

Graduation Project Number: HSa10_07

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES**



**Exploring Post-Divorce Experiences: A
Case Study on Professional Women in
Singapore**

Submitted by: Chong Wen Ee (074374D12)

Supervisor:

Assistant Professor Sun Hsiao-Li Shirley

**A Final Year Project submitted to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nanyang
Technological University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology**

Year of Publication: 2010

Abstract

Divorce rates in Singapore have increased by 43.1% from 5160 in 2000 to 7386 in 2009. Based on divorces documented under the Women's Charter, amongst the female divorcees, the largest group was aged between 35 to 44 years old, at 37.6%. Despite divorce being a prominent social issue in Singapore, there is a paucity of information available on the experiences of divorcees, especially that of divorced women with professional careers. This exploratory study aims to gather insights on the life *after* divorce for professional divorced women in Singapore and how they maintain the impressions people have of them both in the public and private spheres of their lives. The findings highlight some interesting recurring themes on the experiences of the ten professional divorced women that participated in the research. These themes include the cause of divorce due to infidelity on the part of their ex-husbands, the constant struggle over divorce settlements and maintenance for the children in the family court, the changing role of fathers after the divorce, the positive ramifications of social network support and last but not least, socio-economic status as a tool for the reconstruction of self-esteem after the divorce.

Keywords: Professional Women, Divorce, Family, Gender

Total Word Count: 13,200 words

Acknowledgement

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor, A/P Shirley Sun for the constant guidance and help rendered during the course of this study. I would also like to give special thanks to my cousin, Chan Miu Yin, who gave me inspiring ideas and feedback that I needed during the course of this project. Last but not least, my deepest gratitude to the courageous women who were willing to share their experiences. Without them, this project would not have been possible.

Contents

Abstract.....	1
Acknowledgement	3
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review on Divorce.....	6
<i>Summary of Literature Review</i>	8
Divorce Procedure in Singapore	9
Methodology	10
Findings	11
1. Infidelity.....	11
2. The Struggle in Family Court	14
3. ‘Fun Parenting’- The Changing Role of Fathers after Divorce.....	19
4. The Importance of Social Network Support	22
5. Socio-economic Status- Reconstruction of Self-esteem after Divorce	26
Discussion	29
Infidelity as the Cause of Divorce.....	29
Family Court and Changing Role of Fathers after Divorce	29
Positive Ramifications of Social Network Support	31
Socio-economic Status as a tool for reconstruction of Self-esteem.....	31
Conclusion	32
Table 1: Demographics of Respondents	33
Works Cited	34
Appendix 1.....	36

Introduction

In most contemporary societies, marriage is postulated to be based on choice, voluntarily entered and ended, and motivated by emotional gratification of the couple (Coles, 2006). This creates expectation and potential for companionship, intimacy, and personal fulfillment for long-term commitments. However, great expectations can also generate great disappointment (Coontz, 2001). These disappointments take the form of a jump in divorce rates and a change in the acceptable grounds for divorce in Singapore (Coontz, 2001).

Based on Singapore's Statistics of Marriages and Divorce 2009, the total number of divorces and annulments have increased by 43.1% from 5160 in 2000 to 7386 in 2009 (Statistics, 2010). This means that the rate of divorces amongst Singaporeans has increased by almost half in the past decade. Based on divorces under the Women's Charter, amongst the female divorcees, the largest group was aged between 35 to 44 years old, at 37.6% (Statistics, 2010).

Under dominant discourses, divorce is portrayed as a negative consequence of flawed individuals who fail to sustain long term commitments (Schalkwyk, 2005). In a society with traditional values, divorced individuals are usually stigmatized, especially women. In any case, women are usually affected much more than men. Many divorced women are usually seen as 'unwanted' by their ex-spouses and not compromising and accommodating enough to sustain a committed relationship, even for cases in which their ex-husbands were the ones who had committed adultery. They are seen as having trouble getting into another committed relationship, and this could be true due to many factors, such as the burden of having their children with them and inability to have faith in finding love again after the failure of their past marriage.

This research hopes to examine the experiences of divorced women between 35-44 years old after their divorces. The focus is on women who are financially independent, have the ability to bring up their children single-handedly, maintain their own property and also sustain a professional career. Women in this age group are chosen because they make up the largest group among female divorcees documented under the Women's Charter.

The main focuses of this research are to gather insights into the life *after* divorce for professional divorced women in Singapore, how they portray themselves others both in public and private spheres of their lives, and lastly, how they manage to create affirmative spaces for themselves in contemporary Singapore within dominant discourses that perhaps keep their voices somewhat marginalized.

This research will focus on three dimensions. First, I will examine the experiences of professional divorce women during and after their divorce, especially the legal aspects of the divorce that will have impacts on their lives after the separation. Secondly, I will gather insights on how these women portray themselves to others in both public and private spheres of their lives using their socioeconomic resources. Finally, I will focus on how they negotiate affirmative spaces for themselves after their divorce, and how they perceive their status as divorced women under the dominant discourses that have perhaps somewhat marginalized them.

There are extensive studies on the divorce in many different countries (which I will elaborate in the section on literature review). Numerous studies have been conducted to find out the causes for divorce. In addition, a vast amount of literature has already been dedicated to the effects of divorce on the well-being of children, as well as the parent-child relationship in divorced families. Studies were also conducted to examine the beneficial or detrimental effects of divorce on the lives of divorced individuals at the psychological level. However I find limited literature that contributes information or sheds light on the life *after* divorce for individuals, especially women who have the socio-economic resources and hence are not dependent on government agencies for financial aid. The focus on such women, namely the professional women alone, gives me theoretical insights on how life is to have a career and be divorced. This research seeks to present the findings of a preliminary and exploratory study of divorces from the perspective of professional but divorced women in Singapore. Therefore, I see this project as an important starting point for examining the experiences of contemporary and liberal¹ women *after* their divorces in the current 21st century.

Literature Review on Divorce

There is an extensive body of literature on what the contributing factors are that cause individuals to end their marriages. Such studies look at the relationship between marital problems and divorce (Amato & Rogers, A Longitudinal Study of Marital Problems and Subsequent Divorce, 1997); the association between marriage dissolution and mortality (Hemström, 1996); the relationship between socio-economic status and divorce risk (Jalovaara, 2001); the relationship between gender ideology, employment of married women and marital disruption (Greenstein, 1995); the relationship between social network support and marital dissolutions (Osman, 2004); and lastly, the relationship between genes and divorce is also examined by McGue and Lykken (1992), who also conducted studies on the risk of divorce among children of divorced parents using same-sex twin pairs (McGue & Lykken, 1992).

¹ By liberal, I mean women who are not constraint by traditional values rooted in religions.

In addition, a significant amount of literature has already been dedicated to the impact of divorce on the well-being of children as well as the parent-child relationship in divorced families. Simons Et.al (1999) has examined the differences in adolescent adjustment problems between divorced and intact families and they have found that parental divorce increases the chances that a child will have difficulty with school, engage in early sex, suffer from depression, commit delinquent acts and use illicit substances later in life (Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger, & O.Lorenz, 1999). Videon (2002), in her study on the effects of parental separation on adolescent well-being, found there are gender-specific effects on children with divorced parents and increased attention should be focused on the unique contributions of separated mothers and fathers make on their children. Cooney's (1994) study addresses the influence of recent divorce on the contact and affective relations between white young adults and their parents. She found that feelings about a given parent were strongly correlated with contact with that parent after divorce (Cooney, 1994).

Moreover, there are also studies conducted to examine the beneficial or detrimental effects of divorce on the lives of divorced individuals at the psychological level (Amato (2000); Buehler (1987)).

Carbone (1994) examines feminists' perspectives on divorce laws and procedures in United States. She found that all feminists agreed that existing law contributes to the relative impoverishment of many women and children and that, even when the rules purport to be gender-neutral, they are administered in systematically biased ways (Carbone, 1994)

Some studies are also conducted on the men's experiences of marital problems and subsequent divorce and their strategies to cope with divorce. Lawson and Thompson (1995) explores the causes of divorce using in-depth interviews with working/middle class Black men. They found that causes of marital distress and subsequent divorce are associated with active problem-solving efforts Black men use to cope with social and economic marginality (Lawson & Thompson, 1995). White and Bloom (1981) examined the psychological effects of marital disruption upon men who were in the process of divorcing. They found that factors associated with poor adjustment to marital separation were found to include pre-separation help-seeking, weak or nonexistent social networks outside the marital relationship, a variety of difficulties in the work setting, and a continuing relatively intense relationship with the spouse and children; and successful adjustment to marital disruption in the case of some men may require a set of distancing behaviors relative to the spouse, and adjustments in ways of meeting the needs of children (White & Bloom, 1981).

