

A Review of Divorce in the United States

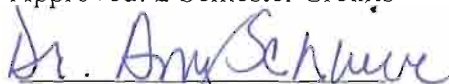
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Abstract

Divorce is an experience that affects all of society; it shapes and changes the lives of millions of Americans every year, including children. Divorce is a reflection of current culture and its impact is felt in homes, schools, communities and health care organizations nationwide. Rates and statistics on divorce have been closely studied over the past century as social climate and marital expectations have changed the defining characteristics of marriage. Current research reflects that nearly 50 percent of new marriages end in divorce, personally impacting the lives of over one million children a year in the United States. While it is difficult to determine how much damage is caused by divorce and how much damage is caused by events leading up to a couple's separation, children of divorce are more likely to experience difficulty in school, behavior problems, negative self-concepts and more problems getting along with both parents and peers. Divorced parents who are able to understand their children's perspective and act in their best interest have the best chance of minimizing associated risk factors.

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Chapter I: Introduction

As the debate over both the immediate and long lasting emotional, economical, and societal effects of divorce on parents, their children and society as a whole gains momentum, many people make assumptions that divorce in the United States is a new trend plaguing the current generation and generations to follow. Divorce as a modern legal and family struggle may be an issue of current times, but according to Stephanie Coontz (2006), anthropologists report rates of separation and remarriage among many hunting and gathering societies dating back several hundred years. It is not only important to look at the trends of divorce rates over the years but to also consider the societal structure and influence that the times had on divorce as a function of society.

Current studies focus on the rising divorce rates and the “unromantic” statistics associated with marriage in the current generation. Many researchers of divorce statistics will tell you that figuring out an accurate national divorce rate for the United States is difficult because of inconsistent collection methods and sources used by various states. Because of the complicated statistics involved, researchers tend to look for trends within specific groups of people and to try to predict their likelihood for divorce, rather than focusing on the country as a whole (Luscombe, 2010). However, one statistic that most researchers agree upon is that almost half of marriages today will end in divorce.

“Divorce affects all of society. It is a shared experience in our culture because it shapes the lives of so many children and adults and reflects our collective values. In sheer numbers, divorce in the country has involved at least a million children each year since 1973. As we enter the twenty-first century, we have outpaced the rest of the Western world” (Wallerstein as cited in Marquardt, 2005, p.xvi). Because of the large number of people affected by divorce not only

today, but as well as in the past and future, it is important to understand some of the possible outcomes. According to Emery (2004), as compared to children whose parents stay together, children from divorced families are:

- Twice as likely to seek professional mental help
- Up to twice as likely to have problems managing their own behavior
- Twice as likely to drop out of high school before graduation
- Up to 1.5 times more likely to divorce themselves as adults

Researchers such as Judith Wallerstein and Elizabeth Marquardt, also warn of additional long lasting effects of divorce, especially on children, that may surface many years after the initial damage has occurred. As compared to adults from intact families, adult children of divorce are three times as likely to experience emotional trouble (Marquardt, 2005). However, not all researchers agree with each other on the damaging affects.

Experts such as Emery actually discuss the two-sided coin as it pertains to the differing opinions on divorce and its effects on children. Emery, and many others, believe the truth lies somewhere in between ‘divorce is always devastating to children’ and ‘divorce is only one of life’s challenges and has little emotional impact.’ It is clear the impact varies from child to child and from family to family, and there are many variables that influence the adjustment for children. “Children from divorced families will be resilient -as most are- if parents truly understand their children’s perspective and honestly act in their best interest,” (Emery, 2004, p.61).

Over the past few decades, the nation’s definition of ‘family’ has changed quite a bit, arguably, mostly for the better. Same-sex marriages, increased multi-racial marriages, increased adoptions from various countries around the world, including single and gay parent adoptions,

extended families and more and more grandparents and other family members as primary caregivers to young children have challenged previous ideologies. As portrayed in the media, the nuclear family from the 1950s consisted of the bread-winner dad, stay-at-home mom, two and a half kids with a dog. However, this is not the family most American's come home to at night (if it ever really was). Many cultural and social changes have made marriage less central to many people's lives, and the nation is now contemplating the place of marriage in contemporary society, according to Nock (2005). It is important to look back on the history of divorce in the United States to determine how it impacts society today. Many researchers have linked current events of the times to rates and trends in the divorce rates, which may also help to better understand what it is saying about current generations and societal norms.

