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**FAMILIES BREAKDOWN – DISCUSSION OF DIVORCES AND SEPARATION IN POLAND WITH
CONSIDERATION OF POMERANIAN REGION**

Aleksandra KAMOS-GUTA

Private Counselling Unit, Legalni Directory, Slupsk, Poland.

Abstract: One of the major social changes to characterize the last decades of the 20th century is the marked increase in the divorce rate worldwide. In Poland in 2004 56,332 marriages ended with a divorce, while in 1980 the number was 39,833. The rising number of divorces has become a new "cultural universal" and social scientists examining the impact of family breakdown on the welfare of children. This brief paper examines the recent trends in divorce and separation in Poland with a consideration of Pomeranian region.

Key words: divorce, separation, divorce rates, family breakdown.

Introduction

Divorce is a concept in the area of law enforcement and legal means to legitimize breakdown and family disorganization and dissolution of marriage in the life of both spouses. Nowadays, divorce has become established phenomenon of social life. To make matters worse, the society with growing approval relates to such a form of resolving marital conflicts and crises. Divorce is treated as an event, which in certain circumstances can happen in any family. Characteristic of modern society differentiation process behaviours, attitudes and moral standards contributed to the increase in the number of single parent families.

Growing number of divorces give cause for many discussions among people dealing with family issues. These discussions are focused around the serious consequences for the durability of a marriage and family functioning. The reasons for marriage have broken down over the years consistently mentioned incompatibility, failure to marital fidelity, alcohol abuse, and reprehensible attitude to family members (Kuszak K., 2009). Number and indicators provide only a rough idea about the processes occurring among all marriages, because they do not disclose the actual number of families actually broken, although formally remaining.

The phenomenon of divorce has various severities depending on the environment, level of education, social group, age, number of children etc. Most are brought by urban lifestyle, where we observe constant rule: the bigger the city, the greater the number of divorces.

Divorce is a highly emotional experience. In psychology, is regarded as one of the most stressful life events. Stress caused by divorce fall into three groups:

1. Social (broken family ties, friendships, loneliness)

2. Psychological (anxiety, hopelessness, guilt, regret)

3. Behavioural (the collapse of the former way of life, worsening economic conditions)

Research conducted over the stress caused by disintegration of marriage and the family, showed that divorce involves a lot of problems to health. Overview of research in this area argues that divorced people - compared with those remaining within marriage - are more prone to serious illness, are frequently hospitalized, more likely to alcohol abuse and more likely to have mental health problems (Kuszak K., 2009).

Family disintegration processes include all generations of marriages - both young couples as well as a people in long-term relationships. Currently, more often than in the past, divorce happens in families with children. From a social point of view, the most important consequences of divorce are those for children (Richards, M. P. M., 1984).

For parents divorce is an end of a certain stage of life, for children it is a real shock, a time of fear and questions about the uncertain future. There is no stability; the situation before the divorce of parents, during and after the divorce is always different. The phenomenon has negative effect on educational, socialization and emotional areas, which provide children with many traumatic experiences (Richards, M. P. M., Dyson, M., 1982). The disintegration of the family on the one hand paralyze a child, triggers an attitude of passivity, apathy, isolation from peers and adults; on the other hand creates an attitude of rebellion and resentment toward their parents. The child ceases to take into account the opinion of parents with their commands and prohibitions. Rebellious and hostile attitude towards them is such a childish revenge for destroyed childhood, lost confidence and security and lost peace of mind (Eekalaar, J., Clive, E., 1977).