There are also various studies done on the experience of divorced women from different cultures; however only prominently on women from minority groups and of stringent religious origins. Guru (2009) examines the experiences of a small number of divorced Punjabi women of Sikh of Indian

origins in Britain. She found that although divorce can have the most devastating effects on women in terms of their exclusion from their community, it can also present some opportunities and optimism for their future because they are able to bring positive changes to their own lives and in the process, also transform the cultures they live in (Guru, 2009).

Cohen and Savaya (1997) explored the experiences of divorced Moslem Arab women living in Jaffa, Israel. She found that these divorced women cope with the negative effects of their divorce by relying on their inner resources and abilities as well as the strength their children gave them and saw their post-divorce adjustment as passing the test of female honour posed by their community, which they did by downplaying their femininity and immersing themselves in housework and childcare (Cohen & Savaya, 1997).

Rush (2010), in her dissertation, explored the experience of divorced women within the Jewish Orthodox community. She found that participants in her study experienced a degree of self-silencing when they began a *get* (divorce) process because in order to receive the *get* she needed to make accommodations, whether for her husband or the rabbis (Rush, 2010). Her results from her study aim to bring awareness of what it means to be a divorced Jewish woman and to fuel social change within a Jewish Orthodox community to establish programmes that support and fulfil needs that are currently not being met (Rush, 2010).

Summary of Literature Review

Numerous studies have been conducted to find out the causes for divorce. In addition, a vast amount of literature has already been dedicated to the effect of divorce on the well-being of children as well as the parent-child relationship in divorced families. Studies were also conducted to examine the beneficial or detrimental effects of divorce on the lives of divorced individuals at the psychological level.

Despite the various studies done on divorced women from minority group and religious origins, I find limited research done on divorced women who are highly educated and have professional careers, at the same time empowered with economic and social capital. There is also generally a lack of empirical evidence about divorce experiences in the local context. Divorce is a phenomenon that is happening worldwide, especially on women who are empowered by their professional careers hence willing to choose to opt out of unhappy marriages. However, it seems that the voices of professional divorced women are constantly silenced in this patriarchal world we live in and their experiences rendered non-existent (Schalkwyk, 2005), when they increasingly make up the most prominent group

of divorced women. Hence the purpose of my research is to provide a channel for these voices to be heard.

Divorce Procedure in Singapore

When a person decides to file for a divorce in Singapore, there are several requirements which one will have to meet before a Court will grant a divorce. One must have been married for at least three years before a Writ for divorce can be filed on the ground that the marriage has broken down irretrievably (The Law Society of Singapore, 2011). On the other hand, if it can be proven that one has suffered exceptional hardship or if the spouse has been exceptionally unreasonable and cruel, a Writ for divorce may be filed before 3 years of marriage (The Law Society of Singapore, 2011).

In addition, the person and the spouse must be domiciled² at the commencement of the divorce proceedings. Alternatively, either the person or the spouse must have resided in Singapore for 3 years immediately before the commencement of divorce proceedings (The Law Society of Singapore, 2011).

The Court will only be satisfied that one's marriage has broken down irretrievably if the Plaintiff (the person suing for divorce) proves one or more of the following factual basis: adultery³, 'unreasonable behaviour'⁴, desertion⁵, separation for three years⁶ and separation for four years⁷ (The Law Society of Singapore, 2011).

Divorce is a two-stage process in Singapore (The Subordinate Courts of Singapore, 2007). In the first stage, the Court will deal with the divorce itself. This means that the Court will decide whether the marriage should be dissolved (legally ended) (The Subordinate Courts of Singapore, 2007). In the second stage, the Court will deal with the ancillary matters. The ancillary matters are issues relating to the children, maintenance, and matrimonial property or individual's property (The Subordinate Courts of Singapore, 2007). One cannot remarry until Final Judgment has been obtained. This will only be

² treated Singapore as her/his permanent abode

³ The Defendant (the person being sued) has committed adultery with another person (the Co-Defendant) and the Plaintiff finds it intolerable to live with the Defendant.

⁴ The Defendant has behaved in such a way that the Plaintiff cannot reasonably be expected to live with him/her.

⁵ The Defendant has deserted or left the Plaintiff for a continuous period of 2 years without any intention of returning.

⁶ The Plaintiff and Defendant have lived apart for a continuous period of at least 3 years and the Defendant agrees to a divorce.

⁷ The Plaintiff and the Defendant have lived apart for a continuous period of at least 4 years. No consent is required from the Defendant.

granted at the end of the second stage of the divorce case (The Subordinate Courts of Singapore, 2007).

A maintenance order is a legal document that states the amount to be paid, when it is to be paid, to whom⁸ it is to be paid, and the method of payment (whether it is made to the complainant directly or deposited into the complainant's bank account) (The Subordinate Courts of Singapore, 2007). In the event when a respondent fails to comply with the terms of a maintenance order, one can apply to enforce the maintenance order by lodging a complaint before a District Judge/Magistrate in the Family Registry (The Subordinate Courts of Singapore, 2007).

Methodology

I have approached 15 individuals for this study but only ten agreed to be interviewed. This is understandable as the topic is deemed to be sensitive. For the five that turned down the interview, they cited reasons such as, 'I feel that emotionally I am not ready to talk about my failed marriage' and 'it is kind of private matter and talking about it makes me sad'.

The ten respondents who agreed to take part in the study are Singaporean Chinese, with ages ranging from 36 to 44 years old. All of them have gone through divorce only once. On their education level, seven of them are degree holders and one of them has A Level qualification and two of them received diploma education. All of them, except for one, work full time in corporations.

The interviews were conducted by me, without any assistance. Ethical approval was sought from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Sociology Department prior to the commencement of interview to ensure that ethical standards are met and that respondents are not subjected to any harm during the course of the interview. Most interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes while some were conducted at their workplaces during their lunch time because of their busy schedules.

Interviews were carried out between January and March 2011. They were conducted in English, as all the respondents are fluent in English and they feel comfortable to communicate in English. Nine out of ten interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. The exceptional one went on for five hours with only 40 minutes of it recorded as the respondent broke down emotionally in the midst of the interview

⁸ One can apply for maintenance for his/her child from the other parent, if he or she neglects or refuses to provide your child with reasonable maintenance; for herself from her husband, if she is a married woman whose husband neglects or refuses to provide you with reasonable maintenance; for himself or herself from his/her parent, if you are over 21 and you are still a full-time NSman or student.

hence audio recording had to be stopped. Before conducting the interviews, I went through the informed consent form (see Appendix 1). The informed consent provided a brief explanation about the project and also served to seek the respondent's permission to record the interview. Respondents were assured that their confidentiality would be protected and all names used here would be pseudonyms. It allowed the respondents a chance to withdraw from the study should they feel uncomfortable talking about the subject. This procedure ensured the respondents' voluntary participations and not by force from anyone. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of information that was transcribed from the interview and they were given the authority to not disclose information that they did not want to share. Information was to be used for research purposes only and was kept in a computer folder secured with a password. All respondents consented to having the interviews audio recorded.

The interview format was a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions and non-directive questions. The main topics included reasons for divorce, divorce settlements, impact of divorce on family relations and social relations, and the role and influence of children. As the interview progressed, I probed further for clarifications and a deeper understanding of some of the private and public issues that the respondents faced during the course of divorce and after the divorce, and how they have resolved the issues. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in English. Each respondent was given a code that was known only to me. Data was then analyzed to find if there were major themes that emerged, and the themes formed the bases of major conclusions.

Findings

There are five major themes that emerged from the experiences of professional divorced women during and after the divorce. They are infidelity as the cause of divorce, the struggle in Family Court, the changing role of fathers after the divorce, the importance of social network supports and socio-economic status as a tool for reconstruction of self-esteem after the divorce.

1. Infidelity

Seven out of ten respondents revealed that the reason their marriages ended was due to their husbands' infidelity. Five out of these seven women initiated the divorce. The remaining two did not initiate the divorce as it was initiated by their ex-husbands.

Cindy, a sales manager in an IT corporation, who ended the marriage due to her ex-husband's infidelity, described how it was quite an emotional process for her when she decided to seek advice from a lawyer regarding the procedure to file for divorce and her rights.

