

World Perspective of Divorce in Selected Countries: A Sociological Appraisal

Mohammad Taghi Sheykhi

Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran

Correspondence:

Professor Emeritus of Sociology,
Alzahra University,
Tehran, Iran Tel: 009821-22859416

Emails: mtshykhi@alzahra.ac.ir, mtshykhi@yahoo.com

Received: April 2020; Accepted: May 2020; Published: June 1, 2020.

Citation: Mohammad Taghi Sheykhi World Perspective of Divorce in Selected Countries: A Sociological Appraisal. World Family Medicine. 2020; 18(6): 66-70 DOI: 10.5742/MEWFM.2020.93823

Abstract

The present paper investigates the quality and quantity of divorce events taking place all over the world more than any time before. The given action creates social, economic, educational, emotional and many more consequences for the families of various cultures, religions, social settings, moralities, and administrative infrastructures. While divorce is a stigma in one society, it is a regular norm in the other. So, attitudes toward divorce is quite different in the societies of the world. Divorce is being facilitated all over the world due to modernization and industrialization processes, and the outcome of social change. Sociologists must be quite vigilant to the phenomenon which is breaking families and creating social problems of all sorts. However, it is sociology that can judge and assess the demerits of divorce. Many of the apparent social issues emerging such as drug abuse, child labor, criminal behaviors and many more, are somehow or other associated with divorce. Method of research used in the present article is of qualitative type, and the article eventually concludes that the outcome of divorce is widely different in sociological terms affecting both parties of parents as well as children to a greater extent.

Key words: Divorce. Culture. Modernization. Stigma. Social issues

Introduction

Divorce being a painful event for families and societies, is increasingly taking place in almost all societies. It is the beginning of new relationships; both parties (men and women) will encounter new life, new values, and new lifestyles. Though some challenges fade away, new challenges emerge. In post-divorce era, children highly face problems materially, emotionally, and from the viewpoints of caring, socialization etc. Among the industrial countries, USA has the highest frequency of divorce; one of every two marriages leads to divorce. Then it is the European countries having an average of 40% of marriages breaking down into divorce. Due to increasing socio-cultural change that is constantly appearing, in many countries where divorce was a taboo before, it is currently highly taking place. Many non-industrial countries in which women have gained more rights, benefits, education and independence in recent decades, divorce takes place in an unprecedented number, and that becomes a new value, being followed by younger generations. Countries like India and Iran in which a low number of divorces once took place, currently high numbers of divorces are registered every year.

Children's adjustment to divorce in family is quite hard to believe. They are the only members of the family who lose a lot. Parents may remarry and continue life, but children lose the process of socialization, emotional attachments, face loneliness, living with one parent, in a stepfather/mother situation or none (in a nursing home). Such children will eventually repeat the cycle in their twenties or so. Many of such children become child laborers in nonindustrial countries. They are usually called "Parasites" by other members of the society. Children may also suppress emotions and the need for connection with others as a means of self-protection. However, they may rationalize that if they get too close to people, others cannot hurt them. Children may also bully other children due to not having learnt how to express emotions in a right way.

Method of Research

Methodology used in the present article is of qualitative type. In that, various paradigms have been used to find out facts regarding divorce. Qualitative research usually studies people or areas in their natural settings. In finding facts for the research, the researcher engaged in careful data collection and thoughtful analysis of what was relevant. In the documentary research applied in the present article, printed and written materials were widely regarded. The research was performed as a qualitative library type in which the researcher had to refer to relevant and related sources. In the current research various documents were thoroughly investigated, and the needful inferences were made. The data fed by the investigator in the present article is hopefully reliable. Though literature on divorce is very limited, yet the author tried to investigate many different resources in order to elicit the necessary information to build up the text.

Healthy Adjustment

When divorce is taking place, healthy relationships are highly recommended. In that, parents are advised to share their emotional experiences toward their children. In this process, one way is through the practice of emotional coaching (Gottman, 1997). It encourages the divorcing parents to help their children to learn how to process emotions effectively and to regulate strong emotional experiences. Skills that are particularly important in co-parenting, include the practice of principles which better enable parents to regulate their emotions as well.