Statement of the Problem

With at least one million children effected by divorce each year for almost the past 40 years, it is no surprise that there is a national concern for the well-being of these children as they become adults in society. Although the degrees of impact on children of divorce vary, experts agree that there are emotional, behavioral and economic implications for both the children imminently and in the future. In order to better understand the impact of divorce on children and society, it is important to learn about the trends and rates of divorce in our nation over the past century as they relate to societal values and happenings of the times. Research problems to consider include: 1) What have been the divorce trends in the United States over the past generations? 2) What is the current divorce rate today and how does it represent society? 3) What does research say about the impact of divorce today and for the future?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this literature review is to better understand both the past and present impacts of divorce on society by examining societal trends through the history of divorce.

Assumptions of the Study

Assumptions of this study are that the sources used are credible and reliable. It is assumed that the statistics as reported are a fair representation of the population it portrays. It is also assumed that negative impacts associated with divorce are actually caused from the divorce and not from other circumstances in the child's life which are unknown to the researchers.

Definition of Terms

Divorce. “a judicial declaration dissolving a marriage in whole or in part, esp. one that releases the husband and wife from all matrimonial obligations” (Dictionary.com, 2010).

No-fault divorce. a divorce in which the dissolution of a marriage requires neither a showing of wrong-doing of either party nor any evidentiary proceedings at all. Laws providing for no-fault divorce allow a family court to grant a divorce in response to a petition by either party to the marriage, without requiring the petitioner to provide evidence that the respondent has committed a breach of the marital contract. Laws providing for no-fault divorce also limit the potential legal defenses of a respondent who would prefer to remain married (Wikipedia.com, 2010).

Uncontested divorce. “a divorce where the two parties are able to come to an agreement (either with or without lawyers/mediators/collaborative counsel) about the property, children and the support issues” (Wikipedia.com, 2010).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study include the large amount of research material available and only a small percentage was able to be included for the review. Another limitation is the varying and sometimes opposing statistics that were found for the purpose of the study, as discussed in the paper, statistics on divorce are difficult to obtain for many reasons. The researcher attempted to include statistics that were often duplicated by multiple sources.

Methodology

The remainder of the paper will outline the evolution of divorce in the United States over the past century and briefly discuss relevant occurrences that may have either impacted divorce rates and trends or been impacted upon by these societal events through a literature review. The researcher will also include a more in-depth look at the current divorce rates and statistics, as well as implications for children of divorce.

Chapter II: Literature Review

History and Statistics of Divorce: Rates and Trends

The history of divorce dates back as early as the sixteenth century in Europe, and many believe it was a firm rejection by Protestant leaders against Catholicism. As discussed by French philosopher Voltaire, divorce has likely been around since the advent of formalized marriage, (De Mostafa, 2009). According to Adams and Coltrane (2006):

The 18th- and 19th-century privileging of contract relations allowed lifelong marriage to coexist with the acceptance of divorce if one of the spouses failed to live up to the marital contract. Such thinking affirmed the nature of marriage as not only between marrying partners but also as an agreement with the state that marriage was to be conducted along certain socially understood lines and in accordance with agreed-upon family roles. (19)

Originally, the first settlers from England had to base their grounds for divorce in religious terms from the Bible and these no-fault divorces were very difficult to obtain. Divorces were only allowed when they were necessary and were used to avoid morally complicated issues associated with married but separated individuals. Reasons that included grounds for divorce were desertion, adultery, impotence, regular inebriation and abuse, but were none the less, difficult to prove and had to be concrete. As the 13 original colonies eventually became the 50 United States, reasons for divorce stayed the same, but definitions became slightly looser according to Coontz (2005):

