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Fifteen years after parental divorce: mental health and experienced life-events.

**Running head:** Divorce, mental health and life events

TERESIA ÄNGARNE-LINDBERG, MARIE WADSBY

## 2 Abstract

The children who experienced their parents divorce when the divorce rate in Sweden had begun to grow to higher levels than in preceding decades are today adults. The aim of this study was to investigate if adults who had experienced parental divorce 15 years before the time of our study, differed in mental health from those with continuously married parents, taking into account life events other than the divorce. Instruments used were SCL-90 measuring mental health, and the Life Event questionnaire capturing the number and experience of occurred events. Forty-eight persons, who were 7 to 18 years old when their parents divorced, constituted the divorce group, and 48 persons matched on age, sex, and growth environment formed the study groups. The symptom check list showed a limited difference between the groups, but not as concerned total mental health. A main finding was a difference with regard to sex and age; women aged 22-27 in the divorce group displayed poorer mental health than other participants in both groups. The results from the Life event questionnaire showed that the divorce group had experienced a significantly larger number of events, and more life events described as negative with difficult adjustment. A regression analysis showed a significant relation between the SCL-90; GSI and life events experienced as negative with difficult adjustment, divorce events excluded, but not with the divorce itself. It seems highly desirable to pay more attention than thus far been paid, to girls with experience of childhood divorce at age 7-12.

*\* Parental divorce, Mental well-being, Life-events, Gender differences, Age differences.*

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The children who experienced their parents divorce when the divorce rate in Sweden had begun to grow to higher levels than in preceding decades (1) are today adults. The long-term consequences of this event on their mental health have been addressed in several studies, but there is a need for further exploration as divorce is a life event that can influence people's lives in many different ways over time (2-15).

Previous Scandinavian research about the consequences of parental divorce has provided conflicting findings, some reporting increased risks as concerns lowered psychological and social wellbeing and lower educational attainment (2,3), similar to most US studies (4), and others only small or negligible risks (5-7). There are, however, studies that conclude that the long-term consequences are more serious than the short-term consequences (3, 8, 10, 15)

Studies from Finland (12), Norway (16) and Britain (17) point to the long-term effects of parental divorce as being stronger among females than males as concerns psychosomatic symptoms, prevalence of depression, minor psychiatric disturbance and anxiety. Other studies suggest that boys are more susceptible than girls to disturbances in life such as divorce (13,18), and there are studies that show minimal or no gender differences (14,19,20).

It has been proposed that younger children may be more seriously affected by divorce than older (13). Other findings have shown no effect of age at the time of parental divorce (16). Thus most studies find equally negative effects for both younger and older children (8, 17, 19).

Divorce is, however, not an isolated event. There are events directly connected to the divorce, but there are also other important life events, both negative and positive such as deaths, marriage, early childbearing etc, influencing. In addition there are processes that occur before, during and after the divorce that have the potential to affect individuals

lives and set in motion a chain of circumstances (21, 22). For children who at the time of the divorce experienced only limited problems, or who appeared to have coped earlier with their parents marital dissolution, problems can emerge or re-emerge later in life as they confront new challenges and developmental tasks (21, 22).

Consequently, it can be stated that studies to date have shown varying effects of parental divorce due to the circumstances mentioned above, and due also to gender and age (14, 21, 22).

Swedish research concerning the conceivable long-term consequences for adult children who experienced parental divorce in childhood is limited, but there are studies from other Scandinavian countries (12, 16, 20) that provide results useful for comparison. As far as we have been able to discover, there are very few studies on the mental health of children of divorce that take into consideration the effect of events other than parental divorce. No studies have been reported in Sweden to our knowledge.

The aim of the present investigation was to study the mental health of a group of children, today adults, who in the majority of cases were studied 15 years ago at the time of their parents divorce, taking into consideration life events of both positive and negative nature in addition to the divorce event itself that might have influenced their mental health.

## **2 Material and Methods**

### **3 Subjects**

Fifteen years before the time of our study all couples with children aged 0 to 18 years old who consecutively applied for divorce at the District Court of Linköping during one year (July 1987 to June 1988), were comprised in a study of children's reactions and mental health in relation to the parents divorce. The children who were 7-18 years old

then, and consequently 22-33 years old at the present study, formed the divorce group, in all 125 children.

