Developing Support Services for Divorced Families

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A Study on the Phenomenon of Divorce in Hong Kong

- by Centre for Suicide Research & Prevention, the University of Hong Kong
- Final report (2/2014)
- Project on Children in Divorce Families (late 2010) by Hong Kong University Family Institute

- Quantitative analysis
  - Data from Family Court
    - 300 cases (2011)

- Qualitative study
  - Interviews of 41 people

- Focus group
  - Helping professionals

Divorce rate in Hong Kong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Registered Marriages</td>
<td>32,825</td>
<td>58,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Divorce Decrees Granted</td>
<td>13,425</td>
<td>19,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce Ratio*</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Divorced/Separated Individuals</td>
<td>2.7% (152,349)</td>
<td>4.4% (278,946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Proportion of Children living in divorced household</td>
<td>4% (57,140)</td>
<td>7% (80,780)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* No. of Divorce Decrees Granted / No. of Registered Marriages in current year
**Socio-economic Status of Divorced Families**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Monthly Household Income for divorced household (with children aged 18 or below)</td>
<td>$10,000 ($18,710)</td>
<td>$9,500 ($20,500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Divorced Households living in public rental housing units</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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</tbody>
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Source of Information: HK Census & CSRP

**Impacts of Divorce**

- On Children
  - Video clip 1d

**Parental Alienation**

- (Amato & Keith, 1991)
  - ↓ academic achievement
  - ↓ psychological well-being
  - ↓ self-concept
  - ↓ social relations

Worse in high conflicts divorced families

- Brainwashing
- Bad-mouthing
- Limiting contact
- Erasing the other parent
- Forcing child to reject the other parent
- Creating impression of dangerous parent
- Threats of withdrawal of affection
- Belittling, limiting contact with extended family
Impacts of Divorce

- On Individuals (Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000)
  - ↑ depression
  - ↑ anxiety
  - ↓ physical health
  - ↑ substance use
  - ↑ risk of overall mortality
  - ↑ vulnerable to suicide
    (divorced men in Japan & South Korea) (Yip et al., 2012)

- Video clip 2a

- http://familymediation.org.hk

- Special thanks to Caritas – Hong Kong

Protective Factor for children of divorced families

- Proper post-divorce handling
- Family cohesion (Cheung, 1995)
  - “Forever parenthood” (Lau, 2001)
- Co-parenting
- Parallel Parenting

Models of Divorce

- Stations of Divorce (Bohannan, 1968)
  - Emotional divorce
  - Legal divorce
  - Economic divorce
  - Co-parental divorce
  - Community divorce
  - Psychic divorce
Needs of Divorced Families

- Financial
- Housing
- Childcare services
- Flexible working mode
- Emotional support
- Counselling on emotions, new identity
- Legal Information
- Knowledge & Skills in parenting

How to support these families?

Family Friendly Environment

- Remove social stigma against Divorced Families, Single-parent Families

Tangible Service

- Financial Assistance
- Affordable Housing
- Affordable & Flexible Childcare Services
Divorce Education

- Information-based education
  - Legal information
  - Divorce process
  - Impacts of divorce on children, couples, in-laws
  - Needs of children

Skills-based education for children

- Stress coping
- Problem solving skills

Skills-based education for parents

- Address emotional needs
- Raise competence in parenting
- Develop effective coparenting

Family Mediation

- Pilot Scheme in mid-2000
- Evaluation Study (Sullivan, 2005)
  - Effective in resolving disputes
  - Draw up separation/divorce agreement covering on assets, maintenance, custodial & access arrangement
Shared parenting as the norm
- Child-focused co-parenting plan
- 4 stages:
  - assessment on parents’ readiness
  - exploration of co-parenting options
  - facilitation of negotiations
  - continuous support/trouble shooting

Post-divorce Counselling
- For parents
  - Resolve emotional problems
  - Minimize hostility between parents
  - Psychic divorce
  - Find new identity
  - Support group

For children
- Be free from parents’ marital problem
- Be focused on own developmental needs

Parenting Coordination
- Child-focused
- Dispute resolution
- By an impartial third party
Primary Goal
- free child from parental hostility

Secondary Goal
- foster constructive post-separation parental alliance

Focus of Intervention
- Disengage from physical & emotional relationship
- Clarify new boundaries
- Manage conflict effectively
- Make effective mutual decisions
- Increase positive collaborative behaviors
- Understand impact of separation & parental conflict on children

US
- Focus of Intervention
  1. Coping Style
  2. Parent-child relation
  3. Preventive Intervention Programmes
     “New Beginnings Program”
     “The Rainbows Programs”
  4. Court-based/Court-connected/Non-court-connected education program for parents

UK
- Focus of Intervention
  1. School-based program
     “Changing Families Project”
     “Dawn Projects”
  2. Counselling service by Catholic Children’s Society
  3. Government department : leaflets
**Taiwan**
- Focus of Intervention (Parents)
  1. Family life education
  2. The Ministry of Education

**Singapore**
- Focus of Intervention
  1. By Family Court
     “Child Focused Resolution Centre” for parents & children
     - mandatory counselling & mediation

**Mainland China**
- Project HEART
- KIDSLine
- Project IMPACT
- Project CONTACT
- Project HOPE
- Project SHINE
- Project SAVE

**Network**
Hong Kong
• Integrated Family Service Centres
  ➢ Case management
    (referral for tangible services)
  ➢ Intensive counselling service

• Family & Child Protective Services Units
  ➢ Social Investigation Report on child custody
  ➢ Supervised access on child visitation

Non-government organizations
• Time-limited projects on divorce education, family mediation & parenting coordination

Way forwards
• Expertise in divorce counselling, parenting coordination
• Training
• Systematic & strategic public education
• Research: evidenced-based intervention divorce phenomenon
Thank you!

References:


