

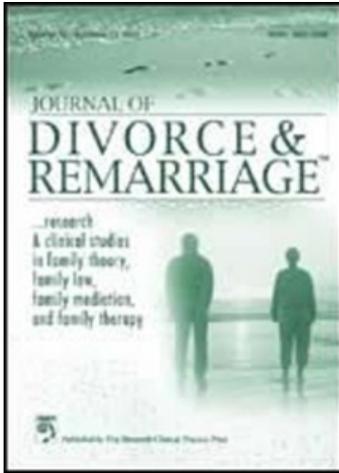
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### Ameliorating the Effects of Parental Divorce

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# Ameliorating the Effects of Parental Divorce: Do Small Group Interventions Work?

Linda J. Skitka  
Michele Frazier

**ABSTRACT.** The Rainbows for Children program (an intervention aimed at ameliorating the effects of parental divorce) was evaluated using a pre- and post-test design that compared program participants to a control group of non-participants. All children indicated higher levels of depression and lower levels of behavioral academic self-esteem than normative samples of children who do not come from divorced families. Children with higher indications of irrational beliefs and feelings about divorce revealed more behavioral and psychological problems as indicated by the Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1982) and the Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem Scale (Coopersmith & Gilberts, 1982). While these results provide support for the premise that changing children's beliefs about divorce should lead to improved outcomes, the program participants did not show any significant improvement over the control group after participating in the Rainbows program. Possible explanations for the lack of effects are provided, and specific recommendations of factors to consider in deciding whether to continue to provide intervention programs of this sort, and if so, how to improve the program and outcomes for the children, are provided. [Article copies available from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678.]

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Divorce is increasingly disrupting the family lives of millions of children. The divorce rate doubled in the 1970s (Bernard, 1978), and showed no signs of abating through the 1980s and 90s. Of children 17 years and younger, 40% will grow up in a family divided by divorce (Jost & Robinson, 1991). However, recent research indicates that divorce has a much greater social, educational and psychological impact on children than we previously believed (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein, 1987). Children of divorced families often experience social, educational and psychological disturbances (Bernard, 1978), more school problems (e.g., grade failure, higher dropout rates, and lower attendance), are more likely to engage in adolescent sexual activity, marry at an earlier age, have more premarital pregnancies, and experience early marriage instability (Furstenburg, 1990).

One intervention approach recommended for stemming or preventing some of the problems children experience as a function of their parents divorce is small-group counseling. Although there are a variety of structured interventions in use (e.g., *Banana Splits*, *Kids in the Middle*), one of the most widely used intervention programs is *Rainbows for Children*. The major goal of the *Rainbows* program, and others like it, is to provide an opportunity for children to accomplish the psychological task of emotionally healing after the disruption of their family by coming to terms with a variety of irrational beliefs and negative feelings (e.g., the belief that the child is responsible for the divorce; irrational hopes for reunification of the parents; the idea that other children will not like them because they come from a divorced family). Once children accomplish or at least begin to make progress on the tasks of modifying and coping with these common fears, misperceptions, and negative emotions, they can begin to redirect and focus their energy to the other tasks of childhood.

### **RAINBOWS**

*Rainbows For All God's Children, Inc.* offers five distinct programs: *Rainbows For All God's Children (Religious Elementary Series)*, *Rainbows For All Children (Secular Elementary Series)*, *Spectrum (Adolescent Series)*, *Kaleidoscope (College Age/Adult Series)*,

and PRISM (Single-Parent Series). Each of the programs includes educational materials (i.e., children's workbooks), a facilitator manual, games, templates, story books, facilitator training, and group sessions. Currently, there is both a grade school and a high school edition that has served approximately 143,000 children from the United States and five other countries during the past decade.

