

Think of the Children: A Family Systems Approach to High-Conflict Divorce

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Divorce has become a common experience in Western cultures, with many families experiencing divorce at least once over the course of a lifetime (Haddad, Phillips, & Bone, 2016). How a family is impacted by divorce often depends on how the process is handled by both spouses. High-conflict divorce, though comparatively uncommon, often comes with a number of negative consequences for both spouses and children alike (Haddad et al., 2016). When spouses cannot agree to settle their differences, the resulting legal conflict often becomes lengthy and hostile, and children can become both weapons used against parents and collateral damage themselves (Joyce, 2016). It is imperative to ensure that spouses considering divorce are aware of the resources available to assist them in working through the separation process so that they are better prepared to make the best choices for themselves and their children. This paper explores the negative effects that can arise in families as a result of high-conflict divorce. Furthermore, this paper details the measures that may be taken to try to mitigate the harm to those involved, including family therapy, mediation, and parenting coordination. Finally, this paper demonstrates the benefits that arise from shared parenting arrangements following divorce, and recommends that further research should be conducted to support and encourage this kind of parenting as much as realistically possible.

#### **Definition and Prevalence**

Although divorce often comes with a certain degree of conflict, not all divorce is considered to be high conflict. Low- and medium-conflict divorces usually involve a focus on and negotiation of the issues of the marriage and may be characterized by certain patterns of relating ranging from relatively amiable to more reactive (Anderson, Anderson, Palmer, Mutchler, & Baker, 2011). In contrast, Haddad et al. (2016) define high-conflict divorce as

a divorce process that lasts longer than two years, which is characterized by a high degree of anger, hostility, and distrust, intensive custody litigation, ongoing difficulty in communicating about the care of their children, and higher than usual rates of nonpayment of child support (p. 244).

Divorces considered to be high conflict are fortunately uncommon, with estimates ranging from 10 to 20 percent (Haddad et al., 2016) to as much as a third of all divorces (Caldwell & Woolley, 2008). However, since 40 to 50 percent of all marriages in Western cultures end in divorce, this nevertheless represents a significant number of couples who will go through a divorce considered to be high conflict (Haddad et al., 2016). Although the presence of conflict in a marriage is itself not a strong predictor of divorce (Caldwell & Woolley, 2008), there are specific types of conflict that are more destructive to relationships and that may carry over into the divorce process (Anderson et al., 2011). These conflicts are characterized as having elements of the *four horsemen*: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling, and involve an overall negative, hostile psychological climate (Anderson et al., 2011). Spouses who cannot resolve their conflicts prior, during, or after divorce are at an increased risk for a variety of long-term problems (Chang & Kier, 2016). However, their ability to cooperate to be effective parents will also likely suffer, and their children may suffer a number of adverse effects as well (Chang & Kier, 2016; Haddad et al., 2016).

### **Effects of High-Conflict Divorce on Spouses**

High-conflict divorce represents a highly tumultuous and often traumatic time for spouses. By definition, this type of divorce is characterized by a high degree of pervasive volatile emotions, and individuals who endure this extended marital discord may be at an increased risk for mood or anxiety disorders, suicidal ideation, and even health problems such as heart disease

(Chang & Kier, 2016). In some high-conflict scenarios, high levels of aggression may contribute to risk of violence between partners (Anderson et al., 2011). Both partners may be at risk for overall quality-of-life reductions, though the extended legal conflicts that often tend to accompany high-conflict divorces will often have a stronger negative effect on those spouses that are most financially vulnerable (Treloar, 2018). The ability for partners to serve as effective parents for their children may be compromised in a high-conflict divorce, especially when children become triangulated within their parents' conflicts (Garber, 2014; Mendes & Bucher-Maluschke, 2017). Garber (2014) explained that children may become involved in these conflicts when parents use their children as external vindication or confirmation, especially by parents under pressure to win custody cases. Partners may seek similar validation in the form of disparaging remarks from members of their extended social networks, which may exacerbate the problem further (Visser et al., 2017). As friends and family want to be supportive and generally tend to hear only the negative details about the ex-spouse, they are often less forgiving and offer harsher comments (Visser et al., 2017). This response may help partners to feel better about their decision to divorce, but it may further undermine any willingness to cooperate with their former spouse, leading to an increase in co-parenting conflicts (Visser et al., 2017).

