

Bird nesting and its relationship with parents' mental resilience

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Abstract: Divorce has increased dramatically in recent decades. Many separated parents adopt the “bird nesting” technique, where the parents rotate on a weekly basis in the family home, allowing the children to remain in their familiar environment. Thus, the present study investigated the correlation of “bird nesting” with the parents' mental resilience. For this purpose, questionnaires were used on a sample of 99 parents who have divorced in the last 2 years, where they were asked about their demographic characteristics as well as questions related to the use of the “bird nesting” technique and mental resilience. The results showed that no statistically significant difference was found in mental resilience between parents who apply and do not apply the “bird nesting” technique. Overall, the present research did not find a relationship between the use of the “bird nesting” technique and the mental resilience of divorced parents. It is possible that the relationship is affected by various factors, such as the duration of the divorce, the age of the children, the financial situation, the existence of new partners, etc.

Keywords: bird nesting; parents; mental resilience

1. Introduction

Until the late 2000s, parental divorce typically resulted in fathers giving up day-to-day parenting and children living almost exclusively with their mothers. This gendered choice after divorce was a reflection of the model in which the father was responsible for the family income while the mother cared for the children (Vanassche et al., 2017). However, child-rearing practices have changed dramatically in recent decades in both Europe and Greece (Koukoulis et al., 2022). Today fathers are likely to be more and more involved in childrearing activities (Vezzetti, 2016). Divorce has now become a norm in the western world. Statistics from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019, 2020) show consistently high rates of divorce and other forms of family breakdown, indicating that an increasing number of children have divorced parents. The negative effects of divorce on children's health and well-being have been studied extensively, and comprehensive research continues to confirm various psychological, emotional, social, and physical health problems associated with parental separation (Raley and Sweeney, 2020). Changes in society have also changed the choices of couples with children on how to raise their children. Divorced couples with children are increasingly turning to an unconventional living option known as “bird nesting” in order to save money in an era of rapidly rising housing costs (Lehtme and Toros, 2022). Under this form of divorce, both parents take turns living in the family home, often on a weekly basis, with the rest of the time spent in another home, usually close to the family home. The name “bird nesting” comes from the similarity that

this way of living together has with how birds raise chicks, where one of the two birds stays with the chicks and the other one looks for food (Choudhury, 1995). This choice is a particularly important way of dealing with a separation, with many (parents and experts) seeing it as a choice that benefits children, allowing them to remain in a familiar environment, providing them with stability, consistency, and less stress (Vanassche et al., 2017). Necessarily, in this form of divorce, the parents must work well together—and communicate openly and constructively—for their cohabitation and child-rearing to be successful (Her et al., 2022). “Bird’s Nest Parenting” can have a benefit in the early days after separation—in the short term, it can prevent children from experiencing too much upset. Children need time to adjust to their parents’ separation. In the long run, it may be more beneficial for children to spend time with both parents in separate homes, having their own room and favorite items in each home (Lehtme and Toros, 2022).

A factor possibly related to “bird nesting” is the mental resilience of the parents. Resilience is related to successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adaptation to external and internal demands (Russo et al., 2012). Experts have described psychological resilience as the interaction of protective mechanisms at all levels, including factors such as supportive family and relationships, effective coping skills, culture, etc. (Rutten et al., 2013). Parents with a high level of resilience as well as quality of life seem to be able to manage a divorce more effectively (Becher et al., 2019; Harper and Power, 1998; Mazzucato, 2014). Research indicates that the way parents’ divorce affects their quality of life and mental resilience with parents who find alternative, viable, and collaborative ways of divorcing reporting better quality of life and better quality of family relationships (Cohen and Finzi-Dottan, 2014).

From the review of the literature, it emerged that while the effects of divorce in the form of “bird nesting” have been widely studied on children, there has not been sufficient research on the effect of “bird nesting” on the parents themselves. Two factors possibly related to “bird nesting” are the mental resilience of the parents and their quality of life. From the literature it appears that parents with a high level of mental resilience can manage a divorce more effectively (Becher et al., 2019), and this leads us to assume that mental resilience is likely to be positively associated with the adoption of “bird nesting” by divorced parents. Furthermore, research has shown that the mode of divorce between parents affects their quality of life (Raley and Sweeney, 2020), with parents who find alternative, viable and cooperative ways of divorce reporting better quality of life and better quality of family relationships (Cohen and Finzi-Dottan, 2014). The above leads us to assume that quality of life is positively associated with the adoption of “bird nesting” by divorced parents. The purpose of the research is to examine the relationship between “bird nesting” and the mental resilience of the parents. More specifically, the objective of the research is to investigate the relationship between “bird nesting” and the mental resilience of parents. Based on the hypothesis of the proposed research, a research hypothesis is defined:

H1: “Bird nesting” is positively related to parents’ mental resilience.

