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Divorce rate explosion expected in Japan

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2nd April, 2007

THE ARTICLE

Divorce rate explosion expected in Japan

Japan has had to get used to many painful social trends in the past six decades. Many traditions, which for a thousand years bound Japanese society tightly together, have slowly unwound since the end of World War II. The “job for life” system, which traditionally rewarded corporate loyalty with guaranteed lifetime employment, proved unfeasible in the global economy; Japan’s once obedient schoolchildren are rebelling; and divorce, once considered a social no-no, has been slowly increasing. A boom in the rate of divorce may soon be the newest unwanted trend. New pension laws are being passed by the government that will entitle wives to half of their husband’s pension once their marriage has finished.

Many women have supposedly been anticipating the introduction of the new legislation since it was first proposed four years ago. A report suggests up to 42,000 wives may now apply for a divorce. It seems economic concerns are overtaking any feelings of shame brought on by marital breakdown. Women often stayed in unhappy marriages fearing they would be unable to support themselves financially without a spouse. However, changes in society have made divorce much less of a taboo than in the past. Greater gender equality means divorce is now seen as a sign of a woman’s independence. Teacher Makiko Inoue got divorced last year. She welcomed the new laws, saying they will liberate many trapped women. Conversely, married men may not feel as positively about the new regulations.

WARM-UPS

1. JAPANESE SOCIETY: Walk around the classroom and find out from other students what they know about Japanese society. When you have finished, sit with your partner(s) and share and talk about what you heard. Did you learn anything new?

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

Japan / pain / trends / society / rebellion / social no-no's / pensions / marriage / divorce / taboos / shame / spouses / independence / liberation / being trapped

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

3. GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE: With your partner(s), talk about these grounds for divorce. Rank them from the most understandable to the least understandable.

- adultery
- boredom
- unequal burden of housework
- greed
- lack of physical attraction
- the idea of single life being better
- physical abuse
- not sharing the remote control

4. WHO GETS WHAT? Imagine you are getting divorced. Which of these things would you want as part of the divorce settlement? Discuss with your partner(s). Role play a husband and wife arguing over who gets what.

- the TV
- the car
- the money
- the sofa
- the pet cat
- the wedding presents
- the house
- the children

5. QUICK DEBATE: Have this quick debate with your partner(s). Students A think marriage is forever and divorce is a no-no; students B think divorce should be something anyone can choose. Change partners and topics every two minutes.

6. DIVORCE: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with divorce. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Japan has been experiencing painful societal change for 60 years. T / F
- b. Things started to go wrong in Japanese society after WWI. T / F
- c. Japanese schoolchildren are becoming increasingly well-behaved. T / F
- d. Wives will soon be able to claim half of their ex-husband's pension. T / F
- e. Up to 4,200 wives may get divorced after new pension laws arrive. T / F
- f. Unhappily married men feel financially insecure without a wife. T / F
- g. Greater equality means divorced women feel more independent. T / F
- h. Many Japanese husbands welcome the new laws with open arms. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| a. painful | unworkable |
| b. bound | on the other side of the coin |
| c. loyalty | dutiful |
| d. unfeasible | united |
| e. obedient | failure |
| f. supposedly | traumatic |
| g. proposed | reputedly |
| h. breakdown | put forward |
| i. liberate | allegiance |
| j. conversely | free |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| a. Japan has had to get | bound Japanese society |
| b. traditions, which for a thousand years | may now apply for a divorce |
| c. rewarded corporate loyalty with | no-no |
| d. once considered a social | many trapped women |
| e. entitle wives | positively about the new regulations |
| f. women have supposedly | used to many painful social trends |
| g. up to 42,000 wives | on by marital breakdown |
| h. feelings of shame brought | guaranteed lifetime employment |
| i. they will liberate | been anticipating the introduction |
| j. men may not feel as | to half of their husband's pension |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

Divorce rate explosion expected in Japan

Japan has had to get used to many _____ social trends in the past six decades. Many traditions, which for a thousand years _____ Japanese society tightly together, have slowly _____ since the end of World War II. The “job for life” system, which traditionally _____ corporate loyalty with guaranteed lifetime employment, proved unfeasible in the global economy; Japan’s once _____ schoolchildren are rebelling; and divorce, once considered a social _____, has been slowly increasing. A boom in the rate of divorce may soon be the newest _____ trend. New pension laws are being passed by the government that will _____ wives to half of their husband’s pension once their marriage has finished.

