

A Scoping Review of Regulatory Framework on Parenting Education for Divorcing Parents

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ABSTRACT

Divorce is a significant life event that impacts the couple and their children. Studies show that children of divorced parents are more prone to emotional, behavioural, and academic difficulties, which are primarily linked to the stress stemming from parental separation. The regulatory framework of positive parenting education for divorcing parents has attracted significant interest among scholars worldwide, prompting the exploration of related emerging issues. With the increasing number of published studies, there is a pressing need to map and review all available literature to provide comprehensive and organised insights into the framework of parenting education. It will help build a solid foundation on the evidence-based regulatory framework that defines effective parenting education in divorce cases. A primary research question guiding this scoping review is "What are the regulatory frameworks of parenting education for divorcing parents?" Related articles and documents were retrieved from Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Wiley, Scopus, and PsycINFO. The thematic analysis has been classified into six (6) key themes emerging from this analysis: (1) mandatory or voluntary participation, (2) settings, (3) programme acceptability and compliance, (4) programme effectiveness, (5) programme variations, and (6) challenges and limitations. While

there are differences in how the programmes are implemented, the results indicate that all of them are beneficial in lowering interparental conflict, improving co-parenting techniques, and promoting children's well-being, which calls for more research and can also be used to inform related programme design and policymaking in other countries.

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INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a significant life event that affects not only the couple involved but also their children. Research indicates that children of divorce are more likely to experience emotional, behavioural, and academic problems, often attributed to the stress associated with parental separation (Amato, 2010). In response to these concerns, parenting education programmes have emerged as a critical intervention to mitigate the adverse effects of divorce on children. It can be defined as tools provided or alternatives by family courts to support fragile families in the face of changes in family structure, such as divorce, custody challenges, foster placement, adoption, or co-parenting by non-spouses (Powell et al., 2020). Parenting education during divorce has a developmental history dating back to the end of the 1970s and expanded at a high pace during the 1990s (Salem et al., 2013). The latest survey reported on the implementation of parenting education programmes in the United States shows that it has been widely used; as many as 46 states have mandated parenting education provided by the family court (Mayhew, 2016; Mulroy et al., 2013; Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008). There are various parenting education programmes, but mostly their goals are the same: to give tips to parents to deal with conflict, to improve communication, to establish well-being for their children both before and after divorce. Notwithstanding these attempts, the effectiveness and extent of programmes are dependent on the legal parameters that guide their implementation.

The legal framework for parenting education varies in its implementation across different jurisdictions, cultures, as well as laws and policies aimed at addressing the challenges of divorce and co-parenting. In Australia, Family Relationships Centres were introduced in 2006 to improve family relationships, maintain family unity, and support families during the separation process (Parkinson, 2013). In the meantime, in Denmark, a new law was passed in 2019 that obliges all divorcing parents to follow a 17-module online Cooperation After Divorce (CAD) course (Ciprić et al., 2020). Additionally, since July 2024, Singapore has required parents whose children are below the age of 21 to first attend a mandated parenting course before entering divorce proceedings (Singapore Ministry of Social and Family Development). The initiative will assist the parents to ensure that they take the well-being of their children seriously and ensure that they embrace cooperative parenting even in circumstances of separation, but with respect for the parental autonomy.

As far as parenting education is concerned, it can be guided by three significant theories: Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1982), Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), and Family System Theory (Bowen, 1978). According to Attachment Theory, secure and consistent interactions between parents and children are of utmost importance, especially in the context of family separation or changes in family structure. On the other hand, Social Learning Theory emphasises the importance of

parents as role models in shaping children's behaviour, implicitly suggesting that practical co-parenting skills can provide children with constructive examples of conflict resolution and communication (Bandura, 1977). Complementing these, Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) provides an understanding of the family system as interconnected units in which the actions of one family member can influence and be influenced by other family members. This theory explains that when parents' divorce acrimoniously, children will experience stress due to the instability in the family system. Thus, such programmes can serve as an intervention to promote healthy family functioning. This study also considers the Islamic perspective through the lens of *Maqasid al-Shariah* (the objectives of Islamic Law), which has five basic objectives for the well-being of individuals and society (Al-Ghazali, 1997). One of them is protecting the lineage (*hifz al-nasl*), which emphasises the importance of maintaining family relationships and the well-being of children by encouraging responsible co-parenting and the emotional well-being of children even after divorce. Together, the combination of psychological theories and Islamic perspectives provides a holistic foundation and a comprehensive understanding of parenting education that encompasses emotional, behavioural, and moral-spiritual dimensions.