In America, fewer than half the states accepted cruelty as a reason for divorce before 1840, and when they did, the cruelty had to be extreme. After 1940, however, cruelty began to be defined more loosely, and by 1960, a majority of states also allowed divorce in cases of habitual drunkenness. (9)

Statistics from the late 1800s show that even though the number of divorces was still relatively low, the frequency was increasing. According to Coontz (2005), between 1880 and 1890, the United States experienced a 70 percent increase in the divorce rate with only .07/1000 people divorcing in 1900. Coontz also states that many researchers believe that the low numbers of divorces of the period are due to older values and social constraints that linked the achieving happiness through marriage alone. Expectations for marital companionship and sexuality were not what they are today, if men and women were unhappy with aspects of their spouse, they were more likely to have those needs met by same-sex friendships than by marriage. Marital ideals of new expectations of love and gender roles were not factors in marriages until the early years of the 20th century.

Increasingly, both men and women marrying in the 1910s and 1920s were expecting more and more from the union. True love, satisfaction, sexual intimacy and companionship were goals that newlyweds planned on for their futures together. With these changes, many marriages became more satisfying, however with greater expectations came greater disappointments and failures, leading to a new profession of marriage counselors emerging in the 1920s.

According to Adams and Coltrane (2007), during the first half of the 1900s, laws remained relatively unchanged as requirements that grounds be proved in court before divorce be granted pitted a guilty victimized against a saddened victim. However, during the 1930s and 1950s, as the nation experienced wars and both extremely good and bad time, it is no surprise that marriage and divorce rates changed along with the social circumstances.

The Great Depression was a worldwide economic depression lasting most of the 1930s and began in the United States when the stock market crashed on October 29, 1929. Later this date became known as 'Black Tuesday,' and the aftermath of the crash was soon felt by almost

every country in the world (Wikipedia.com, 2010). In the United States, unemployment rates spiked to 25 percent and bad economics quickly affected family life for everyone. Divorce rates receded during the decade of the Great Depression, but desertion rates climbed. The end of the 1930s was also the beginning of WWII and the country seemed to come together to join in the war efforts, women were needed in the work force while men were overseas fighting. However, when the war ended in 1945, divorce rates spiked once again. “In 1946, concerned experts estimated almost 1 in 3 marriages was ending in divorce” (Coontz, 2006, p. 12).

The 1950s is a nostalgic era in the nation’s history that epitomized family life and values in television, movies, art and other media. After two long decades of economic hardships and war, the country seemed to shift its focus onto family. In 1958, the divorce rate was not only half what it had been in 1946 (Coontz, 2006), but the rate of marriage was increasing and the age of people entering marriages was decreasing. Additionally, in the 1950s the U.S. courts began to recognize no-fault divorces as reasons to end a marriage. Reasons discussed previously that were required to be granted a divorce, such as adultery, severe abuse, or abandonment were no longer necessary. Although legitimate reasons now included long-term separation, loss of sanity and incompatibility, these were often difficult to prove in a court of law. Because of this difficulty, no-fault legislation was not often used as a means to dissolve a marriage at this time. It wasn’t until California enacted no-fault divorce statues in 1969 that other states began to follow their lead and divorce proceeding actually became easier to initiate (Singer as cited in Adams & Coltrane, 2007). However, not everyone agreed that a simpler divorce was the answer to ending marriages. “It has been said that this kind of simple divorce has broken important bonds, and will continue to compromise the institution of the family” (De Mostafa, 2009).

Again, after a decade of marriages focused on family and not necessarily spousal compatibility, the 1960s brought about emotional expectations for partners similar to the 1920s. In fact, “There was a major shift in the expectations regarding marriage during the 1960s and beyond with more and more emphasis on the affective aspects of a relationship” (Polomeno 2007, p. 16). According to Polomeno (2007), divorce rates dramatically increased by 50 percent between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. “As early as 1957 divorce rates started rising again in the United States and several other countries. In fact, one in every three American couples who married in the 1950s eventually divorced” (Coontz, 2005, p. 252). Significant family factors contributing to this increase included: rise in women’s liberation movement; the sexual revolution; the Supreme Court’s granting of marriage as a “functional” right under the U.S. Constitution and thus the abolition of laws restricting marriage between races; the elimination in most states of no-fault based divorce; and a significant increase in women’s labor force participation (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007).

