

Identifying Factors Related to Divorce in Iranian Couples: A Case Study in Yazd, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Background: Divorce is one of the most damaging social issues. Since the divorce rates are increasing rapidly, the current study evaluated the effects of factors leading to divorce.

Methods: In this qualitative study, by using two-stage sampling method (purposive and snowball) 4 couples on the verge of divorce visiting consulting center and 8 experts with experience in the field of family and divorce in Yazd city were selected. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. The contents of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a content analysis method.

Results: The experts who participated in this study included several marriage and divorce registrars, lawyers, and family counselors with over 10 years of experience in the field of family and divorce. The mean age of women on the verge of divorce was 33 ± 8.51 years and for men 37.2 ± 6.13 years. Fifty percent of the couples had a bachelor's degree and 62.5% of them were self-employed. Most of them had a marriage period of 5-10 years. A total of 23 codes were extracted from the interviews. The codes were organized into four main themes. Major topics included lack of preparation for marriage, psychological factors, unfavorable marital relationships, and social factors.

Conclusion: The interference of families, extramarital relationships, early marriage and the lack of communication skills and media literacy are the most influential factors of divorce.

Keywords: Family, Divorce, Interview, Qualitative Research, Iran

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Introduction

The family is the first public institution and no society can claim health without a healthy family, and every social harm has its roots in the family system (1). Family structure has been linked to children's and adolescents' health and well-being, with a nuclear family being indicative of better health outcomes compared to a single-parent family or a step-family (2). One of the most important family injuries is divorce. Divorce is a controversial and disastrous social issue in Iran and many other societies (3).

Divorce trends have been increasing worldwide, with industrialized countries experiencing higher rates compared to developing countries (4). The worldwide average crude divorce rate in 2021 was 1.8 (5). However, divorce rates vary significantly across countries, with Western industrialized countries generally having higher rates than highly religious Asian and African countries (6). It is important to note that divorce trends vary widely across countries and regions. For example, in South Korea, divorce rates have been increasing in recent years, but recent changes in family law have emphasized the protection of minor children and gender equality (7). In Denmark, the most frequently given motives for divorce were lack of love/intimacy, communication problems, lack of sympathy/respect/trust, and growing apart (8).

According to statistics, the rate of divorce growth has consistently outpaced the rate of marital growth in recent years. By the end of 2016, Iran's crude divorce rate had reached its highest level, standing at 2.27 per 1,000 people (9). In 2016, the divorce-to-marriage ratio reached its highest level at 25.3 divorces per 100 marriages (10). Between 2004 and 2013, the overall mean divorce rate increased in the five most populous cities of Iran: Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz, Mashhad, and Shiraz (11). The age range of 30 to 34 years accounted for the biggest portion of this number (12). Between 2006 and 2016, Yazd province experienced an average yearly growth rate in divorce of 10.09%, making it one of the three provinces with the highest divorce rate growth. Social analysts are worried about the rapid increase

in divorce rate(13, 14).

Of all the social problems, none have as long-term effects as divorce. Many studies have shown that divorce has many side effects on the physical and mental health of parents and their children (15). Divorced people feel less energetic and experience symptoms of depression and aggression, anxiety, social isolation, and more problems (16). On the other hand, children of divorce also face the risk of behavioral disorders, poor educational performance, drug and alcohol addiction, mental illnesses, and difficulty in establishing relationships in adulthood (17, 18).

Several factors contribute to the increasing divorce rates in Iran. According to experts, the most important reasons for divorce in the country include weak literacy, changing patterns of matching, increased individualism and self-interest seeking, unemployment, addiction, and cyber ads (online advertising) (10). Additionally, rapid economic development such as inflation factors in housing sector and income inequality, social transformation, and modernization in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, including Iran, have led to deep cultural changes in marriage and marital instability (18-20).

Divorce as a phenomenon is not a one-dimensional event. Unlike something that occurs in a single instant, it occurs over the course of time as a result of personal, economic, social, and cultural variables. This study seeks to qualitatively examine the factors affecting the occurrence of divorce and the experiences of applicants and experts in Yazd city in light of the rise in divorce statistics in general and the rise in social issues brought on by divorce.

Method

Study design and sampling

In this qualitative study, 16 participants were selected by using two-stage sampling (firstly snowball and secondly purposive sampling) from May 2022 to Feb 2023. At first, a number of experts with over 10 years of professional experience in the field of family and divorce were

selected for interviews in a purposive method. At the same time, using the snowball sampling method, each expert was asked to introduce other experts in the field of family and divorce, and interviews were also conducted with them. Four couples (4 women, 4 men) on the verge of divorce visiting Exir Consulting Center were selected. These applicants were consciously and purposefully selected by the researcher. The sampling process continued until data saturation.