obedient

bound

rewarded

entitle

painful

unwanted

no-no

unwound

Many women have supposedly been _____ the introduction of the new legislation since it was first _____ four years ago. A report suggests up to 42,000 wives may now apply for a divorce. It seems economic concerns are _____ any feelings of shame brought on by marital breakdown. Women often stayed in unhappy marriages _____ they would be unable to support themselves financially without a _____. However, changes in society have made divorce much less of a _____ than in the past. Greater _____ equality means divorce is now seen as a sign of a woman’s independence. Teacher Makiko Inoue got divorced last year. She welcomed the new laws, saying they will _____ many trapped women. Conversely, married men may not feel as positively about the new regulations.

spouse

fearing

proposed

gender

anticipating

liberate

taboo

overtaking

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Divorce rate explosion expected in Japan

Japan _____ used to many painful social trends in the past six decades. Many traditions, which for a thousand years bound Japanese society tightly together, have _____ the end of World War II. The “job for life” system, which traditionally _____ with guaranteed lifetime employment, proved unfeasible in the global economy; Japan’s _____ schoolchildren are rebelling; and divorce, once considered _____, has been slowly increasing. A boom in the rate of divorce may soon be _____ trend. New pension laws are being passed by the government that _____ half of their husband’s pension once their marriage has finished.

Many women have _____ the introduction of the new legislation since it was first proposed four years ago. A _____ 42,000 wives may now apply for a divorce. It seems economic concerns are overtaking any feelings _____ marital breakdown. Women often stayed in unhappy marriages fearing they would be unable to support themselves financially _____. However, changes in society have made divorce much _____ than in the past. Greater gender equality means divorce is now seen as a sign of a woman’s independence. Teacher Makiko Inoue got divorced last year. She welcomed the new laws, saying they _____ women. Conversely, married men may not feel as positively about the new regulations.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'divorce' and 'rate'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "DIVORCE" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about marriage and divorce.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• painful• unwound• guaranteed• obedient• newest• half	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• introduction• 42,000• spouse• sign• taboo• positively
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DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a) What did you think when you read the headline?
- b) Do you think marriage should be forever?
- c) Are you surprised by what you read/heard in the article?
- d) What is your image of marriage in Japan?
- e) How easy do you think it should be to get a divorce?
- f) What do you think of religions that do not allow divorce?
- g) How do you think Japan will cope with a divorce boom?
- h) Do you think it's fair that wives will be entitled to half of their husband's pension?
- i) Should men be entitled to half their wife's pension?
- j) What are the divorce laws like in your country?



STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a) Did you like reading this article?
- b) What do you think of the women who are eagerly waiting for this new legislation?
- c) What do you think of the suggestion up to 42,000 may immediately file for divorce?
- d) Is divorce something society can stop?
- e) Would you feel shame if you got divorced?
- f) What do you think it's like to be trapped in an unhappy marriage because you can't afford to live alone?
- g) Is divorce a real taboo in your culture?
- h) What are the consequences of high divorce rates for society?
- i) What would you do if you worked for an organization trying to stop people from getting divorced?
- j) Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a) What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b) Was there a question you didn't like?
- c) Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d) What did you like talking about?
- e) Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

DIVORCE:

Ask three different students questions about the grounds for divorce in this table.

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3
Adultery			
Boredom			
Disappearance of physical attraction			
Alcoholism			
Other _____			

Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Make a mini-presentation you the class. Vote on the best one(s).

LANGUAGE

CORRECT WORD: Put the correct words from a–d below in the article.

Divorce rate explosion expected in Japan

Japan has had to get used to (1) ___ painful social trends in the past six decades. Many traditions, which for a thousand years (2) ___ Japanese society tightly together, have slowly (3) ___ since the end of World War II. The “job for life” system, which traditionally rewarded corporate loyalty with guaranteed lifetime employment, proved unfeasible in the global economy; Japan’s (4) ___ obedient schoolchildren are rebelling; and divorce, once considered a social (5) ___, has been slowly increasing. A boom in the rate of divorce may soon be the newest unwanted trend. New pension laws are being passed by the government that will entitle wives (6) ___ half of their husband’s pension once their marriage has finished.