The latest data on divorce and marriage of Muslims and non-Muslim in Malaysia recorded a decline, with 8.7 per cent from 63,338 cases in 2022 to 57,835 cases in 2023 (Department of Statistics Malaysia,

2024). However, the divorce rate among Muslims remained high, representing more than three-quarters of the total cases. Despite theoretical support and research evidence from the existing literature that mostly comes from the United States, the possibility of Malaysia implementing a similar regulatory framework has yet to be explored. By reviewing and mapping the evidence-based findings, this study will provide a comprehensive understanding of the current regulatory landscape and identify areas for future research and policy development in Malaysia. A scoping review was chosen for this study as it helps the researchers to examine evidence that is still emerging. It could provide reporting on the type of evidential information that can be used to guide practice in the field and the mode in which research has been carried out (Armstrong et al., 2011). What sets scoping reviews apart from other reviews, such as systematic reviews, is that a more exploratory approach is employed. According to Munn et al. (2018), a scoping review also ensures that a more descriptive review of the existing studies can be conducted without requiring a more critical appraisal of individual studies or evidence synthesis of various studies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Formulation of the Research Question

This scoping review was to map the evidence on areas that should be considered when designing parenting programmes among divorced parents. With the aid of using the participant, concept, and context (PCC)

framework, the scoping review included studies, which: (a) involved divorcing parents, whose children are still minors, (b) targeted the concept of parenting education, and (c) were conducted in the context of a regulatory framework. The scoping review developed a research question for the study, which is: What is the regulatory framework of parenting education for divorcing parents?

Systematic Searching Strategies

The systematic search strategy used in this study had three steps, namely, identification, screening, and qualification. All these

phases were implemented in the study to ensure that it was conducted in a thorough and transparent manner (Figure 1).

Identification

This initial stage plays a key role in expanding keywords in the database during the search process (Durach et al., 2017). The keywords included in the search were “regulatory framework”, “divorce education”, “parenting education”, “divorcing parents”, and other related terms such as “law”, “regulation”, and “co-parenting education”. The search was refined with the help of Boolean operators

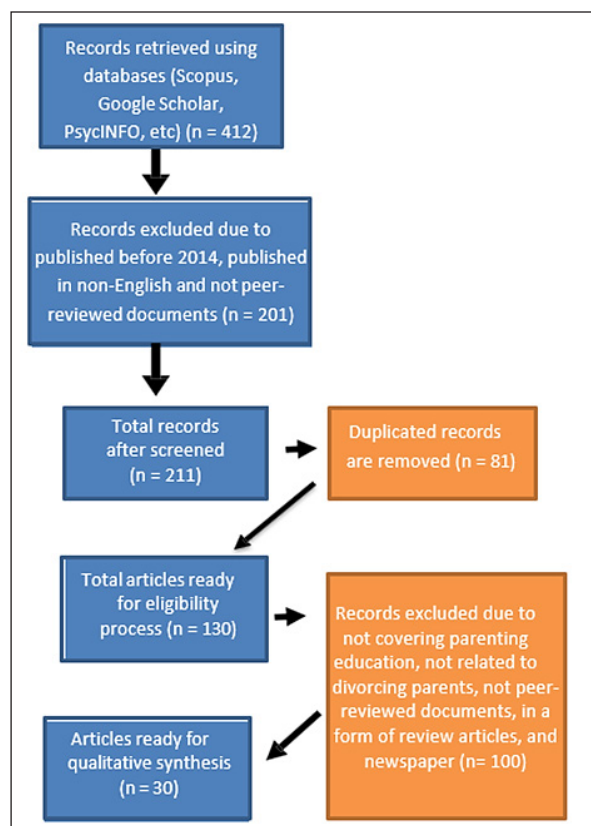


Figure 1. Systematic searching strategies of the scoping review

(OR, AND) and phrasal-level searches. Five databases were used to retrieve the articles, including Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Wiley, Scopus, and PsycINFO. The search was completed throughout June and October 2024, with 30 possible articles being obtained as a result (all duplicate sources were removed).

Screening

Screening was the second process of the systematic search strategies, distinguishing suitable articles from unsuitable ones for the review. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles included are outlined in Table 1. As divorce is a multi-dimensional issue that crosses several domains - legal, social, economic, and psychological - articles were selected amongst those published from 2014 to 2024; one article from 2008 was included due to its significant contribution to the understanding of historical development of parenting education programmes in the U.S.; and only peer-reviewed articles were selected to ensure the quality of the articles. Other important criteria were that only

articles published in one language (English), are included to avoid confusion, minimise costs, and save time (Linares-Espinos et al., 2018).

Eligibility

The third process refers to eligibility; 130 selected articles were reviewed and filtered to ensure they fit the selection criteria. Firstly, all abstracts were read to determine the suitability of the articles. The full articles were then examined to determine their suitability for the research title. As a result, 100 articles were excluded because they did not discuss the topic of parenting education among divorcing parents, were not peer-reviewed articles, and in the form of review papers or newsletters. Therefore, 30 articles were finally selected for the scoping review.

