

## Effects of Divorce on Children: Case Studies of a Family in South Bihar

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### ABSTRACT

Divorce means the end of married life. It is the situation when both husband and wife decide not to stay together anymore. It is an unplanned event in family's life. The entire family has to go through a lot of ups and downs to overcome it. Divorce leaves millions of children each year to deal with the process. The present study is purely qualitative and descriptive in nature. The researchers have adopted purposive sampling to reach the respondents. In-depth interviews and case studies were used for the data collection. This study helps to understand the post-divorce aspect of the respondents. This study reveals that parents divorce affects children in multiple ways, which creates a lot of hindrance in holistic development. The post-divorce period for the children was very disturbing because of separation from either of the parent. In this study, prolonged stress was developed among the children due to the elasticity of the problem. So, parental separation brought some peace in the family environment and provided enough time to work on self-enhancement. Overall, the children face many challenges post-divorce, but they treat it as a constructive step for the entire family.

**Keywords:** divorce, children, holistic development

### INTRODUCTION

When we talk about society, marriage has a strong bond with the community. Because human beings cannot live in isolation that is clearly understood from the Ubuntu theory of social work. Marriage is considered as the new dimension of anyone's life which actually imparts new roles and responsibilities as a part of the extended family. Marriage is the most important institution in anyone's life. But there is another side of a single coin: not all marriages have a pleasant story lineup. Divorce is not a planned event in a family's life. Divorce actually disturbs the equilibrium of each individual of the particular family. Today a couple's incidence of getting a divorce is more as compared to the previous time. As it is discussed earlier that is not a planned event, many factors need to be focused for the betterment of the entire family including children. Literature outlines that child from divorced families experience complex social, academic, and behavioral adjustments compared to children of intact families (Doherty & Needle, 1991). Woosley (2009) also concluded that children from non-intact families tend to have lower psychological well-being as compared to those from intact families. A divorce is definitely an unexpected and disastrous event in a anyone's life. Divorce actually involves each and every individual in a family in different ways. Divorce actually affects each and every individual differently. In a study it was found that about fifty percent of all marriages end with divorce, leaving one million children each year to combat with the process of divorce (Martin, 2003)

Divorce rates in the United States has been increased since the Civil war, decreased during the Great Depression. It was at its peak in 1980, and have remained around fifty percent since then (Lazar, 2004). Studies predict that thirty-eight percent of white children and seventy-five percent of black children born to married parents will experience divorce before sixteen years of age (Lazar, 2004). The study reveals that the most of these adolescents will become part of a remarried family before turning eighteen years of age (Martin, 2003). This results in the

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changing family structure which further leads to many changes and adjustment in their life. Lower income groups are more vulnerable and are more likely to divorce, which compels these families to have a lower standard of living (Peris, 2004). Peris (2004) in a study revealed divorce forced the children to change the school, a parent may have to extend working hours, elder children may have to help their parent in combatting the financial issues which further limits the career scope of that particular children. These are the circumstances that children may encounter post-divorce. Further this could add more stressful situation, anxiety and emotions in anyone's life. Several transformations can take place during a family's divorce. Some of these transformations could include loss of contact with a parent, involvement in the conflict between the parents, and financial issues (Lazar, 2004). The changes can affect every individual differently and can affect significantly at various points in the process (Hines, 2007).

Divorce is considered one of the most harmful events of one's life. But not all divorce is regarded as unfavorable in many aspects. The researchers have tried to focus on the positive aspect of divorce. On the other side researchers also request the readers not to treat this paper as the promoter of divorce. Once again, the researchers make it very clear that divorce is the most unpleasant experience in anyone's life. Whenever the problem in our life becomes chronic, it is always better to find out the root cause of that particular problem and work on that specific thing in order to get out of it. If it is not possible to resolve that problem, then try to eliminate the root cause of the problem. In our country, many couples get adjusted and continue their married life even if they don't want to continue together due to various reasons such as societal pressure, their children, etc. But this continuation always leads to a disturbed family environment which eventually hampers the child's development.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

The literature under presides a solid background for a research study, investigation, and comprehensive knowledge of the field are essential to all research. Hence, the researchers have presented the following review of the literature to identify the problems to find previous research work related to the present study. The collection of literature about the study has helped the researchers to probe the facts more effectively. The results from the previous studies helped the researchers analyze the problems from different dimensions apart from the existing one. The literature discusses the various studies conducted in this area.