Facilitator training is conducted at preparatory workshops and director certification workshops. It is mandatory that all facilitators have these experiences. Support group sessions are conducted with 3 to 5 children in a group. There are twelve forty minute sessions divided into two six-week semesters. Each session begins with a topic, rationale and aim. The format is divided into four parts: theme, activity, discussion, and closing reflection. At the end of six sessions, there is a "wrap-up day." During this day the children come together with the other program participants at the site and each session is extended. There is a closing celebration to which parents or guardians are invited.

Kavanagh (1991) assessed the effects of the Rainbows intervention on children's self-esteem and self-concept by measuring components of their self-esteem on the Behavioral Academic Self Esteem scale (BASE) before and after participation in the program. He reported positive changes in participants' social attention, social attraction, self-confidence, and self-esteem. However, this study lacked a control group of children from divorced families who did not participate in the intervention. For this reason, the results are vulnerable to alternative explanations. For instance, are participants better at the end of the group counseling sessions simply because more time has gone by, allowing them to adjust to the changes in their lives because of the divorce (e.g., "time cures all wounds"), or because children's self-esteem naturally improves as they developmentally mature? Because there was no comparison group of children from divorced families who did not participate in the intervention, but who were assessed at the same time periods, it is impossible to disentangle the effects of the passage of time from the effects of the Rainbows intervention.

Evaluations of other similar programs have similar methodological weaknesses that do not allow a strong assessment of whether

intervention programs in general have the desired positive impacts on children's adjustment to their parents' divorce. While these evaluations have reported positive effects of other group-based interventions, such as lower levels of depression and anxiety, fewer negative feelings about divorce, increased knowledge and adaptation to divorce, increased self-concept, and improved classroom performance (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1989; Anderson, Kenney & Gerler, 1984; Gwynn & Brantly, 1987; Roseby & Deutsch, 1985), they typically lack control groups, or have been based on observation, only parent or child self-reports, or evaluators' assumptions of the effectiveness of the program.

One well-designed study, using a pre- and post-test design with a control group and a sufficient sample size reported positive results of group-level interventions on children's adaptation to divorce. Crosbie-Burnett and Newcomer (1990) found lower levels of irrational beliefs and fears about divorce, decreased depression, and higher self-concept in children who participated in an intervention program than those who did not. The present evaluation was similarly designed to examine the effectiveness of the secular elementary Rainbows intervention program in the semi-rural school district, as administrated by a local public service agency.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

Students from divorced families in first through sixth grades in a semi-rural, midwestern school district were recruited for participation in the study. Sixty-seven Rainbows' participants, and 28 nonparticipants made up the intervention and control group respectively. The sample included 55 females and 40 males, who ranged in age from 6 to 12. Rainbow participants were recruited by sign-up sheets students brought home from school. After expressing interest in enrolling their children in Rainbows, an informed consent letter was sent to the parents that described the program evaluation. Parents were informed that providing permission (or not) to participate in the evaluation would not affect whether their

child could participate in the Rainbows program. Only children with signed consent forms from their parents were included in the evaluation.

Control group participants included children who were on the waiting list<sup>1</sup> for the Rainbows program (who had signed consent forms), and children identified by the district social worker from school records. The parents of the children from the latter group were contacted, told the purpose of the evaluation and the need for a control group, what the evaluation entailed, and were asked for informed consent to include their child in the control group. All students in the control group were given first priority for the next Rainbows program.

### ***Procedure***

Children from the intervention and control group were interviewed before the start-dates for the first Rainbow session, and then two-weeks after their last session with two measures: The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (CBAPS), and the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) (a complete description of measures follows). In addition, the children's teachers completed a Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem profile (BASE) for each subject, again, before the first date of the Rainbows intervention, and then two weeks after the last session.

### ***Description of Measures***

*The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg, 1987)*

The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (CBAPS) was designed to measure children's beliefs and understanding of their parents' divorce. Developed initially in 1978, the CBAPS is a 36-item scale that measures six of the most common psychological problem areas for children of divorced families: Fear of Peer Ridicule and Avoidance, Paternal and Maternal Blame, Fear of Abandonment, Hope of Reunification and Self-Blame. Each construct is measured by six items.

