

The Effects of Divorce on America

(This information is taken from a June 5, 2000, article published by the Heritage Foundation by Patrick F. Fagan and Robert Rector.)

American society may have erased the stigma that once accompanied divorce, but it can no longer ignore its massive effects. Mounting evidence in the annals of scientific journals details the plight of the children of divorce and clearly indicates not only that divorce has lasting effects, but that these effects spill over into every aspect of life. For example, children whose parents have divorced . . .

- Are increasingly the victims of abuse and neglect
- Exhibit more behavioral and emotional problems
- Are involved more frequently in crime and drug abuse
- Will have an increased likelihood to abuse alcohol and begin using drugs.
- Have higher rates of suicide
- Will have increased risks for health problems
- Will experience emotion, mental, health problems significantly more as adults than adult children of intact families.
- More frequently demonstrate a diminished learning capacity, are more likely to repeat a grade, and have higher drop-out rates and lower rates of college graduation.
- Have their relationship with their parents permanently weakened.
- Will have destructive ways of handling conflict and a poorer self-image.
- Will be more likely to feel hostility and rejection.
- Will demonstrate an earlier loss of virginity, more cohabitation, higher expectations of divorce, higher divorce rates later in life, and less desire to have children.
- Will have a higher incident of serious abuse, including sexual abuse
- Will have an increased tendency for premarital teenage sexual activity, number of sexual partners during adolescence, and out-of-wedlock childbirths;
- Will have difficulty with romance and courtship as they reach adulthood, which will include dating more often, having more failed romantic relationships, and experiencing a more rapid turnover of dating partners and higher levels of cohabitation; this will lead to a greater number of sexual partners, which in itself creates a grave risk that one will acquire an incurable sexually transmitted disease.
- Will have more positive attitudes toward divorce, have less favorable attitudes toward marriage, are less likely to insist on a lifelong marital commitment, and are less likely to think positively of themselves as potential parents.
- Will be negatively impacted economically due to a decreased household income and have a higher risk of poverty
- Will have destructive ways of handling conflict because they have not seen their parents' ability to handle conflict and move toward agreement.
- Will be affected in their adult years due to the strains and difficulties that arise in daily rituals, family celebrations, family traditions, and special occasions and see these losses as major.

Unlike the experience of their parents, the child's suffering does not reach its peak at the time of the divorce and then level off. Rather, the emotional effects of the parents' divorce can be played and replayed throughout the next three decades of a child's life.

Divorce has pervasive ill effects on children and the five major institutions of society--the family, the church, the school, the marketplace, and government itself.