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# Influence of Parental Divorce on Anxiety Level of Adolescents<sup>1</sup>

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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## Abstract

Family divorce might have an effect on some aspects of child development. Adolescence as a transitional stage is marked by process of seeking identity, the need for intimate relationship, as well as the struggle for psychological independence from family. Anxiety is defined as a state of extreme worry, fear, and uncertainty which results from the expectation of a threatening event or situation. The aims of study are: to explore the differences in anxiety levels among adolescents from divorced and intact families; to explore the level of anxiety of adolescents from divorced and intact families with respect to their genders. A demographic questionnaire was created and The Beck Anxiety Inventory was applied to measure anxiety. The scale was applied with 162 participants who were chosen randomly from 5 different high schools in Istanbul province. The study found out that there are statistically significant differences in anxiety level of adolescents between children from divorced and intact families. Descriptive measures are in range as follows:  $(17.67 \pm 9.645)$ . The adolescents from divorced families had a higher level of anxiety ( $t = 17.322$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The result related to the second study aim shows that there are no statistically significant differences in anxiety between male and female adolescents from divorced and intact families ( $p > .05$ ).

**Keywords:** family, anxiety, parental divorce, development, adolescence

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most important factors that determine the development of children is family, in which parents provide a secure place for psychosocial development, in which children learn behaviors and moral and ethical principles.

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<sup>1</sup>The research presented in this chapter is part of Master thesis.

From birth to the maturation period, children pass through developmental stages which are marked by different challenges, but at the same time there are achievements of specific developmental milestones. Adolescence is a developmental stage which has particularly emphasized challenges in the field of rapid physical development, development of identity, and positioning of a young person into the world of adults. This is the stage which is marked by the transformation of physical identity, way of thinking, taking responsibility, and trying to become independent. Therefore, for a majority of youth, this is the period which is marked by turbulence and various kinds of fear from failure. This psychological state sometimes transforms into a condition that can be identified as anxiety in a young person which can interfere with normal psychological processes in adolescence. Adolescents are often in conflict with their parents because, they want to be independent, but at the same time their parents' love and the sense of security in the family is necessary for them.

Tendencies in modern society indicate an increased number of divorces and an increased number of families in which one parent takes care of the child, while the other parent only occasionally participates in the upbringing of children. In the most cases, divorce means frequent conflicts, and a tense and insecure atmosphere in the family. If a child grows up in such an atmosphere, his/her judgment of family insecurity may cause the development of anxiety symptoms. Having in mind the natural developmental processes happening during adolescence, we wanted to examine whether growing up in a family where the divorce of parents exists increase the probability of development of anxiety in adolescents. Since we know that family is an important factor in child development, we assume that young persons who grow up in divorced families have higher level of anxiety than those growing up in complete families.

It is very difficult to make a definition of the concept of family that is common for all human societies. Societies give different meanings to the concept of family depending on their own structures. It is accepted by all societies that family is one of the essential structures of organization, and it is even the foundation of society [1].

Various definitions are developed for the concept of family. Some of these definitions focus on the structure of family while the others focus on the functions of family. A common point of these definitions is that family is the most basic social foundation in any society. Family is a social structure making a person happy to be a member of it; it is a place where a person feels protected in every aspect of life. Basic needs in life are fulfilled by family. The first interaction is experienced within the family. Basic behaviors and habits related to life are acquired by an interaction in the family [2]. Family is the first place of learning which is very important for the child's social and emotional development [3].

Family setting in which the child grows up has an important role for the development of child personality; it provides the most useful adaptation skill to the society to which the child belongs. Parents' support to the child in the adaptation process to the physical and social environment has a significant impact on child social and personality development [4]. A harmonious relationship between mother and father helps them develop a consistent, warm, and affective approach to their children. In that way, family represents an environment in which love, compassion, care, confidence, support, and democracy are provided. Furthermore, a democratic interaction between mother and father grounds the development of a healthy and efficient communication between mother-father and their children [5].

