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Development and Divorce: A Sociological Appraisal

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Abstract

While marriage brings us a new set of familial relationships, such relationships may be dissolved through death, divorce or distance as sociologists put it. Divorce interrupts the cycle of family development, forcing family members to alter their expectations and to create new ways of life, new households, new relationships etc. Though marriage and family are known as the highest ideals and values for almost all the people and are supported by religion and wisdom, but they increasingly happen to be dissolved by divorce due to various social and development forces. The quality of social system counts much for the rate and frequency of divorce. In our hypotheses, development is taken as a key factor influencing and increasing the incidence of divorce. In the same manner, causes and consequences of the problem will be analyzed. Socio-economic development also affects the behavior, beliefs and attitudes of the young families in particular; often leading to divorce among them. For the appraisal of this phenomenon, various techniques of research have been used. As found out in the research, "age-factor" plays much in the incidence of divorce.

Keywords: Development. Social change. Urbanization. Industrialization. Modernization

Introduction

While the highest human ideals, values and qualities, namely, love, devotion, cooperation and sacrifice are found in the family as a universal institution, and while it is an association supporting and supported by very civilization, sanctioned by law, esteemed by knowledge, blessed by religion and wisdom, praised in its highest achievements by literature and art, and endowed with specific attributes by all forms of economy, but in spite of all such qualities, the family has witnessed all the assaults made upon it by society and man, leading to divorce. Rate of divorce also varies according to social systems. Iran's population of 79.5 million with a total fertility rate of 1.8 (WPDS, 2016), is seriously facing late marriages and increasing divorce rates with special reference to the youth.

Divorce in the proper and strict sense of the term means complete rupture of the marital bond, the persons divorced returning to their original state of being free to marry. In the legal language, it might appear as a simple phenomenon, but in practical life its implications are massive. Divorce represents the end of the hopes that two people have for each other; it is the certificate that their relationships failed (Whiteheads, 1970).

Objectives

The aim of the present study is to find out, major causes of divorce, the consequences of divorce, the conditions of the children of divorce, remarriage etc. Our hypotheses in this study are also:

- 1- The urban couples are more prone to divorce.
- 2- In more developed societies, greater number of divorces takes place.
- 3- The incidence of divorce is higher in earlier years of marriage, or more among younger couples.

The general objective of our study "Development and Divorce", is to find out the impact of development, and social change on social relationships, lifestyles and behavior of the young married couples. The endeavor to adopt modernization is justified in the sense that fixism and traditionalism block the path towards evolution, or at least reduce its speed, therefore, human societies must always welcome change and ever modernize themselves, otherwise the social evolution will not only involve stagnation, but the social organs as a result of the old traditions with the new exigencies will be impaired and defeated. Such a process has had great and effective impact on family values and structure, or what is known as divorce.

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Technologically underdeveloped nations too, irrespective of their political forms, religious backgrounds, culture and ideology have uniformly strived to achieve the technology and lifestyle of the advanced nations; a process known as "modernization", a consequence of which is increase in divorce rates. Other consequences of modernization and development which somehow or the other have impacts on the incidence of divorce, are uncontrolled industrialization such as enormous growth of cities with its veritable slums, congestion and pollution, and environmental deterioration, internal or external economic and social conflicts, inflation, rising crime rates, drug and alcohol addiction, and a growing alienation of the young generations; all of which are plain evidence of the advanced industrialized economies, which have not deterred less developed nations from copying and imitating. In this process, family too is not left immune, but it becomes very vulnerable, and due to increasing socio-economic contrasts, divorce rates increase. While the complex and interrelated series of changes in man's way of life is generally known as development, an inevitable process of social change has occurred in which divorce is also a by-product. The Western societies have been undergoing this process for some five centuries, and the people in the less developed regions have witnessed it for less than a century. Although development is a part of the universal experience, and has brought welfare to mankind in many respects, yet it has also been in many respects a destructive process.

It has destroyed traditional patterns of life which through centuries had evolved many human values. It has undermined the patterns of rural and family stability etc. that brought satisfaction to the individuals. In exchange for the old, it has created a "mass society" where privacy, individualism and quality of life tend to be submerged by standards of individual taste. In this process, divorce has appeared as a new phenomenon with its own side-effects and value standards.

