

Divorce Trends in Developing Societies: Effects on Children

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ABSTRACT

Divorce, also known as dissolution of marriage, is the termination of a marriage or marital union, the canceling and/or reorganizing of the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage, thus dissolving the bonds of matrimony between a married couple under the rule of law of the particular country and/or state. Some of the effects associated with divorce include academic, behavioral, and psychological problems. Although this may not always be true, studies suggest that children from divorced families are more likely to exhibit such behavioral issues than those from non-divorced families. In developing societies such as India divorce trends are on increase as due to increased pace of industrialization and globalization, faster adoption of modern material culture and lack of or incomplete adoption of non-material culture giving rise of conflict or dissociation of values. In developing societies, Family as an institution is struggling to find a panacea for ever increasing problems in the wake of Liberalisation era. The objective of this paper is to review the concept of Divorce, its trends in Developing societies and its harmful effects on children.

Key Words: Divorce, Developing Societies, Family, etc

INTRODUCTION

The family in its various forms is the universal basis of all human societies and social structures. However the institution of the family has decayed in modern times, so converting society into an alienated agglomeration of disconnected individuals, susceptible to arbitrary, remote and authoritarian governance. Statistics tell us that first marriages today stand a 45 percent chance of breaking up and second marriages a 60 percent chance. But those numbers just confirm what we already knew: Divorce has increased not only in frequency but also in acceptance. And even if we don't focus on figures per se, we know that today far more marriages end in divorce than a couple of decades ago. This represents a massive social change. It has taken place in the relatively short space of about 40 years and is reshaping the basic building block of society. Divorce is altering the institution of marriage and family in ways not yet fully comprehended. However, enough is understood to allow experts in the field to state that increased tolerance of divorce has produced profound changes in our attitudes toward what we think marriage and family to be. It isn't that marriages were perfect in the 18th and 19th centuries, and that toward the end of the 20th century we somehow wandered off the straight and narrow. But regardless of what the institution used to represent, it is well documented that the traditional roles of men and women changed greatly with industrialization and urbanization in the 20th century. Additionally, World War II drew women into the workplace to replace the men who had gone to the front; new birth control methods gave women control over fertility; and in general, women gained greater decision-making ability in family matters as they worked outside the home. The momentum was accelerated by various social movements with civil-rights, feminist and human-potential agendas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Anderson, the laws governing marriage were "historically ... based upon the traditional Judeo-Christian belief that marriage was for life. Marriage was intended to be a permanent institution. Thus, the desire for divorce was not held to be self-justifying. Legally the grounds for divorce had to be circumstances that justified making an exemption to the assumption of marital permanence. The spouse seeking a divorce had to prove that the other spouse had committed one of the 'faults' recognized as justifying the dissolution of the marriage. In other words, the legal system acted as a brake. The basic premise in this fault-based system of divorce law was that marriage was a special institution and needed to be preserved. But this legal foundation was challenged as society shifted its outlook on marriage.

Judith Wallerstein, senior lecturer emerita at the University of Berkeley's School of Social Welfare, states in her 2000 book *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*: "The prevailing climate of opinion was that divorce would allow adults to make better choices and happier marriages by letting them undo earlier mistakes. They would arrive at an honest, mutual decision to divorce, because if one person wanted out, surely it could not be much of a marriage. These attitudes were held by men and women of many political persuasions, by lawyers, judges, and mental health professionals alike."

It all sounds so reasonable—except for one very important detail: Marriages tend to produce children. Wallerstein asks: "But what about the children? In our rush to improve the lives of adults, we assumed that their lives would improve as well. We made radical changes in the family without realizing how it would change the experience of growing up."

Adults, in their eagerness to reduce difficult situations for themselves, convinced themselves that the children would be happier if the parents were happier. They also argued that divorce is a temporary crisis, with most of the harm being done around the time of the initial separation, and that with time children would adjust if the parents "worked things out" amicably.

Both suppositions, however, are being seriously challenged today. For example, UCLA sociologist Nicholas Wolfinger asserts that "cumulative stress as new parents move in and out of a child's life seems to be affecting his marital history as an adult." Wallerstein is even more forceful regarding the effects of divorce on children: "Divorce is a life-transforming experience. After divorce, childhood is different. Adolescence is different. Adulthood—with the decision to marry or not and have children or not—is different. Whether the final outcome is good or bad, the whole trajectory of an individual's life is profoundly altered by the divorce experience."

Wallerstein's 25-year study has deeply convicted her of the long-term effects of divorce. "Moreover," she says, "by following the life of one child of divorce, and then another and another, from early childhood through adolescence and into the challenges of adulthood, I can say without a doubt that they have worries apart from their peers raised in intact homes. These worries are reshaping our society in ways we never dreamt about."

