



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

The Impact of Divorce on Child Well-Being

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center Webinar
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Presenters:

Patrick Patterson, National Healthy Marriage Resource Center

Paul Amato, Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University

Robin Deutsch, Ph.D., Massachusetts General Hospital and
Harvard Medical School



How to Ask a Question...

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Microsoft Office Live Meeting - livemeeting.com - NHMRC July Webinar Practice Session". The browser's address bar and tabs are visible. The main content area displays a Q&A interface with a text input box containing the text "Type your question here." and an "Ask" button to its right. Three numbered instructions are overlaid on the screenshot with arrows pointing to the corresponding elements:

- 1. Click on the word "Q&A"** (Yellow box, arrow points to the Q&A tab)
- 2. Type your question in the top box** (Orange box, arrow points to the text input box)
- 3. Click on the word "Ask" to submit your question** (Green box, arrow points to the Ask button)

Learning Objectives

- **To provide the latest findings from research on how divorce affects child well-being.**
- **To learn and discuss the impact of divorce on parents.**
- **To provide information on the differing outcomes of divorce on children from low-conflict and high-conflict homes.**



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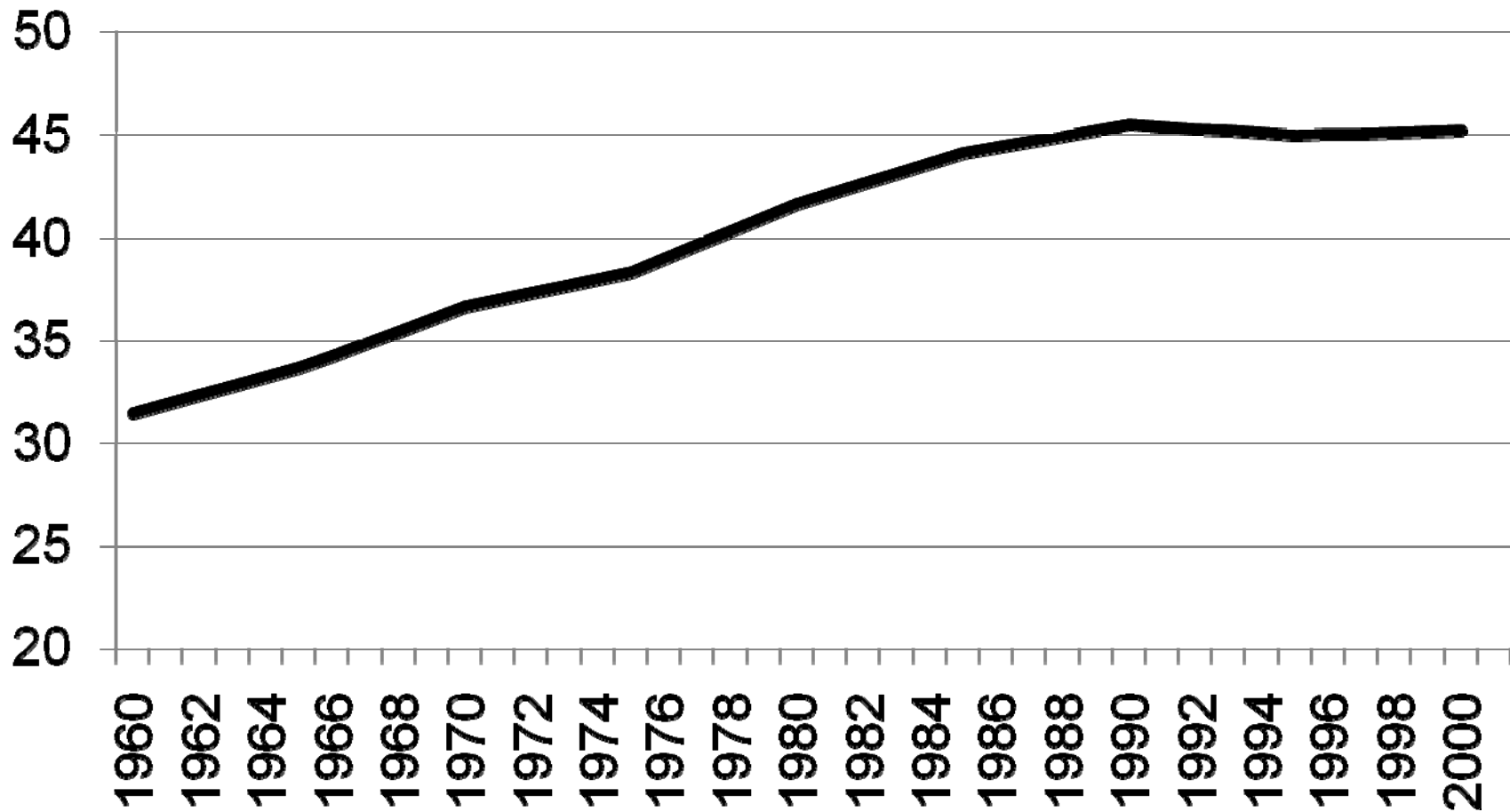
www.healthymarriageinfo.org

