

The Effects of Marital Divorce on Children Well-being in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania

ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the effects of marital divorce on children well-being in Iringa Municipality under the specific objectives named; psychological effects of marital divorce on children well-being. The study used Qualitative approach and descriptive research design. Data collected through interview and focus group discussion. Data were analyzed through thematic approach. The findings indicated that there are direct relationship between the style of life the parents were living before divorce and the style their children live after divorce which in turn affects them and they may cause another divorce to their child in the future. Moreover, the divorced marriages were found to have negative psychological effects of children either mentally or physically, misconduct behavior, social interaction and becoming street children . The study recommends that parents must rethink critical before deciding to divorce on the future development of their children.

Key words: marital divorce, children, children well-being, cultural, social an psychological

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Marital divorce is becoming common experiences in the lives of parents and children in the world. However, following the adoption of the new Divorce Act in 1968, which made divorces more accessible in all provinces/territories and allowed marriage breakdown as grounds for separation, the number of divorces increased dramatically.[1] , between the end of the 2010 and the mid-2015, the divorce rate increased worldwide. Parental separation is common in Tanzania rather than legal divorces followed by a great numbers of marital dissolution complaints in social welfare departments increasing day to day up to 405 divorce in ten years RITA Report, 2016 in [2].

According to [3] describes that emotional divorce passes through several stages, beginning with the loss of affection and love and then partial abandonment of the emotional practices of all types gradually, to complete abandonment. It also involves any sexual relationship, and living outside the home and neglecting maintenance and care with prevailing situation the wife is neither divorced nor married [4].The process of divorce include the destabilization, loss of confidence, loss of love, selfishness, marital silence and emotional Divorce [5]

[6] states child from divorced families where their parents use violence more frequently to resolve conflict, and are more likely to be stressful and aggressive and physically violent to solve marital. (ibid) add that later on, the child in their own marriages will be unhappy in their own marriages consequence practice the same system as their parents did. Probing the effects of marital divorce to the development of the child [7]found that, children of divorced parents may have a lower sense of psychological well-being than children who grew up with intact families. [8] confirm that, children of divorced parents may experience problems such as loneliness and depression. When parents' divorce, children frequently face the loss of one parent's persistent presence and economic instability; as a result, stress may take a tremendous toll on the children.

[9] conduct research on effects of parental marital divorce on adolescent in China the result revealed that high emotional clarity could reduce the influence of life stress on depressive symptoms in adolescents. Both emotional abuse and neglect in childhood trauma were the most predictive factors for the development of severe, early onset, and drug-resistant depression, suicidal ideation, and non-suicidal self-injury (ibid) The study of [10] on effects of family breakdown in Bangladesh reported that Children of different ages have varying developmental levels of cognitive and emotional resources that may influence how they react to parental separation and divorce. Actually, the losses of divorce can have a significant effect on a child but the loss of the parent-child relationship seems to be the most detrimental to the child as it can affect the child emotionally, behaviorally, and socially Czapiewski (2014) cited in [11].However, the stress of divorce tends to weaken and even damage the parent-child relation for divorced mothers Fagan[12].The children from divorced family live unhappy life and uncomfortable because community and relatives view parent separation as sinful and against God commandments. Even the child from those families are neglect and abused as homeless families.

Both divorced men and women in Ethiopia suffer with extreme emotional liability in the period leading up to separation and for the two year post-separation period [13]. An awareness of the opportunities for a new way of life and escape from the emotional pain of chronic marital discord both lead to periods of elation. [14] states that many of them blame themselves for their parent's divorce, which can create sadness and guilt. Contrary[15] has different opinions on divorce as he pointed out that divorce allows women to interact with the society freely and to raise their children in their own ways without being dictated by their husbands; consequence of the divorce, women are less occupied to their husbands" disposition and needs and they got the freedom to spend time alone in their own space.

[16] states that family conflict predicts that adolescents have difficulties in solving adaptive problems in the family, including behavioral problems and depressive moods. Family conflict also affects the prognosis of depression in adolescents, which reduces the clinical remission rate significantly.. Another study conduct Feng [17] found children from divorced or widowed families and reorganized families were significantly worse than those from stable families in behavioral problems, emotional problems, self-concept as well as their overall mental health status.

