

Divorce

Overview: Statistics and trends

1. The divorce rate continued to increase until about 1982 when it appeared it begin leveling off due perhaps to:
 - a. Increase in age at first marriage – since 2000 teenage marriages are decreasing.
 - b. Number of people not getting married but living together. Individuals who cohabit and later cohabit with another partner, have an 84% higher divorce rate when they marry.
2. Divorce in the U.S. doubled between 1965 and 1975.
3. For women born about 1900, 12% divorce; 1920, about 19%; 1940, about 27%; and 1950, about 33%.
4. Today about one in two to one in three marriages ends in divorce. 40% of first marriages end in divorce (National Marriage Project, 2000)
5. For those who marry under the age of 18, 48% will end in divorce (33% Latino American, 50% Caucasian American, non Latino, 55% African American non Latino). High rates of divorce among the young have remained high over a long period of time.
6. The most rapid increase in divorce rates has been among individuals married for 15 to 20 years.
7. The remarriage rate has remained roughly equal to the divorce rate. About 80% of those who divorce while young adults, will remarry. Thus, marriage has continued to be popular.
8. First marriage rates are decreasing slightly.
9. Age at first marriage is increasing.
10. The divorce rate among those at least once divorced is double the rate of divorce in first marriages.
11. 1:4 men and 2:5 women seek professional help during and after divorce.
12. Divorced and widowed have the highest rate of unhappiness and dissatisfaction with their lives. This finding is stronger for men than for women and such data is usually gathered within the first year following divorce.
13. Why are there so many divorces?
 - a. Building and maintaining relationships is difficult
 - b. Higher expectations
 - c. Lessened social stigma
 - d. High rates of abuse and neglect
 - e. More focus on self
 - f. Other possible reasons . . .

Factors Influencing Divorce

1. Marital age – The older a person is at the time of the marriage, the lower the probability of divorce.
2. Church attendance – Those who regularly attend church are less likely to divorce.
3. Socioeconomic Status – Based on education, occupation and income – Higher SES predicts fewer divorces.
4. Geographical area – Increasing probability of divorce from Midwest, Northeast, West and South.
5. Parental divorce – Prior to 1975 people from divorced families were 2.5 times as likely to divorce than those from intact families. By 1995 the rate was 1.5. Girls from divorced families are more likely to divorce themselves primarily because they marry younger and have less education. If the spouses of both individuals were divorced, the probability of divorce is twice as great as those where parents have intact marriages. Why? One possibility is commitment.
6. The presence of children decreases the probability of divorce. Parents may try harder because of the children. Divorce rates increase in families with teenagers and decreases again when children are 17 years or older.
7. Temporal factors – Individuals are most likely to divorce during the first seven years of marriage and again when children are early and middle teenagers.

6. Steps in the Divorce Process - from Everett & Volgy in Gurman & Kniskern (1991)
 1. Heightened ambivalence
 2. Distancing
 3. Pre-separation fantasies and actions
 4. Physical separation
 5. Pseudo reconciliation
 6. Pre-divorce fantasies
 7. Decision to divorce
 8. Recurring ambivalence
 - 9a. The potential disputes -- mediation
 - 9b. The potential disputes -- adversarial
 10. Post-divorce co-parenting
 11. Remarriage
 12. Blended-family formation
 13. Second remarriage
 14. Dual-family functioning
7. Divorce may be more agonizing than the death of a spouse because it lacks finality.
 - a. Feelings of guilt
 - b. Much unfinished business

The legal aspects of divorce

1. Complex issues and causes are forced into a single dimension or cause.
2. Incongruity between the personal experience and the law's interpretation.
3. Legal language for many divorces: incompatibility, irretrievable breakdown and irreconcilable differences
4. Underlying reasons for divorce may not be identified in the legal aspects of the process because they are difficult to prove.
 - a. Desertion
 - b. Nonsupport
 - c. Cruelty
 - d. Adultery
5. 85% of all divorces are uncontested. In a few states it is illegal not to contest because it is seen as collusion.
6. No fault divorce
 - a. Property is usually divided equally between the spouses unless there is mutual agreement to some other division of property.
 - b. Child custody is still a problem and usually involves adversary legal action even in states with no fault divorce laws.

Coping with divorce

1. Prevention
 - a. Early education in the home, school, religious and other organizations
 - b. A slowing down of the adolescent friendship/dating process
 - c. Reduction in the number of pregnant brides
 - d. Explication of the marriage contract
 - e. Exposure of "the grass is greener..." myth

f. From the desk of the Divorce Bug:

- 1) "*Verbal Terminosis*
- 2) "*Lackco Affectionitis*."
- 3) "*Perfectomania*."
- 4) "*Companion Minusis*."
- 5) "*Spouse Modificosis*."
- 6) "*Non Directionalicosis*."
- 7) "*Budgetitis*."

g. Does divorce increase adult's happiness? Waite, et al. (2002) examined a national representative sample of 5,232 happy and unhappy married adults over a five year period. Here are the conclusions of her study.

- "Unhappily married adults who divorced or separated were no happier, on average, than unhappily married adults who stayed married."
- "Divorce did not reduce symptoms of depression for unhappily married adults, or raise their self-esteem, or increase their sense of mastery, on average, compared to unhappy spouses who stayed married. This was true even after controlling for race, age, gender, and income."
- "The vast majority of divorces (74 percent) happened to adults who had been happily married five years previously."
- "Unhappy marriages were less common than unhappy spouses. Three out of four unhappily married adults were married to someone who was happy with the marriage."
- "Staying married did not typically trap unhappy spouses in violent relationships. Eighty-six percent of unhappily married adults reported no violence in their relationship (including 77 percent of unhappy spouses who later divorced or separated). Ninety-three percent of unhappy spouses who avoided divorce reported no violence in their marriage five years later."
- "Two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce or separation ended up happily married five years later."
- "Many currently happily married spouses have had extended periods of marital unhappiness, often for quite serious reasons, including alcoholism, infidelity, verbal abuse, emotional neglect, depression, illness, and work reversals."
- "Spouses who turned their marriages around seldom reported that counseling played a key role" (pp. 4-6).