Active availability of parental and other caregivers is critical after divorce. That is because children generally develop attachment bonds with many significant caregivers including grandparents and other close family friends. But, none is as strong as parents. Children's ability and resilience to changes after the hard process of divorce depends on maintenance of healthy attachment bonds.

Another issue appearing in some families and within some spouses is abandonment or desertion in which sometimes one spouse leaves family, and in that a lot of problems are created for the other spouse and children such as emotional and financial difficulties created as a result. It occasionally happens through migration. It used to occur in fewer instances before, but in recent decades it is appearing more ___ leaving behind lots of family, financial and emotional problems. That is even worse than divorce, since the relationships are not yet officially disrupted; the family is still waiting for the absentee to return. In the US, many such cases are heard especially among the migrants. So, if the disengagement persists, it eventually leads to divorce. However, abandonment has also an impact on the larger society, when society becomes burdened with the responsibility to support the abandoned spouse or family financially through government –funded programs, but the emotional vacuum is still there and un-responded (Durkee, 2010).

Divorce in China

In China both parties of husband and wife can have the power to divorce. But, it requires the agreement of both. At the same time, they should have the economic power to protect themselves such as their property (Retrieved, 2002). Since 1949, after the People's Republic was declared, the country's new Marriage Law was explicitly modified; and the new lawful divorces came into being. Based on that, women had permission to divorce their husbands, and many did so. But the declaration created lots of challenges and many women who were blocked to do so, committed suicide. It has by now become very commonplace—reaching 1.4 for every 1000 people, roughly about twice as compared with the data of 1982. Yet, the divorce rate is less than half of what it is in the United States (Retrieved, 2009). Such a divorce perspective in China is mainly due to social change as a result of economic growth, industrialization and urbanization in that country. Similarly, as more and more women have access to higher education and economic independence, all have contributed to the increasing divorce rate in China.

Moreover, another reason for appearance of more divorces in China is because of an amendment added to Marriage Law in 2001, which shortened the divorce application procedure (Romantic Materialism, 2011). As investigated, high cell phone penetration in China has also destroyed the family harmony and fidelity paving the route to more divorces (Zhang, 2018). As marriage maintenance has decreased due to rising divorces in recent years, many public discussions and governmental organisations often criticize it. To prevent the increasing rare of divorce, some divorce buffer bureaus have been established in some marriage registration offices in certain provinces in order to control some divorce events (Sina.Com 2011). Despite the increasing rate of divorce in China at present, there was a custom sororate marriage there in which a man could marry the sister(s) of his wife, being alive, dead or infertile.

Table 1: Global Divorce Rates (1960-2017)

Year	Percent
1960	12%
1970	16%
1980	26%
1990	28%
2000	35%
2010	41%
2017	44%

Source: BCCL 2000.

Divorce in India

Though divorce was in quite small numbers, and a taboo in India once, based on social change, higher literacy, industrialization, urbanization and women's higher employment rate, the divorce rate has considerably gone up within all communities in India in recent decades. So, many couples facing difficulties are increasingly deciding to part their ways legally unparalleled with the past in Indian history. But, before the legal divorce takes place, the husband and wife would have lived separately for a year. They should also prove that their marriage has totally collapsed, and needs to be dissolved.

Under such circumstances they can file their petition for divorce.

The Hindu Marriage Act 1955 includes all the citizens of India including Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews by region. Divorce law in India highly stresses on adultery. Any one of the spouses indulged in such an act is subject to divorce. Also, in case a wife is acknowledged of any marriage by her husband, can apply for a petition to divorce. Cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Pune are facing increasing numbers of divorces annually. Sociologically speaking, what the country needs in this regard, is more marriage counselors to patch up the differences, and pass away the divorce decisions, and instead, bring about mutual consent between the couples. Divorce, as an unexpected milestone in a person's life in India leads to increasing difficulties. The post-divorce life is challenging in India, being faced by financial hardships especially for the women. Divorces may also be deviated by choosing the wrong and faulty route according to Indian norms and values.