[13] conducted research on the effects of divorce on the family life in Ethiopia where the study realized that divorce leads custodial parents to experience major changes in the their lives including a change in residential arrangements, economic disadvantage, loneliness associated with social

network changes, and role strain associated with the task overload that results from having to care for children and work outside the home. Nicholas. *et al.as cited in [18]* explain the worst troublemaker in school, the child who engages in fighting and stealing, is far more likely to come from a broken home than is the well-behaved.

Parents in a stressful marriage are less likely to have close relationships with their children, whereas parents who are satisfied with their marriage are more likely to have quality relationships with their offspring. Gerald in [19] explains that children of divorced or separated parent 'sex habit increased behavioral problems and the marital conflict that accompanies parents' divorce place the child's social competence at risk. Even in intact families that have low to medium levels of conflict, children still have fewer behavior problems than those in the high-conflict, disrupted families.

During divorce, conflict between parents is often accompanied by less affection, responsiveness, and more inclination to punish their children, which leaves their children feeling emotionally insecure. Boys whose parents divorced while they were in elementary school tend to develop problems in the years following their parents' separation [20]. However, the problem behavior increases immediately following the divorce among boys whose parents divorced while they were in middle school, their problem behavior steadily decreases in the year after the divorce [ibid].

According to Conger et al (2010) as cited in [21] study believed that, divorce diminishes the capacity of children to handle conflict. The difference between marriages that stay intact and those that end in divorce lies primarily in the couple's ability to handle marital conflict and move towards agreement. Conger et al, (2010). Uphold that Children of divorced parents acquire the same incapacity through the modeling of their parents. The marital conflict that accompanies parents' divorce places this competence at risk. When parents are divorcing the conflict between them is often accompanied by less love, less responsiveness and more love towards their children, and leaves their children feeling emotionally insecure, and more likely to believe that their social setting is unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Street children could be considered as indicator of the family breakdown [22] states that the structural breakdown of families and the breakdown of relationships in the families may make children go to the streets after the family conflicts and result into divorce. The study further explained that street children were pushed by different factors including family breakdown, death of parents or guardians, peer pressure, abuses of step father or mother family conflict and labor exploitation in the family, were poverty and facility were the leading factors by 58% of the respondents (ibid).

Sofiya and Galata [23] conducted study in Ethiopia on effects of street children. The findings revealed that changes in family structure and relationships-such as marriages for one of the parents, and family disintegration brought about by separation of parents- seem to create problems of adjustment and anxiety for the children. Leaving home or being away from relatives/family, most of the time, then becomes an attractive option for these children - this despite the harsh conditions that street life presents them with. Moreover [24] on factors contributing to increasing of street children in Meru-Arusha where study revealed that socio-economic factors contributing to the increase of street children ranging from poverty, lawlessness, alcohol and drug abuse, social permissiveness family breakup and child abuse.

The combination of social, economic, psychological challenges which faces families affects the well-being of their children. The parents who fail to solve among of these challenges peaceful and in harmony way do results into conflict consequence divorce if not well handled with wisdom [25] confirms multiple contributory factors experiences of youth homelessness, including family breakdown, influenced by behaviors of both parents and, economic problems, and residential instability.[26] write that the, push-factors such as situations of abuse, domestic violence or poor family relationships are common among street children.

[27] argue that street children are always not attached to cultural, moral and traditional, they usually not concerned about cultural morals because of being away from family since childhood. The literatures show street children result from differences multiple problems from the society. These problems affects the mental and psychosocial of the affected children. The children can be affected with family conflicts, child neglected either through parent divorce or death and other factors.