Divorce and Children's Well-Being

Paul R. Amato

Department of Sociology
Pennsylvania State University

Percentage of Marriages Ending in Divorce



Divorce is Linked with Negative Outcomes among Children

- *externalizing problems*
- *internalizing problems*
- *low self-esteem*
- *academic problems*
- *problems with peer relations*

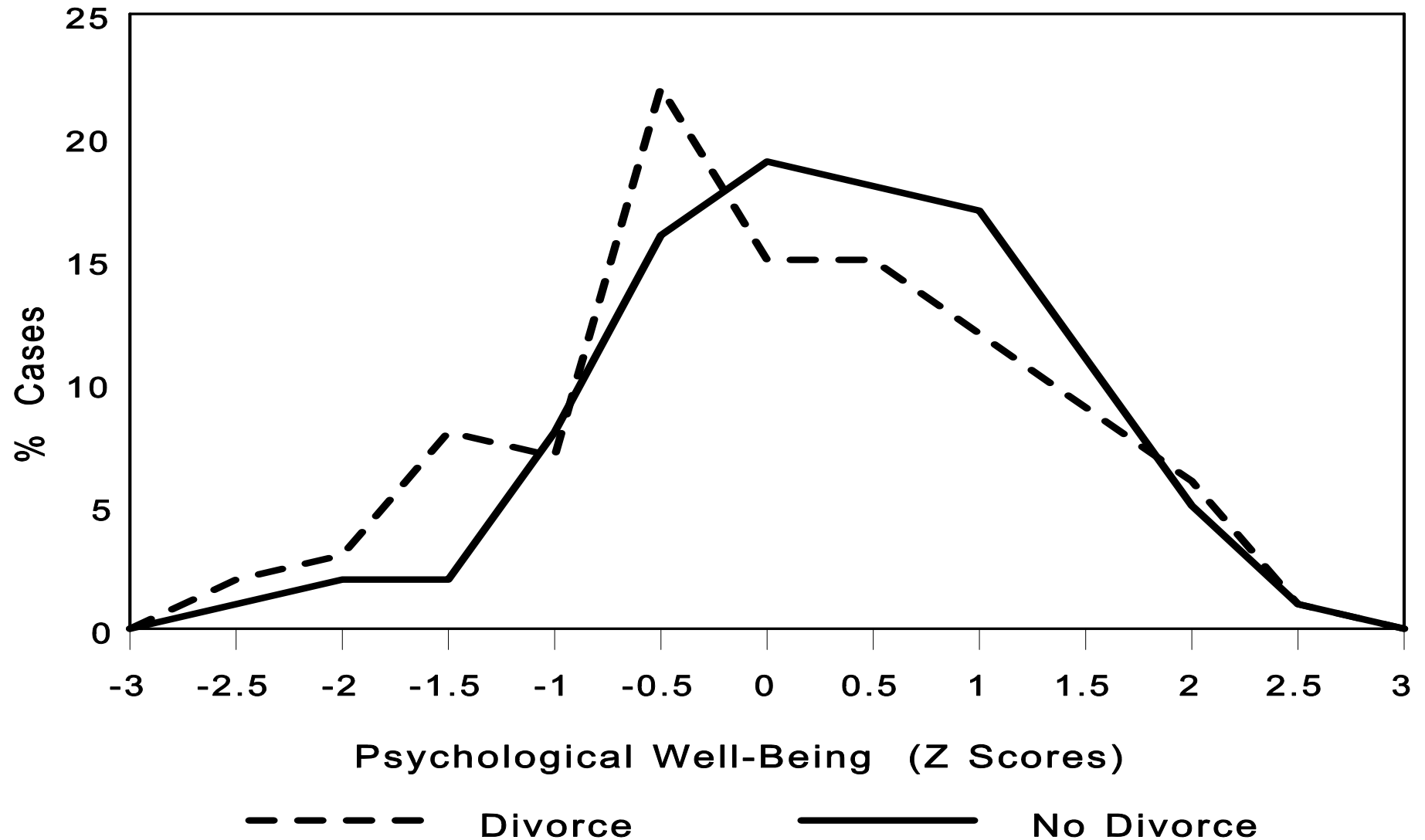
Divorce is Linked with Negative Outcomes among Adult Offspring

