



Intention to Divorce and Its Determinants in the Young Newly Marrieds: A Field-Based Cross-sectional Study from Iran

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Abstract

Background: Increasing the rate of divorce among young couples is a major social problem in Iran.

Objectives: This study was planned to identify the determinants of intention to divorce in order to guide future preventive interventions.

Methods: As a cross-sectional study, young married individuals whose marriages had lasted less than five years and who intended to divorce were interviewed in 2021 at Judiciary-affiliated counseling centers in Shiraz, Iran, using a validated questionnaire. Univariable and multivariable analyses (binary logistic regression: Backward LR) were conducted using SPSS software. Analyses were performed based on two different dichotomous categorizations (women/men, and marriages lasting less than 2 years/2 - 5 years).

Results: A total of 222 respondents, including 168 women (75.7%) and 54 men (24.3%) with a mean age of 27.4 ± 6.4 years, were interviewed. In 85 cases (38%), less than two years had passed since their marriage, while 137 participants (62%) had been married for 2 - 5 years. The median period between the first thought of divorce and the wedding ceremony was six months, while the median time from marriage to filing the divorce petition at the Judiciary was two years. The results of the regression analysis revealed that husbands' economic failure [odds ratio (OR) = 5.1], parsimony (OR = 3.7), chronic illness (OR = 3.4), parents' luxurious lifestyle (OR = 3.1), and discriminatory behaviors (OR = 2.9) were the main determinants of intention to divorce among women. Furthermore, in the group whose marriages had lasted 2 - 5 years compared to those married for less than 2 years, unemployment (OR = 5.5), non-payment of alimony (OR = 2.2), infidelity (OR = 2.2), pornographic chats (OR = 1.9), spouse's parsimony (OR = 1.7), and a long courtship period (OR = 1.1) were identified as major determinants of intention to divorce.

Conclusions: Increasing marriage literacy and empowering single youths to address the identified determinants of divorce – both before marriage and especially during the first months of marriage – are of utmost importance.

Keywords: Intention, Divorce, Young, Marriage, Factors, Determinants, Iran

1. Background

Nowadays, divorce is considered one of the growing public concerns, which can lead to other social problems such as psychological disorders, an increasing number of children from divorced families, and drug abuse (1-5). From 1960 to 2017, a global decline in the

marriage rate by 33% and a rise in the divorce rate by 12% - 44% have been reported (6). In Iran, approximately 175,000 divorces and 530,000 marriages were registered in 2019, indicating a divorce rate of 32.9%, which was higher than the average value over the five years prior to marriage (7).

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Shiraz, the capital city of Fars province in southwest Iran, is one of the largest multicultural cities with a population of two million. According to statistics from 2019, nearly 10,000 marriages and 4,300 divorces were registered in this city, resulting in a divorce rate of 42% – 10% higher than the national average (7). Additionally, a report by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) stated that 47% - 49% of divorces occurred within the first five years of marriage, while 25% took place within the first two years (7). It should be noted that divorce is a multifactorial event, with determinants that vary across different communities, necessitating comprehensive research to identify these factors in each society (8-11).

2. Objectives

Due to the lack of comprehensive research in this area in the city of Shiraz, Iran, the present study was conducted to examine the determinants of intention to divorce among young, newly married couples, in order to guide preventive interventions.

3. Methods

3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

In this cross-sectional study, which continued until January 2021, young individuals intending to divorce – whose marriages had lasted up to five years – were interviewed at the counseling centers of the Judiciary in Shiraz, Iran. These centers aim to restore peace in marital relationships or, at the very least, empower individuals to reduce harm following divorce. The interviews were conducted individually in private settings to maintain confidentiality, and each session was carried out by trained psychologists of the same gender as the interviewees.

The research team for this study consisted of five psychologists, three of whom were affiliated with family courts within the Judiciary of Iran. The remaining members were affiliated with the Health Policy Research Center at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences (SUMS).

