



A Community-Based Survey Studying Causes of Divorce in Rafsanjan City, Iran (2021)

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Abstract

Background: Identification of causes of divorce in any society is the first and most important step in proposing practical solutions to this social problem. This study aimed to investigate certain causes of divorce in a community of divorce applicants in Rafsanjan, Iran.

Materials and Methods: In this descriptive study, 278 people (139 couples) applying for divorce, referring to counseling centers in Rafsanjan, Iran (2021) were enrolled via convenience sampling method. The causes of divorce were examined from the perspective of the counsellor and subjects. The data were analyzed using SPSS.

Results: The mean age were 34.70 ± 9.85 years. From the perspective of counsellors, psychological- psychiatric and sociocultural issues were the most common reasons for divorce (19.4% and 19.1% respectively). Men stated that the most important causes of divorce were lack of boundaries (parental interference) (21.6%), lack of empathetic dialogue (18%), and lack of conflict resolution skills (17.6%). According to women, the principal causes of divorce were the husband's addiction (17.3%), poor anger control skills (15.1%), and economic problems (15.1%).

Conclusion: The findings of this study indicated that apart from the issue of addiction and economy, other causes of divorce are related to marital skills, which can be reduced with proper pre-marriage education.

Keywords: Divorce, Causes, Psychology.

Introduction

Divorce is not a one-dimensional event but a process whose various aspects may appear over time. This requires a series of changes and reorganization of the family foundation over several years [1]. Divorce is a social harm whose prevalence has been growing in most countries in recent decades [2]. The divorce rate has

been reported to be 14.29 in Iran (2017), 42.03 in the United States (2017) [3], and 34.69 in Japan (2018) [4]. Based on the latest statistics published by the Iranian National Organization for Civil Registration, the total number of registered cases of divorce in urban and rural areas of Iran was 21,170 (1996). This figure reached 181,049 cases in 2016, indicating an increase of nearly 75% [5].

Couples have to accept divorce under certain circumstances. However, most cases of divorce are due to couples' unrealistic emotional and economic expectations, medical and psychiatric disorders, addiction, aggression, and betrayal [6]. Numerous domestic and international studies have reported the strong psychological, social, economic, and even legal effects of divorce on those involved in this event [7]. There is no doubt that family conflicts and parental arguments in the presence of children can strongly affect children's emotions and even encourage aggressive behaviors in them in the long run [8]. This painful breakup can seriously harm and injure the spouses. Since divorce is a complicated phenomenon with both individual and social aspects, it can be considered the basis of various other crises [9]. Studies have evidenced a wide range of underlying causes of emotional separation suggesting that various intertwined factors influence this phenomenon. It is necessary to promote couples' skills, such as emotional intelligence, effective communication, and problem-solving, to reduce the unpleasant consequences of divorce and improve the status quo [10]. A study has categorized divorce as a serious problem in Iranian society and one of the ten most stressful life events [11].

The first step in preventing divorce is identifying the causes of this traumatic event [12]. The evaluation of causes of divorce in a certain region will greatly help the mental health experts and officials in that region with short-term and long-term planning for lowering the divorce rate. This study hence aimed to investigate reasons for filing for divorce among divorce applicants visiting the psychological counselling centers affiliated with the Judiciary Department of Rafsanjan, Iran.

Materials and Methods

This descriptive cross-sectional study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Rafsanjan University of Medical Sciences (IR.RUMS.REC.1400.010). The study population consisted of all divorce applicants who visited the psychological counselling centers affiliated with the Judiciary of Rafsanjan, Iran, in 2021. As a rule, the family court introduces divorce applicants to these centers for four counselling sessions. Based on the Cochran formula [13], the sample size was calculated as 284.

Formula 1.

$$n = \frac{(Z_{\alpha}^2 \times S^2)}{d^2}$$

N=1080
d=0.1
z=1.96
p=q=0.5

The participants were selected through continuous sampling which is a convenient non-probability sampling method. The inclusion criteria was the first attendance of the couple in the counseling session and the participation of both couples in the counseling session and the exclusion criterion was having less than 4 counseling sessions or one of the couples' failure to participate in the counseling session.

