

The Consequences of Divorce on Individual, Family and Society

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Abstract: Divorce is an effect of several complicated psychosocial causes. It is an obvious reason for the underlying conflicts, lacking the balance and harmony of a relationship, which lead couples through a decision making process to end up their marriage. In all cultures, divorce has not been welcome. Reviewing statistics and studies on its causes that strived to find solutions for its reduction, indicates the significance of divorce and the traces of its negative effects left on various aspects of the human society. Divorce, either directly or indirectly, affects the mental health of couples, children, relatives and friends. The lack of comprehensive and inclusive studies on this issue urged us to set the aim of this study to identify the consequences of divorce.

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1. Introduction

Marriage is historically the most initial and globally widespread behavioral pattern of human social institution (1). Appropriate family relations are the building blocks of appropriate social relations. The more intimate ties are appropriate, the more family, and subsequently society, is firm and stable (2). If the family is the core social institution, then the roots of a healthy society lay in the healthy families. Divorce is one of the most important damages to a family. Experts believe that the process of divorce, in majority of the cases, includes: minor disagreements, serious arguments due to recurrence of such minor disagreements, separation or disinclination of one partner to the other, repeated long-term sheer offs and exhaustion caused by them, dispute, emotional divorce and ultimately legal divorce (3). One of the partners usually endure more emotional involvement and suffering during the process of divorce. It is also believed that effects of divorce are more damaging to women than men (4). Divorce precedes neither easily nor quickly. In average, it takes at least two years for both partners to recover and regain the energy to found the bases of a new relationship on the ruins, remaining from the previous marriage (5). People try different ways like isolation, escape, oversleeping, work overload, time killing with friends, violence, ignorance and weeping to deal with the problems resulted from divorce during this two-year-period. Therefore, this key period determines the pathway of an individual's future that may lead to personal progress, development and perfection; or failure, adversity and collapse. Divorce is sometimes capable to transform love into hatred, trust into distrust, and support into aggression or vengeance (6).

2. Divorce in Iran

Divorce rate is increasing in Iran day by day; and there has never been such a tremendous collapse risk and its negative effects, threatening the core of the family as it exists today (7). The newest statistics regarding divorce rate in Iran indicate a growth (8). This growth has recently been more aggressive, so that in 2009, comparing to 2008, it is reported as a 13.8% growth (9). At the moment, Iran is placed in the fourth row of the of the divorce rate table among the countries of the world (10).

Passing through a divorce can be classified into three major stages: pre-separation, transition and restoration, and convalescence and renovation. People's experience of the first stage is diverse. Anger and loathing, frustration, surprise and perplexity are of those emotions that people may feel in this stage. Duration of this stage may likewise vary from person to person; and may take weeks, months or even years. The second stage—transition and restoration—for the majority of people, is the same experience during divorce, although its severity may differ from a person to another as well. The second stage—transition and restoration—for the majority of people, is the same as divorce experience, although different individuals, experience a degree of faint and sever. In this stage, couples can experience shock and damages in dealing with changes, grief of loss and unforeseen practical problems (11).

3. Different aspects of damages caused by divorce

According to Paul Bohannon, a number of major transitional stages in life style and attitude should be experienced, if a couple decides to divorce. He believes the divorce process consists of six overlapping stages or experiences, which may all cause difficulties and tensions, affecting couples,

children, relatives and friends. These six stages are the emotional, legal, economic, co-parental, community and psychic divorces.

3.1. *The Emotional divorce*

Official divorce statistics are not fully indicating couple's dissatisfaction of their marriage, for emotional divorce rates are greater than legal ones, which means some men and women lead cold, empty and silent lives together, but do not legally plea for divorce (12). In fact, some of the marriages, which does not end up with divorce, transform into marital relations empty of love, companionship and friendship that continue due to regular flow of time-consuming life (13). For Paul Bohannon, the emotional divorce, is the first stage of the divorce process and expresses the substitution of alienation emotion instead the marital relation, which is deteriorated. (14). Although a couple may continue the relation as a social group, but they are not attracted to each other and there is no trust left among them anymore. In the emotional divorce, the couple hurt one another due to feelings of sadness and despair that they experience (15). Emotional divorce implies the lack of trust, respect and love; couples instead of supporting each other tend to hurt their partner and decrease his or her self-esteem; and to exclude their partner, they look for any kind of excuse to prove a disadvantage or shortcoming of him or her (16). Emotional divorce describes a relationship, in which the partners seem good and intimate in social environments, but in private are not able to tolerate each other (17). So in emotional divorce, couples just live under the same roof, while their relationship is completely disconnected or is no longer desirable and satisfactory (18).

