

The “Family Meltdown” of Western Secular Society

PART 2:

The Causes of Family Meltdown in Western Secular States:

Western governments have tried to introduce various initiatives to stem the tide of family breakdown within their societies. However, these have been to no avail. This is because they failed to recognise that the fundamental causes of this family meltdown are the core secular values and the general lack of importance given to protecting marriage and family life within capitalist liberal societies.

Liberal Personal and Sexual Freedoms:

The “*personal and sexual freedom*” based culture of liberal societies has nurtured a hedonistic and care-free attitude to life based upon the pursuit of carnal and individualistic whims and desires rather than nurturing a mindset of accountability in one’s actions and responsibility towards others. It has created an aversion to marriage in many individuals due to fear over the commitment, fidelity and responsibility required - viewing marriage as a “curbing of their freedom” and preferring rather to be “*free and single*” and to have sexual relations with “*whoever, whenever*”. It has spawned a culture of promiscuity resulting in spiralling rates of extramarital teenage pregnancies, abortions, single mothers and adultery which is one the main causes of divorce in many liberal societies. According to research cited by The Independent, 50-60% of married men and 45-55% of married women in the UK commit adultery. According to figures from The Times, adultery constitutes 12% of the causes of divorce in Britain. Abigail Lowther, associate solicitor with a family law firm, stated that infidelity in the UK was “*skyrocketing*” compared to other types of divorce-related behaviour. In Denmark, 46% of married couples have had an affair according to numbers from Statista. And in the US, some surveys found that around 1 in 3 people admitted to cheating on their spouse. In fact, within liberal societies, the sanctity of marriage and fidelity has eroded to such an extent that businesses providing ‘adultery services’ operate legally within the state! However, this philosophy of maximising personal freedom does not deliver individuals the happiness that individuals necessarily desire. A report by the British Red Cross and the Co-operative, published in December 2016, found that divorce and family breakdown have led to an epidemic of loneliness in the UK. In fact, it has left 9 million Britons lonely.

This liberal culture and lifestyle have also created a situation where a man may have extramarital relations with a countless number of women and father children from different mothers, yet take no physical or emotional responsibility for his child or its mother other than a possible cheque in the post once a month. This has scarred the lives of millions of children and women. Justice Paul Coleridge, a former British High Court Judge in the family division, described this as an, “*endless game of ‘musical relationships’ or ‘pass the partner’, in which such a significant portion of the population is engaged....the endless and futile quest for a perfect relationship.*” It is a situation that has also created a lack of trust in individuals seeking a partner for marriage, for they are unsure whether such a relationship is based upon loyalty, fidelity and care or not, and they are concerned regarding surviving such a societal climate saturated with promiscuity and self-gratification. It is one of the causes of the drop in marital rates in the liberal west.

Furthermore, the dangerous mindset nurtured by liberal values that encourages men to pursue and act upon their whims and desires, alongside the devaluing of women within liberal societies that sanctions their sexualisation and objectification by various industries, is a major contributing factor to the epidemic of domestic violence afflicting Western societies. One in three women has reported some form of physical or sexual abuse since the age of 15 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights). In the UK, one in four women experiences domestic violence in her lifetime and 2 women are killed each week by a current or former partner (UK Office for National Statistics). In the US, one woman is beaten by her husband or partner every 15 seconds (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and 3 are killed by their partner each day (American Psychology Association). And in Australia, every 3 hours a woman is hospitalised because of domestic violence (Research Centre for Injury Studies, Flinders University, Australia).

Individualism:

The “cancerous” individualistic mindset of “*Me, myself, and I*”, bred within capitalist societies that sanctify securing individual self-interest over all else has eaten away at the foundations of the family structure. It has caused individuals to focus on what is best for them rather than what is best for their spouse or marriage resulting in increased divorce. It has caused individuals to place their own desires above the wellbeing of their own children and society, and to detach their self-indulgent actions and lifestyles from the detrimental impact it has on others. It has contributed to people delaying or rejecting having children until later life to maximize their social life, personal finances and personal freedom. According to the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS), the proportion of babies born to women under 25 in England and Wales dropped from 47% in 1971 to 25% in 2008. The ONS 2010 Social Trends forty report stated that the number of people living in family homes with children fell from 52% in 1961 to 36% in 2009, while the number of single person households rose from 1.7 million to 7 million in the same period. According to latest statistics, women in their mid-40s in the UK are almost twice as likely to be childless as their parent’s generation, with one in five women born in 1969 being childless today. Clare McNeil, author of ‘Generation Strain’ (a recent report from the Institute of Public Policy Research) warns that, “*The number of people aged 65-74 without children to care for them in old age will almost double before the end of the next decade,*” and that, “*By 2030, more than a million people in this age group won’t have children, compared with 580,000 in 2012.*” The U.S. Census Bureau’s Population Survey published in 2015 found that nearly half (47.6%) of women in America between age 15 and 44 never had children. It represented the highest percentage of childless women since the bureau started tracking that data in 1976. In a U.S. survey of childfree men and women, entitled “Two is enough: A couple’s guide to living childless by choice” (Scott, 2009) quoted by Psychology Today, 80% of respondents, particularly those aged under 40, rated as a strong motive the statement – ‘*I value freedom and independence*’.