2. Early intervention

- a. Marital counseling
- b. Divorce counseling
- c. Divorce mediation

3. Recognition of the natural phases of grief reaction (Kubler-Ross)

- a. Denial
- b. Anger
- c. Bargaining
- d. Depression
- e. Acceptance (moving ahead)

These phases need not come in this order and may be repeated. Our society provides no recognized way to mourn divorce nor to communicate the divorce to parents, children and friends.

4. Mutual planning of important aspects of the separation process

- a. Living arrangements
- b. Financial/educational planning
- c. Parenting responsibilities

5. Bohannan's Six Stations of Divorce

a. *Emotional Divorce*: Involves a loss of trust, respect, and affection for each other. The spouses act in ways to hurt, frustrate, and lower self-esteem.

b. *Legal Divorce*: The court officially brings the marriage to an end. This is the only station that provides relief from the legal responsibilities of the marriage and the right to remarry. Legal divorce also helps partners feel free of certain obligations.

c. *Economic Divorce*: Involves settlement of property. This station is likely to be painful because there is a sense of loss because of withdrawal of certain possessions. Also, the 'living comfortably' life has been altered because certain possessions were divided.

d. *Co-parental Divorce*: Involves couples with children. Decisions concerning custody, visitations, and responsibilities need to be made. This probably the most tragic part of divorce.

e. *Community Divorce*: Involves leaving one community of friends and relationships and entering another. This change in community is usually difficult and often leaves the individual feeling alone and secluded.

f. *Psychic Divorce*: The individual must regain a sense of being an individual rather than being a couple. There has to be a distancing from both the positive and negative aspects of the broken relationship in order to feel the psychic divorce is final.

The effects of divorce on children

1. Scope of the problem

a. 60% of all couples who are granted divorces have children at home.

b. 32-40% of Children in the U.S. will experience their parent's divorce. Almost 50% of all children under the age of 18 will spend some time in a single parent family. This includes children born out of wedlock, children of divorce and children who have lost a parent through death.

2. Four temporal phases of divorce and after from the child's perspective

a. When divorce is imminent

b. Through the divorce process itself

c. The one-parent experience

d. The reconstituted family

3. Critical dimensions in evaluating the effects of divorce on children

a. The age of the child; the stage of cognitive development of the child

b. The amount and duration of hostile and angry feelings between parents c. The accessibility of both parents

d. The responsible interest of the parents

e. The involvement of the child in the divorce; communicating through the child; getting at the ex-spouse through the child

f. Finances

4. Challenges and principles

a. The child can read the parents emotions.

b. Everyone is experiencing an identity crisis.

c. The mourning process must be recognized.

d. The child may feel at fault.

e. The child may try to reunite the parents.

f. Children need supportive discipline.

1) "I'll go live with Daddy (Mommy)."

2) The carnival parent

5. The Wallerstein and Kelly study (1979)

Subjects: 60 white, middle class, California families with children between the ages of 2 and 18 who sought counseling during the divorce process.

Method: Interview data collected during the first six weeks, periodically over the first year and at a five year follow-up. No comparison with families who remained in tact but were dysfunctional.

- a. Immediate reactions of the children of all ages
 - 1) Extreme anger
 - 2) Regression to earlier forms of behavior
 - 3) Physical symptoms
 - 4) Self-blame (in younger children)
- b. Findings after one year
 - 1) 75% appeared reasonably normal and well adjusted.
 - 2) 25% became increasingly distressed as time went on. They suffered reduced self-esteem, relational problems, and continued feelings of sadness and anger.
- c. Findings after 5 years
 - 1) 34% were happy and reasonably adjusted.
 - 2) 29% seemed to be making a marginal adjustment.
 - 3) 37% were depressed and not adjusting.

The effects of divorce on men and women

1. Effects during the first two years following divorce
 - a. Role changes
 - 1) Household tasks for men
 - 2) Employment for women
2. Late adolescence experienced again: a need to establish autonomy, develop self-esteem and regain confidence
3. Aimless freedom: for example, superficial sexual explorations.
4. Forming new friendships. Dating is an important step.
5. Most men and women experience a reasonably successful adjustment to divorce within two to three years.
6. Fifteen Practical Healing Suggestions (Colgrove, Bloomfield, and McWilliams, 1978)
 1. Do your mourning now.
 2. Be gentle with yourself. Accept the fact that you have an emotional wound but with time it can heal.
 3. Don't take on new responsibilities you don't have to. Let friends and co-workers be supportive.
 4. Don't play the "blame game" with yourself or others. As time goes on you can examine mistakes and make changes in how you decide to do some things.
 5. Remember, it's okay to feel depressed.
 6. Don't rush into any new romantic involvement for a while.
 7. Don't try against obvious odds to rekindle old relationship.
 8. Photographs and mementos can be useful or painful or both depending upon the person. Don't keep "opening the wound."
 9. Remember that it's normal to feel anger toward God, society, or the person who left you; but it is not okay or good for you to hate yourself or to act on your anger in a destructive way. Let the anger out safely.
 10. Don't over medicate yourself.
 11. Watch your nutrition and get plenty of rest.
 12. Avoid alcohol, marijuana, "recreational" drugs or alcohol.
 13. Pamper yourself a little.
 14. Keep a journal.
 15. Heal at your own pace. Most people take two to three years.