Bruce and Kim (1992) found that marital disruption was associated with higher prevalence rates of major depression in men and women. The study reveals that there is a greater risk of first-onset major depression among men. Differences in rates of major depression between men and women were witnessed only among married subjects. The findings outlines that the relationship between marital disruption and significant depressive episodes differs for men and women. They also provide 35 further evidence that differences between men and women in rates of depression vary by marital status. Hickie and Parker (1992) found that the short-time reduction in depressive symptoms was predicted most significantly by the patient's perception of the partner's care (measured by the Intimate Bond Measure). The long-term decrease in depressive symptoms was expected by two components of the intimate relationship (the perceived care of the intimate and a briefer relationship) and was more likely in younger patients. Those who separated from an uncaring partner reported a distinct improvement in depressive symptoms. The patterns of improvement for parents who separated from uncaring partners and for parents who remained in caring relationships were similar, and distinctly superior to the pattern for those who remained with a partner who was perceived as uncaring. During the divorce of their parents adolescents can be put in a situation that can create a triangulation among family members. One researcher also explained the situation when parents form alliances with a child/adolescent against the other parent, the parent-to-parent and parent-

to-child relationships become unclear. This type of disrupted relationship puts the child/adolescent into parent negotiations, tension, and active conflicts, causing an impact on their relationship (Buchanan Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991). The parent-child relationship is difficult to recognize. The relationships can be affected due to various reasons. Children and adolescents were seen as having higher well-being when their parents had less conflict displayed as compared to children who witnessed their parents in conflict often (Woosley, 2009). The quality of a parent-child relationship, amount of contact with the parent, and parenting style seem to play a role in the effects of divorce (Thompson, 1999).

The above literature actually shows the effects of divorce on the entire family. The most affected are the children of that particular family. Based on the above literature, the researchers found that almost all the literature focusses on the negative aspects of divorce. But in this paper, the researchers have highlighted the positive aspects of divorce on the holistic development of children as well as the entire family.

### ***Gaps in the existing literature***

The previous study has touched on the various aspects relating to the effects of divorce on children, but none of them seems to have touched the area which talks about the positive aspects of divorce on the holistic development of children as well as the entire family. The present study proposes to fill the gap in the existing literature.

### ***Rationale of the study***

In the present study, the researchers have formulated the rationale of the study in which he needs to find the way through which we can have a better understanding of the effects of divorce on children as well as on the family.

### ***Objective of the study***

To find out the effects of divorce on children in the studied area.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research design followed was qualitative and descriptive in nature. Purposive sampling for the data collection was used. Case study and in-depth interview were the tools adopted for data collection.

### ***Operational Definition***

An operational definition is used in defining the key terms used in the current study.

- Divorce: Divorce is nothing but the legal way to end marriage.
- Children: In this study, children mean the son and daughter of the divorced couple irrespective of their age.
- Holistic development: In the present study the term holistic points the overall development of the children as well as of the family.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

- Confidentiality was ensured and maintained during the process. In the beginning itself, the participants were told that whatever they shared would be recorded but not shared with anyone and remain confidential. Confidentiality was maintained during data analysis by not revealing the actual identity of the participants. The names of all the participants are not disclosed in order to maintain confidentiality.
- Participation of the respondents was not forced upon them; it was on a purely voluntary basis. Before undertaking the interview, the researchers sought the targeted participants' consent to participate in the process.

- The researchers did not at all manipulate the experiences that were shared by the respondents. During the interview process, the researchers did not force the participants to answer any questions which they were unwilling to answer.
- The data collected from the respondents were respected and used only for the purpose of research.
- Social distancing and government norms are strictly followed during the data collection.

