

# Researcher Helps People See Beyond the 'Typical' Divorce

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(PhysOrg.com) -- According to a University of Missouri family researcher, there is no “typical divorce.” Realizing this, friends and family members of people experiencing divorce should be aware of the appropriate type and amount of support needed, according to Mark Fine, professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies in the MU College of Human Environmental Resources. In his new book, “Beyond the Average Divorce,” Fine examines divorces beyond the “norm.”

Fine developed a new theoretical model – the Divorce Variation and Fluidity Model – to explain the difference in how various people adjust to divorce. The model explains why some people quickly return to their previous level of function and others do not. It also shows divorce as a very fluid process in which the outcome is influenced by a multitude of factors, such as race, gender, economic conditions, cultural values, legal context and sociohistorical context. The model also demonstrates the many pathways a divorce can take, which all have an effect on the final outcome.

“There is a fluid nature in divorce and a variability in responses to divorce, which often are ignored because so much attention is paid to the so-called ‘typical or average’ divorce,” Fine said. “The implications of this new model are that there is no one certain way to deal with or help people experiencing a divorce of any type. Considerations must be made to be sensitive and responsive to the variety of needs and experiences of divorced adults and their children.”

According to Fine, divorce can happen in the legal sense, but it also occurs in a large subset of couples whose relationships may not be dissolved legally, but have actually dissolved in reality. Some couples physically stay together due to socioeconomic status or legal costs, but are still going through the same things as a divorced couple, including trading custody of their children.

Fine also discusses divorce rates among subsets who are not legally married. Heterosexual couples who cohabitate and gay or lesbian couples cannot marry, and thus, cannot divorce. However, the dissolution of these nonmarital relationships sends people, and sometimes children, through the same cycle divorced couples face.

“Most people who study divorce only look at the typical case but not the multitude of variations,” Fine said. “In this book, I am not interested in the mean but rather the variations.”

Fine’s book, co-authored with David Demo, professor of human development and family studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, will be published in 2009.

Source: University of Missouri

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