At first, the nature, aims, and procedure of the study and the role of each participant were explained. The study included experts with over 10 years of experience in the field of family and divorce, who were selected from marriage and divorce registrars, divorce lawyers, and family counselors. Couples who were on the verge of divorce and had filed for divorce in the justice system were selected for the interview. They were referred to the counseling clinic for pre-divorce counseling by the same system. Any participant who declined to be interviewed was excluded from the study.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. The researcher first assured the confidentiality of the information and asked for the

permission of the participants to record the interviews. During the interviews, it was tried to use a separate room without any disturbing factors. Each interview lasted for 30-60 min. Each interview started with an open-ended question and follow-up questions were asked according to the information provided by the participant in order to clarify the concept of the study.

Data analysis

The interviews were analyzed by content analysis. Following verbatim transcription of the interview content, the data were gathered and subjected to content analysis. To comprehend the participants' emotions, every piece of the transcribed interviews content was first carefully examined. After that, the terms that revealed a common idea were put in a category, and the key terms were compared for similarities and differences. Then, the main themes were extracted.

Results

The mean age of couples on the verge of divorce was 37.2 ± 6.13 years for men and 33 ± 8.51 years for women, and the mean duration of their marriage was 9.25 ± 5.35 years. Half of them had a bachelor's degree and most of them had a self-employed job, Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of couples on the verge of divorce

	Couples	Age	Education	Job	Marriage duration
1	Woman	35	Master	Self-employed	10 years
	Man	38	Bachelor	Employee	10 years
2	Woman	24	Diploma	Self-employed	8 years
	Man	32	Bachelor	Self-employed	8 years
3	Woman	46	Diploma	Housewife	17 years
	Man	47	Elementary	Self-employed	17 years
4	Woman	27	Bachelor	Employee	2 years
	Man	32	Bachelor	Self-employed	2 years

Overall, 23 codes were extracted from the interviews. The codes were organized into four main themes. The main themes included

unpreparedness for marriage, psychological factors, unfavorable marital relationships, and social factors (Table 2).

Table 2. Themes and subthemes derived from the statements of experts and divorce applicants about the risk factors for divorce

Themes	Subthemes
Unpreparedness for marriage	Early marriage Lack of life skills literacy Insufficient premarital acquaintance Forced marriage
Psychological factors	Personality disorders Violence Antisocial personality Being skeptical Lying Stinginess Lack of affection Uncontrollable anger
Unfavorable marital relationships	Extramarital affairs Couples' sexual issues Cultural differences Emotional Divorce Age difference (underage marriage)
Social factors	Social networks Interference of families Addiction Criminal offence Not a family-oriented person

Unpreparedness for marriage

This theme had four subthemes including forced marriage, insufficient premarital acquaintance, lack of life skills literacy, and early marriage. "We would argue about trivial matters and struggled to find a peaceful resolution. Our pleasant conversation would rapidly turn into a conflict before long", said one of the participants. "Girls who get married between the ages of 14 and 17 are twice as likely to get divorced compared to girls who marry at the age of 20 or older", an expert said.

Psychological factors

This theme was made up of eight subthemes including personality disorders, violence, and antisocial personality, being skeptical, lying, stinginess, and lack of affection. "My spouse is in a bad mood regularly. He frequently physically abuses me without any justification. Additionally, he engages in inappropriate and crude humor with other people" reported a divorced applicant.

Unfavorable marital relationships

According to the participants, extramarital affairs, couples' sexual issues, and societal differences were the three most significant subthemes. "Extramarital affairs have become increasingly common among men and women recently, leading to a significant rise in divorce cases. Many of these affairs stem from problems in sexual intimacy and lack of consideration for each other's needs" an authority said. "Our sexual experiences were never satisfying and enjoyable due to my husband's consistent issues with ejaculation, causing me immense sadness. This eventually led me to betray his trust by having an affair" a participant said.

Social factors

This overarching theme included five subthemes including the importance of social networks, family interference, and financial issues in couples' separation. "They interfered in every situation. They discouraged my wife from spending time with my family in the early stages of our marriage

because mine lived far away. Why do you still wash dishes by hand when everyone else has a dishwasher? Her sister would often inquire" a participant recalled. "Our financial situation became a constant source of tension between us. We found ourselves arguing over the smallest expenses, each disagreement further chipping away at our love and affection", a second divorce applicant claimed.

"Social networks promote fusionism, diversification, and hedonism in the new generation. Also, compared to the past, it has made communication much easier, but it is not a reason for divorce" explained an expert.

Discussion

The results showed that lack of marriage preparation, lack of mental health and emotional management skills, unfavorable marital relations, and social damage were the four underlying factors for the divorce and separation of couples in Yazd City. It seems that the most important reason can be summed up in social damage and unfavorable marital relations.