*Peer Ridicule* measures children's feelings that their parents' divorce reflects negatively on them, the awkwardness associated with embarrassing questions from peers about their family, and peer avoidance behavior. *Paternal and Maternal Blame* measures the extent to which the child feels one parent is solely responsible for the divorce, and the extent to which the child either distances or allies him or herself with one parent over the other after the divorce. *Self-Blame* assesses the child's beliefs about his/her role causing in the divorce, and guilt. *Fear of Abandonment* measures obsessive fears of loss and excessive dependency behaviors. Finally, the *Hope of Reunification* subscale measures the children's thoughts that the separation may be prolonged or alleviated as a result of the child's actions, which can lead to repeated disappointment and depression for the child. Rainbows is expressly designed to deal with these kinds of beliefs and fears. If the intervention accomplishes its objectives, then we should observe lower reported levels of these beliefs after participation in the program. Lower levels of irrational or psychologically tenuous beliefs and feelings about divorce should in turn lead to a reduction in depression, and an increase in behavioral academic self-esteem.

#### *The Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1982)*

The Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) was designed to assess children's depressive symptomology. Each item on the questionnaire consists of three options ranging from healthy to depressive symptomology; the child is instructed to pick the one that best fits him/her over the last two weeks. The 27-item questionnaire taps three major constructs: Depressive Affect; Oppositional Behavior; and Personal Adjustment (Saylor, Spirito, Finch & Bennett, 1984). The CDI is found to be more valid when self-report measures are used and is capable of discriminating between populations of normal school children and emotionally disturbed children (Saylor et al., 1984).

#### *Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem Scale (Coopersmith & Gilberts, 1982)*

The Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem Scale (BASE) developed was designed to measure the academic self-esteem of children in

pre-school through eighth grade. It consists of 16 statements that are rated by the classroom teacher on a scale of one through five. It measures five constructs: Self-Initiative, Social Attention, Success/Failure, Social Attraction, and Self-Confidence. *Self-Initiative* assesses the extent to which the child is willing to undertake new tasks, make independent choices, show independence and self-direction in activities, and is willing to seek help without coaxing when she doesn't understand something. *Social Attention* measures whether the child is socially appropriate in class (quiet when necessary, speaks in turn, talks appropriately), and cooperates with other children. *Success/Failure* measures how well the child deals with criticism, mistakes and constructive feedback on classroom performance and behavior. *Social Attraction* measures whether the child is attractive to his peers, gregarious, and whether the child references to him- or herself in generally positive terms. Finally, *Self-Confidence* assesses, for example, whether the child readily expresses opinions, and if the child appreciates his or her work, work products and activities.

Scores on the BASE are calculated separately by each sub-type of behavioral academic self-esteem, as well as a total score.

## RESULTS

The first set of analyses established that the control and intervention groups were not significantly different before the intervention. Such tests ensure that the groups are equivalent on all the relevant variables (e.g., self-esteem, depression) so that any changes can be attributed either to time (pre- or post-testing) or intervention (intervention vs. control). Following these analyses are tests of the effectiveness of the Rainbows program.

### *Testing Equality of Treatment and Control Group Before Rainbows Intervention*

Pre-intervention scores were compared for the intervention and control group to determine if any differences between the experimental and control groups existed prior to the intervention. No significant differences were found. Therefore, both groups were equally (mal)adjusted to the divorce prior to any intervention.

### ***Tests of the Effects of the Rainbows Intervention***

Condition (intervention vs. control) by time (pre- or post-testing) mixed design analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted with the dependent measures of the CBAPS subscales, the CDI, and the BASE. We found no significant effects for the intervention program. In other words, the intervention group did not reliably improve over the course of the Rainbows program in their attitudes toward divorce (CBAPS), depression (CDI) or behavioral self-esteem as noted by their teachers (BASE). The analyses are described in more detail in Table 1.