From the legal perspective, divorce is described as the termination of the marriage with the decision of judge based on anticipated reasons explained in the legislation. Different authors presented different factors that might cause divorce. Ozguven [6] presented the basic reasons for divorce as follows: inadequate familiarization of husband and wife during premarital process causes high probability for divorce; different socio-economic status of husband and wife and different cultural environment makes harmony difficult; communication problems among couples damage the relationship of husband and wife; an intervention by parents of husband and wife to family life dynamics cause conflicts and many problems in marriage; jealousy harms the trust and tolerance between husband and wife effecting happiness and harmony. In accordance to Ciftci and Bicici [7], the problems in marriage which can lead to divorce can be listed as follows:

- Financial problems: it is frequently reported that the persistence of financial problems in the family run into the risk for divorce.
- Communication problems: most of problems among people usually occur as a result of failing of communication or a faulty communication. Communication problems can happen between wife and husband, or parents and children, or wife-husband and their parents.
- Environmental problems: environmental problems can cause the existence of some problems within the family by factors such as the effect of the working conditions of family members or neighborhood relations.

Even though divorce is perceived as a relief and rescue from an unhappy marriage for couples, it actually means the destruction of the family system and the marriage which was established with great expectations and hope. Very often problems would not be solved with divorce and it can affect couples in a negative way regarding psychosocial and financial aspects. Because of these reasons, divorce in general is not interpreted as a complete return to the premarital freedom or a rescue, meaning a new bachelorhood period. Divorce is actually the beginning of a difficult period which is not the end of unhappiness. Couples have the feeling of emptiness. They have needs of overcoming previous habits, and building a new life style and new relations [8].

Today, divorce has become a natural matter as a part of marriage life even though it is unfavorable for families, and especially children. In cases when divorce is the best solution for the family, realization of divorce in a civilized way causes less psychological and personal damage in husband and wife, and their children [9].

The concept of mother/father in marriage is a vital element in terms of psychological development and social adaptation of the child. In other words, living with mother and father, growing up with mother and father, and having an unbroken family are the essential factors needed for emotional development, as well as social and psychological maturity of the child. However, if the concept of mother/father in marriage means family atmosphere with tense relations between mother and father and dominant presence of restlessness and conflicts, the family concept does not provide a secure environment for the child. It is indicated that the degree of impact of divorce on child depends on the way how divorce is realized [10]. Moreover, it is specified that the case of a stressful period of divorce, an unhealthy communication, and a lack of love and security issues affect the child deeply rather than divorce itself

[11]. Getting over the case of divorce is very difficult for a child without an intense parental support. Child has the fear of being abandoned. Therefore, a child whose father and mother are divorced need more clear signs to be loved and valued. Each child is affected by the separation of mother and father. The degree of influence depends on some factors such as age, personality development, and parental attitude [12, 13].

The emotional reaction of adolescents on divorce is marked by pain, disbelief, anger, and the feeling of loss. Regarding their behavior, some adolescents show problems in behavior, such as running away from school, taking drugs and alcohol, failure at school and similar, which can be considered as a response to parent's divorce. Adolescents often have the feeling of guilt toward parent's divorce; they believe that either their behavior or the fulfillment of parents' expectations is the cause of divorce. These feelings, besides the judgment of the loss of security of the family environment, reveal the cause of depression or the development of symptoms of anxiety. The reaction on parents' divorce in adolescence is different according to gender. Young girls begin early sexual relations more often due to the lack of self-confidence, while boys often react on a behavior area by aggressive and delinquent behaviors. The risk for drug and alcohol abuse is present in both genders [14].

It is also stated that divorce has rarely a positive effect on the child. Moreover, it is emphasized that lack of a parent, emotional and financial tightness, and sometimes continual conflicts between divorced parents would cause psychological problems for many children. However, it is also mentioned that even though children have adaptation problems for the new life, the sensitivity for divorce mostly depends on age, developmental maturity, length of passed time after divorce, and social support system. The reactions also change according to the maturity of the child and circumstances at home. Therefore, it is explained that the determination of the standard reactions of such situation is very difficult [15].

Children usually assess divorce as the end of the family life, prediction of future period of uncertainty, and loss of love from at least one of the parents. Feelings of uncertainty and difficulties to predict and control the situation can cause anxiety. In addition to that, if parents, because of personal stress, do not pay attention to the child's psychological reactions on divorce, there will be a great risk for development of psychological problems such as anxiety. Separation anxiety, specific phobia, and selective mutism might be more present in children in preschool period. Generalized anxiety disorder, agoraphobia, and panic disorder might be more present in adolescence period [16].