Here I am... I guess I am not a patient person, I also cannot keep living with a man who keeps thinking or wants to see another woman [...] lasted about four to five months... you know the trauma. Finally I have decided, I think, 'no lo, I think I have enough of this', then I decided to file for a divorce [...] I wasn't clear about what exactly when I want to file a divorce I just went to see a lawyer first... er... about all my rights, about basically when I file a divorce... what is the process [...] and I start to understand what is it [...] it was very emotional even seeing a lawyer [...] I look at how things are progressing [...] so I told him, basically file for a divorce and take it from there. *(Cindy, 41, Sales Manager in an IT corporation)*

Whitney, a manager in a corporation doing business development, had been in the process of the divorce for three years and at the point of the interview her marriage had just been legally dissolved but the divorce had not been finalized due to the auxiliary issues she had with her ex-husband. She described that the marriage ended when her husband filed for the divorce three years ago stating she had 'unreasonable behavior'. However it was later found out that there was an involvement of a third party.

He based it on unreasonable behavior... so... at that point in time I really think it was due to my unreasonable behavior. That was the reason why I was telling you that for one and a half year I was in denial stage because I was desperately trying to save the marriage thinking that it was due to my unreasonable behavior but it was found out that there was a third party involved [...] of course he has to state his reasons for unreasonable behavior in his affidavit [...] anyone who takes a look at his affidavit against me has only one thing to say, that he is picking on very petty things, like for example, I created disharmony with my mother-in-law, that's one, and also he cited reasons like I complained about the food that my mother-in-law cooked for me and therefore it caused him stress and distress... so he cited petty reasons like this lah. *(Whitney, 41, manager in a business development corporation)*

Ellie was working as a secretary in a big accounting firm when she had the intention to file for a divorce. After accessing all her options prior to the actual filing for a divorce, she decided to quit her job and joined an insurance company in order to have a more flexible schedule for her children in the event that she has to end her marriage. She revealed the reason why she decided to end her marriage:

The reason why I know my marriage was not working out well because at home there were a lot of quarrels [...] I realized that I can't concentrate on managing my marriage and my children as well [...] I realized that I have to choose and I chose to bring up my two children well [...] I definitely know he does not want a divorce... because he wants to have a family to

come home to [...] he had a lot of women calling and on and off one week he was not home [...] he denies all the affairs that he had... but I checked on a lot of things that he has got it... I am very sure he has got it [...] I was very sure that I want a divorce and I moved out with the children. (*Ellie, 45, Insurance agent*)

Sally, a Chief Financial Officer in a prominent corporation in Singapore, described her decision to end her marriage which dragged on for many years as her ex-husband relied on her financially and did not want to grant her a divorce. He convinced her to go for many sessions of counseling but eventually she decided to file for a divorce when she felt that the marriage was going nowhere. At the point of the interview, she was still at the initial stage of divorce as there were many ancillary matters that had not been settled due to the complexity of her financial status and the assets that she owned and which her husband had contested over and many other issues. She described her tolerance over his infidelity at first because she could not envision herself going through a divorce:

I love my job and I think I am good at it... but with respect to my personal life, I could not see myself being single again [...] I suspected he has someone else [...] there are always weird phone calls and SMSes [...] I look through his email and found out there was indeed a third party [...] we went through many counseling sessions and eventually I realized he wanted to stay in a marriage not because he loves me but he just wants the best of everything... you know men are like that... so I decided to go ahead and file for a divorce. (*Sally, 41, Chief Financial Officer*)

Francesca, a general manager working at a bank revealed that her husband had always had many girlfriends even before they were married. 10 years into the marriage she decided to file for a divorce. She revealed why:

He is a rich man's son [...] even before we were married I knew he has had many girlfriends [...] unfortunately the behavior persists even after we are married. He is always going out for drinks and sometimes my friends will see him with other women in different places [...] we fought a lot at home and eventually I had enough and file for a divorce for the sake of my daughter and myself. (*Francesca, 41, General Manager*)

Eleanor was a part-time property agent when she was still married and she converted to a full-time property agent when she filed for a divorce three years ago. She explained in her interview her decision to do so:

My ex-husband runs his own business so he has the money... and you know... men with money have the tendency to fool around [...] during the last few years of our marriage I found out that he is involved with someone else that I know. I didn't really know what to do at first [...] finally I decided to file for a divorce. (*Eleanor, 37, Property Agent*)

Iris was a housewife when she was married. She became a full-time property agent a few years after her divorce had been finalized and has been doing very well as a property sales person since then.

Well... he is the one that filed for a divorce [...] he has remarried to that woman he was involved with now. [...] in a way I really considered myself as lucky that I'm able to go back to work at my age... being an agent allows me to be in control of my own time, it is better than office jobs because I can work and have time for my children whenever they need me.
(Iris, 40, Property Agent)

Out of the seven women whose marriages ended due to their ex-spouses' infidelity, two revealed that their ex-husbands were the initiators of the divorce. These two women, Whitney and Iris, explained that at the initial stage when they discovered the extra-marital affairs, they had the intention to salvage the marriage through marriage counseling sessions for the sake of their children. However, their ex-husbands were firm on their decisions and took the initiative to file for divorce despite the women's requests to work on the marriages. They felt that their ex-husbands were anxious to end the marriage because of their intentions to marry the women they were involved with. This was further verified when their ex-husbands remarried shortly after the divorce proceedings were finalized.

2. The Struggle in Family Court

All respondents I interviewed have faced some form of struggle in family court during the divorce settlements concerning child maintenance, assets and alimony which their ex-spouses constantly seek to renegotiate. This included the amount of spousal and child maintenance fee and contests over the division of assets. However eight out of ten of them revealed that they had faced more complex issues when there were long term disagreements on ancillary matters such as maintenance for the children and the matrimonial property settlements, making the divorce process 'complicated' and 'emotionally tiring'. They found themselves having to file for enforcement of the maintenance order when their ex-spouses defaulted on their maintenance fee for months. These respondents describe that at some point during and after the divorce, they had to seek the service of lawyers in order to seek their advice and to expedite the whole process, and at times incurred high legal costs, precious time and energy.

Cindy describes how the whole divorce process took more than a year because her ex-husband disagreed on the amount of maintenance fee for their three children.

[...] we couldn't agree on the maintenance [...] because he said that \$3500 for three children is too much... uh... finally we settled for \$1200 per month for three kids [...] and \$1 maintenance for wife because I can work so I only ask for \$1 just to keep the rights of the woman there but even for that he disagreed for the \$1 thing because he thinks that I can work so why should I claim the \$1 thing [...] it is our government legal thing to protect our

woman's charter in case one day I can't work due to illness or whatever, I can still ask him to pay for my maintenance [...] finally after many, many rounds of discussions and the pain of talking to him about such things... then...ok... I settled for \$1200 just to get out of the marriage [...] at one point in time I didn't even want to have the money you know... just want to get out of the marriage and get the kids out and just stop seeing this person.

(Cindy, 41, Sales Manager in an IT corporation)

Cindy later on describes how her ex-husband subsequently failed to pay his child maintenance in full.

But he didn't pay you know... eventually... erm... probably the first two months he paid the full \$1201 [...] subsequently he paid like a thousand [...] and then even recently he starts paying only \$500 now [...] he doesn't pay the full amount.

(Cindy, 41, Sales Manager in an IT corporation)

Subsequently, Cindy decided to apply to the Family Court for the enforcement of a maintenance order when the child maintenance that her ex-husband owed her amounted up to \$12,000 for the past three years. She revealed that out of the \$12,000 she got back from her ex-husband, \$2,000 was used to pay for her lawyer.

[...] somebody teach me what to do... to go to the family court and basically apply to the court... you know... your ex-husband didn't pay and what are the amount in arrears so that there will be a session for mediation for the judge to understand why your ex-husband is not paying [...] this has happened for the past three years already just that I didn't have the time for such things[...] it is getting worse and I think it is ridiculous you know... he has subsequently remarry already, he has his own family, his wife, not kids yet...erm... have a house, a HDB flat and have a new motorbike you know... he goes on holiday and why on earth he can't pay? So that's when I decided to go to the court and apply because the money is the rights of my children and I will just take it... it is not a lot but I will just take... I will just bank into my kids' bank accounts... I think it's their rights... it's not just about... ah... having fun with the kids and just bring them out and just play with them... it's about financial responsibility you ought to know [...] so I decided to take it to the sub-court and take it from there. *(Cindy, 41, Sales Manager in an IT corporation)*

Whitney decided to serve her ex-husband a maintenance summons when he defaulted alimony for two months. In her interview, she also revealed that the divorce drained out almost \$30,000 of her financial reserves.