To the extent that the Rainbows program effectively ameliorates problems associated with divorce, a statistical interaction between time (pre vs. post) and condition (divorced vs. control) should emerge: The subjects receiving the intervention should demonstrate improved self-esteem, less depression and better adjustment to their parents' divorce over time, while the control condition should demonstrate no differences or lower levels of improvement than the intervention group over time. Results indicated no significant interactive effects for the Rainbows intervention. We conducted a variety of more sophisticated analyses that controlled for the effects of such variables as length of time since divorce and subject age. Even when statistically controlling for these possible confounding variables, no significant improvement in children's depression, self-esteem, or beliefs about divorce was found as a function of the Rainbows intervention.

Other analyses did reveal two positive effects for time (pre- vs. post-testing). These analyses indicated that, regardless of whether the children were in the intervention or control group, the subjects' belief that their mother was solely responsible for the divorce and teachers' perceptions of the children's social attractiveness improved over time [ $F(1,88) = 6.25, p < .01$  and  $F(1,84) = 8.03, p < .01$ , respectively]. There were no other significant effects for time.

### ***Comparison to Normative Samples***

The means of this study sample were compared to the means of the original norm groups (averages from large representative samples) on beliefs about divorce, depression, and self-esteem to ex-

TABLE 1. Average scores for children's beliefs about divorce, depression, and behavioral self-esteem as a function of time (pre- or post-intervention) and condition (intervention or control group).

Dependent variable	Condition	Pre-Test	Post-Test	df	F	p
1. Peer Ridicule	Rainbows	1.59	1.57	1,88	0.78	0.38
	Control	1.41	1.11			
2. Paternal Blame	Rainbows	1.35	1.21	1,88	0.01	0.92
	Control	2.04	1.93			
3. Fear of Abandonment	Rainbows	0.95	1.27	1,88	2.45	0.12
	Control	1.04	0.89			
4. Maternal Blame	Rainbows	0.75	0.65	1,88	3.16	0.08
	Control	1.04	0.52			
5. Hope of Reunif.	Rainbows	1.57	1.13	1,88	3.35	0.08
	Control	1.48	1.89			
6. Self Blame	Rainbows	1.49	1.32	1,88	0.45	0.50
	Control	1.67	1.26			
7. CBAPS Total	Rainbows	7.70	7.14	1,88	0.32	0.57
	Control	8.67	7.59			
8. Depression (CDI)	Rainbows	11.51	10.89	1,88	0.64	0.43
	Control	12.41	10.11			
9. Social Initiative	Rainbows	19.74	20.27	1,84	0.16	0.69
	Control	18.50	19.42			
10. Social Attention	Rainbows	10.29	10.63	1,84	0.10	0.75
	Control	9.50	9.67			
11. Success/Failure	Rainbows	6.69	6.98	1,84	0.13	0.72
	Control	6.63	6.75			
12. Social Attraction	Rainbows	9.47	10.07	1,84	0.10	0.75
	Control	8.42	9.21			
13. Self Confid.	Rainbows	6.84	7.18	1,84	0.10	0.75
	Control	6.08	6.46			
14. BASE Total	Rainbows	53.03	55.03	1,84	0.03	0.87
	Control	49.13	51.50			

Note. Items 1-8: Lower means represent better adjustment, Items 9-14: Higher means represent better adjustment.

amine whether the results were due to some kind of unique features of the group studied. For example, it may be the case that our sample was already well adjusted to their parents' divorce, leaving little room for improvement. These comparisons are summarized in Table 2.

As can be seen in rows 1 through 7, the children in our sample were not significantly different from the typical population of children from divorced families in their beliefs about divorce (e.g., paternal blame, self-blame). However, both the intervention and control groups were significantly more depressed than the general population of children. In addition, the teachers of the children in our sample saw these children as significantly lower in each aspect of behavioral self-esteem in the classroom (see particularly row 14). Our sample endorsed the same problematic beliefs and feelings about divorce, and had typical patterns of high depression and

TABLE 2. Sample and population (normative) means for CBAPS subscales, CDI and the BASE.

