

The Effect of Divorce on the Society

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ABSTRACT

When parents divorce, their children are affected in significant ways. Many of the consequences of marital dissolution may adversely affect children's success in their future romantic relationships, but fortunately this downward spiral can be mitigated through deliberate parental efforts. One remedy to counteract this trend is conscientious *coparenting*-continuing to work together despite altered family dynamics, since such effort positively impacts the children's future relationships, specifically daughters' future intimacy. Another significant factor in children's future marital success is the amount of conflict between their parents. High-conflict parental relationships have been linked to children's difficulty in forming their own healthy relationships. Divorce damages society. It consumes social and human capital and diminishes children's future competence in all five of society's major tasks or institutions: family, school, religion, marketplace and government. The reversal of the cultural and social status of divorce would be nothing less than a cultural revolution. Divorce also permanently weakens the family and the relationship between children and parents. It frequently leads to destructive conflict management methods, diminished social competence and for children, the early loss of virginity, as well as diminished sense of masculinity or femininity for young adults. It also results in more trouble with dating, more cohabitation, greater likelihood of divorce, higher expectations of divorce later in life, and a decreased desire to have children. Here, we aim to evaluate the overall effect of divorce on the society.

Keywords: Divorce, Separation, Mental health, Physical health.

INTRODUCTION

During the past 50 - 60 years, marital divorce has become more common and today ~50% of marriages in Norway end in divorce. An increasing number of children are exposed to single parenting, blended families and unstable family situations. According to Statistics Norway 9 950, children under the age of 18 experienced divorce in 2008 [1]. In reality far more children experience parental separation [2]. Concern about children growing up in single-parent households has been expressed, and many believe this may have persistent negative consequences for the children involved [3] [4]

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tasks or institutions: family, school, religion, marketplace and government. The reversal of the cultural and social status of divorce would be nothing less than a cultural revolution. Only a few generations ago, American culture rejected divorce as scandalous. Today, law, behavior, and culture embrace and even celebrate it. Divorce also permanently weakens the family and the relationship between children and parents. It frequently leads to destructive conflict management methods, diminished social competence and for children, the early loss of virginity, as well as diminished sense of masculinity or femininity for young adults. It also results in more trouble with dating, more cohabitation, greater likelihood of divorce, higher expectations of divorce

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Paul Amato, professor of sociology at Pennsylvania State University summed it up. Divorce leads to “disruptions in the parent-child relationship, continuing discord between former spouses, loss of emotional support, economic hardship, and an increase in the number of other negative life events.” Divorce detrimentally impacts individuals and society in numerous other ways. In religious practice, divorce diminishes the frequency of worship of God and recourse to Him in prayer [5]. In education, divorce diminishes children’s learning capacity and educational attainment. In the marketplace, divorce reduces household income and deeply cuts individual earning capacity. Divorce significantly increases crime, abuse and neglect, drug use, and the costs of compensating government services in Government. From the Health and well-being perspective, divorce weakens children’s health and longevity. It also increases behavioral, emotional, and psychiatric risks, including even suicide.

The effect of divorce on children’s hearts, minds, and souls ranges from mild to severe, from seemingly small to observably significant, and from short-term to long-term. None of the effects applies to each child of every divorced couple, nor has any one child suffered all the effects we will discuss. There is no way to predict how any particular child will be affected nor to what extent, but it is possible to predict divorce’s societal effects and how this large cohort of children will be affected as a group. These effects are both numerous and serious [6].

Parental Divorce and Socio-economic Status. Does Divorce Disable the Compensatory Effects of Social Origin?

A stronger negative association between parental divorce and children’s educational and occupational attainment for those coming from a higher socio-economic background would be a relevant finding not only for the debate on diverging destinies and family polarization. From a theoretical perspective too, such a result would be

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unexpected, and hence interesting. The literature on inter-generational mobility has emphasized that it is especially the lack of downward mobility of children from a high socio-economic background that prevents societies from moving towards more openness [9] [10]. Studies on educational performance have shown that when children from higher socio-economic backgrounds are faced with failure at school, they get a ‘second chance’ to achieve success in the system more often than others [11].