Of these 125 persons, 76 agreed to participate in the study (42 women and 34 men). Forty-nine persons (24 women and 25 men) did not participate. Reasons for this were that two of the children's parents were remarried, 14 could not be reached, and 33 declined to take part in the study.

A non-divorce group was formed through the "Register of the population". Persons with the same sex, born on the same day or otherwise on the closest day following or preceding the birth date of the individual in the divorce-group, were living in the same area/village/town at the time of the study, and had parents who according to the same register were still married and living at the same address were chosen. Of the 125 persons selected for the non-divorce group, 63 agreed to participate in the study.

Since the intention was to keep the two groups as alike as possible to fulfil the original criteria noted above, only those persons in the divorce group who had fully answered the same questionnaires, and matched the persons in the non-divorce were comprised in the analyses. Consequently, 48 of the persons in the divorce-group corresponded with 48 persons in the non-divorce group.

### **3 Instruments**

The Symptom Checklist, SCL-90 (23), a self-report mental health inventory was used.

The scale consists of 90 questions which are scored on a five-point scale of distress, from "not at all" (=0) to "very much" (=4), the higher the score the more distressed.

The questions are interpreted in terms of nine primary subscales. Three global indices of psychological disturbance are also used; Global Severity Index (GSI), Positive

Symptom Distress Index (PSDI), and the Positive Symptom Total (PST), (see table 1, 2a, and 2b).

The instrument is standardized for the Swedish population, and it has been tested for validity and reliability with satisfactory outcome (24).

The Coddington Life Events inventory (25,26), revised and modified for Swedish conditions by Höök et al 1995 (27), was used in order to make a survey of life events that had occurred in life up to the date of the interview and of the subsequent reactions/experiences and adjustments to these events.

The Swedish version of the questionnaire (27) originally consisted of 48 items. Items concerning the subjects' own adult experiences were added to the questionnaire for use in this study, as the subjects were now up to 33 years of age. In all, the inventory comprised 57 life events. Every occurred event was valued by the interviewed, (see table 3a and 3b).

### **3 Procedure**

The divorce group was first sent an introductory letter with information about the study and with a request about participation.

The non-divorce group got a letter with information about the study and how they had been selected for the study as well. Both groups were informed that we were going to call them within a few days after they had received the letter, to ask them if they wanted further information, and to get their consent to participate in the study. They were told that they were free to decline or to withdraw from participation at any time during the study, and they were also free to learn what had been documented about them.

After giving their consent, time and place for a personal meeting was settled, most often in the home of the participants (71%) or at the university department from which the

study was administered. At this meeting, the questionnaires were reviewed and an interview concerning experiences, memories and opinions about the parental divorce and divorce in general was conducted. The results from these interviews will be presented in coming articles. The participants in the non-divorced parents' group were interviewed by phone and were sent the questionnaires by mail.

### **3** *Statistical analyses*

The SPSS package version 13.0 was used. The results of the SCL-90 are presented in terms of means and standard deviation, and life events in terms of the number of occurrences.

Differences between the divorce group and the non-divorce group concerning the SCL-90, between men and women and between different age-groups were tested for by Mann-Whitney U-test.

The disparity in number of life events between the divorce group and the non divorce group was tested for by using the t-test, and when the experience of, and adjustment to different life events were to be compared, the Chi-square and Fisher-Freeman-Halton's test were used when appropriate.

A regression analysis was performed in order to see the effect of diverse categorized events, differential associations between the events, and how much variance they explained. The SCL-90 global scale GSI was used as a response/dependent variable, and as explaining/independent variable six categorized events were made through summarizing experiences by the participants described as; positive experience, negative experience with easy adjustment, negative experience with difficult adjustment, divorce events excluded. Other categorizes were positive divorce, negative divorce with easy

adjustment, and negative divorce with difficult adjustment. To that gender and age were added.

### **3 Ethical consideration**

The study was approved by The Human Research Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Linköping, (Dnr 03-249).

## **2 Results**

As shown in Table 1, there was a weak but significant difference between the divorce group and the non-divorce group, the divorce group scoring higher on two of the nine subscales; paranoid ideation ( $p<0.05$ ), and psychoticism ( $p<0.05$ ). No difference was noted what concerned GSI, PSDI and PST.

