

## Introduction

The divorce rate itself provides clear evidence of changes in Quebecers' (Canada) values and laws: in 1977, it was situated at 35.2% (Institut de la statistique du Québec ISQ, 2005); it now hovers around 50% (ISQ, 2006). An examination of the distribution of families from the Province of Québec in Canada showed that 66.9% of these were intact two-parent families, 9.5% were stepfamilies, and 23.6% were led by a single parent (Government of Québec, 2004).

Authors are currently debating the best way of accounting for conflict associated risk (Amato, 2006; Beach, Fincham, Amir, & Leonard, 2005; Margolin, Oliver, & Medina, 2001). Should we see it as a continuum or should we identify a conflict threshold that entails detrimental results for children when it is surpassed and brings about little or no harm when it is not? Based on systemic family theories, this study attempted to increase our understanding by comparing two groups of children with separated parents, namely a first group whose parents had a high degree of conflict and a second whose parents displayed a low degree of conflict.

## Hypotheses

**H1:** Compared to children whose separated parents had a low level of conflict, children whose parents had a high level:

- 1) display more behaviour problems;
- 2) report more relationship difficulties with their mother and their father;
- 3) feel more triangulated and are more directly involved in the conflict.

**H2:** Conflict level and relational processes within the family are related to behaviour problems.

The role of child's gender was examined in an exploratory manner.

## Methodology

### Sample

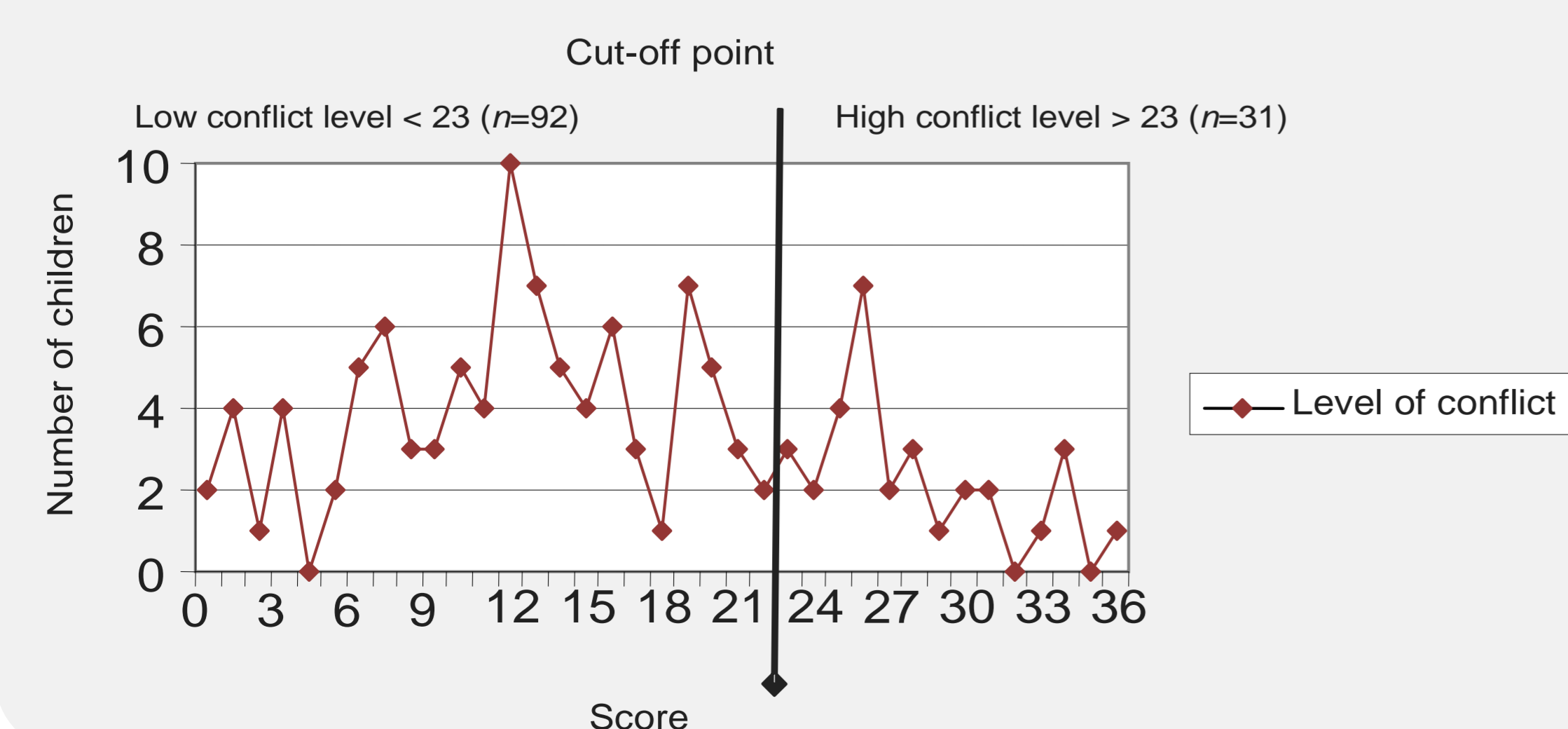
- 123 children from 8 to 11 years old
- 64 girls and 59 boys
- 2.5 years elapsed since the parental separation
- All had been in contact with the other parent during the last six months (38% one weekend out of two)
- Primarily with their mother (73%)
- 48 % annual revenue of less than \$30,000
- Recruited through primary schools from Quebec City

