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The Impact of Divorce on Children Living Conditions and Behaviors: A study on a Sample of Divorcees in Jordan

Reham Abu Ghaboush, Talal Al-Qdah

Social Work Department, The University of Jordan

Wafa A. Jomah

Free Lance – Researcher

Abstract:

Background and Objectives: Divorce is known to have tremendous negative impacts on children. These impacts are detrimental to the development of children and their standards of living. Globally this topic is well research, while in our region still it needs more investigation and interventions. Therefore, the current research investigates the consequences of divorce on children and their mothers. It responds to the following questions, (a) Does divorce impact the daily living arrangement of divorced mothers and their children?, (b) Does mothers' divorce impact the social behavior of their children? And (c) Does divorce impact the living standards of mothers' and their children?

Methodology: The population of the study was divorced men and women in Jordan at the time of data collection. The sample of the study consisted of 400 participants (divorced men and women). Data were collected through interviews conducted by professional and trained researchers using a questionnaire which was designed as a main tool for the study.

Results: Finding of the study show that children are severely impacted by divorce. They daily life was interrupted, they living arrangement was altered, their level of education was lowered. In addition, they experience psychological and emotional and social problems.

Conclusions: The findings of the study contributed to the international research finding from various regions in the world and through decades of research that divorce is a highly stressor for children in their present and future life.

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Precautious measures and interventions should be used to mitigate the negative impact of divorce on children.

Recommendations: Further investigation using children samples is proposed, with the intention of developing evidence-based intervention to counter the negative impact of divorce and to help children and their mothers (and fathers) to better adjust and cope with the consequences of divorce.

Keywords:

children, divorce, divorced mothers. Children of divorces parents, Impact of divorce

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Introduction

Divorce rates are increasing almost all over the world. Divorce is the major stressor of families and their members. It is a direct attack on the structure and functions of families. In general divorce is a difficult and demanding human experience. Divorce is considered as the dissolution of family and social life. It is also considered as a mean to overcome the failure of the marriage as the last resort (Coskun and Sarlak, 2020). Understanding that living in a turbulent and conflictual marriage is more harmful than the dissolution of marriage.

In order to best understand the consequences of divorced on the divorcees and their children, we initiated an ongoing research project studying divorce, causes, consequence and responses. The current article focuses on the economic and behavioral impact of divorce on divorced women with children. How divorce interrupt the daily life of children, their living arrangement, their education and their social and personal functioning.

The importance of the study

As stated previously divorce represent one of the major stressors in people's life. It has drastic and crucial consequences on their live and future. Therefore, it is of utmost important to undertake such studies to best understand the dynamics of divorce and how people react to it, cope with it, and conduct their life. A thorough understanding of divorce will help in proposing policies, programs and measures to counter the negative effects of divorce.

Research Questions

The major research question to be answered is what are the economic and behavioral impact of divorces on mothers with children? Sub question are:

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- Does divorce impact the daily living arrangement of divorced mothers and their children?
- Does mothers' divorce impact the social behavior of their children?
- Does divorce impact the living standards of mothers' and their children?

Related Literature

Divorce and its consequences on the divorcees and their families has attracted research and studies all over the world. The serious impacts of divorce especially on children makes it a ripe area for continuous research. In this section we briefly review the most relevant and recent literature on the consequences of divorces on children and their divorced mothers.

There is a group of Arab studies on the consequences of divorce and its effects on divorced women and their children (Zahwa, 2012; Al-Obaid and Al-Ramzi, 2010; Al-Anzi, 2009; Al-Ali, 2004; Asaad, 2007; Tunisian, 2002; Al-Yaqoub, 1994). These studies have shown that divorced women in general experience a myriad of difficulties in their life after divorce. They suffer from a sense of social isolation and stigma, because people are asking why the divorce took place, and the view of divorced women is inferior and difficult to re-marry, compared to men. Men are less stigmatized than women. They can marry directly even before the divorce process is completed. While women in general sacrifice their life in order to care for their children. The uncomfortable view of a divorced woman causes her to avoid social interaction and tends to be withdrawn, and the divorced woman may be subjected to harassment and mistrust. Although the increased incidences of divorce make it a noticeable and a fact of life. Still women suffer from the dissolution of their families, and it is harder for them to remarry or assume a comfortable life.

Also, in their study, Al Gharaibeh and Olimat, (2012), found that children of divorced parents experience social suffering, problems in social relations and behavior problems as well as economic problems for the divorced women. Children of divorced in some occasions are used as a weapon between the two conflicting parents. This causes severe harm for children. Some of them even are shredded between their parents, and it is not unusual that some of them experience suicidal ideations.

A number of recent studies and review studies reiterated and confirmed the negative consequences of divorce on women and their children (Amato and Keith 1991, Wallerstein, 1991, Douglas, 2020, Zhang, 2019).

