

The High Cost of DIVORCE!

by Harold & Bette Gillogly

As you read the above title, some of you may have thought, "You'd better believe it!" You've been through it or you know someone who has. And you know the high price which was paid...emotionally, spiritually, physically, financially.

Researchers have been studying the effects of divorce for over 25 years. The results of some of these studies have now been published. They are astonishing, as the truth often is. Whether you have been divorced, are thinking about divorce, or know someone who is divorced or is thinking about it, you need to know **the truth about divorce**. When you are faced with well-meaning but mindless clichés like, "You'll be better off without him (or her)," "It's better to divorce than subject the children to your fighting," or "The grass is greener on the other side," you'll have the truth as a weapon against such lies.

Divorce causes pain that never goes away.

The truth is no one ever emerges from divorce unscathed. Everyone involved is permanently harmed. Everyone understands there will be immediate trauma to the divorcing couple, but few realize the lingering emotional and psychological effects. For example, research by Judith Wallerstein with the California Children of Divorce Project shows an especially **dismal future for women 40 and over**. Ten years after their divorce, half the women studied were diagnosed as being clinically depressed, and all were moderately to severely lonely, even though 50% of the women studied initiated the divorce themselves.¹

Divorced men fare little better. While men usually find it easier to become involved in new relationships, they don't find happiness so easily. 83 percent of divorced men remarry, but **75% of them divorce again**.¹ For many, the happiness they search for eludes them

their whole lives.

Divorce is also **economically devastating**. Some statistics suggest that men's post divorce financial situation gets better. However, economists Saul Hoffman and John Holmes conducted a **seven-year study of income** of both divorced men and women and married people. The results? **Divorced men lost 19 percent** in income over seven years and **divorced women lost 29 percent**. In contrast, married couples experienced a 22 percent rise in income.¹



In the first year after divorce, many women's standard of living declines as much as **73 percent**.¹ No wonder women report feelings of **hopelessness** and **incessant worry** over finances the first few years after divorce. Add this to all the other emotional trauma she's going through, and it's a wonder any woman survives the post divorce years.

Divorced men, if they accept their responsibility of child support, basically **live today to pay off their past**. This usually puts financial stress on their second marriage, necessitating wife number 2 to work to help make ends meet, not only for their present family, but also for his former family. **God never intended such complicated living!**

Divorce causes pain that never goes away. One divorced father described his divorce to us like this. "Divorce," he said, "is like chopping down your tree of marriage. You think you have done away with the tree, but branches keep shooting up from the trunk. The branches are my children, so I must tend the branches, even though they are part of the tree trunk

I tried to destroy. How can I hate the tree but love the branches? It's very confusing and painful to me. No matter how hard I try to ignore the tree, the pain never goes away."

Yes, husbands and wives suffer great pain from divorce. But they are not the most violated victims. No one suffers more from divorce than the children. **1.5 million children a year** become the casualties of their parents' divorce.² One-third of these children never see one of their parents after the divorce. Children of divorce often feel abandoned by not just one parent, but both, for the parent who stays in the home is usually so preoccupied with their own pain, they can't give the emotional stability the child so desperately needs.

Psychologist Judith Wallerstein and Julia Lewis, a psychology professor at San Francisco State University, have released the results of their 25 year study of children of divorce. Their study traced the effect divorce has had on 60 middle class and upper-middle class families in Marin County, California.

Half of the children studied became deeply involved with drugs and alcohol, and many of them became sexually promiscuous. Twenty-six of the children studied were very young — between 2 and 6 — when their parents were divorced. **These were the children most damaged**, for they were the most vulnerable and spent the most time living with the fallout.³

"There was no transition, no cushioning of the blow," writes Wallerstein. "Their loneliness, their sense that no one was there to take care of them, was overwhelming....**Such are the core memories of these adults 25 years later**....At the time of their parents' breakup, these children felt raw terror, fear of abandonment, and even fear of starving. And as time passed, many of their fears were realized. Their fathers remarried and became distant and their mothers were preoccupied with trying

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to put their own lives back together.”³

One of the children, now 29 years old, confesses, “I was angry at [my mother]. I was angry at my father. I was always angry at somebody....I had nobody to talk to. **I had nobody.**”³

As adults, children of divorce are “very, very anxious about marriage [and] fidelity. They don’t trust their own picture of marriage.” Their memories are “how unhappy one or both of their parents were [and] the infidelity, the depression and sadness.” As a result, they find it very difficult to bond with someone of the opposite sex. And why shouldn’t they? Their mother or father served them platitudes like, “Your mother (or father) and I don’t love each other any more; but we still love you.” Do we think children are stupid? They can put 2 and 2 together and get four. It’s the divorcing parents who don’t get it! Children can figure out that if love isn’t forever, and their **Mom and Dad can stop loving each other, then they can stop loving them too.** So they behave very, very good out of fear of losing their parents’ love, or they behave very, very bad as if to say, “You don’t love me anyhow! Why should I be good?”

Do you still believe that old credo “A good divorce is better than a bad marriage”? Are children more harmed by their parents’ fights than by their parents’ divorce? Many people used to think so, but a study by Exeter University’s Medical School shows that

is just another **divorce myth**. The study demonstrates that “children of divorced parents are **more likely to be unhappy**, unhealthy and experience problems at school and with friends than children of parents who quarrel, but remain married.”⁴

The children of parents who were fighting but remained together experienced some of the same health and social problems as children of divorced parents, however the “level and number of problems were **closer to those of harmonious families** than to those of divorced families.”⁴

The Exeter researchers summed up their study: “Conflicts at home always are distressing for the children, but even if the parents have problems with each other, the children may still have a good relationship with both parents. **At least they are there.** The children lose that when the family splits up...**it is the loss of a parent that damages the children.**”⁴

“I hate divorce,” says the Lord God of Israel.

These are the realities of divorce! The hard evidence speaks for itself — and it is downright frightening. **Everyone pays for divorce:** the children, the couple, the extended family, friends, the church, the community, our whole society.

But the most convincing argument against divorce is what God has to say about it. Listen to His emphatic words in Malachi 2:13-16a: *You flood the Lord’s*

altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, “Why?” It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce,” says the Lord God of Israel.

God knew the devastating cost of divorce long before the researchers. That’s why He hates it. God wants us to hate divorce too; to hate it like He does. He wants us to remember we are partners, we are one, and we are His. He commands us to guard ourselves from unfaithfulness and live out what we promised in our marriage covenant. Because He loves us, God never wants us to pay the cost of divorce. It’s too high!

¹ The Case Against Divorce. Diane Medved, PhD, Ivy Books, New York. 1989.

² Marriage Savers. Michael J. McManus, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1993.

³ “Kid’s Feelings, Lives Affected,” Elizabeth Fernandez, Dayton Daily News. June 8, 1997.

⁴ “Divorce Worse for Children Than Fighting, Study Finds,” Veronique Mistiaen, The Tennessean, April 18, 1994.

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