## **2. Key aspects of development in adolescence**

Adolescence as a transitional stage is the period in which psychological, cognitive, and emotional changes are experienced as a result of seeking identity, the need for intimate relationship, cognitive development, rapid sexual development, and the struggle for being psychologically independent from family. The beginning, duration, and termination of this period depend on social and cultural factors as well as individual maturity levels [17].



Various physiological, psychological, and social changes and developments occur in this stage. The outcomes of changes in adolescence period might have an impact on future life of the adolescent. This period is referred as “storm and stress” by many authors, has a crisis attribute with these developmental challenges. An adolescent has to cope with sex drives caused by biological changes in body by adjusting to them. The cognitive developments occur in parallel with the periodical maturity drive [18].

The most important challenge in adolescence is the beginning of self-exploration as an individual. The adolescent begins to ask questions such as ‘Who am I?’, ‘What kind of person will I be?’, and ‘Who am I according to other people?’ During adolescence, psychosocial conflict of this stage develops as a result of getting in identity confusion against identity development. Identity problems come into prominence in this stage mostly. Achieving autonomy and adopting the new values are significant developmental points for adolescence. In this stage, conflicts with parents, failures at school, and problems in relations with persons of the same gender and peer of opposite sex stand out. According to Erikson’s theory, the most important developmental duty of adolescence is the identity achievement. There are many dimensions of identity concept. These dimensions may be grouped as sexual, social, physical, psychological, moral, ideological, and occupational dimensions. All these dimensions form the entire identity. Firstly, sexual and physical dimensions of identity develop. While adolescents are mostly interested in their body images and sexual identities in early adolescence, the choice of profession, ideologies, and moral values are considered more important in later years [19]. Psychological changes appearing during this period are results of rapid physical changes. The adolescent gets anxious, uneasy, unbalanced, and incompatible even though he/she was previously happy, easygoing, and balanced. Adolescent’s emotions and interests change, get waver and indecisive, while enthusiasm becomes excessive, limitless, or unbalanced [20]. Stress developing as a result of changes in adolescence causes the adolescent to be depressive, so the feeling of loneliness appears. Therefore, the adolescent needs parents who would provide trust and support in struggling with distress, pleasant feelings such as pessimism and uneasiness. If parents are able to listen to the adolescent without criticizing, despising, and judging, they provide an opportunity to him/her for self-expression and better condition for personality and identity development. However, the adolescent who does not have parental support may experience anxiety, fear, and the feeling of loneliness. Time spent with friends increase and the adolescent gets under the influence of friends more than he/she does during childhood. However, subjects that are under the influence of peers are limited and parents continue to be the source of information in important topics for a young person. The adolescent finds parents’ opinion to be important firstly in the subjects of future, school choice, and profession choice. The experienced conflicts are generally related with moral behavior, relations with family members, academic success, taking responsibilities, and social interactions such as dressing style and hair style [21].

As it is obvious, many adolescents experience internal psychological conflicts and external conflicts with their family and peers at the same time. Frequent shifts from mature behaviors to childish behaviors while identity development continues make adolescents restless. Conflicting emotions generally increase in the effort to be independent of family. The adolescent is in emotion conflict with his need to be independent from family on one side, and the

need for their support and love on the other. The adolescents dream about being grown-up and changed into an adult persona as fast as possible. In the same time they are not sure about new social roles and ways how to make personal choices and decisions. Even though adolescents try to deny the adequate role of parents and other significant people, they still feel safer to have parents around them. They usually resolve internal conflicts temporarily which give them the impression that they are independent and parents' support is unneeded in their life. However, in most cases, it is just an impression and a feeling, but in fact, they need parent's support, but on a different and more sophisticated way. The role of parents in adolescence period is supposed to be backed up in resolving conflicts and struggling in identity confusion. Very often, parents experiencing their personal crises because of marriage problems and a possible divorce are not able to offer relevant support to their children. Therefore, adolescents growing up in such families are faced with natural developmental challenges, problems in the family, and poor support from parents. All of this puts them into the more risky situation for the development of psychological problems such as anxiety [22].

