

**VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
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The Final thesis

The Impact of Divorce on the Health of Families' Members

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Abstract

Background: Divorce as the ending of a marriage between two people leads to many consequences, including relocation and moving of separated spousal partners, stress, emotional impact, breakage, deterioration of parent-child relationships, trust issues, and mental health issues.

Objective: The systematic review was conducted to synthesize information on the impact of health on the health of family members.

Hypothesis: Divorce has no health impact on family members

Data Sources: Data was collected from two online databases; PubMed and Science Direct.

Study Eligibility Criteria: Peer-reviewed articles within the year range of January 1, 2017 and April 1, 2022. Articles were supposed to be fully accessible. Articles were to be written in the English language. Articles were to focus on the impacts of divorce on the health of family members.

Methodology: The study employed a thematic synthesis methodology that analyzed data identified, coded, and generated specific themes toward the research topic of the systematic review.

Study Appraisal: The study was appraised through the 10-question checklist of the Critical Appraisal Skill Programme (CASP) appraisal tool.

Results: The analysis of data resulted in the evidence revealing that divorce has health impacts on family members. Amongst children, divorce led to psychological and mental health concerns that attributed to increased drug and substance abuse, alcoholism, poor academic performances, increased physical injuries, increased suicidal tendencies, poor oral health, and deterioration in the growth and development of children. Amongst parents, the research revealed increased psychological and mental health concerns.

Limitations: While searching for articles for the research, there were limited databases to search data. The systematic review process is a time consuming process having to read full articles to validate their authenticity and use in research. Some articles held vital information towards the research, but had to be excluded because of their inaccessibility.

Conclusion: The study showed that divorce has an impact on health of family members. Research showed increased stress, anxiety, and depression amongst children of divorce led to decreased social well-being, low self-esteem, increased confrontations that led to physical injuries, suicidal tendencies, malnutrition, obesity, and the development of chronic condition in the future. Parents undergoing marital discord and dissolution should be provided with counseling sessions to help alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression before they turn into chronic conditions for children in the future.

Conflict of Interest: None

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Keywords: Divorce, children of divorce, social well-being, stress, anxiety, depression, parents, substance abuse, growth and development, obesity, chronic conditions

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Introduction

Introduction

A family is the basic unit in society. It comprises a father, mother, and children, forming a nuclear family. As the basic societal unit, a family behaves like every living organism; it can create, develop, and advance over time, changing its structure ^(1; 2). Family structures change in one of two ways, through the addition or reduction of individuals. Sometimes family structures change with the addition of new individuals into the family by marriage or childbirth. At times the family structure changes by reducing individuals in the family structure by losing people we cherish through death. However, it is especially daunting to manage the breakdown of the family structure through the occurrence of separation or divorce. Individuals deal with divorce differently, so there is no right or wrong way to do so. It is fundamental to know how separation or divorce affects family members in the basic societal unit.

Divorce is the ending of a marriage between two people. However, what happens to the extra connections tied to the marriage? These fringe connections include in-laws, as the extended families, while centrally, children in the marriage are most affected by their parents' divorce ⁽³⁾. Divorce leads to many consequences, including relocation and moving of separated spousal partners, stress, emotional impact, breakage, deterioration of parent-child relationships, trust issues, and mental health issues. In addition, divorce leads to depression, engagement of children and parents in risky behaviors, eating disorders, increased resentment of children toward their parents, trouble children adjusting to the new norm of divorce, anger, irritability, and loss of interest ⁽³⁾. While these issues persist, more issues arise as divorce impacts the health of family members. This systematic review elucidates information on the impact of divorce on family members.

Rationale of the Review

Research expresses that divorce has had a negative impact on the spouses who separate, the children in the families, and the extended families as in-laws of the family. While these effects are seen in social, economic, and psychological terms, the health of these family members is also affected. As dynamics of a family change, healthy family relationships foster better overall family health by promoting connections that better emotional support, social connections, a favorable environment for every family member to grow in, and overall health ⁽¹⁷⁾. On the other hand, Divorce increases stress, relationship strain, and overall deterioration of health among family members. Divorce has become an increasingly pressing matter in question threatening the stability of homes and the health of the family members. While divorce rates in the US decrease with many young adults opting for cohabitation over marriages, the few cases of divorce in the country lead to detrimental effects on the health of family members.

Objective of the Review

General Objective

The principal justification of this review is to synthesize information about the ramifications of divorce on the health of family members.

Specific Objectives

1. To expound on the causes of divorce
2. To elucidate the consequences of divorce
3. To investigate the effects of divorce
4. To identify and discuss the major health impacts of divorce on family members
5. To provide recommendations on how to reduce the effects of divorce on family members

Hypothesis

- Divorce has no health impacts on family members

Background

Understanding Divorce

In non-technical language, divorce ends a marriage between two people. However, Edet Upkong defines divorce as "a legal dissolution of the marriage relation; any formal separation of a man and his wife according to established customs; a complete separation of any kind" ⁽⁶⁾. However, divorce as a legal separation between man and woman takes partners through these consequences; many attributing factors lead to divorce.

Causes of Divorce

The leading causes of divorce in the world currently are economic reasons, extra-marital affairs, domestic violence, unrealistic expectations, and addictions. Economic reasons stem from various issues in marriages that contribute to divorce. An example of such would be that if the husband loses his job and the burden to support the family falls on the wife, many wives feel scorned for such a position falling on them, leaving them to opt out of the marriage through a divorce ⁽⁶⁾. In another instance, a husband may feel intimidated by his wife earning more than him from a recent job promotion, leaving them dissolution, and a divorce is always imminent ⁽⁶⁾. At times, the spending habits of one of the spouses may leave the family, as a unit, bankrupt, leading to one of the spouses filing for a divorce.

Addiction follows suit of the leading causes of divorce in the world. While in marriages, spouses are found as addicts to certain substances. Addictions can range from illicit drug abuse to alcoholism to gambling or engaging in extra-marital affairs with multiple partners ⁽⁶⁾. These contribute to risky behaviors such as contracting sexually transmitted diseases and passing them on to their partners, finance wastage, landing families in debt, and dishonesty that breeds more dishonesty ⁽⁶⁾.

Extra-marital affairs are yet another major cause of divorce among the world's populations. In modern times, extra-marital affairs have been condoned and deemed normal in society ⁽⁹⁾. While marriage unions are between a man and his wife, research shows that the spouses engage in cheating behaviors and entertaining lovers while within the union. Issues of sexual incompatibility may bring about a loss of interest in one's spouse and a decrease in the desire to stay in the marriage ^(6; 9). Ultimately, a divorce between the marriage partners is imminent.

Domestic violence is yet another leading attributing factor to divorce worldwide. Coupled with extra-marital affairs, most spouses become abusive and physically violent to their partners when accused of 'stepping out of the marriage' ^(6; 7; 8). Abused partners seek asylum in other people's homes to the extent that they file for separation and, later on, divorce fleeing for their safety ^(6; 7). In certain cultures, especially around Africa, it is deemed insubordination and a lack of respect when wives speak against their in-laws; hence, the

husband has to 'punish' them. Domestic violence leads such wives to seek separation and divorce ^(6; 7).

In addition, unrealistic expectations are another cause of divorce amongst married couples. When dating, some spouses in the courtship process lie to their partners about what they will do once they get married. Other fails to express what they expect from their partners once they are married ⁽⁶⁾. On both ends, either spouse is met with the failure or increased expectation of what the marriage entails, hence the divorce. As divorce ravages families, it leaves more effects once the marriage is annulled.