In situations where former spouses' ability or desire to co-parent their children is sufficiently damaged, parental alienation may become more likely (Bosch-Brits, Wessels, & Roux, 2018; Mendes & Bucher-Maluschke, 2017). Parents, especially those in the middle of high-conflict litigation or custody battles, may begin to view their children as trophies to win or tools to use against their former spouse in the power struggle (Joyce, 2016; Mendes & Bucher-Maluschke, 2017). One form of this conflict is when one parent, most typically the custodial parent, "undermines or damages the relationship between the child and the other parent" (Bosch-

Brits et al., 2018, p. 92). Although this can happen to either parent, as many areas tend to favour the mother in custody arrangements, it is often the father who is alienated from his children (Caldwell & Woolley, 2008). Bosch-Brits et al. (2018) studied several of the effects of parental alienation on fathers, including a feeling of intense pain and anger, distrust of women and the court system, and a loss of self-worth. What's worse, the longer these negative effects continue, the greater the likelihood that the father will want to withdraw further from his children, which will only strengthen the rejection the child experiences as a result (Bosch-Brits et al., 2018). High-conflict divorce often demonstrates this kind of pattern; the negative experiences that impact the spouses involved often impact the children even more profoundly.

### **Effects of High-Conflict Divorce on Children**

Children involved in their parents' high-conflict divorces are often at risk for a wide variety of emotional, mental, developmental, and physical complications that can last a lifetime (Ängarne-Lindberg, Wadsby, & Berterö, 2009; Haddad et al., 2016; Joyce, 2016). Emotional problems such as depression, excessive anger, and conduct disorders are common in children who are frequently involved in their parents' conflicts (Joyce, 2016). These problems often come to characterize their own interactions with peers as they tend to model their parents' poor communication styles, leading to issues of aggression, social isolation, and difficulties in school (Joyce, 2016; Rowlands, 2019). Children of high-conflict divorce may be more likely to experience adjustment difficulties and developmental disorders, which may include regressive behaviour or attempts to try to change their behaviour to better suit what they believe to be their parents' needs (Garber, 2014; Greenberg, Doi Fick, & Schnider, 2016; Rauh, Irwin, & Vath, 2016). Poor health outcomes may manifest in a number of ways both short-term and long-term, including general lower quality of life, an increase in headaches that persists even into adulthood,

a higher proportion of drug and alcohol abuse, an increased likelihood of earlier sexual activity, increased incidence of autoimmune diseases, and increased self-harming and suicidal behaviours (Haddad et al., 2016; Rauh et al., 2016). Though some children may be able to display surprising resilience in the face of their parents' divorce, for many others it remains a highly traumatic experience with long-lasting consequences (van der Wal, Finkenauer, & Visser, 2019).

These consequences may be even more complex in children who experience parental alienation. Baker, Burkhard, and Albertson-Kelly (2012) explained several characteristics of children said to be experiencing parental alienation syndrome, such as a strong rejection and demonization of one parent, often with frivolous reasons, and an idealization of the other parent, who often influences the child's hatred of the alienated parent. This enmeshment with the favoured parent is problematic, as it blurs the psychological lines between parent and child such that the child is often not aware of and may even decline the favoured parent's involvement in their hatred of the other parent (Baker et al., 2012; Garber, 2014; Ludolph & Bow, 2012). Oftentimes, the child resists separating from the favoured parent, which not only contributes to the alienation process from the other parent, but also isolates the child from other age-appropriate events as well (Garber, 2014). Very young children will often experience the alienation process with considerable trepidation, as they may enjoy their time with the alienated parent despite some anxiety, but then proceed to feel guilt and doubt about their feelings upon returning to the alienating parent (Ludolph & Bow, 2012). Furthermore, young children may desire closer attachment to a parent during a high-conflict divorce in search of a sense of protection and familiarity, which may exacerbate alienation from the other parent (Ludolph & Bow, 2012). These issues when combined with the other problems already mentioned that children of high-conflict divorce may face mean that high-conflict divorce should be considered

a serious adverse event for children, and measures should be put in place to prevent such an event from happening in the first place (Haddad et al., 2016).

