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Reversal cited

Trend to sturdier marriages seen

The U.S. divorce rate will stabilize and begin to decline by 1980, a U-M faculty member predicts.

"People are marrying at a later age, starting families later, and having fewer unplanned children. This is a reverse of the trends which contributed to most divorces," notes Prof. Lois N. Glasser, who holds a joint appointment in the U-M schools of social work and public health.

"Other favorable signs include the improving economy—for poverty is the single biggest cause of family breakdown—and the tendency toward

more flexibility and role-sharing between wives and husbands."

Such optimism might seem unexpected from a social worker, marriage counselor, and co-editor (with her husband, U-M Social Work Prof. Paul H. Glasser) of "Families in Crisis." Her view, however, is that

"Other favorable signs include the improving economy, for poverty is the single biggest cause of family breakdown."

—Professor Lois Glasser

families cope exceedingly well with crises and, for the most part, emerge stronger from them.

Mrs. Glasser defines crisis as "any crucial period or turning point." It may be an outbreak of war, a weather disaster, or a crippling traffic accident. But more frequently, its source is within the family: a death, divorce or mental breakdown.

Even a seemingly happy event, such as the birth or adoption of a first child, represent a "crisis" for it is almost always accompanied by a degree of tension and unforeseen problems. "Whenever a family adds or subtracts a member," Mrs. Glasser says, "it is extremely vulnerable."

But the experience can be a positive one, she continues. Parents and children adapt to the problems and find creative, satisfying solutions. The experience often draws them closer and makes them more self-confident about adjusting to future change.

How can families prepare themselves to handle emergencies? "Husbands and wives should be flexible," Mrs. Glasser replies, "and able to assume all roles. The family in which the male is the sole breadwinner and home repairman and the female handles all housekeeping, shopping, and childcare faces a difficult adjustment if one partner is gone or incapacitated."

"All responsibilities should be shared," the U-M educator stresses, "and this includes children. We deprive our children of many learning opportunities to save ourselves inconvenience. We don't let them prepare meals because they might mess up the kitchen; we don't let them weed the garden because they might pull up a plant."

"Children need to know they have important functions within the family. They feel good about themselves when they contribute to its well-being."

Grandparents are another unused resource, particularly in times of crisis, Mrs. Glasser notes. "Divorce is a poignant example. What happens to the parents of the spouse who is not awarded custody of the children? On top of seeing the marriage break up, they face the chance of never seeing their grandchildren again."

Typically, the wife assumes that her in-laws have taken her husband's side and are furious with her. More often, grandparents are not interested

in building hostilities but in restoring a sense of equilibrium. Their support can help ease the parents and children through a difficult transition period."

The news media have showered attention on the "extended family," the "blended family," and the "single parent household." But the people who are living within these situations need more information about how to cope with their complex and shifting relationships, Mrs. Glasser says.

She believes family life education should be an indispensable part of the school curriculum, beginning with kindergarten. She helped develop such a curriculum in Australia in 1973 while on sabbatical leave as a consultant to the Australian state and federal governments.

"But in this country, many school systems equate family life education with sex education. Since the latter is so controversial, they avoid the whole subject area."

"It's a shame," Mrs. Glasser declares, "because even the youngest children can benefit from an open discussion of how family members get along with one another, make decisions, and solve problems."

"What better training ground do we have for learning to succeed in school, on the job, and in all other life situations? Families deserve far more attention from researchers and policy makers," she contends.

"The family is the most flexible institution which performs tasks that maintain the stability of society. It must be strengthened."

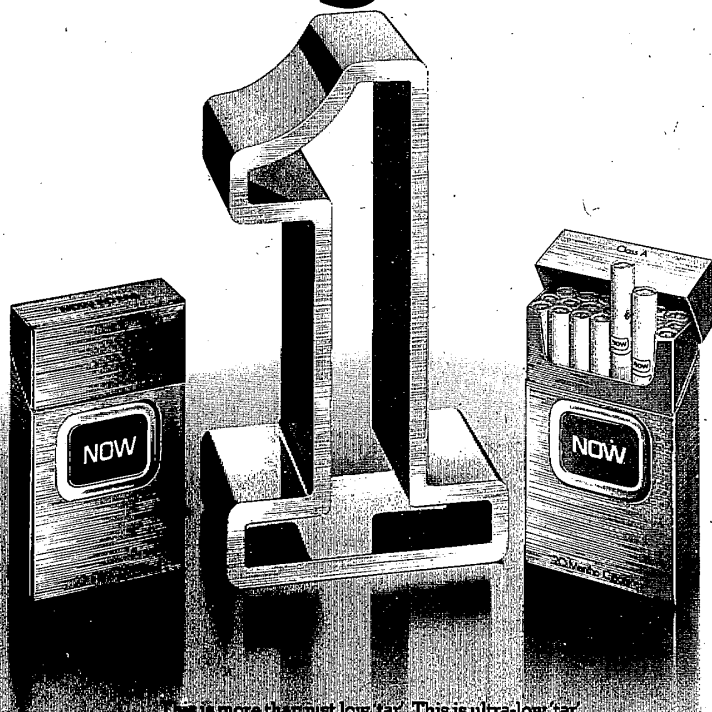
Booth space open at OCC

The Women's Center of Oakland Community College, Orchard Ridge campus, Farmington Hills, is sponsoring its Autumnfest Music and Art Fair from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Oct. 1 on campus. The fair will feature local artists and musicians.

Artists interested in applying for booth space may obtain an application at the counseling center located in M Building, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday-Thursday, or by writing the Women's Center.

Applications must be received by Sept. 1 so that artists may be advised of designated booth areas by Sept. 15.

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