Damota (2019) argues that divorced couple's residential arrangements, economic status, social networks and role demands lead to deterioration in physical and mental health for the majority of individuals immediately following separation. Children's approval of premarital sex, cohabitation, and

divorce rises intensely, while their authorization of marriage and childbearing falls [28]. According to [29] children from divorced families are also more likely to believe that marriage is not important prior to having children and are more likely to have a child out of wedlock. Gilliland [30] explains that growing up in an unsupported, neglectful or violent home is also associated with poor physical health and development. The negative health behavior identified by scientists after marital break-up includes the increased risk of alcohol intake as well as tobacco use among men. Also Such children's may experience more externalizing problems such as conduct disorders, delinquency and impulsive behavior than kids from 2 parent families. Despite the reviewed literature there are limited studies on the effects of marital divorce on children. This study intended to fill the existing knowledge gap through investigating the effects of marital divorce on children's well-being in Iringa Municipal Council Tanzania.

2.0 MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 The study area

The study was conducted in Iringa region with special focus in Iringa Municipality. Iringa region is among of the regions in Tanzania, The region is bordered by Morogoro region to the east, Njombe region to the south, Mbeya region is bordered to the west and Dodoma and Singind to the north. The Iringa region comprises of four districts namely: Mufindi town council, Kilolo, Mufindi Distric council Iringa rural and Iringa municipal council. The Iringa municipal has been chosen as the area.0 of the study following the Iringa District Court statistics of the year 2022 up to 2023 June show that Iringa Municipal has 156 marital divorce (Resident magistrate Iringa, 2023). Contrary, to other districts were the rate of divorce is less, for example Iringa rural has 106 marital divorce (refer appendix...). The higher prevalence has prompted the researcher to examine what could be effects of the children well-being from these massive marital divorce.

2.2 Research approach

The study employed qualitative research approach. The approach helped the researcher to collect detailed information from the participant and provided explanations of findings from objectives. The approach provided clear comprehensive in depth data collection and analysis on how the practice of marital divorce children in Iringa municipal.

2.2 Research design

The study employed a descriptive study design using only **qualitative research** qualitative research approach. The design was used because the study requires description of characteristics of the information and respondents involved in this study without operation of variables.

2.3 Population

Participants of the study were children whose parents were divorced and divorcee parents, social affairs officers, community development officers, ward executive officer, Police gender desk officers and magistrate officers from Iringa Municipal were included as key informants.

2.4 Sample size

The purpose sampling techniques was used to obtain two social affairs officer, three community development officer, one magistrate officer, three ward executive officer, and two police gender desk officers' six children from divorced family and six divorced parents which make a total of twenty-four participants. These participants were involved in this study because they have experiences and knowledge of the violence occurring in the community. For example, the social worker community and police gender desk deal with day to day receiving and solving the community violence issues from the community.

2.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

2.5.1 Interview

For the seek of collecting reliable data, different method of data collection were used. Sem-structured interview was used to collect data from social affairs officer, community development officer, magistrate officer, ward executive officer, and police gender desk officers. The instrument was developed in English, later on was translated in Kiswahili because the key informant were used to Kiswahili to ensure understanding and draw insight, and experiences information on the effect of marital divorce on children well-being in Iringa Municipality.

2.5.2 Focus group discussion

The focus group discussion method was used to collect data from children with divorced parents and divorced parents. The methods was used to gain in depth understanding on the effects martial divorce from children with divorced parents and divorced parents.. The researcher used two groups during discussion. The first group was for divorce parent and the second was for children from divorce families.

2.6 Data analysis

The study used content analysis to analyse the collected data. The qualitative data was analysed by using content data analysis. Five steps were involved during data analysis namely; data collection and organisation from interview and focus group discussion in systematic manner and translated data from Kiswahili to English , next step was to analyse data according to themes in relationship with research specific objectives where each data emerged including coding of data and theme transcription. The researcher interpreted the data in meaningful relationship between the data and the objective and what the participants reported during interview and focus group discussion. Finally, summarizing the data and writing a report that clearly communicate results of the analysis. Data were presented in the form of word text narration.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Psychological effects of marital divorce on children well-being

3.1.1.Mental health

The life after divorce of the children of the divorced parents becomes very difficult emotionally and mentally which may cause sometime the deterioration of physical health. Generally, the children of the divorced parents develops the mental health problems because they think their life are over and when they meet their peers whose parents are still living together, they get frustrated on hearing those stories their fellows are talking about their parents for example one respondent said that:

My parents divorced when I was in standard six but two years later I and my father shifted to another region where I started a day secondary school education. But in our street most of my friends used to tell stories about their mothers which cause mental illness because of missing mothers love. One day I got malaria which caused to be admitted to hospital for three days, my friends used to frequently visit me and kept talking about their mothers who took care of them when they fall sick. The stories disturbed my health and increased stress to me and made me mentally disturbed and this caused my illness to take long time to be cured because of the thoughts of missing one parent..(Focus Group discussion with children 15th Marh,2023)

In additional one of the parent has the same opinion that she has following in health problems due to divorce with her husband as she said;

“...after the divorce with my former husband I didn’t sleep at night, I was full of stress which causes me to have High blood pressure and Heart problem. Now am attending clinic at Iringa government hospital” Focus Group discussion with divorced parent 18th Marh,2023)

3.1.2 Misconduct behavior

Children of divorced or separated parent’s sex habit increases behavioral problems and the marital conflict that accompanies parents’ divorce place the child’s social competence at risk. This is psychological problem which is developed once the parents get divorce because the child is now free to do what he or she needs to do. One of the child responded that:

“...when we were living together with my both parents, mother used to control me in every step I were making. She knew everything about me while my father was very busy with his own business like he never knew even that I have started undergoing menstrual period. But after divorce I remained with my father while my siblings went with my mother which made me to be very free to do whatever I want and this made me to enter into sexual activities with different boys in our street. The behavior which I went with it up to completion of my secondary school education but during those periods my father never discovered that I have started engaging in love affairs but my mother did...”..(Focus Group discussion with children 15th Marh,2023)

So this shows that after divorce the parental care to the children always decreases which makes the children now to develop behaviors which are not acceptable to the society like the one narrated above. Another respondent said he entered into drug usage immediately after the divorce because there was no one to control him and he said:

“...my father used to control me on every steps which I was making and he was always cruel and brutal on me to the extent that I used to be afraid of him very much but after the divorce with my mother in which we children all went to our mother I started engaging on some bad company who transformed me into drug addiction in which I used to use them as well as supply (sell drugs to the mateja) them but this occurred because my mother was very fair to me and I was not afraid of her...” Focus Group discussion with divorced parent 18th Marh,2023)

The finding was reported by the social worker officer during interview that that: “In Iringa Municipal we have street children who come from divorced families and they engaging in drug abuse and robbery” More findings were revealed during interview when the community development officer said that, “The number of children in Makorongo ward who are engaged in drug abuse, and sexual practice. (Interview with social worker 24th March,2023)

Children from divorced families are also more likely to believe that marriage is not important prior to having children and are more likely to engage themselves into sexual intercourse for leisure because they are affected with the divorce their parents took. For instance most of the children said that they wish not to get married because they don't like to be heartbroken like their parents respondents. They added that they will not entertain marriage but they will involve themselves in sexually because of leisure or getting children because of different reasons.

During data collection it was revealed that misconduct of among of the married couples contributed to some of the family divorce. One of the families came into divorce because the husband gave a child with another mother outside their couple's bond and kept it as a secret to his beloved wife. When the wife realized, she failed to tolerate she went and fought with her co-wife. This information was reported with one mother during focus group discussion by saying that;

“... I lived with my husband for ten years without knowing that he had a baby with another woman,....after knowing, I decided to go to the house of the mother who has shared with my husband and beating her heavily. My husband chased me and blamed that I have insulted him to the community...” Focus Group discussion with divorced parent 18th Marh,2023)

3.1.3 Street children

The research finding indicates that marital divorce leads into street children. The children from divorced parents had the habit of quitting from their caregiver at start living in the street due to different reasons. Some of the relatives have hash parenting systems while others do not care at all just let them free. The community development officers and the ward executive officer explained that, there is a rapid increase of street children in their working area. Some of the reasons are parent divorce which causes children to lack parenting care. For example the executive ward officer from Kihesa said;

