



SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE AMONG CHILDREN: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY FROM KERALA

*Fr Dipin Joseph John, **Dr Mohan Lal Jakhar

*Research scholar, *Department of Sociology* Mansarovar Global University – [Mgu] Sehore, Madhyapradesh.

** *Department of Sociology* Mansarovar Global University – [Mgu] Sehore, Madhyapradesh.

Abstract: Parental divorce has emerged as a significant social issue influencing children's emotional stability, educational performance, and social integration. Although divorce rates in India remain comparatively lower than in Western countries, states such as Kerala have experienced a rapid increase in marital dissolution over the last decade. The present study examines the social, economic, and psychological effects of parental divorce among children in Kerala, using empirical data collected from 600 children of divorced parents. Employing a descriptive-analytical research design, the study investigates differences in children's experiences based on gender, education, and religion. The findings indicate that parental divorce significantly affects children's emotional well-being, academic concentration, social relationships, and economic security, with female and school-going children exhibiting higher vulnerability. The study highlights the urgent need for integrated sociological, educational, and psychosocial interventions to support children from divorced families.

Key words; Socio-Economic and Psychological, Parental Divorce

1.INTRODUCTION

Marriage in Indian society has traditionally been viewed as a sacred and enduring social institution that extends beyond the union of two individuals to encompass families, kinship networks, and cultural traditions (Parsons & Bales, 1955). However, rapid social transformation driven by modernization, urbanization, women's education, and changing gender roles has significantly altered marital expectations and family structures (Giddens, 2006). As a result, divorce has become increasingly visible, even in socially progressive states such as Kerala. Divorce represents not merely the legal termination of marriage but a structural disruption of the family system, affecting the processes of socialization, emotional security, and role stability essential for child development (Amato, 2010). Children of divorced parents often experience emotional distress, social stigma, academic decline, and financial instability, particularly in societies where traditional family norms remain influential (Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001). Kerala, despite its high literacy rate and strong human development indicators, has witnessed a substantial rise in divorce cases. This paradox highlights the need to examine how parental divorce influences children's lives within Kerala's unique socio-cultural context. Understanding these impacts is critical for developing effective social policies and family support mechanisms.

Divorce or closure of marriage is the final termination of a marriage, cancelling the legal duties and responsibilities entailed in nuptial contract and dissolving the bonds of matrimony between married persons. The divorce rate and the causes of divorce do vary in different Nations and cultures. The divorce rate in India, is still lowest among all the nations in the world with a divorce rate of 1.1% as compared to Sweden 54.9%, United States 54.8% and Russia 43.3%. Recent data shows that this scenario is fast changing and divorce rates are on an increase in India. In the Journal of Divorce and Remarriage survey shows that over the past four years, the divorce rate in Delhi has almost doubled. Metro cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, and Chennai are also showing similar trends. Kerala, known to be the state with the highest literacy levels has experienced an increase of divorce rate by 350% in the last 10 years. According to a report published by Deccan chronicle on 2018, Kerala leads with the highest divorce rates among states in the nation. Divorce cases are increasing at an alarming rate in Kerala. Various reasons like Physical, Psychological, & Sexual Abuse, Addictions, Adjustment Problems can lead to divorce. Family Court of Kerala provided by the state government reveals that the state capital, Thiruvananthapuram, is the capital for divorce cases too and leads in no of cases of divorce recorded in any given district of the state. Of the 22475 cases filed in 16 family courts in the state, 6000 cases were from Trivandrum district alone. In Pathanamthitta which is the place of the present study, had 2880 cases filed for divorce in the year 2018 Marriage, one of the oldest social institutions, forms the cornerstone of family and kinship systems across societies. However, in the twenty-first century, the meaning and permanence of marriage have undergone substantial transformation. Rising individualism, economic independence especially among women and changing value orientations have contributed to a growing acceptance of marital dissolution in contemporary India (Desai & Andrist, 2019).

2. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE

Although statistical reports indicate an increasing trend of divorce in Kerala, systematic sociological research focusing on children's experiences remains limited. Much of the existing literature emphasizes legal aspects or demographic trends, while the lived experiences of children—particularly their emotional, social, and academic challenges—remain underexplored (Cherlin, 2010). Kerala's distinct socio-cultural setting, characterized by high female literacy, economic mobility, and shifting gender roles, necessitates region-specific empirical studies (Rajan & Zachariah, 2019). These social changes may influence marital stability as well as children's responses to parental separation. Understanding the causes and consequences of divorce is essential for designing early intervention strategies that can prevent long-term psychological and social harm.