Douglas V.I (2020) in a comprehensive review of research from several disciplines regarding the effects of divorce on children assert that there is a

growing consensus that “significant numbers of children suffer for many years from psychological and social difficulties associated with continuing and/or new stresses within the post-divorce family and experience heightened anxiety in forming enduring attachments at later developmental stages including young adulthood. Different conceptual models in the field are explicated.” For example (Douglas, 2020), these negative impact of divorce on children include: “Poor performance in academics, loss of interest in social activity, difficulty adapting to change, emotionally sensitive, anger/irritability, feelings of guilt, introduction of destructive behavior, increase in health problems, and loss of faith in marriage and family unit”.

Wallerstein, (1991) in a comprehensive review of research from several disciplines regarding long-term effects of divorce on children reported that significant numbers of children suffer for many years from “psychological and social difficulties associated with continuing and/or new stresses within the post-divorce family and experience heightened anxiety in forming enduring attachments at later developmental stages including young adulthood. Different conceptual models in the field are explicated. Wallerstein, (1991) emphasized the “critical importance of expanding clinical research to enhance understanding of the child's perspective and experience is proposed.”

Zhang (2019) and based on the review by Amato and Keith 1991) reported that a large body of research in Western societies has indicated an association between parental divorce, single parenthood, and negative child outcomes. Accordingly, those children living with a divorced single parent have been viewed as disadvantaged in academic performance, cognitive and noncognitive development, and psychosocial development. This what the current study investigates and show support to these findings. According to Maunde, et all (2019) *The stress involved in the divorce can cause lack of sleep, depression, fatigue and listlessness; a divorce can have numerous psychological implications as well.*

The thrust of the previous studies on the consequences of divorce on children can be summarized as that the children of divorced women, suffer from trauma, educational problems, poor social interaction and low academic achievement. They are also victims of the negative perception of divorce and divorced women, and they are most vulnerable to delinquency. As well they feel inferiority and may experience several mental health disorders.

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Methodology

The current article is based on data collected on an ongoing project focuses on divorce, causes, consequences and responses. Data were collected through interviews conducted by professional and trained researchers. The study used surveys and in-depth focus groups discussion

To achieve the aims of the study, a questionnaire was designed as a main tool for the study, which was implemented through personal interviews of the divorced and included four main sections, the first section was on personal data of the respondents, and the second focused on studying the factors and reasons leading to divorce. The fourth section of the tool dealt with the effects of divorce on children as well as the economic effects of divorce. The present article reports on the fourth section of the data collection tool.

Statistical analysis: After the completion of data collection, verification and coding, it was entered and analyzed using a descriptive and inferential statistical integration according to the levels and nature of the data collected, which is multi-level data, from nominal to quantitative data.

Population and Sample:

The population of the study was divorced men and women in Jordan at the time of data collection.

The sample of the study consisted of 400 participants (divorced men and women). In order to approximate the representativeness of the sample, data was collected from the three regions of Jordan (North, Middle, and South). Participants was recruited from NGOs and agencies used as a meeting places from divorced individuals and their children.

Description of the Sample:

More than half of them were females (57.0%) and the rest were males (43%). The sample has included respondents of all ages from 17-75 years, with an average age of 36 years and a median of 35 years. The most frequent ages were between 25-45 years, with bias for ages 5 and its multiples (25, 30, 35, 40, 45), and this is a known bias - as people tend to express their age by rounding them off to these numbers.

Mate selection was based on traditional customs for (64.3%) and after previous knowledge for (30.8%), and the rest used other arrangements. Concerning the relationship of kinship, the data indicate that about half of them were married to relatives.

As for post-divorce arrangements, especially for children, more than half (55.3%) live with the mother, 16.3% live with the father, and the rest are with either the mother's family, the parents' family, or other arrangements. Living in a separate residence before divorce was about three quarters of the sample (74%). After the divorce, the percentage decreased to 45.8%, and they moved to housing with one of the parents about half of the divorced (48.8%). The percentage of those who live in their own homes also increased from (48%) to (54.8%). This increase may be due to the fact that the divorced people returned to live with their families, and most of the time the people owned housing. In the case of husbands, and in the prime of their married lives, they often rent housing.

Economic and Behavioral Impacts of Divorce

As expected, divorce has great economic burdens on divorced women, especially women, who often take care of children. It appears that there have been shifts in the living arrangement of the divorced women. It is clear that divorce is a huge financial burden for a large percentage (42.8%) of divorced women. In addition, the cost of living consumes a large portion of their income (52%).

As a result of the economic pressures, about one-fifth (21%) of the divorcees moved to a new house due to insufficient resources, in addition to more than a third (34.5%) who sought to find work to cover the shortfall in alimony. Moreover, more than one fifth of the participants (22.3%) in the study had to live with their relatives for the same reason. There (21.3%) of those who had to sell holdings to cover the financial shortages, a larger percentage (29.3%) borrowed money, and (14.8%) transferred their children to less expensive schools. These difficult economic conditions led about a third (31.3%) of participants to seek aid from institutions or associations.

