Previous studies also have suggested more rapid movement through the legal system, less relitigation, increased rates of compliance with court mandates, and increased occurrences of joint custody among parents who had attended the seminar (VanHoy & Pitts, 1995; Zirps, 1992). A likely research question to target was the increase of joint custody among parents who attended psycho-educational seminars, but in Texas "it is a rebuttable presumption that the appointment of the parents of a child as joint managing conservators is in the best interest of the child" (Sampson & Tindall, 1996, p. 366). Therefore, because joint custody is the rule
rather than the exception of Texas law, and therefore would likely reflect factors other than reduced parental hostility, the joint custody question was not researched.

The encompassing question asked by this study was "does litigation in a court that mandates a psycho-educational seminar confer a benefit to the divorcing parents and therefore contribute to the emotional well being of their children?" If the For Kids’ Sake Seminar has benefits then litigation records should reflect that the parents who litigated in the court that mandated the seminar agreed more often and had less interim intensity and less relitigation than similar parents who litigated in a non-mandating court.

When a divorce suit was filed in Collin County, Texas, the District Clerk randomly assigned each case to one of five courts. The 219th District Court Judge required all parents to attend a psycho-educational seminar and specifically to attend the For Kids’ Sake Seminar. The 199th District Court Judge did not require or suggest that parents attend a psycho-educational seminar. All subjects were parents of minor children, who filed for divorce in Collin County between July, 1994, and January, 1996, who had a divorce case randomly assigned to the 199th or 219th District Court, and whose divorce had a final disposition date on or before April, 1996. The treatment group consisted of divorce cases from the 219th District Court, who were mandated by the court to attend, and who attended, the For Kids’ Sake Seminar. The control group
consisted of divorce cases from the 199th District Court who were not mandated by the court and did not attend the For Kids' Sake Seminar.

Hypotheses

To carry out the purpose of this study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. There will be no difference between the treatment group and the control group in the Total sample in the number of types of final dispositions.

2. There will be no difference between the treatment group and the control group of the In-Depth sample in the number of cases involving interim motions filed during the divorce.

3. There will be no difference between the treatment group and the control group of the In-Depth sample in the number of cases involving relitigation.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are included for a better understanding of the terminology in this study and are intended to impact an adequate understanding of the terminology.

Studied divorce case: A divorce case filed in Collin County between July, 1994, and January, 1996, randomly assigned to the 199th or 219th District Court, that reached final disposition on or before April, 1996.
Minor child: A child who was less than 18 years of age at the date of the final disposition of the case and whose parents were the subjects of a studied divorce case.

Divorcing parent: The biological, presumed, or adopted parents of a minor child of a studied divorce case.

Agreed Divorce: A divorce in which both the parties agreed to the content of the decree. In other words, the divorce was granted or finalized.

Contested Divorce: A divorce in which a judge or a jury resolved one or more disputed issues and rendered the divorce finalized.

Non Suit Divorce: A legal term that is used when a litigating party or parties request that their case be dismissed. In other words, the parents decide not to divorce and thereby remain married.

Default Judgment Divorce: A divorce that results when a party has legally sufficient notice or service of citation and fails to answer or come to court and present an answer. This enables the petitioning party to go forward with the divorce without the agreement of the other party. Even though the case may be one sided, the Judge of the Court still has an obligation to render a verdict that is in the best interest of the children involved.

Interim motions: A motion or pleading to the court requesting temporary orders which will be in effect until the final disposition. Any motion filed between the date the divorce decree was filed and the final disposition of the case would be an interim motion. A wide variety of issues were
included such as custody, child support, temporary visitation, and
restraining orders.

Final disposition: The conclusive determination of the case such as an
order or judgment. For example, the divorce was agreed, non suited,
contested, or defaulted.

Relitigation: Legal action to seek relief in a court of law to modify or
enforce a previous final disposition. Anything regarding a Suit Affecting
Parent-Child Relationship can be relitigated, but anything regarding the
property division in a divorce cannot be relitigated.

