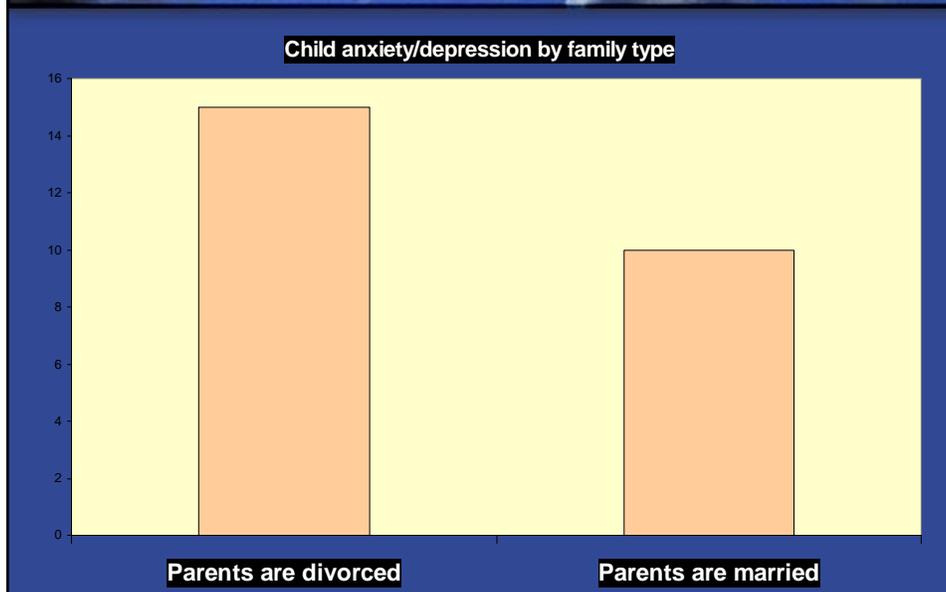


# Parental divorce and child mental health trajectories: Findings from the NLSCY

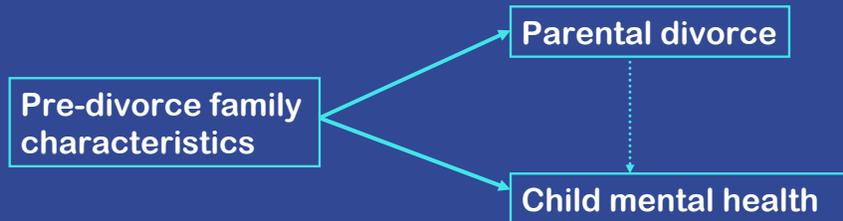
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## A process-oriented approach to parental divorce



Cette présentation a été effectuée le 26 octobre 2006, au cours du Symposium "Comprendre la petite enfance, agir pour l'avenir : l'apport des enquêtes longitudinales" dans le cadre des Journées annuelles de santé publique (JASP) 2006. L'ensemble des présentations est disponible sur le site Web des JASP, à l'adresse <http://www.inspq.qc.ca/jasp>. 1

## A process-oriented approach to parental divorce



## A process-oriented approach to parental divorce

- Ideally, to track the consequences of divorce, require a study design that:
  - prospectively follows children in biological two parent households over a specified period of time, during which some families will experience the exit of a parent from the household
  - has intervals between measurement occasions that are meaningful (NLSCY – every two years)

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- When we look at divorce as a process, we learn:
  - differences exist long before the divorce occurs, but not all effects are spurious
  - the quality of family life not only accounts for these differences, it conditions responses after the divorce
    - eg. family dysfunction and child antisocial behaviour

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- However, we still know very little about the recovery process after divorce:
  - crisis versus chronic strain model

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- crisis model:
  - immediate response to the loss of a parent from the household
  - effects are greatest around the time of the transition
  - model predicts a return to pre-divorce levels within two years as child adjusts to the loss
- chronic strain model:
  - divorce has the potential to create further stresses, such as economic hardship, that perpetuate or even amplify the mental health consequences of a parental divorce over time

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We want to be able to distinguish between the two models:

- Do kids whose parents divorce eventually return to pre-divorce levels of mental health? If so, what is the average length of time?
- Do emerging secondary stressors associated with living in a single parent household inhibit the recovery process?

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- Sample: Canadian NLSCY (1994 – 2002)
  - ages 2 – 3 in 1994 and participating in 5<sup>th</sup> wave
  - two biological parent household in 1994
  - marital dissolution not due to widowhood
  - after divorce, there is no re-marriage (censored when remarried)
  - of 1514 kids, 253 (16.7%) experience parental divorce
  - dependent variable: child depression

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### Method:

- growth curve analysis
- compare changes in depression over time for children whose parents divorce compared to children whose parents remain married
- effect of divorce and time elapsed since divorce

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Results (controlling for pre-divorce differences):

- the divorce event is associated with a significant increase in child depression
- over time, levels of child depression slowly dissipate, but do not return to baseline levels within two years

## A process-oriented approach to parental divorce

How are children's responses to divorce influenced by their mother's mental health following divorce?

- literature on the effects of divorce on adult mental health suggests maternal depression increases following divorce
- maternal depression may represent a secondary stressor that hinders a child's recovery process

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Test whether changes in maternal depression influence child depression

- improvements in maternal depression are associated with lower levels of child depression, and vice versa
- once take into account changes in maternal depression over time, children's responses to divorce attenuate (when mothers adjust well to the divorce so do their children)
- however, changes in maternal depression matter equally for both divorced and non-divorced children

## A process-oriented approach to parental divorce

Questions? Comments?

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