Data Extraction and Analysis

The research question guided the data extraction process. All data extracted from the selected studies were related to the regulatory framework of parenting education for divorcing couples. This study

Table 1

Inclusion and exclusion criteria of the included articles in the analysis

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Databases	Wiley, PsycINFO, EBSCOhost, Scopus, Google Scholar	All other databases
Time frame	2014 – 2024. One from 2008.	
Focus	Studies focused on the regulatory frameworks of parenting education for divorcing parents.	Studies that did not address the regulatory framework of parenting education for divorcing parents.
Language	English	Other than English
Target population	Divorcing parents	Other types of parents

used thematic analysis to identify themes based on patterns obtained from the selected articles, then similarities and correlations between the abstracted data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similar or related data were grouped in the initial stage according to specific themes. The researchers identified six main themes. The themes were reviewed and re-filtered in the next stage to ensure their usefulness and accurate data representation. During this process, all themes were selected because of their relevance to the research questions, namely (1) mandatory or voluntary participation, (2) programme settings, (3) programme acceptability and compliance, (4) programme effectiveness, (5) programme variations, and (6) challenges and limitations.

RESULTS

The reviewed studies emphasise the critical role of parenting education programmes, particularly in the context of divorce. They highlight their effectiveness in reducing interparental conflict, enhancing co-parenting practices, and supporting the well-being of children. Mandatory and voluntary programmes demonstrate varying degrees of success, but several consistent main categories have emerged. Before tapping into the main categories, this study investigated the characteristics of the selected studies.

Characteristics of the Selected Studies

This study involved 30 articles. As expected, most of the studies were conducted in the U.S. (23 studies), as the U.S. has

experienced historically high divorce rates, particularly in the late 20th century. Spain follows this (4 studies), Ireland (1 study), Hong Kong (1 study), and Norway (1 study) as illustrated in Figure 2. Most selected studies were published as journal articles in 2021 (6 studies), as shown in Figure 3.

The Emerging Themes

Mandatory or Voluntary Participation

This scoping review examined participation models and identified three distinct implementation approaches: mandatory, voluntary, and hybrid. Mandatory approaches were discussed in twelve studies (Becher et al., 2018; Ferraro et al., 2016, 2018, 2020; Jewell et al., 2017; Lau, 2021; Monk, 2024; O'Hara et al., 2021, 2024; Turner et al., 2021; Yamaguchi & Randel, 2021; Powell et al., 2020). These approaches represent the most structured model, requiring participation through court orders or state legislation (e.g., A.R.S. §25-351, 2024; Ferraro et al., 2016). Their target audience is typically divorcing or separated parents with young children (Monk, 2024; Jewell et al., 2017). Examples of the programmes include Arizona's Pima County Parent Education Program (PC-PEP; O'Hara et al., 2024).

Besides mandatory programmes, the voluntary methods of parenting education have been described in six other studies (Choi et al., 2017; Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2015, 2021; Merino et al., 2017; Novo et al., 2019; Sandler et al., 2017). This choice will enable parents to choose and participate on their free will and