### 3. Anxiety disorders

Anxiety is defined as a state of extreme worry, fear, and uncertainty which results from the expectation of a threatening event or situation. It frequently causes disruption of physical and psychological functioning [23]. The way how anxiety disorder was presented has been changed through different Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders classifications (DSM). DSM 5th Edition (DSM-5) has several changes regarding the diagnostic category of Anxiety Disorders. Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is among the change which is moved to its own chapter as a new entity. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is moved to a new chapter in which acute stress and adjustment disorders are included. Furthermore, anxiety disorders in childhood are not included as a separate chapter anymore. Panic disorder and agoraphobia are classified as separate disorders in Anxiety Disorders because each of them can exist alone. Moreover, a Panic Attack Specified is added to the DSM-5 to use for the case panic attacks existing in the context of another anxiety disorder. Moreover, selective mutism is added to the Anxiety Disorders. Furthermore, the 6-month duration for symptoms is possessed to all ages with DSM-5 [24]. Another change is that separation anxiety disorder is shifted into Anxiety Disorders which was included in the Disorders Usually First Diagnosed in Infancy, Childhood, or Adolescence part as previously [25].

In DSM 5 Classification, different types of anxiety disorders are presented and symptoms and diagnostic criteria are explained. *Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)* refers to the statement of the feeling of anxiety almost all the time in any kind of circumstances or the case that is characterized with a persistent and a long duration of anxiety, which makes it different from the other forms of anxiety disorders [24]. *Agoraphobia* refers to the statement of intense fear that develops in places or situations in which is difficult to escape. According to the DSM-5, for diagnosing people with agoraphobia, there is a need of having symptoms of extreme fear in public places which are perceived as too open, dangerous, and crowded mostly. *Panic attack* refers to the repetitive state of anxiety and sudden panic attacks with the fear of outcomes of this state, such

as the fear of death, being mad, or losing control. Panic disorder is the disorder which brings a serious loss of functionality and the state of distress for the person. *Specific phobia* is characterized by an intense and persistent fear of a particular situation or object. For people with specific phobia, an intense anxiety develops by the exposure to the particular object or situation causing the fear. People with specific phobia have the fear of getting harmed. *Social Anxiety Disorder* was named as Social Phobia in DSM-4. It was explained as a kind of anxiety that was developed as a result of the fear of getting insulted by others and the feeling of shame in social conditions which cause severe anxiety. According to DSM-5, Social Anxiety Disorder indicates a broader scope of the condition as covering variety of social conditions. The person with the Social Anxiety Disorder feels stressed in cases of performing a social performance, which can bring about a panic attack. People with the Social Anxiety Disorder have distress in public speeches, eating or writing in the presence of other people and they avoid such situations. *Separation Anxiety Disorder* is referred as an excessive statement of anxiety or feeling of fear for separation from attachment figure that is developmentally inappropriate. Duration of the disorder to meet diagnosis for the Separation Anxiety Disorder criteria is at least 6 months in adults and at least 1 month in children. *Selective Mutism* is identified with the person not being able to speak in specific social conditions (as in the school) in which speech is expected even though he/she is capable of speech in other conditions normally. One of the characteristics of selective mutism is that the person with selective mutism does not speak in specific social conditions though she/he speaks in other conditions. The important point is that children who suffer from selective mutism usually do not have any kind of language deficits. The onset of selective mutism is often under 5 years which is generally realized in school. The state of anxiety can be experienced in various severities from a mild restlessness and tension up to the degree of panic. It can be listed from psychological range to physical range specified as worry, tension, wince, feeling of loneliness, insecurity, fear, panic, astonishment, nervousness, unclear thinking, dry mouth, headache, dizziness, vomiting, weakness, lack of appetite, lower blood pressure or high blood pressure, muscle rigidity, stomach problems, hyperventilation, sweating, shaking, and insomnia. Moreover, anxiety can show behavioral indications varying from person to person [24].