Consequences of Divorce

The effects of divorce are felt not only by the spouses whose marriage is annulled but the people constituting the family, both children, and the extended families, as in-laws ⁽³⁾. Divorce affects the spouses through separation and aspects of psychological well-being, health, social life, and economic and domestic lives.

Divorce has been cited to be extremely hard for children. Children of divorce often struggle with psychological issues of explaining to their peers why they have one parent at home and not two. Psychological issues also come up when insensitive peers ridicule them for their situation as 'children of divorce' ^(3; 6; 19). They may carry these issues into their marriages as well. In addition, children of divorce have become objects of abuse by their parents, who use them as venting 'emotional punching bags' to express their anger about the divorce and other issues of their routine lives. ^(6; 19). The self-esteem of these children is adversely affected in these situations.

Moreover, children of divorce are prone to engaging in unhinged behaviors as a way of retaliation or coping mechanisms. These behaviors include alcoholism, partaking in illicit drugs, criminal acts such as robbery, vandalism, and sexual vices ⁽¹⁹⁾. Furthermore, children of divorce have problems readjusting to the new life of single parenthood, which has them relocate from their homes in cases where parents sell off the home ⁽¹⁹⁾. Children also blame their parents, especially the one they have been led to believe is the cause of the divorce, breeding resentment and hatred towards the parent ^(3; 19). After divorce for such children, starting life again becomes a problem because of their low self-esteem and lack of parental support.

Spouses recently annulled through divorce are affected by divorce through financial and psychological consequences coming up. Consequences of divorce span into men dropping their satisfaction levels while women risk poverty from loss of household incomes. Collectively, men and women suffer confidence dwindling after divorces ⁽¹⁶⁾. Women are adversely affected when divorce happens, with the biggest issue being economic disadvantages. A decrease in household income sees a decrease in resources to sustain the lives of the family members women after divorce. These women seek to get re-employed, return to live with their parents, or re-partnered through re-marrying ⁽¹⁸⁾.

In addition, custodial issues negatively affect parents' physical and psychological health after divorce. Parents start to self-bout themselves as capable parents after divorce, increasing anxiety, depression, and anger ⁽²⁰⁾. Women of divorce lose their identity, especially women who associate with their former husbands ⁽²⁰⁾. These parents become irritable, presenting mood swings that affect their physical and mental health. While understanding divorce and its causes, it is significant to recognize the history of divorce in the United States.

Global Statistics on Divorce

Between 2008 and 2017, statistics report a significant decline in divorce rates worldwide. However, some countries still hold high divorce rates compared to others. Globally, the Maldives ranks first in divorces rates with 5.52 divorces per 1,000 people population (4). The US ranks ninth in divorce rates at a 2.7 divorce rate per 1000 population, while the UK has a 1.7 divorce rate ⁽⁴⁾. Amongst global countries, Sri Lanka ranks least in divorce rates with a 0.15 rate per 1000 population.

History and Evolution of Divorce in the United States

According to historical records, divorce dates as far back as Henry VIII. During his reign, unable to bear children for him, Henry VIII used this loophole within the British kingdom to divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. However, the American Revolution saw the rise and escalation of divorce in the United States in the 1820s and 1830s ⁽¹⁰⁾. Americans resulted in the use of 'omnibus clauses' to dissolve marriages. According to the omnibus clauses, if one had proof of adultery or physical abuse and cruelty as a spouse in a marriage, courts in the US would grant them divorce on these terms ⁽¹¹⁾. However, people went to great lengths to fabricate physical cruelty and abuse and adultery charges toward dissolving their marriages as desperate measures, especially in Indiana. These ambiguities and leniencies granted people a way out of marriages, leading to an absurd rise in divorce rates across the US through the 19th Century ⁽¹¹⁾. However, between the 1870s and 1960s, reforms in the divorce laws commenced leading to more clauses and reprieves in divorce.

The reforms in divorce law have seen the emergence of women granted rights to file for divorce. Before the 1960s reforms in divorce law, women were subjected to fabrications by their husbands who wanted to get out of the marriages, leaving them dissolution and at fault with the law and society ⁽¹²⁾. Men had the sole responsibility of filing for divorce. However, women could now provide grounds for filing for divorce through the emergence of feminists and lawyers advocating for women's rights and equality in the eyes of the law. Lawyers and feminist activists saw the precedence of creating family law and family courts where divorce proceedings were delegated and argued. The emergence of family courts strengthened the stance on divorce and increased divorce rates in the US.

Family court and a fight for equal rights saw change in divorce laws. Looking back at divorce governing laws in the 19th Century, divorce proceedings needed to happen in a courtroom ⁽¹³⁾. However, ratifications in the 20th Century saw that there would be amicable and less intrusive formats of settling divorce cases out of court. This was because lawyers for spouses undergoing divorce cases would expose not only themselves and their private affairs but also expose their children to psychological issues when they see their parents take the stand against each other ⁽¹³⁾. Therefore, couples in divorce proceedings would undergo an arbitrary settlement seated across each other in arbitration family courtrooms and agree on debt management, child custody, wealth distribution, and child support. The same system applies to most divorce cases settling out of court. This system is advantageous in cutting costs to take cases to court and time for hearings and statements from opposing counsels or other witnesses. While these reforms help address and ensure divorce cases happen in closed spaces, there is a need to know to understand the decline in divorce rates in the US.

Divorce in the US

Databases and research posit that divorce rates declined between 2008 and 2017. One would assume that the decline would be from thriving marriages; however, that is not the case. Americans opt out of a marriage and seek alternatives such as cohabitation. According to research, divorce rate probabilities are higher amongst women over 45 compared to previous decades, when women over 45 have been found in thriving marriages ⁽⁵⁾. On the other hand, research findings postulate that women below 35 choose cohabitation over marriages. This is a way to mitigate risks of financial instability, emotional distress, depression, disorientation, and having to relocate if they are married and get divorced from their partners.

Education plays an important role in the decline of divorce rates in the US. In the American education system, an individual will spend up to 23 years of their lives in education, given that they will go through kindergarten, junior and senior high school, and university; before getting involved in any romantic relationships that lead to marriage. This does not play the same in other countries with child marriages ⁽¹⁴⁾. Child marriages have been noted to have girls as young as twelve sold off or auctioned for marriage from low-income families ^(14; 15). Ultimately, these teenagers soon discover their rights and leave their marriages early, increasing divorce rates. On the other hand, children in the US can go through education before engaging in early marriages, offering them the experience of life beyond romance and falsehoods with opportunities awaiting them toward satisfying careers. Having looked at the history, statistics, and divorce rates in the US, it is imperative to look into the

Methodology

The systematic review applied a thematic synthesis methodology. As an inductive approach to research methodology, data is identified, coded, and generates specific themes toward the research topic of the systematic review. These themes help interpret the research topic and formulate conclusions about the research topic ⁽²¹⁾. The thematic synthesis methodology aligned with the 'line-by-line' text coding toward developing and analyzing themes applicable to the objectives of the systematic review. The methodology helped in:

- a) Providing insight beyond mere integration of findings into research
- b) Synthesizing results for the systematic review through analyzing major themes found in research data
- c) Utilizing the results of the research data to synthesize information on the impact of divorce on the health of families' members

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The research data included combing through online databases to identify peer-reviewed journal articles that met the study's criteria. The inclusion criteria included:

- a) Focusing on the data surrounding how divorce impacts parents and children
- b) Articulate stating of the authors used in each analyzed article
- c) All articles should be published in the English language
- d) All articles should be published within the five years of January 1, 2017, and April 1, 2022

