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# Individualism As The Philosophical Concept: Definition And Effects

Individualism was born as a philosophy and dates way back to the early 19th century, which followed the American revolution and Declaration of Independence, (a statement of extreme individualism). It signifies elevating the interest of the individual above the collective interest.

It is based on the idea that the relevant units of ethical or political inquiry are the individual human beings, as opposed to a race, society, sex, class, or other groups. Individualism places an emphasis on the moral worth of an individual. Even though the concept of individualism seems straightforward, there are different ways of understanding it better, both in practice and in theory. It has resulted in becoming an essential part of different ideologies. Individualism in America was idealist and universalist but later on, it acquired a harsher approach as it became infused with the elements of social Darwinism (survival of the fittest).

Individualism believes in one's individuality, their diversity, and their freedom over conformity and authority. It emphasizes the uniqueness, independence and separateness of people. It's a part of many political and philosophical movements' like- egoism, liberalism, humanism, anarchism, libertarianism, and existentialism.

While individualism involves conceiving people as autonomous and self-directed and prioritizes uniqueness and independence as cultural values, collectivist cultures see people as connected with others and places an emphasis on interdependence, family relationships, and social conformity. While individualism seems harmless, we will now analyse it a little further and look into the impact and effects it has on the community as a whole and on the family structure.

## The Impact of Individualism on The Community and on The Family Structure

Individualism is often accused of promoting selfishness and greed at the expense of the common good. Some argue that individualism causes economic inequality, corporate and political corruption, and leads to the fragmentation of the society. Individualism has been criticized and condemned from both the secular and religious perspectives and from both the right and left. It glorifies oneself, their private, personal environments, while neglecting the involvement of the public and communal attachment.

It is equated with selfishness and narcissism. Republicans are of the perception that individualism deprives the state of the support and active involvement of the citizens, thereby threatening democratic institutions. Some of the individualists also support egotism, social inequality, and the termination of social and political institutions. Individualism is a concept that can be applied many ways and the biggest difference among philosophies of individualism is whether they promote concern only for oneself, or for every individual.

With the advent of individualism, family life has declined to a great extent. Instead of the couple being a team, adults are considered as autonomous beings and marriage is nothing but a mere

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contract between individuals which can easily be broken by agreement.

A published research indicated that above 40% of marriages now end in a divorce, and for the first time (in American history), more than 50% of the adult population are unmarried. Besides, over one-quarter of households comprise of people living alone, and this rate is quickly rising. Individualism is affecting the purity and sacredness of familial ties, and the move away from collectivism is resulting in consequences for the family. Ultimately, it is not just the parents, but also the children who suffer as a result of divorce. Children are often being treated as objects when families split.

Research has shown that children whose parents divorce are more likely to be less healthy, suffer from mental health problems, acquire fewer qualifications, die earlier and get involved in crimes. The reason behind this is the absence of a proper family, where both the mother and father play a role in raising their child, negotiate through problems and find solutions. This provides a healthy atmosphere for the child to grow. Without that experience the children are more likely to have difficulties in relationships and may have broken marriages themselves. What also needs to be noted is that family values have eroded to the extent of a serious crisis. The family unit is essential to uphold society. And it is undeniable that a healthy marriage boosts happiness in individuals and is the primary vehicle to give rise to responsible individuals for the future generations.

Individualism not only weakens the family in terms of parental rights but also influences the marital bond between the husband and wife negatively.

It has also progressed in the Supreme Court jurisprudence to incorporate a number of rights that give an individual, the right to sodomy. Many countries now permit homosexual individuals to sanctify their sodomy in marriage even though marriage has always been understood to be between a man and a woman.

What also needs to be taken into account is that there has been a sharp decline in the membership of organisations that brought meaning, goal and social opportunities to the people and the communities. One of the strongest indicators of heightened individualism is the increase in socioeconomic development. Although this makes sense, what makes it a problem is that, in such a setting, the more the individuals and their families are better off and well-to-do, the more concern they show towards remaining that way. This need is the basis of the growth of the economy—numbers have to constantly rise in order to retain social position, while creating a strong sense of competition, on which the free market relies. But what one acquires in personal wealth the society loses in collective power.

Parallel to this declination has been an upsurge in the use of social media, as well as an increase in the use of computer games and other related solitary activities. All of this indicates a considerable decline in the time spent socializing and an increase in the time spent alone.

Research also shows that social ties and social support act as protection for an individual's mental health, especially in the presence of chronic and acute stress. It is proven that social support can contribute greatly towards the prevention of a depressive episode. This is especially so when faced with particularly harmful and life changing events such as a divorce, unemployment or the death of a loved one.

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Studies have found that the rise in proportion of people living alone is directly proportional to the rising rates of suicide. Another finding by French sociologist- Emile Durkheim, showed that people who include themselves socially have lower rates of suicide as compared to those who are socially isolated, because social isolation can be extremely painful.

Mental health research shows that, social ties, social support, and the community as a whole improves mental health to a great extent and reduces mental illnesses. While on the other hand, individualism can lead to isolation, loneliness and more alienation, which in the long run can be detrimental to the individual's mental health.

All of the above factors solidify the argument against individualism. It affects the family, the society, the government, the country and the world. In the future, it seems, individualism will continue to rise and its rule will never end. As for religion, it will decline; as for marriage, it will be postponed; as for ideologies, they will be rejected; as for patriotism, it will be abandoned and as for strangers, they shall be distrusted. The rise of individualism can only end when we adopt a selfless attitude, when the welfare of the community is placed above our own selfish interests.

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