Condition	Rainbows	Control	Norms
1. Peer Ridicule	1.58	1.26	1.45
2. Paternal Blame	1.28	1.99	1.72
3. Fear of Abandonment	1.11	0.97	1.33
4. Maternal Blame	0.70	0.78	0.85
5. Hope of Reunification	1.35	1.69	1.26
6. Self-Blame	1.41	1.47	1.55
7. CBAPS Total	7.42	8.13	8.20
8. Depression (CDI)	7.42	8.13	8.20
9. Social Initiative	3.34	3.16	3.79
10. Social Attention	3.49	3.20	4.14
11. Success/Failure	3.42	2.23	3.98
12. Social Attraction	3.26	2.97	3.57
13. Self-Confidence	3.48	3.14	4.04
14. BASE Total	54.03	50.32	65.44

Note: Items 1-8, lower means represent better adjustment, and the normative sample referred to is large representative samples of children from divorced families.

Items 9-14, higher means reflect better adjustment, and the normative sample is based on a large representative sample of school-aged children in general, not a focused group of children from divorced families.

low self-esteem. Therefore, the lack of programmatic effects cannot be attributed to the possibility of a ceiling effect—that is, that the children were well-adjusted to their parents' divorce to begin with.

### ***Interrelationships Between Self-Esteem, Attitudes Toward Divorce, Depression and Demographic Characteristics***

Are the assumptions of the Rainbow program well validated? That is, if the program objectives of changing children's problematic beliefs and feelings about their parents' divorce were met, do the data indicate that we would find a decrease in depression and an increase in academic and behavioral self-esteem? Correlational analyses indicated that as the children's overall adjustment to the divorce improved (their total score for the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale), they experienced less depression ( $r = -0.61$ )<sup>2</sup> and were rated by their teachers as having more behavioral academic success ( $r = -0.26$ ). Higher levels of depression were correlated with more fear of peer ridicule and avoidance ( $r = 0.57$ ), fear of abandonment ( $r = 0.72$ ), maternal blame ( $r = 0.38$ ) and self-blame ( $r = 0.46$ ). However, no relationships were found between depression and paternal blame or hope for reunification. Similarly, teachers' perceptions of the children's self-esteem were significantly correlated with the children's self-reported depression: As children's depression scores increased, the teachers' ratings of the child's self-esteem ( $r = -0.31$ ), feelings of success ( $r = -0.36$ ) and self-confidence ( $r = -0.26$ ) correspondingly decreased.

Therefore, in general, the assumptions and programmatic goals of Rainbows are well-founded. Given the interrelationships between attitudes and beliefs about divorce, depression, and indices of social and academic self-esteem, it is appropriate to attempt to ameliorate the negative effects of divorce by changing children's attitudes or beliefs about divorce.

Other analyses indicated that older children experienced less hope for reunification of their parents ( $r = -0.32$ ), and were perceived by their teachers as lower in social initiative ( $r = -0.36$ ), social attractiveness ( $r = -0.39$ ), and self-confidence ( $r = -0.37$ ). While one potentially damaging belief does diminish over time (hope for reunification), these results indicate that based on teach-

ers' ratings, children from divorced families have decreasing levels of self-esteem as they become older.

As part of their demographic questionnaire, we also asked subjects how well they thought their parents got along. Children who perceived better relations between their parents also reported lower levels of fear of peer ridicule and avoidance ( $r = 0.30$ ), fear of abandonment ( $r = 0.26$ ) and depression ( $r = 0.33$ ).