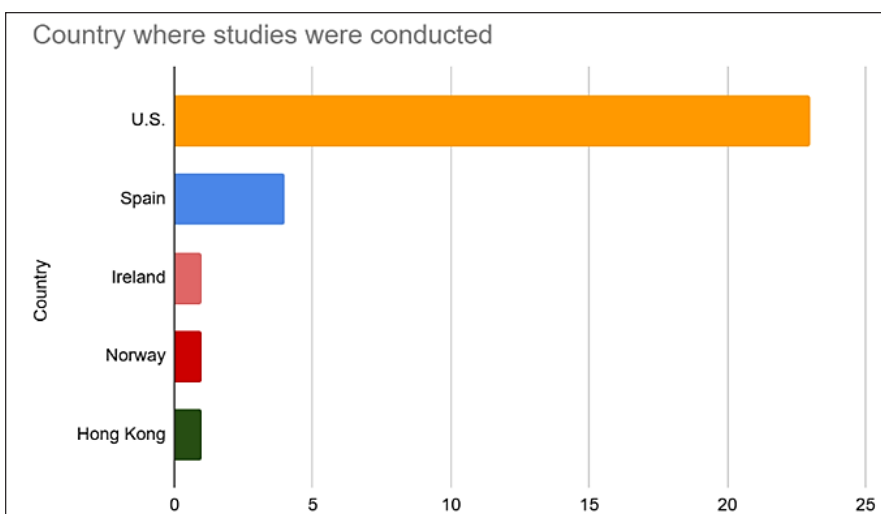


Figure 2. Countries where studies were conducted

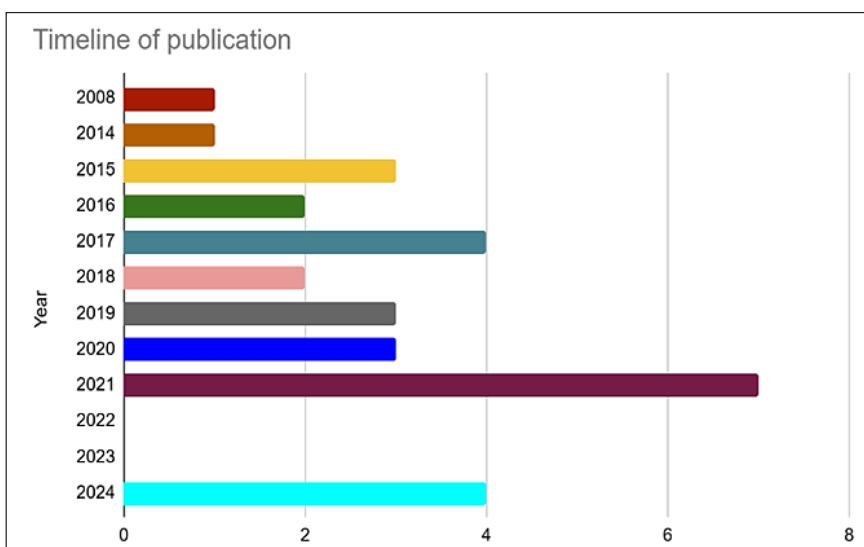


Figure 3. Timeline of publication

preferences, particularly when they are at a vulnerable stage (Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2021; Novo et al., 2019). For example, the Egokitzen and Parental Separation Program focuses on self-directed involvement

without any coerciveness in co-parenting services and honouring their availability. The voluntary nature of participation is also upheld in several court-referred initiatives, such as the New-Beginnings-Dads Program

(Sandler et al., 2017), which serves as an element of alignment as jurisdictions integrate systemic advice and personal autonomy (Pruett & Cornett, 2017).

There are seven studies that commented on the co-parenting education programmes hybrid-form (Cox et al., 2021; deLusé & Braver, 2015; OHara et al, 2021; Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008; Mayhew, 2016; Saini & Corrente, 2024; Schramm & Becher, 2020). The degree of hybridity involves a liberated structure to participation, as well as offering parents options (Saini & Corrente, 2024; O'Hara et al., 2021). According to a recent study, the New Beginnings Program (NBP) offers both court-ordered services to high-conflict families and voluntary ones through the same medium (O'Hara et al., 2024). Moreover, Georgia as well as Texas also have hybrid systems that are subject to the decision of the judicial department that may enable the determination of participation requirements on a case-by-case basis (Ferraro et al., 2016). Additionally, some hybrid programmes will require a domestic violence opt-out clause (Choi et al., 2019), acknowledging that not all family situations will need or benefit from mandatory requirements.

Programme Settings

A second theme that emerged from this scoping review was the delivery setting of the co-parenting education programmes. It is also indicated in the analyses that these parenting programmes were presented in different arrangements that included traditional face-to-face, online-based and presented in various institutions, including

court-based, community-based, and university-based. A particular discussion was about the two main delivery models: online or traditional face-to-face (Becher et al., 2018; Bowers et al., 2014; Mayhew, 2016; Monk, 2024; O'Hara et al., 2024; Powell et al., 2020; Schramm & Becher, 2020). On top of this, five studies emphasised self-paced learning through online platforms (Ferraro et al., 2020, 2018, 2016; Turner et al., 2021; Yamaguchi & Randel, 2021).

Ten studies on parenting education programmes reported to deliver on a traditional face-to-face basis and occurred mostly in court-mandated and community-ordered cases (Bertelsen, 2021; Cox et al., 2021; Jewell et al., 2017; Keating et al., 2015; Lau, 2021; Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2015; Merino et al., 2017; O'Hara et al., 2024). Such programs are operated through a court order and within the court setting. As an example, the Pima County Parent Education Program (PC-PEP) has been implemented in person at courthouses (O' Hara et al., 2024) and in community-based settings (e.g., Children First Initiative) (Jewell et al., 2017). In addition, seven studies document university-based implementation, primarily for research and development-oriented programmes (Ferraro et al., 2020, 2018, 2016; Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2015, 2021; Merino et al., 2017; Pruett & Cornett, 2017).

Programme's Acceptability and Compliance

The third theme discusses how participants accept the programme and their compliance.

The majority of studies reported high levels of participant acceptance, satisfaction, and compliance across a variety of programme structures (Bowers et al., 2014; Cox et al., 2021; Ferraro et al., 2018; Keating et al., 2015; Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2015; Mayhew, 2016; Monk, 2024; O'Hara et al., 2024, 2021; Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008; Pruett & Cornett, 2017; Randel, 2021; Saini & Corrente, 2024; Shapiro et al., 2024; Turner et al., 2021; Yamaguchi & Schramm & Becher, 2020). Online programmes demonstrated particularly strong acceptability, with participants citing convenience as a key advantage in programmes like Successful Co-parenting After Divorce (Ferraro et al., 2016; O'Hara et al., 2024). However, some studies noted opportunities for improvement, with participants suggesting enhanced interactive elements in digital formats (Bowers et al., 2014).