The criteria for exclusion included

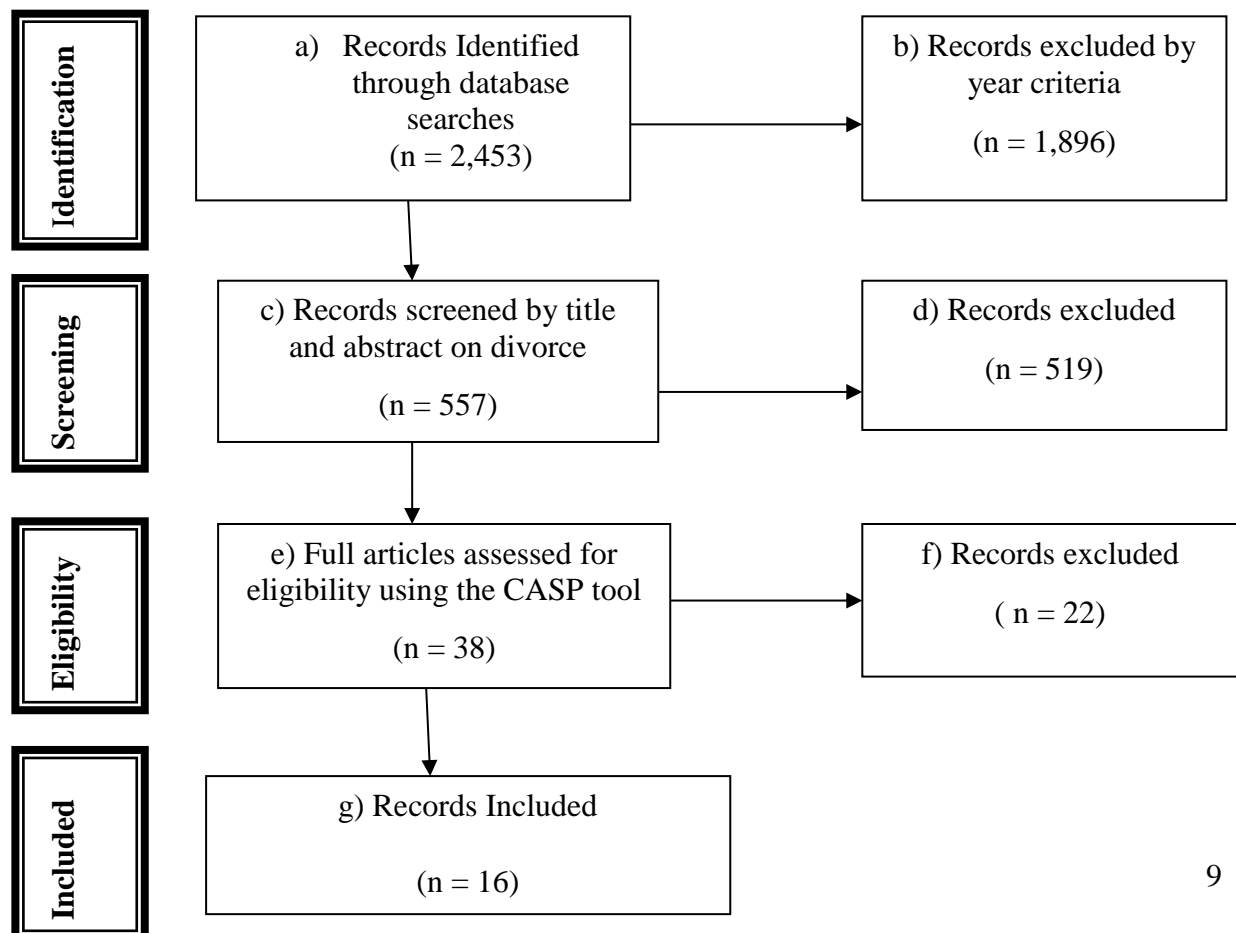
- a) Articles that focused on other effects of divorce rather than health impacts
- b) Articles not within the five-year publishing range mentioned
- c) Inaccessible articles

Literature Search Strategy and Retrieval of Research Data

The search strategy included going onto online databases, PubMed and Science Direct, to search for articles on the research topic. The search for the journal articles was conducted within the specified period of January 1, 2017, and April 1, 2022, fitting the designated database search timeline. Choosing this timeline is to help with evidence-based research that provides recent research on the topic. In the two databases, keywords inputted were *impact*, *effect*, *consequence*, *divorce*, *family dissolution*, *family members*, *parents*, *children*, and *health*. These keywords were combined with Boolean operators *OR*, *ON*, and *AND*.

While investigating the research topic using the keywords provided, I screened for articles with titles and abstracts according to my research and found 2,453 articles; 1316 from PubMed and 1137 from Science Direct. Filtering the articles to meet the inclusion criteria, 557 articles remained; 179 from PubMed and 378 from Science Direct. Examining the articles for full articles that presented data on divorce and its impacts on the health of family members, 38 remained; 22 from PubMed and 16 from Science Direct. Upon reading through each of the remaining articles, 16 combined articles were included to fit my analysis of the systematic review research topic; 13 from PubMed and three from Science Direct, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Table showing search strategy and outcome of articles for analysis



Data Collection Process

Data collection was conducted by searching through online databases for secondary data such as journal articles to analyze information to synthesize data for the systematic review. Working independently, the online search for peer-reviewed journal articles was conducted on PubMed and Science Direct online databases. The collection of data from online databases proved instrumental in the cost-effectiveness of the process. All that was needed was a stable internet connection to collect data after combing through articles searched on the online databases. In addition, the use of secondary data for my systematic review proved time-efficient ⁽³⁸⁾. The online databases reduced the time needed for research as done in field research, where it takes months to research while collecting primary data that would then have to be tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted over a period of months on end.

Article Appraisal

The search strategy yielded 16 articles with viable information on the health impacts of divorce on family members. The quality of the studies identified was appraised with the Critical Appraisal Skill Programme (CASP) appraisal tool. As an appraisal tool used in research, CASP has a 10-question checklist that helps determine the authenticity and eligibility of research and research practices conducted by researchers on a topic of study ⁽³⁷⁾. The checklist involved ten questions with an additional column denoting the type of study conducted in each appraised article. The first two parameters had the option of answering "Yes" or "No." These two parameters were to screen for whether the aim of the study and methodology used was appropriate and achieved. The other eight questions worked on a value-based point system that determined different parameters within a researched peer-reviewed article. The parameters each had a 3-point scale ranking, following whether these parameters were reached or not. Each column represented the following parameters; research design, recruitment strategy, data collection, reflexivity, ethics, data analysis, findings, and implications. The total maximum score would be 24. The points were awarded on criteria; a point was awarded if the study parameter showed minimal to no justification. Two points were added to the studies mentioned but did not fully elaborate on the parameters. Three points were awarded on parameters that had an extensive justification and succinct explanation of the parameter. The tabulation is presented below in **Table 1**.

“Risk of Bias” Reporting

Researchers may sometimes offer misleading information during the research in generating information from references to information conjured. As secondary data, articles, journals, and reviews need an assessment and appraisal to help with the authenticity of data researched and a correlation of data to research findings. The CASP appraisal tool was instrumental in appraising and assessing my research findings' authenticity and eligibility and formulating a succinct discussion. The 10-question checklist helped improve the methodology, research design, and all other parameters discussed above towards providing eligible articles as references to my research.