According to Stevenson and Wolfers (2007), much of the concern over the high divorce rates of the 1970s arose because of the impact of divorce on children. In 1968, the average divorce involved 1.34 children, up from the 1950s. Divorced couples who share children face the struggle of child support and custody issues. By the late 1970s, in reaction for increased child support payments, a father’s rights movement began to promote joint custody between mothers and fathers. This movement was part of a greater men’s rights movement that was in response to the famous women’s movement of the 1970s (Adams & Coltrane, 2007). Fathers, who lost custody during this era, blame feminists for the perceived loss of privileges many divorced father’s suffered. Additionally, considering that men typically have a higher income level, especially during this decade, many fathers were ordered to make child support payments

that became regulated by the federal and state governments by the mid-1980s to ensure proper payment to mothers and children (Coltrane & Hickman, 1992, as cited in Adams & Coltrane, 2007). As discussed in Coontz (2005), many other legal victories in the 1970s contributed to American couples rethinking how their marriages should function. In 1972, Title IX of the Education Act forced schools to begin funding women's athletics and prohibiting discrimination by sex to any federally funded school program. In 1973, the United States Supreme Court ruled that women had the right to choose abortion in *Roe v. Wade* and in 1975 women were no longer required to obtain their husband's written permission to get a loan or a credit card.

By the late 1970s the social climate had changed so drastically that people's attitudes and beliefs towards marriage had also changed. For example, in the 1950s, most people surveyed believed that persons whom remained single by choice were "sick" or "immoral" as compared to only 25 percent of people agreeing to that statement in 1978 (Coontz, 2005). By 1980, divorce rates rose again to 50 percent as one in every two newlyweds could expect their marriage to end sometime in the future. However, after 1980, rates leveled off and began a slow decline as social structure of relationships changed and fewer and fewer people remarried after a first divorce.

The Last Three Decades of Divorce

As discussed in Adams and Coltrane (2006), Lakoff concludes that divorce has been relegated to the margins of public consciousness. Assumptions over the last few decades have been made that "healthy" marriages will make divorce go away. However, these assumptions set up the two as polar opposites, associating the former with moral good and the latter with evil. Current statistics on divorce vary greatly depending on the source and sub-groups of individuals studied. According to statistics reported by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Data and Statistics), in 2008, 40 percent of all marriages ended in divorce, which

was a decline from the past two decades. Additionally, in that same year, 46 percent of all new marriages involved a remarriage following one or more divorces for one or both parties. Further statistics from the CDC show how marriage rates declined from 2007 (7.3/1000 people) to 2009 (6.8/1000 people). Similarly, divorce rates also declined from 2007 (3.6/1000 people) to 2009 (3.4/1000 people) (cdc.gov/, 2010).

“The family is not a static institution. In recent decades, marriage rates have fallen, divorce rates have risen and the defining characteristics of marriage have changed” (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007, p.27). Many social changes have impacted the divorce rates of the last thirty years in the United States. Age of marriage, education and income of couples, having children out of wed-lock and cohabitation of couples are all contributing factors when studying the rates and trends of recent generations. Today, the age of couples at the time of their first marriage is much higher than it was in the 1950s or during previous decades. “In 1960 only one in ten American women aged twenty-five to twenty-nine was single. In 1998, nearly 40 percent of women in that age group were unmarried” (Coontz, 2005, p. 264). Since the 1970s, more and more women have started going to college or entering the work force after graduating from high school. Marriage and financial dependency on a spouse is no longer the only option for women leaving home. Another social change is that couples in the last 30 years have been more likely to cohabit first before entering marriage. “It has been concluded that couples whom live together before marriage are more likely to divorce or not to go on to marry at all so without cohabitation, divorce rates may be even higher” (Davis, 2010, “The Changing Nature of Divorce and Marriage,” para. 5).