*Insert Table 1 about here.*

Women in comparison with men in both the divorce group and the non-divorce group showed no significant difference in mental health.

An age-difference was found between the younger and the older women, a difference that was most pronounced when the groups were divided into one consisting of 22-27 years old (*i.e.* 12 years and younger at the time of the parental divorce) and the other 28-33 years old (*i.e.* 13 years and older at the time of parental divorce). Women in the younger divorce group scored significantly higher on every symptom scale ( $p<0.01$ - $0.001$ ) than women in the younger non-divorce group (22 to 27 year old groups), but in the older group (28-33 years old), the women in the non-divorce group were noted to score higher than the women in the divorce group on the obsessive-compulsive scale ( $p<0.01$ ), the depression scale ( $p<0.05$ ) and the PSDI scale ( $p<0.001$ ), (Table 2a).

Significant differences on every symptom scale ( $p<0.01-0.001$ ) were also found when women within the younger divorce group (22 to 27 years) were compared with women in the older group (28 to 33 years), the younger women showing poorer mental health. When the same comparison was made in the non-divorce group, women in the older group (28 to 33 years) scored significantly higher in the obsessive-compulsive ( $p<0.01$ ), depression ( $p<0.02$ ) SDI ( $p<0.05$ ), PSDI ( $p<0.05$ ) and PST ( $p<0.05$ ), (Table 2a ) than women in the younger group. No significant differences were noted between men in the corresponding groups (Table 2b).

*Insert Table 2a and Table 2b about here.*

In total, the divorce group had experienced a significantly greater number of life events ( $p<0.001$ ) than the non-divorce group, divorce related events excluded (Table 3a and 3b). The experienced events had also been experienced as more negative ( $p<0.001$ ) and more difficult to adjust to ( $p<0.001$ ) in the divorce group compared to the non-divorce group.

*Insert Table 3a and 3b about here*

Events that had occurred more frequently in the divorce group, although not experienced as more or less positive or negative or easy or difficult to adjust to, were events that might have been in some cases directly divorce-related and in others not (Table 3a and b). Examples are more conflicts between parents ( $p<0.001$ ), but also fewer conflicts between the parents ( $p<0.01$ ). Family of origin changes home ( $p<0.05$ ) and moves to another place ( $p<0.01$ ) had been more frequently occurring in the divorce group. In this group it had also been more common to begin nursery school ( $p<0.01$ ) as had getting out of work ( $p<0.01$ ) and, probably as one consequence of this, a markedly reduced income/financial status ( $p<0.05$ ). Serious illness or own injury ( $p<0.05$ ), of mother ( $p<0.05$ ), and most of all father ( $p<0.001$ ), who also had been more frequently

hospitalized ( $p<0.05$ ), were noted. Of interest to note was also that the individuals in the divorce group more often had moved together with a partner ( $p<0.01$ ) and more often separated ( $p<0.001$ ).

Just as changing home and moving to another place were more common during childhood in the divorce group they were also more common in young adulthood ( $p<0.01$  and  $p<0.05$  respectively), but now such change was experienced as more negative and difficult to adjust to compared with the non-divorce group. Inversely the job of a parent requiring more absence from home was experienced as more negative in the non-divorce group than in the divorce group ( $p<0.01$ ).

Although there was no significant difference in occurrence between the groups as concerned changed position among friends and one's own hospitalization, it was experienced differently in that the change in position among friends was in a more positive direction for the divorce group than for the non-divorce group ( $p<0.05$ ), while one's own hospitalization was experienced as more negative when occurred than in the non-divorce group ( $p<0.05$ ).

Three events were only relevant for the divorce group; divorce/separation of parents, mother re-marries, and father re-marries. The parental divorce was mainly experienced as neither positive nor negative or as a purely negative experience and it was an event that was about as easy to adjust to as it was difficult to adjust to (Table 3a). No difference in number of experienced life events between men and women was noted.

The connection in the regression analysis between mental health and life events was found to be meagre with one exception (Table 4). A significant connection ( $p<0.03$ ) was present between GSI and "negative experience with difficult adjustment". The grouped variable "negative experience with difficult adjustment answered" for 19.6% of the

variance. None of the other grouped variables showed significance, and neither did age and gender.

