

Divorce And The Challenges Of Children Upbringing In The Contemporary Family Life

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Abstract

The paper appraised the challenges faced by children in the contemporary family life as a result of divorce. The emphasis is on some specific interplay of factors in the process of children upbringing. Content analysis based on existing literature was applied in determining the causes, effects and challenges posed by divorce in children upbringing. The study observed the way children perceive divorce. The paper equally discussed the individual variation and abandoned children as a result of divorce, which have acutely plagued in the contemporary family life. Finally, the study proffered alternative strategies on how to checkmate the effect of divorce on children upbringing in our contemporary family life.

Introduction

Divorce is a growing social problem. It has caused so many discomfort in our contemporary family life. Divorce has made couples to pass through a period of strong emotional trauma. It is a distressing stage in which one or both couples have decided on taking legal steps. Imagine, the love that once existed from the onset has turned into hatred, resentment and hostility. Some people even feel so much psychic pain that they turn to alcohol or other substances in an attempt to put the matter out of their mind. Even, there are those who fall into deep depression, others come down with some illness, due to the involvement in divorce (Melgosa *et al.*, n.d). Also, loneliness is equally a widespread condition both spouses feel tremendously occasioned by divorce.

Still commenting on the agony of divorce, Oneke (2004), observed that divorce is painfully destructive and nothing good comes out of it. He equally lamented that divorce is usually accompanied by excruciating pain

occasioned by the breaking of a relationship as intimate as marriage, and is more intense and complicated when children are involved. Children from divorced families face the problem of academic performance, juvenile problems, food and clothing. Children who grow up in divorced families often have more difficulties getting along with siblings, peers, and their parents. Furthermore, adolescents who experience divorce are likely to engage in delinquent activities to get involved in early sexual activity, and to experiment with illegal drugs.

Furthermore, Melgosa *et al.* (n.d) opined that coparental divorce is perhaps the most emotionally charged and the most difficult to overcome. This is a case where many fathers (or mothers) stop paying the stipulated maintenance of their family life. Melgosa (n.d) went further to argue that some fathers and mothers manipulate their children so they stop loving the other parent. Certain mothers or fathers who have divorced do not allow the corresponding visits of their children to each other depending on the side where their children are residing at that moment. At this juncture, some fathers or mothers get frustrated by the situation, “kidnap” their child in order to spend some time with him (her). Sometimes, a young child who has come of age and was brought up by his/her mother, for instance, shows a strong desire to know his/her father better and decides to go and live with him. This singular act irritates, worries and frustrates the mother, and makes divorce never-ending.

Definitive Overview of Basic Concepts

We need to define some concepts used in this study, particularly those of family, marriage and divorce.

Family is a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility for caring for children (Giddens, *et al.* 2005:446). Murdock (1949) defined family as “a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children owned or adopted, of the sexually co-habiting adults” (see Haralambos & Holborn, 2004:466). Macionis (2006:346) see family as a social institution that unites people in cooperative groups to oversee the bearing and raising of children. Madukwe (2008:1) describes it as a group of people (parents and children) living in the same place, having common characteristics, interests and a common source. To her family living is the way and manner family members stay together.

Marriage is a legal union or relationship between two people; a man and a woman who are married as husband and wife. The Nigerian society believes that marriage should be between a young man and a young woman who are in love with each other. Iffih and Ezeah (2004) see marriage as a durable union between one or more men and one or more women sanctioned by society. Okeke (1997) opined that marriage is a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognized by custom or law and involves certain rights or duties both in the case of the parties entering the union and in the case of the children born into it. Marriage is of good value most especially in the area of procreation that is bearing children. These children help in developing and harnessing the manpower requirement of a nation. Macionis (2006) define marriage as a legal relationship, usually involving economic cooperation as well as sexual activity and childbearing that people expect to last.

Kendall (2003:487) asserts that divorce is the legal process of dissolving a marriage that allows former spouses to remarry if they so choose. Most divorces today are granted on the grounds of irreconcilable differences, meaning that there has been a breakdown of the marital relationship for which neither partner is specifically blamed. Haralambos and Holborn (2004) view divorce as the legal termination of a marriage.

