Divorce: Its Impact On Families And Children

Shashi Shukla

Research Consultant, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi, India
Abstract

A documentation study was conducted in Delhi to investigate the single parent families through divorce and influence of absent of one parent through divorce on children. The study investigated problems faced by these families in social, economic and emotional dimensions. The objective was to look at family dynamics and socialization pattern in single headed families. Data was obtained by using semi-structure interview schedule for both children and parent. Sample consisted of 20 single parent families which included 20 single parent and 20 children making a total sample of 40. The study was located in Delhi. The findings revealed that majority of the single parent have taken divorce as a positive decision of their life. All the parents have managed well the dual role and responsibility as bread winner, home manager and sole care giver to the children. There was no difference found in mother headed single family and father headed single family. All the single parents believed that divorce was a traumatic part of their life but its pain has decreased with time. All single parent families have developed strategies to cope with problems that occurred after divorce. Data reveals that mutual incompatibility, extra-marital affairs, drug addiction/ alcoholism, and dowry were among the main reason for divorce.

Keywords: Divorce, Family, Children, Trend, Education

1. Introduction

Marriage is defined as a bond between not only two people but between two families. Family owns a home and that home is often counterpoised against the whole world. Home is associated with shelter, refuge and safety. A heaven in the heartless world. But we cannot accept home as a space without problems or simply for nurturance and security. Change eve if it is for better is stressful because it demands adjustment and readjustment. Divorce represents change in social life, changes in parenting pattern, changes in financial status and changes in home life. A marriage has to pass through various role conflicts, which at the worse leads to marriage dissolution. There are various factors which impact the adjustment in marriages and sometimes the results are very disheartening at times for the couple involve, divorce is one form of it.

1.1 Definition Of Divorce

Divorce is legal dissolution of marriage and it has great socio-cultural implications. It is also viewed as a socially devised mean of dealing with marriage failure. If the married couple have children it leads to single parent families. Divorce not only has impact on the married partners rather it has great impact on the life, social and personal of children as well. The regular conflicts at home among the partners become the precursor for divorce. Divorce shows its serious impact on holistic development of the child, who is not able to understand the reasons for majority of conflicts and is only suffering throughout the process. A home
broken by divorce/separation of parents is likely to be a source of emotional disturbance and conflict for a child. The actual separation of parents is bad for the child. Bringing up a child in a safe and secure environment providing him/her with all basic needs to an healthy and meaningful life is a real challenge for both the parents but when after divorce one parent leaves the responsibility solely comes on the one who is taking care of the child, which at times becomes exhausting both for the parent and the child. To maintain a balance and get back to right tracks of life is one of the difficult process for the people involved. Restructuring your life and at the same time bringing up your child, while handling the social remarks in Indian society Single parenting is not at all a rosy picture, nor does it offer any extra reward for you doing it courageously and patiently.

Marital relationship is a very important factor influencing home environment and shaping personality of children. It involves the most intimate type of emotional relationship, mutual acceptance, cooperation, understanding, trust, self-sacrificing and sharing role responsibility. For better marital adjustment both husband and wife must learn to live together, to share, to compromise, to accommodate, to adjust and to plan together. Parental marital adjustment influence relationship of parents with their children thus shaping the personality development of children.

2. Literature Review

Freud (1905) and Burlingham (1973) acknowledge that the infant preoedipally cathected and identified with both mother and father. Father breaks the infantile, symbolic mother child relationship and thus “cuts the cord” between the two (as sited in Jasuja, 1993). Single parents stand at the cross section of various currents. Single parents are not essentialised, exclusive categories rather some of their dilemmas and concerns resonate with those of other parents and in fact, all parents as such.