The research tool was a demographic checklist covering age, marriage age, length of the marriage, economic status, type of marriage, divorce applicant, and number of children. The checklist of divorce factors based on the opinions of couples covered Mental causes, Sociocultural causes, Remarriage issues, Sexual causes, Economic causes, Violence-related problems, Physical causes and Addiction. The checklist of divorce factors based on the consultant's opinion captured Psychological and psychiatric Sociocultural, Addiction factors, Factors of violence, Economic factors, Sexual factors, and Remarriage Physical factors. Honarian and Younesi [13] used this checklist in their study to categorize the causes of divorce. The validity of this questionnaire was 0.7 in Honarian's study [13] and 0.73 in the present study. The divorce applicants were required to attend four counselling sessions from Saturday to Thursday (evening) in the counselling centers. The participants were briefed on the research objectives as well as procedure and were assured that their personal information would be kept confidential. Those who expressed their oral consent entered the study. The research checklist was completed for all participants at the end of the fourth counselling session. In addition, the participants were asked to mention the causes of their divorce petition or other marital problems in this checklist. If one of the couples were absent in counselling sessions for any reason, including a compromise, both were excluded from the study. The data were analyzed using Chi-square test in SPSS-18.

Table 1 presents the checklist used for evaluating the causes of divorce (mental causes, sociocultural causes, remarriage issues, sexual causes, economic causes, violence-related problems, physical causes, and addiction).

Results

Of the 278 participants in the study, the age of 125 people (45%) was between 31 and 40 years, the age of marriage of 192 people (69.1%) was between 21 and 30 years, and the economic status of 166 people (59.7%) was average. Among the 139 couples studied, the marriage style of 66 couples (47.7%) was traditional, divorce petitioners in 80 couples (57.5%) were women, the number of children in 56 couples (40.3%) was one child, and the duration of marriage in 61 couples (9 /43%) was up to 5 years (Table 2).

Table 1. Study checklist including divorce factors and demographic characteristics

Mental causes	Lack of mutual understanding or compromise, failure to meet psychological needs, personality problems, bad manners, psychological problems, miserliness, disobedience, problems with children, irresponsibility, prejudice, intellectual immaturity, hatred of each other, substantial gaps between expectations and reality
Sociocultural causes	Family interference, cultural-educational differences, educational difference, social differences, age differences, woman's employment, forced marriage, religious-ideological differences, non-observance of moral principles, the unrestrained transition from tradition to modernity, imprisonment of one of the spouses, and familiarity of women with their right
Remarriage issues	Temporary marriage, second marriage
Sexual causes	Failure to satisfy sexual needs, illicit relationships (infidelity), and betrayal
Economic causes	Failure to meet welfare needs, economic problems, non-payment of alimony, occupational problems and unemployment, women's independence
Violence-related problems	Mental violence, abuse and physical violence, and property damage
Physical causes	Infertility and physical diseases
Addiction	Addiction to drugs or psychedelics, alcohol, and gambling
Marriage type	Traditional (Without prior acquaintance but with consent), Mandatory (Without prior acquaintance, without the lady's consent, with parental coercion), Romantic (With prior acquaintance and consent of both, with or without parents' opinion)
Economic status	Monthly income: up to 50 million Rials = poor, up to 100 million Rials= moderate, more than 100 million Rials = good

From counsellors' perspective, psychological and psychiatric issues accounted for the majority of the causes of divorce (19.4%), followed by sociocultural issues (19.1%). Addiction, violence, economic problems, sexual problems, remarriage, betrayal, and physical factors were the subsequent causes (Table 2). Male participants argued that the primary cause of divorce was the personal and family boundaries for couples (parental interference, 21.6%)

The male participants argued that the primary cause of divorce was the personal and family boundaries for couples (parental interference) (21.6%), while other important causes were lack of empathetic dialogue, lack of conflict resolution skills, inability to control anger, sexual dissatisfaction, improper distribution of power between spouses, lack of non-verbal affection, financial problems, and lack of verbal affection.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of subjects according to demographic variables