Explaining Adjustment to Divorce: Theoretical Perspectives

Numerous theoretical perspectives have been used to explain how adults adjust to divorce, including feminist theories, social exchange theory, family systems theory, social learning theory, and sociobiological theories. However, many researchers apply family stress theory to offer two general models of adult adjustment. The crisis model suggests that divorce poses a crisis for divorcing adults that results in temporary declines in well-being, but from which most individuals ultimately recover. The chronic strain model depicts divorce as setting a number of other stressful events into motion (e.g., moving to a new neighborhood, ongoing conflict between the former spouses, economic hardship) that send divorced individuals into a downward spiral from which they never fully recover. Research supports both models to some degree. In a review of research from the 1990s regarding the consequences of divorce, Amato (2000) found that the crisis model best described the postdivorce experiences of some individuals, and the chronic strain model best described the experiences of others. He concluded that both models contained some truth, and that the determination of which model more accurately depicted postdivorce adjustment largely depended upon

characteristics of the individuals studied (e.g., education, age, self-esteem), as well as the context in which the divorce occurred (e.g., social support networks, child custody status).

Adult Adjustment

Divorce affects the couple economically, mentally, emotionally, and physically. Divorce also influences the current and future relationships of the couple. Despite the predominant belief that only negative outcomes exist (deficit perspective), divorce also benefits some individuals. Best viewed as a process rather than a discrete event, divorce influences individuals before the divorce occurs, immediately following the divorce, and years later.

Economic outcomes. Because of the political and policy implications of the economic situation associated with divorce, much attention has focused on its economic impact. In the United States, Canada, and most other countries, women generally experience a decline in their economic situation following divorce, whereas men undergo lesser declines or slight increases in their economic status. It is important to note that differences in both the magnitude of these changes and the disparity between men and women's postdivorce economic outcomes have been debated (see Braver and O'Connell 1998, for a discussion of U.S. findings). However, research shows that German men fare better than U.S. men after divorce, and German women fare worse than U.S. women (Burkhauser et al. 1991). Similarly, Indian women generally fare worse economically than their U.S. counterparts, whereas Indian men experience little or no economic disruption following divorce (Amato 1994).

Mental and emotional outcomes. Studies demonstrate that divorced individuals exhibit higher levels of depression and anxiety than do individuals who are married, and those divorced also tend to have poorer self-concepts and exhibit more symptoms of psychological distress (compared with those who are married). Those with a history of two or more divorces report significantly more depression than either those with one divorce or those who are not divorced (Kurdek 1991), suggesting the cumulative nature of stress from divorce. Research findings are similar in other countries, as Amato (1994) found that two-thirds of divorced women in India suffer severe emotional problems. Further, Cotten (1999) noted that the common practice of categorizing divorced and widowed individuals into a single group underestimates the actual depression levels of divorced individuals, because widows often exhibit lower levels of depression and psychological distress.

Consistent with the crisis model of divorce adjustment, depressive symptoms appear to peak shortly after the divorce and then gradually decline for most.

Physical outcomes. Divorced individuals also have more health problems and higher mortality rates than married or other nondivorced persons. Divorced adults exhibit more risk-taking behaviors (e.g., elevated rates of drugs and alcohol use/abuse). Particularly among those recently divorced, there is an increased risk for illness, likely due to poorer immune system functioning from the stress associated with divorce (Kitson and Morgan 1990).

Causes and Prevention of Divorce in Contemporary Family Life

Existing literature has identified a number of factors that could lead to divorce. Kendall (2003:487) stated that the societal factors associated with rates of divorce include changes in social institutions, such as religion and family. Oneke (2004) opined that people make a mistake especially in settling down with a person of different religious beliefs system. This incident for sure is likely to bring problems and challenges. Oneke (2004) further stated that as far as love is concerned, it will handle the conflicting measure associated with religious issues and this in turn will affect the quality of the relationship. This is so because, there will not be the possibility of two people sharing different religious belief and ideas think of flowing together. Invariably, there is likely to be pains, heartache and argument daily.