He is ordered by the court to pay a sum of money to us every month but he defaulted on the payments and when I file summons against and take him to court, he pleaded poverty which of course did not go because it has been ordered mah [...] his income still remains the same

even though he still tried to plead poverty [...] he has no case but just that I allow him to make the payments in those areas he owes me by installments [...] you know I need to hire lawyers for the divorce and the maintenance summons [...] I think eventually I spent about \$30,000 on the divorce. (*Whitney, 41, manager in a business development corporation*)

Whitney also revealed the issues she had with her ex-husband over the sale of the matrimonial house and she had to negotiate in court to delay the selling of the house. Eventually she was granted by a judge a legal delay in selling till her son became eight years old.

He wants to sell the house and I want to keep the house for the sake of my children so both of us have to present the case to the judge. So he told the judge he needs to sell the house so that he can get another place to stay [...] I told the judge I must fight to keep this home for sake of my boy because this is where he was born and I can't rob him of this house. So I will try to fight to keep the house. (*Whitney, 41, manager in a business development corporation*)

Ellie, an insurance agent who had been divorced for almost 10 years describes how she had to file for many maintenance summons during the initial years after her divorce.

I made a lot of summons, they called it summons, like beginning he didn't want to pay... you know like suppose to pay and didn't pay and then he delayed payments [...] I spent a lot of money on this divorce [...] I have to enforce my maintenance order because each time he did not pay [...] good thing he was a civil servant and later on he retired and set up his own PI firm hence he paid punctually through the years later on. But let's say he is a businessman or working in private sectors, I don't think he will want to pay. He did it because he needs the license to be renewed with the government and all that and he knows he cannot forfeit the maintenance. (*Ellie, 45, Insurance agent*)

She later on describes her experiences in the Family Court during the initial years after her divorce and felt that 'endurance' was required for her maintenance order to be enforced:

In the beginning I had to fight for it a lot... through a few years... each time I go to the court to try to renegotiate because he tried to bring it down and tried not to pay [...] I know he has no grounds for it [defaulting of maintenance order], once maintenance order is ordered, I'm very sure he cannot... they will not want to listen... they just want to listen when he is going to pay... so it is just the 'stamina'... that first you have to put up the summons and then go for amicable reconciliations to get him to pay and after which if he still doesn't want to pay you have to go down for court hearings... you have to go down at least *three times*. So it's because of my job I got the time to spare to go down one week once, so imagine if I have a fixed office job, it will be very difficult and I think my boss will be very irritated with me [...] you know when you work in a company you will feel very pressurized [...] but I felt that if

you put everything in place and eventually it will flow though... and it did... I did not have to go to the court I guess for the last 5 years... in the beginning I have keep on going down for the first few years. (*Ellie, 45, Insurance agent*)

Sally, on the other hand, revealed in her interview that she was still in the midst of her divorce process because of the complexity of her ex-husband being unemployed and her high income. Due to personal reasons, she declined to discuss the details of her divorce proceedings but describes her whole divorce process as 'exhausting' and 'time-consuming':

We have many issues regarding assets divisions [...] the car is under his name but I am paying for it [...] he wants to sell the matrimonial house but I don't think it is the right time to sell the condo now... you know... all these issues that we have not reach an agreement... (*Sally, 41, Chief Financial Officer*)

Francesca revealed that for her, the issue was not on the maintenance for her daughter but on the division of their matrimonial assets. She revealed that she had contributed a substantial amount to the intangible costs of their assets and felt that the court did not really take them into serious consideration when deciding on her share of the matrimonial assets.

In a way I feel that the Women's Charter does not protect women completely [...] for example you own a house with your ex-husband; you paid for the renovations and the electricity and water bills and all sort of intangible costs [...] yet do you know that under the law you are not automatically assumed to have 50% of the share of the house? It starts with 20% [...] they will then account for additional contributions before you can even get 50% of the share of the house. (*Francesca, 41, General Manager*)

Dawn used to work as an account assistant in a shipping company until her ex-husband filed for divorce six years ago. She revealed that she was distraught by the divorce and subsequently became depressed. Hence she quitted her full-time job after her divorce settlement was finalized. She describes that her decision to do so was to give all her attention to her son, who had become a very important aspect of her life after divorce. She is now a part-time tuition teacher and she only takes up assignments that require her to teach during the time her son is in school. Her son is now already in Secondary One. She revealed how her marriage eventually led to sudden filing for divorce by her ex-husband:

When my boy is about five years old, I started noticing that my ex-husband only wants to spend his time with his friends and not with me, other than the time he spends with his son. Whenever I question his whereabouts, like where is he going, what is he doing you know... and the time he spends outside, he just gets very annoyed and he just does not include me in his social circle. [...] I could never pinpoint what exactly... what kind of friends he has you

know or who is he interacting so closely with but definitely he was not so close to me... we didn't have that kind of things that we can talk through the night and we don't even spend time going out together. [...] we started fighting a lot over this and it just appears to me that he doesn't care how I feel or what I think [...] eventually things broke down because I threaten him, I said we should just divorce and all that [...] and surprisingly to me at that point in time he seemed to think that that is the right way to go and he just went ahead with it. (*Dawn, 38, Part-time tuition teacher*)

Dawn describes that even when she was still married, she basically spent most of her time with her son and taking care of the house because they were living in a huge private property and did not have any domestic helpers. The private property and the car were under her ex-husband's name. Even during the divorce, she did not really think about her options and rights as she was very emotional about it. She explained that she was not in a right state of mind at that time to negotiate and consider the financial aspects of her divorce. Hence she did not contest over any other ancillary matters for her divorce. Eventually, with the persuasion and insistence of her sister-in-law, her ex-husband agreed to buy her a three-room flat near her parents' place as the only divorce settlement she got other than child maintenance. Even so, her ex-husband was unwilling to pay for the flat in full as well as for spousal maintenance.

My ex-husband did not pay for anything as far as my alimony is concerned, he refused to pay. I was also not in the right frame of mind to fight with him over it. At that time I was too emotional to really pursue it properly so my ex-husband only pays for our son, the expenses of my son [...] so my own expenses I have to earn it through tuition just to get by [...] with my sister-in-law's help I managed to get a house which is a big thing off my financial burden otherwise I won't even have a house. [...] after much negotiation between my sister-in-law and my ex-husband, he is willing to pay about 75% of the house and I paid the balance with my CPF, so at least I don't have to fork out any money. (*Dawn, 38, Part-time tuition teacher*)

Eleanor revealed that she was working as a part-time property agent during the time she was married. Her ex-husband was a successful businessman and had no trouble providing her and her daughter a comfortable lifestyle. However when she filed for the divorce, her ex-husband refused to pay for child maintenance and has repeatedly defaulted the payments. He has also disagreed on the need for him to pay for spousal maintenance because she has a job. She feels that her husband did that on purpose because he has grievances over the fact that she filed for the divorce:

He has the money you know... but I think he is just being stubborn and wasting my time and money. My divorce settlement dragged on for years, and eventually we settled for \$2000 for my daughter and \$1 thing for me because I am just too tired with the negotiating. [...] yet he still doesn't pay in full and sometimes he doesn't pay. And I have to keep going to my

lawyers to issue him the summons. [...] each time I go to see my lawyer I have to pay you know. I think he just did it on purpose... (*Eleanor, 37, Property Agent*)

Iris, a full-time property agent who has two children, revealed that her ex-husband claimed that he does not have the money for child maintenance because of his new family and often either does not pay in full or defaults on the payment altogether. Initially she did try to issue a summons to get him to pay but eventually she gave up totally. She revealed why:

I guess I just can't be bothered anymore, just so sick of talking to that man. He gave me sole custody and doesn't even want to see his children. Initially I still want to fight for the maintenance for my children because after all they are his flesh and blood right... you know he still has to share some financial responsibility at least. But now I just can't be bothered to waste the time and money to chase after him. I am very busy with my job and it is paying well although it is commission-based. (*Iris, 40, Property Agent*)

All respondents had issues concerning ancillary matters such as maintenance for the children and the matrimonial property settlements during their divorce proceedings. Eight out of ten expressed that their disagreements with their ex-husbands dragged on after their divorces have been finalized. More often than not, these disagreements were explicitly expressed by their ex-husbands when they delayed payment of child maintenance, refused to pay in full and defaulted the payment of their child maintenance altogether. Hence these eight respondents had to file for enforcement of the maintenance orders which were exhausting for them because apart from work and caring for their children, they had to find the time to consult their lawyers and appear in family court. The two remaining respondents who did not face such problems expressed that there was no resistance from their ex-husbands with regards to child maintenance and property assets' divisions; hence they did not have to pursue legal actions against them after their divorces.