Greater negative effects of parental divorce on children of higher socio-economic status might therefore be a contrasting example, where, when faced with adversity, parents do not manage to compensate for the difficulties experienced by their children. Understanding why such ‘compensatory effects’ are absent in this case would therefore greatly enhance our understanding of the processes that determine the intergenerational transmission of social advantage in general.

Heterogeneity In The Effects Of Parental Divorce According To Parental Background

In 1988, Coleman argued that the effect of family SES (Socio-Economic Status) on children’s outcomes should be lower among single parent families. Given that parental divorce puts constraints on both the time and resources of parents, those from higher socio-economic backgrounds will have fewer opportunities to transmit advantages to their children. The empirical evidence accumulated supports this claim in general. Studies have looked at the inter-generational transmission of educational and occupational attainment [12]; [13] or at the heterogeneity of the effects of parental divorce according to SES and found children from higher social backgrounds to suffer more from parental divorce than others [14] [15]. The outcomes studied range from educational attainment, occupational status, children’s behavioural problems and their general well-being. The studies use a variety of moderators, such as parental education and also parental class,

occupation [16]; [17] and resources at home that could stimulate child development [18].

The results differ when looking at the effects of maternal resources. When authors have looked at the effects of mothers' resources separately, they have found smaller effects of parental divorce the more maternal resources are present. Because children often live with their mothers after divorce, it seems as if access to the outside parent's resources is less following divorce, but that the resources of the residential parent become essential. Congruent with these results, some studies have found that following divorce the inter-generational transmission of advantage becomes more dependent on the socio-economic background of the resident parent, who normally is the mother [19]; [20]. Given that the relationship between children and their mother does not normally worsen following divorce [21], this might point to the transmission of advantage by the mother being unaffected. Indeed, the mother's resources are likely to ease adjustment to the experience of divorce.

Most of the results quoted are based on cross-sectional data and therefore leave space for several other explanations. It could well be that the lower performance of children (and its predictors) was already present before divorce and that the patterns observed are due to distinct selection into divorce by educational level [22]. Two studies on behavioural outcomes have looked at the pre-divorce characteristics of children. They found for the UK that also when controlling for the pre-divorce behaviour of children the effects of parental divorce on post-divorce behaviour are greater when paternal resources are higher [23] and lower when maternal resources are higher [24]. However, none of the studies looking at educational outcomes have been able to effectively control for the pre-divorce educational performance of children. A longitudinal study that effectively controls for pre-divorce achievement and

other characteristics of children could therefore make a great step forward in investigating whether the effects of parental divorce observed are in fact causal or not (but cannot exclude the possibility that unobserved time-varying characteristics play a role).

Effects of Divorce on Children

The effects of parental conflict on children regarding divorce manifest themselves in a variety of ways. When exposed to continual conflict, children struggle because they obtain "a more disturbing view of the world" [25], and this altered worldview may lead to difficulty in future relationships as the children learn and internalize their parents' conflict styles [6]; [7]. Fortunately, research has shown that when divorces effectively decrease the amount of conflict between parents, the negative effects of the previously experienced conflict may be lessened; children in these situations have relationship success comparable to those from low-conflict families [11]. When parents divorce, if they take measures to have less conflict in their relationship, they can counteract the negative effects on their children due to previous conflict. [7] identified problems with trust and selflessness in future marital relationships as another frequent consequence of conflict on children. Interestingly, these effects were not found in children from intact families, indicating that children from divorced families are particularly influenced by conflictual family dynamics [14]. Although [18] reached a different finding that the effects of conflict were seen in children only when fighting parents stayed married and not when parents divorced many other studies have shown that conflict between parents does affect children even after their parents' divorce [20]; [21]. Even though parental conflict may not appear to have long-term effects on children, exposure to conflict may translate to hardship for those children in forming healthy romantic relationships.

CONCLUSION

High divorce rates have become a fact of life in most developed, western societies.

Although divorce rates have declined slightly in recent years in some countries,

we are unlikely to go back to the low levels of divorce that characterized the past. Although people often lament this trend, we should keep in mind that in the past, many continuously married couples were not particularly happy. The general availability of divorce has made it easier for people to leave dysfunctional or

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abusive marriages and seek greater happiness and fulfillment with more compatible partners. It makes little sense to return to a time in which marital dissolution was difficult to obtain and divorced individuals were scorned and stigmatized.

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