Unfamiliar family background and children upbringing could lead to divorce. In other words, there is the need to consider the family background and upbringing of one's partner and relate it with ones family background, value and your upbringing. It is not ideal to expect two people from different family background to have the same training. However, Oneke (2004) asserts that for both to flow together the difference in their orientation should not be much as not to have conflict in their marriage. He went further to say that compatible partners are partners that share similar dreams and goals in life. Oneke (2004) equally advised that it is important that both should not have vision and dreams that conceal each other. Rather they should share or support the vision of ones' spouse.

Individualism according to Macionis (2006: 357) is on the increase and this could cause divorce. This is a case where family members devote less time together. He is of the view that we have become more individualistic, more concerned with our own personal happiness than with the wellbeing of our families and children. In order words, one should devote

more time to the family and also work for the interest of the family instead of being concerned with one's own personal happiness. Macionis further stated that women who are less dependent on men could equally cause divorce. In this case, women's increased participation in the labour force has reduced wives' financial dependency on their husbands. Thus, women find it easier to leave unhappy marriages. He equally argued that many of today's marriages are stressful. He cited a case where both partners working outside the home in most cases, jobs leave less time and energy for family life. This makes raising children harder than ever. Children do stabilize some marriages, but divorce is most common during the early years of marriage when many couples have young children.

Poor communication between couples could lead to divorce. This is a situation whereby couples do not understand each other. Through effective communication, couples learn to recognize and understand the meaning of certain issues that may crop up and also facial expressions and body language will be vividly understood.

A person's socioeconomic position has a strong influence which could lead to divorce. Despite the stereotype that divorce is a middle-class phenomenon, and despite increases in the divorce rate in all socio-economic levels, divorce rates have always been higher among lower-income people, and among those with less education (Kendall, 2003). In other words, there should be a stable finance that can sustain the family and equally educational background must be considered before marriage. Oneke (2004:31) is of the view that a highly educated person will have problem marrying a stark illiterate all in the name of love. If a high social person marries a non-social person, it will bring a lot of opposition, which could lead to divorce.

A person who thinks differently from how the other think cannot make a good mate and this could lead to divorce if adequate action is not taken. Similarly, a person who is generally slow and sluggish about everything different from the other could equally lead to divorce. Therefore, one should make a good mate with the person whose energy level is so high, who likes camping, sports, hiking or partying but his partner is of the indoor type. Unless both parties share near equal energy level, they will have quite some challenges (Oneke, 2004).

Unsatisfactory sexual activities between couples could lead to divorce. Because of the intense sexual attraction between some couples, they allow emotion to lead them. Some couples sometimes deny each other their body. At times even when they do, it will not be satisfactorily done. Both

sides will not reach orgasm. So once intercourse sets in, any one that first reaches orgasm should help the other to reach equally.

Interference of in-laws especially female in-laws in the affairs of the family or even their control will contribute immensely to divorce. In other words, couples should be left alone without any third party no matter how close the person is to the family.

Viewing Divorce From Children's Perspective

Young Children

It's important to keep in mind that the way adults understand or experience a situation is quite different from the way children experience it. No matter their age, children have a limited ability to understand what is happening during a divorce, what they are feeling and why. Younger children see things from their own perspective, that is, they see themselves as the cause of events. This is why younger children often blame themselves or invent imaginary reasons for their parents' divorce. Many children will say to themselves; "if only I had behaved better or helped Mum and Dad get along better, they would still be together. They may imagine that their parents will walk out of the door and never come back. Too afraid to tell anyone, they believe they are the only one in the world who feels this way (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/mh-sm/divorce/2-eng.php>).

Most children believe their parents will get back together, or wish that they would. Because of their limited ability to imagine the future, younger children cling to the only reality they know. Even children who have experienced or witnessed abuse may wish their parents would stay together. No matter what the circumstances, children develop a profound bond and a deep sense of loyalty to both parents.

Also, because children first learn and build their sense of self by watching and interacting with their parents, those children who witness parental argument often experience it as though they are personally involved. It is obvious that young children cannot separate themselves from their parents. Worse still, it is very hard for children to understand why the two most important people in their lives, on whom they depend for their very safety and survival, cannot get along. Children do not understand why an argument would cause one of their parents to leave. When parents continually argue, their children get caught in the middle. They worry about having to

take sides and about pleasing both parents – a very heavy burden for a child (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/mh-sm/divorce/2-eng.php>).

