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Article

Number of people divorcing for second time doubles

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by **Ann Corrigan, solicitor specialising in family law**

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Although the divorce rate fell overall for a third consecutive year in England and Wales, the most interesting fact to come out of new government statistics (Office for National Statistics) is that the number of people divorcing for the second time has doubled in the last 25 years. The figures show that one in five men and women in marriage break-ups last year had already gone through a previous divorce

Why should this be? It could be a combination of everyone's expectations being higher than ever and a case of once you have gone through the painful process, it's easier to do it again. Interestingly people in their late 20s have the highest divorce rates but overall the average age of people divorcing is around 40 for women and 43 for men.

The data also shows that the overall divorce rate has dropped in England and Wales to its lowest level in 30 years. Ann Corrigan, family law specialist at Phillips Solicitors commented: 'Fewer people are getting married, but you can't ignore the fact that financial settlements within divorce are unpredictable and costly and the legislation that governs the way financial settlements are made is out of date. And of course the cost of a divorce can run into thousands if you go through the Courts. Maybe that puts a lot of people off. But we are finding that people are beginning to take up the different options available to them such as counselling and mediation.'

Ann added: Mediation is a very good cost effective and sensible way of helping couples come to a mutual agreement with much less acrimony and bad feeling. What happens is that a trained mediator, who may be a counsellor or a family lawyer, sits down with both parties over a number of sessions and works out things like financial settlements, putting any children at the centre of discussions. Mediation can avoid the painful win-lose situation and is much cheaper than fighting through the Courts.'

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The government figures also show that the average length of a marriage before breakdown is 11.6 years, exactly the same as it was in 2005. For the fifth consecutive year both men and women in their late twenties had the highest divorce rate of all age groups although the average (mean) age at divorce is around 40 for women and 43 for men.

'Extramarital affairs are still the number one reason for divorce' says Ann 'and over half divorcing wives cited the husband's behaviour as the main cause of breakdown, whereas a third of divorces granted to men proved the wife's behaviour as the main cause.'

Ann concludes 'Many couples are choosing to formalise what's called a 'Pre-nuptial agreement' before they even get married. Although they are not legally binding the Court will consider the contract along with all the other circumstances of the case. Divorce can be messy and can ruin lives so we aim to help couples separate or divorce in the most painless and cost-effective way.'

ENDS

Note to editors: About Ann Corrigan

Ann has specialised in family law for over 20 years and was one of the first tranche of lawyers to train in collaborative law in the UK. From her experience it is clear that clients value the mediation and collaborative law alternatives to the Courts because they are cost effective ways that allow couples to resolve their issues in a non-aggressive way and continue a relationship with responsibility even after it breaks down. This is so important, particularly where there are children involved.

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