Regarding the dimension of marriage preparation, perhaps the most important theme in the failure of marriages and divorce is the lack of preparation for people to form a new family. Akhavi Samrin (3) reported that decision-making based on feelings and insistence to marry the person in question without knowing the result of logic can lead a person to make a wrong choice. A person who has not reached full maturity cannot have the right criteria for marriage and his view of marriage cannot be based on reality. Also, he may not have the necessary knowledge about the opposite sex and marital relationship, and this issue causes tension and instability in the relationship (21).

The results of the study showed that the impact of weak literacy and marital skills on couples' marriage can be significant. Communication and relationship skills are important aspects of marriage, and previous studies have shown that couples who improve their communication skills and increase intimacy in their marriage can reduce conflicts and improve their marital satisfaction (22-24).

Communication skills training is one of the most important ways to enhance marital adjustment and satisfaction (22). In a study, communication skills training and conflict resolution tactics were found to have a positive effect on marital satisfaction in married women in Kermanshah (22). Another study showed that communication skills training can positively affect the family relationship between young couples (24). Conflict resolution skills were also found to reduce marital conflict and enhance couples' mental health (25).

The second theme is mental health. Psychological issues and lack of personality stability are reported to be one of the factors affecting divorce. Men's mental and personality problems in most cases lead to couples' tension and conflict, and as a result divorce (26). One of the disorders that most couples mentioned was paranoid personality disorder. This disorder appears in the form of lack of trust in others and skepticism, it is one of the problematic factors in relationships with others and marital relationships (27). Therefore, in the current research, factors related to mental health, such as paranoid, antisocial personality traits, etc., have been mentioned as factors related to divorce.

The results indicated that domestic violence can have a significant impact on a couple's marriage. It can cause physical, emotional, and psychological harm to both partners and can lead to a breakdown in trust and communication. Domestic violence can also lead to a decrease in marital satisfaction and quality of life (28, 29). Studies have shown that relationship enrichment counseling can be effective in improving marital satisfaction among couples with a history of domestic violence (30).

Extramarital relationships and sexual problems can have a significant impact on a couple's marriage. According to a study, 34% of extramarital affairs ended in divorce, while 43.5% of marriages were preserved but in an overall negative atmosphere. The impact of extramarital relationships on betrayed spouses can include damage to their self-image, personal confidence, or sexual confidence, feelings of abandonment, betrayals of trust, enraged feelings, and/or a surge of justification to leave their spouses. Sexual problems

can also lead to marital issues, with sexual dysfunction occurring in almost half of marriages and in about 75% of couples who need therapy or assistance in marital problems. Other studies explain that hypnosis has been found to increase sexual arousal and reduce pain during sexual activity and the intensity of pain to address these issues (31).

The interference or influence of the primary families is one of the most significant societal harms that can result in a couple's separation or divorce. Akhavi Samrin's study has demonstrated that family involvement is one of the significant causes of marital conflicts from the start to the end of every marriage (3). The immaturity of both men and women may be the root of these interferences (32). Self-efficacy in relationships can serve as a protective element in marriage, since it demonstrates a couple's maturity and personality maturity. In this study, economic problems have also been mentioned as one of the common problems by the participants causing divorce, but not as the most important (33, 34).

Another effective social damage is social networks. Social networks can also play a role in increasing the divorce rate. Valenzola et al. reported that the use of Facebook has increased the number of divorces (35). It seems that social networks, in addition to having many benefits, can create grounds for divorce. Therefore, the lifestyle and attitude of the new generation towards family formation and marriage have changed and they will not follow the life pattern of their parents. Gaining insight into the causes and underlying factors of divorce from the perspective of experts in the field can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation and be instrumental in implementing effective policies to prevent divorce. Due to couples' lack of cooperation on the verge of divorce and the policy of maintaining confidentiality of their information, only couples from a single counseling clinic were interviewed. It should be noted that the results of this qualitative study cannot be generalized to other societies, which are considered as limitations of this study.

Conclusion

Weak literacy and marital skills, families and relative's interference, extramarital relationships and early marriage (less than 22 years old) are the most important risk factors for divorce. It seems that identifying the main causes of divorce can help the authorities to take suitable steps for stopping this social process in order to prevent divorce. Implementing premarital counseling and life skills training to improve communication and conflict resolution skills, raising awareness about domestic violence and providing resources to victims, and sex education have also been found to increase sexual knowledge and improve sexual attitudes. Additionally, collaboration during conflict resolution has been found to be an effective way to solve marital problems.

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Conflict of interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of this research included obtaining informed consent from the participants and recording their interviews, not considering the names of the interviewees, observing the principle of secrecy and confidentiality of information and maintaining the right to withdraw at every stage of the research.

Code of Ethics

IR.SSU.SPH.REC.1401.064

Authors' contribution:

F. M, M. TS and MH. L; contributed to the study concept and design, N. T; participated in collecting, analysis, and interpretation of data, N. T; wrote the manuscript with support from, F. M and MH. L. All

authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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