Treatment: Litigation in a court that mandated attendance at a For Kids'
Sake Seminar by one or both of the divorcing parties.

Total comparison: A sample of 673 cases, which consisted of 343 cases
in the 199th District Court and 330 cases in the 219th District Court, which
met the criteria of having filed for divorce in Collin County between July,
1994, and January, 1996; having reached a final disposition on or before
April, 1996; and having been randomly assigned to either the 199th or the
219th District Court.

In-Depth comparison: A sample of 200 cases from the 676 "total
comparison" cases of which 100 cases were from the 199th District Court
and 100 cases were from the 219th District Court. These divorce cases
had file dates beginning December, 1994.
Research

The research was conducted in Plano, Collin County, located in the north central portion of Texas, just north of Dallas. Subjects in the treatment group litigated in a court that mandated attendance at a For Kids' Sake presentation. The For Kids' Sake Program was a collaborative effort of the Plano Bar Association, Judge Curt B. Henderson of the 219th Judicial District Court, Practical Parent Education, and the Texas Bar Foundation.

The For Kids' Sake Program was presented two or three times monthly with more than 10 parents attending each session. The seminar cost $30 per parent unless the parent could not pay, in which case the fee was waived. Classes were held at the Practical Parent Education Office in Plano, Texas.

Research Subjects

The research subjects were parents who were divorcing, who had a child younger than eighteen years of age at date of final disposition, and whose Collin County divorce was filed between July, 1994, and January, 1996, and reached a final disposition on or before April, 1996. Each couple seeking divorce in Collin County, Texas, was randomly assigned by the District Clerk to a specific court and only District Court 219th required divorcing parents to attend the For Kids' Sake Seminar.

The treatment group consisted of 330 parents randomly assigned to the 219th Judicial District Court in which Judge Henderson mandated the For Kids' Sake Seminar. The Judge gave these parents notice that their attendance at a
four-hour psycho-educational class (For Kids' Sake) was mandatory and that completion of the seminar would be necessary for their hearing to be scheduled. The parents received a letter from the Judge and a brochure (Appendix A) describing the For Kids' Sake Seminar. The control group consisted of 343 parents randomly assigned to the 199th Judicial District Court in which the Judge did not mandate the For Kids' Sake Seminar. Archival information was obtained from the Collin County District Clerk's office files. An assumption was made that subjects' interactions with a particular judge in and of itself did not influence parenting attitudes and behaviors. However, from the most conservative research approach this was an uncontrolled variable.

Research Procedures

Archival data was collected from a computer list as well as from the District Clerk's files. Judge Henderson provided a computer generated list of cases from the two District Courts in Collin County that were used in this study. The Judge downloaded the information from the District Clerk's computer and classified the data according to the research criteria. The computer generated list included the court number; cause number; day, month, and year the divorce was filed; nature of the case; and final disposition of the case. Three hundred forty three cases were listed from the 219th District Court and 330 cases were listed from the 199th District Court. All cases met the criteria previously described. The final disposition data were used to test Hypothesis 1.
Data from the 219th District Court comprised the treatment group data. On July 8, 1994, Judge Henderson began mandating the For Kids’ Sake Seminar to all divorce cases involving minor children. The Judge required the District Clerk, upon receiving the divorce petition, to immediately issue an Order requiring both parties to attend the For Kids’ Sake Seminar before their case could be heard for a final disposition. The 199th District Courts’ data constituted the control group. The Judge in the 199th Court did not mandate parents to attend any psycho-educational seminars.

The In-Depth sample consisted of 200 cases identified from the original computer generated list. An In-Depth analysis was completed on these cases to retrieve data used to test Hypotheses 2 and 3. One hundred cases from each court were chosen. The first 100 cases in each court that were filed beginning in December 1994 were used.

Of the original 200 cases, 182 cases were used for the In-Depth analysis. Cases were disqualified from the In-Depth analysis if the minor child reached the age of 18 before the final decree, if the case was an annulment of a marriage, if the 219th cases did not have proof in the District Clerk’s file of For Kids’ Sake attendance of one or both parties, if the 219th cases attended another psycho-educational seminar other than the For Kids’ Sake Seminar, or if the 199th cases attended the For Kids’ Sake Seminar or any other seminar.