‘In my ward we have street children who have abandoned their home lives due to the treatment of their step mother after their parents' divorce. The same finding was reported by the police gender desk who said; (Interview with social worker 24th March,2023)

Similar information was revealed from the police gender desk officer who explained the day to day experiences on the marital cases and how children are suffering because of their parents' marital divorce as follows;

“In our gender desk we usually receive cases of street children who are under 18 from social workers or from the community that they have found committing offences in the street’. (Interview with police gender desk officer 24th March,2023)

In light of the finding above, one of the children from focus group discussion explained that;

‘Am living as a street child because I have no one to take care of my life. I decided to join the life of this nature due to my friend who joined street life after the death of his parents. To me the divorce of my parent, hard life and hash life system and treatment of my step mother which I did not experience before caused me to run away from home because, even my father is busy with children of my stepmother only’ ..(Focus Group discussion with children 15th Marh,2023)

3.1.4 Stress and emotion.

The finding indicates that the style of life of children and divorce parents were occupied with stress and emotion which were the results of conflicts during married life and after divorce. The divorce parents said that some of the parents after divorce they have been stressed to the maximum as a result they enter sexual relationship with young boys who seems to be like their children. One of the parent explained the effect of marital divorce as follow,

“.....there are some of us who have been divorced, we are living in a stressed life situations. You can come across with older mother but married to young boy as a way of reducing stress.” ..(Focus Group discussion with parent 18th Marh,2023)

The similar information were provided by the community development officer who had similar answers that marital divorce leads to stress and emotion among the divorced parents as reported that during interview session;

“We are receiving conflict from the divorced parent’s especial mother having conflict with neighbors or husband’s relatives. When trying to resolve the problem we come to know she is just full of stress and string emotion with the husband’s relative thus they become into unnecessary conflict all the time with their neighbors” .(Interview with community development officer 24th March,2023)

The marital divorce had effect on the life style of the children of the divorced parent. The children who had exercised life of parent divorce have been affect emotional due to the habit practiced by their parents inform of them. One of the children said that during group discussion:

“...my father used to beat my mother whenever they get into arguments. That habit affect my life and I always emotion when I find somebody beating his wife in the street. On the other side I so stressed because am missing my mother’s love because she left us with our grandmother and went to Musoma to her parent so as to be free from stress and my father’s harassment...”(Focus Group discussion with children 15th Marh,2023)

The findings from the respondent revealed that, there were direct relationship between the styles of life the parents were living before divorce and the style their kids will live after divorce which in turn affects them in terms of feelings and emotional

4.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDING

The marital divorce between marriage parents had revealed to have mental problems to both divorced parents and their children because of experiencing new system of life hardship. This had affected the health of children and their parent either mentally or physically. Similarly [31] findings justifies that mental health. The findings of this study bodes well with the findings of the study by [32] children needs transitions from living with both parents to living with only one parent which always caused frustration and hence who concluded that children from divorced parents develops strong depression which make them develops mental disorders to some extents. Many families from divorced families suffer mental illness. The finding also, revealed that children from single mother were like to be affected with mental health due depression brain thinking disorder. Some mothers suffer a lot because their husbands was the source of incomes. It became difficult for such mother to start struggling for children food and other requirements.

Damota [12] argues that divorced couple’ face challenges of economic status, social networks and role demands which lead to deterioration in physical and mental health for the majority of individuals immediately following separation. With regard to Damota study, the current study, findings relate in the way that a wellbeing mind of parents influences mental health of their children while poor and distributed mental status of the parents causes families instability which internally and externally affect the mental health of their children and growing up in an unsupported, neglectful or violent home is also associated with poor physical health and development. The same observation have been realized from this study were children from divorce parent suffered more on poor physical and health support. The unfriendly life situation lead them not to sleep at night due to depression. Also loneliness and lack of parent’s care and love which they used to, affected their mental health well-being.