### Instruments

- **Conflict Properties subscale** and **Triangulation sub-scale** of the *Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Questionnaire* (Grych et al., 1992) (Child)
- **Child's Attitudes Toward the Mother** and **Child's Attitudes Toward the Father** (Giuli & Hudson, 1977) (Child)
- **Child Behavior Checklist** (Achenbach, 1991) (Parent)
- **Child involvement during the conflict** from the *Multidimensional Assessment of Interparental Conflict Scale* (MAIC, Tschann et al, 1999) (Parent)

### Differentiating Level of Conflict

The overall score was separated at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile to divide our groups according to the level of conflict.



## Key findings

- When **conflict level was high** (table 1):
  - 1) boys had more **internalized problems** and **felt more drawn into their parents' disputes**.
  - 2) girls had more **relational difficulties with their father**.
- 78% in the low conflict group and 58% in the high conflict have a **good relationship with both parents** (figure 1).
- Compared to girls, **boys had 4.8 times more risks** to be in the category "**Problems with mother only**" (logistic regression) (figure 1).
- **Level of interparental conflict and triangulation** were associated with internalized behaviour problems (table 2).
- Having a **problematic relationship with the mother**, and parent's report of **child involvement during conflict** were associated with externalized problems (table 2).

## Tables and figure

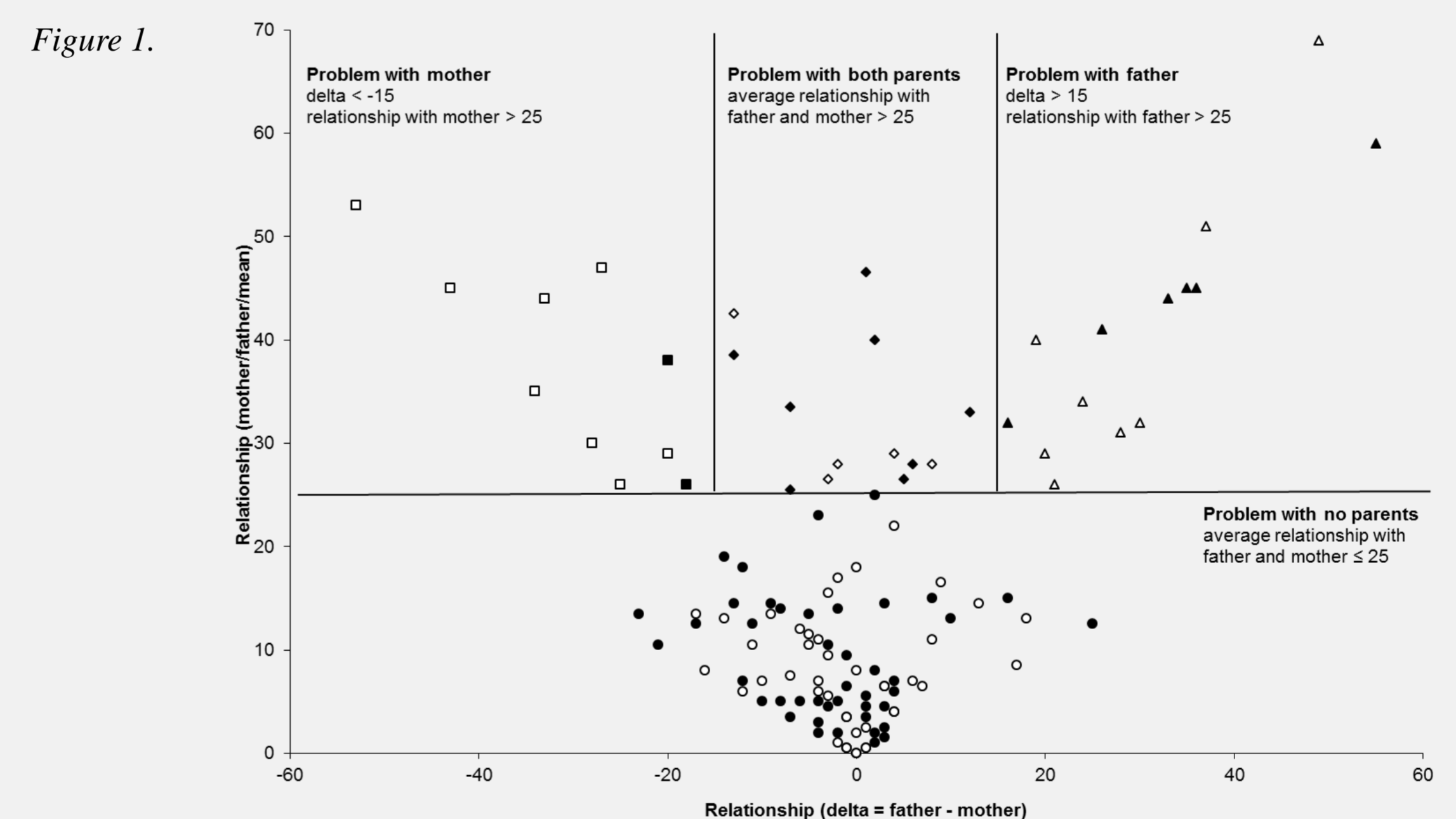
### Comparisons Level of Conflict X Gender (Manovas)