### **Efficacy of Various Therapies in Working with High-Conflict Families**

Perhaps due to the significant level of harm that high-conflict divorce is capable of inflicting on families, there are a number of different kinds of therapies intended to help families work through these kinds of problems. For example, integrative family therapy (IFT) can provide both broad and targeted assistance to families at various stages in the divorce process. IFT can be helpful in building constructive alliances between family members that may be dealing with triangulation issues, in assisting family members to develop realistic goals throughout the court process, in teaching parenting skills, in fostering the ability to disengage from unproductive conflict, and finally, in developing effective communication and negotiation skills (Lebow & Black, 2012; Lebow & Rekart, 2007). In disputes over child custody and visitation rights, IFT can be especially effective in redirecting conflict-oriented parents towards a solution-oriented focus on the future (Lebow & Rekart, 2007). Furthermore, because of the systems-oriented nature of IFT, therapists working in this domain are mindful not just of the interactions between spouses, but also of their interactions with their children and how extended family members may be contributing to the family conflict (Lebow & Rekart, 2007). A form of therapy called child-centered conjoint therapy (CCCT) may be used in conjunction with more standard family therapy and is focused on fostering healthy development in children (Greenberg et al., 2016). While IFT focuses more on the needs of the family as a whole, CCCT may be additionally helpful in that it targets some of the areas of concern for children involved in high-conflict divorce scenarios and helps to promote healthy, prosocial behaviour while also helping parents to develop parenting skills that can facilitate this positive development (Greenberg et al., 2016).

Another area where IFT can be of considerable assistance is in helping with cases of parental alienation. In parent-child reunification treatments, IFT focuses on targeting all family members and a variety of different behaviour patterns at once to try and affect system-wide change (Lebow & Black, 2012; Smith, 2016). Some behaviour patterns targeted in this manner include helping children learn to navigate both parental systems while tending to their vulnerabilities, challenging the aligned parent's control over the child and their relationship with the other parent, addressing situations where the rejected parent's mistakes may have been magnified, and managing the issues of blame and polarization that are often abundant in parental alienation cases (Smith, 2016). Smith (2016) illustrated a case illustration of IFT in which a young girl had become gradually more resistant to seeing her father to the point of refusing to see him as her parents' high-conflict divorce dragged on for many years. Over the course of therapy, the child was able to bring up her frustrations regarding her father, the father was encouraged to apologize, and the therapist was able to challenge the young girl's polarized thinking (Smith, 2016). Treatment goals involved increasing the father's sensitivity to his daughter, increasing the mother's support for the father's presence in their daughter's life, increasing the daughter's problem-solving skills, and disrupting triangulation in the family (Smith, 2016). Ultimately, despite periods of progress and regression, the girl was ultimately able to successfully rebuild a relationship with her father (Smith, 2016).

Cognitive behavioural family therapy (CBFT) is another therapy that has been used to positive ends for multiple purposes when working with divorcing couples and their children (Garber, 2015; Spillane-Grieco, 2000). CBFT is consistent with systems theory, in that it works not only within the personal cognitive and behavioural patterns of each individual involved in the high-conflict family, but also acknowledges that the conflicts within these families are often

maintained and exacerbated by external factors as well (Spillane-Grieco, 2000). A case study involving an Italian-American family in a high-conflict scenario revealed that a father and his two daughters who had recently come to live with him were now at odds because of his conflict with their mother and because of his conservative views about women (Spillane-Grieco, 2000). Spillane-Grieco (2000) illustrated the use of CBFT in teaching the father patience and effective parenting skills in light of the surrounding conflict, and also in helping to foster empathy and understanding in the daughters for what their father was going through.

While CBFT can be helpful in fostering positive skills in the family such as assertiveness, empathy, improved communication, and hope for the future (Spillane-Grieco, 2000), cognitive behavioural techniques can be helpful in reunification practices as well (Garber, 2015). In many ways, a child alienated from one parent develops what is essentially an irrational fear or phobia, not only of the alienated parent but in some cases also of the reactions of the favoured parent in the event that they spend any time with the other parent (Garber, 2015; Ludolph & Bow, 2012). Under these circumstances, a therapist may utilize cognitive behavioural techniques such as flooding or systematic desensitization to counter the phobia and the effects of the alienation process (Garber, 2015). Typically, gradual exposure through systematic desensitization is more effective and less stressful than the more immediate and immersive exposure through flooding (Garber, 2015). However, regardless of which method is used, it is important that therapists display a client-centered approach and account for each child's unique needs, as different children will prefer to undergo this kind of therapy at different paces (Garber, 2015).

