

Eleventh Family Research Network (FRN) Forum

“Home Alone – Life after Divorce in Singapore”

Monday, 28 April 2014
Auditorium, Level 1, Civil Service College

ELEVENTH FAMILY RESEARCH NETWORK (FRN) FORUM:
“HOME ALONE – LIFE AFTER DIVORCE IN SINGAPORE”
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PRESENTATION II

**“The whole village must help”:
Exploring the Effectiveness of Social Support
for Singaporean Divorced Parents**

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Purpose of research

- Present a nuanced understanding of divorce and sole parenting by discussing both the precarious and productive aspects of the experience
- Conduct a qualitative study to gain deeper insights to the thoughts, emotions, choices and trajectories of Singaporean divorced parents

Method

- qualitative methodology
- semi-structured, in-depth interviews
- 25 Singaporean divorced respondents
- 22 female respondents, 3 male respondents
- lower and upper middle classes (income and home ownership)
- different ethnic background
- duration of marriage (mainly between 6 and 20 years)
- no. of years since divorce (mainly 5 or less than 5 years)

Post-divorce support for divorced single parents

Successes and challenges in obtaining post-divorce support from these groups:

- personal community of family and friends
- school system (teachers, counsellors, administrators)
- workplace (colleagues, supervisors) and community groups

Personal community of kin and friends

- ‘an ensemble of people who provide some combination of emotional and psychological support, economic contributions, and routine household chores and maintenance’ (Hertz & Ferguson 1997: 204)
- important source of supportive resources – practical and emotional
- source of stress and discrimination

Finding a new family

- Moving away from unsupportive family members
 - distanced themselves, minimised contact
 - avoided family gatherings
 - reconnected out of familial obligations
 - wanted children to be surrounded by relatives
- Including biological family in reconstituted family unit
 - new family arrangement
 - created new family practices
 - same family values
 - redefined meaning of family
 - demonstrated family life could still thrive within this reconstituted family arrangement

Personal community of kin and friends

Childcare

- ‘parent figures’, ‘backup help’, ‘emotional cushion’, ‘surrogate parents’
- a new family - sense of belonging, intimacy
- actual childcare help – biological parents
 - temporary vs long-term help
 - free vs paid help
- friends demonstrating familial characteristics
- suffusion (Pahl & Spencer 2004: 212)
- friends incorporated into the new family
- gap: when they could not turn to personal community for childcare help and could not afford childcare fees

Personal community of kin and friends

Living arrangement

- One of the most common and pressing problems
- 10 out of 25 divorced parents remained in matrimonial home
- 14 moved back to live with parents and 1 moved back to live with children
- Reasons for moving back to their parents' home
- Related both positive and negative experiences moving back to parents' home
- Gap: those who don't qualify for assistance schemes, yet cannot afford renting or buying in the open market and moving back to live with their parents is not an option

School system

- educators, counsellors and administrators
- related both positive and negative experiences
- some schools offered beneficial structured programmes to help children cope with difficult emotions and changes
- lack of open conversations and discussions on alternative family arrangements in school – children face ridicule and bullying
- lack of acceptance and sensitivity towards alternative family arrangements – procedural obstacles and inappropriate treatment
- distress experienced by both parents and children

Workplace and community groups

- supervisors and co-workers
- sympathetic and understanding towards divorced parents' circumstances
- subtle discrimination and passive aggressiveness in everyday interaction

Workplace and community groups

- divorce recovery and sole parenting support groups
- benefits of such groups
- lack of information and publicity – most did not know where to find such groups
- lack of trained counsellors, social workers and psychologists to deal with unique challenges of divorcees and their children
- wish for a one-stop centre where divorcees can obtain resources and help in housing, legal, work and single parenting issues.

Conclusion

- language of hope and growth in the midst of multifaceted challenges
- call for comprehensive, constructive and timely post-divorce support to support divorcees' aspirations to move on and be productive
- 'I am not asking for handouts, just a bit of support to help me quickly get back on my own feet so that I can move on and care for my kids'
- systemic alienation and exclusion in different aspects
- structural conditions produced more obstacles and challenges
- sociological reasons for policy review in the context of Singaporean society
- aid them to a trajectory of self-responsibility, resilience and strong families however the forms they are in