## RESULTS

In this section, the researchers have analysed and interpreted all the information collected during the research.

**Table 1: Socio demographic details of participants**

Case no	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation
Case 1	Male	26	Graduation	Banker
Case 2	Male	24	Post-graduation	Employed
Case 3	Female	21	Graduation	Student
Case 4	Male	12	8 <sup>th</sup> standard	Student

**Table 2: The key challenges identified in the cases**

Case 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inferiority complex</li> <li>• The problem between parents for a long time</li> <li>• Disturbance in academic life</li> <li>• Chronic stress due to parental problem</li> </ul>
Case 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not able to stay at home</li> <li>• Disturbance in academic life</li> <li>• Affected career due to parental conflict</li> <li>• Future plan not working</li> </ul>
Case 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It affected personal life a lot</li> <li>• Not focused study</li> <li>• No any future plans</li> <li>• Inferiority complex</li> </ul>
Case 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most affected children due to parental disturbance</li> <li>• Self-conflict personality</li> <li>• Not focused study</li> <li>• Disruption in daily life as well</li> </ul>

Some of the detailed investigation from the participants (case 1 to 4) while interviewing is given below:

- **Case 1** described that the self-esteem, in the beginning, was very low. His behavior indicated insecurity as perceived by both parents. Day by day after the divorce, his self-esteem began to improve. He was able to see that life holds good things for him, and he became more sensitive to others' feelings. He continued to look for the opportunity. He planned to keep a current job and rely on its opportunity for the level of promotion. He was concerned more about present financial needs than future financial security. Intellectually, he knew that future financial independence was necessary but ignored the reality of it. He lived for the day, perceiving the future as a concern of neither educational goals nor marital decisions.

- **Case 2** pointed out that in school performance, he showed apparent responses such as declining grades. He lost his interest in doing pleasurable acts, disliked studying, and had poor study habits. His academic year was lost after graduation due to truancy and family problems. He is an intelligent student and dreamt of doing civil service, but he shifted himself to another field due to a family problem. After the divorce, he focused more on his career and became more goal-oriented. He actually loves to study, but the prevailing situation extorted the equilibrium in his life. His behavior consistently displayed moodiness, withdrawal, anger, and verbal acting out towards his parents, but he is very frank to his close friend circle. Actually, he is very introvert type, and that's why he has a very small circle.
- **Case 3** mentioned that initially, she expressed denial that it was happening. She was surprised and left with a feeling of helplessness and powerlessness. She came to accept the divorce without denial. She never expressed or indicated disbelief that it was happening. In withdrawing from the situation, she spent more time with friends. She expressed that she went out more so as not to see her parents quarrel all the time. She did not like people asking her about the divorce or how she was doing. She felt ashamed and resentful that people knew. She came to accept the divorce as final and adjust to new surroundings and life with a single parent. Self-esteem, in the beginning, was very low. Her grades began to decline in the school exam. She continued to perform very low in academics. She was not motivated to study.
- **Case 4** said, "I performed poorly in school. I have academic difficulties. My academic year also lost due to the parental conflict". Children of this age have little control over their environment. It was found as a common theme of children that divorce made them small, weak, and vulnerable. This child performed poorly in school performance. Emotional difficulties, such as anxiety, and feelings of abandonment and insecurity, were seen in this child. With the inception of the separation and divorce, this child was left with a feeling of helplessness and powerlessness. He came to accept the divorce without denial. He never expressed or indicated disbelief that it was happening. He came to accept the divorce as final and to adjust to new surroundings and life with a single parent.

#### ***Outcome from the interview***

- The divorce has disturbed life as well as study.
- The post-divorce situation for the children was quite challenging.
- Everyone wishes to have a normal and happy life.
- A lot of financial instability among the family.
- Struggling to adjust to their normal life.
- Inferiority complex has been developed among the children.
- Stressed of thinking about the future
- The entire family structure has been disturbed.
- Facing problem while performing daily activities.
- Sometimes health conditions became worse.
- Hope and belief in God are the only critical factor.
- Career growth became stagnant.
- As the problem between the parents has been prevailing for a long time, children believe this divorce may enhance their personal and professional lives.