3.2. *The Legal Divorce*

According to common law of every country, dissolution of marital relationship in permanent marriage, either based on mutual consent or not, is plead by the couple's legal representative or by the court to be declared (19).

3.3. *The Economic divorce*

When a family is broken down, the assets and properties must be necessarily divided into two shares.

3.4. *The Co-parental Divorce*

Some decisions are made about the custody or visitation rights with children, their next meeting, and the financial or parental responsibilities of each parent toward children.

3.5. *The community Divorce*

It refers to some changes that occur in relationships with friends and acquaintances. This means that divorcee have to handle with individual reactions of those, who are aware of divorce.

3.6. *The Mental Divorce*

Through which individual breaks the emotional linkage and have to face the necessity of independent life. There is no empathy left, when the marriage is broken. None of the parents constitute a relation, because both of them feel lonely, which is a trauma for both of them.

4. **Men and women after divorce**

Mahnaz Akhavan Tafti study shows that women are more vulnerable to the social consequences of divorce. Economic problems have a similar impact on men and women, but women are more concerned about their economic future than men. Women, more than men, suffer from emotional and mental problems. Concern about the future of children, are more observed among mothers rather than fathers. Women show more concern on what people may think about their divorce than men do. Both men and women are weary of remarriage, but optimistic about the future. None of them show interest to consult to friends and are both reluctant in this case (20). Some consequences of divorce on the individual, family and social level briefly include:

4.1. *Individual Level*

4.1.1. *The concerns of the future*

After divorce lonesome is a feeling that women experience more than men. This concern is mostly about whether they will be able to find a partner again? Fear and despair of not being able to live without a husband, taking care of children single handedly and finding a job. These real concerns are the result of some realistic doubts about financial, labor market problems, raising children and change in personal and social life issues (21).

4.1.2. *The Guilt*

According to some experts, guilt is the most important feeling experienced by divorced of parents. The concerns about the happiness of children, in addition to their uncertain future, result various reactions that severs the guilt experienced by divorced parents (22).

4.1.3. *The Loneliness*

Divorced men and women may feel alone after a while, because they left the safe environment of the family, despite of all its problems and have to face the problems of life and divorce alone. Studies

show that loneliness after a divorce is experienced by women more than men.

4.1.4. Physical and psychological problems

The absence of a partner and loneliness after divorce, causes the majority of women suffer from different physical and mental disorders and discomforts after separation (23). The mental problems, of course, are far more harmful than physical ones. The severity emotional divorce is equal for parents, but other conditions can change the fact. Therefore the greater loss that is felt by divorced women is a result of socioeconomic inequality of two genders in the open society. Divorced women, due to the lack a certain social position, are dependent to their family: father or brothers. The opportunity to remarry of divorced men and women also depend on their different socioeconomic status. As a matter of fact "divorce" is considered a socioeconomic threat to women (24).

4.1.5. Duality of roles

During the divorce, women, regarding their relation with their children in addition to economic difficulties, are faced with the difficulty of fulfilling two roles. Divorced woman must act the both roles of parents, as a mother and a father. It is valid about the divorced man who has the custody right of the children (25).

4.1.6. Economic issues

Economic issues are more outstanding among divorced women. These issues affect women with low education and vocational skills severely. The reaction of other family members to divorce and separation is different. In some cases, they are worried about the economic dependence of divorcee to them. Divorce can affect socioeconomic status of a person such as his or her career. Many divorced people (whether male or female) lose their jobs after the divorce (26).

4.1.7. Social isolation and impaired social identity

Divorced parents are underprivileged by social isolation, impairment of social relations during marriage, lack of communication with external environment, loss of a confident and empathic person and lack of private place to live as their house. The attitude of community toward divorcee women, in some cases, is so negative that makes them feel that they entirely lost their social position. A divorced person is neither single nor married anymore. Therefore the community cannot define an appropriate position for divorced people and develop negative attitude toward them. They seem like people who do not want to face the realities of life; and has

preferably given priority to following their own desires rather than the interests of the institution of the family (27). In fact, a very negative assessment of divorce leads to a generalized negative assessment of a divorced couple (28).