Along with the structural changes towards modernization of societies, behavior, beliefs, and attitudes of the people in general and the young families in particular are also affected by these changes. These changes are reflected in the behavior, beliefs, and attitudes of the people of the concerned society.

Western demographers, sociologists, and commentators are predisposed to expect that, throughout the world, increasing urbanization and industrialization will lead to rising divorce rates, because these are processes associated with decline in religious belief; break-down of traditional norms, including reduced social pressure to maintain the marriage relationships: pursuit of individual self-interest, increasing economic independence of women, and increased levels of stress in family life (Goode, 1963).

On the basis of researches conducted on families and divorce cases, in majority of cases women and children have been found as the biggest losers in divorce, suffering consequences that are not easily surmounted. Men tend to suffer less and for shorter time.

Methodology

To make a scientific, unbiased and logical research suitable methods must be adopted. The following methods and procedures have been adopted to do the paper on Development and Divorce:

1- Scope of study. By scope, we mean the specific areas of study. The main scope of the present study is:

- (i) The impact of development concept on divorce.
- (ii) Causes of divorce, especially with reference to the socio-economic status of the couples, and the social conditions of the society.
- (iii) Consequences of divorce, such as personal problems, family problems, reaction of the community, employment of the divorce women, sexual adjustment etc.
- (iv) Remarriage, incidence of remarriage, prevalence of remarriage, the chance to remarry, children born in remarriage etc.

2- Tools of data collection. The different techniques or tools of data collection are very important in a research. In the research relating to the present study, the following tools have been used;

- (i) Books, documents, records, and relevant sources of information.
- (ii) Interview, To find out right and direct information on divorce, various divorced couples, especially women were contacted.
- (iii) Case study, It has been experienced and proved that for the study of phenomenon like divorce, case study method is one of the best, the most useful and effective methods.
- (iv) Observation, The researcher used this method too, through visiting various families where first hand and requisite information could be gathered. Through this method, ideas and opinions of different people regarding divorce and its side-effects were elicited too.
- (v) Judicial court attendance, Through attendance at some court cases and witnessing personally the proceedings of certain divorce cases, deeper insights regarding divorce conditions were found.

Implications of Key Concepts

Sociologically speaking, the concepts illuminating divorce may be discussed in the following terms:

To begin with, inequalities in the position of women in the social structure causes them to suffer more than men when a marriage ends in divorce. Women tend to earn less income than men and usually retain custody of the children. As experienced and observed, after a divorce many women and children usually find dramatic decrease in their standard of living, while men usually see an improvement in their standard of living (Weitzman: 1985).

Culture also plays an important part in the outcome of divorce. As a cultural norm, men choose younger partners, therefore divorced men have a larger pool of potential new partners than women do. Women, especially those over the age of forty, are much less likely than men to remarry (Wallerstein: 1974). This means that the economic situation women face after divorce is less likely to improve.

Children are perhaps the biggest losers in divorce, because for them the family is the basic mode of functional integration into society. The family is their source of emotional support and nurture. Yet, when parents go through a divorce, they tend to have less time and energy for their children. Such children may feel that they have no one to rely on. Such a situation much likely leads them to stress.

The experiences of their parents' divorce also shapes children's lifelong orientation to social action. They may

pull back from emotional commitments, and become overly jealous when they enter into relationships.

In terms of power, it is important to note that when abuse of power is a characteristic of the family, divorce may be the best alternative. In terms of Western norms, no one advocates continuing a situation in which a wife or a child is abused. An important reason for higher divorce rates especially in the Western world is that women are less completely under their husbands' power, when they are able to enter the workforce and provide a material basis for their autonomy.

The concept of divorce may be understood as different from such terms as (a) separation, (b) desertion and (c) annulment.

(a) Separation: It may be an informal preliminary step toward divorce; a temporary expedient to lessen the immediate conflict, or a legally recognized decision to live separately without divorcing. Marital separation means that the mates are deprived of normal marital association, affecting their health, security and happiness. In such a state, for the children, there is the loss of daily love and counsel of one parent.