In addition, the study finding found that some of children from divorced developed negative behavior attitude towards sex and remained unmarried because of painful of their parents divorce.. The

similar findings as these were found [ibid] who concluded that most children whose parents divorced vowed not to marry rather they would only participate on sexual interactions. The children from divorced parents develop habits of dislike get marriage fearing being divorced as their parent. Some of these children engage in misconduct behavior like sexual relations and robbery as comforting zone

Furthermore, Gager *et al* [33] is of the same opinion that children from the divorced parents always develops internalizing behavior which they learnt from the parent they are living with after divorce or externalizing behavior which they learnt outside their parent because their parents can no longer control them. Children from divorced families need closer care and education on how to leave without their beloved parents. If the children remain with one of the parent after divorce, they still need affection and moral support. The findings revealed mostly of the misconduct behaviors was the outcome of hard living conditions. In addition children from divorced parents were found involved in drug abuse, sexual relation, drop out from school and theft. Some of the children turned into these misbehavior during struggling for survival while other children practiced this bad behavior as a way of coping with their stress.

As revealed in this study, children from divorced family enter more into behavioral problems rather than finding ways of recurring their destination of their future life. They decided to do that because in their grow-up they had experienced parents conflicts which psychological affected their mind way of critical thinking and judgment. Children from divorced parent need great care because family conflict affects the prognosis life and lead children into depression and misconduct behavior.

Moreover the findings revealed that, there were direct relationship between the styles of life the parents which they lived before divorce and the life style of their kids live after divorce which are full of stress, feelings and emotional. Similarly, The results are in line with [34] state that children always copies the lifestyle of their parents which in turn affects their emotions and feelings of their children as they grow up concerning married and way of living. Children values their parent as their role mode in their life. If their parents' life become occupied with conflicts and quarrels possibly the children's life in their adult hood will possess similar character. It is observe that in this study children have been in conflict with step mother since fighting was not a new phenomenon in their live, while the main source was stress and emotions of being placed to new step mother and living in the house which they lived with their mother before.

[5] argued that children from divorced families who were used to violence more frequently to resolve conflict were more likely to be stressful, aggressive and subjected to physically violent. Actually the study finding shows that there was close relation between the live of the parents and the future life of their children especial on controlling and fighting against stress and emotions. The parent's decision on their divorce has both negative and positive effect to their children. The [29] research on effects of divorce to women and children in Nigeria revealed that divorce has psychological and emotional effects on women; the divorced women and children experience more social isolation, which makes them end up producing greater feelings of loneliness, unhappiness, and lower self-esteem. The children who were occupied with stress and emotions were found to be risk taker. They have engage in any activities regards was good or harmful to them.

Actualy findings found children's were affected their mental ability of thinking due to stress and too anger unnecessary. Thus [8] supports that emotional ,abuse and neglect in childhood trauma were the most predictive factors for the development of severe, early onset, and drug-resistant depression, suicidal ideation, and non-suicidal self-injury. The study finding found children engaged in smoking, drunkenness and child labor business so as to reduce their internal and external psychological pain.

5.0 CONCLUSSIONS

It was found that, divorce creates the gap between children and the parents knowingly or unknowingly and in many cases since it weaken their relationship especial one of the divorced parent decide to remarry and become busy with stepparent and newly born children. When stepparent hates the children, then automatically the relationship between children and parent deteriorates. Also children from divorced parents develops the mental health problems because they think their life are over and when they meet their peers whose parents are still living together feels guilty to themselves, Furthermore, after divorce the parental care to the children always decreases which makes the children now to develop behaviors which are not acceptable to the society. Those behavior include sexual relations. Early marriage, drug abuse and robbery.

Based on the findings it is recommended that divorced parents must build strong relationship with their children after divorce so as to make them not to develop negative sense of femininity or masculinity. Also, divorced parents should take care and show love to their children's in order to children's create mental health which will rescue them not being affected by psychological problems. If possible divorced parents should not remarry until their children reaches certain age of being independent Parents should support their children in social security, financial and moral in order to reach their vision and life destine. In addition, this study was limited to the effects of marital divorce on children well-being in Iringa Municipal. The researcher recommends another study to be conducting on the causes of marital divorce in the families for more understanding of the marital divorce.

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