The researcher used a worksheet (Appendix B) as a guide during the In-Depth review of the cases. The researcher interviewed a Board Certified Family...
Law Attorney for guidance in identifying categories of information that might be available through an In-Depth review of the District Clerk's files. Three categories existed for retrieval of pertinent data. Those categories included For Kids' Sake, Interim Motions, and Relitigation. Data collection for each category is explained as follows:

For Kids' Sake Seminar Information: The For Kids' Sake information consisted of a certificate indicating whether and when the mother and/or father attended For Kids' Sake.

Interim Motions: The interim motion information included whether or not there were additional motions once the suit was filed.

Relitigation: The relitigation category included whether or not relitigation had been filed since the final disposition of the case as of January 15, 1997.

Statistical Analysis

Following the collection of the archival data from the 199th and the 219th District Courts, chi square ($\chi^2$) was computed to test the significance of the difference between the treatment group and the control group for each hypothesis. "One of the simplest and yet most useful of statistical tests, the chi square" (p. 153) was utilized to answer whether the nominal data collected in this study differed significantly because of the treatment or from chance (Kerlinger, 1986). Unlike phi (\(\phi\)) which is restricted to a 2 X2 contingency table,
chi square can be used with contingency tables larger than 2 X 2 tables (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1988).

The researcher first examined the differences in the Total group by comparing the 199th and the 219th data. The researcher then examined the differences in the In-Depth group by comparing the 199th and the 219th data. A sample size of 145 cases was need to have a medium to large effect size of .30 (Richardson, 1996); the Total sample size of 673 cases and the In-Depth sample size of 182 cases exceeded this requirement. Significance of difference was tested at the .05 level. On the basis of the chi square, the hypotheses were either retained or rejected.
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data for each hypothesis tested in this study. Included also is a discussion of the results, implications, and recommendations for further research.

Results

Results of this study are presented in the order the hypotheses were tested. Chi square was performed on all hypotheses and a level of significance of .05 was established as the criterion for either retaining or rejecting the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1

There will be no difference of the treatment group and the control group in the Total sample in the number of types of final dispositions.

Table 1 presents the number and the percentage of Agreed, Non Suit, Contested, and Default Judgment Final Dispositions for the treatment and control group. Table 2 presents the Chi square analysis data, showing the difference between the treatment and the control groups' final dispositions.

Three degrees of freedom were associated with the test of Hypothesis 1. At the
significance level of .05 for three degrees of freedom the critical value of $\chi^2_{cv}$ was 7.82. Because the calculated value ($\chi^2 = 14.93$) exceeded the critical value ($\chi^2_{cv} = 7.82$), the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1

**Total Group Final Dispositions Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disposition</th>
<th>Agreed</th>
<th>Non Suit</th>
<th>Contested</th>
<th>Default Judgment</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>214 (62%)</td>
<td>86 (25%)</td>
<td>16 (5%)</td>
<td>27 (8%)</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>231 (70%)</td>
<td>46 (14%)</td>
<td>26 (8%)</td>
<td>27 (8%)</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>445 (66%)</td>
<td>132 (20%)</td>
<td>42 (6%)</td>
<td>54 (8%)</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

