

## Consequences of Divorce on Children



- By Airi Trisnadi

Student researcher who in her recently completed senior year in high school has brought forth important findings on child outcomes.

In 2019, over 1,976,162 people have divorced, standing alone in America (“Divorce in the Last Year”). Divorce is a legal process in which one married couple instantly becomes two individual strangers. As there may be new characteristics learned about each other and the unexpected sides that may come up during a fight after marriage or by simply seeing each other differently after spending time together, there are multiple reasons as to why couples decide to divorce. Whether that be for the sake of one person or for the good of both sides. However, the greatest consequence of the divorce is not only to the parents, but the children who are left having to separately spend time with each parent living a life completely different; a change in their health, identity, and mental, physical and emotional aspects which drives them farther away from hope, and more towards aggression, depression, and to choices that may be life threatening.

Data from “Vital Statistics of the United States,” a national center for health statistics of 1984, shows a peak in divorce rates in 1979, with approximately 3,510,000 individuals divorced (with California being in the top few states) and a decrease since then (2-6). However, compared to the present year, the decline only accounts for ½ of the total divorced in 1974, the year when the divorce rates were just starting to rise (“Vital Statistics of the United” 2-6). Likewise, according to Alicia Vanorman and Linda A. Jacobsen, research associates analyzing trends in the United States of children in different households, in the late 1900s, 44% of married couples had children while currently in 2020, only 19% have children, with approximately similar rates of married individuals without children. However, compared to the 1900s, when the average rate of single parents (that were once married) with children was at 4%, now, the percentage has increased to 9%, meaning there is a higher population of households with children living with separated parents as compared to the year with the peak in divorce rates (Jacobsen and Vanorman).

When children are left in a situation with no way out, they start to feel psychologically weak and helpless which serves as a severe consequence. Ramon Arce, a professor of forensic psychology, and four other psychology researchers from Spain stated that children coming from separated families show a higher level of anxiety, depression, hostility, and paranoid ideation due to feeling neglected by their parents, where 27% of the consequences are emotional loss and 32% from academic loss (5). Furthermore, Brittany Pittelli, a graduate of the University of South Carolina majoring in science and sociology, compiled data from a longitudinal study during 1979 (the year with the peak in divorce rates) showing that out of the children who have divorced parents, 74% ended up receiving less than a bachelor's degree with only 8% graduating with a graduate degree, while from those with parents, 57% received less than a bachelor's degree and 13% graduated with



graduates degree (19). Therefore, those coming from single parent families were more prone to mental issues and ended up achieving a lower education, which is a long-term consequence impacting their future.

Children who are victims of divorce also face an unstable emotional state and poor connection with society. During the process of separation, children who experience more conflicts between parents end up having a weaker emotional security. George J. Cohen and Carol C. Weitzman, professors of pediatrics at Yale University, stated that even at the start of adolescent stage, children begin to show aggressive delinquent behavior as well as withdrawal from community and turning to substance abuse (2). Alissa Medders, a marriage and family therapist, claimed in the personal interview that she has faced children who mostly suffer in two general ways. One called “bump low,” which includes feeling depressed and suicidal, and the other being “bump high,” where children become highly anxious. According to data compiled by Jane Anderson, a clinical professor and pediatrician from the University of California San Francisco, children who live with one parent were twice as likely to gain suicidal ideations (383). In addition, divorce may mean a change in environment for many households. Switching schools results in a loss of friends and supporters, and “children in single-mother families were twice as likely to be absent from school due to illness or injury” (Anderson 382). Having no voice in the idea of separation or moving away and losing hope that was within friends, children may be driven to lose hope in their life, turning

themselves towards suicide or relieving their suffer by inflicting their pain on others.

Though at one glance, parents may not seem as troubled by the process of divorce, financial problems lead to their own loss of economic security. From not being able to pay for their child's education tuition to a reduction in family income, parents mainly become overwhelmed by the problems related to money. Approximately 32.3% of single-mother households lived in poverty in 2009, while only 18.7% of married couples were impoverished (Anderson 381). Furthermore, women are more likely to struggle economically and financially from losing health insurance and having a lower earning potential than male after a divorce (Cohen and Weitzman 3). Based on data from the early 2000s when divorce rates were higher, women who experienced a divorce lost 27% of their standard living and married men earned 22% more than single men (Anderson 383). Although over 10 years have passed, now with a different working system where women have more opportunities as the men, Brette Sember, an award-winning author for child custody and health during a divorce, stated that currently people still suffer from “finding a way to financially survive after half of the household income is no longer available.”

While the scale of psychological and emotional state differs from what parents and children experience, the physical health of parents who are divorced and those married show comparable differences similar to that of the kids. As children with one parent show more aggressive be-

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havior and higher suicidal ideations, separated parents smoke and drink more than those married and are also more likely to commit suicide (Anderson 383).

Common and severe factors that lead to a divorce include problems with money such as assets and debts, and the lack of communication before marriage (Sember). While there are moments that one may find themselves lonely from not feeling connected to the other, in modern society, addiction, especially to electronic devices, is another reason for separation as “many things get hidden on phones” (Medders). Likewise, Elizabeth S. Allen and four other members, all from the department of psychology at the University of Denver, arranged data from surveys asking divorced individuals about their experiences of marriage and 75% claimed the separation was due to the lack of commitment, 57.5% from arguments, 34.6% due to drug abuse, and 23.5% of them from domestic violence (135-6). Conflicts intensify due to collisions in times when one does not obtain the support and positive connections by the other individual when desired, and drug abuse and violence escalate as time goes by (Allen et al. 136).

Divorce, a process considered common in certain areas, may end with serious consequences especially for families with children in terms of their physical, emotional, and mental health. From poor education achievements, insecurity, and aggressive attitudes to suicidal ideations, children take out the uncontrollable feelings and emotions to make up for the loss of having separated parents. Thus, children with divorced parents experience a change in identity and lifestyle, which may permanently stick with them forever with the likelihood of themselves divorcing in the future as well. Even if parents decide to separate, to prevent their children from feeling pain, parents are to take responsibility to properly take care of their children by still providing them with support and love.

This is a baby. He doesn't judge. He doesn't hate anyone. He is not racist or prejudice. Please don't teach him to be.




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