Table 1: Table showing CASP appraisal checklist of reviewed articles

Appraisal of Reviewed articles using CASP appraisal tool

No.	Main Author	Clear Aim	Type of Study	Appropriate Methodology	Research Design	Recruitment Strategy	Data Collection	Reflexivity	Ethics	Data Analysis	Findings	Implication	Total Score
1	Akingube	Yes	Translational Research	Yes	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24
2	Lursen	Yes	Historic Cohort	Yes	3	1	3	1	3	3	3	3	20
3	Shaikh	Yes	Cross-sectional Study	Yes	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	22
4	Windle	Yes	Qualitative Study	Yes	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	1	20
5	Hjern	Yes	Qualitative Study	Yes	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	22
6	Shi	Yes	Cross-sectional Study	Yes	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	1	21
7	Westermair	Yes	Qualitative Study	Yes	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	19
8	Walleborn	Yes	Qualitative Study	Yes	2	3	3	2	1	3	3	1	18
9	Tian		Longitudinal Survey	Yes	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	22
10	Pagerols	Yes	Standardization	Yes	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	21
11	Wang	Yes	Cross-sectional Study	Yes	3	3	3	2	1	3	3	1	19
12	Meland	Yes	Longitudinal Cohort	Yes	3	3	3	2	1	3	3	2	20
13	Obied	Yes	Cross-sectional Study	Yes	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	22
14	Sands	Yes	Systematic Review	Yes	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	23
15	Ayano	Yes	Systematic Review	Yes	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	23
16	Tosi	Yes	Longitudinal Cross-sectional study	Yes	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	1	19

1 Point for minimal to no justification of a parameter and 2 points for addressing the issues without fully elaborating. 3 points for succinct explanations on a parameter with proper justification

Data Analysis and Reporting

Analyzing the results from the retrieved articles followed the steps of the thematic synthesis methodology. First, the articles were read three times each, ensuring that no information was omitted during the generation of specific themes to research conducted on the research topic. Also, re-reading the articles before reaching the final 16 included for research analytics ensured there was no bias or overlooking of information on any other excluded articles. Second, 'line-by-line' coding ensured that I adhered to the research topic; *The impact of divorce on the health of families' members*. Therefore, all the data synthesized and grouped into metadata aligned with the research topic. Third, the 'line-by-line' coding helped identify major health problems affecting family members brought about by divorce. Using these health problems, there was a formulation of major themes to help in guiding the explanation of the results through clustering any health issues into major groupings for easier identification. These analytical themes in line with the research topic were presented in a Microsoft Excel table in **Table 2**.

Results

Hypothesis Testing

In the writing of my research, I formulate the null hypothesis H_0 as “Divorce has no health impacts on family members.” However, the tabulation of results from the research articles rejects the null hypothesis formulated for the study. Each of the identified studies shows that divorce affects the health of family members in one way or another.

Sixteen articles were analyzed to synthesize information for the research topic of my systematic review on the impacts of divorce on the health of family members. As shown in **Table 1**, four of the articles retrieved used qualitative study methods; one used a translational methodology, one was a historic cohort; five were cross-sectional studies; one was a standardization study, one was a longitudinal survey, one was a longitudinal cohort study, and two were systematic reviews providing information on specific health impacts of divorce on family members. From the articles, a meta-summary was formulated. With each of the studies presenting different health issues affecting different family members, there was a need for clustering the health issues into major issues tabulated, as shown in **Table 2**.

The major themes identified were divided into two major sub-sections: the health impacts of divorce on children and the health impacts of divorce on parents. The articles did not provide any information on how a couple's divorce affected the in-laws' health and other extended family members. Under the sub-division that highlighted the health impacts of divorce on children, themes included psychological and mental health deterioration, substance abuse, poor oral health, growth and development health issues, physical injuries and suicide, and poor academic performances. Under the sub-division highlighting the impact of divorce on parents' health, one major theme was common was psychological and mental health deterioration.

Table 2: Thematic Meta-summary of Results from Reviewed Articles

Thematic Meta-summary of Results from Reviewed Articles																
	Akingube	Lursen	Shaikh	Windle	Herjn	Shi	Westermair	Walleborn	Tian	Pegarols	Wang	Meland	Obeid	Sands	Ayano	Tosi
Main Author name																
Year of Article Publication	2018	2019	2020	2018	2021	2021	2018	2019	2019	2022	2021	2019	2021	2017	2021	2020
Themes																
Poor Oral Health	X															
Substance Abuse (YA)	X			X			X						X			
Substance Abuse (A)				X												
Psychological Health (YA)		X	X		X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	
Mental Health (YA)			X		X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	
Growth and Development (YA)						X	X	X	X							
Mental Health (A)											X		X			X
Psychological Health (A)											X		X			X
Academic performance		X								X						
Physical Injury and Suicide (YA)											X		X			
(YA) represents children and adults, while (A) represents adults																

Subs-section1: Impact of Divorce on the Health of Children

As devastating as divorce is to parents, in-laws, and other extended family members, the most affected group of family members are the children. The new adjustment of the children to the single-parent family, a new location after moving, or the financial predicament brought about by the loss of household income leads to increased health concerns for children of divorce. The most profound health concern of divorce that affects children of divorce is the psychological and mental health issues that lead to a ripple effect of other issues such as growth and development issues, substance abuse and poor oral health concerns, physical injuries and suicide, as discussed in the themes below, derived from the article analysis.

Theme 1: Psychological and Mental Health Issues

In a historic cohort study conducted to investigate the impact of divorce on school-going children from divorced parents in Denmark, it was determined that the social well-being of these children deteriorates amongst these school-going children during and after the divorce of their parents. According to the researchers, the reason behind this is that most children of divorce stem from the adjustment of these children back in school while still having to deal with the divorce situation happening at home⁽²³⁾. In between this adjustment, the children face ridicule and bullying from their peers, developing psychological issues such as social anxiety, affecting their ability to integrate back into school. The family dissolution affects the children's focus in class-leading to reduced academic performance coupled with the bullying from peers on the divorce happening back at home. Compared to children from 'intact families' – families where the children's parents have not undergone divorce; the study showed that children from dissolution families developed psychological issues of feeling not wanted, which led to a drop in their self-esteem⁽²³⁾. There was a documented decline in their social well-being and academic performances. On the other hand, children from 'intact families' thrived socially amongst peers, promoting higher self-esteem and increasing their social well-being through improved social interactions. In addition, children from 'intact families' improved in academia.

In a cross-sectional study carried out amongst young females in Saudi Arabia investigating the wellness of their mental health after their parent's divorce, the researchers concluded that divorce led to the decline in the females' psychosocial health, social well-being, and a deterioration in mental health coupled with increased mental health issues. From the 296 participant-filled questionnaires, it was evident that parental marital discord before, in-between, and after divorce affected the females' mental and psychological health, raising their anxiety and stress levels while increasing points of depression amongst them⁽²⁴⁾. Poor parental support played an important factor in aggravating anxiety and stress, anxiety, and depression, with the study's results showing that female children displayed 'Affectionless Control' amongst peers and while in school⁽²⁴⁾. According to the study, divorce led to an increased distortion of father-daughter relationships with most single families after divorce comprising the children and the mother, leaving the father completely out of the picture. In turn, psychosocial problems increase, topped off with the female children dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression from the marriage dissolution at home⁽²⁴⁾. According to the Saudi-Arabian culture, the female child highly depended on the male figure in the house. Therefore, with the absence of a father figure at home, self-esteem issues were high among children because of the divorce. Compared to children from 'intact families,' they had the parental support of both parents leading to better academic performance, social well-being through increased social interactions with peers, and an overall better mental and psychological health than their counterparts, the children of divorce.

