

Book Reviews

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Kruk, E. (2011). Divorced Fathers: Children's Needs and Parental Responsibilities. Nova Scotia:
Fernwood Publishing

Reviewed by: Mikaela Donnelly, MacEwan University

Edward Kruk's book, Divorced Fathers, combines research findings from previous studies and one current study to provide insight into the effect of divorce on dads and their relationships with their children. Kruk aims to provide "a more informed perspective on what constitutes 'the best interests of the child'" from the fathers' point of view, as well as to examine the responsibilities of social institutions in supporting parents in fulfilling their parental responsibilities (p.10). Kruk also utilizes his research findings to promote active paternal involvement after divorce and suggests how socio-legal reforms can help enable the continuance and enhancement of parenting by fathers. A central theme of the book is the obstacles faced by divorced fathers in remaining active and responsible in the lives of their children. Kruk focuses on the problems associated with father absence following divorce, and how in large part, this is a result of problems within the legal system.

Kruk includes research findings from previous studies done on the subject of divorced fathers. One study was focussed around a commonly held notion of the "dead beat dad," which is the idea that after divorce fathers enjoy freedom from the responsibilities of marriage and child care tasks. This study found that in reality, fathers experience a severe grief reaction that has more to do with potential loss of parental rights than the loss of marriage. This study also revealed the struggles faced by fathers in the legal system when it comes to getting what they want in terms of parental rights. Kruk summarizes that "the disengagement of non-custodial

fathers after divorce appears to be the result of a combination of structural constraints and father's own psychological response to the loss of their children and the pre-divorce father child relationship" (p.19).

Additional studies Kruk included on divorced fathers found that "children are more likely to attain their developmental potential when they are able to maintain meaningful relationships with both parents" (p. 21). The resounding evidence from the multiple research studies presented suggests that children cope far better with the divorce process when both parents maintain active and present in their lives. The absence of a parental figure can have detrimental effects on both the children and the absent parent.

Kruk synthesized the findings from previous studies with those of his current study in which the book is centered around. The current study involved eighty two divorced fathers who volunteered from lower mainland area of British Columbia, recruited via the Fatherhood Involvement Network of British Columbia. There were a variety of different participants including: non-custodial fathers struggling to maintain relationships with their children, sole and joint custody fathers, fathers who preferred and choose a traditional bread winning role, and fathers whose parental status was in a state of instability (p. 33). Kruk interviewed the father's using a three part questionnaire consisting of: qualitative data collection, demographic information, and open ended questions about the father and the family. The focus of the interviews was primarily on the father's divorce stories and their personal opinions as to their children's needs, their paternal responsibilities, and the responsibilities of social institutions in providing support for fathers. Of the eighty two men involved in the study, sixty five were non custodial fathers, and thirty of those sixty five were disengaged fathers. Only eleven of the sixty five non custodial fathers were involuntarily non custodial.

Kruk included individual documentation of the lived experiences of the father's involved in his study. There were eight main themes that presented themselves in the stories of the eighty two men interviewed. The core themes Kruk identified were: (1) grief and loss, (2) mother's discouragement of contact, access denial, and parental alienation, (3) non-existence of support services, (4) conflict and violence, (5) effects on children, (6) financial losses, (7) positive outcomes, (8) other themes including new relationships, remarriage, birth of children, relocation of custodial mother and lack of adequate legal representation. For a large majority of the divorced fathers, legal systems were unjustified in custody cases, favoring mothers in the ruling process. Joint custody father's also felt that despite the label of "joint custody" their rights to their children did not meet those laid out in joint custody laws. As well, in most cases fathers did not feel there were adequate social supports offered to them, both during and after the divorce process. It was found that these institutions often fail to regard fathers as equal parents and do not fulfill their responsibilities in promoting the maintenance of father-child relationships (p. 85).

Kruk's primary focus in his interviews was the fathers' views on their children's needs in the divorce process. What Kruk discovered was that according to these fathers, the needs of the children were not being addressed during and after divorce. The number one need of the children that all the participants of the study agreed on was having a stable relationship with both parents. Kruk found that "fathers consider their children's unmet emotional needs as more important than their physical needs" (p. 82). Other needs that the fathers viewed as most important in regards to the children in the process of divorce is receiving love and reassurance from the parents that the divorce is not the children's fault, safety and security, maintaining physical needs (food, shelter, clothing), parental cooperation, and stability and consistency.

Kruk's book informs the reader of the perspectives of divorced fathers; these perspectives have failed to be considered in the majority of previous research. He reports several significant findings from his research. First of all, there is critical need for reform in child custody outcomes toward equal rights and responsibilities between mothers and fathers. Also, the child custody process is in need of urgent reform, from adversarial resolution toward non adversarial processes (p.93). Kruk also reports that the perspective of the majority of the men involved in his research believe the legal system is the main problem in the unjust dealings of divorce and child custody. Another major finding was that fathers who lose contact with their children following the divorce process are displaying more pronounced grief reactions, to the point of exhibiting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The intended readership for Divorced Fathers is parents and divorce professionals (p.16). I believe this book would also appeal and be beneficial to a wider range of audiences including: legal practitioners, mediators, family therapists, as well as anyone studying family dynamics. Each of these groups would benefit from the insights provided in this book. It sheds light onto the real struggles faced by fathers in the divorce process and in turn the effects this has on their children and their relationships with their children. It provides valuable information as to what needs to be done in order to improve the maintenance of father-child relationships through divorce, and how to ensure children's needs are being met in this process.

Kruk's book is well organized and successfully integrates the findings of previous studies with that of his current study. I believe the information he has provided is crucial in bringing the issue of divorce and unjust legal agreements into the lime light. The only area of improvement I would suggest for the book is for Kruk to more briefly summarize the individually documented

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fathers' experiences, although important and insightful, many came off as repetitive. Aside from that, I found Divorced Fathers to be a powerful, eye opening, and informative read.