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In 2002 the American Journal of Family Psychology (an American Psychological Association publication) published a meta-analytical study of child outcomes, which aggregated the results of 33 "joint vs. sole vs. intact family" type studies.

The overwhelming conclusion is that children in joint or shared custody situations fared as well or better than intact family children but always better than sole custody children. (See attached cover page and also see *Journal of Family Psychology, 2002, Vol. 16, No.1* available at <http://files.silentmajority.info>)

**A-1123 will improve the outcome of New York children, and reduce the cost of treating social pathologies.**

## Child Adjustment in Joint-Custody Versus Sole-Custody Arrangements: A Meta-Analytic Review

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The author meta-analyzed studies comparing child adjustment in joint physical or joint legal custody with sole-custody settings, including comparisons with paternal custody and intact families where possible. Children in joint physical or legal custody were better adjusted than children in sole-custody settings, but no different from those in intact families. More positive adjustment of joint-custody children held for separate comparisons of general adjustment, family relationships, self-esteem, emotional and behavioral adjustment, and divorce-specific adjustment. Joint-custody parents reported less current and past conflict than did sole-custody parents, but this did not explain the better adjustment of joint-custody children. The results are consistent with the hypothesis that joint custody can be advantageous for children in some cases, possibly by facilitating ongoing positive involvement with both parents.

Research evidence has clearly demonstrated that, on average, children from divorced families are not as well adjusted as those in intact families, although this relative disadvantage does not necessarily imply clinical levels of maladjustment (Amato & Keith, 1991b; Guidubaldi & Perry, 1985). Joint custody, an arrangement that involves shared legal and/or physical custody of children following divorce of their parents, has increased in popularity as an option in divorce since the 1970s, with many states now having either a preference or presumption for joint legal custody (Bender, 1994). An ongoing debate between proponents and opponents of joint custody has continued since the 1970s as well, with different researchers and authors expressing both strong opposition (e.g., Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1973; Kuehl, 1989) and strong support (e.g., Bender, 1994; Roman & Haddad, 1978). Arguments in favor of joint custody have often focused on benefits for the child of maintaining relationships with both parents. In contrast, opponents have argued that joint custody disrupts needed stability in a child's life and can lead to harm by exposing children to ongoing parental conflict.

A variety of theoretical perspectives have been proposed to explain the links between divorce and child adjustment (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998): individual characteristics of the child that might increase vulnerability to maladjustment; the change in family composition and the possible negative effects of father absence in the typical maternal custody situation; the increased economic stress and problems in shifting from a two-parent to a one-parent

household; effects of parental distress on the child; and changes in family processes such as conflict and expression of emotion. Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch (1996) classified factors affecting children's postdivorce adjustment into three categories: loss of a parent, interparental conflict, and diminished parenting (in which the quality of parenting from the custodial parent deteriorates, typically during the first 2 years after divorce). In an analysis of several large-scale national samples, McLanahan (1999) found that father absence due to divorce is associated with less school achievement for both boys and girls, more labor market detachment (i.e., unemployment) for boys, and early childbearing for girls. The impact of father absence seemed to be mediated by several variables, including loss of parental resources (less involvement and supervision), loss of financial resources, and loss of community resources (the broader network of social involvement, interaction, and support obtained from each parent). In a meta-analysis of 63 studies of nonresident fathers' role in children's well-being, Amato and Gilbreth (1999) found that authoritative parenting and feelings of closeness between father and child related to well-being. In addition to child support payments, authoritative parenting by the father was the most consistent predictor of outcomes including school achievement, externalizing (behavioral) problems, and internalizing (emotional) problems.

Notably, joint custody (and joint physical custody in particular) is relevant to many of the issues raised by Buchanan et al. (1996), Amato and Gilbreth (1999), Hetherington et al. (1998), and McLanahan (1999). For example, ongoing and frequent access to both parents may mitigate potential effects of parental absence as seen in sole-custody households, and access to the households and resources of both parents may reduce economic stress and disadvantage for the child. On the other hand, as critics of joint custody have noted, close ongoing contact with both parents might expose the child to ongoing conflict. Thus, research on custody and adjustment needs to examine not just differ-

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