Compliance rates vary significantly across programmes. Court-mandated programmes such as the Pima County Parent Education Program (PC-PEP) and the Children First Program have documented high and consistent participation rates due to their mandatory delivery methods (Jewell et al., 2017; O'Hara et al., 2024). In contrast, voluntary programmes face challenges in engagement and lack of cooperation, as evidenced by the New Beginnings Program (NBP), which reports only 7-8% enrolment (O'Hara et al., 2021), and Egokitzen is also experiencing significant attrition (Merino et al., 2017). Although most studies reported high participant acceptance and compliance,

five studies also documented incidents of non-compliance and dissatisfaction (Bertelsen, 2021; Mayhew, 2016; O'Hara et al., 2021; Schramm & Becher, 2020; Shapiro et al., 2024). According to Mayhew (2016), some parents could not see the programme's importance and benefits and considered it burdensome. Schramm and Becher (2020) reported resistance among participants who saw the program content as irrelevant or time-consuming.

Programme Effectiveness

The effectiveness of this programme across various domains of family functioning was also studied. Eleven literature reviews showed consistent evidence for the efficacy of divorce education programmes in improving family outcomes with significant reductions in destructive interparental conflict and measurable improvements in parenting quality (Becher et al., 2018; Bertelsen, 2021; Choi et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2021; Keating et al., 2015; Lau, 2021; Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2021, 2015; Merino et al., 2017; O'Hara et al., 2024, 2021). Four research centred on parent-focused outcomes reported that participants gained significant benefits in parenting knowledge and co-parenting skills across a range of interventions (Saini & Corrente, 2024; Turner et al., 2021; Yamaguchi & Randel, 2021; Jewell et al., 2017).

Additionally, eight studies included mental health benefits as secondary outcomes for both parents and children (Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2021, 2015; Novo et al., 2019; Merino et al., 2017; O'Hara et al.,

2024, 2021; Sandler et al., 2017). While many studies have demonstrated program effectiveness, nine studies have reported inconsistent and variable effectiveness, with some showing significant benefits while others have found limited or negligible effects (Becher et al., 2018; Bowers et al., 2014; deLusé & Braver, 2015; Ferraro et al., 2020, 2018, 2016; Lau, 2021; O'Hara et al., 2021; Pruett & Cornett, 2017). For example, Family Transition Guides (FTG) have shown a significant positive effect on reducing legal conflict but have only minimal impact on children's fragile psychosocial outcomes during this phase (O'Hara et al., 2021).

Programme Variations

A comprehensive analysis of 30 studies revealed a fifth theme: programme variation. Ten studies specifically documented variation in programme duration, ranging from brief 1-hour interventions to more extensive, intensive, and comprehensive 10-hour programmes with different modules (Becher et al., 2018; Bertelsen, 2021; Bowers et al., 2014; Keating et al., 2015; Lau, 2021; Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2015, 2021; O'Hara et al., 2024; Powell et al., 2020; Schramm & Becher, 2020). Most programmes establish a standard 4-hour program format, such as the Pima County Parent Education Program (PC-PEP) and the Parents Forever Program. This format has been subject to practical considerations and court-mandated requirements, making the 4-hour programme format the standard across jurisdictions.

In terms of programme content, there is a lot of variety and interest depending on the length and needs of the programme. Based on this analysis, the average programme used content focused on child-centred and adult-centred situations. The Focus on Kids (FOK) and the Successful Co-parenting After Divorce content focused on child-centred workshops, had activities such as group sessions for children (typically ages 6–15), and understood divorce from a child's perspective. For adult-centred, on the other hand, it was about the effects of divorce, co-parenting communication strategies, legal guidance, and managing conflict. There are also content programmes tailored to special circumstances, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health for families in need.

Almost all programmes have their own creativity to encourage participation. They incorporate interactive elements, such as workshops, lectures, role-plays, self-guided workbooks, and real-life scenario discussions, including the use of multimedia components such as PowerPoint slides, videos, and quizzes as noted in eight studies (Cox et al., 2021; Ferraro et al., 2020; Keating et al., 2015; Lau, 2021; Monk, 2024; O'Hara et al., 2024; Turner et al., 2021; Yamaguchi & Randel, 2021). In addition, program accessibility is also enhanced through multilingual options to ensure that participants from diverse linguistic backgrounds can benefit from the program, such as the Online Parenting Program, which is offered in two languages, English and Spanish (Bowers et al., 2014),

but not all programmes offer this option. Regarding time, there are programmes with flexible scheduling, including weekend or weekday sessions, allowing participants to adapt to their schedules, such as the Parents Forever Program (Becher et al., 2018).