Writer Holly Preston points out, for instance, that "divorce is hard for adult children too." Preston is 34, married, and a mother, and her parents recently divorced. Given the psychology generally accepted regarding the effects of divorce, this should not have been a major issue to a secure, happily married, 34-year-old woman. But she comments, "Contrary to popular belief, divorce isn't any easier or less painful when you are an adult child... . The loss of that original family unit and the hope tied to it is often irreplaceable for a child... . I'll never manage to fill the void that's been created. It's like mourning the death of someone I loved and now miss terribly" (*Newsweek*, September 4, 2000).

Objectives:

- To study the concept of Divorce
- To study the Divorce trends in developing societies
- To study the effect of divorce on children

Concept of Divorce

Divorce is the termination of a marriage or marital union, the canceling and/or reorganizing of the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage, thus dissolving the bonds of matrimony between a married couple under the rule of law of the particular country and/or state.

Divorce Trends in Developing Societies

A little-noticed trend is spreading in many of the world's emerging economies: More and more people are getting divorced. Outside of North America, Europe, and Oceania, two-thirds of the countries for which the United Nations has data saw rising divorce rates from 2007 to 2011. According to the UN, the divorce rate in Mexico has climbed from 0.3 to 0.8 per thousand people since the late 1970s. In Brazil, where ending a marriage was illegal just 30 years ago, the divorce rate is now about 1.4 per thousand people. Rates have climbed dramatically in China, Thailand, Iran, and South Korea, which has seen more than a fivefold increase in divorces over the past few decades.

Effects of Divorce on Children Psychological

Divorce is associated with diminished psychological well-being in children and adult offspring of divorced parents, including greater unhappiness, less satisfaction with life, weaker sense of personal control, anxiety, depression, and greater use of mental health services. A preponderance of evidence indicates that there is a causal effect between divorce and these outcomes. Children of divorced parents are also more likely to experience conflict in their own marriages, and are more likely to experience divorce themselves.

Poorly managed conflict between parents increases children's risk of behavior problems, depression, substance abuse and dependence, poor social skills, and poor academic performance. Exposure to marital conflict and instability, most often has negative consequences for children. Several mechanisms are likely to be responsible. First, observing overt conflict between parents is a direct stressor for children. Observational studies reveal that children react to inter-parental conflict with fear, anger, or the inhibition of normal behavior. Preschool children – who tend to be egocentric – may blame themselves for marital conflict, resulting in feelings of guilt and lowered self-esteem. Conflict between parents also tends to spill over and negatively affect the quality of parents' interactions with their children. Researchers found that the associations between marital conflict and children's externalizing and internalizing problems were largely mediated by parents' use of harsh punishment and parent-child conflict. Furthermore, modeling verbal or physical aggression, parents "teach" their children that disagreements are resolved through conflict rather than calm discussion. As a result, children may not learn the social skills (such as the ability to negotiate and reach compromises) that are necessary to form mutually rewarding relationships with peers.

Academic and Socio-Economic

Frequently, children who have experienced a divorce have lower academic achievement than children from non-divorced families. In a review of family and school factors related to adolescents' academic performance, it noted that a child from a divorced family is two times more likely to drop out of high school than a child from a non-divorced family. Children of divorced parents also achieve lower levels of socio-economic status, income, and wealth accumulation than children of continuously married parents. These outcomes are associated with lower educational achievement. Young men or women between the ages of 7 and 16 who had experienced the divorce of their parents were more likely than youths who had not experienced the divorce of their parents to leave home because of friction, to cohabit before marriage, and to parent a child before marriage.

Divorce often leads to worsened academic achievement in children ages 7–12, the most heightened negative effect being reading test scores. These negative effects tend to persist, and even escalate after the divorce or separation occurs. Children of divorced or separated parents exhibit increased behavioral problems and the marital conflict that accompanies parents' divorce places the child's social competence at risk.

CONCLUSION

Divorce is viewed as a remedy by the partners to sort out problems in matrimonial relations. The increasing economic independence, growing anxiety and intolerance coupled with escaping tendency towards responsibilities of a permanent relation has led to increased trends in divorce. The effect of divorce on children has led to risk of behavior problems, depression, substance abuse and dependence, poor social skills, and poor academic performance. Children of divorced parents also achieve lower levels of socio-economic status, income, and wealth accumulation than children of continuously married parents. Though there are approaches by which divorce professionals can help parents reduce conflict. Options include mediation, collaborative divorce, co-parent counseling, and parenting coordination. But even still divorce proves detrimental to psychological, social and academic well-being of children.

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