

## "The Leader's Family"

In recent years, I have been concerned about the impact of our achievement-oriented society on the family. This is exacerbated by the constant pressure to be No. 1 and our obsession on ranking. I reckon this is perhaps, the most serious challenge facing leadership in the government and corporate world today.

We need to seriously examine the devastating effect of work and its negative impact on the family. This problem is going to get worse especially in this economic downturn, where CEOs are under tremendous pressure to survive and perform. The stress on mid-management is also very great. With retrenchment hanging ominously over our heads and companies not hiring, managers and staff have to work even harder and stay even longer to complete their work.

Allow me to highlight some statistics regarding the breakdown of the family found in The Law Gazette<sup>i</sup>, published by the Family Court.

Between 1996-2000, the number of divorce petitions filed at the Family Court of Singapore has been increasing by 8% each year<sup>ii</sup>. In 2000, there were 5,160 divorces granted.<sup>iii</sup> It was estimated that another 5,000 individuals and couples might be contemplating ending their marriages each year.<sup>iv</sup> These are what we call “marriages at risk”.

Also, it was found that about half of the divorce couples has 1.6 dependent children<sup>v</sup>. In all, about 11,600 people are affected by divorce<sup>vi</sup>. The effects on juveniles are even more tragic. Studies<sup>vii</sup> have also shown that children from divorce families are likely to:

- Fare worse in education
- Have higher truancy rate
- Have greater tendency to drop out in school

For girls, they are likely to have higher teenage pregnancy with serious repercussions such as single parenting, lowered education prospects & lower socio-economic status. There is also a higher probability of them involving in criminal activities. In Singapore, studies undertaken by the Ministry of Community Development and the Subordinate Courts<sup>viii</sup> bore this out.

- 54% of male juvenile offenders come from divorce families
- 37% of female juvenile offenders come from divorce families

What I find most disconcerting is that often in my mediation work with divorce couples, I hear the wife regretting, “My husband always says ‘I work hard so that we and the children can have a better life, live in bigger house.’ Unfortunately, we have all these for nothing. Because he has lost me and the children.”

Indeed, this poses one of the greatest challenges as leaders. We need to examine our priority if we truly believe that the family is the foundational unit of society.

As the saying goes, “No one on his death bed will ever say, I wish I spend more time at work!”

John Ng, *Ph.D*

President

Meta

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Tel: (65) 6419 5255

Fax: (65) 6227 7170

Email: john@meta.com.sg

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<sup>i</sup> Addressing the Criminogenic Effects of Divorce, Law Gazette, 2001

<sup>ii</sup> [Research, Family Court](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [Key Indicators on Marriages and Divorces, 1995-2000. Singapore Department of Statistics, 2001.](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Addressing the Criminogenic Effects of Divorce, Law Gazette, 2001.](#)

<sup>v</sup> [Addressing the Criminogenic Effects of Divorce, Law Gazette, 2001.](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [Addressing the Criminogenic Effects of Divorce, Law Gazette, 2001.](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [Addressing the Criminogenic Effects of Divorce, Law Gazette, 2001.](#)

<sup>viii</sup> [Addressing the Criminogenic Effects of Divorce, Law Gazette, 2001.](#)