



The
Grass
ISN'T GREENER

*The
Damaging
Effects
of Divorce*



**ROCKY MOUNTAIN
FAMILY COUNCIL**

Over the past 30 years there has been a significant loss of the ideal of marriage in our country and an increasing acceptance of divorce. The broken promise has been normalized to such a high degree in our society that Hallmark now has a “congratulations on your divorce” card. Books with such titles as *The Good Divorce* are best sellers. Phrases like “we just grew apart” and “we fell out of love” are now common grounds for filing for divorce. But research shows that troubled wives and husbands who think that divorce will lead them to greener pastures are in for a rude awakening.

DIVORCE HURTS WOMEN



A new phenomenon has resulted from no-fault divorce laws: what commentators have called “the feminization of poverty.” The rate of child poverty is five times higher for children living with single mothers than for children in intact families.¹

- In 1992, 53.4 percent of female-headed households with children subsisted below the poverty line, compared with only 10.7 percent of all other families with children.²

- Studies show a drop in income for both women and men after divorce, noting that women experience an income decline of about 30 percent while the divorced male will experience about a 10 percent drop in income.³

- Three years after the failure of their marriages, divorced women experience greater adversity and suffer from more bouts of depression than their married peers.⁴

- Another study shows that “during the first year after divorce, custodial mothers were more anxious, depressed,

angry, and self-doubting than were married mothers. They also showed comparatively less affection to their children, communicated less with them, punished them more, and were more inconsistent in their use of discipline.”⁵

- These statistics are in spite of the fact that historically the vast majority of divorces are initiated by women, not by men.⁶

Women have been sold a bill of goods—easy divorce is not the ticket to a better life.

DIVORCE HURTS MEN



The image of the successful professional man who leaves his faithful wife and children and runs off with his pretty young secretary is well ingrained in our national mind. The devastated wife and children are left to pick up the pieces. But is the grass really greener for the roaming father?

- Divorced men experience early health problems to a much greater extent than married men. Premature

death rates for divorced men are double that of married men from such causes as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and strokes. The premature death rate from pneumonia is seven times greater for divorced men than for married men.⁷

- The suicide rate for divorced white men is four times higher than for their married counterparts.⁸

- Divorced or separated men undergo inpatient or outpatient psychiatric care at a rate 10 times that of married men.⁹

- According to one study, only half of divorced mothers valued the absent father’s continued contact with his children. One-fifth saw no value in continued contact whatsoever, and “... actively tried to sabotage the meetings by sending the children away just before the father’s arrival, by insisting that the child was ill or had pressing homework to do, by making a scene, or by leaving the children with the husband and disappearing.”¹⁰

Divorce hurts fathers’ relationships with their children, and may prove dangerous and even fatal physically and emotionally.

DIVORCE HURTS KIDS



Children do not ask to be born into troubled families. The truth is that divorce has long-lasting psychological, social, and economic consequences for these little ones. Children are the ultimate victims in the divorce wars.

- The vast majority of children who spend time in a single-parent home will experience poverty.¹¹

- Studies have shown that children from disrupted marriages were over 70 per-

cent more likely to have been expelled or suspended from school and experience greater risk of injury, asthma, headaches, and speech defects than children from intact families.¹²

- Suicide rates for children of divorce are much higher than for children from intact families.¹³

- Delinquency rates are 10 to 15 percent higher in broken homes than in intact ones.¹⁴

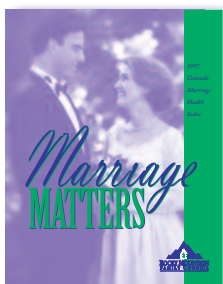
- In a study conducted for the National Institute of Mental Health, Dr. Nicholas Zill found that “18 to 22-year-olds from disrupted families were twice as likely to have poor relationships with their mothers and fathers, to show high levels of emotional distress or problem behavior, and to have received psychological help.” Zill found the effects of divorce still evident 12 to 22 years after the breakup.¹⁵

- About 40 percent of the children who live in fatherless households haven’t seen their fathers in at least one year. Of the remaining 60 percent, only 20 percent sleep even one night per month in the father’s home. Only one in six sees their father an average of once or more per week.¹⁶

- Children whose parents have divorced are much more likely to drop out of school, to engage in premarital sex, and to become pregnant themselves outside of marriage. These effects are found even after taking into account parental and marital characteristics before the divorce.¹⁷

- It is estimated that only about one-third of all divorces involve highly conflicted marriages. The divorces that are most likely to be stressful to children are those involving low conflict. As low conflict divorces continue to increase, so do the troubles of the children of those divorces.¹⁸

THE SOLUTION



Rocky Mountain Family Council (RMFC) is now suggesting a three-fold strategy to deal with the divorce problem in Colorado.