- *less education*
- *lower income and job status*
- *increased risk of depression*
- *increased risk of marital conflict and divorce*
- *weak long-term bonds with parents*

Are All Children Affected Similarly?

- *Some children exhibit lifelong increases in serious problems*
- *Some children show only minor, short-term distress*
- *Some children are better off following divorce if their parents had an overtly hostile relationship*

Distributions of Psychological Well-Being for Offspring with Divorced and Married Parents



How Does Divorce Lower Children's Well-Being?

- *Economic hardship*
- *Poor parenting*
- *Feeling caught in the middle*
- *Multiple stressful transitions*
- *Interactions with genetic risk*

The Effects of Divorce on Children

Robin M. Deutsch, MD

Children and Adolescent Program

Massachusetts General Hospital

Factors that harm children:

- Diminished parenting after divorce
- Being in the middle

Diminished parenting after divorce

- Conflict between parents associated with poorer parenting
- Parents more preoccupied with own life changes after divorce
- Parent looks to child for support and companionship

Diminished Parenting after divorce

- Compared to married parents divorced parents more prone to depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, psychosomatic complaints
- Mothers less warm, more rejecting, use harsher discipline
- Fathers withdraw more from and engage in more difficult interactions with children

Children caught in the Middle

- Exposure to anger and rage toward other parent is damaging to children
- Having child carry hostile messages, asking intrusive questions, creating a need for secrets place children in the middle

Planning the divorce: what do children need



Initial Separation Stress

- First year or two most stressful time
- Adequate preparation and information reduces isolation and confusion
- Ongoing contact with leaving parent important
- Predictability regarding new school, another home, absences from school important

Preparation for Preschoolers

- Tell children together
- Tell children shortly (no more than a few days) before a parent moves
- Let children know that you will always be their mommy and daddy and that you will always be there for them

Preparation for Preschoolers

- Let them know it is not their fault
- Have a room set up in new home with some familiar toys; invite non-moving parent into the new space
- Let children know when they will see the other parent and show them a calendar with days color coded

Preparation for School-aged Children

- Tell them together
- Let them know that this is an adult decision and they had nothing to do with it
- Both parents love them and always will

Preparation for adolescents

- Ask for their thoughts about a new schedule and consider their input
- Let them know that their personal schedule matters and parents will work with that
- Let them know that as parents you will communicate about any schedule changes, issues

Protective Factors

- Minimal conflict between parents
- Continued love and support from both parents

Protective Factors

- Good relationship with their parents
- Sense that each parent respects the other's relationship with the child and the child does not have to enter and re-enter different compartments because parents are so negative about each other
- Feeling known and understood by both parents

Child adjustment linked to parent adjustment

- Effective parenting mediates impact of divorce
- Effective Parenting style: warm, authoritative discipline, appropriate expectations, involvement, monitoring of activities

Children's adjustment: conclusions from the research

- Divorce creates stressors for children and families
- Divorce is a risk factor for psychological problems among children
- BUT resilience is the normative outcome of divorce for children
- Children still have painful feelings and memories
- Individual differences in children's post-divorce outcomes are influenced by post-divorce family life and family process variables

