

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF EVOLVING FAMILY DYNAMICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: This article provides an in-depth examination of the social institutions of marriage and divorce, which serve as critical indicators of societal change. In the contemporary era, the transition from traditional, contract-based unions to companionate partnerships centered on emotional fulfillment has redefined the family structure. This paper explores the socioeconomic, psychological, and technological factors influencing modern marital stability. Furthermore, it analyzes the rising global trends in divorce, identifying key drivers such as shifting gender roles, economic independence, and the "psychological revolution." By evaluating the impact of marital dissolution on children and the broader community, the study emphasizes the need for robust social support systems.

Keywords: Marriage, Divorce, Socio-economic Factors, Psychological Well-being, Gender Roles, Family Stability, Modern Society.

Introduction

Marriage has long been regarded as the fundamental building block of human society, providing a structured environment for emotional support, economic cooperation, and the upbringing of future generations. Historically, the institution was governed by rigid cultural, religious, and economic rules, where stability was often prioritized over individual happiness. However, the 21st century has ushered in a paradigm shift. Today, marriage is increasingly viewed through the lens of "individualized marriage," where the primary goal is personal fulfillment and mutual self-development.

While the desire for long-term companionship remains a near-universal human trait, the increasing frequency of divorce suggests a growing tension between traditional ideals and modern realities. This article aims to explore these complex dynamics, investigating why marriages are changing and why they are ending more frequently in the globalized world.

The Historical and Sociological Evolution of Marriage

To understand modern marriage, one must acknowledge its roots as an economic and strategic alliance. For centuries, marriages were arranged to consolidate land, wealth, or social status. Love was often considered a secondary benefit rather than a prerequisite.

In the mid-20th century, the "companionate marriage" model emerged. This model emphasized the nuclear family, where distinct gender roles—the male breadwinner and the female homemaker—were the norm. However, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have seen the rise of "egalitarian marriage." In this contemporary model:

Shared Responsibilities: Both partners contribute to the household income and domestic labor.

Emotional Intimacy: The success of the union is measured by communication quality and emotional satisfaction.

Autonomy: Individuals maintain their personal interests and career goals alongside their marital identity.

Factors Influencing Modern Marital Stability

Several key factors determine whether a modern marriage thrives or falters:

A. Economic Factors: Research shows a strong correlation between financial stability and marital longevity. Economic stress is one of the leading triggers for domestic conflict. Conversely, the increased participation of women in the workforce has changed the power dynamics within the home, leading to more balanced but sometimes more complex negotiations regarding time and resources.

B. Technological Impact:

The digital age has fundamentally altered how couples interact. While social media and communication apps help partners stay connected, they also introduce new challenges, such as "digital infidelity" and the comparison of one's private relationship with the idealized versions of others' lives seen online.

C. Psychological Readiness:

Modern couples are marrying later in life than previous generations. This delay often allows for greater emotional maturity and financial independence, which can contribute to more stable unions. However, the high expectations for "soulmate" levels of connection can also lead to disappointment if the reality of daily life falls short of romantic ideals.

Understanding the Global Rise in Divorce Rates

Divorce is no longer seen as a rare social failure but as a common life transition. Several sociological theories explain this trend:

The Independence Hypothesis: As women have gained higher education and professional success, they are no longer economically tethered to unhappy or unhealthy marriages. This independence provides a "safety net" that allows for the dissolution of the union.

Legal Reforms: The introduction of "no-fault divorce" laws in many countries has made the legal process of ending a marriage significantly less adversarial and more accessible.

The Secularization of Society: In many cultures, the religious and social stigma once associated with divorce has diminished, allowing individuals to prioritize their mental health and personal happiness over social conformity.

The Multi-Dimensional Impact of Divorce

The consequences of divorce extend far beyond the legal separation of two individuals. It is a process that reshapes entire social networks.

A. Psychological Impact on Adults:

Divorce is consistently ranked as one of the most stressful life events. It often involves a period of mourning, loss of social status, and a shift in self-perception. However, for many, it also marks the beginning of personal renewal and the opportunity to build a more authentic life.

B. Impact on Children:

The effect of divorce on children is a subject of intense study. While children from divorced families may face initial challenges in academic performance and social behavior, research indicates that the *level of conflict* in the home is a more significant predictor of child well-being than the divorce itself. A peaceful "broken home" is often healthier for a child than a high-conflict "intact home."

C. Economic Consequences:

Divorce often leads to a decline in the standard of living for both parties, particularly mothers who may primary caregivers. The division of assets and the establishment of two separate households create significant financial burdens.

Conclusion

Marriage and divorce are not static concepts; they are evolving responses to the changing world. While the high rates of divorce may seem to signal a decline in family values, they also reflect a society that values individual dignity and emotional health. The future of the family lies not in returning to the rigid structures of the past, but in fostering resilient, flexible, and egalitarian partnerships. As we move forward, the focus must remain on supporting the well-being of all family members, regardless of the legal status of the union.

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