3. 'Fun Parenting'- The Changing Role of Fathers after Divorce

Another theme that is prominent among the respondents was what one of the respondents termed as 'Fun Parenting' where there is a changing role of fathers after divorce. The role of fathers seems to exclude welfare and educating the child and is limited to financial responsibilities and having 'fun' with the children.

Most respondents have shared custody with their ex-spouses except for two who revealed that their ex-husbands had given up their custody despite their disapproval. Shared custody means that the respondents share the time they have with their children with their ex-spouses. Most of the time, their

ex-husbands will take over the children on weekends, picking the children and sending them back to their mothers at agreed timings.

What is evident from the interviews is that these women feel that their ex-spouses took over the children just to spend time and have 'fun' with them, most of the time neglecting other responsibilities that were required of parents. That is, their ex-husbands would often bring them out to play over the weekends, neglecting the other aspects of parenthood such as their welfare and discipline. Some mentioned that most of the time their ex-spouses would not take over the children when they were sick.

This phenomenon is in line with cultural feminists' perspective on divorce i.e. the society undervalues child rearing (Carbone, 1994). At divorce, mothers overwhelmingly retain physical custody of their children and present divorce awards neither close the earning gap nor account for the full cost of child rearing because mothers are asked to 'meet greater demands with fewer resources than their former husbands (Carbone, 1994). Shared custody in Singapore is commonly practiced by having the children to stay with their mothers on weekdays. On Friday evening or Saturday mornings, their ex-husbands will pick up the children and have them till Sunday evenings when they have to send the children back to their mothers again. This practice has strong indications of society's views on the differentiated roles of women and men with respects to child rearing.

Judy recalls one minor incident that she feels indicated how easy fatherhood has become for her ex-husband after the divorce:

He just brings the boys out to play on weekends. So it's like you make good efforts to take care of your children on weekdays make sure they are clean and healthy without a single scratch right? Then on weekends he will come and bring them out to play play play until come back all dirty and full of mosquito's bites because they went to the zoos or parks or something... and you're like 'what did you do to them?' (*Judy, 41, Personal Assistant*)

Ellie feels that her husband used to be inconsiderate with their schedules when he took over her two girls on weekends.

So he will come bring them on weekends [...] when they are younger sometimes he will come bring two out and then only send one back and kept my younger girl with him because the older one wants to come back and do her school work. Sometimes he was either late picking them up or late sending them back. I was quite angry as I have appointments and the girls have school the next day morning and he can't decide to send the children back as and when he feels like it. (*Ellie, 45, Insurance agent*)

Dawn describes she was quite upset when her ex-husband blamed her for her son's PSLE results when he felt that their son did not meet his expectations.

My son score 244 for his PSLE last year and everyone told me it was really quite good [...] I mean I was quite happy about it until my ex-husband called and scolded me for not putting in more efforts on our son's studies. I was quite shocked by his comments at first and eventually I got quite depressed over it. Then my ex-husband's sister called, consoled me and asked me to ignore him [...] she said that it is typical for her brother to behave this way, however I felt quite affected and was really sad like I didn't do my best. (*Dawn, 38, Part-time tuition teacher*)

Cindy has trouble getting her husband to pay monthly maintenance in full for her three children over the years. She decided that it was important to keep her husband's financial irresponsibility from her children because she wants them to have positive impressions of their father after their divorce. However she describes her frustrations during the times when her ex-husband seems to create a negative impression of her when the time spent with them over the weekends seems more 'fun' in comparison with hers:

My ex-husbands is really good at having fun with the children, he will bring them out to play on weekends. [...] bring them swimming, cycling, and to all kinds of places. [...] they enjoy his company [...] so I am not that 'fun' in comparison because I think being a parent is not just about having fun with your children, there are other responsibilities like making sure you have time to coach them for their studies, making sure they do well in school, teaching them the right values. [...] but I feel that my ex-husband is all about having fun with them and nothing else. He does not even pay for their monthly maintenance in full. [...] like I said just now I feel that he does not take his financial responsibility as a parent seriously [...] \$1200 for three children doesn't even cover their tuition fees! [...] In fact I have been paying for most of my children's expenses and their expenses are not just food and clothes you know [...] they have piano classes, ballet classes, tuitions, Berries classes [...] He only knows just to pick them up to go out and play on weekends. (*Cindy, 41, Sales Manager in an IT corporation*)

Another interesting phenomenon that is revealed by two respondents is how their ex-husbands 'outsource' their responsibility to care for the children over the weekends to their own parents whenever they do not have the time.

Francesca describes her displeasure at times when she has to send and pick her daughter to her ex-husband's parents' house whenever he does not have the time to pick or send their daughters.

Although it is not every weekend that I have to send my daughter to her *ye ye* (grandfather in Mandarin) and *nai nai* (grandmother in Mandarin). But sometimes I just feel that why we even bother to have shared custody when he doesn't even want to spend time with his own daughter? Whenever I discuss this with him, he will give me excuses that his parents want to spend time their granddaughter, but I know that it is not exactly true because he likes to go out on Friday and Saturday nights to drink with his friends so he just dump her to his parents. (*Francesca, 41, General Manager*)

Eleanor describes how her ex-husband would pick her daughter out for lunch on Saturday mornings and send her to his parents' house till Sunday evening when he has to send her back.

I confronted him initially... I told him if he has no time for our daughter on weekends he can just bring her out for lunch or dinner and send her back instead of dumping her to his parents. And he says I am being unreasonable because I don't want her to spend time with her grandparents [...] I feel that my daughter should spend quality time with him instead of his parents because I don't want my daughter to drift apart from her own father because of our divorce... but he just doesn't get it. (*Eleanor, 37, Property Agent*)

From the feminist's perspective, society has undervalued child rearing, and this has increased repercussions for women who are divorced when the sole responsibility of child rearing falls on their shoulders.

4. The Importance of Social Network Support

All respondents that have been interviewed have brought out the importance of having support from family and friends. However, not all of them have expressed having actual substantial support from friends and family during and after their divorce. Those who have indicated that they had such support said it helps them gain confidence and feel contented with life after the divorce. They feel that social network support is one of the key factors that allow them to handle the stress of the divorce and aid them with moving on with their lives.

Two out of ten respondents have expressed that they have limited support from friends and family, especially with discussing the emotional problems they faced during the divorce. These two respondents were also emotional during the interviews and because they were not the initiators of their divorce, they described that they felt 'abandoned' by their ex-husbands numerous times during the interviews.

Dawn, who is currently a part-time tuition teacher, revealed that she moved with her son to stay with her parents in a three-room HDB flat during first few years after her divorce. She describes how her family was not very supportive about her moving back:

It was difficult... I was staying with my mother in her small three-room flat, so everybody was kind of squeezed together; my unmarried brothers were still staying at home and my parents were there. It was very cramped and difficult for my son, and I know my family members were not exactly happy about the living arrangement. (*Dawn, 38, Part-time tuition teacher*)

Dawn felt that there was not really anyone she can talk to about her emotional divorce and eventually she felt there was no need to talk about it altogether. She revealed that in order to be close to her own family, she makes herself helpful during the day:

I stay one block away from my mother. My mother is also getting older but she is still working so I spend a lot of time cooking for the family. I spend almost all my time... in fact I take care of all the dinners and lunches. I feel that in a way my family and my ex-husband family felt that the divorce is my fault. My son and my own family are all I have now, so in order to make myself helpful, I spend all my other free time cooking and cleaning for them. [...] I didn't really want my parents and my brothers to be ashamed of me even though they think the divorce is my fault. (*Dawn, 38, Part-time tuition teacher*)

Whitney, on the other hand, repeatedly used the word 'abandoned' when she described about her divorce. During the interview, she was emotional and cried a few times. When asked if she had received any emotional support from family and friends, Whitney responded by saying this:

My parents are quite old, they will come by whenever they can to play with their grandchildren... but not on a regular basis [...] I used to have a close friend that I often talk to, and when I got divorced she became someone that I often called when I am feeling down. Like I've told you I was in denial stage in the first about 2 years of the divorce... eventually I guess she got tired of it and one night I was feeling emotional and I called her, she kind of said 'Whitney, what do you want me to do? I can't just keep listening to you like this... I have a family that I need to take care of, I suggest that you get some professional help', and I guess that was the last time I ever spoke to her... so I guess no friends I can talk to... (*Whitney, 41, manager in a business development corporation*)

On the other hand, the remaining eight respondents described how their social networks of family and friends' support was important for their stress management during and after the divorce, enabling them to move on successfully from their failed marriages.

