



Sociological Briefing

South Africa and divorce: a pending issue? Infidelity? Abusive relationships?

The family changes in contemporary societies have scaled up in the last decades and they are at the core of sociological research and family studies. The rapid transformations and increasing diversity of personal and family relationships have played a crucial role to understand and conceptualize how the socialization processes are influenced by these changes. In the scientific literature, there are specific journals with the scope to better understand the evolution and main features of family changes. Besides, authors such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim have expanded knowledge about the transformations of intimacy with contributions such as “The normal chaos of love”, among many others. Amidst this context, the different socio-political realities influencing family should be taken into account to avoid bias in the sociological analysis. The sociological briefing “South Africa and divorce: a pending issue? Infidelity? Abusive relationships?” approaches the main aspects highlighted by Nkuke Evans Mohlatole, Sello Sithole, and Modjadji Linda Shirindi regarding the divorce among young couples in Lebowakgomo, South Africa.

The authors of “Factors contributing to divorce among young couples in Lebowakgomo” published in *Social Work*, aim to identify the factors explaining the levels of divorce of young people in the region, including aspects such as the lack of and poor communication, financial problems, abuse, and infidelity. Through a case study and qualitative methods, the authors reveal the existence of a relationship between

abuse and divorce, or infidelity causing, for instance, HIV/AIDS.

Divorce.. why?

The authors open their contribution by indicating concerns about the increasing numbers of divorces among young people, between the ages 18 and 35. Moreover, they also state that marriage tends to be perceived as a lifelong decision or in the case of African societies, like a “lifelong learning contract”. As a starting point, it is important to mention that the literature review shows evidence of several factors influencing divorce in the country, going in-depth into some of them. For example, infidelity is at the top of the list of reasons for divorce. This is related to cultural beliefs especially after having a baby. Furthermore, infertility or sexual incompatibility should be considered to analyze this phenomenon. Several authors are exploring these factors but more recently, the abuse and the role of social media have been also incorporated as aspects influencing divorce. In this vein, it is relevant to highlight that the authors support the contributions stating that abuse is a problem in all ages, cultures, or social classes.

This work claims the need to study the factors influencing divorce from different disciplines, and identify synergies across them. Social work, psychology, and sociology can play an important role in this arena.

Collecting and analyzing data: what do people say about the factors of divorce in Lebowaqomo?

The qualitative fieldwork of this contribution includes 11 semi-structured interviews with divorced young adults, and the results show that the factors contributing to divorce are five: character, poor communication, abuse, financial problems, and infidelity. The information of the participants includes their age, gender, religious affiliation, educational level, duration of the marriage, and the number of children. Most of them are Christian and all of them have children. Moreover, the duration of the marriage is between 1 and 6 years. The findings include quotations from the participants, illustrating for instance that infidelity is controlled by strict social norms. According to the results, the authors suggest the differences between men and women and highlight the impact on health. Financial problems can cause disagreement between couples, affecting their financial well-being and their relationships. Considering this, the work also includes contributions from the literature review illus-

trating the effects of financial issues on couples. The implications of the identification of these factors are introduced in the paper, mentioning the role of therapists during marital counseling, the role of government to pass legislation, and the importance of family counselors and social workers in the problems raised during divorce, such as child custody.

Divorce is a research subject that requires further investigations with an interdisciplinary approach, raising the situation also of the global south. Previous works such as the one presented in this sociological briefing can contribute to the understanding of family changes and the increasing diversity of realities. Opening debates with new insights is crucial to conceptualize the emerging forms of family.