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## Marital Dissolutions in Iligan City

*Luis Q. Lacar*



Divorce as a legal means of dissolving marital unions which, for some reasons, have turned out to be unworkable for some couples, has been opposed by the Roman Catholic Church—the majority Church—in the Philippines for a long time now. Although the Roman Catholic Church allows annulment of a marriage on certain grounds such as lack of consent or canonical form, or the presence of impediments which inhibit the marital contract, it has remained firm in its stand against legalized divorce (interview with Brother Gilbert Galorio, chairman, Family Apostolate, St. Michael's Parish, Iligan City, 17 February 1972).

The Philippine Civil Code, on the other hand, sanctions "legal separation" as a way of dissolving a marriage. The line demarcating legal separation and divorce seems extremely thin, however. A person who has successfully obtained a legal separation may, in effect, be considered essentially to have obtained divorce. Technically, however, such a person is only "legally separated."

While the grounds for the granting of "legal separation" under the Philippine Civil Code do not seem stringent, they appear neither to have induced nor encouraged couples with problematic marriages to resort to it as a way of resolving marital stresses. This is evidenced by the scarcity of legal separation litigations on the dockets of the Philippine courts. Under the Philippine Civil Code, there are ten grounds for granting legal separation. Among these are: (1) repeated physical violence or grossly abusive conduct directed against a spouse or child, (2) physical violence or normal pressure to compel a spouse to change religious or political affiliation, (3) attempt to corrupt or induce a spouse or common child to engage in prostitution, or connivance in such corruption or inducement, (4) Conviction of any crime and imprisonment of more than six years even if pardoned, (5) drug addiction or habitual alcoholism, (6) lesbianism or homosexuality, (7) bigamy, (8) sexual infidelity or perversion,

(9) attempt against the life of a spouse, (10) abandonment without justifiable cause for more than one year (See Pineda 1990).

### **Survey of Marital Dissolutions**

Observations of the Philippine familial scene, however, indicate rather strongly that marital dissolutions are real social occurrences which can neither be ignored nor glossed over by legal euphemisms notwithstanding the Church's official position against divorce and the State's roundabout way of dealing with the problems of marital stress.

By and large, these dissolved unions are both informal and illegal, given the existing and pertinent laws of the country. What seems actually to be happening is that one of the parties in a conflict-ridden marriage simply decides to get out of the union and establish another household with a new informal (and many times illegal) marital partner. Quite a number of these consensual or third unions have offspring.

My interest in the subject of marital dissolutions in the City of Iligan came about rather by chance. When my youngest daughter was in second year high school in a private Catholic school in Iligan City, she became a close friend to at least three classmates whose parents were separated. Curious, I casually asked her on one occasion whether there were others in her class whose parents were also separated. Quite matter of factly, my daughter said "there are many" in her class whose parents were separated. Her response led me to the present study which asks several questions. How extensive are marital dissolutions, legal or otherwise, in the city of Iligan? What was the cause of these marital break-ups when they occurred? Which party to the marriage usually initiated the separation? With whom do the children of dissolved marriages live?

Given the sensitive nature of the subject of marital problems among Filipinos in general, ways had to be devised to obtain the answers to the questions raised without having to confront directly the couples involved or their children, and in the process offend their sensitivity. The method had to be indirect and unobtrusive.

One solution was to ask students in classes from Grades 3 to fourth year high school to fill up a "Family Inventory Profile (FIP)." The FIP requested the students to give certain information about their family life situation. Among the information requested on the FIP

form was the name of the student's biological father and mother, the address of the biological father and mother, and whether the biological father and mother were living together in the same household. If the biological father and mother were not living together in the same household their addresses and the reasons why they were not living together in the same household were asked. Other questions meant to obtain indirectly the information needed concerned whom the children were living with at the time, the one single experience that the child considered as the most painful in his/her life, and the most important wish the child would like to have in his/her life. The FIP had seven questions about the child, such as birth-date and number of brothers and sisters. Fourteen questions were about the child's family, such as biological father and mother's home address, occupation, education, religion, and monthly income.