H0: “Bird nesting” is not positively related to parents’ mental resilience.

2. Method

2.1. Research design

This research studies the relationship between “bird nesting” and the mental resilience of parents who use this method. The research sample consists of a total of 99 parents who have been divorced in the last two years, most of whom are women, aged 36–50, married or in a partner relationship, working as well as university/university graduates. The sampling method used is convenience sampling, while data collection was carried out using a three-section questionnaire. In the first, the demographic data and the application of the bird nesting method are studied, and in the second, mental resilience is studied with the Wagnild and Young scale. The Cronbach’s Alpha index was used to measure the reliability of the scales, while the SPSS program (version 25) was used to analyze the data. In addition to using percentages, frequencies, means and standard deviations to present all variables, *t*-test, and Mann-Whitney tests, and Spearman and Pearson correlation coefficients were used to investigate the research questions.

2.2. Sample

The research population consists of parents over the age of 18 who have been divorced in the last two years. The final sample consists of a total of 99 respondents, most of whom are women, 36–50 years old, and in a marriage or partner relationship. In addition, more often the respondents state that they are working and that they are graduates of university. At the same time, 40 apply the bird nesting method, with the remaining 59 not choosing it. It should be mentioned that out of the total of 100 responses, 1 respondent was removed as he had not completed most of the survey statements. The selection of the sample was carried out by applying purposive sampling. Purposive sampling refers to the researcher’s own judgment regarding the selection of a sample required for a survey. Usually, the selection of the sample with this form of sampling is carried out from the social, friendly, and family environment of the researcher (Etikan et al., 2016).

2.3. Materials and tools

In order to collect the data and answer the research questions, a 3-section questionnaire was used. The first section consists of a set of 7 closed-type statements. This section explores the demographic profile of parents, as well as whether they use the ‘bird nesting’ method and the extent to which they consider it effective. In the second section, the level of mental resilience of the parents is studied. Mental resilience will be assessed based on Wagnild and Young’s Mental Resilience scale created in 1993 (Wagnild and Young, 1993). The original version includes 25 questions. However, for the purposes of the research, a shorter version of the original scale is used, which consists of a total of 15 statements on a Likert scale from 1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree. In order to calculate the total mental resilience of the respondents, in this research a variable-score is created which is calculated from the average of all the statements of the scale and a higher value leads to a higher level of mental resilience of the respondents. The Cronbach’s Alpha index

was used once again in order to study the reliability of the scale, and it is particularly high with a value of 0.942.

2.4. Research process

The distribution of the research tool was carried out after informing the parents about the purpose of the research through an appropriate information form. In addition, consent was obtained from the parents, who signed an appropriate written consent form. They then completed the questionnaire and were informed about their right to withdraw from the research (even after completing the questionnaire) as well as about the confidentiality and anonymity of their answers, while it was made clear that the research is voluntary and their answers will be used only for the results of this research.

2.5. Data analysis

The analysis was carried out in the SPSS software (version 25), while the Microsoft Excel program was also used as an aid. Initially, descriptive statistics indicators are used to present the sample data, and then inductive statistics tests are used to highlight the relationship between “bird nesting” and the mental resilience of the parents. More specifically, a comparison is made between parents who have implemented “bird nesting” and parents who have not implemented “bird nesting” in terms of their level of mental resilience. This comparison is carried out using the t-test and Mann-Whitney statistical criteria. In addition, a correlation test (Pearson and Spearman) is used between the effectiveness of “bird nesting” and the mental resilience of the parents who have implemented “bird nesting”.

3. Results

In the following section, the results of the research are studied, while an answer is given to the research hypotheses raised. **Table 1** shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents, whether they practice bird nesting, and how effective they consider it. 66.7% of respondents are women, and 33.3% are men. In addition, 57.6% are 36 to 50 years old, 22.2% are over 50, and 20.2% are up to 35 years old. Regarding the marital status of the respondents, 52.5% are married or in a partnership, 33.3% are divorced, and 14.1% are single and free. Also, 82.8% of the respondents are working, while 17.2% are unemployed. Continuing with the educational level of the respondents, 49.5% are university graduates, 26.3% have a master’s or doctoral degree, and 24.2% are high school graduates. At the same time, 59.6% of respondents do not apply the bird nesting method, while 40.4% do. Of those who apply it, those who consider it to be moderately or very effective occupy 32.5%, respectively; 22.5% consider it very effective and 12.5% a little effective.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics, application of bird nesting and its effectiveness.