Challenges and Limitations

Every parenting programme is faced with impediments, such as the implementation, participant-related, and content-related limitations. Regarding the implementation issues, six research studies indicated that participants complained about the program being too brief and as such, it had failed to capture all the significant contents (Becher, 2020; Becher et al., 2018; Bowers et al., 2014; Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008; Schramm & Mayhew, Z. 2016; Turner et al., 2021). Moreover, nine findings described that mandatory attendance was associated with some problems whether in terms of low compliance levels, high attrition rates, as well as participants' choices to drop out without the successful completion of the programme assigned to them (Choi et al., 2019; deLusé & Braver, 2015; Keating et al., 2015; Lau, 2021; Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2021, 2015; O'Hara et al., 2024, 2021; Pruitt & Cornett, 2017).

Moreover, the online programmes that offer flexibility encounter problems, including technology impasses and technical failures on the part of the participants who may be weak in digital literacy (Ferraro et al., 2018; O'Hara et al., 2024). There are still numerous socioeconomic and logistical barriers to participation (Shapiro et al., 2024). Lastly, participation is not easy due

to content restrictions, especially when addressing behavioural change. Few studies highlighted the one-sided focus on adults, making the absence of child outcomes post-interventions (Becher et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2019; Cox et al., 2021; Jewell et al., 2017). Previous studies also reported that many programmes adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, which may overlook critical issues such as trauma-informed approaches for vulnerable participants (Bowers et al., 2014; Ferraro et al., 2020).

DISCUSSION

Child well-being, co-parenting dynamics, programme implementation, and programme effectiveness are among the most extensively studied family dynamics related to divorcing or separating families. Most of these studies have undergone significant theoretical development, evidence-based programme development, and policy integration, making them a mature study area in family studies, family psychology, education, and law. However, it is still evolving, with vast and contrasting outcomes. Parenting education for divorcing parents has historically garnered academic attention since the 1970s and continues to be actively studied today, particularly in Western countries. However, in non-Western countries, these studies are still in the initial and exploratory stage of development, which might be due to differences in the legal systems, research investment, cultural norms, and parental readiness.

Although past studies can be best described as a mature field with ongoing

innovation, the debate over whether the programme should be mandatory or voluntary remains a hot topic. Previous studies have revealed a variety of approaches across jurisdictions and different programs, with some programmes being strictly mandatory with court orders, others being voluntary based on need, and some offering a combination of both and hybrid programs. Pollet and Lombreglia (2008) are among the early studies that explored this topic, reporting that some form of mandatory parenting education programmes has already been implemented by 46 states in the US, with 27 states mandating attendance while only two states make it non-compulsory; a fact that has also been cited in several subsequent studies (Barth et al., 2019; Choi et al., 2019; Mayhew, 2016). Across all reviewed articles, the case of *Troxel v. Granville* (530 U.S. 57, 2000) was the only court case cited in general (O'Hara et al., 2024) to emphasise the constitutional balance between parental autonomy and the best interests of minors in family court decision-making. On the other hand, state statutes are often discussed and used as a reference, especially in studies that analyse legal provisions of parenting education programmes in the Western countries.

Among the most frequently cited legal provisions are the Florida Statutes (§ 61.21) which mandates parenting education and family stabilisation courses for divorcing couples; Arizona Revised Statutes (Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 25-351 & 25-381.01) require completion of mandatory parenting education before parties participate in

family mediation and providing ways for married couples to resolve family conflicts amicably; Iowa Code (§ 598.15) requires mandatory parenting education courses during divorce for parties in actions involving child custody or visitation; Kansas Statute (§ 23-3214) mandates parenting education to inform divorcing parents of the effects of divorce on children; Minnesota Statute (§ 518.157) mandates divorcing parents with minor children to attend the "Parents Forever" programme which is described as one of the approved options that meet the statutory requirement for parenting education (Becher et al., 2018; Ferraro et al., 2016; Mayhew, 2016; O'Hara et al., 2024; Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008).

On the other hand, other states mandate online platforms, such as Utah's online divorce education course and Florida's 4-hour Parenting Education and Family Stabilisation Course (Ferraro et al., 2016; Turner et al., 2021). While certain jurisdictions make it mandatory, some programmes offer it voluntarily, allowing parents to participate in equipping themselves with parenting knowledge based on their personal needs or interests. For instance, the Egokitzen, the New Beginnings Program (NBP), and the Parental Separation, Not Family Breakdown Program are conducted voluntarily, and non-participation will not result in legal or disciplinary action (Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2021; Novo et al., 2019; Sandler et al., 2017). Different approaches according to jurisdictions have led some to mandate specific programmes and others to offer voluntary options (Saini & Corrente, 2024).

In some other states, such as Texas (Tex. Fam. Code § 105.009) and Georgia (Ga. Unif. Super. Ct. R. 24.8), the decision to mandate participation is left to the presiding judges to decide whether parents must attend co-parenting education programmes, which makes it voluntary participation (Ferraro et al., 2016). Taken together, these statutes establish that most U.S. jurisdictions require court intervention or allow court-mandated parenting to promote shared parenting, resolve family conflicts amicably, and protect the well-being of children after divorce.

