

Fighting parents might be more harmful to child development than divorce, study suggests

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Credit: Tjook

The damage caused to a child's development during a family breakdown is done before the parents separate, a study suggests.

Researchers at the University of York say children of divorcees are around 30 per cent more likely to have behaviour or [emotional issues](#) because of the arguing at home they have witnessed.

The research was based on data from 19,000 children born in the UK in 2000 and looked at 'non-cognitive' skills such as behaviour, emotional issues and interaction with peers.

The findings were presented at the Royal Economic Society's annual conference in Bristol.

The study also found that children of [divorce](#) perform about 20 per cent lower for [cognitive skills](#). This gap is largely down to [parents'](#) education and finances, the study suggested.

Divorced parents

Gloria Moroni, from the Department of Economics and Related Studies, said: "The main result of my research is that the fact that children of divorced parents have on average lower cognitive and non-cognitive skills compared with children of intact families is not necessarily due to divorce itself.

"Most of the damage is given by pre-divorce circumstances and characteristics of the [family](#).

"For example, parents who decide to divorce may also be lower-educated, may also be poorer, or they may have more conflictual relationships.

Cognitive gaps

She added: "The most interesting thing is that when comparing cognitive and non-cognitive skills, what we find is that cognitive gaps are mainly driven by the fact that parents who decide to divorce are also for example, less educated and have lower financial resources.

"But on the other hand, the non-cognitive gaps are mostly driven by the fact that parents who divorce have more conflictual relationships."

Dr Moroni said that the results suggest that interventions that encourage parents to co-operate, or that make them aware of the negative impact of conflicts on [children](#), could help to close these non-cognitive gaps.

Provided by University of York

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