Variables	Subjects (n=278)		Variables	Couples (n=139)	
	group	No (%)		group	No (%)
Age (years)	<20	20 (7.2)	Marriage type	Traditional	66 (47.7)
	21-30	77 (27.7)		Mandatory	13 (9.2)
	31-40	125 (45)		Romantic	60 (43.1)
	>40	56 (20.1)		Men	40 (28.7)
Marriage Age (years)	<20	39 (14)	Divorce applicant	Women	80 (57.5)
	21-30	192 (69.1)		Both	19 (13.8)
	31-40	41 (14.7)		Without	31 (22.3)
	>40	6 (2.2)	1	56 (40.3)	
Economic	Poor	80 (28.8)	number of children	2	40 (28.7)
	moderate	166 (59.7)		3	9 (6.5)
	good	32 (11.5)		4	3 (2.2)
Total	278 (100)	Marriage duration (years)		up to 5	61 (43.9)
			6-10	32 (23.0)	
			11-20	31 (22.3)	
			>20	15 (10.8)	
		Total	Total	139 (100)	

Table 3. Frequency of causes of divorce from the couple's and consultant's point of view

Causes of divorce	Problematic causes from women's point of view	Problematic causes from men's point of view	Problematic causes from consultant's point of view
	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Involvement of parents and others			
lack of external demarcation (parental intervention)	10 (3.6)	60 (21.6)	
Lack of empathetic dialogue	24 (8.6)	50 (18)	
Lack of conflict resolution skills	8 (2.9)	49 (17.6)	
Inability to control anger	42 (15.1)	39 (14)	
sexual dissatisfaction	5 (1.8)	30 (10.8)	
Improper distribution of power between spouses	12 (4.3)	29 (10.4)	
Lack of non-verbal affection	24 (8.6)	10 (3.7)	
Financial problems	42 (15.1)	7 (2.5)	
Lack of verbal affection	30 (10.8)	4 (1.4)	
Spouse addiction	48 (17.3)		
Ideological differences	18 (6.5)		
Interference of others	12 (4.3)		
personal and family boundaries for couples (parental interference Lack of internal demarcation (lack of respect for personal differences)	3 (1.1)		
	Psychological and psychiatric		54 (19.4)
	Sociocultural		53 (19.1)
	Addiction factors		46 (16.5)
	Factors of violence		42 (15.1)
	Economic factors		42 (15.1)
	Sexual factors		33 (11.9)
	Remarriage		6 (2.2)
	Physical factors		2 (0.7)

Discussion

This study was conducted with 278 women and men applying for a divorce. Most participants were aged 31-40 years and 21-30 years respectively, with only 2.2% over 40 years. This is consistent with the findings of Honarian and Younesi in Tehran (13), Ghayyur on divorced American Muslims [14], a survey commissioned by the UAE Marriage Fund [15], and a study conducted by Bracher et al. in an Australian population [16]. All these studies have reported that most divorce applicants are aged 20 to 40 years. Marriage at an early age is considered a risk factor for marital life because such marriages are associated with low educational, financial, personal, and interpersonal resources, which can pose a wide range of marital problems and restrict the solutions available for marital conflicts [17].

Most divorce applicants in this study were in the first 5 years of their marital life (43.5%), which is in line with the findings of previous studies [13, 18, 19]. This indicates that spouses need to make more efforts to support each other and enhance their relationship in the early years of their marriage. Indeed, the early years of marriage are considered a critical period when most

problems threatening marital life may occur. However, some problems may arise during the later years of marital life; for example, the values and wishes of spouses may change over time in a way that they can no longer meet each other's expectations [13, 20]. The study results revealed that most divorce applicants were women (57.2%). This is concordant with the findings of some other studies reporting that women were more willing to leave a relationship or apply for a divorce [21, 22]. Although women tend to suffer more than men in divorce, most divorce cases or divorce petitions in most societies are filed by women. This can be attributed to many factors; for example, women are more sensitive to intimate qualities of marital relations. Moreover, since women take more responsibilities for household duties and raising children, it is easier for them to leave a non-intimate relationship [23]. On the other hand, the spouses who apply for a divorce usually force their partners to do so in order to suffer less damage legally [24]. This is true especially among Iranian couples, as this study revealed that consensual divorce accounted for 15.1% of divorce cases. Although men may also apply for a divorce, they are usually less willing to do so as they will have to fulfill their financial obligations to their wives (e.g., marriage portion). In Honarian and

Younesi's study, only 27.7% of divorce petitions were filed by men [13].