Identifying the causes of anxiety disorder still has an unclear answer. In early theories, anxiety is explained as a defense strategy mechanism against the unconscious conflict. It is explained as a kind of adaptive behavior that is needed for person with internal conflicts. We cannot ignore biological innate tendency to react on the new situation with fear and anxiety that many children perform in early childhood. Behavior learning theories claim that children learn anxiety feeling and behavior from their parents or important people. Parents with specific or generalized anxiety disorder usually teach children to worry all the time or to be scared of specific objects or situations. A new research has proved that anxiety is linked with specific neurobiological and hormonal changes and processes in the body. Factors related to family situation, parents' anxiety, family atmosphere, are factors that should be considered as important causes for anxiety disorder in children. Among other family factors, parenting styles, such as rigid-authoritative or oppositely permissive parenting, can cause fear and nervousness in children. The way how family functions in everyday life, the way how parents cope with stress, solve family problems or use disciplinary methods, are important aspects of family life that influence child's psychological development. Additional factors, such as marital relationship and parent-child relationship, are significant factors effecting child's feelings and behavior. Parents' reaction on child's



developmentally appropriate fears and behavior can even increase anxiety in children. Families with many marital problems that might result in divorce are weighed with stress as well as disturbed family atmosphere. Growing up in such an atmosphere, living with parents who worry or fight most of the time, has effected child psychological development [26, 27].

## 4. Research methodology

Descriptive research method was applied in order to determine the relationship between parental divorce as independent variable and anxiety as dependent variable. A quantitative method was applied to analyze the data.

### 4.1. Aims and hypotheses of study

The study had following aims: to explore the differences in anxiety levels among adolescents from divorced and intact families; to explore the level of anxiety of adolescents from divorced and intact families with respect to their genders.

Based on research questions the following hypotheses are developed:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is statistically significant difference in level of anxiety between adolescents from divorced and intact families.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is no statistically significant difference in anxiety level among adolescents from divorced and intact families in regards to gender.

### 4.2. Participants and procedures

The sample consists of adolescents from five different high schools from Istanbul, Turkey. The participants of the study were chosen with systematic random sampling technique.

Principals from participating schools allowed the research. Departments in which the research was done are selected based on the information we get from schools' managements, in which the departments containing children from divorced families were indicated. The study was conducted with 190 students. However, the analysis was done with 162 participants because some students did not give the data about whether or not they live in divorced families. Some participants did not respond to all questions from Back Anxiety Scale, therefore, all participants with incomplete data are excluded from the research. An additional selection of participants of the study in regards to parental divorce as independent variable was not done, however we come to an equal number of adolescents from divorced and intact families.

Participants were provided with the information sheet and informed consent before the study. The questionnaires were distributed to the participants. The participants were asked to answer the questions. For the assessment of anxiety, the Beck Anxiety Inventory was applied with its Turkish adaptation. The instructions were given to the participants by explaining that they should select the closest statement in the answer box. The researcher was present during the survey, and as each was done, s/he would put them into the arranged box.

The research was conducted in 2016–2017 academic year. Both female and male adolescents were included in the research. A total of 73 female and 89 male participants participated in the study.

#### 4.3. Materials

A demographic questionnaire was created and one data collection instruments were applied for the study. For assessment of anxiety level of participants Beck Anxiety Inventory was used. It is a self-report inventory which is developed by Aaron Beck in 1988 in order to measure intensity and severity of an individual's anxiety. The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) is a 21-item Likert scale that is presented with four response choices (4-point scale) ranging from 0 to 3 as "Not at all", "Mildly", "Moderately", and "Severely". The total score has a minimum of 0 and maximum of 63. Results interpretation provides us with a possibility to discriminate participants as anxious and non-anxious group. Among anxious group the results from Back Anxiety Inventory discriminate participants with low anxiety, moderate anxiety and high anxiety. The adaptation of the scale in Turkish version is done by Ulusoy. Cronbach's alpha is .92 while test-retest is found as  $r = .75$  and  $r = .67$  [28].

#### 4.4. Data analysis

A quantitative method was applied to analyze the data. The analysis of data was done using IBM SPSS version 19.0. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were employed in this study for summarizing the statistical characteristics of adolescents from divorced and intact families. Independent samples t-test was applied for investigating the difference between adolescents from divorced and intact families in their anxiety levels. Moreover, two-way ANOVA was applied to examine the difference between male and female adolescents from divorced and intact families in their anxiety levels.

