

Divorce and the Multiple Birth Family

MOST (Mothers of Supertwins) conducted a survey of parents with multiples (twins, triplets, quadruplets, etc.) from June 25, 2009 to July 27, 2009. The survey was designed to develop baseline statistics about the prevalence of divorce among multiple birth parents and contained 10 multi-part questions on family background, socio-economic status, parent and children's age, as well as questions about marital status and divorce.

The research team consisted of:

- Laurie LaMonde, Ph.D., MOST Research Director
- Marcia W. DiStaso, Ph.D., Assistant Professor at Penn State University
- Maureen A. Doolan Boyle, MOST Executive Director
- Lauretta Shokler, MOST Technology Director
- Kelly Ross, MD, MOST Medical Director, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Division of Newborn Medicine Washington University School of Medicine & Pediatric Hospitalist at Missouri Baptist Hospital

The survey had a large sample size. A total of 2,849 parents or guardians of multiples completed the MOST Divorce and the Multiple Birth Family survey questionnaire. The majority of survey participants were:

- Mothers (97.5%)
- Residents of the United States (93.4%)
- Predominately Caucasian (92.4%)
- An average age of 32 when their multiples were conceived
- Households with an average of 3 children, mostly families of twins (61%) or triplets (30%).
- Married for the first time (86%)

Researchers commonly report that the lifetime divorce rate is about 40 to 50% for first marriages in the United States, and although it certainly makes sense that parents of multiples would face additional emotional, financial, and medical-related stressors, this study is the first known research examining the divorce rate among this growing population of parents. The survey found:

- That 4.3% of respondents divorced during the pregnancy or following the birth of multiples (indicating that the divorce rate among this group may not be as high as many have speculated.)
- Over 95% of the marriages were intact.
- About 82% of the respondents reported an overall positive level of marital satisfaction.

According to MOST researcher, Dr. Laurie LaMonde, a clinical psychologist and mother of triplets, "Identifying a more accurate divorce rate is important to ease the concerns of multiple birth families as well as to determine if additional services may be beneficial for families that may be at greater risk of marital discord."

Specifically, the divorce rate was:

- 3.6% for parents with twins
- 5% for parents with triplets
- 9.2% for parents with quadruplets
- 4.2% for parents with quintuplets/sextuplets or multiple sets of multiples

Among those who divorced, the majority of their multiples were between the ages of 1 and 5 at the time of divorce.

In addition, 4.8% of respondents reported that their marriage involved a history of physical or substance abuse. Of those reporting abuse, marital dissatisfaction ratings were higher and the likelihood of divorce was greater.

Survey Limitations

Although this preliminary study by MOST indicates that the overall divorce rate among families with multiples is low, it is important to note that this was a convenience sample and therefore may not be representative of the general population of all multiple birth parents. Therefore, caution should be made when making inferences from this data to other samples.

Of note: the current sample tended to have a more advanced educational level and household income than the general population. The methodology of the study relied on families completing the survey online, which may have limited those without access to a computer.

Although the MOST study was informal, it did have a large sample size and showed remarkable trends that warrant additional research. MOST believes future systematic studies are needed to further assess trends in divorce rates for multiple birth families. If you are a researcher who is interested in working with us on a study related to this or other multiple-birth related topics, please contact us.