Administering the FIP was done in cooperation with school administrators and teachers. The purpose of the FIP was explained to the teachers and administrators but was not revealed to the classes to protect the feelings of the potential subjects of the study. This strategy appears to have worked very well, as the information sought by the study seems to have been obtained adequately.

The FIP was filled out by 125 grade 3 pupils, 142 fourth graders, 80 fifth graders, 60 sixth graders, 180 first year high school students, 97 second year high school students, 78 third year high schools and 92 fourth year high school students. All in all, a total of 854 students filled out the FIP form. Of the 854 completed FIP's four were discarded as unusable because they were either not filled up properly or had information which was extremely difficult to decipher. All of the four cases came from grade 3 students. Therefore, only 121 of the 125 filled up FIP forms from the grade 3 students were used, giving us a total sample size of 850 usable FIPs. Table 1 is a detailed distribution of the proportion of children who filled up the FIP forms by grade/year level. Grades 1 and 2 were deliberately excluded in the sample because it was felt that they might not be able to understand the questions or be able to give sensible/meaningful responses to the questions. The correctness of these assumptions may be open to questions.

The schools from which the subjects of the study were taken included four private schools, two of which are run by religious denominations (all Roman Catholic schools), two nonsectarian private schools; and three public high schools, one of which is a public

barangay high school located about six kilometers from the trade center of Iligan City.

The two sectarian private schools attract the middle and upper income groups and some who are upwardly mobile economically. The non-sectarian private schools serve mostly lower income groups with a sprinkling of middle income categories. The public high schools cater to the majority of the lower income groups in the City, although they also attract a sizeable number of middle and upper income categories. At the time of the study, all the parents were reported by the children as alive.

Iligan City is one of the three fastest growing cities in the Philippines. Its population growth is estimated at about 3.5 percent. It is a net in-migration area which is estimated at about 22 in-migrants per 1000 population. In 1990, the population of Iligan has been estimated at about 220,000.

Iligan City is located in the central portion of Mindanao, southern Philippines, and is considered the industrial city of the south because of the presence of large industrial complexes such as cement plants, steel plants, flour plants and coconut and oil refineries (see Ulack 1974, also 1978). The Maria Cristina Hydroelectric Plant of the National Power Corporation, one of the largest hydroelectric power plants in the country, is located in Iligan City and supplies the power and energy needs of the entire Mindanao Island. It has been claimed that industries have been attracted to Iligan City primarily because of the cheap cost of energy supplied by the Maria Cristina Hydroelectric Power Plant.

Table 1. Distribution of Students with FIP (N = 850)

Grade/Year Level	Number	Percent
Grade 3	121	14.24
Grade 4	142	16.71
Grade 5	80	9.41
Grade 6	60	7.05
First Year High School	180	21.18
Second Year High School	97	11.41
Third Year High School	78	9.18
Fourth Year High School	92	10.82
Total	850	100.00

As a rapidly industrializing community, families and individuals in the city also experience the pressures of change occurring in practically every sphere of social life. The stresses and strains concomitant with industrial growth are slowly being felt both at the individual and the family level.

### Results of the Study

Table 2 is a detailed presentation of the distribution of the proportion of children who indicated having parents who were separated by grade/year level. Among the 121 grade 3 pupils in our sample 11 or 9.90 percent reported having parents living separately. The groups that reported having separated parents of 10 percent or higher were: fourth year high school, 10.87 percent; grade 4, 10.56 percent; second year high school, 10.31 percent; third year high school, 10.26 percent; and first year high school, 10 percent. Only grades 5 and 6 reported rates of 6.25 and 6.66 percent respectively which appears to be way below the rates for the rest of grades. For the entire sample of 850 students, there were 81 cases or 9.53 percent, who indicated having separated parents in their FIP forms.