### 5. Results

In this part of the study, descriptions of the findings are presented. Firstly, a description of the characteristics and background of the participants of the study were illustrated. The collected data were analyzed by applying frequencies, descriptive statistics, correlations, independent samples t-test, and two-way ANOVA. Research questions and hypotheses are followed for the representation of the results and interpretations of the results one by one. The results are illustrated with tables.

In **Table 1** demographic characteristic of participants are presented. The gender, chronological age, and information about parental divorce are in the focus of our study.

Regarding the gender of participants, 45.1% of participants were female and 54.9% were male. Majority of participants are age 17 (51.9%), age 18 (25.3%), and 16 (16.7%.) Data presented in **Table 1** proved that our participants are in adolescence period, and that half of them live in divorced families and another half in intact families.

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	73	45.1
	Male	89	54.9
	Total	162	100
Age	15	10	6.2
	16	27	16.7
	17	84	51.9
	18	41	25.3
	Total	162	100.0
Parental divorce	Yes	81	50.0
	No	81	50.0
	Total	162	100.0

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of participants.

From the results in **Table 2**, we can conclude that 63.6% of our participants scored 21 and less, which can be interpreted as low level of anxiety. About 32.7% of our participants scored between 22 and 35, which indicates moderate anxiety of our participants. Approximately 3.7% adolescents scored 36 and more, which we considered as high anxiety. Although statistical data indicate that more than half of participants in the study have low level of anxiety, the fact that 36.4% of participants have moderate and high level anxiety is important information to be considered and discussed.

Statistics		
BAI (0–3)		
N	Valid	162
	Missing	0
Mean		17.67
Std. error of mean		.758
Median		15.50
Mode		7
Std. deviation		9.645
Variance		93.031
Range		36
Minimum		3
Maximum		39

BAI (0-3)		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	3	1	0.6	0.6	0.6
	4	8	4.9	4.9	5.6
	5	6	3.7	3.7	9.3
	6	3	1.9	1.9	11.1
	7	11	6.8	6.8	17.9
	8	6	3.7	3.7	21.6
	9	9	5.6	5.6	27.2
	10	6	3.7	3.7	30.9
	11	1	0.6	0.6	31.5
	12	10	6.2	6.2	37.7
	13	5	3.1	3.1	40.7
	14	6	3.7	3.7	44.4
	15	9	5.6	5.6	50.0
	16	4	2.5	2.5	52.5
	18	3	1.9	1.9	54.3
	19	7	4.3	4.3	58.6
	20	7	4.3	4.3	63.0
	21	1	0.6	0.6	63.6
	22	5	3.1	3.1	66.7
	23	3	1.9	1.9	68.5
	24	8	4.9	4.9	73.5
	25	4	2.5	2.5	75.9
	26	2	1.2	1.2	77.2
	27	5	3.1	3.1	80.2
	28	7	4.3	4.3	84.6
	29	5	3.1	3.1	87.7
	30	2	1.2	1.2	88.9
	32	3	1.9	1.9	90.7
	33	3	1.9	1.9	92.6
	34	1	0.6	0.6	93.2
	35	5	3.1	3.1	96.3
	36	3	1.9	1.9	98.1
	38	2	1.2	1.2	99.4
	39	1	0.6	0.6	100.0
	Total	162	100.0	100.0	

**Table 2.** Frequencies for Beck Anxiety Inventory scores.

Descriptive statistics								
	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. error	Statistic	Statistic
BAI (0–3)	162	36	3	39	17.67	.758	9.645	93.031
Valid N (listwise)	162							

Table 3. Descriptive statistic for Beck Anxiety Inventory scores.

The data present cumulative results for all participants in the study, which includes adolescents who live in divorced and intact families. These data are confirmed by the data analysis presented in **Table 3**.

In **Table 4**, data on anxiety level of adolescents from divorced families as well as adolescents from intact families are presented. We find out that adolescents from divorced families scored higher ( $M = 25.43$ ,  $SD = 6.469$ ) than adolescents from intact families ( $M = 9.90$ ,  $SD = 4.823$ ) in anxiety.