(b) Desertion: Desertion, as the term is ordinarily employed, means "the irresponsible departure from home on the part of either husband or wife, leaving the family to fend for itself. Several studies have shown that deserters are husbands from the lower economic groups. Desertion is popularly known as "the poor man's divorce". According to some studies/findings done in family, some of the prominent causes for desertion of husbands are:

- (i) marital incompatibility,
- (ii) immaturity of one or both the partners,
- (iii) mother-in-law interferences,
- (iv) alcoholism,
- (v) gambling,
- (vi) money worries,
- (vii) modern women's spirit independence,
- (viii) cruelty,
- (ix) lack of interest in the home,

Many of the consequences of desertion are similar to those of divorce, for, the family may be permanently dissolved. Desertion sometimes, is worse than divorce, presenting special problems. Emotionally, the wife and children often suffer much more severely than in the case of divorce, for desertion entails a humiliating rejection of the spouse. It also carries with it a lack of certainty. Will husband return? Whether he has died or what? These and other countless questions plague the deserted wife.

(c) Annulment: Annulment is a court decision that the marriage contained some legal flaw (coercion, fraud, bigamy etc.) (Nimkoff, 1965) defines annulment as "a legal action that invalidates the marriage on the ground that it never legally existed and should not have occurred. In the Third World countries a lot of marriages continue whereas they should in fact have not happened and must have been annulled.

Impact of Divorce in General

Legislations permitting divorce and separation will have far reaching consequences in any society. The impact of legal dissolution of marriage on the institution of family and the entire society is a matter of difference of opinion. According to (Derrett, 1971), divorce cases reflect a sick society not a healthy one. Divorce and desertion are also

widely recognized as problems (Horton, 1960). But, they are not problems in all societies, as they do not exist in all societies. Research on divorce being the most practical index of family disintegration is not generally favored in many Asian societies including Iran. This is possibly due to the adverse effects of divorce.

There is another view expressed by some other social scientists: They have pointed out that "family dissolution is an imperfect index of family disorganization". That is to say, divorce is an imperfect index of marital disorganization, because there may be disorganization without divorce. For further elaboration (Marshall Clinard, 1965) in his sociology of Deviant Behavior has stated that: Although many persons regard divorce as the only index of family disintegration, it is but one of the many signs, since it represents the legal dissolution of the marriage, it certainly is the final one.

Anyhow, we should not underestimate the seriousness of the far-reaching consequences of divorce with regard to persons, social institutions and communities. The alarming rates of divorce in the Western world and even the developing world of today indicate the same consequences. Fifty percent divorce in the U.S.A., about 40 percent in Europe, roughly 22 percent in Iran and finally the increasing trend in the other developing parts of the world, virtually affect the lives of millions of adults and their children. As it is observed, divorce generally hurts million of people especially in the industrial world where the frequency is higher, this situation is sometimes justified as a national health emergency by some countries. Although one in two of the American marriages and one in three of the European marriages now end in divorce, most married people basically are opposed to the concept (Anthony Pietropinto, 1981).

In all, although husbands and wives often hurt one another during divorce, the children are the real victims. They feel helpless and betrayed, caught between two people they love, but who hate each other. For them, the future is uncertain and the present unbearable. Many feel that this is the real tragedy of divorce-children suffering from their parents' mistakes. Ruptured relationships — between husbands and wives and between parents and their children, with the attendant feelings of betrayal, guilt, and anxiety are symptoms of a major upheaval within the Western families today. It is mainly due to a range of social change as occurred in the West.

Who Gets Divorced?

Sociological research suggests that some marriages are more prone to divorce than others. Such a perspective which has more a Western and industrial basis is currently penetrating the less developed and newly industrializing societies too. Therefore, the likelihood of divorce is highest when:

- * The husband and wife live in urban area.
- * They both work, but their incomes are not high.
- * They married early.
- * The wife has egalitarian attitudes about division of labor in the home, and the husband does not.
- * Neither husband nor wife has strong religious convictions.
- * Both husband and wife are rather pessimistic about life.
- * One or both have parents who have divorced.