Many women have supposedly (7) ___ anticipating the introduction of the new legislation since it was first proposed four years ago. A report suggests up to 42,000 wives may now (8) ___ for a divorce. It seems economic concerns are overtaking any feelings of shame brought on by (9) ___ breakdown. Women often stayed in unhappy marriages fearing they would be unable to support themselves financially without a (10) ___. However, changes in society have made divorce much less of a taboo than in the past. Greater gender equality (11) ___ divorce is now seen as a sign of a woman’s independence. Teacher Makiko Inoue got divorced last year. She welcomed the new laws, saying they will liberate many trapped women. (12) ___, married men may not feel as positively about the new regulations.

1. (a) many (b) maniacal (c) much (d) ouch
2. (a) bonding (b) binding (c) bond (d) bound
3. (a) intermingled (b) intertwined (c) unwound (d) unwind
4. (a) former (b) twice (c) once (d) ex
5. (a) no way (b) no-no (c) no go area (d) no can do
6. (a) to (b) for (c) with (d) of
7. (a) been (b) had (c) wait (d) are
8. (a) imply (b) supply (c) reply (d) apply
9. (a) nervous (b) husband (c) wedding (d) marital
10. (a) sponge (b) spores (c) spouse (d) espouse
11. (a) mean (b) means (c) meaning (d) meant
12. (a) Flip side (b) Conversely (c) Opposite (d) Reverse

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information about divorce in your country. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. DIVORCE POSTER: Make a poster about the different laws regarding divorce around the world. Show your poster to your class in the next lesson. Vote on the best one(s).

4. MAGAZINE ARTICLE: Write a magazine article about the consequences of an explosion in the divorce rate in your country. Write about how it might change different areas of society. Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Which article was best and why?

5. LETTER: Write a letter to one of the wives anticipating the new pension laws being passed. Give her three pieces of advice about her marriage or divorce. Ask her three questions. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. F d. T e. T f. F g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| a. painful | traumatic |
| b. bound | united |
| c. loyalty | allegiance |
| d. unfeasible | unworkable |
| e. obedient | dutiful |
| f. supposedly | reputedly |
| g. proposed | put forward |
| h. breakdown | failure |
| i. liberate | free |
| j. conversely | on the other side of the coin |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| a. Japan has had to get | used to many painful social trends |
| b. traditions, which for a thousand years | bound Japanese society |
| c. rewarded corporate loyalty with | guaranteed lifetime employment |
| d. once considered a social | no-no |
| e. entitle wives | to half of their husband's pension |
| f. women have supposedly | been anticipating the introduction |
| g. up to 42,000 wives | may now apply for a divorce |
| h. feelings of shame brought | on by marital breakdown |
| i. they will liberate | many trapped women |
| j. men may not feel as | positively about the new regulations |

GAP FILL:

Divorce rate explosion expected in Japan

Japan has had to get used to many **painful** social trends in the past six decades. Many traditions, which for a thousand years **bound** Japanese society tightly together, have slowly **unwound** since the end of World War II. The "job for life" system, which traditionally **rewarded** corporate loyalty with guaranteed lifetime employment, proved unfeasible in the global economy; Japan's once **obedient** schoolchildren are rebelling; and divorce, once considered a social **no-no**, has been slowly increasing. A boom in the rate of divorce may soon be the newest **unwanted** trend. New pension laws are being passed by the government that will **entitle** wives to half of their husband's pension once their marriage has finished.

Many women have supposedly been **anticipating** the introduction of the new legislation since it was first **proposed** four years ago. A report suggests up to 42,000 wives may now apply for a divorce. It seems economic concerns are **overtaking** any feelings of shame brought on by marital breakdown. Women often stayed in unhappy marriages **fearing** they would be unable to support themselves financially without a **spouse**. However, changes in society have made divorce much less of a **taboo** than in the past. Greater **gender** equality means divorce is now seen as a sign of a woman's independence. Teacher Makiko Inoue got divorced last year. She welcomed the new laws, saying they will **liberate** many trapped women. Conversely, married men may not feel as positively about the new regulations.

LANGUAGE WORK

- 1 - a 2 - d 3 - c 4 - c 5 - b 6 - a 7 - a 8 - d 9 - d 10 - c 11 - b 12 - b