Through a cohort study involving 39,661 7-year-old children in Denmark, researchers sought to identify whether parental separation affected the mental health of the 7-year-old children. It was determined after the research that divorce had a detrimental impact on the children's mental health. The study compared children of divorce from parents who have joint custody with single-parent divorcees with sole custody and found out that children of divorce in the latter had a higher risk of developing mental health issues than the former ⁽²⁵⁾. The researcher hypothesized that this was because of the attachment theory of early childhood. According to the attachment theory of early childhood, children, as they grow, develop a stronger emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual connection and relationship with parental caregivers and guardians who remain present, responsive, and available in their lives, especially between infancy and adolescence ⁽³⁹⁾. The attachment theory of early childhood improves the safety feeling of a child where the child is believed to grow in an environment that fosters all their growth and development, improving their mental, physical, social, and psychological abilities. Therefore, early the attachment theory of early childhood promotes child security, reducing the child's risk of developing anxiety, depression, or stress ^(25; 39). The study explained that children within the 7-year growth and developmental stage usually had increased attention-seeking and attachment to their caregiving guardians ⁽²⁵⁾. From the study, it was clear that the lack of parental support and divorce as a precursor for the absenteeism of one parent led to increased outbursts from children leading to increased anxiety and stress. The study explained that children from single-parent divorced homes would develop depression from pre-teen to adolescence.

In another study involving 7,036 school-going students in Barcelona, Spain, the researcher sought to look into how the children's psychopathology affected their academic performances. Amongst the issues discussed as precursors to an increase in psychological issues developing amongst these children was the divorce of the student's parents. Children of divorce denoted that they had difficulty concentrating in class because they had increased worry about the situations at home brought about by the divorce and separation of their parents ⁽³⁰⁾. As a stressful event in the children's lives, Divorce increases anxiety and stress amongst these children brought about by worry, leading to the development of 'academic depression' ⁽³⁰⁾. Resultantly, researchers linked such students' lack of concentration in class to increased delinquency, truancy, and engagement in risky behavior.

In a longitudinal cohort study involving two-year research investigating how the experience of divorce affected the psychological health of 1,225 Norwegian junior high students, the researcher found out that the experience of divorce majorly affected the student's psychological health. The students explained that the anxiety and stress of the divorce caused them to develop somatic health concerns such as headaches, abdominal pain, backaches, dizzy spells, and neck pains ⁽³²⁾. In addition, these somatic health concerns were coupled with increased nervousness, difficulty falling asleep, lethargy, and being afraid. The breakdown of the parent-child communication increased these feelings and somatic health concerns, leading to these children developing anxiety, stress, and mild depression ⁽³²⁾. More girls reported health complaints than boys, increasing concern and investigations on the junior high student's self-esteem. Resultantly, children of divorce developed low self-esteem to the point that they had difficulty holding conversations with people; hence, a drop in conversational confidence. The study shows that losing contact with one's parents during divorce increases the chances of a pre-teen developing anxiety that affects their interactions with peers because of low self-esteem developing.

A 2017 national cross-sectional study is investigating the mental health outcomes of Lebanese adolescents after divorce showed increased psychiatric disorders amongst adolescents. The study postulated a 22.5% rise in divorce in Northern Lebanon in 2017 from approximately 7,000 to 8580 divorces. The study also explained that with the increase of divorces in the country, one out of two adolescents from divorced homes developed psychiatric disorders ⁽³³⁾. The psychiatric disorders were preceded by an increase in stress, anxiety, and depression because of the emotional, mental, and psychological turmoil the adolescents faced from the divorce of their parents ⁽³³⁾. Increased stress and depression led to an increased incidence of suicidal ideation amongst these adolescents, a rise in the indulgence of risky behaviors such as skipping school, and developing major anxiety disorders ⁽³³⁾. Increased anxiety amongst these adolescents led to lowered self-esteem and elevated social avoidance brought about by the fear of being judged and ridiculed because of their parents' marriage dissolution. Social avoidance was a precursor to these adolescents, especially daughters, developing major depressive and anxiety disorders. The increased concern of the children developing major depressive disorders and major anxiety disorders, and suicidal ideations affected the parents' psychological and mental health.

A systematic review involving 29 studies from different online databases investigating whether depression and anxiety increased amongst offspring of divorced spouses determined a higher likelihood of developing depression and anxiety in these children. The research also concluded that these children would grow up with depression and anxiety increasing throughout their lives and stay with them into adulthood ⁽³⁴⁾. The study concluded that once depression and anxiety increased, these children would have trouble forming lasting relationships throughout their lives. This would affect the way they relate because of increased low self-esteem and the fear that they would become their parents divorced ⁽³⁴⁾. The researcher also determined that with depression and anxiety affecting their future relationships, it could be hard to make long-term relationship commitments and marriage.

Yet another systematic review investigating the risk factors associated with children of divorce developing psychiatric disorders after their parents' divorce concluded that children are more likely to develop psychiatric disorders after their parents' divorce and family dissolution. The study looked into parents who had psychiatric disorders and the likelihood of their children developing them after divorce ⁽³⁵⁾. Such psychiatric conditions discussed included bipolar disorders, major anxiety disorders, and parental schizophrenia. Upon analyzing the results of their findings, the researchers concluded that children from homes with divorced parents with psychiatric conditions developed psychological health conditions that later ended up as psychiatric disorders ⁽³⁵⁾. Anxiety, stress, and depression developed during the gruesome and mentally draining process of divorce amongst the children's parents were precedent psychological and mental health issues that led to the development of psychiatric disorders such as social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorders, major depressive disorder (MDD) and major anxiety disorder (MAD) ⁽³⁵⁾. The findings of this study were insightful in understanding that divorce affects the mental and psychological health of the child while young, but with time, these psychological and mental health problems progress into worsened psychiatric conditions.

Theme 2: Growth and Development Issues

While psychological and mental issues increase amongst children of divorce, they lead to further detrimental effects such as affecting the growth and development of the child. Some of the articles elucidated this theme toward understanding how parents' divorce affects children's health.

In a cross-sectional study conducted to investigate how parent-child separation affected the socio-emotional development of a home in rural China, the researcher concluded that divorce was a major contributing factor to decreased child socio-emotional development after divorce or marital separation. The study concluded that divorce played a major role in increasing mental and psychological issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression in the child left behind after parents' divorce ⁽²⁶⁾. Consequently, the researchers concluded that increased mental and psychological issues amongst children of divorce affected their growth and development, especially those in rural China ⁽²⁶⁾. The study extrapolated that during divorce, most times, the mother was left as the sole custodian of the child when the father left, while in some situations, the grandparents were left with the child as guardians while the father or mother went into the cities and surrounding towns to earn a living towards improving their lives after the divorce ⁽²⁶⁾. While the parents were away or in a single-family setting, the child developed low self-esteem from increased social anxiety, leading to less social interactions with their peers. Also, mental and psychological health concerns developed, leaving the child of divorce stressed and anxious that they lost their appetites. Lack of an appetite increases the risk of growth and development issues such as malnutrition amongst the children of divorce. Moreover, without seeing their parents, those left under the care of their grandparents led to a lack of daily stimulation. This was also the case in single-family houses where the parents would come home tired from working immense hours to provide a living for the child ⁽²⁶⁾. The children in these situations developed depression that affected their overall growth and development, increasing incidences of low self-esteem. In other situations, grandparents and single parents would issue harsh punishments that involved canning a child or violent outbursts of blaming the child for their after-divorce situation, leaving children of divorce as 'emotional and physical punching bags'; hence, becoming socially awkward because of their low self-esteem ⁽²⁶⁾. Socially awkward children of divorce did not have the opportunity to develop amongst other children and enjoy playtime essential for their growth, development, and stimulation.