Another critical dimension that determines the effectiveness of the programmes is the programme setting. Initially, most programmes used a traditional in-person format approach, especially in courts, community centres, or university settings. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has limited face-to-face meetings, has led to a surge in online approaches. Typically, programmes conducted in in-person classes are closely tied to the family court system and in community settings. Examples include the Parents Forever Program (Becher et al., 2018), two levels' (Level 1: information-based talks and Level 2: participatory, interactive workshops), parenting education programmes in Hong Kong (Lau, 2021), Family Visitation Centres (FVCs) in Spain (Martínez-Pampliega et al., 2021), the Children First Program (Jewell et al., 2017), Pima County Parent Education Program (PC-PEP) (O'Hara et al., 2024), and the Family Transitions Guide (FTG) (O'Hara et al., 2021).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, programmes such as the Pima County Parent Education Program (PC-PEP) and the eNew Beginnings Program (eNBP) have introduced an online format to ensure their accessibility and continuity (O'Hara et al., 2024). In the same way, a Focus on Kids (FOK) Program has also been converted into an online form to meet diverse demands (Monk, 2024). Besides, numerous other programmes were conducted online featuring various interactive and multimedia components to increase participants' involvement. Among such programmes are the Successful Co-parenting After Divorce Program (Ferraro et al., 2016), Online Parenting Programs (Bowers et al., 2014), and a state-mandated online divorce education course offered by the state of Utah (Turner et al., 2021).

Research has recorded the success of court-mandated interventions and well-structured programmes that suit the needs of parents, which leads to a high level of acceptability among participants. For instance, the Pima County Parent Education Program (PC-PEP) was highly acceptable to parents, with 87% reporting the modules personally relevant and 96% agreeing that it was intelligible (O'Hara et al., 2024). Participants in the Focus on Kids (FOK) Program, on the other hand, reported high levels of satisfaction (92.7%) agreeing that the content presented would influence their decision-making regarding their children and 87.2% stated that the programme was overall beneficial to them, with reward of receiving a certificate of completion upon

successful completion of the programme (Monk, 2024). Likewise, two Midwestern counties that mandated the Children First Program also recorded high attendance rates due to its nature of court-directed participation (Jewell et al., 2017). Co-parenting for Resilience (CPR) programmes that do not require a court mandate also have high acceptability rates, with 95–98% of parents reporting that the programme is worthwhile and would recommend it to others (Cox et al., 2021).

Online programmes have also been well-received due to their flexibility and convenience. For example, the Successful Co-Parenting After Divorce Program was made accessible anytime, available 24/7, designed to be highly quality, and empirically based. It has allowed participants to learn independently (Ferraro et al., 2016). Similarly, for Online Parenting Programs, participants' feedback suggests adding multimedia elements to encourage engagement (Bowers et al., 2014). Although many studies have documented high levels of acceptability and compliance among participants, voluntary programmes often face lower compliance and higher attrition rates because they rely entirely on individual personal preferences. For example, the New Beginnings Program (NBP) still has a low enrolment rate (7-8%) even though no fee is charged, demonstrating low parental motivation to participate voluntarily (O'Hara et al., 2021).

The most important dimension of this study is programme effectiveness, which has several findings related to factors such as

target audience, programme design, module content, and outcomes measured. The study revealed a variety of outcomes, including reduced parental conflict, improvements in parental knowledge and skills, and positive child outcomes. Martínez-Pampliega et al. (2021), through the Egokitzen, reported a significant reduction in parental conflict while improving their mental health state with lasting effects at six and 12-month follow-ups. Similarly, Cox et al. (2021) also documented a reduction in conflict in co-parenting through the Co-Parenting for Resilience (CPR) Program, as did the New Beginnings Program (NBP), which showed long-term benefits for high-conflict parents, as reported by O'Hara et al. (2021).

Apart from that, such programmes have also reported improvements in parental knowledge and skills related to co-parenting. Participants in the Focus on Kids (FOK) Program gave positive feedback, such as being able to control themselves from maladaptive behaviours, including arguing in front of their children, indicating the programme had increased their knowledge of co-parenting practices and strategies (Monk, 2024). Online Parenting Programs also claim that parents become more confident when communicating with their children, although communication between co-parents was observed to have less progress (Bowers et al., 2014). In this regard, positive effects on child well-being have also been reported, such as reduced mental health problems and increased social competence. According to Martínez-Pampliega et al. (2021), the Egokitzen

Program, which incorporates many elements of parental mental health, indirectly helps in reducing children's anxiety symptoms. In addition, following a 10-months of the New Beginnings-Dads Program (NBP-Dads), it was reported that children improved their social competence, enabling them to interact effectively with others.