*Insert Table 4 about here*

## **2 Discussion**

The main finding in the present study was that no overall difference in mental health between men and women with divorced parents and non-divorced parents was found, but the results did indicate a poorer mental health among the younger women aged 22-27 years (aged 7-12 at the time of parental divorce) in comparison with the other participants in the study. As concerned life events, the main findings were that the children from divorced families had experienced more life events than the non-divorce group, but only few of these events were experienced as more negative and difficult to adjust to, compared with the non-divorce group. The regression analysis showed no significant correlation between divorce and GSI, but there was a relation between GSI and the events categorized as “negative experience with difficult adjustment”, divorce events excluded.

Some limitations of the study must be addressed. A weakness was the small size of the study group (n=48) and the even smaller size of groups after the total groups had been divided for gender and age. A larger group had been desirable in order for us to have a broader basis for interpreting the outcomes and to increase the reliability of the results, and irrespective of whether the potential participants gave reason for declining to participate, this might have influenced the results.

A strength of the study was however, that the divorce group and the non-divorce group were matched on age, date of birth and on living in the same area. Thereby the two groups were equalized by at least these factors. However, no major difference in

outcome was noted due to whether the study group comprised 48 or at most 63 persons. The time since parental divorce was the same for all the participants in the divorce group, and we also took into consideration possible events other than divorce that could have influenced the participant's mental health. The contributors were personally contacted, and were thereby given the opportunity to ask questions about and get clarifications of the instruments that were to be filled in. The results showed no differences in the overall mental health between the divorce group and the non-divorce group, but the divorce group differed from the non-divorce group on the SCL-90 scales paranoid ideation and psychoticism. No obvious explanation for this outcome on these two subscales is to be found, and a bigger study group is desirable in order to verify this.

The study first and foremost showed that the younger females in the divorce group display poorer mental health than the others in the study. This result is in agreement with the Swedish standardization (24), but with the difference of the non-divorce group showing better mental health compared to the norms. An explanation for this might be that the persons in the non-divorce group who voluntarily accepted to take part in the study were in a relatively good mental shape. Evidence of gender differences concerning mental health following parental divorce show disparities, some showing only minimal or no gender differences in mental health (10,20), and others finding parental divorce in childhood to be a greater risk for women (12,16, 17,28). Differences between results could derive from differences in the length of time since divorce, and different age at the time of parental divorce within the groups (10). There are also methodological differences such as for example recruitment of only university/college students for the study group (20).

In the original study to which the present study is a follow up of, the children aged 7-13 years at the divorce (today 22-28 years old) showed the strongest reactions to receiving information about the divorce, but there were no gender differences in the reactions displayed (6). Gender differences in mental health that were not present at earlier developmental stages could however appear later during adolescence (29). Previous research has indicated a more depressed mood among adolescent girls than boys associated with different life events (30-32), something that might explain a part of the outcome in this study.

There have also been proposals made that younger children may be more affected by divorce than older children because they are less able to understand and interpret what is happening around them (13). Younger children are also more likely to blame themselves (13), and girls appear to experience more guilt than boys (33). This might also contribute to the explanation of the outcome in this study.

The regression analysis showed no significance for divorce alone as an explaining variable for GSI. It is nevertheless probable that parental divorce can set in motion a number of events with possible stressful reactions that can affect individuals and cause reactions and consequences in life (13). The divorce group had experienced more life events than the non-divorce group, a few described as negative and difficult to adjust to. However, the individuals in the divorce group seem to have coped well in most cases. The divorce group had in adult life “changed home or moved to another place”, and “separated” more often than the non-divorce group. It was also more common with own, mothers or/and fathers “serious illness/injury/hospitalization”. Several changes of home in the original family and/or their own change of home may be seen as difficulties in settling down or in adaptation, *i.e.* adjustment to changes occurring in life and the sense of psychological balance that a person is able to achieve, possibly caused by

divorce. This may indicate underlying stress maybe caused by, or causing the parental divorce. Findings indicate that when examining mental health issues of children, parental stress, among other issues must be considered (34). The children's own separation is perhaps an indication of difficulties in intimate relationships, more common among children from divorced than intact families (35). As concerns serious illness, injury or/and hospitalization, there are studies that have shown an increased risk for physical illness related to alcohol and tobacco consumption either as an effect of the child's own or parental divorce (36), or as a consequence of an addiction to alcohol abuse being a factor causing divorce (37, 38). A majority of the children in the present study showed good mental health as young adults. The influence of childhood experiences on adult well-being may be modified by protective factors or processes within the individual, in interpersonal relationships and the environment in other respects (21). Studies have shown large differences in people's responses to risk experiences, genetic susceptibility operating through gene-environment interactions (39). Another moderator refers to the manner in which a divorce is regarded. There are adult children of divorce who refers to their parents divorce as something positive to which they could easily adjust (Table 3a). There have also been arguments that potentially stressful events such as divorce, can have positive long-term consequences if people manage to resolve their problems successfully (21).