**Chi Square of the Final Dispositions of the Total Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>O-E</th>
<th>(O-E)$^2$</th>
<th>(O-E)$^2$/E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>231</td>
<td>217.80</td>
<td>13.20</td>
<td>174.24</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>214</td>
<td>226.38</td>
<td>-12.38</td>
<td>153.26</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>66.00</td>
<td>-20.00</td>
<td>400.00</td>
<td>6.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>68.60</td>
<td>17.40</td>
<td>302.76</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19.80</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>38.44</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20.58</td>
<td>-4.58</td>
<td>20.98</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26.40</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27.44</td>
<td>-1.44</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The differences between the observed and the expected frequencies in the four categories were too great to be attributed to sampling fluctuation. To determine which of the categories were major contributors, the standardized residual was computed for each of the categories. The results of the standardized residual computation is in Table 3. The standardized residual identified the non-suit category as greater than 2 (absolute value), therefore the non-suit category was a major contributor to the significant \( \chi^2 \) value. Significantly more litigants from the 219th Court, all of whom attended For Kids' Sake, asked for their divorce case to be dismissed and agreed to stay married, as compared to litigants from the 199th Court, none of whom attended For Kids' Sake.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disposition</th>
<th>Agreed</th>
<th>Non Suit</th>
<th>Contested</th>
<th>Default Judgment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>-.82</td>
<td>2.10*</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>-2.50*</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Major contributors to the significant \( \chi^2 \) value which were greater than 2 in absolute value were identified with an asterisk (*).
Hypothesis 2

There will be no difference between the treatment group and the control group of the In-Depth sample in the number of cases involving interim motions filed during the divorce.

Table 4 presents the number of cases in which additional motions were filed in the treatment and control groups during the divorce. Chi square analysis of the data was used to compare the treatment and the control groups (Table 5). One degree of freedom was associated with the test of Hypothesis 2. At the significance level of .05 for one degree of freedom the critical value of $\chi^2_{cv}$ was 3.84. Because the calculated value ($\chi^2 = 2.89$) did not exceed the critical value ($\chi^2_{cv} = 3.84$), the null hypothesis was retained.

Table 4

Number of Cases Where Interim Motions Were Filed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Motions Filed</th>
<th>Motions Not Filed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>29 (35%)</td>
<td>55 (65%)</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>46 (47%)</td>
<td>52 (53%)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75 (41%)</td>
<td>107 (59%)</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Chi Square Comparison of Cases Where Interim Motions Were Filed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>O-E</th>
<th>(O-E)^2</th>
<th>(O-E)^2/E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>40.18</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>33.87</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>34.44</td>
<td>-5.44</td>
<td>29.59</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>57.82</td>
<td>-5.82</td>
<td>33.87</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>49.56</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>29.59</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine the significance level involved with the finding on interim motions, further calculations were undertaken. At the significance level of .10 with one degree of freedom, the calculated value of \( \chi^2 = 2.89 \) exceeded the critical value of \( \chi^2_{0.10} = 2.71 \). Although it did not meet the significance level established at the beginning of the research, it met the level specified for significance in exploratory research (J. M. Holden, personal communication, February, 22, 1997).

Hypothesis 3

There will be no difference between the treatment group and the control group of the In-Depth sample in the number of cases involving relitigation.

Table 6 presents the number of cases involved in Relitigation after Final Disposition for the treatment and the control groups. Table 7 presents the Chi square analysis data, showing the difference between the treatment and the control groups' relitigations after final dispositions. One degree of freedom was
associated with the test of Hypothesis 3. At the significance level of .05 for one degree of freedom the critical value of $\chi^2_{0.05}$ was 3.84. Because the calculated value ($\chi^2 = 5.38$) exceeded the critical value ($\chi^2_{0.05} = 3.84$), the null hypothesis was rejected. Litigants from the 219th Court, all of whom attended For Kids’ Sake, evidenced significantly fewer relitigations as compared to litigants from the 199th Court, none of whom attended For Kids’ Sake.

Table 6

Relitigation Comparison of the In-Depth Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relitigation</th>
<th>No Relitigation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>12 (14%)</td>
<td>72 (86%)</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>28 (29%)</td>
<td>70 (71%)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40 (22%)</td>
<td>142 (78%)</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