Pre-teens and Teenagers

Children of this age have a growing ability to understand human problems. At the same time, they are becoming their own person. Developmentally, pre-teens and teenagers are going through a lot of change. They experience conflicting emotions and needs sometimes torn between wanting independence and protection, freedom and guidance, love and detachment. Whereas younger children typically view divorce as the enemy, pre-teens and teenagers tend to hold their parents accountable for the divorce. They will most likely react to their parents' news of separation with anger, and older teenagers may wonder about their own capacity to build good relationships.

Furthermore a child was narrating his experience thus: “they would fight a lot and I was really young, and I didn't really know what was happening and so I would think it was my fault. And I would sit in my room and not know what to do. And I always thought that maybe it was my fault (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/mh-sm/divorce/2-eng.php>).

It's important to be aware that the emotional experience of anger is common to all children, just as it is to adults. But children, pre-teens and teenagers express it differently. As a basic human feeling, the experience of pain is at the heart of anger.

Teenagers have the advantage of a growing maturity and understanding of human relationships. However, this greater understanding makes them aware of how life will change, from housing to disruptions in their school and social life. Therefore pre-teens and teenagers will worry about how the divorce will affect them – both now and in the future. You can help by encouraging them to talk about their feelings, express disappointment and fears, and give them some clues on how to deal with the challenges that may likely occur.

Divorce and the Challenges of Children Upbringing

One instructive means of thinking about divorce is to consider divorce not as a single event that influence people's lives, but rather as a process. This conceptualization of divorce suggests that the manner in which divorce ultimately affects children involves a confluence of factors and processes that occur early in the divorce, as well as processes occurring after the divorce. Moreover, this line of reasoning suggests that many negative effects for children in divorced families may be due to exposure to traumatic

experiences and processes that have nothing to do with divorce per se. That is, children whose parents divorce witness negative family interaction prior to a divorce and also experience many life transitions and strained familial relationships after divorce (Rodgers and Pryor, 1998).

It is equally glaringly clear that there will be no exceptions, in age or circumstances, when children do not suffer bitterly in the process of divorce. There has been a build-up over the last few decades in psychological and sociological research aimed at identifying the pains and traumatic experience divorce leaves on children. These findings are divided among:

- (a) Studies stating that divorce leave permanent marks which accompany them into adulthood (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1996).
- (b) Studies confirming that divorce seriously affect young children for a limited period.
- (c) Studies confirming that the first two years of divorce seriously affect young children for a limited period, but they can return to normal after that (Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch, 1996).

In other words, all the studies conducted show that divorce process affects the children's normal development in some way. This is an indication that all children went through a devastating experience. Melgosa and Melgosa (n.d:152) commenting on the study, stated that the effect is largely dependent on the childhood problems present prior to the divorce. They went ahead to say that those children already in a problematic situation tend to suffer tremendously. On the other hand, those who did not have problems before the divorce are quicker in returning to normal.

In addition, the process of unraveling and family dissolution continues, coupled with numerous potentially life-altering transitions for children. Following divorce, children live in many different family forms, but the most common pattern is that they live with their mothers and have less contact with their fathers. A research conducted in the United States revealed that five of every six single-parent households are headed by a mother (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). As a result, a common alteration that children are forced to make is an adjustment to life without their father at home. Most children share time between the mother's household and the father's household, and families are creative in finding ways for children to maintain meaningful relationships with both parents. For example, children change residences to accommodate changes in their relationships with their parents, changes in parental employment, remarriage, and step family formation (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992). Still, most children suffer from declining father involvement after divorce. National surveys indicate that more than

one-fourth of children living in single-mother families never saw their fathers at least weekly, and among those children who maintain regular contact with their fathers, less than one-third had opportunities to spend significant amounts of time with them. There is evidence, however, that frequent father-child interaction and close relationships are common in African-American families. Postdivorce father involvement is also higher among fathers who had very close relationships with their children prior to divorce, fathers who live near their children and fathers who have joint custody (Arditti and Keith, 1993; Mott, 1990). These studies provide further evidence to suggest that characteristics of families prior to and after divorce ultimately influence the adjustment and well-being of children. Cherlin (1999) argue that the general effect of divorce on children are: almost all children experience an initial period of intense emotional upset after their parents separation; Most resume normal development without serious problems within about two years after the separation; A minority of children experience some long-term problems as a result of the breakup that may persist into adulthood.