Some therapists have used a psychodynamic approach in working with high-conflict divorced couples. Cohen and Levite (2012) explored relationship dynamics in high-conflict couples through the lens of object relations theory, explaining the concept of the *self* and that

individuals can experience themselves as both distinct from and intimate with others. Through this lens, individuals with weaker object relations tend to select partners with whom they experience little psychological autonomy (Cohen & Levite, 2012). As a result, these individuals may fail to properly distinguish a sense of self as distinct from their partners and may become more vulnerable towards projection of insecurities onto each other (Cohen & Levite, 2012). This is not unlike the concept of enmeshment in family therapy, in which there is a breakdown of healthy boundaries between family members (Garber, 2015), but is distinct in that the troublesome boundaries in object relations reside within the individual, causing them to perceive their partners as necessary for a sense of completeness (Cohen & Levite, 2012). When unable to live up to this impossible standard, couples react with a high degree of anxiety and hostility, and lacking mature communication skills, respond to each other in ways more likely to exacerbate rather than relieve conflict (Anderson et al., 2011; Cohen & Levite, 2012). Because partners come to see each other as objects that must be destroyed to attain some sense of autonomy, therapists working from this therapeutic model seek to reduce conflict primarily by restructuring healthy boundaries between the partners, clarifying parental roles, and containing client anxiety to reduce the strength of their maladaptive defense mechanisms (Cohen & Levite, 2012).

Therapeutic interventions represent only one means of helping families going through high-conflict divorce; there are many other methods available to help reduce conflict and facilitate healthier parenting strategies. One such method is to have a neutral mediator help couples establish agreements on various issues including personal disputes, custody concerns, finances, property division, and any other matters relevant to the divorce (Chang, 2016). Different types of mediation may serve different purposes in the divorce process, such as facilitative mediation for a focus on spousal interests, evaluative mediation to help couples

determine the likely outcome of litigation in an attempt to establish a settlement, and strategic mediation to help interrupt unproductive patterns in the family unit, to name a few examples (Chang, 2016). Jacobs and Jaffe (2010) suggested that, in cases where mediation is unsuccessful, combining mediation with therapy (CoMeT) can result in significant reductions in spousal conflict and productivity in divorce negotiations. One issue in mediation is that the focus of discussion may be kept only to specific elements of the divorce process, leaving other underlying issues unaddressed and likely to lead to impasses (Jacobs & Jaffe, 2010). Thus, in order to move beyond these impasses, the CoMeT model employs a combination of mediation and an eclectic therapeutic intervention to match the needs of individual couples with the goal of helping them to reach secure, sustainable agreements that are in the best interests of their children (Jacobs & Jaffe, 2010).

A similar method to assist in this manner is parenting coordination, a technique intended to combat the hostility and stress that can get in the way of effective parenting (Henry, Fieldstone, Thompson, & Treharne, 2011). Parenting coordination can help to more quickly settle disputes regarding children and custody agreements, reduce child exposure to parental conflict, improve communication skills, and facilitate compliance with court orders (Demby, 2016). Unlike most forms of therapy and mediation, parenting coordination places the focus primarily on the needs of the children rather than on the issues between the divorcing couple (Henry et al., 2011). Generally considered a post-divorce intervention, parenting coordinators are usually appointed to divorced couples to help them adhere to the parental agreements arranged by the court and prevent further litigation in the event of new or ongoing disputes (Demby, 2016). Divorce and parental education courses, mandated or otherwise, may also bolster this process as these courses require divorcing couples to complete class content covering

information on dispute resolution, child development and adjustment to divorce, methods to reduce child stress, and several other related topics (Ferraro, Oehme, Bruker, Arpan, & Opel, 2018). Henry et al. (2011) noted several significant improvements in couples who made use of parenting coordination such as fewer court appearances, fewer court motions regarding children following the divorce, and overall improved family communication. Further, the effectiveness of parental training videos such as those used in parental education courses in helping to improve parents' perceptions of post-divorce parenting suggests a method that could potentially be further utilized by parenting coordinators to bolster their own services (Ferraro et al., 2018).