STEP 1: Public Awareness

This brochure, along with RMFC's *Marriage Matters* survey, will help to focus the divorce

debate where it belongs: on the individuals victimized by easy divorce.

STEP 2: Avoiding Bad Marriages Before They Start; Strengthening Existing Marriages

According to RMFC's *Marriage Matters* survey, over 80 percent of first marriages are blessed in a church or synagogue in Colorado. However, only about one-third of couples receive any premarital counseling. Pastors, priests and rabbis throughout Colorado must begin requiring engaged couples to undergo a minimum of premarital counseling before they can be married. Churches can strengthen existing marriages by adopting mentoring programs where couples help other couples through their marital troubles. Having a written church marriage policy is a must. RMFC offers a packet of valuable information to help churches equip new marriages in Colorado and strengthen existing ones.

STEP 3: Reforming the Law

RMFC's *Marriage Matters* survey shows that 64 percent of currently separated or divorced Coloradans see a growing acceptance of divorce in our society as a major blow to the institution of marriage.

Colorado's laws are part of the problem and need to be changed. Under the current system, it is easier to divorce your spouse of 30 years than it is to fire an employee of only one week. Reform of the law is already underway, with post-divorce counseling and parenting plans already required. What remains is to adopt covenant marriage legislation which would require the law to honor a couple's commitment to stay married except under certain special circumstances.

Endnotes

- 1** U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1992 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), table 719.
- 2** Ibid, p. 458.
- 3** Atlee Stroup and Gene Pollock, "Economic Consequences of Marital Dissolution," *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 22: 37-54, 1994.
- 4** Frederick O. Lorenz et al., "Married and Recently Divorced Mothers' Stressful Events and Distress: Tracing Change Across Time," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 59 [1997]: 219-232.
- 5** Paul R. Amato et al., "Parental Divorce and the Well-Being of Children: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, [1991], 53:28.
- 6** (Marilyn Ihninger-Tallman and Kay Pasley, (eds.), "Divorce and Remarriage in the American Family: A Historical Review," *Remarriage and Step-parenting: Current Research and Theory*, (New York: Guilford Press, 1987), p. 3-18.
- 7** J.J. Lynch, *The Broken Heart: The Medical Consequences of Loneliness*, (New York: Basic Books, 1977).
- 8** Ibid.
- 9** B.R. Bloom, S.W. White, and S.J. Asher, "Marital Disruption as a Stressful Life Event," *Divorce and Separation: Context, Causes and Consequences* (New York: Basic Books, 1979.)
- 10** Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan Berlin Kelly, *Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), p. 125.
- 11** David Ellwood, *Poor Support*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 46.
- 12** Deborah A. Dawson, "Family Structure and Children's Health and Well-being: Data from the National Health Interview Survey on Child Health," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, pp. 573-579.
- 13** Susan Larson and David Larson, M.D., M.S.P.H., "Divorce: A Hazard to your Health?" *Physician*, May/June 1990, p. 16.
- 14** Edward L. Wells and Joseph H. Rankin, "Families and Delinquency: A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Broken Homes," *Social Problems*, 38:1, p. 87.
- 15** Nicholas Zill, Donna Morrison, and Mary Jo Coiro, "Long Term Effects of Parental Divorce on Parent-Child Relationships, Adjustment, and Achievement in Young Adulthood," *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7:1, p. 96.
- 16** Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. and Christine Winquist Nord, "Parenting Apart: Patterns of Child Rearing after Marital Disruption," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, November 1985, p. 896.
- 17** Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. and Julien O. Teitler, "Reconsidering the Effects of Marital Disruption: What Happens to Children of Divorce in Early Adulthood?" *Journal of Family Issues*, 15 (1994), pp. 173-190.
- 18** Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation At Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 220.

Rocky Mountain Family Council

Solutions begin in our own homes, with our own family relationships and our commitment to each family member. At Rocky Mountain Family Council, we help families grow stronger and deepen their roots so they won't be shaken by the strong winds of our changing culture.

We are a nonprofit educational organization recognized for tax-deductible giving by the federal government.