The sample size was calculated to be 309 respondents, using the formula z^2pq/d^2 , based on a 72% intention-to-divorce rate – the highest among young housewives (12) – with a 95% confidence interval (CI) and a 5% margin of error. There were no exclusion criteria except for unwillingness to participate in the study.

3.2. Questionnaire

The research questionnaire covered the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the interviewees, as well as their attitudes regarding the effects of personal, socioeconomic, and cultural-familial factors on their intention to divorce. The validity of the questionnaire was verified and approved after several expert panels composed of legal counselors, psychiatrists, and psychologists. Reliability was assessed in a pilot study conducted with twenty interviewees by a psychologist, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 74.4% for the questionnaire overall. Domain-specific coefficients were 79% for personal, 60% for economic, 61.5% for cultural-familial, and 90% for social domains.

The demographic and socioeconomic section of the questionnaire included items on the respondent's gender, age, birthplace, ethnicity, level of education, and occupation, as well as those of their spouse. It also inquired about kinship with one's spouse, the time interval between engagement and marriage, the period between marriage and the wedding ceremony, the timing of initial thoughts and conversations about divorce with one's spouse, and the duration between marriage and filing for divorce at the Judiciary. Personal factors included differences with one's spouse in age, appearance, health status, level of education, preferred post-marriage residence, marital-sexual, and psychological issues. Economic items addressed the financial status of parents, income, financial independence, economic failure, parsimony, and the luxurious lifestyle of the original families. Cultural-familial characteristics examined included superstitious beliefs, a history of divorce, marriage at very young or old ages, polygyny in the family, and interference by original families. In terms of social background, the questionnaire focused on the influence of societal values, media, social networks, and marital-sexual education on divorce trends within the community. In all personal, socioeconomic, and cultural-familial domains, responses to each item were recorded using a Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 to 3 (i.e., 0: None, 1: Low, 2: Moderate, 3: High).

3.3. Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics software (version 25). After completing cross-

tabulations and *t*-tests, variables with a *P*-value < 0.2 were selected for inclusion in the multivariate analysis (i.e., binary logistic regression: Backward LR). A *P*-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant in the final analysis. Analyses were conducted based on two different dichotomous categorizations: (1) Women/men and (2) marriages lasting less than 2 years versus 2 - 5 years. The attitudes of these groups toward the role of personal, socioeconomic, and cultural-familial factors in their intention to divorce were analyzed separately. The rationale behind the 2 years/2 - 5 years categorization was based on evidence indicating that more than half of divorce cases within the first five years of marriage occur within the first two years of marital life (7).

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Voluntary participation, the use of an anonymous questionnaire, availability of the researchers via two dedicated phone lines, and the maintenance of privacy at all stages of the study were among the ethical commitments upheld. A written consent form was also obtained from each interviewee. Furthermore, the study protocol adhered to the ethical guidelines of the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki, as reflected in the prior approval granted by the Ethics Committee of SUMS, Shiraz, Iran, under the registered number: [IR.SUMS.REC.1397.015](#).

4. Results

A total of 222 newly married individuals, including 168 women (75.7%) and 54 men (24.3%), with a mean age of 27.4 ± 6.4 years, participated in this study, yielding a participation rate of 72% (222/309). Among them, 192 respondents (86.5%) had more than 12 years of education, 115 individuals (51.8%) were employed, and 160 participants (72.1%) reported no kinship with their spouse. The mean duration between engagement and the registration of the marriage contract was 5.7 ± 9.3 months, while the mean time between marriage registration and the wedding ceremony was 3.5 ± 6.9 months. Out of the 222 interviewees, 206 (92.8%) had not attended pre-marital counseling programs. The mean period between the first time participants thought about divorce and the wedding ceremony was 9.43 ± 11.4 months, with a median of six months. Additionally, the mean time between the first discussion about divorce with one's spouse and the wedding ceremony was

13.1 ± 13.7 months, with a median of seven months. On average, after 1.62 ± 0.48 years from the registration of the marriage contract (with a median of two years), the participants referred to the Judiciary to file a divorce petition (Table 1).

