

Couples divorce for relocation compensation

A wave of divorces recently swept a small village in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, with more than 160 couples rushing to the local marriage and divorce registration office within a short space of time, the Nanjing Morning Post reported.

Unlike the usual case when a couple split due to a disharmonious relationship, these couples, in ages ranging from the 20s to 80s, divorced for an ulterior motive – to get more relocation compensation.

Marriage and interests in the eyes of villagers

Located in Gaoxin District, Jiangbei Village was included in the provincial capital's urban land requisition project long time ago. After large-scale demolition, the village was left in ruins, with only a few shops left scattered along the main streets.

Interviewed by the Nanjing Morning Post on the reason for their divorce, villagers were not at all shy. "This is indeed the case, and we do it because we want to get more relocation compensation out of it," many said.

According to local land acquisition and relocation policy, compensation is measured in terms of household size, and each family group can receive an additional 70-square-meter of housing and 131,000 yuan (about US\$19,070).

The compensation proved very tempting. So far, most of the 160-plus households in the village have completed their divorce formalities, according to a shop owner, who used the term "fake divorce" to describe the act.

Many divorced couples still live together. A man in his 80s said that he and his wife had a very good relationship, but they divorced for financial reasons. He said that their "fake divorce" was aimed at getting more compensation for the future relocation.

Asked what might happen if they couldn't remarry, a villager explained that nobody cared about it for the time being. "Everybody is doing it and we'll deal with other things later. Just wait and see," the villager said, adding that the divorce is worthwhile if it could help them get more compensation.

Loopholes in land requisition and relocation policies

According to the house demolition policy, only consensual divorces occurring at least five years before could be used to determine household size for demolition and relocation compensation. So, why did so many couples still rush to register for divorce and therefore get benefits?

Things always sort themselves out. A local legal service agency sent staff workers to the village to help villagers handle the business. The workers

were familiar with helping villagers seeking the “fake divorce” approach to avoid the limits on relocation cases.

This time, they explained to the villagers, there were no clauses in the demolition and relocation policy stipulating that a court-approved divorce couldn't enjoy the compensation policy.

Villagers followed the staff's advice to use this loophole and, as a result, divorce service fees subsequently surged from 5,000 yuan to 15,000 yuan.

Later, an official from local house demolition office said that the office did receive complaints that some villagers had taken the advantage of the policy loophole; however, he said, the office had yet to determine whether the demolition and relocation project will continue to be implemented without any change in the policy document.

Experts warn of severe consequences of ‘fake divorce’

A similar case happened in a village in the province's Changzhou City seven years ago when 84 couples rushed to register their divorce within the space of a few days in order to get more relocation compensation. Similar cases also happened recently in the province's Jiangxizhou, Jiangning and Pukou areas.

So, the “fake divorce” cases reveal one of the anomalies emerging amid rapid urbanization in China.

Legal experts argue “fake divorce” for such a purpose can bring about potential legal consequences, so it is a “dangerous game.” People who use loopholes existing in State policies for their personal benefits not only damage family harmony, but also undermine social stability.

Zhou Haiwang, vice-director of the Institute of Population and Development at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, said that when so many people decide to divorce against their wish for family stability, policy makers should consider an adjustment, China Daily reported.

Legal experts suggest that the key to curb this phenomenon at source lies in the government departments, who must carefully check and carry out relevant policies and even set up a remedial mechanism.