Judy was divorced six years ago when she drifted apart from her ex-husband. She felt that her family is an important aspect to support her through her divorce.

The family is important because none of my family member were against it (the divorce) or against the idea. They all hear my story and supported what my decision was. (*Judy, 41, Personal Assistant*)

She also describes how her independence was the source of strength for her when she was going through the divorce. And this characteristic of hers was due to her upbringing.

I have been very independent in the past since young. So I didn't feel that if I don't have a man in my life I will crash. My family is very strong minded, we don't ask for help and we all think we are '*pa buay si*' (Not easily defeated in Hokkien) [...] my sisters and brothers will not pity me, they understood that if I need help I will go to them and they will always help one but we will never like pity each other... you know what I mean... that kind of relationship loh... they will always say 'can one lah... Judy can do it...' Just like when any of my siblings got problems I also think that they also can do it. So it is that kind of upbringing that makes me feel that I am not emotionally weak. (*Judy, 41, Personal Assistant*)

At the point when the interview was conducted with Jenny, she had just started her divorce proceedings with her husband. She stated their decision to do so was due to the fact that they had drifted apart for the last 4 years of their marriage. She revealed that her parents had been taking care of her only daughter since her child was born and hence this made the whole decision-making process easier. Also discussions with her husband about what the next step for their marriage would be was also less stressful.

When we decide to have a kid, we decide that my parents will look after because we don't trust a maid. My mom and dad are healthy and they are at home all the time. Because it was their first grandkid so my mom was really excited and she said she will look after and it will help her kill time also. So she took the kid from us and she was looking after her. We were staying across the road [...] eventually my mom said, 'why don't you keep her with us on weekdays, you will come back for dinner every day to see her till 9 ish then you go back home'. I thought it was perfect to leave the baby with my mom because we don't have to wake the baby up early in the morning to bring her to my mom's place and all that... and this arrangement just works for us until now... my daughter is already in primary six this year. (*Jenny, 40, Executive Assistant*)

Eventually Jenny's daughter got used to staying with her grandparents on weekdays and spending weekdays with her parents. Her unmarried aunt coaches her studies and this allows Jenny to concentrate on her career and to develop new social circles after drifting apart from her husband. Even though she was at the initial stage of her divorce, she revealed that she does not feel the stress and personally feels optimistic that the divorce will go through smoothly.

Extended family members also proved to be an important source of support for some cases. Ellie received help from her uncle when she decided to move out of her matrimonial home with her two daughters during the divorce.

I know I have to move out because I am very sure I want divorce, so I have to make a choice even if I have to move out from the bungalow house to a 3-room flat or stay with someone for a while... I know I have to shift a few times till the whole divorce is over [...] I don't have parents and my brothers were staying in HDB flats... one thing very unfortunate, I feel this way in Singapore, is that the HDB flat nobody can really house you... because if they are married the most they have are three or four rooms, so how many rooms can they spare me? [...] But I have an uncle who when I tried to approach him for insurance ... he has CPF and single and I got some money so I got his help to help me to buy a house... just to buy a three-room flat in his name [...] in the beginning I was staying with someone else for a while and when I approached him it was like few months later so I used his name with my cash and bought a flat and stay there until my marriage is over. *(Ellie, 45, Insurance agent)*

In the interview, Ellie mentioned one incident that she felt is a structural constraint for her during her divorce with respect to the living arrangement even though she has received help from her uncle:

My ex-husband complained to the HDB because he found out that I am staying in a flat that is not in my name. And then I got fine from the HDB [...] I find that the whole system is not very supportive [...] for HDB, if you are not the owner and somebody else stay in you will get fine... so my ex-husband is the one that make the complaint and I got fine all over [...] I got income tax fine and I also got the HDB fine... it was around five to seven thousand I can't quite remember. *(Ellie, 45, Insurance agent)*

Cindy describes how her best friend was the first one she turned to upon discovering her ex-husband's extra-marital affair:

My immediate reaction was to take all my kids and ran to another place. I actually went to Miao's place, my good friend's place [...] Miao Yan... my best friend... I told her what happened and we don't know what to do [...] so I took my passport and all my kids' passports... I took all my three kids... bring them from school... wherever they are and ran

away to Miao's house [...] I stayed over her house for a few nights. (*Cindy, 41, Sales Manager in an IT corporation*)

She also mentioned that during and in the later years after her divorce is finalized, it was the same friend who helped her to be better off financially than she was when she was married:

Miao and her husband have been investing on property for many years [...] when I was still married my ex-husband and I owned our matrimonial home, a 5-room HDB apartment, and also a condo in Bukit Timah which we bought as an investment property. So when I was doing through my divorce, my friend and her hubby advised me to sell our matrimonial home and split the money and bought over my ex-husband's share of the investment property so that my kids and I can move in the condo. It was the right move as the condo was at about \$700k when I took over my ex-husband's share; I stayed there with my kids until I moved to another condo last month. I sold the condo at about \$1.2 million and basically made a substantial profit. [...] I had some savings over the years also... so my friend advised me to invest on some properties [...] I was staying in a HDB flat and driving a Honda when I was married, and how I am staying in a condo in Bukit Timah and driving a Lexus, so can you imagine how much my friend Miao has helped over the years? [...] I had a good income as a sales person, but because of my friend I was financially secured as a single mother and basically very comfortable on my own. (*Cindy, 41, Sales Manager in an IT corporation*)

It is quite prominent in the findings that women who received help from their social network during and after the breakdown of their marriages are able to handle the emotional stress of the divorce than women who do not have such support. The help that they receive mostly comes in the form of emotional support, childcare support, legal advice as well as advice on housing and asset management. As most of the women (nine out of ten) are financially independent, they expressed that they do not need help financially but feel that that does not release their ex-husbands from financial responsibilities that they should bear with regards to their children. Hence they are willing to sacrifice their time and money to fight for their children whenever there are defaults on child maintenance.

5. Socio-economic Status- Reconstruction of Self-esteem after Divorce

Seven out of ten of the respondents interviewed have expressed high self-esteem due to their socio-economic status. They have strong social network support together with independent financial security due to their professional occupations. They have indicated that their jobs are fulfilling and feel that their jobs enhance their financial stability and are hence an important aspect of their post-separation life. They have expressed that they have enriching careers and have control of their time

due to their positions in the company and hence they feel 'strong' and 'independent' when it comes to having to juggle family and work after their divorce.

The remaining three respondents who are not able to do so have indicated that, despite their financial independence and their abilities and skills to generate a decent income, they have lacked the psychological fortitude and social skills that could be influenced by their family backgrounds.

For the purpose of discussion, I shall make use of Jalovaara's (2001) definition of socioeconomic status. He defines 'socioeconomic status' as various aspects of the social and economic position of each individual (Jalovaara, 2001).

Dawn, a diploma holder, who despite having a job as an account assistant that paid reasonably well, always feels inferior in comparison with her ex-husband due to her family background and educational level. She grew up in a three-room flat with two brothers. Her mother works as a cleaner in a Christian orphanage and has yet to retire. Her father has retired as a construction foreman. According to her, her ex-husband is a university graduate and has better family background because her in-laws run their own business and are quite well to do.

I have always felt that he looked down on me because he is a university graduate and I'm not [...] I felt that we can't exactly communicate about things at the same level [...] the things that we talk about are usually the domestic stuffs. (*Dawn, 38, Part-time tuition teacher*)

Her socio-economic status in comparison to her ex-husband attributed to her depression and low-self-esteem after the divorce. She has mentioned several times during the interview she feels 'unwanted' by her husband:

I got quite depressed after the divorce [...] I didn't ask for anything during divorce settlement because I thought that there is really no point... what is the point of asking when he doesn't want us anymore? (*Dawn, 38, Part-time tuition teacher*)

Cindy feels that in the eyes of her colleagues, she is a strong and independent woman because of her performance as a top saleswoman in an IT corporation despite her status as a divorced woman.

