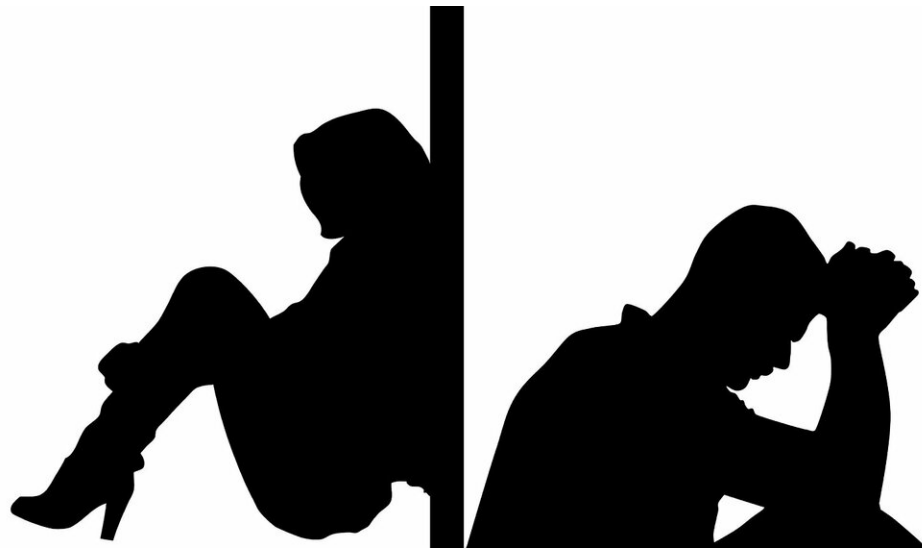


# Child's age at parental divorce can affect antidepressant use in adulthood

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Divorce has become increasingly common in recent decades, not just in Norway. Married couples currently have 40% chance of divorce. More adults are living in partnerships even when they have children, and these unions are less stable than marriages. Consequently, many children experience parental separation. Despite much research, little is known about their well-being.

A recent study from the Centre for Fertility and Health demonstrates

that children's age when their [parents divorce](#) has implications for their chance of suffering from depression as [adults](#).

"We could demonstrate that children whose parents divorced when they were 15-19 years-old are 12 per cent less likely to use antidepressants as adults compared to those whose parents divorced when they were four years old or less. Similarly, offspring who were adult (over 20 years) at the time of their parents' divorce were 19 per cent less likely to use antidepressants," explains Øystein Kravdal, the lead author of the study.

The researchers used data from the Norwegian Prescription Database, a database that monitors drugs dispensed by prescription in Norway. About 180 000 children who had experienced parental divorce and 640 000 children who had not were included in the analysis.

"We measured antidepressant prescriptions by adults aged 20-44 from 2004 to 2008," explains Kravdal .

## **Use of sibling models**

The parents' resources and attitudes and many other factors may affect the chance that their relationship will deteriorate and eventually dissolve, plus the outcomes in the child under study, in this case antidepressant use in adulthood. Unfortunately, many of these underlying factors are very hard to measure.

"With [sibling](#) models, we can compare outcomes among siblings and can take some of these unobserved factors into account," says Kravdal. It is also very difficult to estimate the effect of the partner separation itself. If the relationship is in a poor state, separation may be in the best interest of the child and the parents.

## **Interpretations**

The study suggests that special attention should be given to children who experienced parental divorce at young age.

"However, in order to give more specific advice, we would need new knowledge about why a divorce at an earlier age is detrimental to the mental health of the children. More research is needed to answer to this question," says Kravdal.

"Importantly, one should not conclude from these findings that delaying a divorce until the children are older would be beneficial. A difference in depression between, for example, children who were 10 years-old at the time of their parents' divorce and their siblings who were 15 years-old does not tell us what the outcome would be for the former if the [parents](#) had delayed the [divorce](#) for five years. A five-year delay may prolong the exposure to parental discord, and the [children](#) would then not be in the same situation as the 15-year old siblings with whom they are compared," concludes Kravdal.

**More information:** Øystein Kravdal et al. Children's age at parental divorce and depression in early and mid-adulthood, *Population Studies* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/00324728.2018.1549747](https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2018.1549747)

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