The demographics of who is getting married in today’s society are as important as who is getting divorced today. According to Luscombe (2010), age of marriage, finances, education

and bearing children together all seem to impact whether or not a marriage will last. Individuals with more income, more education, better social supports and fewer children are less likely to experience divorce than their counter-parts. According to Paul Amato, a sociologist at Penn State:

What seems most clear is that less-educated, lower-income, couples split up more often than college grads and may be doing so in higher numbers than before. The people who are most likely to get divorced have the least resources to deal with its impact, particularly on children. (Luscombe, 2010, "Divorcing by the Numbers," para. 7)

According to Robert Hughes (2008), there are two significant factors affecting the rising divorce rate in the United States and elsewhere. The first contributing factor is that men and women are less in need of each other for economic survival. Women today are not only graduating from college at a higher rate than men, but they are closing the income gap for equal status jobs. If a woman is in a broken marriage, making her own money and obtaining health insurance for herself and her children, she is more willing to consider divorce an option. Today, most women who experience divorce face a drop in their standard of living, but are more capable of doing it on their own none the less. However, according to Coontz (2005), there are also risks associated to women who stay in unhappy marriages; not only do unhappily married women have higher rates of depression and alcohol abuse than single women, but a bad marriage raises a woman's cholesterol and decreases her immune functioning. It is estimated that among divorces today, 95 percent are "uncontested" where both parties come to an agreement about property, finances, children and support issues of the above (Wikipedia, 2010). Hughes (2008), goes on to state that the second contributing factor to the rising divorce rate is the gains made in birth

control allow men and women to separate sexual activity from having children and making a life-long commitment to one another.

Couples with children have a lower divorce rate than childless couples (Ahrons, 2004). Many sociologists believe childlessness may be a common cause of divorce. Others researchers believe many married couples with major marital issues often stay together for the sake of the children, even in situations where divorce may be best. According to Teachman (2004), between 1970 and 1996, the proportion of children under the age of 18 living in a single-parent household grew from 12 percent to 28 percent.

“Many divorced parents ended their marriages for good reasons, and others divorced at a time when expert opinion told them that what was best for them was also best for their children” (Wallerstein cited in Markquardt, 2005, p. xxi). According to Wallerstein (2000), parents undoubtedly expected that family life would soon resume its normal course and parents and children would benefit from the end of the marital conflict. Additionally, parents may not have fully understood how divorce goes on to affect the lives of young people once they reach adulthood. Because of the complicated nature of divorce for both women and men, parents may be caught up in rebuilding their own lives which may include restructuring finances, dealing with social stigmas, new living accommodations, possible new career changes and the potential of new romantic relationships.

Demographers now tell us that a quarter of adults under the age of forty-five are children of divorce. We are talking about millions of people who are struggling with the residue of an experience that their parents would rather forget. (Wallerstein, 2000, p. xxv)

The debate continues over the impact of divorce on children, but according to Stevenson and Wolfers (2007), it is almost impossible to determine how much of the damage was caused by

the divorce and how much was caused by the events leading up to the divorce. They argue that the type of parents and households that end up divorced are likely to be different from those that do not. Actually, these difference themselves may be the cause for worse outcomes for children even if the family were to remain intact.

Impact of Divorce on Children

There are many confusing and contradictory media reports about the effects of divorce on children. Much of the discussion on the effects comes from research done by Wallerstein, Lewis and Blakeslee (2000). The findings of their research of children from divorced families, dates back as many as twenty-five-years, and the results were disturbing at best. According to the researchers (2000), “Divorce is a cumulative experience. Its impact increases overtime and rises to a crescendo in adulthood” (p. 298).

In Wallerstein and Kelly’s (1980, as cited in Weston, 2009) study of 60 families and 131 children of divorce, “teachers reported that two thirds of the children showed changes in school behavior and/or academic performance following the parental separation” (“Effects of Divorce or Parental Separation on Children,” para. 2). Even more devastating are the effects reported by Wallerstein, Lewis and Blakeslee (2000), according to the researchers, children in post-divorce families are more aggressive, experience more depression, have more learning disabilities, suffer from more peer related problems, are two to three times more likely to be referred for psychological help and are more likely to end up in mental health and hospital settings. They also report these children engaging in sexual activities at younger ages, greater chance of having children out wedlock, having lower marriage rates and increased divorce rates later on in life. In fact, most of the effects of a parent’s divorce aren’t actually even felt by the children until adulthood.