I think most of my colleagues will see me as strong and independent. They probably see me as strong and independent for the work I am doing and for the results I am showing... and for the way I am working with them is very 'business as usual'... nothing has changed whether I have a husband behind me or not. Basically it is me delivering the job and not my husband or anyone else behind me doing the job... I think they... well... a lot of them tell me before that they have admiration for me because I can handle both... I mean I can perform my job pretty well and I can handle my three kids single-handedly with a helper at home. A lot of people

wonder how I can managed that generally [...] they still treat me as an independent individual and probably there is a respect there. (*Cindy, 41, Sales Manager in an IT corporation*)

Judy also shares that her independence from her upbringing plays a crucial role in the ways she shared her financial responsibilities with her ex-husband during the marriage and eventually the ways she managed her divorce and the divorce settlements. She was a successful auditor when she was married and was close to becoming a partner in her accounting firm when she decided to quit and slow down her career because of her divorce. It was also during the same time when her son was diagnosed with mild autism. Hence she decided to work as a personal assistant because it allowed her to have flexible time for her children and also because her younger son needed more attention.

We were in a situation where because I am very independent, we shared expenses all the time. All the years we were together everything is 50-50 percent [...] right to every month we would see how much is our 'out' then we will split into two and whatever extras we have we will save it for ourselves. We also don't have such things like joint bank accounts so it has been like for a long time all the time. [...] when we are separated, we also decided to split everything 50-50 percent as well [...] so when we split the assets everything was very clear... 50 percent each. [...] so alimony wise everything was also quite smooth in the sense that he was willing to give and I was willing to accept. (*Judy, 41, Personal Assistant*)

There has been extensive literature done on the inverse relationship between socio-economic status and the risk of marriage dissolution among couples. Jalovaara (2001), in his study done on relationship between socio-economic status and divorce risk, has suggested that the divorce risk for spouses in higher educational category is *lower* than that of those in the other educational categories. His secondary research suggested that this could be due to that the fact that higher educated spouses communicate more effectively, which facilitates problem-solving in the marriage (Jalovaara, 2001). He emphasizes that better communication skills is not the direct result of longer education but factors such as family background can influence the social skills which affect the prospects of a marriage (Jalovaara, 2001). While socio-economic status is effective in lowering the risk of divorce, my findings also suggests that highly educated women, with family backgrounds that can enhance their personalities, psychological characteristics and social skills, are equipped with the resources and skills to reconstruct their self-esteem and pick up their lives again after their marriages ended as in the case of seven of my respondents.

Discussion

This research is motivated by the paucity of literature that examines divorce from the point of view of professional divorced women. The findings highlight some interesting recurring themes on the experiences of the ten professional divorced women that participated in the research. These themes include the cause of divorce due to infidelity on the part of their ex-husbands, the constant struggle over divorce settlements and maintenance for the children in the family court, the changing role of fathers after the divorce, the positive ramifications of social network support and last but not least, socio-economic status as a tool for the reconstruction of self-esteem after the divorce.

Infidelity as the Cause of Divorce

Greenstein (1995) studies the relationship between gender ideology, employment of married women and marital disruption. He found that nontraditional women will experience the most stress trying to resolve the conflicts between outside employment and household labor responsibilities (Greenstein, 1995). They are likely to perceive such inequalities as inequitable; their normative expectation of an egalitarian relationship with their spouse are violated by being forced to work a 'second shift' (Greenstein, 1995). Their reaction to this inequity may manifest itself as a decline in marital satisfaction, increase in conflict with their husband, and ultimately an increased probability of marital disruption (Greenstein, 1995).

However, the findings have shown that ex-husband's infidelity is a prominent cause of divorce for these professional women unlike previous research that tend to highlight career-driven women as the cause of marriage dissolutions. Hence, the finding is a contribution to a wider literature and further research is necessary to acquire an improved understanding on the causes of marriage dissolutions among career-driven and non-traditional women in Singapore.

Family Court and Changing Role of Fathers after Divorce

Carbone (1994) examines feminists' perspectives on divorce laws and procedures in United States. She found that all feminists agreed that existing law contributes to the relative impoverishment of many women and children and that, even when the rules purport to be gender-neutral, they are administered in systematically biased ways (Carbone, 1994). Despite large scale increase in mothers' labor force participation, women continue to bear the overwhelming responsibility for child rearing (Carbone, 1994). Such unequal division of labor within the family has resulted in divorcing women facing bleaker financial prospects, but enjoying closer emotional ties to their children than their former husbands (Carbone, 1994). Existing divorce law in United States, with its emphasis on each party's self-sufficiency, limited provision for child support, and gender-neutral custody principles, does not fully recognizes or address these differences (Carbone, 1994).

My findings are consistent with the feminist perspective on divorce. Eight of the respondents that were interviewed have revealed structural constraints with existing divorce law and practices that do not enforce the provision of child maintenance by their ex-husbands. Lack of enforcement often causes long term disagreements on ancillary matters such as maintenance for the children and asset divisions, making the divorce process ‘complicated’ and ‘emotionally tiring’ when the respondents’ ex-husbands often contest and default on the child maintenance that they are ordered to pay monthly.

Most respondents also reported that there is a changing role of fathers after the divorce that further skewed the gender division of family responsibilities towards the mothers. The term ‘fun parenting’ is used by one of the respondents in describing the role of her ex-husband in caring and his involvement in their children’s lives. All respondents feel that the divorce has spared their ex-husbands the responsibilities of all other aspects of parenthood, limiting their role to financial contributions and having ‘fun’ with the children.

Changing role and responsibilities of fathers after the divorce explain the strong tendencies for seven of the respondents to issue maintenance summons to their ex-husbands when there are defaults in maintenance payment even when they have the financial abilities to support their children. They need to ensure that there are shared responsibilities from their ex-spouses in bringing up their children after the divorce and their only substantial and tangible way to do so is by forcing their ex-husbands to pay child maintenance every month.

These findings coincide with cultural feminists’ perspectives on the cause of such inequalities after divorce is ‘not that women disproportionately care for children, but that society so undervalues child rearing’ (Carbone, 1994).

Existing divorce laws Singapore emphasize on self-sufficiency of individuals, especially with respect to the income capabilities of divorced women. In deciding on the division of matrimonial assets, the Court will take into consideration the extent of contributions made by each party in money, property or work towards the acquiring of the assets and non-financial contributions made by parties; any debts owing by either party which were contracted for this joint benefit; and the needs of the minor children of the marriage (The Law Society of Singapore, 2011).

Women who have the ability to generate incomes are usually not entitled to spousal maintenance. Eight out of ten respondents that participated in this research have revealed that they have received a symbolic ‘one dollar’ spousal maintenance instead of getting substantial amount for wife maintenance. However their greatest issue lies with maintenance for the children. Often the amount

awarded for child maintenance was dependent on their ex-husbands' incomes at the point of divorce rather than the actual needs of the minor children.

Positive Ramifications of Social Network Support

Osman (2004) in his study on Muslim divorces in Singapore, aims to analyze if social network support play a role in preventing divorces among Malays in the Muslim community. His study revealed that social support network members, particularly extended family members, play critical role in supporting 'rocky' marriages (Osman, 2004). However, he found that such support has both positive and negative ramifications as network members have the potential to be 'agents of change for these couples' (Osman, 2004). Hence he proposes that network intervention must also be developed to ensure that social support network members are equipped with the necessary skills to support and strengthen the marriages that are facing difficulties.

On the other hand, all respondents in this research have mentioned the importance of social network support, in particularly support from family and friends, during and after the divorce. Although not all actual substantial support has been documented during the interviews, those who have indicated having social network support felt that it is one of the key factors that allowed them to handle the emotional stress of the divorce and aid them with moving on with their lives. The social support they received from their network members have positive ramifications.

It is important to point out that the types of support that eight of the respondents received are mostly emotional and practical support. I shall define practical support as advice and assistance with legal, investment and housing matters. None of the respondents have indicated that they have received actual financial aid in which money was loaned to them from family and friends, in part due to their ability to generate incomes on their own.

The finding with regards to the role of social network support generated from this research is a contribution to the limited literature in Singapore context. Future research is necessary to acquire an improved understanding on the role of social networks support in assisting professional women after their divorce.

Socio-economic Status as a tool for reconstruction of Self-esteem

Jalovaara (2001), in his study done on relationship between socio-economic status and divorce risk, has suggested that the divorce risk for spouses with higher socio-economic status is *lower* than that of those with lower socio-economic status. For the purpose of discussion, 'socioeconomic status' is defined 'various aspects of the social and economic position of each individual' (Jalovaara, 2001). This hence can include family backgrounds that can enhance individuals' personalities, psychological

characteristics and social skills to equip them with the resources and skills for the reconstruction of their self-esteem after their marriages ended.

Seven out of ten of the respondents interviewed have expressed high self-esteem due to their socio-economic status. This allows them to be equipped with relevant problem-solving and communication skills to deal with the stress of their divorces. Hence they felt 'strong' and 'independent' when it comes to having to juggle family and work after their marriages have ended.