In summary, the present study showed that experienced parental divorce during childhood did not imply an overall poorer mental health in young adulthood, but women aged 22-27 did display poorer mental health than the older women and men whether they were in the divorce or the non-divorce group. More life events were experienced in the divorce group, but the relation between life events and mental health was only present if the event had been experienced as negative and difficult to adjust to.

Continuing efforts to study possible causes of the differences in reaction to parental divorce based on a larger study group would be of future interest.

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Table 1. Symptom Checklist (SCL-90). Comparison between the divorce group and the non-divorce group, means, standard deviation and test of significance.

Subscale	Divorce group (n=48)		Non-divorce group (n=48)		Test of significance
	Mean	<i>s</i>	Mean	<i>s</i>	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> -test
					<i>p</i> -value
Somatization	0.46	0.47	0.30	0.29	ns
Obsessive-compulsive	0.70	0.64	0.58	0.60	ns
Interpersonal sensitivity	0.53	0.57	0.38	0.43	ns
Depression	0.61	0.57	0.48	0.47	ns
Anxiety	0.58	0.62	0.34	0.33	ns
Hostility	0.39	0.47	0.28	0.37	ns
Phobic anxiety	0.13	0.24	0.10	0.20	ns
Paranoid ideation	0.52	0.59	0.28	0.41	<0.05
Psychotism	0.20	0.26	0.16	0.31	<0.05
GSI	0.47	0.41	0.34	0.30	ns
PSDI	1.42	0.41	1.34	0.35	ns
PST	25.94	17.36	20.88	16.04	ns

Table 2a. Symptom Checklist (SCL-90). Age-divided comparison between women in the divorce group and the non-divorce group. Mean, standard deviation and test of significance.

Subscale	Divorce group		Non-divorce group		Divorce group		Non-divorce group		Test of significance			
	Women		Women		Women		Women		Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> -test			
	Age 22-27		Age 22-27		Age 28-33		Age 28-33		<i>p</i> -value			
	(n=11)		(n=11)		(n=15)		(n=15)					
	Mean	<i>s</i>	Mean	<i>s</i>	Mean	<i>s</i>	Mean	<i>s</i>	(a/b)	(c/d)	(a/c)	(b/d)
	(a)		(b)		(c)		(d)					
Somatization	0.93	0.53	0.23	0.19	0.26	0.24	0.41	0.40	<0.001	ns	<0.001	ns
Obsessive-compulsive	1.26	0.67	0.30	0.29	0.35	0.33	0.93	0.78	<0.001	<0.01	<0.001	<0.01
Interpersonal sensitivity	1.00	0.65	0.25	0.31	0.31	0.39	0.45	0.44	<0.01	ns	<0.01	ns
Depression	1.14	0.55	0.27	0.28	0.39	0.42	0.74	0.52	<0.001	<0.05	<0.001	<0.02
Anxiety	1.17	0.69	0.24	0.24	0.42	0.60	0.37	0.41	<0.001	ns	<0.01	ns
Hostility	0.76	0.39	0.24	0.29	0.17	0.20	0.38	0.51	<0.01	ns	<0.001	ns
Phobic anxiety	0.34	0.36	0.03	0.09	0.05	0.15	0.12	0.20	<0.01	ns	<0.01	ns
Paranoid ideation	0.34	0.36	0.03	0.09	0.05	0.15	0.12	0.20	<0.01	ns	<0.01	ns
Psychotism	0.42	0.34	0.06	0.15	0.06	0.12	0.27	0.43	<0.001	ns	<0.001	ns
GSI	0.91	0.39	0.20	0.17	0.26	0.25	0.48	0.38	<0.001	ns	<0.001	<0.05
PSDI	1.75	0.33	1.21	0.20	1.29	0.47	1.51	0.32	<0.001	<0.01	<0.01	<0.05
PST	43.82	14.96	14.36	12.01	16.27	11.99	27.93	20.50	<0.001	ns	<0.001	<0.05

Table 2b. Symptom Checklist (SCL-90). Age-divided comparison between men in the divorce group and the non-divorce group. Mean, standard deviation and test of significance.