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for the DVs according to gender and level of conflict: Summary.

Gender	Level of conflict	Internalized		Quality of the relationship with the father		Triangulation	
		M	S.D.	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Boys	Low (n = 43)	57.4 <sub>a</sub>	10.9	14.2 <sub>a</sub>	14.5	1.88 <sub>a</sub>	1.48
	High (n = 16)	65.9 <sub>b</sub>	8.6	12.8 <sub>a</sub>	14.0	3.75 <sub>b</sub>	2.08
	Total	59.7	11.0	13.8	14.3	2.39	1.84
Girls	Low (n = 49)	56.0 <sub>a</sub>	8.2	11.3 <sub>a</sub>	13.7	1.38 <sub>a</sub>	1.38
	High (n = 15)	57.1 <sub>a</sub>	11.4	24.2 <sub>b</sub>	14.6	1.38 <sub>a</sub>	1.39
	Total	56.2	9.0	14.3	14.8	1.37	1.37
Total	Low (n = 92)	56.6	9.5	12.7	14.1	1.41	1.42
	High (n = 31)	61.6	10.8	18.3	15.2	1.97	1.98
	Total	57.9	10.1	14.1	14.5	1.63	1.62

N.B. Means subscripted with *a* and *b* show a statistically significant difference in the ANOVA test.

### Relational patterns in the family system



Note. Females are illustrated by full marks (solid symbols) (male = empty marks)

### Prediction Internalized and Externalized behaviour problems

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Children's Internalized and Externalized behaviour problems

Step and predictor variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Regression A: V.D. = Internalized Behaviour Problems</b>						
Step 1					.07*	
Child Gender	2.82	1.78	.14	1.58		
Conflict Level	4.88	2.05	.21	2.34*		
Step 2					.13*	.06 <sup>+</sup>
Relationship Mother	-0.05	0.08	-.06	-0.57		
Relationship Father	-0.04	0.06	-.06	-0.61		
Child involvement (parent)	0.28	0.14	.19	2.09*		
Triangulation (child)	1.14	0.59	.19	1.93 <sup>+</sup>		
Step 3 (none of the interaction terms were significant)					.17*	.04
<b>Regression B: V.D. = Externalized Behaviour Problems</b>						
Step 1:					.01	
Child Gender	.28	1.78	.02	1.58		
Conflict Level	2.46	2.05	.11	2.34*		
Step 2					.12*	.11**
Relationship Mother	.18	.08	.23	2.33*		
Relationship Father	.01	.06	.02	-.22		
Child involvement (parent)	.34	.13	.23	2.54*		
Triangulation (child)	-.17	.57	-.02	-.21		

For regression A,  $F(3,112) = 2.52, p = .01$ . For regression B,  $F(4,115) = 3.65, p = .01$ .