However, not all research paints such a grim picture for children of divorce.

Wallerstein's conclusions that children of divorce are doomed to have such serious problems may have led others to conduct their own research to find out what outcomes are actually expected for these children. In fact, Ahrons (2004) reports that Wallerstein's harmful effects of divorce are exaggerated and not as widespread as she claims them to be. Ahrons goes on to say that two-thirds of the parents in the twenty-five-year study, ranged from chronically depressed to seriously mentally ill. Undoubtedly, not all divorced families could expect the same outcomes of their children as these already troubled families experienced.

In 1991, Amato and Keith examined the results of 92 studies involving 13,000 children ranging in age from preschool to young adult, which included children of both divorced and intact (married with two-parents) families. According to Amato, (as cited in Hughes, 2009) overall results of this analysis found that children from divorced families are on "average" only slightly worse off than children from intact families. However, children from divorced families may still experience more difficulty in school, more behavior problems, more negative self-concepts, more problems with peers and more problems getting along with their parents. Amato goes on to state that more recent research, updated in 2001, indicates that this pattern continues.

Although these findings may also seem devastating to the success of children from divorced families, important findings suggest that the actual differences between the two groups are small and the children in the groups are more alike than they are different (Hughes, 2009). According to Amato and Keith (as cited in Hughes, 2009), there are several types of risks that may contribute to children's difficulties. These are:

1. PARENTAL LOSS—divorce often results in the loss of contact with one parent and with this loss children also lose the knowledge, skills and resources (emotional, financial, etc.) of that parent.
2. ECONOMIC LOSS—another result of divorce is that children living in single parent families are less likely to have as many economic resources as children living in intact families.
3. MORE LIFE STRESS—divorce often results in many changes in children’s living situations such as changing schools, child care, homes, etc. Children often also have to make adjustments to changes in relationships with friends and extended family members. These changes create a more stressful environment for children.
4. POOR PARENTAL ADJUSTMENT—generally how children fare in families is due in part to the mental health of the parents, this is likely to be true for children in divorced families as well.
5. LACK OF PARENTAL COMPETENCE—much of what happens to children in general is related to the skill of parents in helping them to develop. The competence of parents following divorce is likely to have considerable influence on how the children are doing.
6. EXPOSURE TO CONFLICT BETWEEN PARENTS—conflict is frequently part of families and may be especially common in families that have undergone divorce. The degree to which children are exposed to conflict may have substantial effects on children’s well-being. (para. 6)

However, regardless of the degree to which children are impacted from the divorce of their parents, it is important to identify these risk factors in an attempt to minimize their effects.

While researchers, teachers, parents and counselors may never agree on how damaging divorce is on children, it is clear that some of the long-term effects may be avoided.

There is mounting evidence that interventions provided at the time of divorce can improve things for the families that receive them. Divorce education programs increased threefold in the mid-1990s, and although the programs vary widely in scope and approach, results are promising. (Fritz, 2000, "Children on Divorce: A Fresh Perspective," para. 5)

The truth is, divorce is a part of society and has immediate and long term-effects on both divorcing parents and their children. These effects are felt in schools, communities and health care organizations. Coontz (2006) states that divorce changes which have occurred and continue to happen in society are inevitable regardless of our own personal likes or dislikes to their effects. "No matter how much we value marriage, we cannot afford to ignore the fact that so many children are being raised and so many obligations are being incurred in alternative setting" (p. 15).

Chapter III: Summary

Summary

Divorce is an experience that affects all of society; it shapes the lives of millions of children and adults and, in many ways, is a reflection of current culture. Today, almost half of all marriages end in divorce and fewer and fewer people are choosing to marry every year. The history of divorce in the United States dates back to when settlers first stepped onto American soil. Expectations for marriage, social stigma for divorce, dependency of women on men and legal issues of divorce have all drastically changed over the past century.