Subscale	Divorce group		Non-divorce group		Divorce group		Non-divorce group		Test of significance			
	Men		Men		Men		Men		Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> -test			
	Age 22-27		Age 22-27		Age 28-33		Age 28-33		<i>p</i> -value			
	(n=11)		(n=11)		(n=11)		(n=11)					
	Mean	<i>s</i>	Mean	<i>s</i>	Mean	<i>s</i>	Mean	<i>s</i>	(e/f)	(g/h)	(e/g)	(f/h)
	(e)		(f)		(g)		(h)					
Somatization	0.25	0.16	0.34	0.28	0.44	0.51	0.21	0.16	ns	ns	ns	ns
Obsessive-compulsive	0.68	0.40	0.45	0.39	0.66	0.70	0.49	0.52	ns	ns	ns	ns
Interpersonal sensitivity	0.37	0.22	0.36	0.35	0.51	0.63	0.40	0.53	ns	ns	ns	ns
Depression	0.50	0.35	0.41	0.32	0.51	0.62	0.41	0.50	ns	ns	ns	ns
Anxiety	0.38	0.35	0.43	0.44	0.41	0.42	0.32	0.24	ns	ns	ns	ns
Hostility	0.33	0.68	0.27	0.33	0.38	0.45	0.19	0.27	ns	ns	ns	ns
Phobic anxiety	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.11	0.11	0.20	0.14	0.28	ns	ns	ns	ns
Paranoid ideation	0.31	0.33	0.38	0.33	0.49	0.63	0.24	0.34	ns	ns	ns	ns
Psychotism	0.23	0.22	0.10	0.17	0.17	0.22	0.14	0.29	ns	ns	ns	ns
GSI	0.38	0.18	0.33	0.21	0.41	0.41	0.29	0.27	ns	ns	ns	ns
PSDI	1.36	0.26	1.41	0.29	1.33	0.36	1.24	0.45	ns	ns	ns	ns
PST	23.38	7.21	20.50	13.60	23.71	18.62	18.64	12.99	ns	ns	ns	ns

Table 3a. Experienced life-events in divorce group.

Life event	Divorce group n=48								
	Occurrence	No. of occurrence	Positive experience	Neither pos. nor neg. experience	Negative experience	Easy adjustment	Neither easy nor difficult adjustment	Difficult adjustment	
<i>Changes in family-composition and living conditions</i>									
1. Birth or adoption of a brother or sister	29	38	27	10	1	34	2	2	
2. Knowledge of adoption	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
3. Brother or sister leaving home	35	42	10	23	9	34	2	6	
4. Less conflicts between the parents	20	20##	16	3	1	18	1	1	
5. More conflicts between the parents	19	19###	0	3	16	3	3	13	
6. Less conflicts with the parents	12	12	7	2	3	9	1	2	
7. More conflicts with the parents	13	15	1	5	9	3	1	11	

8. Divorce/ separation of the parents	48	48###	5	21	22***	25	3	20***
9. Original family changes home	21	29#	8	17	4	15	10	4
10. Original family moves to another place	12	18##	2	11	5	9	7	2
11. Jail sentence of a parent	3	3	1	0	2	1	0	2
12. Mother re-marries	36	36###	18	11	7***	25	4	7***
13. Father re-marries	28	31###	15	10	6***	16	4	11***
14. Position among friends changes	17	17	9	3	5♦	9	2	6
15. Moving away from home	45	45	40	4	1	39	2	4
16. Beginning to work	45	46	36	8	2	36	2	8
17. Getting out of work	23	24##	3	3	18	10	0	14
18. Moving together with partner	34	40##	34	4	2	31	2	7
19. Getting married	8	8	7	1	0	7	1	0
20. Separates	18	19###	7	5	7	10	1	8
21. Changes home	42	84##	44	32	8♦♦♦	49	20	15♦♦
22. Moves to another place	30	42#	22	13	7♦♦	23	8	11♦
23. Job requires more absence from home	8	8	1	5	2	5	1	2
24. Income/financial status reduces markedly	11	11#	0	4	7	4	2	5
25. Jail sentence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