Chi Square of Relitigation for the In-Depth Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>O-E</th>
<th>(O-E)^2</th>
<th>(O-E)^2/E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>21.56</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>41.47</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>18.48</td>
<td>-6.48</td>
<td>41.99</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>76.44</td>
<td>-6.44</td>
<td>41.47</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>65.52</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>41.99</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Parents who filed for divorce and were assigned to a court that mandated attendance at the For Kids' Sake psycho-educational seminar engaged in less subsequent litigation than did similar parents assigned to a court that did not mandate such attendance. The weakest specific finding was a strong but not significant reduction in interim motions among parents in the court that mandated For Kids' Sake. For purposes of exploratory research a .10 level of significance is often used. Although this finding did not reach the level established at the beginning of the study of .05, the fact that it reached a .10 indicates that it may be worthy of further attention in later research. Because interim motions such as restraining orders are not a regular part of a divorce and they only appeared in 41% of the cases, a larger sample size may yield a greater level of significance. The findings suggest that the strong possibility future research may find a significant difference in regard to interim motions because the small sample size in this study may not have allowed a higher level of significance to emerge from the data.

In the For Kids' Sake mandated court, a smaller, but not significantly smaller, percentage of parents actually ended up divorced and/or contested their cases. Significantly more decided not to divorce, as evidenced by their mutually agreed-upon withdrawal of the divorce suit. This finding was surprising in that For Kids' Sake was not designed to dissuade parents from divorce but only to help them understand the effects of divorce upon their children. In the process of
parents associating with a judge who supports For Kids' Sake and possibly exhibits other family enhancing and mental health enhancing attitudes, it is possible that parents rethink their decision to divorce. It is equally possible that For Kids' Sake inadvertently prompts parents to rethink their decision. Until further research separates these variables, it is safest to say that a court that holds attitudes supportive of parent attendance at a For Kids' Sake psycho-educational seminar and that actually mandates such attendance will likely experience an increase in parents deciding not to divorce and a possible reduction in contested cases. Similarly, a court with a supportive attitude toward and mandatory attendance at a For Kids' Sake psycho-educational seminar can expect a significant reduction in relitigation.

On the surface an increase in non suited divorces may seem desirable but the researcher can not be sure that parents who choose to non suit their divorce have less hostility in their relationships. Perhaps parents in Judge Henderson's Court feel pressured, succumb to guilt feelings, and decide to continue in their marriage unhappily. The message that the researcher witnessed at the For Kids' Sake Seminar and during interactions with Judge Henderson was simply a concern to reduce hostility in order to foster the best possible adjustment for their children. The researcher observed absolutely no pressure for parents to remain married.

This study supports the value of cooperative efforts between the legal and mental health communities. Recent movements toward cooperation and
integration have included mediation as well as psycho-educational seminars. Perhaps together the mediation and the psycho-educational seminars indicate a trend that will benefit everyone. Judges across the United States are mandating programs similar to For Kids' Sake as well as programs which are more intensive and extensive for parents and children. In Kansas, families (parents and children) who kept coming back to court were mandated to attend a weekend workshop (Roeder-Esser, 1994). "Arizona's 'New Beginnings' consists of eleven sessions including individual and group meetings" (Salem, 1995, p. 840). Perhaps the seminars will stimulate the parent desire to continue psycho-education or enter counseling and thereby learn more lasting ways to parent more effectively.

Reductions in divorce litigation benefit litigants by reduced legal expenses and benefit courts by reduced volume. But the greatest potential advantage is in the reduced stress, enhanced mental health, and enhanced adjustment of litigants and their children. Reduced litigation implies greater cooperation and less hostility between parents which probably helps children's adjustment. Further research may substantiate this link, but for now it is probably a reasonable assumption that the reduced litigation found in this study reflected greater cooperation and less hostility between parents which is known to facilitate the adjustment of and thereby benefit the children of divorce.
Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Judges mandate divorcing parents to attend psycho-educational groups that as closely as possible resemble the For Kids' Sake Seminar.

2. Follow-up research on relitigation with the In-Depth group. The purpose of the follow-up research would be to measure both groups at a 5 year and 10 year period using Hypothesis 3 from this study.

3. Further research in which the children's adjustment is objectively measured before and after the For Kids' Sake Seminar and compared to a control group.

4. Further research in which the parents' parenting behavior is objectively measured before and after the For Kids' Sake Seminar and compared to a control group.