Divorce in the Philippines

The Philippines with a population of over 108 million, does not practice divorce, but the move toward legalizing it is under way. Many couples like other countries have differences with each other, but being Roman Catholic, they cannot apply for divorce. Only Muslims who are roughly 5% of the entire population in that country can do so. The only other country where divorce remains illegal is the Vatican City. A bill passed by the Philippines House of Representatives is giving hope to proponents of divorce. It will hopefully permit and legalize divorce in cases of irreconcilable differences, abuse, abandonment and infidelity.

In case of prohibition of divorce and shortage of population control in the Philippines, the situation has left the country with a total fertility rate (TFR) of 2.7 children for a woman in 2019. As over 80% of people in the Philippines are Catholic, the church has a powerful influence in the country. Under such circumstances many marriages are remaining irreparable in the country. In this way, they want to revive the sanctity of the marriage and family within the population.

Divorce in Germany

While Germany faced the highest rate of divorce among the EU countries in the past, the proportion of divorce has decreased in that country in the past few years. In 2011, a total of 187,640 marriages were dissolved, compared with 148,066 in the year 2018; a decrease of around 21%. Based on the Eurostat, the divorce rate in Germany which is the highest in Europe, or so to say, 2.3 per 1000 people has fallen to 1.9 per 1000 inhabitants; below the average of 2.0 in Europe. Such statistics mean that marriages currently appear to last longer as compared with past decades (Schlun & Elseven, 2020).

The decision to divorce is often a hard one. It is psychologically a difficult time to start and end it. Lawyers play an important role to make it smooth and possible. After divorce has taken place, their child (ren) is/are separated to one of them. However, the child has the right to contact both parents. In order to have a legal divorce, both spouses should have lived apart at least for a year. Similarly, in case both parties are wealthy and have a lot of assets, there would emerge disputes lengthening the process of divorce event. The cost of getting a divorce in Germany depending on circumstance would be between Euro 1000 and 3000. This cost usually has to be split between the couple. However, in case of low income families, the divorce costs could be reduced or totally waived by the court.

Divorce in Australia

In Australia, divorce is not so fast or instantaneous. To apply for a divorce, spouses must be separated for at least twelve months, only then can the divorce procedure start. Lawyers can help in seeking legal advice for divorce.

Support for children under the age of 18 needs to be decided. Similarly, the filing fee for divorce application of \$ 910 needs to be paid by the applicants. In case of financial hardships, reduced fees may be applied. However, property distribution or arrangements for children, financial support and other wealth issues are determined later and after the divorce. Marriages that happened overseas may be applicable to divorce under certain conditions such as being Australian citizen, ordinarily living in Australia, and having done the 12 months of separation etc.

Crude divorce rate dropped from 4.6 divorces earlier to just 2 in 2017. One reason for such a drop in divorce rate is a decrease in marriage rate, and more interest in cohabitation. However, as the average life span has increased to 82 in 2016, average age of marriage age has also gone up to 30 years. Divorce rate has increased by 5.2% from 2016 to 2017. In 2017, the number of marriages was 112,954, and the number of divorces was 40,032. So the ratio of divorce to marriage was

$$\text{Divorce to Marriage Ratio} = \frac{\text{Number of Divorces}}{\text{Number of Marriages}} \times 100$$