The finding is a contribution to the wider literature on the critical role that socio-economic status plays during and after the divorce for professional women. Future comparative research is needed to find out if women of high socio-economic status are able to cope with the stress of divorce better than women of lower socio-economic status.

Conclusion

As with all research, this study suffered from a number of limitations which readers should bear in mind while considering the findings.

As divorce is a taboo subject in Asian society, it will not be easy locating professional divorced women through random sampling hence snowball sampling is used where each respondent recommended professional divorced women from their social circles. Because my sample is generated through snowball sampling; the sample might not be representative of all professional divorced women and hence the same can be said for their experiences although there are recurring themes generated from the interviews conducted.

Due to the timeframe constraint for this research, interviews were conducted at one point in time only, hence making longitudinal analysis of the experience of professional divorced women impossible.

The research presents the findings of a preliminary and exploratory study of divorce from the perspective of professional divorce women in Singapore. The motivation and purpose of this research is to provide a starting point for future research on the experience of contemporary women after their divorce in the 21st century.

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

No	Pseudo name	Age	Occupation	No. of Children	Initiator of Divorce	Divorce due to Spouse's Infidelity	Custodial Parent	Possession of Matrimonial house	Amount of Alimony given for Children
1	Cindy	41	Sales Manager	3	Y	Y	Y	N	\$1200
2	Judy	41	Personal Assistant	2	Y	N	Y	N	\$2600
3	Ellie	45	Insurance Agent	2	Y	Y	Y	N	\$2000
4	Francesca	40	General Manager	1	Y	Y	Y	N	\$2000
5	Sally	41	Chief Financial Officer	2	Y	Y	Y	NIL	NIL
6	Jenny	40	Executive Assistant	1	Y	N	Y	NIL	NIL
7	Dawn	38	Part-Time Tutor (Account Assistant before divorce)	1	N	N	Y	N	\$2500
8	Whitney	41	Manager	2	N	Y	Y	Y	\$4600
9	Eleanor	37	Property agent	1	Y	Y	Y	N	\$2000
10	Iris	40	Property Agent	2	N	Y	Y	N	\$4000

Works Cited

- Amato, P. R. (2000). The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 62, No. 4 , 1269-1287.
- Amato, P. R., & Rogers, S. J. (1997). A Longitudinal Study of Marital Problems and Subsequent Divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 59, No. 3 , 612-624.
- Buehler, C. (1987). Initiator Status and the Divorce Transition. *Family Relations*, Vol. 36, No. 1 , 82-86.
- Carbone, J. R. (1994). A Feminist Perspective on Divorce. *The Future of Children*, Vol. 4, No. 1, *Children and Divorce* , 183-209.
- Cohen, O., & Savaya, R. (1997). "Broken Glass": The Divorced Woman in Moslem Arab Society in Israel. *Family Process*, Volume 36, Issue 3 , 225-245.
- Coles, R. L. (2006). Cross-Cultural Comparisons. In R. L. Coles, *Race and Family: A Structural Approach* (pp. 48-62). London: Sage Publications.
- Cooney, T. M. (1994). Young Adults' Relations with Parents: The Influence of Recent Parental Divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 56, No. 1 , 45-56.
- Coontz, S. (2001). Historical Perspectives on Family Diversity. In S. J. Ferguson, *Shifting the Center: Understanding Contemporary Families* (pp. 59-76). California : Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Greenstein, T. N. (1995). Gender Ideology, Marital Disruption, and the Employment of Married Women . *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol 57, No. 1 , 31-42.
- Guru, S. (2009). Divorce: obstacles and opportunities – South Asian women in Britain. *The Sociological Review*, Volume 75, Issue 2 , 285-305.
- Hemström, Ö. (1996). Is Marriage Dissolution Linked to Differences in Mortality Risks for Men and Women? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 58, No. 2 , 366-378.
- Jalovaara, M. (2001). Socio-Economic Status and Divorce in First Marriages in Finland 1991-1993. *Population Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 2 , 119-133.
- Lawson, E. J., & Thompson, A. (1995). Black Men Make Sense of Marital Distress and Divorce: An Exploratory Study. *Family Relations*, Vol. 44, No. 2 , 211-218.
- McGue, M., & Lykken, D. T. (1992). Genetic Influence on Risk of Divorce. *Psychological Science*, Vol. 3, No. 6 , 368-373.
- Osman, M. M. (2004). Muslim Divorces in Singapore: Social Support and 'Rocky' Marriages. In G. W. Jones, & K. Ramdas, *(Un)tying the Knot- Ideal and Reality in Asian Marriages* (pp. 133-153). Singapore : Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore.
- Rush, S. (2010, August). The Experience of Divorce Among Jewish Orthodox Women. Walden University.
- Schalkwyk, G. v. (2005). Exploration of Post-Divorce Experiences: Women's Reconstructions of Self. *ANZJFT Volume 26 No.2* , 90-97.

Simons, R. L., Lin, K.-H., Gordon, L. C., Conger, R. D., & O.Lorenz, F. (1999). Explaining the Higher Incidence of Adjustment Problems among Children of Divorce Compared with Those in Two-Parent Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 61, No. 4 , 1020-1033.

Statistics, S. D. (2010, June 1). *Statistic of Marriages and Divorces 2009*. Retrieved November 26, 2010, from Statistics Singapore Website: <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/pubn/popn/smd2009.pdf>

The Law Society of Singapore. (2011, April 4). *The Law Society of Singapore: Divorce*. Retrieved April 4, 2011, from The Law Society of Singapore: http://www.lawsociety.org.sg/public/you_and_the_law/divorce.aspx

The Subordinate Courts of Singapore. (2007, April 4). *Divorce Procedure*. Retrieved March 11, 2010, from The Subordinate Courts of Singapore: http://app.subcourts.gov.sg/Data/Files/File/Family/LitigantsInPerson/LIP_DivorceProcedure.pdf

The Subordinate Courts of Singapore. (2007, July 16). *Maintenance*. Retrieved March 12, 2010, from The Subordinate Courts of Singapore: <http://app.subcourts.gov.sg/Data/Files/File/Family/Brochure/Maintenance.pdf>

Videon, T. M. (2002). The Effects of Parent-Adolescent Relationships and Parental Separation on Adolescent Well-Being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 64, No. 2 , 489-503.

White, S. W., & Bloom, B. L. (1981). Factors Related to the Adjustment of Divorcing Men . *Family Relations*, Vol. 30, No. 3 , 349-360.

Appendix 1

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I'm Chong Wen Ee, and I am a Sociology student at the Nanyang Technological University. I am conducting research, the title of which is "Exploring Post-Divorce Experiences: A Case Study on Professional Women in Singapore". This interview should take about one hour.

This research hopes to examine the experiences of divorced women between 35-44 years old, especially women that are independent, have the ability to bring up her children single-handedly, maintains her own property and also sustain a professional career. Hence the main focuses of this research are to gather insights on the life *after* divorce for professional divorced women in Singapore in particularly to gain theoretical insights on how it is like to be divorced and have a career. The research also hopes to examine how professional divorced women maintain their images or impressions both in the public and private sphere of their lives, and lastly how they create affirmative spaces for themselves in contemporary Singapore society with dominant discourses that keep their voices perhaps somewhat marginalized.

I will be asking a series questions now, they are mostly open ended. There will be no right or wrong to the answers. Most importantly, I just want to know what you think, so feel free to take your time to comment. And if at any point of time you feel uncomfortable to answer any of the questions, please let me know. In any case, you identity will be kept confidential.

I will audio record our interview so that I can listen to it again later without having to take too many notes while we talk.

Let me assure you that any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. In final research products I will disguise your identity by utilizing a pseudo name (or by only presenting aggregate data). When I write up my notes about the interview, I will use a pseudo name, so you never have to worry about your name being anywhere except on the audio recording. If you have a preferred choice of a pseudo name, you can tell me at the beginning of the interview. Once I have transcribed the interview onto paper and completed the project, I will erase the digital audio file. During the project, the audio files will be kept in a password protected folder.

Your participation in providing us with information on the experiences of professional divorced women is completely voluntary and you may discontinue our interaction at any time or skip any question you don't want to answer. If you have any questions about anything related to our project, please ask me.

If you have any questions about my research at a later date, you can contact me at: 91078762

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Names of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to:

**Sociology Ethics Committee c/o Head of Division
Division of Sociology
Nanyang Technological University
14 Nanyang Drive, Singapore 637 332
E-mail: H-DSOC@ntu.edu.sg
Tel: (65) 6316 8730 / 6790 5668**