Current and historical events such as The Great Depression, WWII and the changing social climate of the 1970s have all impacted the divorce rates in the nation. In many cases, people stayed married during difficult times only to divorce when events turned around and individuals began to search for their own happiness. Through the years people have entered marriages for many different reasons and continue to do so for their own personal expectations or needs.

The first American settlers had a much more difficult time obtaining a divorce than do couples today. Originally, divorces were only allowed when “necessary” and issued only to avoid moral dilemmas such as married persons living separately. Many researchers believe that also contributing to the low numbers of divorce at the time was the fact married couples linked the achieving of happiness through marriage alone. Marital ideals of new expectations of love and gender roles became factors in marriage in the early years of the 20th century.

Divorce rates dropped during the 1930s due to the economic hardship felt by almost every American, but desertion rates climbed. The country came together again during the 1940s as American fought in WWII, but divorce rates spiked again at the end of the war in 1945.

During the 1950s, marriage rates rose and people seemed to commit once again to the idea of family as young people were marrying at younger ages than in previous decades. The 1960s and 1970s brought on dramatic social climate changes fueled mostly by the Civil Rights Act and the women's movement. Women were putting their own education and careers first, while waiting to enter into marriage or start a family until later in life. The impact of divorce on children became a concern in the late 1970s as the divorce rates once again climbed. By the mid-1980s, state and federal government became involved in legal child support issues to ensure that children were being taken care of.

Currently, couples who are more educated, have greater financial wealth and who have children are less likely to divorce than are their counter-parts. Today, at least one million children are affected by the divorce of their parents each year. Children who come from divorced families have been at the center of research and debate for the last few decades. Recently, researchers have warned about the long-term damaging effects of divorce on a child's emotional, behavioral and academic successes. However, within these studies, parents and child psychologists have been able to identify many risk factors that can be controlled by parents, while they are together and separated, to help minimize the effects of divorce on children. Parents who are able to put their children's needs before their own have the best chance of reducing the negative effects of divorce on their children. It is not merely enough to condemn divorce, it is more valuable to parents, children and society that efforts be made to recognize and help minimize risk factors for those involved through divorce education programs at various social service levels.

Recommendations for Further Research

With the changing dynamic of the modern family, and the current legislation involving same-sex unions and marriage, it is critical that these individuals and children be included in future studies. Because of the ever-evolving social climate, men and women are cohabitating together at increased numbers, co-parenting without a marriage or a divorce and entering same-sex relationships where children are involved. For many people involved in a break-up after months or years with the same person, it is likely that the effects of the dissolution are similar to that of a divorced couple.

Same-sex marriage is a civil rights, political, social, moral and religious issue that has caused great debate among many Americans. Currently, there is no federal recognition of same-sex marriages in our country. However, there are five states that recognize the union and allow gay couples to marry and receive the same rights granted to opposite-sex married couples. Same-sex couples seek to gain economic, insurance, child-custody, and civil rights that other married couples are automatically afforded. With these changing family dynamics, it is important to look that the divorce or separation rate of these couples and their children in further research. Individuals involved experience the same struggles when the union ends as traditional married couples.

Another area recommended for further research are the outcomes for individuals and children who never married, but shared a long-term relationship that ended. Currently, the marriage rate in our country is declining as more and more individuals are cohabitating before entering a legal marriage. Often when couples cohabitate, their family structure is the same as couples whom are married; finances, household chores, parenting, and social circles are shared

between the individuals, causing dependency upon each other. When these relationships end, there are many changes and challenges for the couple and any children involved.

Finally, research on the effects of divorce on men, women and children suggests that there may be many long-term struggles and issues for those involved. There is also evidence to suggest that many unhappily married couples stay together “for the sake of the children.” However, there needs to be further research to examine the effects of an unhappy marriage on those involved. The research on the effects of divorce on children supports that children often feel torn between parents when they split, leaving them to “take sides” in the divorce. However, children whom are raised in an unhappy marriage may feel the same tension and be forced to take sides in the constant disagreements and fighting. Many researchers conclude that it is difficult to study which effects of divorce are from the separation and which are from the unhappy marriage which caused the divorce.

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