



The following excerpt is from *Divorced Dads: Shattering the Myths*, published by Tarcher/Putnam. This groundbreaking book, which Diane co-authored with researcher, Sanford L. Braver, PhD, became the subject of a 20/20 report by John Stossel.

What if one of the most significant pieces of social data of our time was flatly wrong, the result of a glaring arithmetic error?

In 1985, a book was published that immediately had a profound effect on how the general public viewed the economic impact that divorce had on women versus men, a book that, in the end, came to be recognized as having been based on flawed analyses, even according to its own author. Based on her comprehensive ten-year California study, the book, *The Divorce Revolution: The Unexpected Social and Economic Consequences for Women and Children in America*, by Harvard sociologist Lenore Weitzman, Ph.D., proclaimed that after a divorce, women and children suffer on average a 73 percent drop in their standard of living. Fathers, on the other hand, were actually found to benefit economically from the termination of their marriage, since whatever income they retained went to support only themselves. According to Weitzman, the average divorced man's standard of living increases by 42 percent.

If ever anyone needed any evidence to fuel their outrage against divorced fathers, to contribute to their bad divorced dad beliefs, or to inform them what is wrong with the divorce system and why so many men are moved to abandon their families, this was what they were waiting for. Social scientists, divorce professionals, some feminist writers, policymakers, and the media jumped on this news with all the zeal of a dog with a fresh bone. On the book jacket, the past President of the American Sociological Association called it "social science at its best"; a divorce judge was quoted as saying it would be "required reading for all lawyers and judges in family law"; and feminists Jessie Bernard and Betty Friedan gushed, respectively, "The book is a winner" and "I hope that Weitzman's compelling analysis and proposals will stimulate new legal thinking about the realities of equity and equality in divorce." An AP newswire story later printed widely in major newspaper around the country called Weitzman's findings "jawdropping,...[and] widely influential in the movement to change America's divorce and child support laws."

It is probably impossible to overestimate how influential Weitzman's 73 percent figure was. Her data, for example, are widely cited in legislative debates, and she herself has testified before Congress. A search of databases found that over 175 newspaper and magazine stories have since cited Weitzman's numbers.

Even this figure understates enormously the extent to which her findings have invaded popular culture. Like a virus out of control, Weitzman's results have surfaced in an unknown number of reports in which her figures are erroneously attributed to other sources. For example, in the January 24, 1993, edition of *The Arizona Republic* newspaper, an article stated, "...that observation is underscored by *U.S. Census figures*, which indicate that an average ex-husband's *income* increases 42 percent on average after a divorce, while an ex-wife's *income* declines 72 percent." The italicized words represent the errors in this quote. ...

... I, too, had been curious about Weitzman's findings, because, in some previous work, I had attempted similar analyses, using the same method she and Hoffman and Duncan used (a method I now believe — and will later argue — has serious deficiencies), and got a figure of a 26 percent drop in standard of living for divorced mothers, very close to every other researcher's results except Weitzman's. I, too, had called her, in late 1989, to ask some questions about exactly how she had gotten her figures, since I wanted to replicate her procedures as closely as possible with my own sample. She told me she didn't remember or couldn't answer any of my questions because a graduate student had actually conducted the analyses, and the data tapes were in a state of disarray. She mentioned that other researchers around the country were in communication with her also, having trouble corroborating her findings.

Then I asked her the loaded question I had prepared. "You know, Dr. Weitzman, I have an idea I want to run by you about why your results were so different from everyone else's. When I first attempted my analyses on mothers and picked up my computer printout, I looked at the bottom line and saw the figure 74 percent. I thought to myself: 'a 74 percent drop — almost exactly the same figure Professor Weitzman found.' But then I paused a minute and remembered what figure I had programmed the computer to give me: 'What percent of the former, pre-divorce standard of living, is the present, post-divorce standard of living?' It was *that* figure that was 74 percent. But that figure means the *drop* is only 26 percent, much like what others have found. [If one's income was \$10,000 and is *now* \$7,400, it is currently 74 percent *of its former value*, which is a 26 percent *drop* in income.] I wondered: 'Is my mistake possibly one that Professor Weitzman made as well? Would that account for her weird finding?' What do you think, Dr. Weitzman, is that possibly a mistake you also made?"

There was silence, except for labored breathing on the other end of the phone. I determined not to say anything more. I waited a very, very long time. Finally she answered, "I'm not sure I can rule out what you said. I'll investigate it and get back to you." And she hung up.

But she never got back to me.