

# Long Term Effects of Divorce

## 1. Enduring Consequences

Unlike the experience of divorced former spouses, a child's suffering does not reach its peak at the divorce and then level off. Rather, the effect of the parents' divorce can affect children for years to come.<sup>1)</sup> For instance, an Australian parliamentary study tracked children whose parents divorced in 1946, and tested them two and three decades later. Even 30 years after the divorce, negative long-term repercussions still clearly affected the income, [health](#), and [behavior](#) of many of the grown children, and increased their risk for depression.<sup>2)</sup> As Paul Amato writes, "Though some adults and children adjust relatively quickly to divorce...others exhibit long-term deficits in functioning."<sup>3)</sup> Children's well-being over the long term is determined by circumstances both prior to and after their parents' divorce.<sup>4)</sup>

### 1.1 Intergenerational Effects

Divorce has a profound intergenerational effect. One study showed that "ever-divorced grandparents live significantly farther away from the parent and grandchild...report a weaker relationship with the parent...and are more likely to be part of a family system where both generations have divorced (13 [percent] vs. 3 [percent])."<sup>5)</sup>

Paul Amato and Jacob Cheadle studied the long-reaching effects of divorce across three generations and found that "[d]ivorce in the first generation (G1) was associated with [lower education](#), more [marital discord](#), [weaker ties with mothers](#), and [weaker ties with fathers](#) in the third generation (G3). These associations were mediated by family characteristics in the middle generation (G2), including lower education, more marital discord, more divorce, and greater tension in the early parent-child relationships."<sup>6)</sup> This study demonstrates that parental divorce has consequences for children and subsequent generations. Amato and Cheadle also reported in this study that "[p]arental divorce doubled the odds of divorce" in the child's own life.<sup>7)</sup>

### 1.2 Costs

Of special note is the finding that children of divorce are less likely to think they should [support their parents](#) in old age.<sup>8)</sup> Compared to children of widowed parents, children of divorced parents are less likely to support their divorced father in his old age but just as likely to support their divorced mother.<sup>9)</sup> This finding portends a monumental public cost problem for the frequently-divorced baby boom generation as it becomes the dependent elderly generation in the first half of the 21st century.

## 2. Impact on Our Nation

The family is the building block of society, and [marriage is its foundation](#). Divorce has pervasive weakening effects on children and on all of the five major institutions of society—the [family](#), the church, the [school](#), the marketplace, and government itself. However, this foundation is growing

weaker as fewer adults marry, more adults divorce, and more adults choose single parenthood or cohabitation.<sup>10)</sup> Society's major institutions (family, church, school, marketplace and government) all have a great interest in reducing divorce to almost zero, for it weakens each institution by weakening the human capacities of each laborer, citizen, worshiper, and student that it touches. Leaders of these institutions must shoulder their responsibility to end the culture of rejection. Policymakers, pastors, and academics all bear the responsibility to motivate them in that direction.

American children today are weaker than children of previous generations— intellectually, morally, **emotionally, and physically**, and our human capital is decreasing.<sup>11)</sup> Moreover, the American nation today is socially weaker than in the past, and the America of tomorrow will be weaker still. For instance, few are willing to point to divorce as a major contributor to the economic problem. Americans in the media and in politics are comfortable pointing at a failing educational system or at **teenage unwed mothers** and the deleterious effects they have on children and society, but no one likes to dwell on the pervasive and broad negative effects of divorce.

<sup>1)</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, *To Have and To Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships* (Canberra, Australia: Parliament of Australia, 1998), 39.

Jennifer M. Weaver and Thomas J. Schofield, "Mediation and Moderation of Divorce Effects on Children's Behavior Problems," *Journal of Family Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2015): 45.

<sup>2)</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, *To Have and To Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships* (Canberra, Australia: Parliament of Australia, 1998), 35.

Holly Uphold-Carrier, and Rebecca Utz, "Parental Divorce Among Young and Adult Children: A Long-Term Quantitative Analysis of Mental Health and Family Solidarity," *Journal Of Divorce & Remarriage* 53, no. 4 (2012): 261, 263.

<sup>3)</sup> Paul R. Amato, "The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62, (2000): 1282.

<sup>4)</sup> Frank F. Furstenberg and Kathleen E. Kiernan, "Delayed Parental Divorce: How Much Do Children Benefit?" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63, (2001): 446.

<sup>5)</sup> Valarie King, "The Legacy of a Grandparent's Divorce: Consequences for Ties Between Grandparents and Grandchildren," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 65, (2003): 176.

<sup>6)</sup> Paul R. Amato and Jacob Cheadle, "The Long Reach of Divorce: Divorce and Child Well-Being Across Three Generations," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, (2005): 191.

<sup>7)</sup> Paul R. Amato and Jacob Cheadle, "The Long Reach of Divorce: Divorce and Child Well-Being Across Three Generations," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, (2005): 201.

<sup>8)</sup> William S. Aquilino, "Later-Life Parental Divorce and Widowhood: Impact on Young Adults' Assessment of Parent-Child Relations," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 56, (1994): 918.

<sup>9)</sup> I-Fen Lin, "Consequences of Parental Divorce for Adult Children's Support of Their Frail Parents," *Journal Of Marriage & Family* 70, no. 1 (February 2008): 113, 123.

<sup>10)</sup> Between 1960 and 1990, there has been a 41 percent decline in marriage. The number of always-single persons has risen from 21 million in 1970 to 46 million in 1996. At the same time, cohabitation has jumped from 430,000 in 1960 to 4.25 million in 1998, an increase by a factor of 10. The literature also shows that cohabitation itself is linked to an **increased likelihood of divorce**: those who cohabit before marriage divorce at twice the rate of those who do not. Also, percent of cohabiters separate before marrying; these former cohabiters, when they finally marry, divorce at twice the rate of those who marry their first cohabiting partner and at about four times the rate of those who do not cohabit before marriage. See: Larry L. Bumpass, Population Association of America, 1990 Presidential Address, "What's Happening to the Family? Interactions Between Demographic and Institutional Change," *Demography* 27, (1990): 483-498.

<sup>11)</sup> Henry Potrykus and Patrick Fagan, *Decline of Economic Growth: Human Capital & Population*

*Change* (Washington, D.C.: Marriage and Religion Research Institute, August 2011). See also paper on the effects of divorce on the growth rate of the economy by Potrykus and Fagan.

This entry draws heavily from [Effects of Divorce on Children](#).

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