The present study is significant because it Provides empirical evidence on the socio-economic and psychological effects of divorce on children. Examines gender-, education-, and religion-based variations in children's experiences. Contributes to sociological theory on family change in contemporary Indian society. Offers practical insights for policy makers, educators, and counsellors.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To study the Socio- Economic and Psychological effect of Parental Divorce among Secondary schools.

Research Design

A descriptive survey research design supported by analytical and inferential methods was adopted to examine the effects of parental divorce on children (Best & Kahn, 2016).

Population and Sample

The population consisted of children of divorced parents residing in Kerala. A purposive sample of 600 children, aged 10–18 years, was selected from different districts.

Results and discussion

This study was to examine the social, economic, and psychological consequences of parental divorce on children in Kerala. The findings reveal that divorce has a profound and multidimensional impact on children's lives. The results demonstrate that parental divorce disrupts not only the family's structural and economic stability but also the child's emotional security and social identity, emphasizing the need for coordinated social, educational, and counselling interventions to support affected children in Kerala.

Table 1: Social effect of parental divorce among children.

	No		Rarely		Occasionally		Yes, frequently	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Social Stigma Experienced	20	3.3%	120	20.0%	160	26.7%	300	50.0%
Change in Social Interactions	20	3.3%	60	10.0%	260	43.3%	260	43.3%

Half of the respondents (50%) reported that they frequently experienced stigma from peers, relatives, or society due to their parents' divorce, while another 26.7% encountered it occasionally. This suggests that more than three-fourths of the children faced some form of social discrimination or labelling after their parents separated. In terms of social participation, an equal proportion (43.3%) indicated that their social interactions and friendships changed frequently, while another 43.3% said these changes occurred occasionally. Only a minimal 3.3% stated that they were unaffected socially. These results indicate that divorce profoundly disrupts children's social identity, altering how they relate to peers and their surrounding community. Overall, the data demonstrate that the social aftermath of divorce is widespread and deeply felt, with children frequently encountering stigma and reduced community integration.

Table 2: level of Economic Effects among Children of Divorced Parents in Kerala

Post-Divorce Financial Strain	Count	%
No	0	0.0%
Rarely	0	0.0%
Occasionally	300	50.0%
Yes, frequently	300	50.0%

Half of the respondents (50 %) stated that their families frequently experienced financial strain following divorce, and the remaining half (50 %) reported this occurred occasionally. None of the participants indicated that their families were free from financial stress. This pattern clearly demonstrates that economic instability is a universal post-divorce consequence for children in Kerala. The total absence of "No" or "Rarely" responses implies that separation invariably disrupts household income, savings, and lifestyle standards, reflecting the economic vulnerability of single-parent families.

Table 3: Economical effect of parental divorce among children.

	Yes		No	
	Count	%	Count	%
Living Standard	240	40.0%	360	60.0%
Career choice	260	43.3%	340	56.7%

Two major aspects of financial adjustment were explored change in living standard and impact on career or educational choices. A substantial 40 % of respondents reported a decline in living standard, indicating reduced household resources and lifestyle limitations after the parental separation, whereas 60 % perceived little change likely those supported by extended families or remittances.

Similarly, 43.3 % felt their career or higher-education plans were affected, suggesting that economic constraints influence academic trajectories and long-term aspirations. The remaining 56.7 % experienced no such restriction, implying heterogeneity in post-divorce adaptation.

Table 4 :Psychological Effect of parental divorce among children.

	No		Rarely		Occasionally		Yes, frequently	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Emotional Distress	0	0.0%	60	10.0%	280	46.7%	260	43.3%
Mood and Emotional Instability	0	0.0%	60	10.0%	260	43.3%	280	46.7%
Feelings of Guilt or Shame	60	10.0%	120	20.0%	140	23.3%	280	46.7%
Difficulty in Trust and Close Relationships	180	30.0%	120	20.0%	20	3.3%	280	46.7%
Loss of Faith in Marriage / Family Institution	60	10.0%	120	20.0%	160	26.7%	260	43.3%
Change in Relationships with Friends/Family	0	0.0%	20	3.3%	240	40.0%	340	56.7%
Coping through Hobbies or Activities	120	20.0%	140	23.3%	320	53.3%	20	3.3%
Seeking Professional Counselling	380	63.3%	100	16.7%	80	13.3%	40	6.7%
Sense of Insecurity	20	3.3%	120	20.0%	40	6.7%	420	70.0%
Difficulty Understanding Self-Worth or Family Identity	0	0.0%	80	13.3%	240	40.0%	280	46.7%