26. Congenital or acquired handicap/disability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Childcare arrangements and parental occupation</i>									
27. Beginning nursery school	37	39##	24	13	2	34	3	2	
28. Change of nursery school or family care	18	18	6	9	3	12	4	2	
29. Beginning pre-school year	44	44	29	10	5	34	5	5	
30. Mother beginning to work	18	18	5	12	1	14	4	0	
31. Father beginning to work	5	5	2	2	1	2	2	1	
32. Job of a parent requires more absence from home	15	15##	2	11	2♦	11	2	2	
33. Loss of a job by a parent	12	12	0	3	9	7	2	3	
34. Income/financial status of parent reduces markedly	7	7	0	2	5	4	2	1	
<i>Serious illness or injury</i>									
35. Serious illness or injury of the mother	16	16#	0	1	15	7	1	8	
36. Hospitalization of the mother	15	15	0	1	14	7	1	7	
37. Serious illness or injury of the father	19	23###	2	1	20	9	1	13	
38. Hospitalization of the father	15	18#	1	1	16	7	1	10	

39. Serious illness or injury of own	10	10#	0	2	8	4	1	5
40. Hospitalization of own	9	9	1	1	7♦	3	0	6
41. Hospitalization of a brother or sister	5	5	0	1	4	3	0	2
42. Serious illness or injury of partner	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
43. Hospitalization of partner	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	2
<i>Death</i>								
44. Death of the mother	3	3	0	1	2	0	0	3
45. Death of the father	4	4	0	0	4	0	0	4
46. Death of brother or sister	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
47. Death of a close friend	6	6	0	0	6	0	0	6
<i>Schooling/education</i>								
48. Beginning 1 <sup>st</sup> year of compulsory education	48	48	30	15	3	37	4	7
49. Change of school	28	34	17	11	6	22	3	9
50. Re-take a year in school	2	2	1	0	1	1	0	1
51. Beginning upper level of compulsory school	48	48	33	13	2	41	3	4
52. Beginning upper secondary school	46	48	38	7	3	42	2	4
53. Start of professional education	36	40	34	5	1	32	3	5

*Sexuality*

54. Separation from boy/girlfriend	34	41	4	16	21	15	7	19
55. Pregnancy	18	23	18	3	2	17	2	4
56. Abortion	4	4	0	3	1	1	1	2

*Remaining item*

57. Other events	8	10	2	0	8	2	2	6
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Sum	1090	1223	562	342	319	783	135	305
Divorce related events $\diamond$	-112	-115	-38	-42	-35	-66	-11	-38
Total	978	1108####	524	300	284***	717	124	267***

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$\diamond$  Item 8, 12,13

<i>t</i> -test	# = $p < 0.05$	## = $p < 0.01$	### = $p < 0.001$
Chi-square test (Df=2)	* = $p < 0.05$	** = $p < 0.01$	*** = $p < 0.001$
Fisher-Freeman-Halton's test	$\blacklozenge$ = $p < 0.05$	$\blacklozenge\blacklozenge$ = $p < 0.01$	$\blacklozenge\blacklozenge\blacklozenge$ = $p < 0.001$

Table 3b. Experienced life-events in non-divorce group.

Life event	Non-divorce group							
	n=48							
	Occurrence	No. of occurrence	Positive experience	Neither pos. nor neg. experience	Negative experience	Easy adjustment	Neither easy not difficult adjustment	Difficult adjustment
<i>Changes in family- composition and living conditions</i>								
1. Birth or adoption of a brother or sister	27	35	27	7	1	29	2	4
2. Knowledge of adoption	2	2	1	0	1	1	0	1
3. Brother or sister leaving home	39	40	12	23	5	33	1	6
4. Less conflicts between the parents	5	5	5	0	0	4	0	1
5. More conflicts between the parents	5	5	0	1	4	1	0	4