		Frequency	Valid Percent
What gender do you identify with?	Male	33	33.3
	Female	66	66.7
What is your age?	Up to 35 years old	20	20.2
	36–50	57	57.6
	Over 50	22	22.2
What is your current marital status?	Married, In a Partner Relationship	52	52.5
	Single	14	14.1
	Divorced	33	33.3
Are you currently working?	No	17	17.2
	Yes	82	82.8
What is the higher education level that you have successfully completed?	Lyceum	24	24.2
	University	49	49.5
	Master or PhD	26	26.3
Do you apply the bird nesting method?	No	59	59.6
	Yes	40	40.4
Do you think the bird nesting method is effective?	Little	5	12.5
	Moderate	13	32.5
	Very	13	32.5
	Too	9	22.5

In **Table 2**, the level of mental resilience of the respondents is presented. The variable is made up of the average of 15 statements in total and accepts values from 1 to 7. Higher average values are identified with a higher level of mental resilience of the respondents. In **Table 2** it can be seen that the lowest value reaches 3.07 units and the highest 7 units, while the average reaches 5.60 units, making the average level of mental resilience of the respondents high.

Table 2. Mental resilience.

<i>N</i>	Valid	99
	Missing	0
Mean		5.6074
Std. Deviation		0.88699
Minimum		3.07
Maximum		7.00

Before studying the research questions, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests were performed. **Table 3** shows that the variable “Suitability of environment” follows the normal distribution, and for this reason parametric tests will be used in the research questions. Regarding the rest of the variables, they do not follow the normal distribution, and for these, non-parametric tests will be used.

Table 3. Normality checks.

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Mental resilience	0.111	99	0.004	0.953	99	0.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The Mann-Whitney test was used to answer the main research question. In **Table 4**, where the results are presented, it is clear that the level of mental resilience does not differ in a statistically significant way between the two subgroups of parents, rejecting the second research hypothesis.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney’s test of mental resilience.

	Mental resilience
Mann-Whitney U	1035,000
Wilcoxon W	1855,000
Z	-1.035
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.301

a. Grouping Variable: Do you apply the bird nesting method?

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between “bird nesting” and the mental resilience of the parents. The results of the study showed no correlation between bird nesting and this variable. While correlations have been found between coping with divorce and mental resilience, this is the first study to examine their relationship with the application of the ‘bird nesting’ method. According to experts, mental resilience is the characteristic that allows people to better adapt to new situations (Russo et al., 2012). “Bird nesting” is a method chosen by parents who are looking for an alternative solution for easier adaptation of the child to the new situation, but it requires significant sacrifices for the parent himself, which include changing living space with the other parent at regular intervals. This sacrifice in order to provide more protection to the child is significantly similar to the definition of mental resilience (Rutten et al., 2013). Therefore, we hypothesized that the choice of this method would be more frequent by people with a high mental resilience score, but this was not confirmed. Regarding the quality of life of both children and parents after divorce, the way the divorce is dealt with plays a decisive role in it (Raley and Sweeney, 2020). Parents who choose alternative and cooperative ways of divorce have been found in a previous study to have a better resilience and quality of life (Cohen and Finzi-Dottan, 2014), but this was not confirmed by the present study. While the assumptions we made are based on both logic and international literature, they were rejected. This may be due to the limitations of the study, the main one being the small sample size. If the correlations are not so obvious, it may not be possible to show them in a sample of 99 people, while in a larger sample they would emerge as statistically significant. Furthermore, our study did not examine confounding factors that could affect the results, such as the time

since the divorce was issued and the “bird nesting” method that was applied, where the parents live, if the divorce was consensual and the separation was easy, etc. These factors would be important to examine in a larger study in order to better explore the associations between the above variables. Finally, it is important that tailored programs and interventions take place in order to manage the mental status of these parents.

5. Conclusion

This research examined the relationship between the use of the “bird nesting” technique and the mental resilience of the parents who apply it. Specifically, it was assessed whether there is a difference in mental resilience between parents who apply the “bird nesting” method compared to those who do not. From the results of the research, it emerged that no significant difference was observed in the level of mental resilience, as the values were comparable between the two groups.

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Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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