Importance of Divorce Studies

Sociological study of divorce is very important due to the following different reasons:

1- As the process of modernization and social change is taking place constantly and in every society from the highly developed to less developed, and in the meantime, while there are contrasts of values ever emerging between the traditions and modernity, therefore, it is very essential to study the divorce. As the divorce rate is also very much influenced by the influx of the new values and modern criteria, therefore, the sociological study of divorce may control it, or put it in the right direction. There are also very few studies on divorce in Iran and many other developing societies, and it is transpired that the field of study is almost virgin, hence, it is worthwhile to probe into it sociologically.

2- Sociological study of divorce will help us to be aware of the situation and the consequences of the problems of children of the divorced (for instance, their custody, upbringing, education, personality development etc.), and the future of the divorced men and women (more particularly women, their maintenance, remarriage, employment etc.) are very important. Through the study of divorce, all the above aspects may be studied too.

3- The sociology of family, being a distinct field of sociology is in its infancy in Iran as in many other developing societies. Marital disruptions like divorce, desertion, separation and annulment are very vital subjects to be studied in the sociology of family. The changing patterns of marriage and family due to modernization, marital adjustment, the organization, disorganization and reorganization of the family, customs and problems pertaining to family such as dowry/mahr, (bride price) to the father or kin of a woman, child marriage, widow remarriage and such like matters may also be included within the scope of family sociology. Study of divorce has been recognized very important by the sociological and anthropological researchers, especially in urban context. The developing world in which urbanization is quickly going on, and a new type of social transition is taking place, divorce too, as a social problem is widely emerging.

4- Divorce is one of the most striking and predominant themes of modern sociological literature; attracting the attention of many social scientists during the past several decades particularly in the Western world where the incidence is higher. Judges and lawyers maintain that with the change in the status of women through work, education, social and political liberties etc., the rate of divorce has surged, that is to say, it has legally and socially been facilitated.

Sociological researches indicate that there is a considerable increase in the rate of divorce with special reference to the developing world, but what seems to be problematic is the low rate of remarriages in the Asian societies including Iran. More advertisements must be done so as to lower the destructive impacts of divorce. In the West, it is rather satisfactory, but much work must still be done in the East to increase the rate of remarriage especially among the divorced women.

The Case of Iran

Statistics on Iranian divorce rates indicate that in the decade 1987-1996 very slight fluctuations have emerged on divorce figures in both urban and rural areas. Many social, cultural and economic factors are responsible for the low trend of divorce in the country. Social structure of the country, more male-dominant role, cultural clues, antisocial value of divorce, and low economic status of women in general, all are parts of factors which play role in the phenomenon.

The dominant factor; i.e. low economic security of the women and their economic dependency on their husbands is casual factor, not allowing the divorce rates incline in the country. Culturally too, the incidence of divorce is not regarded as a desirable approach, therefore, every effort is made to prevent the divorce from taking place.

As the change of remarriage is not high in the Iranian society, such value system is also responsible for the low percentage of divorce in the country as compared with the West. The rate of remarriage as calculated in years 1989, 1991 and 1994 through the Registration Organization indicated about 1.5 percent.

Number of Marriages, Divorces and Divorce Rates of Iran by Urban and Rural Areas, 1987-1997

| Year | Urban | | | Rural | | |
|------|----------|---------|---------------|----------|---------|---------------|
| | Marriage | Divorce | Divorce Rate% | Marriage | Divorce | Divorce Rate% |
| 1987 | 225566 | 27588 | 12.2 | 121086 | 5845 | 4.8 |
| 1988 | 239095 | 26893 | 11.2 | 122850 | 6221 | 5.1 |
| 1989 | 295982 | 27626 | 9.3 | 162726 | 6317 | 3.9 |
| 1990 | 309438 | 30656 | 9.9 | 145525 | 7171 | 4.9 |
| 1991 | 314893 | 33776 | 10.7 | 137782 | 6123 | 4.4 |
| 1992 | 299725 | 28289 | 9.4 | 122732 | 5694 | 4.6 |
| 1993 | 332629 | 25469 | 7.7 | 130858 | 3843 | 2.9 |
| 1994 | 329687 | 28385 | 8.6 | 123984 | 4321 | 3.5 |
| 1995 | 340807 | 30277 | 8.9 | 122048 | 4461 | 3.7 |
| 1996 | 357138 | 32697 | 9.2 | 122125 | 5120 | 4.2 |
| 1997 | 387231 | 36459 | 9.4 | 124046 | 5353 | 4.3 |
| 2015 | 562671 | 146714 | 26.1 | 122681 | 17051 | 13.9 |