4.1.8. Crime and delinquency

A divorced person is suddenly faced with lack of sexual gratification, since one of the functions of marriage is to meet such desires. Thus a probable increased sexual drive may lead to an unhealthy sexual relation, if the person does not have the opportunity to remarry. The probability of worsen circumstances especially increases when the divorced person is not capable to handle his or her own financial problems and ultimately he or she is driven to sexual and financial corruption (29).

4.2. Family Level

Children are the most vulnerable and defenseless members of the family who perceive their parents as their only supportive and protective guardians (30). Parent's argument is not only the cause to unbalance the secure environment of the family that affects children's physical and mental health, but also is considered as serious threat to the security of the society (31). Research results that are generally agreed by everyone indicate of long-term effects of divorce on mail children (32). Male children are vulnerable to psychological, social and educational impairments (33). Male children are more sensitive to their parent's relation and their divorce and usually react more disobedient and show destructive behavior, but female children quickly adapt themselves with the new situation and do not complain. The perhaps suppress their dissatisfaction (34). It usually takes two years of girls to find a compromise with the new environment, but boys need more time to adapt. Generally children express their disturbance through crying; however male children may show aggression, violence and decreasing educational performance and female children tend to be isolated and depressed. Parents apply more control over the children with the same gender. That means fathers do not take easy on their sons but are patient with daughters, while mothers are more kind to sons and are rigid with daughters. However, both boys and girls are equally in need of love and attention from their parents. But divorced parents generally deal with female children more affectionately. Therefore, their adaptation is slower than female children (35). Statistics confirm the point that the root of most delinquencies of children and teenagers lays in the disintegration of their warm family. The crime and suicide rates, among children of divorced parents, have dramatically increased (36).

These children are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and addiction is more prevalent among them. Studies on causes of delinquencies among children of divorced families indicates that the lack of mother figure within the family causes children to be unable to adapt, act deviant and finally escape from the family environment (36). However, existing of a family is helpful for children, when disputes and arguments within the family are not in a level that may affect children. Otherwise, the family itself turns to be a source for mental and psychological tensions and problems of the children living in that family.

Some studies show that divorce is not the cause for mental problems of the children, member to that family, but it is the constant disagreement of parents which creates a chaotic environment in the family prior to divorce, which ultimately leads to divorce, triggers misbehavior, mental or psychological disorder of the children. It is believed that divorce or separation, by itself, does not harm any member of the family; but underlying factors and problems that lead the family to the point of divorce are the main causes for mental and psychological problems children and even for parents (37).

4.2.1. *Creating an urgent family*

Divorce raises an urgent need for another family. One of the parents, mainly the mother of the family, due to financial problems, has no choice but to reside in her parents' house, tolerating any kind of circumstances after divorce. Although the majority of divorced women is literate and can have a job, but they steel feel to be a burden and dependent (38).

4.3. *The community level*

Divorce can increase the social damages like addiction, sexual abuse and other violent behaviors. On the other hand it is an effecting factor on increasing suicide rates. It shakes the very basic building blocks of the society that can ultimately lead to devaluation of the family and social values in a society (39). Studies show that unpleasant divorce experiences form negative radical and generalized attitudes among couples so that they feel that they must either avoid the opposite sex for the rest of their lives, or quickly jump to another relation escaping lonesome after divorce. Although both of these approaches seem to be normal reactions, but both of them are traumatic (40).

5. Conclusion

In the present study, the negative effects of divorce are pointed out on the individual, family and community levels. It must not be forgotten that divorce is not always a bad event. Divorce is a solution in some cases that continuation of a marriage

either is harmful for the couples or at least does not meet the necessary requirements of a satisfactory mental, physical and social healthy relationship between them. Despite of the fact that divorce was considered very ethical, but today we all see that it is widely used as a solution and the new generation is no longer concerned about divorcing and it seems this social phenomenon is going to find its proper place in the society. Therefore increasing divorce rate is not totally a sign to derangement, but there are some times that it is positive. To cope with divorce, seeking help from mental health professionals and self-help groups consisting of divorced people can be helpful. Sometimes we see that, even when the couples are determined to divorce, counseling can change their decision. Some problem-solving techniques and conflict resolution skills can be useful to avoid effecting damages of divorce. For this mean it seems necessary that couples receive some consulting services that enable them to deal with the issue of divorce properly by reducing the pressure and tension between them, helping them forgetting the past, exonerating each other and break up the relation while they have both forgiven one another.

Both courts and consultants must remind them to avoid any hostile behavior toward each other after divorce.

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