

EN106 HOD

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3/19/2016

I want a divorce but I can't

Introduction

Dai is a Chinese woman that I know. She has been suffering years from her “servant” life with her spouse. As soon as she came back from day work, she has to “work” on all the housework accumulated, and take care of the dinner. When she was finally irritated from the workload, she asked the husband why he pretended to be blind to any housework and her tiredness. And she got the answer from the husband: “I already have a job to do, and housework is never a part of it.” As the conflicts got heated, Dai began to be tortured by endless arguments and fights as well, or sometimes even physical threats. The conflicts were like tides; they went away temporarily and came back again the other day; they never truly went away. Besides, the husband stayed out late almost every night for the excuse of his work, and never asked about or cared about their daughter, Tony, at all. Now Tony is twenty years old, and such days continued for almost two decades.

Problem: Marriage Dilemma

There are numerous couples in China suffering from the distorted marriages and being reluctant to get divorced for some reasons, even if the marriage is hard to maintain and

impossible to heal. The reason why they are enduring torturing marital lives could be the consideration for children, economical problems, other family difficulties or public opinion. Under such background, the dilemma met by the “divorce-phobic” couples has become a social problem in China. The dilemma derives from the fact that these couples themselves realize that there are no other ways besides divorce to eliminate their suffering, or even to soothe the conflicts between husbands and wives, or to improve the depressing and awkward situations, because the conflicts were accumulated since the very beginning of the marriages in the earlier years, when the threshold of going into marriage was very low and arranged marriages prevailed. At that time, people absolutely did not think deliberately before getting married, and most of the couples did not even fit each other.

In this way, severe differences in values and attitudes become one of the sources of conflicts. For example, men used to believe that only wives are supposed to take care of the whole house, and husbands only need to focus on their careers. But as women’s social positions are improved, wives start to hold the opinion that they deserve a different style of life than what they have. Another source of conflict is divergence in living habits, such as extremely different bedtimes and diets.

People have not realized that the unhappy marriage has turned into a latent social problem, which needs to be resolved urgently.

This problem has a dreadful influence on my demographic: Chinese women. An unhappy marriage leads to a depressed couple, which, after a long time period, generates worse problems: excessive drinking, health problems, domestic violence, suicide and etc.

Furthermore, it has an undeniably negative influence on children in these families.

Excessive drinking, for instance, can be one of the consequences derived by unhappy marriages. In “Problematic alcohol use and marital distress: An interdependence theory perspective,” Rodriguez, Lindsey M. et al. claimed that pressure in marriages can result in an abnormally high level of use and problems of alcohol. According to them, marital issues can trigger negative emotions and psychological stress, which directly or indirectly lead to alcohol abuse. “Halford and Osgarby (1993) found that approximately one-third of couples presenting with marital problems reported alcohol abuse in the male partners, and over three-quarters of couples reported frequent disagreement about alcohol consumption.” Since alcoholism is a global problem related to poor marriages, Chinese couples are also being disturbed by it. The excessive drinking husbands are a big group of people created by their distorted marriages, and it indirectly hurts their wives later on.

A worse problem caused by problematic marriages is the negative effects on children. In “A family process model of marital hostility, parental depressive affect, and early adolescent problem behavior: The roles of triangulation and parental warmth”, Karen L. Franck examines the relationship among “parents' depressive affect, marital hostility, and adolescent outcomes”. The result consists with the conclusions of former researches. “Although bringing a third person (children) into the conflictual interaction might help reduce personal anxiety and spousal tensions (Haley, 1976) and even increase the adolescent's feelings of power and control, this boundary intrusion places adolescents at risk for personal distress.” From the research, it can be revealed that having children can only bring temporary or mild remission

to spousal tensions, but in the long-term, marital hostility will deteriorate adolescents mentally and maybe physically. Since it is a generally manifested cause and effect, the problem is also revealed on Chinese families.

Tony, the daughter of Dai, experienced a rebellious adolescence. She started smoking and drinking in her earlier years, and underwent an addiction to video games. Undeniably, the fights between her parents induced a negative effect on her. She did not receive enough feelings of love from her parents, and did not even get enough attention. These factors affected her behaviors negatively.

More disturbingly, in such situations, women are usually the worst victims. Intimate partner violence against women has become a severe social problem in China. In “Intimate Partner Violence, Women, and Resistance in Postsocialist China”, Tiantian Zheng introduces that during “the Third World Women’s Conference in Nairobi in 1985 attended by Chinese female intellectuals”, the violence against Chinese females was recognized as an expanding collective issue, and males perpetrate severe and injurious violence more frequently than females.

It was reported that over 95 percent of intimate partner violence in China was committed by men against women (Zhang, 2004). Intimate partner violence in China has increased by 25.4% since the 1980s (Hou et al, 2011). It was estimated that 35.7 percent of women in post-socialist China suffer intimate partner violence (Huang, 2008)

Besides, the misfortune of marriages hurts women in various ways, such as physical and mental health. According to the researchers from University of Rochester, the health of

females is more sensitive to marriages than males. They did a research on 225 patients who underwent the coronary bypass operation between 1987 and 1990. The patients recorded their marital status, and evaluated their rate of satisfaction about their marriages after one year since the surgery. Among the 124 people out of 225 who survived after one year, the researchers revealed that marital status is the most important factor to the survival rate. “29% of females survived in the group of people who had marital difficulties, while the survival rate of male was 60%. In comparison, 83% of the couples who maintained happy marriages survived. The survival rate of single women was 27%, and that of single men was 36%.” In this case, unless they are in a satisfactory marriage, the relationship contributes nothing to women’s health. So in the cases of problematic marriages in China, women are usually hurt more severely than men.

Nevertheless, serious as the problem is, several solutions can still be formed for it.

Solution:

Remember Dai? She is now living with her daughter, enjoying her life placidly and freely.

This is because she finally got divorced from her husband.

So the first solution is that couples should choose divorce as a way of ending the marital tragedy when necessary. “It is always better to have short, sharp pains than long, dull pains.”

Also, in order for the couples to feel comfortable about getting divorce, the public opinion should be changed, which means the public should be convinced that divorce is a natural stage of development of marriages, but not a shameful affair. To make it happen, media

campaigns are needed to arouse public attention and gradually change the traditional way of thinking.

Actually, the overall divorce rate in China has exceeded 30 percent, which has increased by approximately forty percent during the latest five years. In a 2015 survey, it is recorded that the divorce rate in Beijing (capital) has reached 39%, which is the highest, with the second highest city Shanghai to be 38%. However, this only occurs in the most advanced Chinese cities, but is rather rare in other places, because people in Beijing or Shanghai are more easily exposed to the international vision of things, and tend to think progressively. Thus China, as a whole, should be more open to the opinion on divorce, and make it a solution to problematic marriages.

Secondly, before getting married, people should take premarital counseling or premarital education to eliminate possible conflicts, and to make deliberate decisions about marriages. In “Premarital Education, Marital Quality, and Marital Stability: Findings From a Large, Random Household Survey”, Scott M. Stanley et al. suggest that from a series of surveys and research, it is found that premarital education generally makes positive contributions to marriages. “The analyses show that participation in premarital education is associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction, lower levels of destructive conflicts, and higher levels of interpersonal commitment to spouses. Similarly, premarital education was associated with a 31% decrease in the odds of divorce.” In this case, from the counseling or education, couples should pay more attention to seek the sharing of their spiritual values and the compatibility of their life styles, so as to avoid future conflicts during marital lives.

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