The data in Table 2 seem to confirm the suspicion and common sense observation that the incidence of "informal" marital cleavages in Iligan is high. For a city like Iligan with a population of only a little over 200,000, the rates of marital dissolution noted from Table 2 may be considered as high.

Table 2. Distribution of Students with Parents Living Separately (N = 850)

Grade/Yr. Level	Parents Intact		Parents Separated		Total	
Grade 3	110	90.9 %	11	9.90 %	121	100 %
Grade 4	127	89.44	15	10.56	142	100
Grade 5	75	93.75	5	6.25	80	100
Grade 6	56	93.33	4	6.66	60	100
1st yr. hs	162	90.00	18	10.00	180	100
2nd yr. hs	87	89.69	10	10.31	97	100
3rd yr. hs	70	89.74	8	10.26	78	100
4th yr. hs	82	89.13	10	10.87	92	100
Total	769	90.47	81	9.53	850	100

Studies in the United States show that the rate of divorce in that country rose steadily as it became more urbanized and industrialized. During the first half of the 1940s, for instance, the divorce rate in the United States was pegged at around 2 per 1000 population. In 1946, the rate rose to 4.6 per 1000 population, and in 1971 the rate rose to around 17 per 1000 population (Goode 1970; also Eshleman 1974). In 1979, Glick and Norton estimated that 38 percent (38 per 100) of marriages in the US ended in divorce (Glick and Norton 1979; also Horton and Hunt 1984; Goode 1970; Monahan 1962).

In this study, the data indicate that for every 100 marital unions, about 9 or 10 ended in formal dissolution. Whether this rate indicates a trend or is merely a manifestation of present stresses, cannot be assessed in this note as we have no information from the FIP to be able to do so. Furthermore, whether the rates of marital dissolution in Iligan City can be generalized to other industrializing and urbanizing cities in the Philippines remains to be investigated. Sociologists interested in studies of the family might be encouraged to venture into this area or research. In the present study, we have been unable to study only the "legality" aspect of the separations indicated by the children on the FIP form. The FIP forms contain only information indicating that the parents were living separately from each other. From the FIP form there is no way of knowing what proportion of these dissolved unions were legal or otherwise. This is an area of research which may be worth probing further.

Table 3 shows the responses of the children to the item in the FIP form on the reasons for their parents' separation. Actually, these responses are more appropriately labeled under the rubric of "symptoms," since these seem simply manifestations of the "real causes." However, as we had no way of probing into the matter, we accept the children's responses with caution.

The highest percentage is notably the "nangabit ug lain" (father had an affair with another woman, 25.93) percent. Apparently, children are able to discern incidence of marital dalliances of the parents when they occur. It is highly possible, too, that the affair is revealed to the children in the "quarrels" that usually follow the revelation or discovery of a parental affair.

It seems obvious from the data that marital dissolutions tend to be initiated by the husbands. A careful examination of the second, third, fifth and sixth reasons given by the children (Table 3), for the separation of their parents clearly shows that these are all male-initiated break-ups. All in all, the proportion of marital breakups which

can be attributed to the males as the immediate initiators is 63.20 percent. Only the fourth reason given ("nakabitan") directly implicates involvement of a woman first. But even here, it is highly possible that the women involved did so only in retaliation for the man's affair after she discovered it. In any event, the data strongly suggest that the double standard of morality is still pervasive.

This interpretation is supported further by the data on the initiator of the separation (Table 4).

Table 4 shows that the idea of separation was initiated by the fathers 46.91 percent of the time; while the mothers did so only 19.54 percent of the time. It is interesting to note from Table 4 that close to one-fourth (24.69 percent) of the children said that they did not know who initiated the separation. I suspect that these responses are indications of the children's attempt to dissociate from the trauma

Table 3. Common Reasons for the Separation of Parents (N = 81)

Reasons Given for Parents' Separation	Number	Percent
1. "Gabulag," "break-up"	20	24.69
2. "Married another woman"	20	24.69
3. "Married another man after father married another woman"	5	6.17
4. "Nakabitan" (had an affair with another man)	9	11.11
5. "Nangabit ug lain" (had an affair with another woman)	21	25.93
6. "Nagtaban" (eloped)	6	7.41
Total	81	100.00