6. Less conflicts with the parents	13	13	12	0	1	11	0	2
7. More conflicts with the parents	9	9	1	2	6	2	0	7
8. Divorce/separation of the parents	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. Original family changes home	16	18	5	8	5	14	1	3
10. Original family moves to another place	5	5	0	5	0	4	0	1
11. Jail sentence of a parent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12. Mother re-marries	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13. Father re-marries	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
14. Position among friends changes	12	13	1	2	10	8	0	5
15. Moving away from home	46	47	40	4	3	41	1	5
16. Beginning to work	44	45	40	4	1	42	1	2
17. Getting out of work	12	13	1	2	10	8	0	5
18. Moving together with partner	27	28	27	1	0	27	1	0
19. Getting married	10	10	9	1	0	9	1	0
20. Separates	5	5	2	0	3	2	0	3
21. Changes home	38	70	56	13	1	57	7	6
22. Moves to another place	25	34	29	3	2	29	1	4
23. Job requires more absence from home	3	3	0	3	0	2	1	0
24. Income/financial status	4	4	0	0	4	2	0	2

reduces markedly									
25. Jail sentence	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
26. Congenital or acquired handicap/disability	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
<i>Childcare arrangements and parental occupation</i>									
27. Beginning nursery school	25	26	14	12	0	22	3	1	
28. Change of nursery school or family day-care	7	10	4	4	2	7	2	1	
29. Beginning pre-school year	40	40	28	8	4	33	2	5	
30. Mother beginning to work	15	15	4	10	1	12	3	0	
31. Father beginning to work	5	5	1	4	0	3	2	0	
32. Job of a parent requires more absence from home	7	7	0	2	5	4	1	2	
33. Loss of a job by a parent	10	10	1	3	6	6	1	3	
34. Income/financial status of parent reduces markedly	3	3	0	2	1	2	1	0	
<i>Serious illness or injury</i>									
35. Serious illness or injury of the mother	7	7	0	0	7	2	0	5	
36. Hospitalization of the mother	9	9	0	3	6	4	0	5	
37. Serious illness or injury of the	8	8	0	1	7	2	0	6	

father									
38. Hospitalization of the father	9	9	0	2	7	2	0	7	
39. Serious illness or injury of own	3	3	0	1	2	1	1	1	
40. Hospitalization of own	4	4	1	3	0	1	1	2	
41. Hospitalization of a brother or sister	6	6	0	2	4	2	0	4	
42. Serious illness or injury of partner	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
43. Hospitalization of partner	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Death</i>									
44. Death of the mother	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	
45. Death of the father	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	
46. Death of a brother or sister	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
47. Death of a close friend	3	4	0	0	4	0	0	4	
<i>Schooling/education</i>									
48. Beginning 1 <sup>st</sup> year of compulsory education	48	48	36	10	2	39	3	6	
49. Change of school	19	26	16	7	3	21	1	4	
50. Re-take a year in school	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	
51. Beginning upper level of compulsory school	48	48	33	13	2	43	1	4	
52. Beginning of upper secondary	47	47	35	10	2	41	2	4	

school								
53. Start of professional education	34	38	30	4	4	32	1	5
<i>Sexuality</i>								
54. Separation from boy/girlfriend	28	36	6	8	22	12	1	23
55. Pregnancy	12	15	13	2	0	13	0	2
56. Abortion	4	6	1	0	5	3	0	3
<i>Remaining item</i>								
57. Other events	3	3	0	0	3	1	0	2
<hr/>								
Total	756	842	491	191	160	634	44	164
<hr/>								

*t*-test                   # =  $p < 0.05$        ## =  $p < 0.01$        ### =  $p < 0.001$   
Chi-square test (Df=2)   \* =  $p < 0.05$        \*\* =  $p < 0.01$        \*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$   
Fisher-Freeman-Halton's test   ◆ =  $p < 0.05$        ◆◆ =  $p < 0.01$        ◆◆◆ =  $p < 0.001$

Table 4. Regression analysis for variables predicting mental health

Predictors/independent	$\beta$	Sign.
Variables		
Positive experience *	.134	.383
Negative experience with easy adjustment *	.013	.946
Negative experience with difficult adjustment *	.410	.027
Positive divorce	-.124	.421
Negative divorce with easy adjustment	-.208	.149
Negative divorce with difficult adjustment	.188	.249
Age	-.039	.077
Gender	.087	.491

Notes: Dependent variable: Global Severity Index (GSI)

\* Divorce events excluded

