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Divorce rates higher when child has ADHD

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Parents of children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may be more likely than other parents to divorce before their child's 8th birthday, a new study suggests.

The study included nearly 500 couples - 286 had a child with ADHD and 206 had a child without this condition. The researchers found that couples with a child with ADHD were almost twice as likely to divorce before their child turned 8 years old. After that age, however, divorce rates were similar in both groups of parents.

Past research has found that compared with couples with a child without ADHD, parents of children with the disorder tend to argue more often and be less satisfied with their marriage. But studies have come to conflicting conclusions regarding the divorce rate.

These latest findings, published in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, suggest that divorce may be more common in families with young children affected by ADHD.

"Families that 'survive' through that age, perhaps because they are low on all of the risk factors, apparently will make it through the rest of the child's childhood," Dr. William E. Pelham Jr., one of the researchers on the study, said in a statement.

Other factors associated with divorce in couples with a child with ADHD included antisocial behavior in the father; a maternal and paternal history of divorce; parent substance abuse; and depression in the mother.

It's also important for parents to realize that a child's ADHD alone will not break up a marriage, according to Pelham, a professor of psychology and pediatrics at the University of Buffalo, State University of New York.

"Certainly we are not suggesting that having a child with ADHD is the only reason these marriages end in divorce," Pelham explained. "Disruptive child behavior likely interacts over time with other existing stress in the family to spark conflict in a marriage and, ultimately, divorce."

Unfortunately, he and his colleagues point out, children who already have behavioral problems may have a particularly hard time dealing with divorce. With this in mind, the researchers write, health professionals who treat children with ADHD should try to routinely ask parents about their marital relationship.

They add, however, that divorce is sometimes the best option for couples having serious marital conflicts.

SOURCE: *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, October 2008.

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