From counsellors' perspective, psychological and psychiatric issues accounted for most causes of divorce (19.4%), followed by sociocultural issues (19.15%). Addiction, violence, economic problems, sexual problems, remarriage, betrayal, and physical factors were ranked next. Bolhari et al. have found that psychological and sociocultural factors are among the top causes of divorce [25]. Shahmoradi showed that depression, paranoid thoughts, number of children, income level, and neuroticism are the strongest predictors of divorce, as increased depression, paranoid thoughts, and neuroticism elevate the risk of divorce [26]. It has also been demonstrated that the prevalence of psychiatric and personality disorders, such as schizoid personality disorder, avoidance, depression, dependent personality disorder, histrionic personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, negativism, masochism, schizotypal personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, thought disorder, major depressive disorder, and delusional disorder is higher in couples applying for divorce compared to other couples [27]. Personality traits and mental disorders are among the most important roots of divorce. Indeed, some personality and psychological characteristics increase tensions and conflicts between couples and threaten the persistence of their marital life. For example, neuroticism, lack of conscientiousness, interpersonal sensitivities, high levels of narcissism, paranoia, depression, anxiety, and obsession are negative personality traits that can increase the risk of divorce [28, 29].

This study investigated the sociocultural causes of divorce. Niazi et al. showed that cultural factors have moderate to large effects on the possibility of divorce [12]. Most of these factors are related to premarital and marital skills. Studies have indicated that poor communication and conflict settlement skills are among the main problems of couples with marital tensions [30]. This highlights the necessity of communication skills. Most marital disputes and quarrels result from violating the principles of correct communication [31]. Poor interaction reduces spouses' mutual understanding as well as their support for each other; it also discourages them from trying to meet each other's needs [13].

The male participants in this study believed that the primary causes of divorce were the lack of a red line for couples (parental interference) as well as the lack of attentive and empathic conversations. This indicates that girls can hardly separate themselves from their original families, which may lead to family interference in the marital life of couples [32]. Barikani et al. stated that family interference and dependence on families are among the main causes of divorce [33]. Based on the network theory, when others interfere with the life of

couples, they restrict the decision-making power of spouses, cause disputes between them, and, finally, increase the risk of separation or divorce [34].

The female participants of this study also stated that economic problems and poor anger control skills are the principal causes of divorce following addiction. This reveals the profound effect of addiction on the emotional and economic structures of the family. Hosseini et al. reported that family interference, husband's addiction, educational attainment of spouses, unfulfilled expectations, and forced marriage were among the main contributors to higher divorce rates in the studied population [35]. Scott et al. noted that poor commitment, infidelity, violence, and addiction were the main causes of divorce [36].

An important finding of this study is that sexual dissatisfaction was considered the fourth and twelfth cause of divorce from the perspective of men and women, respectively. This indicates that a correct and satisfactory emotional relationship between spouses can bring sexual satisfaction, and sexual dissatisfaction alone cannot lead to separation or divorce. This result is in line with the findings of some previous studies [37, 38].

Similar to any other scientific study, this research faced some limitations. First, since this study was conducted in Rafsanjan, Iran, the findings should be cautiously generalized to other populations or regions. Second, this study was conducted with the divorce applicants visiting counselling centers; since couples were in a state of anger, fear, and sadness during this period, they may fail to precisely explain the causes of their problems, which may be rooted in years of marital life. Third, the divorce applicants had already consulted a lawyer before filing their petitions. Thus, the lawyer's opinions could have influenced the divorce plaintiff and the legal procedure of divorce. Based on the study findings, premarital counselling is recommended to be mandatory, similar to other premarital tests, to raise couples' awareness of possible post-marital risks and challenges as well as promote their communication and marital skills. Further, the presence of spouses in the court for filing a case or petition against each other may initiate a power struggle between them, which may make it very difficult for them to compromise. It is recommended that spouses consult experts and counsellors before filing a case or petition.

Conclusion

The study findings demonstrated that parental interference, lack of attentive and empathic conversations, addiction, poor anger control skills, and economic issues were the primary reasons why the participants applied for divorce. In order to reduce the risk of divorce, young couples should gain an accurate understanding of their spouse's economic status and

attend premarital counselling programs to become familiar with personality and psychiatric issues as well as marital skills such as effective communication and conflict resolution.

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