Data presented in **Table 4** proved that there are statistically significant differences in anxiety level of adolescents from divorced and intact families ( $t = 17.322$ ;  $p < .05$ ). These results suggest that divorce has a statistically significant influence on adolescents' anxiety level in our sample.

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	T	Sig
Anxiety	Adolescent from intact families	81	9.90	4.823	160	17.322	.003
	Adolescent from divorced families	81	25.43	6.469			

Table 4. Independent samples t-test result on the Beck Anxiety Inventory scores of adolescents from divorced and intact families.

One of the aims of our study was to investigate gender differences in anxiety level of our participants. In addition, we wanted to get an answer on the question if young boys and girls react differently on divorce in the family in regard to anxiety level.

**Table 5** illustrates results of two-way ANOVA on the Beck Anxiety Inventory scores of adolescents from divorced and intact families with respect to their genders. As it is evident from **Table 5**, there are no statistically significant differences in anxiety between male and female adolescents from divorced and intact families ( $p > .05$ ). Results indicate that young boys and girls react the same way on parents' divorce, and that divorce is a variable which has an influence on anxiety level, and that gender has no statistically significant influence on anxiety level.



Tests of between-subjects effects					
Dependent variable: BAI (0–3)					
Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Corrected model	8459.881 <sup>a</sup>	3	2819.960	100.696	.000
Intercept	48166.439	1	48166.439	1719.934	.000
Gender	7.984	1	7.984	.285	.594
Parental divorce	8121.297	1	8121.297	289.996	.000
Gender × parental divorce	87.945	1	87.945	3.140	.078
Error	4424.761	158	28.005		
Total	61626.000	162			
Corrected total	12884.642	161			

<sup>a</sup>R squared = .657 (adjusted R squared = .650).

**Table 5.** Two-way ANOVA result on the Beck anxiety inventory scores of adolescents from divorced and intact families with respect to gender.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

Presented research findings served us to explore the issue of anxiety level in adolescents and the way how anxiety level could be connected to parents' divorce. We also wanted to look at the role of gender on anxiety level in adolescents and its relationship to parents' divorce. We have measured the level of anxiety by applying The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) scale. The mutual developmental challenges and identity crises in adolescence period might be connected to the development of symptoms of anxiety in general. The results we got by measuring the anxiety level in adolescents in our study indicated present tendencies of anxiety level in adolescents. Results in **Table 2** explained that anxiety level among participants is not very high. Following the results of frequencies for Beck Anxiety Inventory scale, we can see that the majority of our participants have low level of anxiety. However, our study indicated that 36.4% of our participants have moderate and high level of anxiety, which means that every third participant have some symptoms of anxiety.

Our study indicated that adolescents from divorced families scored higher level of anxiety than adolescents from intact families, and that there are statistically significant differences in anxiety level of adolescents from divorced and intact families ( $t = 17.322$ ;  $p < .05$ ). If we compare the results from frequencies for Beck Anxiety Inventory scale presented in **Table 2** and the results presented in **Table 4**, we can conclude that, most likely, the majority of adolescents from divorced families belong to the group of 3.7% of adolescents who scored 36 and more, which we considered as high anxiety, and that the rest of participants from divorced families belong to the group of 32.7% of participants who scored between 22 and 35, which indicated moderate anxiety.

Those results can be confirmed with the results presented in **Table 5**. Results explored the issue of gender in regard to anxiety as dependent variable and divorce as independent variable. Data proved that adolescents from divorced families and intact families do not vary in their anxiety level in relation to gender in our sample. Our data indicate that adolescents react the same way on parents' divorce, and that both young boys and girls react the same way.

According to Ref. [14] possible reactions of young boys and girls on divorce are different. Young girls react more emotionally, such as early sexual relations, lack of self-confidence, while young boys show aggressive and delinquent behaviors more frequently. Anxiety can be closely related to the mentioned behaviors in boys and girls. Anxiety could be a cause, but also a consequence, of inappropriate behaviors among youth, which indicates the tendencies that divorce, anxiety, and problems in behavior are closely related. According to the same source, school phobia is the most frequent reaction of adolescents on the loss of one parent due to divorce. Our study confirmed this statement considering that school phobia is one of the types of anxiety.