The association between personal, socioeconomic, and cultural-familial factors and intention to divorce was compared between genders through univariate analysis. In terms of personal factors, women reported that their spouse's chronic illness ($P=0.04$), drug abuse ($P=0.01$), engagement in pornographic chats ($P=0.02$), dishonesty ($P=0.02$), and spending too much time with friends ($P=0.03$) were significantly associated with their intention to divorce at a moderate to high level. Regarding economic factors, economic failure ($P=0.04$) and parsimony ($P=0.01$) of the spouse were identified as significant determinants for women in filing a divorce petition. As for cultural-familial characteristics, interference by original families ($P=0.021$) and marriage at an early age ($P=0.01$) were reported as significant factors associated with the intention to divorce by women and men, respectively in the social domain, men identified media and social networks ($P=0.003$) as the main contributors to their intention to divorce (Appendix 1 in Supplementary File). Overall, personal factors (47%), economic status (26%), cultural-familial conditions (19%), and the social context (8%) constituted the main determinants of the intention to divorce among both women and men.

The results of the logistic regression revealed that the spouse's economic failure [odds ratio (OR) =5.1], parsimony (OR=3.7), chronic illness (OR=3.4), luxurious lifestyle of the original family (OR=3.1), and discriminatory behaviors towards original families (OR=2.9) were the main determinants of intention to divorce identified by women, compared with men (Table 2).

As mentioned earlier, both groups – including those married for less than two years ($n=85$; 38%) and those married for 2 - 5 years ($n=137$; 62%) – were assessed and compared through univariate analysis and logistic regression. In this regard, the univariate analysis showed that, in the second group compared with the first, chronic illness ($P=0.04$), drug abuse ($P=0.01$), porn chats ($P=0.02$), spouse's dishonesty ($P=0.02$), spending too much time with friends ($P=0.03$), spouse's lack of income and financial independence ($P=0.05$), economic failure ($P=0.04$), parsimony ($P=0.01$), interference by

Table 1. Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Marital Characteristics of Newly Married Couples with Intention to Divorce ^a

Characteristics	Values	Characteristics	Values	Characteristics	Values
Women/men	168 (75.7)/54 (24.3)	Level of education (y), ≤12/> 12	30 (13.5)/192 (86.5)	Between registration of marriage contract and wedding	75 (33.8)
Age (y)	27.4 ± 6.4	Spouse's level of education ≤12/> 12 (y)	55 (24.8)/169 (75.2)	After wedding	89 (40.1)
Spouse's age (y)	29.1 ± 6.9	Occupation, having jobs/jobless	115 (51.8)/107 (48.2)	First time of talking to one's spouse about divorce	-
Ethnicity, Fars/others	177 (79.7)/45 (20.3)	Spouse's occupation, having jobs/ jobless	155 (69.8)/67 (30.2)	Between engagement and registration of marriage contract	14 (6.3)
Spouse's ethnicity, Fars/others	162 (73)/60 (27)	First time of thinking about divorce	-	Between registration of marriage contract and wedding	85 (38.3)
Kinship with one's spouse, yes/no	62 (27.9)/160 (72.1)	Between engagement and registration of marriage contract	23 (10.4)	After wedding	110 (49.5)

^a Values are expressed as No. (%) or mean ± SD.

Table 2. Multivariable Binary Logistic Regression to Show Factors Influencing Intention to Divorce in Newly Married Women and Men (as Reference)

Characteristics	Beta	P-Value	OR (CI 95%)
Economic failure	1.94	0.029	5.13 (1.38 - 7.73)
Parsimony	1.7	0.004	3.77 (1.53 - 9.26)
Chronic illness	1.23	0.042	3.45 (1.04 - 11.42)
Luxurious behaviors of original families	0.89	0.036	3.14 (1.08 - 9.16)
Discriminatory behaviors towards original families	0.72	0.019	2.9 (1.19 - 7.04)

Abbreviations: OR, odds ratio; CI, confidence interval.

original families ($P=0.02$), marriage at an early age ($P=0.01$), and social networks ($P=0.003$) were the main factors affecting the intention to divorce (Appendix 2 in Supplementary File).