Broken family issue creates a rather complicated system of mother-child-father. The problem of custody arises: sometimes the parents - especially during the first few months or years after a divorce - maintain a war of the child, in many cases not carrying about the child's welfare but to play on each other's grievance, humiliation and disappointment. Mother-child-father system introduces additional problems, like re-marriage of divorced parents. Sometimes the new spouse weakens the husband's or wife's ties with the previous family, which leads to less contacts on parent-child level; this therefore cripples a youngster and creates further problems in adulthood (Eekalaar, J., Clive, E., 1977). Such young person is more likely to replicate the cycle. Adult children of divorced parents are experiencing a lot of problems in close relationships in their newly established families; they carry the burden of duty and fear. They want to be important to someone, but also feel a tremendous fear of rejection. They also tend to have trouble deciding on marriage, often procrastinate on it because of the strong fear of a repetition of what parents do.

Separation is considered as another serious cause of the formation of single-parent families. Separation removes the cohabitation of the spouses, but the formal bond of marriage, preventing anyone from re-marrying, remains. Reconciliation in this case and merge of the family is much easier than in the case of divorce. The suffering of children is also a bit smaller, because the marriage of their parents formally sustains.

Divorce and separation in Pomeranian region

The condition of Polish marriages in relation to their durability weakens from year to year. A growing number of divorces and all the coefficients of this phenomenon take more and more unfavourable turns. This process took on the dynamics of the early eighties of the last century. In the years 1980-2004 hundreds of thousands of families broke up. Currently, the number of divorces pronounced is over 40% higher than twenty-five years ago.

I region of Pomeranian in 2004 court ordered termination of more than 3 thousand of marriages. In the period 1990-2003, there was an increase in the number of divorces by almost 33%. Whereas in 2004 only, there was a decrease of just over 2.7%. The table below represents data of divorces pronounced by a court and divorce rates: per 10,000 of population, per 10,000 of population in age of 20yo and more and per 1,000 of new marriages.

Table 1. Divorces pronounced and divorce rates

	1980	1985	1990	2000	2003	2004
Poland overall	39,833	49,095	42,436	42,770	48,632	56,332
per 10,000 of population	11.2	13.2	11.1	11.1	12.7	14.7
per 10,000 of population in age of 20yo and more	16.5	19.5	16.5	15.4	17.2	19.8
per 1,000 of new marriages	129.6	184.0	166.2	202.6	248.8	293.2
Pomeranian region overall			2,385	3,014	3,169	3,106
per 10,000 of population			11.0	14.0	15.0	14.0
per 10,000 of population in age of 20yo and more				19.2	19.7	19.0
per 1,000 of new marriages				241.1	280.4	283.6

Source: CSO, "Demographic Yearbook", Warsaw 2005, p. 282 and own calculations based on statistics from the US in Gdansk. (data partially missing due to regions re-arrangement in 1999)

Indicators show that in Pomeranian province nearly 20 couples parted every year, or 40 people for every 10 thousand people of marriageable age. A comparison of the number of divorces to the number of new marriages (within the first year of marriage) concluded that the divorce rate per 1 thousand in new marriages is increasing. In 2000 241 new marriages per 1 thousand broke up.

Table 2. Divorces in 2004 by duration of marriage

	Overall	Years of marriage						
		0 – 4	5 -9	10 -14	15 -19	20- 24	25- 29	30 years and more
Poland	56,332	11,418	12,874	10,672	8,258	6,613	3,923	2,574

Source: CSO, "Demographic Yearbook", Warsaw 2005, p. 287.

Observing the trends in divorces, it is clear that younger couples are more likely to get divorced and the most divorces happen in first 10-15 years of marriage.

The most divorces affect those who have entered into marriage at the age of 20-24 years. The causes of the phenomenon should be seen in the fact of higher intensity of marriage by persons belonging to this age group. Years ago marriages of young people were often forced by pregnancy, while now they are triggered by lack of maturity to take social roles responsibly. Young clearly lack of education in this direction.