In India, exact statistics on the incidence of single parent families are not available and it is even not clear what the cause of single parent families is? In India more than 70% of single parents are women. Single parent families are not a new concept, there can be various reasons for families being run by single parent. Some of the major reasons are death of the spouse, imprisonment of the spouse, migration for work, or job outside country to earn better livelihood, extramarital affairs leading to separation and also divorce. In India the institution family is very well acknowledged, still though the rates of divorce is very high, people are becoming single parents by adoption but the value of a complete normal family is much higher than any form of broken family or incomplete family. Initially when most of the families were joint and extended, one or two cases of separation/ divorce were hidden behind the larger screen but today when the families are nuclear the separation or divorce is recognised or I can say that absent of one parent is immediately recognised,
people still might attach stigma to such families but the truth is that single parent families are now large in number and are in open, they are not hidden behind any cover any more.

Children are the ones who are most affected by the process of divorce and also by the repercussions of divorce. Young children are not able to understand the reason of separation of the parents and thus the conflict in their mind is causing fear to them about parental separation. Children often in these cases feel that there is no one who wants to take care of them thus they feel dejected and neglected. Sometimes the impact of divorce is so harsh on children that they stop expressing their feelings, and become isolated leading to depression and negative energies. It is always been suggested by the experts that parents should avoid the conflicts in front of children, and should make the child understand the situation. The parental comfort and support from both the parents should be provided to the child. The child should not be made to feel that he is not needed, there should not be any confusion in mind of the child. Both parents should equally share the responsibility of the child and make this painful experience of his/her parents separation to be less painful for the child.

3. Single Parents In Delhi

A study done by Shukla (2005), on documentation of profiles of single parent families living in Delhi. She found all the single parents were financially independent and well qualified. The study investigated problems faced by these families in social, economic and emotional dimensions. The objective was to look at family dynamics and socialization pattern in single headed families. Data was obtained by using semi-structure interview schedule for both children and parent. Sample consisted of 20 single parent families which included 20 single parent and 20 children making a total sample of 40. The study was located in Delhi.

The findings revealed that majority of the single parent have taken divorce as a positive decision of their life. All the parents have managed well the dual role and responsibility as bread winner, home manager and sole care giver to the children. There was no difference found in mother headed single family and father headed single family. All the single parents believed that divorce was a traumatic part of their life but its pain has decreased with time. All single parent families have developed strategies to cope with problems that occurred after divorce. Data reveals that mutual incompatibility, extra-marital affairs, drug addiction/ alcoholism, and dowry were among the main reason for divorce.

In coping with their responsibilities and taking life as challenge, single parents develop various skills. As single parents cope with the demands made by multiple roles, they may be exhausted, conflicted, traumatized and/or healing. They negotiate risks and find new ways to survive. A single parent family may be healthy or fragile just as a dual parent family may be. Doing well has to do with feeling secure, having self-esteem,
steady emotional relationships and have stable home life. These conditions may or may not obtain in a single parent household, just as they may or may not obtain in a two parent family.

Most of the parent in the sample felt that they were gifted with a new life after divorce. The problem faced by them and the way that they coped through them helped make their personality stronger and more defined. Few parent reported feeling lonely sometimes still they themselves pointed out the loneliness was favourable then the tension that they had undergone while they were married.

4. Conclusion

Divorce is on the rise. Whether it’s metropolitan city or a small town, the upper classes or the middle classes, educated or illiterate, the divorce is again coming to be defined as necessary evil in the society. In Delhi the figures are have jumped from one to two cases in 1960’s to approx. nine thousand cases in present year. Divorce is widely viewed as deliberate violation of the sacred unity of the family. Yet people involved in it at some point feel that divorce is the legal solution to the pain and agony they suffer when married. Divorce in most of the cases provides peace and relief to parties involved. Children of divorce need a lot of soft counselling and conducive environment to survive the loss that will be part of their life, from the time of divorce. The fights and arguments that the children have been witnessing have to be evaporated from the memories and this can only happen in a conducive and supporting environment. The single parent who is living with the children, and forming the single parent family needs to focus on his/her health as well. Life for everyone needs a smooth path and thus single parent families also will need to work towards the smooth and stress free life.

5. References