### *Summary*

In short, these results indicate that children in this sample look very much like other children from divorced families. One of the major assumptions underlying the programmatic goals of Rainbows is that children from divorced families will show improved self-esteem and lower levels of depression once problematic beliefs about divorce are addressed and coped with. These correlational analyses appear to validate that assumption: As problematic beliefs children had about divorce increased (e.g., fear of abandonment, hope for reunification), emotional health of the children decreased. Assuming that the causal direction moves from problematic beliefs as a cause of depression and low self-esteem (rather than depression and low self-esteem causing problematic beliefs about parental divorce), the goals of the Rainbows program are well-founded. If the problematic beliefs are addressed, we should see a corresponding improvement in children's mental health. Unfortunately, no changes in beliefs were observed as a function of participation in Rainbows.

Other results indicated that older children were less likely to have inappropriate hopes for the reunification of their parents, but also showed considerably lower levels of social and academic self-esteem. Finally, children showed evidence of stronger emotional health if their parents were getting along despite the divorce, than if their parents were not seen as getting along well.

### *DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS*

The results of this study indicated that the intervention was not effective in improving children's beliefs about divorce, decreasing

their depression, or improving their behavioral academic self-esteem. Although depression and academic success did not significantly improve as a result of the intervention, depression and academic success did improve as the children's attitudes towards the divorce improved, regardless of whether they were in the intervention or the control group. Therefore, congruent with other research, as the children's realistic perceptions about the divorce increased, they experienced less depression and more academic success and self-esteem (Wallerstein, 1983; Roseby & Deutsch, 1985; Anderson, Kinney & Gerler, 1984; Crosbie-Burnett & Newcomer, 1990).

Parental relationships seem to play a significant role in improving the child's adjustment to the divorce. Children who perceived their parents' relationship positively experienced less peer ridicule and avoidance, fear of abandonment, and demonstrated lower depression scores. Tschann, Johnston, Kline and Wallerstein (1990) also found that children from divorced families that witnessed less parental conflict exhibited better emotional outcomes after their parents' divorce. One possible implication of these results is that the focus of intervention may need to be directed toward the divorced parents rather than their children. Improving parents' communication, negotiation, and conflict management skills would ultimately benefit their children's mental health. To the extent that divorced parents can accept that they need to cooperate to effectively raise their children, regardless of their other problems or differences, children's mental health outcomes will benefit.

Why were no positive effects found for the Rainbows intervention? Several possible answers to this question can be explored: (a) the program as a whole doesn't work, (b) if the program does work, then perhaps the program is not being properly implemented at site, or (c) the evaluation itself was flawed by, for example, small sample sizes or insensitive measures.

### *The Effectiveness of Small Group Interventions*

Other intervention evaluations, including a previous Rainbows evaluation, have demonstrated that small group interventions can help heal some of the negative impacts of divorce on children (Gwynn & Brantly, 1987; Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll & Cowen,

1989; Kavanagh, 1991). But for a variety of reasons these results are generally inconclusive: (a) because control groups were not utilized in these evaluations, other factors besides the intervention may have created these effects; (b) they generally have very small sample sizes; and (c) many do not use well-validated measures. But even if programs like Rainbows are not entirely effective, they are popular, and may have the secondary benefit of easing parental guilt which in turn may have indirect positive effects on the children.

One strong possibility, however, is that the thrust of intervention is misdirected. Children may feel stigmatized by having to leave their classrooms to attend sessions, which in turn may act to diminish any gains they might otherwise achieve through the program. As noted above, it may be better to focus intervention on parental training than teaching children how to cope with these complex psychological issues. In other words, treat the problem, not the symptoms of the problem. Some states, including Illinois, mandate that divorcing couples with children have to participate in a class on how to assist their children before they can get formally divorced. Based on our correlational data, such interventions are in the best interest of the children.