Table 2: Selected Divorce Rates by Country and Population 2019

Country	Number of Divorces Per 1000 Population	Population 2019
Guatemala	0.4	17.581.742
Qatar	0.4	2.832.067
Peru	0.5	32.510.453
Ireland	0.6	4.882.495
Malta	0.8	440.372
Greece	1.0	10.473.455
Uzbekistan	1.0	32.981.716
Mexico	1.1	127.575.529
Armenia	1.2	2.957.731
Azerbaijan	1.3	10.047.718
Bulgaria	1.5	7.000.119
Italy	1.6	60.550.075
Turkey	1.6	83.429.615
Belgium	2.0	11.539.328
South Korea	2.1	51.225.308
Spain	2.1	46.736.776
Iran	2.3	82.913.906
Czech Republic	2.4	10.689.209
Sweden	2.4	10.036.379
Finland	2.5	5.532.156
United States	2.5	329.064.917
Cuba	2.9	11.333.483
Ukraine	3.1	43.993.638
Russia	4.7	145.872.256

Source: Marriage and Divorce, 2020, American Psychological Association

Also, the most common age for getting a divorce is 45.5 for males and 42.9 for females in Australia.

Divorce in Africa

Widowhood and divorce are very common in Africa. Statistics show that 10% of African women are widows, and out of every six women, one is a divorcee. So, female-headed households are growing all across the continent. Women must seriously struggle to respond to the economic hardship. There is a sort of inequality after divorce in terms of arrangements of child custody, property rights, and inheritance. Women are seriously hurt under the divorce event, and such impacts are really understudied in Africa.

One of the African countries where divorce takes quite a long time is South Africa where there are civil marriages and customary marriage. In both cases, marriage needs to be dissolved by a court. However, in case a spouse is not wanting divorce, divorce could be granted without his or her consent. Legal separation does not exist in South Africa even if you are no longer living with your husband and not divorced. According to law you are still married. There are two types of in South Africa: contested and uncontested divorces. The uncontested divorce is found to be very effective for all the parties concerned. It could be finalized within four weeks, whereas in case of contested divorce, it will take more than two years. (Retrieved, 2017).

Niger also in West Africa have divorce courts taking place on sidewalks around which lots of men and women gather to see what is going on. In this way, divorce easily takes place in Niger. In Niger where there is child marriage, abortion is also legal there (New York Times, January 11, 2019).

Eventuality of Divorce

The consequence of divorce is not generally a happy life in any society; in the industrial or unindustrial world. Over 40% of American children experience parental divorce or separation in their childhood (Sun, 2008), which is very hurting and painful. They have to live with a step mother, or step father, or spend their childhood in a home which is not quite natural, and not as warm as their parents' home. They are usually deprived of natural parenting and affection. Such children of divorce are usually deprived of educational attainment, job prestige and good income in their adulthood. Similarly, their psychological well-being is hurt and affected. The situation is a lot different for post-divorce children. They mostly become child labor, and gradually face socio-demographic challenges like early marriage, more children, more mortality, shorter life expectancy and many more.

It has been shown that those who had divorced, did not have a happier life than those who had stayed together (Waite, 2003). Studies show that children after the death

of a parent are usually as happy as before that, whereas children after divorce do not have that level of happiness as before the event (Tebeka, 2016).

Divorce in OECD Countries

Most of the OECD countries have experienced a dramatic change in their divorce rates in the past 50 years; from 1.0 to 1.9 per 1000 population (Aassve, 2007). This unprecedented change in the statistics of divorce is more due to change in social norms and culture to trivialize divorce. World-wide speaking, marriages happening today, are more likely to divorce than generations before because of greater social acceptance and easier procedures of divorce.

In general, standards of living decrease more for the women than for men (Bonnet, et al. 2015). When a woman has the custody of the children, it is even worse. In this way, women are highly more prone to poverty after divorce than what happens to men. Similarly, divorce causes the unemployability of women already employed as they have to care for their children, and poverty of children as well.

However, divorce which is happening more than any time before, has lots of social costs, emotional costs, challenges and poverty for the women and children. So, it is a multi-dimensional risk impacting the well-being of women and resulting in a shorter life span for them.