A survey conducted amongst university students at the University of Lubeck, Germany, revealed that a divorce is a stressful event in a child's life attributed to increased growth and development issues. The study initially investigated how adverse childhood experiences influenced their adult mental and behavioral health. As part of the stressful events occurring in a child's life, divorce was a stressful childhood event picked up by the researchers showing that children develop mental and psychological issues when young and carry them into adulthood ⁽²⁷⁾. Stress, depression, and anxiety in adjusting to the new norm of single-parenting lifestyles or joint-custody factored in the distorted eating habits of children of divorce ⁽²⁷⁾. Increased anxiety amongst children of divorce made them socially awkward because of increased low-self esteem and a lack of conversational confidence. These children developed depression that saw them isolated from their peers and parents while at home ⁽²⁷⁾. Depression increases the need for a coping mechanism among children of divorce; hence, the overindulgence in eating leads to overeating. Furthermore, in homes with single-parent families, there was minimal supervision around the children of divorce; therefore, these children indulged in the eating junk foods because the parents were out working intense work shifts; hence, all that was left to eat instead of a decently balanced diet meal was junk food ⁽²⁷⁾. Advertently, increased intake of junk foods and overeating and a lack of parental

supervision led to the children developing conditions such as obesity and being overweight, which were precursors to children of divorce contracting chronic conditions such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and high cholesterol ⁽²⁷⁾. Obesity and overweight affect children's growth and development, especially for growing children, as it can lead to child strain in exercising and physical activity ⁽⁴¹⁾. From the study, it was evident that divorce largely impacts the growth and development of children of divorce as poor parental supervision and support coupled with low-income earning increase the existing stress, anxiety, and depression of these children leading to increased indulgence in overeating and junk food; hence, obesity and overweight issues form in children of divorce affecting their mobility and physical activity while putting them at the risk of developing chronic conditions.

In a cohort study investigating how marital disruptions through separation or divorce affect a child's health, the researcher concluded that children of divorce have growth and development issues as they progress in a life characterized by the start of stress, anxiety, and depression ⁽²⁸⁾. The study result showed that anxiety develops in children during the early stages of divorce and progresses into major anxiety disorders, while depression progresses into major depressive disorder. On the other hand, the stress in children of divorce transposed into chronic stress during adulthood while developing neuro-developmental disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) ⁽²⁸⁾. ADHD in children can be characterized by impulsive behavior where children of divorce act out and perform actions without thinking ⁽²⁸⁾. The impulsiveness caused by ADHD was noted as a coping mechanism for the change in family dynamics and family structure amid divorce in the family. Children of divorce would also be seen not paying attention to details or events, another sign of ADHD development. The study was instructive in explaining that psychological and mental health issues in children of divorce are precursors to increased and detrimental growth and development issues in the children as they pass through different stages. These growth and developmental issues happen in different stages of life as the child gains cognition of their surroundings, leading to adverse health concerns.

In a longitudinal survey in China involving 114 children, researchers sought to understand the effects of absent parents on a child's nutrition. The results inferred that as much as their psychological and mental health is affected during divorce, a child's nutrition is also affected ⁽²⁹⁾. The study explained that during divorce, marital dissolution happens, leaving homes economically disadvantaged with income in the house moving from two to one. Therefore, single parents struggle with providing the necessary foods that give their children proper nutrition. The study concluded that single-parent households in this struggle overcompensate by providing their children with more food to mask the absenteeism of the other parent ⁽²⁹⁾. The study showed that single-parent households with only fathers provided more meat products, including aquatic foods and meat over cereals for their children, affecting their overall development. For children to grow fully, basic nutrients should be available in the child's meal with all food groups - carbohydrates, proteins, and vitamins – present. Cereals are a good source of carbohydrate-rich dietary fibers and nutrients necessary for a child's general growth and development ⁽⁴⁰⁾. The lack of such food groups in a child's nutritional content will increase the risk of poor brain development, lethargy, low immunity, increased infections, and weak learning.

Theme 3: Substance Abuse, Alcoholism, and Poor Oral Health Concerns

As children of divorce grow into adolescence, their social anxiety, depression, and stress increase. Consequently, children of divorce may indulge in risky behavior such as drug and substance abuse and alcoholism. The following paragraphs explain the results of specific studies in the articles retrieved that talk about substance abuse and alcoholism amongst children of divorce.

In a survey analyzing how exposure to adverse childhood experiences increases poor oral health amongst children, divorce was cited as a stressful event that increased the likelihood of children of divorce having poor oral health. Childhood trauma from divorce increases children's divorce, having increased depression, anxiety, and chronic stress that leaves them socially isolated and with low self-esteem. These psychological and mental health concerns become precursors to children of divorce retaliating against the divorce situation in the house or as a coping mechanism by engaging in risky behavior such as smoking, drug abuse, and alcoholism ⁽²²⁾. The research's findings postulated that adolescents engaging in cigarette smoking, alcoholism, and drug abuse have detrimental effects on their health later on in life. Smoking, in particular amongst children of divorce, saw up to six teeth extracted because of poor oral health before they turned 18 ⁽²²⁾. Consequently, cigarette smoking led to children of divorce contracting chronic conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchitis and asthma, and lung cancer in their adult life. Additionally, alcoholism and illicit drug use contribute to health risks such as liver cirrhosis, obesity, high blood pressure, and hypertension. Intoxication from alcohol and illicit drug use saw children of divorce engage in risky sexual vices with people who would take advantage of them, leaving them low self-esteem.

From data involving research of 706 young adults in New York, the researcher sought to investigate whether parental divorce contributed to alcoholism and marijuana usage amongst children of divorce. The study's results were clear on an increased marijuana smoking amongst boys than girls of divorced families ⁽¹³⁾. Compared to alcoholism, the study revealed a higher marijuana smoking amongst children of divorce than in alcoholism ⁽¹³⁾. This was because adolescent children of divorce sought marijuana smoking to escape the stress, anxiety, and depression they faced because of their parents' marriage annulment. Male adolescent children were on a higher marijuana usage as an act of defiance from having to live with their fathers after the divorce. Living situations with paternal father figures brewed conflicts amongst adolescent children of divorce; hence, the escape from a household conflict affected their psychological and mental health through marijuana usage ⁽¹³⁾. However, adolescent children of divorce engage in alcoholism from watching their parents' binge drink or stress drink to cope with the divorce and the pressure of less household income.

Data from the German research at the University of Lubeck shed light on substance abuse amongst adolescent children of divorce. The data explained that as acts of defiance or coping mechanisms, children of divorce engaged in alcoholism and substance abuse in their pre-teen to adolescent lives ⁽²⁷⁾. Characterized by alcohol dependency, alcoholism was higher, leading to risky behaviors that increased drug addiction amongst children of divorce ⁽²⁷⁾. The study revealed that children of divorce partook in alcoholism and illicit drug use as a form of pain management where the intoxication feeling let them believe they were immune from the pain, stress, anxiety, and depression caused by their parents' divorce.

The national study involving Lebanese teenagers also provides insight into increased smoking and alcoholism by adolescents from divorced homes. With already psychological and mental health issues looming over teenagers from divorced homes, peer pressure led to the increased indulgence of alcoholism and smoking habits by these teenagers ⁽³³⁾. The lack

of parental support saw increased peer pressure and victimization of teenagers from divorced homes, increasing drug and alcohol abuse.