### ***Program Implementation***

Indirect feedback indicated that many groups had problems with both time, resources, and teacher support necessary to meet Rainbows' objectives. Several researchers suggest that the group format is helpful when the group's focus is aimed at individual and parents' thoughts and feelings, and when social role-taking and modeling are exercised (Wilkinson & Bleck, 1977; Green, 1978; Roseby & Deutsch, 1985). Listed in the manual were structured role-taking and modeling activities to be completed during the intervention. However, verbal feedback from some facilitators indicated that due to time constraints, lack of teacher cooperation and unavailability of resources, these activities were not necessarily completed.

Some teachers expressed resentment at having to let students miss class to attend sessions, or insisted that the children return sooner than the time needed for completion of the full objectives of any given Rainbows session. While most teachers were either neu-

tral to quite supportive of the program and participated by evaluating the children on the BASE, a small minority expressed attitudes ranging from skepticism to outright hostility about the program to the evaluators. These teachers' attitudes were likely communicated to the children (e.g., by only grudgingly supporting their students' involvement in the program, comments made when leaving the classroom, even through non-verbal expressions of disapproval or annoyance). It is well-established that teacher expectations powerfully influence children's classroom performance, regardless of their objective or "true" abilities (self-fulfilling prophecy effects, e.g., Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). It would not be surprising, then, for teachers' attitudes and expectations to affect Rainbows' effectiveness as well. To the extent that students sense their teachers' skepticism of the value of participating in Rainbows, the experience is likely to be diminished considerably.

In addition, facilitators reported that teachers did not receive extensive feedback about their students' progress or activities during the Rainbows program, and the only feedback parents receive is from their child. It has been suggested by Stangeland, Pellegrino and Lundholm (1989) that parents view their children, as well as the divorce, very differently than the child. Therefore, it is suggested that some aspects of the Rainbows program may need to be revised to more actively involve teachers, as well as parents. If the parents and teachers were more actively involved in the Rainbows intervention they could obtain a better understanding of the individual child, as well as the overall effects divorce has on children, and also the need for support of the children and the program for it to be effective. By increasing the parents' and teachers' knowledge and involvement, the support and reinforcement available to individual children would increase. Jost and Robinson (1991) have referred to these extra support systems as being an asset for increasing the child's knowledge and adjustment to the divorce.

### *Strengths and Weaknesses of the Present Evaluation*

The present evaluation used the same measures of adjustment as those used in previous studies that have found positive effects of small-group interventions for children from divorced families. For

example, Kavanagh (1991) reported positive outcomes on the BASE for a Rainbows' program, the same measure we used to measure self-esteem. The Children's Beliefs About Parental-Divorce Scale (CBAPS) is the most well-validated and reliable measure of its type, and is the best measure of the direct programmatic goals of Rainbows. Similarly, the CDI is the most widely used and validated measure of depression in children. From a measurement standpoint, the evaluation used measures sensitive and reliable enough to detect any effects of the intervention. The sample size of the intervention group was more than adequate, but it would have been desirable to have a larger control group. However, extrapolating our results statistically, even adding 100 subjects to each group would not have yielded significant differences between the intervention and control group in the direction of demonstrating program effectiveness. In short, the lack of results do not appear to be due to any methodological weaknesses of the evaluation. However, based on the data collected, we cannot conclusively understand why the intervention is failing to have positive effects (e.g., we did not collect data on the effectiveness of facilitator training, teacher or parent perceptions of the program, the extent to which programmatic guidelines were followed by each facilitator).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that there is little evidence that the Rainbows program as implemented in this school district is meeting its primary objective of improved childhood adjustment to parental divorce, a reassessment of the program is in order. Program managers have a variety of options, including abandoning the program, attempting to improve the existing program, considering use of alternative intervention programs, or even continuing to run the program in its present form. At this point, it is important to point out that while the results indicate that Rainbows did not improve client outcomes, they also indicate that Rainbows did not *harm*, or in any way deteriorate, participants' coping or adaptation to their family situation. Continuing the program, therefore, will not harm program participants in any way.