The data reveal that parental divorce has led to substantial psychological distress among the children surveyed. Nearly 90 % reported frequent or occasional sadness, anxiety, or depression, while an almost equal proportion (90 %) experienced mood fluctuations following the separation. A large share (90 %) struggled with guilt, shame, or self-blame, suggesting internalization of parental conflict. Trust issues were striking: 46.7 % frequently found it hard to build relationships, showing the long-term effects of emotional insecurity. About 43.3 % reported losing faith in marriage, implying a shift in their social values. More than half (56.7 %) felt significant changes in relationships with peers and family, and 70 % expressed an enduring sense of insecurity. Although 76.6 % used hobbies and activities as emotional outlets, only 6.7 % sought professional help, revealing persistent stigma around counselling. Finally, 86.7 % had difficulty understanding their self-worth and family identity, indicating deep emotional disorganization.

4. MAJOR FINDINGS

Parental divorce significantly affects multiple aspects of children's lives. Academic performance and concentration declined, with female children experiencing greater social stigma, economic strain, and psychological distress. School-going children were more vulnerable than college students, especially financially and academically.

Social Effects: Divorce carries moral and cultural stigma in Kerala, disrupting children's peer relationships, community engagement, and sense of belonging.

Economic Effects: All children reported financial stress, with 40% experiencing lower living standards and 43.3% facing career or education disruptions. Extended family support helped some, but economic adjustment remained uneven.

Psychological Effects: Nearly 90% experienced sadness, anxiety, or depression, along with guilt and self-blame. Trust issues (46.7%), insecurity (70%), and identity struggles (86.7%) were common. Although most coped with hobbies, only 6.7% sought professional counselling, highlighting persistent mental health stigma.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Parental divorce in Kerala has significant social, economic, and psychological impacts on children, with broad implications for families, schools, communities, mental health services, and policy.

1.Sociological: Divorce remains stigmatized, leading to social exclusion. Community awareness programs are needed to normalize divorce and support children's identity development.

2.Family and Parenting: Parent-child communication weakens after divorce, highlighting the need for post-divorce parenting support and involvement of extended family.

3.Educational: Academic and behavioural declines call for school-based interventions, including trained counsellors, teacher sensitization, life-skills programs, and safe spaces for emotional expression.

4.Economic and Welfare: Financial strain underscores the need for scholarships, fee waivers, transport aid, and social protection measures targeting children from single-parent household.

5.Psychological and Mental Health: High emotional distress and low counselling uptake indicate a need to expand accessible mental health services and reduce stigma through schools and community programs.

6.Policy and Institutional: A coordinated, multi-sectoral approach is needed, linking family courts, schools, health services, and social welfare. Mandatory counselling and child-impact assessments during divorce proceedings can help safeguard children's well-being.

6. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that parental divorce has **significant social, economic, and psychological consequences** for children in Kerala. While social modernization has reshaped family norms, institutional support systems have not evolved sufficiently to address children's emotional and educational needs. Gender, education, and religion mediate the intensity of divorce-related effects, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive interventions.

Divorce should be understood not as a moral failure but as a social transition requiring collective responsibility. With coordinated efforts involving families, schools, communities, and policymakers, children affected by divorce can be supported toward resilience and well-being.

REFERENCE

- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 650–666.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization*. Sage.
- Best, J. W., & Kahn, J. V. (2016). *Research in education*. Pearson.
- Cherlin, A. J. (2010). Demographic trends in the United States. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36, 139–157.
- Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics*. Sage.
- Furstenberg, F. F., & Kiernan, K. E. (2001). Delayed parental divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(2), 446–457.
- Giddens, A. (2006). *Sociology*. Polity Press.
- Hetherington, E. M., & Kelly, J. (2002). *For better or for worse: Divorce reconsidered*. Norton.
- Parsons, T., & Bales, R. F. (1955). *Family, socialization and interaction process*. Free Press.
- Rajan, S. I., & Zachariah, K. C. (2019). Family transformation and divorce trends in Kerala.