Theme 4: Physical Injuries and Suicidal Ideations

Substance abuse couples with psychological and mental health concerns can see an increase in risky behavior like increased engagement in fights and suicidal tendencies amongst children of divorce. The paragraphs below explain findings from my research on the increased physical injuries and suicidal tendencies amongst children of divorce.

The 2017 national cross-sectional study investigating the mental health outcomes of Lebanese adolescents after divorce also showed an increased incident rate amongst Lebanese adolescents from divorced homes of suicidal ideation and potentiality to cause self-harm. The study showed that girls from divorce homes had higher suicidal ideations and the potential to cause self-harm than boys who opted for social avoidance ⁽³³⁾. Ultimately, boys from divorced homes fought with peers who ridiculed them or bullied their home situations. On the other hand, girls sought to be closed off with increased depression that saw them engage in acts that would be harmful to their lives to the extent of taking their lives as well.

In a cross-sectional survey, researchers identified that children's mental health from divorce and self-harm was high while investigating the impact of parental divorce on the mental health and self-injury frequency of Chinese children. According to the research findings, parents have divorced because of the changing economic times, leaving their children with a one-parent support system. According to the study, the children of divorce had elevated stress, anxiety, and depression levels ⁽³¹⁾. While nuclear families slowly digressed into single-family households, the absence of one parent-led to increased conflicts with children from 'intact families' ⁽³¹⁾. Potentially, physical injuries ensued in the confrontations, and as stress, depression, and anxiety increased without their family's dynamics changing, suicidal ideations were more of the route for these children. Ultimately, the study was industrious in explaining how children of divorce suffer psychological and mental health issues leading them to defend themselves and the honor of their households by engaging in confrontations and brawls. These brawls increased the risk of physical injuries, and the ridicule and bullying increased the number of children of divorce opting for suicidal tendencies.

Sub-section 2: Impact of Divorce on the Health of Parents

The burden of divorce falls not only on the children but also on the parents. Characterized by loneliness, a decrease in household income, fear of starting over again, relocation, and adjusting to the new norm, divorce has affected parents' psychological and mental health as much as it has children.

Theme 1: Psychological and Mental Health Issues

In a cross-sectional study to investigate the effects of divorce amongst old spouses in the UK, the researcher noted that the rates of divorce amongst older aged adults (45 and above) were higher. The research also showed that spouses who divorced earlier in their adult lives had increased depression brought about by the lack of support from their children now that they were of adult age and had moved out of the parental home to pursue their lives independently ⁽³⁶⁾. This came because the children had little to no communication with their divorced parents once they left home, as they felt that the parents were responsible for the deterioration in their family structure and would not want anything to do with them ⁽³⁶⁾. In addition, divorced individuals in their 50s had elevated chronic stress where they were worried that as they age, they would die alone and still worried over chronic conditions that came with old age.

The cross-sectional survey on Chinese children's health impacts from parental divorce also highlighted some vices that may lead to parents' psychological and mental health concerns. As pressure increases on single spouses to deal with the decreased household income, adjust to new norms of single parenting, and make a living, the study explained that parents develop anxiety to meet the demands of the household financially ⁽³¹⁾. In addition, the study highlighted that depression increases with the loneliness and reality of divorce, leaving the parent a single parent occurring. The study further emphasized how stress increased with deteriorating parent-child relationships, especially since the child would start being closed off ⁽³¹⁾. The study shows that most parents who turn into single parents after the divorce increase the likelihood of parent-child relationships dwindling because of the lack of availability while working to fend for the new family.

The 2017 national cross-sectional study investigating the mental health outcomes of Lebanese adolescents after divorce highlighted that divorce crippled the economic stance of the family when families split. There was also a breakdown in the parent-child communication, which increased the family relationship. The absenteeism of one parent led to the overwhelming feeling of the house feeling overcrowded with children a no spousal support, which increased anxiety and stress on the parents ⁽³³⁾. The children's indulgence in drug and alcohol use did not board well with parents who did not know how to handle the children, coupled with suicidal ideations; parents were at odds in how to parent ⁽³¹⁾. Consequently, parents dealing with all these issues and a loss of household income led to increased stress, anxiety, and depression, increasing their risk of developing adverse psychological, psychiatric, and mental disorders.

Discussion

Having gone through various online databases and reviewed articles, journals, and other academic materials, I believe that this systematic review is an original meta-analytical presentation of original work performed to include all family members by investigating the impact of divorce on the health of family members. Previous research has dealt with one or two aspects of research concerning specific health issues amongst other issues because of divorce on family members. However, my findings presented in this review show a collective idea focusing on parents and children as their health is affected by divorce. The 16 articles were a mixture of cohort studies, systematic reviews, cross-sectional studies, and surveys from different global regions providing me with succinct data and knowledge presented on the impact of divorce on the health of family members. From ten categories synthesized in the data collection process, as indicated in **Table 2**, there was an identification of five major themes for the synthesis of information. These themes were psychological and mental health issues of children of divorce, growth and development issues, substance abuse and alcoholism amongst children of divorce, physical injuries and suicidal ideations, and psychological and mental issues of parents of divorce.

The research underlines "Psychological and mental health issues" amongst children of divorce as a health impact of divorce. Evidence exhibited in the results of my analysis shows that children of divorce are highly susceptible to developing psychological and mental health issues brought about by divorce. Divorce leads to the breakage of homes, switching families from nuclear families to single-parent families after the marriage dissolution occurs. Children are the most affected family members, yet, the least looked after when divorce occurs. Until recently, people assumed that the physical relocation of children after the divorce is what accounted for adjustment issues. However, my research shows succinct data that children are vastly affected by divorce leading to psychological issues developing such as stress and anxiety and mental health concerns when depression sets in ^(23;25). These three developments in children even before they reach adolescents.

While many may assume that children from homes plagued with divorce do not understand parental marital discord and marital separation, the evidence exhibited in my research suggests otherwise. Children have shown signs of stress, anxiety, and depression amid other neuro-developmental health issues such as ADHD as early as seven ^(23;25). Alluding to the attachment theory of early childhood development, growing children seek emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual, and social support as they grow into adults ⁽³⁹⁾. For this to happen, children form a connection and relationship with parental caregivers and guardians who remain present, responsive, and available in their lives, especially between infancy and adolescence ⁽³⁹⁾. However, divorce negates that breaking families into single-parent families from nuclear families increases psychological and mental health concerns amongst children of divorce. Divorce adversely affects school-going children, dropping their academic performances ⁽³⁰⁾. Stress increases amongst children of divorce in their adjustment into single-parenting families affecting their attention and concentration in class. In addition, anxiety and depression brought about by divorce increase a decline in a child's social well-being. Findings from research expound on this by denoting that children of divorce find it difficult to integrate back into learning institutions because of the fear of being judged by others and ridicule and bullying occurring in academic centers. These factors contribute to their self-isolation tendencies and somatic health manifestations of anxiety and depression, including headaches, backaches, feeling afraid, nervousness, neck pains, abdominal pains, lethargy, and sleeping difficulties ⁽³²⁾. Ultimately, self-isolation reduces social interactions as self-esteem lowers in these children while social avoidance, social anxiety, and depression increase. From the results of the meta-analysis and data presentation in the results section,

there is a need for collaborative interventions between counselors, healthcare facilities, academic institutions, and the US government to address psychological and mental health issues among school-attending children of divorce.