Our study has reached its aims, research hypotheses were proved, and direct findings answered our research questions. In order to broadly explore the issues of family, divorce, developmental challenges in adolescents in regard to anxiety level, it is important to be aware of some of the unavoidable limitations of the study as follows:

This study was conducted in Istanbul Province, Turkey, with 162 participants in total. Therefore, research findings cannot be generalized to all adolescents from divorced and intact families. However, our research findings indicate the tendencies that could be discussed in connection with other research, knowledge, and practices as it is explained below.

Divorce of two persons formally marks the legal termination of mutual life and the division of common property. A particularly important issue is the division of responsibilities for the upbringing and education of children. Possible effects of divorce on the development of child and the connection to anxiety should be observed over a long period of time. Observational period starts from the childhood period before divorce, child's assumption about life after divorce takes place and period of life when child lives with one parent and spends limited time with another one. The period before divorce is most often the period which is marked by problems in parents' communication, whether the communication is insufficient or involves various forms of aggression. Such communication generates a tense atmosphere in family, which creates the feeling of tension and unpredictability for the child. Those feelings directly have an influence on development of fears, feeling of inability to control the situation in the family, which all are a precondition for development of anxiety in young persons. If this situation lasts quite long, which is very often the case, children start to develop very intensive specific fears which cannot be considered as "normal" or "typical" for a particular chronological age.

The parents' response to these fears is often inadequate, and involves the advice that the child should ignore the fears, or these fears are even mocked by them. Over time, children learn to hide their fears, or pretend not to have them at all. The accumulation of hidden fears often results in social phobias or panic attacks in the adolescent period [16].

Another important aspect of divorce begins with bringing the decision that parents will divorce, and the way how they communicate that decision to children. Children are rarely ready for such

a decision, parents often hide that decision in order to protect their children, or to give themselves enough time to accept the fact that they are getting divorced. The moment the child realizes that the parents are getting divorced, the grief process starts due to the breakdown of the family, fears develop about what the future will bring, and a sense of confusion starts to develop about to whom the child should be more loyal, the parent with whom child continues to live, or the one who is “less responsible” for divorce. Living in such a situation is associated with a high level of stress for both the child and parents, which is an additional risk factor for the development of anxiety.

The role and responsibility of parents often change because the conditions in which marital union functions are marked by frequent conflicts, lack of understanding, and violent relations among married partners at times. Parents because of their own problems spend less time with their children, have less patience in communicating with them, and bring their own frustrations into the parent-child relationship. Children often become the object of arguments and unsolved partner relations. In this way, the expected positive role of parents on the development of children becomes an additional risk for the development of psychological problems in youth, which includes anxiety as well. Parents are supposed to provide support, love and understanding, with clearly established rules and limitations, which would provide a good structure for adolescent to overcome developmental challenges and stress because of divorce.

The period of adolescence, besides the developmental challenges already mentioned above, is the period in which stress related to the inadequate family relations is most accumulated. Young persons are very critical toward their parents during adolescence, and the act of divorce for them causes either anger toward their parents because of their inability to solve the problem, or otherwise a complete withdrawal from society and difficulties to define and achieve life goals. In both cases, a young person manifests a high level of frustration and the difficulty of adjusting behavior to the new role an adolescent has.

Findings of the research [29] about the perceptions of youth concerning the values of parenting indicate that adolescents highly value warmth, love, understanding and support of their parents, regardless of the fact that they pay a great importance to their peers at the same time. Parents who are getting divorced or are already divorced often face themselves with the difficulty to provide an emotional support to their children because of personal or environmental reasons.

Our research was conducted on a relatively small sample, and in one geographical area, however, results point to significant tendencies of higher anxiety level in adolescents who grow up in divorced families. The fact that, in this study, we found that boys and girls respond equally to divorce when it comes to anxiety, and that there is no statistically significant differences in gender, further confirm our elaboration. The causes of anxiety can be found in already explained situational, relational, and emotional effects of divorce on the psychological development of youth.

Our research findings should help researchers to explore other components which link divorce, adolescence and anxiety, such as the developmental period when divorce occurred, causes of divorce, support of other family members, additional financial effects of divorce, etc. This study should draw the attention of parents who are getting divorced that support for their children during such process is necessary in all aspects of psychosocial development.

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