Individualism has also caused parents to neglect their children while pursuing their own personal interests, and caused children to neglect their elderly parents, viewing them as burdens on their time and their personal finances, placing them in homes for others to look after. And the individualistic concern for one’s own family and disregard or neglect of other relatives has caused a lack of a support system for extended family facing physical, financial and emotional problems, causing many to suffer in silence alone.

Gender Equality:

Within capitalist secular societies, there has been a devaluing of motherhood and family life against economic life. On a historical level, the Western struggle for gender equality and the rise of feminism placed the public life and the man’s traditional role of breadwinner above the private life, motherhood and the woman’s traditional role of home-maker. Many feminists argued that female respect and liberty was not compatible with economic dependence upon her husband or full domestic responsibility, and therefore, it was not simply a matter of the woman having the right to work but that it was almost obligatory to work. Christabel Pankhurst, the well-known radical feminist and member of the suffragette movement of the early 20th century, said of home-life responsibilities that they were an intolerable burden on married women, a waste of time and economic energies, and was unpaid and unrecognised.

Today, one of the consequences of this view of home-life and concept of “*Gender Equality*” has been the creation of societies where women do not simply have the right to employment but rather are expected to work even if they were single mothers with sole responsibility for the care and upbringing of their children. The concept of gender equality that was in theory to produce the “*have it all woman*”, in reality produced the “*do it all woman*” – who continued to burden the responsibilities of motherhood and household chores but now also struggled with the added burden of financially maintaining the family. With both parents as breadwinners in many families, there is a constant struggle to find time for the children or time to make marriages strong, often straining the relationship between the husband and wife. Hence, *Gender Equality*, where one looks at what is best for the woman verses what is best for the man rather than what is best for a family or community overlooks what is best for a strong marriage for the children and for society overall. Furthermore, gender equality, which erodes the appreciation of sex differences and roles, has also impacted the recognition within the workplace and society of the importance of motherhood, leading to many employers failing to accommodate adequately for those women with young children, such as providing flexible working hours or other required needs, dismissing the importance of their

duties to their family.

Materialism:

The capitalist, materialistic system that has placed the pursuit of wealth as its supreme ideological goal has placed profit over people and finance over families. It has focussed consistently on securing the coffers of government or revenue of businesses over securing the family. This constant drive for short-term profitability has undervalued motherhood and family life and forced even single mothers into work, leaving them little time to bring up their children effectively. Indeed, there are often financial incentives for mothers to return to work; very few incentives for them to stay at home to ensure the effective upbringing of their children. This valuing of materialism over motherhood has led to a situation where a pregnant woman or one with young children is often seen as a burden to a company rather than as an asset to society. A survey of 500 managers by the UK law firm, Slater & Gordon published in 2014, shows that more than 40% admitted they are generally wary of hiring a woman of childbearing age, while a similar number would be wary of hiring a woman who has already had a child or hiring a mother for a senior role. A third of managers in this study stated that they would rather employ a man in his 20s or 30s over a woman of the same age for fear of them taking maternity leave. A 2005 survey of 98 companies in the UK by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation found that $\frac{3}{4}$ of businesses would rather break the law than employ a pregnant woman or one of child-bearing age. The consequence is that not only are women pressured into employment and expected to be wage-earners for their family, they are discriminated against in the workplace for having a womb! The consequence is that many women would rather delay having children or remain childless rather than face this “fertility penalty” on their earnings or career. It seems that, for many women in the West, being “*chained to the kitchen sink*” has been replaced with being “*chained to the economic market*”. This is one of the contributing factors to the low birth rates and ‘fertility crisis’ affecting many western capitalist states today which is having various detrimental effects on their societies, including fewer people to look after aging populations. One should also not forget the emotional gauntlet experienced by those women forced to undergo IVF treatment in order to conceive due to reduced fertility, miscarriages and increased pregnancy-related complications associated with delaying motherhood.

Conclusion:

It is clear that it is the values and laws of the capitalist secular liberal system implemented within most western states which are the root cause of the chaos and ruin of the family structure within their societies. Indeed, the system is inherently designed to create family instability and breakdown, resulting in untold human misery for so many individuals and children and countless problems for the state.

Unfortunately, the Muslim Ummah living in the West or in the Muslim world has not been shielded from these secular or materialistic values due to being submerged in environments and living under systems which promote and celebrate these non-Islamic ideals. The consequence is that the concept of “strong marriages” and “strong family units” that has always been understood by Muslims over the generations to be the heart or building block of a strong community has today also been eroded within the Muslim Ummah. As Muslims, it is vital that we take serious lessons from the meltdown of the family structure that has transpired within western societies and reject the beliefs, values and system that have caused this social chaos, so that our communities do not follow the same destructive path. This is alongside understanding clearly and embracing the sound values, social laws and system of Islam which alone are equipped to solve the many problems affecting the harmony and unity of family life in our Ummah.

“In the coming decades, success will accrue to those cultures that preserve the family’s place.”
Joel Kotkin - Author of ‘Where Have All the Babies Gone?’ and Fellow in Urban Studies at Chapman University in Orange, California, US.

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