Table 4. Separation Initiator (N = 81)

"Who Initiated the Idea of Separation?"	Number	Percent
Father	38	46.91%
Mother	16	19.75
Both	7	8.64
Don't Know	20	24.69
Total	81	100.00



of the experience of the parental separation rather than their lack or absence of knowledge of the initiator of the break-up. Disavowal of any knowledge about the party who may be pointed to as the source of their painful experience is probably a sign also of the children's wishes or desires not to place any blame on either of their parents. An ambivalent feeling toward both parents seems also indicated by these responses.

Paradoxically, while the fathers were the dominant initiators of the marital dissolution, mothers and mother's parents took the bulk of the burden of caring and sheltering the children once the separation of parents was carried out. More than 44 percent of the children stayed with the mother's parents, while only a little over 30 percent stayed with the father's parents (Table 5). Only 1.23 percent of the children lived or stayed with their fathers, while 7.41 percent were living with their mothers (Table 5).

Children of these dissolved families, it seems, prefer to live with their mothers rather than with their fathers when they are able to do so. When living with their mothers was not feasible or involved other problems, maternal grandparents are the most likely residential destination. Father's parents is the next highest group that cared and sheltered children of dissolved marriages.

Whether residing with their maternal or paternal grandparents is the children's choice or the decision of the children's parents, or that of the grandparents themselves, we cannot say, as we did not probe into this matter in the FIP. The FIP form simply asked the students for information on who they were living with at the time of the study.

Table 5. Residence of Children of Dissolved Families (N = 81)

Child Resides With	Number	Percent
Father and step mother	1	1.23
Mother with step father	2	2.47
Father's brother/sister	2	2.47
Mother's brother/sister	3	3.70
Father, only	1	1.23
Mother only	6	7.41
Father's parents	30	37.04
Mother's parents	36	44.44
Total	81	100.00

## Conclusions

Data gathered in this study indicate that the phenomenon of marital dissolution is more rampant than we are willing to admit or acknowledge. On the average, about 9 percent of the total sample of students studied through an indirect and unobtrusive measure using a Family Inventory Profile, indicated having parents who were separated. While we are not in any position to state the generalizability of the findings to other industrializing cities in the Philippines, we have no reason to doubt that nonlegal, nonformal forms of marital cleavages are actually happening.

Like the problem of generalization, the question of whether the findings are suggestive of an emerging trend or pattern for industrializing and urbanizing communities like Iligan City, is just as difficult to make (Ulack 1974; 1978). Iligan attracts populations from the rural as well as urban areas in the country because of the presence of industries, and commercial and banking establishments which are perceived as potential providers of employment opportunities for the hundreds of thousands of unemployed and underemployed (Ulack 1974; 1978). There are at least 20 large factories located within the city boundary of Iligan. This is complemented by at least 10 commercial banks and 5 large educational institutions with at least three offering tertiary professional degree programs.

The trend of increasing marital dissolutions by divorce because of industrialization and urbanization has already been noted in other countries of Asia and Europe (Ham 1973; Monahan 1962; Goode 1970). Our limited data and the absence of a systematic analysis of trends of important social events in the Philippines severely limit our ability to make any statements as to levels and trends of marital dissolutions in the Philippines.

However, in our sample of only 850 students in only one city, at least 9 percent have parents who are separated. That this figure is high for this sample seems clear. However, whether this figure is high or low relative to some established benchmark, is impossible to declare in the absence of the necessary studies along this line in the Philippines.

In light of these findings, it would seem appropriate to suggest a thorough reexamination of the position of the government and the Church toward legalizing divorce in this country. I am, of course, fully aware that legalizing divorce in the Philippines may suddenly

open the gates of family unity to a rush of applications for legal marital dissolution. But then again, it is possible that it will not, given the premium we accord familism as a people.

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