Sources: State Registration Organization, Document Number 32.681, August 20, 1997.

Iran State Registration Organization, 2015, Tehran, Iran.

Statistical Yearbook, Statistical Center of Iran, 1998.

As obvious, the rural areas of the country being more traditional, more biased, with different social settings, has lower rates of divorce as compared with the urban areas. In urban areas, more divorces are prevalent among the families whose wives are either employed, or have more

socio-economic security. However, the most recent statistics in Iran indicate that there were more than 24 registered divorces vs very 100 registered marriages in Iran in 2015 (State Registration Organization of Iran, 2015).

Consequences of Divorce

The consequences of divorce are many and grave. They may also be different societies under the conditions of social security, women's socio-economic conditions, liberties in general etc. Socio-cultural backgrounds of the couples in divorce, the causes and the after-effects of divorce are also very important to note.

Marriage is considered to be the most important event of a person's life: changing the personalities, attitudes and the lifestyles of men and women. Marriage also is entered into with great hopes and expectations. Divorce is the failure of marital life, and therefore, it has serious repercussions on the individual, family and the community. Many researches have so far shown that the negative results of divorce are perhaps more than the positive ones. In all, divorce brings about personal, familial and social disorganization. In majority of cases, the effects of divorce are more severe for the wife rather than the husband.

Due to the adverse effects of divorce on the entire society, the mounting rate of divorce is treated with great concern in countries like the U.S.A., where some writers¹ have recently held that divorce generally hurts, and that pain affects 15 million Americans. Such a lifestyle and thought as a consequence of development and modern life, is finding its way into the Third World countries too.

Age and Divorce

Age at the time of divorce has been investigated in different societies, and some of the findings have been as follows:

- (i) Vast majority of the men (65 percent) are of age groups 26-35.
- (ii) Vast majority of the women (67.5 percent) are of age groups 21-30.
- (iii) As found, vast majority of the divorcees is still young and have the chance of remarriage and readjustment.
- (iv) There is only 5 percent of women divorced at the age of 40 and above, while the percentage for men at the same age group stands at 14 percent.

As found out, we may conclude that majority of the divorced spouses are comparatively young, and are fit to remarry and settle in life, provided other factors are favorable to them. Social system has a great responsibility in this regard. It must provide the suitable ground for its occurrence. In this manner, the appearance of further problems are controlled.

Divorce and Children

According to the divorce statistics, in most of the families where divorce takes place, there is no child; that is because most of the divorces occur in the early period of marriage, but in some cases, young children are involved too.

A mentioned earlier, women and children are the worst sufferers of divorce, though husbands suffer too. Husbands can remarry, wives also can remarry after divorce, but where can the children go then? American Sociology Literature makes it very clear that divorce is a serious problem in that country as well as other countries. Divorce affects the family organization, and at least some of the crime and juvenile delinquency cases are due to divorce and its consequences. As found out, the children of divorce

are very much vulnerable, and as (Kingsly Davis, 1966) held: divorce is more a serious problem in single family rather than in joint family, in so far as children are concerned.

(Kenkel, 1973) has stated that, in 1968 divorce in the United States involved 784000 children. The average number of children per divorce-decree with children in 1968 was 2.20. Further, the average number of children involved in every 100 divorce-decree was 134.

Although family planning has much improved, couples have fewer children, and practice child-spacing, but still the children of divorce is quite considerable, especially in the developing countries.