5. Further research in which the children's adjustment (recommendation three) would be compared to the parents' parenting behavior (recommendation four).

6. An experimental study involving a Judge who is sympathetic to For Kids' Sake and one who is skeptical about For Kids' Sake. Each Judge would agree to randomly assign half of their cases to attend the For Kids' Sake Seminar and subsequent litigation would be compared.
The effects of the attitudes of the Judges would be separated from the effects of the seminar.

7. An experimental study in a state other than Texas to ascertain the relationship between psycho-educational seminars and types of custody agreements.

8. Interview parents who non suit their divorces with the intent of determining what may be influencing them to continue their marriage after filing for divorce.

**Concluding Remarks**

Future research can specify which parents are likely to be influenced by litigating through a court that mandates psycho-educational seminars like For Kids’ Sake. Until then, this study indicates that a court that mandates across the board will likely see a reduction in litigation as well as benefits resulting from reduced litigation.
To Register
or for Additional Information,
Call
Practical Parent Education
519-8720

Seminar Location
Practical Parent Education
1517 Avenue H
Plano, TX 75074

As a reminder for your records:

Date and Time of
Selected Seminar

Date__________________

Time__________________

For Kids' Sake

Nurturing Children through
the Transitions of Divorce
For Kids' Sake

Sake

For Kids' Sake, seminars are designed to help parents gain insight into the needs of their children during the transitions of divorce. The program is a collaborative effort of the 219th Judicial District Court, the Plano Bar Association, and Practical Parent Education. It was developed out of a concern for the potentially devastating effects divorce creates for children.

Divorce is a painful and confusing experience for all children. Research indicates that the manner in which parents handle divorce can have a direct effect on children's adjustments.

Even the most caring parents will find it difficult to focus on their children's needs during such a traumatic time. Most parents will not have the skills necessary to help their children with the resulting change and loss.

For Kids' Sake seminars will help put parents in touch with their children's needs and provide them with the knowledge and skills to safely nurture their children through this process.

The four hour seminar is an educational model. It does not deal with personal or legal issues, nor is it a counseling experience. The overwhelming majority of parents who have participated in this type of seminar feel that it is a very supportive and worthwhile experience.

Who May Attend? Any interested parent or professional is invited to attend. Parents involved in a divorce, motion to modify, or other suits involving the parent/child relationship may be required by the district court to attend.

When and Where are the Seminars Held? The seminars will be held in the educational classroom of Practical Parent Education, 1517 Avenue H, Plano. (See map on reverse side) twice a month.

Who Facilitates the Seminar? Individuals with masters level degrees in counseling, social work, or parent education will lead the sessions. Generally a male and female will co-facilitate.

What is the Cost? Fees are $30.00 per person and are payable by check or money order ahead of time. Fees may be waived by the courts for individuals unable to pay. A fee form is attached.

How Do I Register? You may call Practical Parent Education to register at 519-9720 between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Monday-Friday.

What Information Will Be Covered? The seminar will focus on issues such as:

- Understanding the effects of divorce on children
- Gaining insight into children's perceptions of divorce
- Talking to children about divorce
- How to avoid placing children in the middle of parents' issues
- Maintaining a meaningful relationship with your children

Will I Receive a Certificate of Completion? All participants who complete the four hour seminar will receive a certificate of completion. Seminars will begin and end on time. No late arrivals will be allowed and participants must remain in class for the entire four hours. No exceptions.
APPENDIX B
DATA

Court/Case Number ___________________________ Date Filed __________

For Kid's Sake Information

Mother: Attended For Kid's Sake. Yes/No Date attended FKS __________

Other Parenting Yes/No

Father: Attended For Kid's Sake. Yes/No Date Attended FKS __________

Other Parenting Yes/No

Interim Motions

Yes/No

Final Disposition

Date: __________ Non Suit Agreed Decree Trial by Judge Trial by Jury

Relitigation

Relitigation since final disposition of case (last date checked 1/15/96). Yes/No
REFERENCES