Asia too as the largest continent has variously been facing rising rates of divorce in its different parts in the past four decades. In East Asian countries, divorce rates have been highly rising since 1980. In Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong, the increase has been considerable since 1990. As a special case, between 1995-2008 when the financial crisis happened, substantial increase in divorce emerged there. For example, family honor, appearances, and number of children were points impacting the rise in divorce in South Korea. Likewise, the big city environment and increasing economic independence of women affected the divorce rate to rise. Asia with a high degree of urbanization, is widely facing change through divorce (Premchand, 2017).

Conclusion

Divorce leads to a large number of problems for the separated partners, children, parents of the divorced etc. Results of divorce are different from country to country according to socio-cultural norms and values of those countries. Children will be the most affected after divorce. They are seriously emotionally affected, and will likely not be able to use their potentialities. A cycle of repeated divorces may follow in the years to come too. Adjustment will be hard for the children to pursue. Similarly, availability of parental care-giving would deteriorate, and the substitutes like grandparents cannot provide the same standards as the parents. Another type of marital suspension which happens and is different from legal and formal divorce, is abandonment or desertion in which usually the male spouse leaves home without saying where he is. Such an action too seriously hurts the family.

After divorce, women lose more. They may age without marrying again. Divorce being a stigma, in many countries and cultures, leaves women with hardships. They will be socially and economically in trouble. The proportion of divorce has gone up in different countries since 1950 according to their social and industrial change. Women's economic independence has highly impacted the rate of divorce in any country whether industrial or industrializing. Countries where which divorce was entirely a taboo, is currently happening normally there more due to social change and urbanization in the country. Tables show how divorce is growing in traditional and modern societies. Some countries like the Philippines with special moral and religious code of behavior does not allow the divorce practice, but is intending to enact new laws to legalize it. The divorce rate is quite high in countries like US and Germany, a practice appearing as a social norm. In traditional societies illegitimacy is something forbidden (a social stigma), while in the modern world it is widely observed and practiced. In the industrial world, divorce occurs more in later ages, while in the developing world it mostly happens in earlier ages. However, divorce needs more interpretation and analysis in sociological and psychological terms in order to reduce it. One main reason contributing to the increase of divorce worldwide, is the application of cell phones that emotionally part spouses from each other.

References

- 1- Aassve, A., et al. (2007), Marital Disruption and Economic Well-being: A Comparative Analysis, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society)*, 170(3), PP.781-799.
- 2- BBCL 2000, All Rights Reserved.
- 3- Bonnet, C., et al.,(2015), "Les variations de niveau de vie des hommes et des femmes a la suite d'un divorce ou d'une rupture de pacs", *Insee references, couples et Families*, PP. 51-61.
- 4- Divorce is Increasingly Common, Retrieved, 2009.
- 5- Durkee, B.,(2010), *Navigating Marital Abandonment*, Amazon Create Space.
- 6- Gotman, J., et al. (1997), *Raising and Emotionally Intelligent Child*, New York, Simon and Schuster.
- 7- *Marriage and Divorce (2020)*, American Psychological Association, *World Population Review*.
- 8- Zhang, J. et al. (2018), Does Mobile Phone Affect Divorce Rates? Evidence from China, *Sustainability (MDPI)*, 2018, 103301, DOI 103390.
- 9- *New York Times*, January 11, 2019.
- 10- Premchand, D. et al. (2017), *Divorce Trends in Asia*, Nanyang Technological University.
- 11- Retrieved, 2002.
- 12- Retrieved, 2017.
- 13- *Romantic Materialism*, (2011), *Development of Marriage Institution and Related Norms in China*, *Thinking Chinese*.
- 14- Schlun and Elseven, *Rechtsanwalte*, Retrieved 2020.
- 15- Sina.Com 2011.
- 16- Sun, Y. and Li, Y. (2008), Parents' Marital Disruption and its Uneven Effect on Children's Academic Performance, 37, 449-460.
- 17- Tebeka, S., et al. (2016), Parental Divorce or Death During Childhood and Adolescence, and its Association with Mental Health. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 204 (9)678-685.
- 18- Waite, J., et al.(2003).