

### **New findings on an old question: Does divorce cause children's behavior problems?**

CHICAGO, IL, April 24 - In a discussion paper prepared for a panel to be held at the 11th annual conference of the Council On Contemporary Families, on April 25 and 26, 2008, University of Illinois, Chicago, Allen Li presents a new approach to researching the impact of divorce on children. Li argues that it is methodologically unsound to compare the outcomes of children of divorced parents with those of continuously-married parents. Instead, the proper comparison is between the behavior of children years before a divorce occurs and their behavior after the divorce. Only this can tell us whether children's problems after a divorce were a result of the divorce or were a continuation of prior problems attributable to pre-existing conditions of the child's environment. Arguing that previous studies have over-stated the impact of divorce by failing to control for both "observable" and "unobservable" differences in families prior to divorce, Li used longitudinal research and novel statistical methods to revisit the question. He found that the average effect of divorce was neither to increase nor decrease children's behavior problems. "It is possible that the dissolution of some marriages decreases some children's behavior problems and the dissolution of others increases children's behavior problems," Li writes, "so that they cancel each other out, creating the zero effect that I found when I totaled the average effect of divorce. However, for this to be true, one must admit that while certain divorces harm children, others benefit them. My findings contradict the widely-accepted claim that MOST divorces increase children's behavior problems and that only a tiny minority of divorces do NOT."

[This discussion paper](#) summarizes the findings of a more technical, unpublished paper that won the 2007 Graduate Student Paper Award in Social Demography from the Section on Population of the American Sociological Association. Li describes his methods and findings below. Following the appendix, several other scholars offer differing perspectives on his work and on the debate over the impact of divorce.

Read [The Impact of Divorce on Children's Behavior Problems](#) here.