As far as the effects of divorce on children are concerned, there have been conflicting statements. There are estimates that 80 percent of delinquent children in U.S.A are found in divorced homes, while on the other hand it is said the children adjust to situation very quickly after a brief period of disturbance.

On the basis of researches done, it has been found out that at least half of the divorced parents do not keep contact with their children due to a number of reasons and problems including remarriage, migration etc. Also, so far as the average age of the children of divorce is concerned, on the basis of the finding obtained, such children proportionately and on average live four² years less than those who peacefully live with their parents and are affected by their affection and care.

Remarriage

Remarriage is not unknown to any society. Depending on socio-cultural structure of societies, remarriage happen in different societies in various rates and frequencies. This incidence permits the widows and widowers to rebuild a normal family life, forgetting the unpleasant aspects of the earlier marriage. Based on increasing trend of divorce, and change in value system, remarriage is increasing especially in the First World countries. Statistics on marriage and remarriage in the U.S.A. indicate that: in 1948, about 4.5 million (13%) of all the 35 million married men, had been married more than once. Their median age at remarriage was 36.5 years. Some of the interesting aspects of divorce and remarriage in a society such as the United States may be discussed as follow:

- (i) There is a swelling tide of remarrying divorcees.
- (ii) 70 percent of remarrying females and 75 percent of the males had been previously divorced.
- (iii) Some remarriages do fail, and on the other hand, some divorced persons do achieve a successful remarriage, and perhaps for the 50 percent or so which manage to survive, there is a high level of happiness.

Studies on the incidence of remarriage show that in the U.S.A., as the representative of other industrial countries, majority of the divorced husbands (70.5 percent) get remarried. At the same time, majority of the wives (65 percent) could not get remarried. Hence, remarriage is one of the most successful solutions to the problems of divorced persons. Also, remarriage prevents other social problems from taking place, and is society short answer to divorce.

¹-Peitropinto and Simenauer, Husbands and Wives, 1981.

²-B.B.C. as quoted by Iran TV., Aug 26,1997.

Suggestions

In order to reduce the rate and frequency of divorce, and thereby to prevent the after-effects and problems resulting from divorce, certain suggestions may be forwarded as follows:

- 1- Marital and familial counselling must be increased and practiced. In such a movement, sociologists, psychiatrists, social workers, doctors and religious leaders/priests have vital roles.
- 2- Marriage should be entered into after sufficient study; thought and planning, and must be followed with great mutual flexibility.
- 3- Marriage should always be entered into according to the wishes and values of the spouses concerned, and not against it in any case.
- 4- Basic instruction and briefing regarding, marriage, marital life etc. should be transferred to the youth in schools, colleges and other institutions.
- 5- Social security measures should be put into operation by the governments so as to prevent further problems and difficulties.
- 6- Constructive and greater efforts for reconciliation must be made by courts and other agencies.
- 7- Scientific and sociological researches are necessary to be conducted about the causes, effects and trends of familial maladjustments in every country.
- 8- Public opinion regarding divorce and remarriage, especially in case of female spouse should undergo serious and immediate change.
- 9- The dowry/mahr cases and bottlenecks should be compromised.
- 10- Unnecessary interferences by parents and in-laws should be seriously avoided, and the marriage be followed by freedom and privacy.
- 11- Utopian and high expectations after marriage should be adjusted and avoided.

Conclusion

Divorce is becoming more common than ever before regardless of class, caste, religion, education, occupation etc. in every country/society. Modernization as a new way of life, has brought about new patterns of life which has influenced traditions, customs and norms; that is a wave of socio-economic change including revolutionary changes in the family standards and values. Development and education as symbols of modernization have brought about higher expectations in the marriage and family. Conflicting standards and values have caused divorces, especially in the urban areas.

Divorce is usually a product of multiple personal, familial, environmental, social and work factors simultaneously. It is a process of readjustment. When marital tensions and discord continue persistently, family undergoes a process of disorganization, resulting in acute emotional problems, children's problems, remarriage etc. The only way to prevent divorce and irrevocable situation is to encourage young couples to understand each other better, and to create conditions under which there is not a gap between the material and non-material cultures.

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