So, it can be said that the divorce is impacting the wellness of the children, and it's also influencing the family. This divorce has affected both the mental health and physical health condition of the children. The post-divorce period for the children was actually very disturbing because of separation from either of the parent. In this divorce, chronic

stress was developed among the children due to the elasticity of the problem. So, parental separation brought some peace in the family environment and provided enough time to work on self-enhancement. Overall, the children face many challenges post-divorce, but they treat it as a constructive step for the entire family.

## DISCUSSION

Family is considered the most important part one can have. In the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic, only family helped the individual get over this difficult time. But not everyone is that lucky to have a good family. In this paper, the researchers have tried to focus on the positive outcome post-divorce. When we talk about this family, they have been married for the last 30 years. It can be easily said from this case that love and affection are inversely proportional to time.

Regarding the short term, in the immediate period after the family break-down, the participants reported intense suffering, with feelings of abandonment, sleep disorders, mood disorders, behavioral problems, severe emotional disturbances, and poor school performance, among other effects - divorce results in an unfavorable situation for a family. Not only do the parents realize their new course of actions of relating to each other, but they are also learning new methods of parenting for their children. The effects of divorce on different children vary differently. Some children deal with divorce very patiently and calmly, while other children find it very difficult to cope with their post-traumatic events. Children are resilient, and with the proper assistance, the divorce transition can be experienced as an adjustment rather than a crisis. The changing dynamics of the family structure actually distract and confuse the children with divorced parents. This disequilibrium in their daily lives can easily be reflected in their academic performance. The more distracted children are, the more prone to poor academic performance. Many studies also pointed out that children with divorced parents may struggle to extend their social boundary resulting in fewer social intimation. Divorce develops a sense of insecurity among children, and they feel like their family is the only family going through a particular situation. Divorce helps the children to learn to adapt to the changing life situation. They experience entirely a new outer shell post-divorce which further affects their inner shell. The changing family dynamics, new schools, new friend, and environment actually enhance their well-being.

Children often find it very difficult to figure out the current situation. They always try to figure out the reasons for their parental conflict. They sometimes blame themselves for their parental separation, which actually creates a hindrance in their development. These feelings of guilt actually push children into a self-conflict situation which hampers their overall development. Self-conflict situations can lead to various health hazards. It increases pressure further, leading to depression, stress and anxiety. Providing context and counseling for a child to understand their role in a divorce can help reduce these feelings of guilt. Some research also says that children who have experienced divorce are more prone to divorce events in their own relationships. This propensity to divorce maybe two to three times as high as children who come from non-divorced families. Thus, it is very noteworthy to say that children from disrupted family are more vulnerable.

## CONCLUSION

Experiencing divorce can be challenging for a family. The parents are discovering new ways to parent their children as well as new ways to relate to one another. Parents should focus on their parenting skills to figure out their children's psychological, emotional, and economic needs.

They must work on their academics to prevent the children from becoming drop-outs in school. Further, parents should also include plans for other financial needs of the children. Children from broken families should be given proper education about the need to have a proper and successful marriage devoid of divorce. This will further change their perception towards divorce as an option but an abnormality to be avoided. (Eyo, 2018)

This divorce has affected both the mental health and physical health condition of the children. The post-divorce period for the children was bothersome because separation from either parent is quite disturbing for the children. In this divorce, prolonged stress was developed among the children due to the elasticity of the problem. So, parental separation brought some peace in the family environment and provided enough time for self-enhancement. Overall, the children face many challenges post-divorce, but they treat it as a constructive step for the entire family. Children with divorced parents are more likely to have increased empathy for others. They actually understand the situation of others having the same family dispute and develop a sense of acceptance towards various problems and situations experienced by others. It is very obvious to cut off an unhealthy and unpleasurable relationship to avoid long-term effects. Termination of painful relations can further act as a constructive step for the children and as well as for the entire family. It is essential to lead a healthy and stress-free life.

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