

Conversational difficulties with father affects adolescent health

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Credit: Colourbox

Conversational difficulties with father after a divorce affects the children's health negatively. "This demonstrates that contact with both parents after a divorce is important," says researcher Eivind Meland.

According to numbers from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health around 40 percent of all teenagers have experienced a divorce.

"We wanted to explore what happens to the communication between parents and [children](#) after a divorce and how this impact the children's future health," professor emeritus Eivind Meland at the Department of Global Public Health and Care, explains.

The study included 1225 youths from the former region of Sogn of Fjordane. They were asked if they found it easy or difficult to talk with their parents. The answers were graded from "very easy" to "very hard or lost contact."

The researchers also asked the children about their health complaints and self-esteem. The health complaints included various physical and psychological symptoms, such as headaches, dizziness, stomachaches, anxiety, depression and trouble sleeping.

They asked the children in 2011 and in 2013. In 2011 213 of these children had divorced parents. Two years later the number had increased to 270.

"The divorce did not seem to affect how they communicate with their mother, but are strongly connected to conversational difficulties with father," Meland says.

"We also see that closeness to both father and mother impacts the [children's health](#) two year after the divorce."

More health complaints when the children had lost contact with their father

The researchers observed a clear connection between how easy the children found to talk with their father after divorce and health complaints later in life:

"Those children that reported having lost contact or who find it difficult to talk with their father after divorce also had most health complaints," says Meland.

They also saw a clear connection between the divorce and conversational difficulties between children and [fathers](#):

"It seems like conversational difficulties between children and father was present also before the divorce, but we also see that the divorce weakens the relationship between the children and their fathers," Meland states.

If the children reported having a good relationship with both parents after the divorce, the divorce did not seem to affect the [self-esteem](#) or health to the children in any negative manner.

Daughters find it hardest to talk with their father

The study also shows that the girls have more difficulties talking with their fathers than the boys. Daughters also reported having more health complaints, but the consequence of conversational difficulties seemed to be the same for both sexes:

"In the data we can see the tendency that girls suffer more from having lost contact with their fathers, but the difference is not significant," the researcher says.

A neglected subject

The data included information on which parent was the child's main caregiver and where the children lived, but it was not considered reliable enough to be included in the article. It suggested that three times as many children reported having lost contact with their fathers than with their mothers:

"If the divorce is taken to court, it is the mother that most often ends up with the status as the main caregiver," says Meland, but adds that he sees a tendency towards that the parents decide to share the custody.

Meland strongly believes that the importance of maintaining a close relationship between father and child after a [divorce](#) is a neglected subject:

"Our research clearly shows that a [strong relationship](#) with both [parents](#) is important for the children's [health](#). This should impact the family policy," says Meland.

More information: Eivind Meland et al. Divorce and conversational difficulties with parents: Impact on adolescent health and self-esteem, *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1403494819888044](#)

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