The harshest of these alternatives appears to be pushing children to work (6.8%). While those who are pushed to child labor represents a small percentage, however, child labor is considered a detrimental for the development and education of children. The most conspicuous harm of child labor is that it comes at the expense of their proper education, cognitive, emotional and social development. Consequently, child labor has long-lasting effects on children future development and quality of life.

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Table (1) Economic Burdens of Divorce

Items	Yes	No	NA	Refused to answer
1. My children and I moved to a less expensive home because the alimony is insufficient	21.0	34.3	40.3	4.5
2. I sought to find work to cover the lack of maintenance	34.5	41.0	22.3	2.3
3. I had to live with my relatives because the alimony was not enough	22.3	52.5	23.8	1.5
4. I sold holdings to cover the shortfall of alimony	21.3	54.3	22.0	2.5
5. I borrowed to cover the shortfall in alimony	29.3	47.0	21.5	2.3
6. I moved my children to less expensive schools	14.8	41.3	39.0	5.0
7. I have to send my children to work	6.8	53.0	34.8	5.5
8. I got married to another to cover the needs of my children	6.8	54.5	35.0	3.8
9. The cost of living consumes a lot of my salary	52.0	23.3	22.8	2.0
10. Divorce costs were a huge financial burden	42.8	37.5	16.5	3.3
11. I applied for aid from an institution or association	31.3	49.8	17.3	1.8
12. I receive any aid now	18.0	63.3	16.5	2.3

The behavioral impacts of divorce on mothers and their children

The data indicate behavioral shifts in both the divorced and their children. A number of them indicated, in varying degrees, that they had become more assertive with their children after separation (14%, 20.8% and 12.8% always, often and sometimes respectively). These numbers, and with varying timing and frequency of occurrence, but as a whole, they indicate the occurrence of this behavior among the divorced, see Table No. (?):

Table (2) The Behavioral Impacts of Divorce on Children

Items	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Scarcely/ seldom	Never	Refused to answer
1. My seriousness (firmness) increased in dealing with my children after separating from my partner	14.0	20.8	12.8	8.0	21.0	23.5
2. My children have problems at school	3.8	14.0	15.8	13.8	26.0	26.8
3. My children's tendencies to violence increased	3.5	10.8	15.8	15.0	31.5	23.5
4. My children's feelings have changed towards me	4.3	9.8	12.5	12.3	37.0	24.3
5. My divorce caused social and emotional problems for my children	9.0	17.5	20.0	9.3	20.5	23.8
6. My children adapted to divorce	11.5	17.8	18.5	12.0	15.0	25.3
7. My children get more chances to socialize with people	20.5	10.5	17.3	13.3	14.0	24.5
8. My children are satisfied with the watch time they receive	13.5	12.3	15.3	13.3	19.5	26.3
9. My children behave more violently	3.8	10.0	14.0	17.5	30.5	24.3
10. My children became introverted	4.0	7.0	17.3	17.3	31.0	23.5

As for the children themselves, divorce has a myriad of behavioral problems and difficulties for them. Children suffer in varying degrees from problems in schools, Parents' emotional changes towards their children and vice versa, parents, albeit in small proportions. Attitudes toward violence and violent behavior have also increased among children, and some of them have become introverted. In total, the divorce causes social and emotional problems for children (9.0%, 17.5%, and 20.0%, always, often, and sometimes, respectively). On the other hand, over time, children have adapted to divorce at different rates (11.5%, 17.8%, 18.5%, always, often and sometimes respectively).

Children in some instances had more opportunities to socialize after a divorce. This may be due to the feeling of the caring parent who has a double duty for his/her children. As for the adequacy of children's viewing times, the data indicates that it was sufficient for a few percentages in general. This is expected, as the time for viewing is short and is often in centers or institutions that do not inspire intimacy, and times of viewing may have been dominated by conflict and problems between the two divorced parents. Which makes it a terrible and unpleasant occasion for children.

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Discussion

The findings of this study support a large number of studies that are conducted in various parts of the world addressing the impact of divorce on children. Divorce obviously has a drastic negative impact on the life and development of children. The impact of divorce includes but is not limited to children's standard of living, living arrangement, education, and psychosocial emotions and relationships.

The serious impacts indicate the extent of the emotional, psychological and relational damage that divorce causes. It is understandable that divorce incurs all of these negative consequences for all parties involved including children. Divorce is a forced and unwelcomed termination of a marriage relationship in conditions of conflict, polarization and possibly intrigue. Divorce is accompanied with intense emotional and emotional immersion in the process of divorce. In addition to the fact that divorce comes as the dissolution of a human relationship that is supposed to have been built in general on love, desire, drive and enthusiasm. The severe emotional and social effects of divorce indicate the extent of the emotional and social investment in the marriage process. And these potential energies rebounded after the divorce process to be negative consequences in the entirety of this complex human relationship arena.

Recommendations:

Further research is needed especially research that uses children samples and utilizing proper methodology that is appropriate for young children. In addition, evidence based programs and interventions are needed in order to best help children and their mother to best adjust and respond to the demand of the new life after divorce. Mitigating the process of divorce in more peaceful manner may minimize the negative impact of divorce on children.

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