In terms of programme variation, parent education programmes are delivered in a variety of designs and formats. It encompasses several dimensions, such as the duration of the time, with programmes ranging from a brief 1-hour online course to the longest 10-hour intervention. However, on average, most programmes are conducted in the 4- to 8-hour range, as established by the Pima County Parent Education Program (PC-PEP), which is predicted to be more beneficial for participants (O'Hara et al., 2024). They continued that delivery methods have evolved from traditional in-person to online and hybrid formats, which have been accelerated by COVID-19, making in-person meetings limited. For example, the Forever Parents Program also offers both online and in-person 4-hour and 8-hour formats that reflect the court's different needs and the family's needs (Becher et al., 2018).

As for programme content, average programmes focus on three specialised areas, such as child-centred, adult-centred, and special circumstances (domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health). Among the programmes that emphasise child-centred elements in their content is Focus on Kids (FOK), which contains activities

to help children's express feelings about the divorce, understand that divorce is not their fault, and develop coping skills (Monk, 2024). In their review, Schramm et al. (2017) also suggested that child-centred content or co-curricular activities are key in teaching parents and helping them to increase the likelihood of children making healthy adjustments during the divorce process or changes in family structure. In addition, it draws attention to adult-centred elements such as equipping parents with skills to manage conflict, improve communication with their co-parents, and provide emotional stability for children.

In the context of pedagogical approaches, some programmes incorporate interactive elements in the modules, such as workshops, role-plays, customised parenting plans, parenting booklets, and discussions of real-life scenarios to ensure active participation. For example, the Child-Focused Program utilises multimedia elements such as video vignettes, as its primary educational delivery method (Monk, 2024), and group therapy sessions are also available for all family members (Bertelsen, 2021). Besides, the Hong Kong programmes, Level 1 and Level 2, also applied information-based lectures and participatory workshops, resulting in a more effective reduction of children's involvement in parental conflicts (Lau, 2021).

Despite many documented effectiveness, challenges and obstacles in terms of implementation also exist. For instance, some feedback reported that the programme duration was too

short to cover all important content, significantly impacting the programme's delivery and effectiveness. Additionally, through the Parents Forever Program, Becher et al. (2018) have reported that an 8-hour programme may not equip parents thoroughly with meaningful co-parenting knowledge, suggesting that at least 12 hours are needed to ensure benefits in co-parenting dynamics. Similar conclusions were drawn by Turner et al. (2021) and Bowers et al. (2014), who reported that programmes with short interventions are usually insufficient for meaningful behaviour change.

Besides, mandatory or mandated programme participation also results in low parental motivation and engagement (Shapiro et al., 2024; O'Hara et al., 2021), while voluntary programmes face constraints in terms of recruitment, retention, and attrition issues (O'Hara et al., 2021). Previous studies reported that, despite being ordered by the court to follow the programme, only about two-thirds of parents in the treatment group complied. This matter indirectly raises questions about enforcement and the effectiveness of such orders. Additionally, there were 50 dropouts (31% of the treatment group, 34% of the control group), and the reasons for dropout were not documented (Parents Plus – Parenting When Separated; Keating et al., 2015). Along with this, the complex circumstances of participants, such as domestic violence survivors, parents with a history of trauma, and high-conflict families, also contribute to the challenge as they

exceed the capacity of standard programmes (Ferraro et al., 2020; Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008).

Finally, programme content limitations also reflect the wide participation gap, resulting in difficulties in participation. One of them is that many interventions miss the most essential part, which is the children's perspective on divorce, even though they are the most affected group. Other than this, past research indicated that numerous programmes take a one-size-fits-all strategy, which could disregard serious concerns such as mental health, domestic violence, and legal advice, particularly among parents who have experienced trauma (Ferraro et al., 2020; Bowers et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

This scoping review comprehensively overviews the current practice and provides a firm ground to develop a regulatory framework of parenting education for divorcing parents. The results are needed to empower parents and children who undergo changes in family structure due to divorce and to minimise the negative impacts of divorce on both parents and children. The absence of parenting education affects the couple as well as worsens the condition of children, who are also in a vulnerable position. Based on the findings of past studies and the increasing divorce statistics in Malaysia, it is timely to develop a regulatory parenting education framework for divorcing parents to support co-parenting practices and child adjustment following parents' divorce. Such a regulatory framework should align

with the country's legal, cultural, and social fabric of Malaysia.

Moving forward, stakeholders such as policymakers and programme developers must refine how best to adapt parenting education programmes nationally. Among the issues that need to be considered is whether the approach should be mandatory, voluntary, or a combination of both, depending on the needs of diverse families. Collaboration between education, research, law, and social service agencies should also be established to develop the best and most effective parenting education modules or settings for family institutions. While stakeholders are responsible for creating the framework, the public also needs to play a role by spreading awareness of the importance of programmes that support families in transition (divorce) and promoting healthy family communication to encourage healthy parenting practices. These efforts can encourage parents to participate in such intervention programmes to enhance their parenting competencies and contribute to the overall framework's success in guaranteeing the family's well-being during or after divorce.

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