Divorce can devastate children, regardless of their age, some claim that children fare better. The reason was that they are more mature and are in the process of separating from their parents anyway. However, researchers see a flip side to the coin. They have found that because of those very factors, divorce can hit children the hardest. For instance as they navigate their way toward adulthood, children are highly insecure, perhaps even more so than when they were children. No matter how independent streak children might term to be, they need to anchor on family stability as never before. At the very time in life when children are learning to forge mature friendships, divorce teaches them to be skeptical of such values as trust, loyalty, and love. Furthermore, while it is common for children of all ages to act out their pain, adolescents are more likely to do so in dangerous ways, including delinquency, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse. This is not to say that children whose parents divorce are doomed emotionally or otherwise. They can succeed, especially if they have a relationship with both parents. However, it is naïve to think that divorce will always be, as some might say, ‘better for the children’ or that it will put an end to all tension between spouses (Awake, 2009). In fact, some find that they have to deal more with their “intolerable” spouse after the divorce than before and on much more volatile issues, such as financial support or children custody. In such cases divorce does not end family problems; it simply moves them to a different arena.

Individual Variation

Substantial research evidence shows that, on average, children who have experienced parental divorce score somewhat lower than children in first-marriage families on measures of social development, emotional well-being, self-concept, academic performance, educational attainment, and physical health (Amato 2000; Furstenberg and Kiernan 2001). This conclusion is based on group comparisons that consistently show small differences between the average adjustment level of children in first-marriage families and the average level for children whose parents have divorced. Equally important, but less well understood, is that children and adolescents in divorced families vary widely in their adjustment (Demo and Acock 1996). That is, many children exhibit delinquent behavior, difficulties with peers, and low self-esteem following their parents' divorce, while many others adjust readily, enjoy popularity with friends, and think highly of themselves. A useful way of thinking about this is that children's adjustment within any particular family structure (e.g., first-marriage families, divorced families, stepfamilies) varies along a continuum from very poor adjustment to very positive adjustment, with many children and adolescents faring better postdivorce than their counterparts living in first-marriage families. This latter point raises the possibility that in some cases, parental divorce may have *positive* effects on children. Children most likely to benefit from parental divorce include those who endured years of frequent and intense marital conflict (Amato and Booth 1997; Hanson 1999), and those who develop very close, mutually supportive, and satisfying relationships with single parents (Arditti 1999). These studies support the notion that pre and postdivorce family environments (i.e., highly conflicted prior; supportive after) have great potential to assist in understanding how children will adjust to life after their parents' divorce.

The preponderance of scientific evidence thus suggests that popular impressions, media images, and stereotypes greatly exaggerate the effects of divorce on children. On average, there are small differences in emotional and social adjustment between children of divorce and children in intact families, and in some instances, parental divorce has a positive effect on children. Most children and adolescents experience short-term emotional, behavioral, and academic difficulties, which usually peak at the point in the divorce process when their parents physically separate and engage in legal battles related to divorce. These problems tend to subside with time, however. Children tend to be resilient, adapt well to most changes in their family roles and life situations, and exhibit normal adjustment (Emery and Forehand

1994). Still, a minority remains vulnerable. Following divorce, approximately 20 to 25 percent of children in divorced families experience long-term adjustment problems, compared to roughly 10 percent of children in first-marriage families (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan 2000).

The children and adolescents who appear to be most vulnerable socially and emotionally are those who experience multiple transitions in parenting arrangements throughout their childhood. Research indicates that children who experience no changes in family structure (e.g., children who live continuously with both biological parents, or those who live their entire childhood with a single parent) have higher levels of adjustment (Demo and Acock 1996; Najman et al. 1997). As the number of parenting transitions increases, children's adjustment generally decreases, albeit modestly. Thus, children whose parents divorce (one transition) have somewhat lower adjustment; those who experience divorce and subsequent remarriage of their residential parent (two transitions) exhibit lower adjustment than those in the one transition group; and children who experience two or more parental divorces and/or remarriages have the lowest adjustment and most behavioral problems (Capaldi and Patterson 1991). Studies conducted in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia corroborate these findings (Rodgers and Pryor 1998). Again, there is wide variation among children who experience multiple family transitions, but the evidence suggests that each change in parenting arrangements represents a risk factor, thus increasing the likelihood that a child will react negatively to their postdivorce environment.