Growth and development issues are yet another highlighted the health impact of divorce on children. Proper growth and development require a proper environment that fosters a child to express themselves, play with their friends and peers, socialize, explore, and have balanced diets that offer nutritional benefits needed for growth and development. However, divorce leads to children of divorce not being able to grow up in a pristine environment. Research shows that the family's burden falls on the single parent raising the child, where divorce occurs in some cases. This becomes especially difficult as the single parent has to fend for the child to ensure that all household bills are settled and provide a meal for the child or children ⁽²⁶⁾. Absenteeism of one parent leaves the child with no social interactions and increased stress, anxiety, and depression to the point that the child loses their appetite. While this goes on, malnutrition happens, leaving the child to lack proper growth and development. In other scenarios, the fact that the single parent is out working tirelessly to provide the basic needs for the child and lack of parental supervision leaves the child to eat junk food; hence, overweight and obesity as growth issues that affect the child's physical abilities opening the child to the risk of contracting chronic conditions ⁽²⁷⁾. In other instances, parental compensation for the lack of the other spouse leads to overfeeding the child-specific foods while negating others, increasing the risk of the child having poor brain development, increased lethargy, low immunity, increased infections, and weak learning ^(29;40). Therefore, there is a need for proper parental supervision of children to ensure that they have proper nutrition and avoid developing chronic conditions from being overfed or underfed. Parents should also look into being as present as possible, offering the child an opportunity to grow and learn from them rather than everyone else, increasing parent-child communication.

The research highlighted substance abuse because of psychological and mental health concerns amongst children of divorce. As a way of defiance or coping mechanism, adolescents are culpable of engaging in risky behavior involving illicit drug use, cigarette smoking, and drinking alcohol. Cigarette smoking has been deemed harmful amongst youth and teenagers, leading to increased addiction to nicotine, reduced lung function, reduced lung growth, early cardiovascular damage, and oral health damage ^(22;42; 43). Adolescents from families where parental divorce and marriage dissolution have entered into risky behavior that includes cigarette smoking. This leads to the above-mentioned detrimental effects with increased oral health damage where adolescents smoking cigarettes have been noted to have up to six teeth extracted before they are 18 ⁽²²⁾. After divorce, adolescents in single-parent families have been noted to emulate their fathers in binge drinking or stress drinking as a way of avoidance, increasing the risk of alcoholism and alcohol-related health complications ^(22;27). In addition, some adolescents from families plagued with divorce engage in marijuana smoking and usage as a coping mechanism for divorce and social avoidance to numb the stress, anxiety, and depression of handling depression at home ⁽¹³⁾. The research extrapolates a need to avoid engaging in alcoholism and cigarette smoking around children of divorce while ensuring parental control oversees interactions amongst peers to avoid illicit drug use and addiction. Parents also need to engage with counselors and therapists to address alcohol and substance use issues amongst adolescents from homes plagued with divorce.

Additionally, it is vital to address the increase in physical injuries and suicidal ideations among children of divorce. Looking at the research formulated, it is clear to establish a pattern between psychological and mental health issues and substance abuse and suicidal ideation amongst children of divorce. Chronic stress, anxiety, and depression among

children of divorce build within them, leading to increased instances of substance abuse and alcoholism and increased suicidal tendencies⁽³³⁾. Boys from divorce homes engaged in fights with peers who ridiculed them or bullied their homes situations. On the other hand, girls become increasingly depressed that seeing them engage in acts that would be harmful to their lives to take their lives. Confrontations within the family unit are a reason for increased physical injuries where guardians harm their children to punish them. It is important to take the opportunity and look into ways in which parent-child communication can be fostered to help increase sharing amongst children and their parents on what they feel, hence, avoiding situations of suicidal ideations and physical injuries.

It is important to highlight the interplay between themes and how they add to each other when looking at the impact of divorce on the health of children of divorce. Majorly, psychological and mental health concerns are the root of all ripple effects of health concerns such as substance abuse and alcoholism amongst children of divorce, physical injuries, and suicidal ideations. Stress, anxiety, and depression increase the need to fit in amongst adolescents of divorced families, leading to increased substance abuse, which lands them into confrontations with peers who may bully or ridicule them, resulting in physical injuries. At times the bullying may lead to emotional scaring amongst those who cannot defend themselves, and with low self-esteem, these children of divorce may take their lives through suicide. Therefore, there is a need to handle, manage, and prevent psychological and mental health issues as they start to avoid the repercussions of increased substance abuse and alcoholism amongst children of divorce, physical injuries, and suicidal ideations.

The major theme highlighted amongst parents was psychological and mental health issues when divorce occurs. As pressure increases on single spouses to deal with the decreased household income, adjust to new norms of single parenting, and make a living, the study explained that parents develop anxiety to meet the demands of the household financially⁽³¹⁾. In addition, the study highlighted that depression increases with the loneliness and reality of divorce, leaving the parent a single parent occurring. Stress also increased with deteriorating parent-child relationships, especially since the child would start being closed off⁽³¹⁾. The research shows that most parents who turn into single parents after the divorce increase the likelihood of parent-child relationships dwindling because of the lack of availability while working to fend for the new family. In addition, there is a breakdown in the parent-child communication, which increases the family relationship's strain. The absenteeism of one parent led to the overwhelming feeling of the house feeling overcrowded with children a no spousal support, which increased anxiety and stress on the parents⁽³³⁾. The children's indulgence in drug and alcohol use did not board well with parents who did not know how to handle the children, coupled with suicidal ideations; parents were at odds in how to parent⁽³¹⁾. Consequently, parents dealing with all these issues and a loss of household income led to increased stress, anxiety, and depression, increasing their risk of developing adverse psychological, psychiatric, and mental disorders.

Limitations of the Study

While the literature search involved secondary data, combing the articles to identify the 16 articles used in this systematic review proved time-consuming. In addition, many reviews failed to provide adequate summaries that seemed valid with information. However, the articles' inaccessibility led to the exclusion of certain articles that would be vital to the study. The assessment of the study quality was limited; I was using secondary data over primary data to help with improved decisions in analyzing the information presented. Mostly, the research was limited to specific databases accessible through the university.

Clinical Implications of the Study

Given that divorce has affected children's and parents' health in a family setting, it is important to look into interventions that alleviate each health concern arising from divorce, especially around children of divorce. Parents should manage stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms as early as possible to help the children adjust well to divorce. Parents can achieve this by being more open about divorce proceedings and situations. Explaining the process without blaming one parent will improve the understanding of the family structure's adjustment while ensuring that the child's mental health is protected. Children will be more expressive toward explaining what they feel present, and parents should adopt ways of acceptance, even when some of the feelings expressed may hurt them. In addition, parents should find ways of balancing work and social life with their children, enhancing interactions that help boost the child's self-esteem. Ultimately, children with higher self-esteem will improve their social well-being and consequently improve their academic performances. Group counseling is needed for adolescents with suicidal ideations, with both parents present to improve their child's mental health. Looking into parental care of their mental and psychological health, it is important for couples counseling and finding ways to fill the void through meaningful activities that promote good health rather than isolation.

Conclusion

Divorce ends marriage legally and has been attributed to increased consequences such as financial loss, relocation and moving of separated spousal partners, stress, emotional impact, breakage, deterioration of parent-child relationships, trust issues, and mental health issues. As such, divorce has had adverse effects on the health of family members, specifically children, leading to psychological and mental health concerns, physical injuries and suicidal ideations, growth and developmental health issues, and substance abuse and alcoholism. Parents also face emotional turmoil from the adjustment of life from a nuclear family with double income to a single-parent family with the loss of household income, increasing mental and psychological issues. If not managed, psychological and mental health issues may live with children into their adult lives where they will not engage in meaningful, long-lasting relationships while blaming their parents for their outcomes. Parents also need to manage their mental and psychological issues to help with improved health even in their old age, guaranteeing them life after divorce.

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