

Developing Support Services for Divorced Families

Ms. Wendy WONG

Member
Specialized Committee on Family & Community Service
HKCSS

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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
 - 900 cases (1999, 2004, 2009)
 - 300 cases (2011)

- **Qualitative study**

- Interviews of 41 people

- **Focus group**

- Helping professionals

Divorce rate in Hong Kong

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

* No. of Divorce Decrees Granted / No. of Registered Marriages in current year

Socio-economic Status of Divorced Families

	2001	2011
Median Monthly Household Income for divorced household (with children aged 18 or below)	\$10,000 (\$18,710)	\$9,500 (\$20,500)
Proportion of Divorced Households living in public rental housing units	44%	57%

Source of Information : HK Census & CSRP

Impacts of Divorce

- On Children
- [Video clip 1d](#)

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

Worse in high conflicts divorced families

Parental Alienation

- 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

- 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

- Project HEART
- KIDSLine
- Project IMPACT
- Project CONTACT
- Project HOPE
- Project SHINE
- Project SAVE

Mainland China

- Few marriage education workshops
- Cross-Strait Marriage & Family Service 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 !

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