Interventions to Alleviate the Negative Effects of Divorce on Children

There are ample opportunities for intervention efforts that may offset some of these negative processes. Although in some instances divorce, may have positive effects for children (as in the case where exposure to intense and frequent fighting between parents is reduced), in many other situations, changing parent-child relationships, life transitions, and economic strains that accompany divorce present challenges to children's well-being. Social science research has successfully identified key factors accompanying divorce that negatively affect children, thus illuminating potential areas for intervention. That is, programmes and policies can be developed to address the factors that ultimately compromise children's well-being during the divorce process (<http://family.jrank.org/pages/413/Divorce.html>).

Many states require divorcing parents to complete either a divorce mediation or parent education programme (Emery, 1995; Grych and Fincham, 1992). These programmes are designed to increase parents'

understanding of the difficulties that their children may face during the divorce process. Parents are taught, for example, how to manage their conflict, avoid treating children like pawns in dispute, and to appreciate the importance of maintaining positive relationships with their children. Studies have shown that following a divorce, parents may find it difficult to maintain optimal parenting behaviours, such as monitoring their children's activities, providing warmth and support, and keeping consistent rules. Consequently, if intervention programmes can be developed to educate divorce parents on the importance of maintaining positive parenting during stressful transitions, some negative effects on children may be mitigated.

Other possible areas for intervention include policies and programmes that recognize the economic strain that divorcing parents, and especially the custodial mother, often face post-divorce. Studies have shown that custodial mothers often face dramatic economic losses following divorce, leading to feelings of stress that adversely affect parenting. Researchers have postulated that divorce is disruptive for children largely because the custodial parent faces a significant amount of economic stress in the time period immediately following the divorce (Furstenberg, 1990). Economic loss may trigger multiple transitions for the child (e.g. moving, changing schools, and taking in other household members), adversely affecting child wellbeing. Social policies should address the economic strain experienced by divorcing parents and recognize its potential to adversely affect family relationships.

Another important step toward reducing the negative effects of divorce on children involves the de-stigmatization of divorce. Given our cultural emphasis on the sanctimony of marriage and our cultural disapproval of divorce, many children suffer psychologically because they perceive that their family experiences are dysfunctional. Societal mores and cultural beliefs strongly devalue divorced families. Such families (in their many forms) are judged to be inferior to the traditional nuclear family headed by a male breadwinner and female mother and homemaker who live together from marriage until death, and who produce and rear children in an intact family environment.

A Child Who Experiences Abandonment

Abandonment can take many forms: the parent who walks away and refuses to have any further contact with the child, the absentee parent who rarely communicates with or sees the children only rarely, and the parent who slowly drifts out of the child's life over time.

Children who are abandoned by a parent may face significant problems. A child who is abandoned often feels an overwhelming sense of rejection. The thought that one parent no longer loves her, wants her, or even cares about her is potentially devastating to self-esteem and the future ability to form healthy, loving relationships. A child who has been abandoned may develop an intense yearning for the absent parent - a longing that can interfere with development (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/mh-sm/divorce/2-eng.php>).

A Child in Distress

Children often react to stress by falling back on behaviours they have outgrown. But when this behaviour continues over time, or when your child is clearly not coping, it's time to get help.

There are some warning signs that a child is in trouble: anxiety, sadness and depression, eating or sleeping disorders, school problems, overly aggressive behaviour, alcohol or drug abuse, isolation from family and friends, and other unusual, persistent problems. It's always a good idea to seek help if you notice that a problem is persisting over time or getting worse. Some parents suspect sexual abuse when they notice their young children touching or stroking themselves. It's normal for young children to explore their bodies and comfort themselves by stroking their genitals. During times of stress, parents can expect that these natural behaviours may increase. However, if the behaviour persists or you are worried about it, you might want to discuss this with your family doctor.

If your child refuses to spend time with or see his other parent, this behaviour is telling you something important. Since children don't have the same tools as adults to deal with conflict and pain, they may react by shutting out one parent. Both the child and parent need each other to work through their feelings. Because a child's reluctance to interact with a parent may get worse and may interfere with his or her healthy emotional development, counselling is recommended (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/mh-sm/divorce/2-eng.php>).

Research Perspectives

The effects of divorce on parents are most frequently studied from a resource perspective by focusing on the exchanges taking place between parents and their divorcing children (Spitze et al. 1994). The studies are based upon the assumption that as children's marriages dissolve they will turn to their parents for help (Johnson 1988a). An alternate situation may occur,

however, particularly for older parents who are in need of help. A child going through a divorce may not be readily available to offer support to them because of the demands and stressors of the divorce process.

Other researchers maintain that conceptions of continuity provide an alternative but less common perspective on the adult children and their parents (Rossi and Rossi 1990). This focus assumes that divorce has no discernable effects on the relationship between the adult child and his or her parents. Advocates of this perspective propose that there may be some changes in the level of contacts and supports, but there is no evidence of changes in the level of closeness and contact (Umberson, 1992).

When minor children are present, the continuity perspective is difficult to sustain as marriages dissolve. One spouse, usually the husband, leaves the household, and in the process, the quality of parenting changes as one parent is performing the role previously performed by two people. This situation can have major repercussions not only on the former nuclear family but also on grandparents and the wider kinship group. The custodial parent's extended family becomes the primary sphere of activity, as members of the ex-spouse's kinship group become more distant.

Way Forward

Sufficient support has to be made available to children to enable them come over these trying moments. In other words, the role of teachers, grandparents or family friends and relatives may prove highly valuable in occupying the children in positive jobs and conversations, which will help them to overcome their parents' divorce with the least possible suffering.

There should be enactment of divorce laws which can make divorce possible but difficult. This will go a long way in ensuring that couples take adequate consideration before being committed to marriage.

There should be element of courtship. In courtship, the couple will be able to study themselves, prove their love at the initial stage of the relationship and face their problems frankly and solve them together. They will tend to discuss the problem openly and proffer an intelligent solution to the problem. This will help both couples to know when a partner is not really in love or when he/she uses every problem as stepping stone for criticism and faulting the other. Having studied yourselves deeply, both will avoid deliberately making a wrong choice in your love life and also curb the issue of divorce in future.

There should be religious consideration before entering into marriage. Those who believe and live according to religious teachings need to find

someone who shares their convictions and practices. This aspect is of vital importance to the success of married life as religious beliefs imply a philosophy which determines ones life style.

Compatibility: Nobody should shy away from this issue. If it is not working now, it will not work tomorrow. There are some married people today who are living in utter deprivation and suffering and therefore, they are unsatisfied. There are those that have everything, and yet, they are still unsatisfied. The degree of compatibility or incompatibility is determined by what you are getting out of a relationship. The noticeable differences between what you want from a relationship and what you are getting out of it is a characteristic of a bad marriage. Therefore, the most logical techniques for you to get what you want from a relationship is to marry the right partner in the first place whose personality is complementary with you.

Before you can know how to get what you want from your partner, you must have known what you want from your partner. Getting married to your most compatible marriage partner qualifies you to reach the highest life goal and deter divorce from surfacing.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that divorce seriously affects children upbringing in the contemporary family life. Nevertheless, the existing literature indicates that divorce is a stressful process that affects divorcing individuals and their children as well as their parents. It equally affects the children's normal development in some ways. They often suffer a period of marked emotional anxiety following the separation of their parents. The effect is largely dependent on the childhood problems present prior to the divorce. Those children already in a problematic situation tend to suffer in the extreme. On the other hand, those who did not have problems before the divorce are quicker in returning to normal.

No matter how we may decide to look at it or try to interpret it to suit any situation, divorce is not adviceable and those who are contemplating or agitating for a divorce should have a rethink more especially the ordeal experienced by their children. Once divorce has taken place, to get back to normality will be a long and difficult road, on occasions leaving long-lasting scars.

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