Table 3. Divorces by number of underage children

Year	Overall	Divorced couples					Average number of children from broken families
		Without children	With number of children:				
			1	2	3	4 and more	
Poland							
1984	49,095	16,449	20,139	10,156	1,804	547	1.47
1990	42,436	13,207	16,831	9,909	1,914	575	1.53
1995	38,115	11,619	15,500	8,642	1,787	567	1.53
2000	42,770	14,994	17,153	8,265	1,775	583	1.49
2003	48,632	18,435	19,388	8,515	1,740	553	1.45
2004	56,332	19,780	22,413	10,794	2,490	855	1.51
Pomeranian region							
2002	2,934	1,038	1,189	555	112	40	
2003	3,169	1,156	1,251	571	145	46	
2004	3,106	1,111	1,223	585	136	51	1.52

Source: CSO, "Demographic Yearbook", Warsaw 2005, pp. 295, 298.

In Poland, nearly 65% of divorces apply to married couples with children as many as in Pomeranian region. It is interesting that in 2004 there is a rise in divorces among couples with three or more children.

While examining the Polish and Pomeranian model of delegating parental authority and custody of children from dissolved marriages, it is clear that family courts most often leave children with their mother. In Poland 64% of cases and in the Pomeranian region 53.5% of divorce cases are decided this way. The decision on the exercise of joined custody courts made in 31% of cases in Poland, and in 41.5% in Pomeranian region. This is represented in a Table.4.

Table 4. Divorces in 2004 by the court's decision on the exercise of parental responsibility and taking care of children

	Overall	Custody			Child gave up to	
		maternal	paternal	joined	Foster care	Adoption
POLSKA	36,552	23,291	1,194	11,707	74	222
Pomorskie	1,995	1,068	57	847	4	18

Source: CSO, "Demographic Yearbook", Warsaw 2005, p. 299.

Legislations promoting lone parent system

Polish legislations significantly contribute to the strengthening of families breakdown trend. A special role is fulfilled here by the Family Benefits Act, 2004, which promoted role of a lone parenting. It did so by encouraging physical separation and divorce and discouraging marriage by introducing additions to the family allowance of 170PLN per month, as well as introducing a benefit in the amount of 400PLN for the loss of unemployment benefit by a single person who takes care of a child. These benefits are not available for children raised in complete families in similar financial situation as those from single-parent families. These changes caused a wave of divorce and separation, as well as deter many couples from marriage. It is evident in data:

- a) Between October 2003 and September 2004 divorce and separation applications received by the courts in Poland counted 100,362
- b) Between October 2002 and September 2003 70,206 divorce and separation applications were made

Three further amendments of the act did not improve the error that caused the damage to the families. The amendments aimed at slightly larger than before provision for families with many children (having four children, and more), and slightly reduce help for single parents. It has not been proposed, however, that everyone in the same financial situation received similar benefits. (Jablonski K., 2008)

Maintenance support

It was not until September 2005 when important amendment to the Family Benefits Act and the Act on Maintenance Support came into force. This led to the resignation of the allowances for single parents (leaving them in exceptional cases). This Act continues to discriminate against children of single-parent families. Only parents who cannot enforce a child support for their children can benefit from this act. Unfortunately, this solution is provided exclusively for single parents. Children in families that are full (parent remarried) and in similar material situation have been deprived of such a possibility. This solution

is unfair because it violates the equal treatment of children. This undermines the foundation of social life, which is the family.

Conclusions

Decay dynamics of families in Poland is very high, which is why it is necessary to undertake intensive measures to prevent this phenomenon. These include the following:

- Education and promotion of the complete family pattern as a lasting solution to the benefit of all its members and particularly children.
- Urgent reinstatement of mandatory mediation and conciliation proceedings in cases of divorce and separation, which was abandoned in December 2005.
- Dissemination of marriage and family counselling for estranged spouses helping to solve their problems.
- Change of laws that benefit lone parenting over full families.

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About the Author

Aleksandra Kamos-Guta is a Personal Assistant to Director at *Legalni* as well as a private Marriage Counselling Advisor. She completed social studies in 2000 with a specialisation in Family counselling. Her aim is to publish a book on problems of young marriage couples of the modern world; she is currently gathering material.