Whether therapy, mediation, or other training techniques are used to help families in the middle of a high-conflict divorce, helpers involved should be aware of certain factors to consider during the counselling process. First, because of the sensitive nature of the situation these families find themselves in, it is imperative that therapists are clear about the parameters of the therapeutic intervention such as which family members will attend and how often, the fees and who will be covering the costs, and the degree to which clients can expect confidentiality, particularly if the therapy sessions are court-ordered (Lebow & Black, 2012). Secondly, because of the intensity of emotions and potential for aggression in these high-conflict scenarios, therapists should be aware of and on the lookout for signs of intimate partner violence and/or child abuse (Amundson & Lux, 2016). This is not only because therapists have a duty of care to report to the relevant authorities under circumstances of abuse, but also because some couples in high-conflict scenarios may make accusations of abuse towards their partners, either believing this to be true but without confirmation, or making malicious false claims in an attempt to discredit them (Amundson & Lux, 2016). Finally, it is generally inappropriate for counsellors to attempt to fill multiple roles, such as therapist *and* mediator, when working with clients that are

in conflict with one another (Chang, 2016). Adhering to only one role will help counsellors to ensure both that they are maintaining appropriate levels of neutrality with both clients and also that they are working within the ethical boundaries of their expertise (Chang, 2016). Because of the challenges that often attend working with couples going through a high-conflict divorce, many therapists may simply choose to avoid working with this population (Amundson & Lux, 2016). However, due to the many negative effects on both spouses and children alike, there is considerable need for services in this field, so being aware of the risks can help therapists to assist people in need while also protecting themselves from potential legal ramifications (Amundson & Lux, 2016; Chang & Kier, 2016).

### **Trends in the Literature**

Much of the literature discusses the deleterious effect of high-conflict divorce on children and how children's needs should therefore be given priority over any other considerations throughout the divorce process (Haddad et al., 2016; Joyce, 2016). However, other research indicates the many ways in which children's needs may be inadvertently pushed aside by the divorcing couple (Demby, 2016; Joyce, 2016; Mendes & Bucher-Maluschke, 2017; Visser et al., 2017). Even prior to the decision to divorce, individuals may be negatively influenced by the critical remarks of their social networks, who may feel the need to provide support by offering polarizing comments that lead the individual to see their spouse in a worse light than they otherwise would have (Visser et al., 2017). As those who are likely to end up in high-conflict divorces find themselves hating their ex-partners rather than merely feeling indifferent, this can lead them to see their ex-partners as enemies to be destroyed (Demby, 2016). In some cases, this can impede partners' ability to look out for the best interests of their children as their decision-making process becomes corrupted by hostility and self-centeredness (Joyce, 2016). In worse

cases, this can even lead parents to use their children as tools of war against their ex-partners, as in parental alienation situations (Garber, 2014; Ludolph & Bow, 2012; Mendes & Bucher-Maluschke, 2017). Because of this tendency for high-conflict couples to lose sight of their children's needs in their crusades against each other, this could indicate the need for more compulsory programs for litigious parents to attend to help them maintain their focus on healthy parenting (Ferraro et al., 2018; Jacobs & Jaffe, 2010).

Other research indicated the need for system reform when it comes to working with high-conflict couples (Haddad et al., 2016; Henry et al., 2011). Haddad et al. (2016) indicated that the literature identified a need for legal decisions in high-conflict divorce cases to be more child-focused. Henry et al. (2011) discussed how the adversarial nature of litigation practices can encourage couples to engage in more aggressive behaviour such as trying to obtain any negative information, even to the point of fabrication, about their ex-partners to discredit them in court. This fabrication is often seen in cases of parental alienation, where one parent may actively seek to turn their child against the other parent in an effort to gain legal ground (Bosch-Brits et al., 2018; Garber, 2014; Ludolph & Bow, 2012). Furthermore, the court fees incurred over the course of a divorce may exacerbate the conflict between couples first because prohibitive legal costs may often make it more difficult for one or both parents to fairly assert their legal rights (Treloar, 2018), and second, because the adversarial nature of court may encourage spouses to relitigate as a means of punishing their ex-partners with legal fees rather than out of a desire to solve problems, especially at the behest of lawyers who often profit based on the length of the legal battles (Henry et al., 2011). If the goal is to increase the focus on children's needs in high-conflict divorce cases, efforts need to be made to challenge and reform the systems in place that

inflare tensions between spouses and replace them with systems that help to encourage collaboration and parental education (Jacobs & Jaffe, 2010).

### **Best Practices Given Current Research**

High-conflict divorce affects not only the spouses and children directly involved, but it also impacts extended family, members of the surrounding community, and can even increase burdens on healthcare systems (Haddad et al., 2016). Because of the far-reaching effects of this phenomenon, research suggests that every possible effort should be made to target high-conflict couples with services such as therapy, mediation, and parenting coordination to help interrupt negative patterns (Ferraro et al., 2018; Jacobs & Jaffe, 2010). In particular, services should help spouses to recognize problem behaviours that are causing conflict to escalate such as defensiveness, aggressiveness, escalation, and emotional reactivity (Anderson et al., 2011; Cohen & Levite, 2012; Lebow & Black, 2012), but also strengths that they can use to move beyond the conflict (Greenberg et al., 2016; Lebow & Rekart, 2007). Services should help parents develop positive communication skills and the ability to cooperate for the sake of their children's needs (Greenberg et al., 2016; Ferraro et al., 2018; Lebow & Rekart, 2007). Finally, methods of training should be as accessible as possible to the largest number of people, such as through online delivery courses (Ferraro et al., 2018). In summary, the goal of reducing high-conflict scenarios between spouses will require a combination of targeting specific negative behaviours, redirecting spousal focus back onto their children, and providing services that are more cost efficient and effective at problem resolution than litigation.

One additional factor to consider in these goals is the demonstrable benefits that come from shared parenting outcomes (Nielsen, 2014, 2018). A meta analysis by Nielsen (2018) found that, in the significant majority of cases, children in shared parenting situations fared better than

their counterparts under sole physical custody. Overall, the research found that the combination of joint parental custody and positive parent-child relationships resulted in the best outcomes for children, independent not only of family income(s), but largely also of residual conflict between the parents following divorce (Nielsen, 2018). Although conflict resulted in some negative impact on children in some studies in the meta-analysis, children in joint parental custody situations with parental conflict nevertheless had better outcomes compared with children in single-parent custody situations (Nielsen, 2018). When compared to the outcomes in sole custody situations or worse, the negative effects that children display in cases of parental alienation (Garber, 2014; Ludolph & Bow, 2012), it appears that children would be better off if the services their parents utilized to help them through their divorces would encourage them to seek joint physical custody, even in cases of high tension (Nielsen, 2014).

### **Gaps in the Literature and Suggestions for Future Research**

First, much of the literature discusses high-conflict divorce and how to mitigate it once it is in progress, but there is not as much research on how to prevent high-conflict divorce from happening in the first place. A synthesis of the literature exploring the factors that may lead to increased likelihood of high-conflict divorce may provide suggestions for targeting these behaviours earlier in the separation process to reduce or even prevent high-conflict situations from arising. Another gap in the literature is in exploring which parent may be more likely to struggle over the course of the litigation process. If one parent is more likely to be unfairly favoured in the courts as is suggested by Bosch-Brits et al. (2018) and Caldwell and Wooley (2008), then research should be done on this phenomenon to address these inequities so that we may target potential areas of increased conflict between spouses and their children. More research needs to be done to demonstrate the full extent to which costs of litigation affect the

process and outcomes in high-conflict divorce cases. Though some research has suggested that spouses *may* use the high cost of court as a tool against their ex-partners (Henry et al., 2011), more research could be done to show exactly what this may look like in order to present stronger examples for why systems reform is required. Additionally, given that the research supports the efficacy of programs such as mediation and parenting coordination in helping high-conflict couples prioritize their child's needs, further consideration should be made in making these programs mandatory in the litigation process both as a means of helping to reduce spousal conflict and to potentially reduce costs of relitigation. Furthermore, in light of information that shared custody between parents results in the best outcomes for children (Nielsen, 2014, 2018), it is important that further research be done to identify cases where parents may be giving up pursuing theirs and their children's rights in the interest of trying to avoid further costs. Finally, given the demonstrable benefits of shared parenting, much of the services discussed within this paper should be targeted towards securing this outcome in as many situations as is feasible, naturally barring cases of abuse (Nielsen, 2014; Treloar, 2018). If further research in this subject confirms the benefits of shared parenting, this information ought to be presented to the courts and to higher government to enact system-wide and even legislative change that results in better outcomes for children and families as a whole in divorce cases.

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