With this fact in mind, secondary, rather than primary, objectives and outcomes warrant consideration in any decisions to be made as a result of this evaluation. For example, Rainbows may act as an excellent conduit for identifying children at risk, and connecting them with other services that can help children cope with their parents' divorce (e.g., counseling centers). In the current situation, the program has accomplished just that. The vast majority of the parents indicated that they wanted to take advantage of the free counseling session offered by the counseling center at the social service agency conducting the Rainbows program to discuss their individual child. While at this time it is not known how many of these families will pursue continued counseling (available at a sliding scale), children with especially high depression scores have been identified, and options for individualized counseling will be made available to them. Other possible considerations are local school administrations' feelings either pro or con Rainbows, and the extent to which providing such services enhances the public image of the sponsoring organization to the community or funding sources. While the present evaluation did not empirically assess these possible secondary outcomes of providing Rainbows in local schools, these kinds of issues should be taken into account when deciding whether or not to continue the program.

Specific recommendations for change in the program were offered: (a) Increase facilitator training time. Due to budget problems, the governing agency did not fully adhere to the recommended training time for facilitators. In revamping the program, it was strongly encouraged that more time should be devoted to facilitator training. In addition, many of the program facilitators have been running Rainbows groups for years, and had developed idiosyncratic styles of conducting the Rainbows program. Given the results of the evaluation, the facilitators need to be encouraged to be consistent in following programmatic guidelines; (b) Before Rainbows begins, have a meeting with parents and teachers to solicit better support and understanding of the goals of the program. All programs are more effective if all affected parties are involved and supportive of the program objectives; (c) Provide parents and teachers "report cards" on each child's individual

progress at the end of the program to help them better serve individual child needs. Informal feedback indicated that teachers in particular had a strong interest in the results of the evaluation, and wanted to know how to better deal with an individual child; (d) Connect the children and their families to other social agencies for further intervention. Most of these children indicated that they do have problematic beliefs and feelings about their parents' divorce, and many exhibited levels of depression sufficiently high to be labeled "severe," in addition to low behavioral academic self-esteem. Even though at this point Rainbows may not be entirely successful at treating or healing these emotional problems, it is one means of identifying children at risk, and helping them and their parents to connect with other social services that may more successfully ameliorate these problems. Moreover, parents of Rainbows' participants indicated overwhelming interest in a follow-up individualized visit with a counselor (again, 79% expressed a desire to be contacted to make an appointment following the program and evaluation), indicating that such a referral is likely to be very positively received; (e) If these changes are implemented, it was recommended that the program be reevaluated to ensure that these recommended changes create the desired improvement. This second-tier evaluation should also include an assessment of teacher and parent support of the program, specific questions regarding whether the children feel stigmatized by participation, examination of facilitators' understanding of program goals and objectives upon completion of training and evaluation of individual facilitators' experience (a brief questionnaire assessing, for example, adherence to Rainbows' procedures, perceptions of time pressures and of teacher support, adequacy of training, support for the program), and measures of the extent to which Rainbows fulfills secondary, as well as primary, objectives.

In conclusion, despite not finding any direct positive effects for the Rainbows intervention as it was implemented in this particular school district, the data support the underlying premise of the intervention. Specifically, the correlational results indicated that there are moderate to strong relationships between beliefs about parental divorce and indices of child well-being, such as depression and

academic self-esteem. Therefore the underlying assumptions of the intervention (that if you change a child's problematic beliefs about divorce you may ameliorate the negative effects of this life change for the child) are well-grounded. But this study also indicates the importance of considering not only the child's beliefs, but the family system as a whole, if one wants to fully ameliorate the effects of the divorce on the child, in addition to the importance of considering possible secondary benefits of a program that does not yield statistical improvement in client outcomes.

## NOTES

1. Children were assigned to the program on a first-come, first-served basis.
2. Degrees of freedom for all correlations are equal to 93. All reported correlations are significant at  $p < .01$ .

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