Logistic regression also revealed that, in the group married for 2 - 5 years compared to those married for less than 2 years, unemployment (OR: 5.5, 95% CI: 2.5 - 12), non-payment of alimony (OR: 2.2, 95% CI: 1.4 - 3.6), infidelity (OR: 2.2, 95% CI: 1.5 - 3.2), porn chats (OR: 1.9, 95% CI: 1.1 - 3.1), spouse's parsimony (OR: 1.7, 95% CI: 1 - 2.8), and long courtship period (OR: 1.1, 95% CI: 1 - 1.2) were the major determinants of filing for divorce. Conversely, in the second group, having no job (OR: 3, 95% CI: 1.4 - 6.3) was found to be more significant (Table 3).

5. Discussion

This study revealed that personal factors, economic status, cultural-familial conditions, and social context were, respectively, the main determinants of intention to divorce among newly married individuals. Furthermore, economic failure, parsimony, chronic illness of one's spouse, luxurious lifestyle of original

families, and discriminatory behaviors of the spouse toward original families were the primary determinants of intention to divorce among women compared with men. Moreover, in the group with 2 - 5 years passed since marriage, compared to those with less than 2 years, spouse's unemployment, non-payment of alimony, infidelity, porn chats, parsimony, and a long engagement period were identified as the major determinants of filing for divorce.

According to the latest global reports, more than 1 million divorces were registered in 2019 (13), representing an approximate four-fold increase since 1960 (6). Additionally, the SCI reported one divorce for every four marriages (7).

In surveys conducted by Kalantari et al. (9) and Thurnher et al. (14), age and education level were introduced as significant predictors of divorce. However, the present study did not find such associations. This discrepancy may be due to differences in the study populations. Our study focused on a narrow age group — specifically, young individuals who had been married for no more than five years — most of

Table 3. Multivariable Binary Logistic Regression to Show Factors Influencing Intention to Divorce Between 2 - 5 Years and Less Than 2 Years (as Reference)

Characteristics	Beta	P-Value	OR (CI 95%)
Unemployment of spouse	1.71	< 0.001	5.59 (2.58 - 12.05)
Non-payment of alimony	0.822	0.001	2.27 (1.42 - 3.64)
Infidelity	0.725	0.007	2.2 (1.59 - 3.21)
Porn chat	0.666	0.008	1.94 (1.19 - 3.19)
Parsimony	0.561	0.024	1.75 (1.08 - 2.85)
Long courtship period	0.112	0.005	1.12 (1.03 - 1.21)

whom had similar educational backgrounds. In contrast, the aforementioned studies assessed couples of varying ages and diverse educational levels. Consistent with our findings, several studies have shown a significant association between economic factors and divorce (9, 14, 15). For example, an economic downturn or boom may intensify conflict and psychological stress, thereby decreasing the perceived value of marriage for many couples, ultimately leading to higher divorce rates. Conversely, during an economic boom, increased labor market opportunities — particularly for women — can raise the perceived value of divorce and contribute to higher divorce rates. As long as inequality in the perceived value of marriage persists, even if an economic shock affects all individuals equally, disillusionment may drive some couples toward divorce. Moreover, unemployment and inflation significantly influence the divorce process. This demonstrates that economic crises at the societal level can directly impact marital dissolution. Therefore, one of the most critical and influential factors contributing to the rising divorce rate in Iran is the turbulent economic situation that has persisted over recent decades.

In terms of engagement duration, and in line with our findings, Guertin (16) identified a correlation between engagement length and divorce. An engagement period that is neither too short nor too long appears necessary for the sustainability of marriage. Specifically, couples who have known one another for more than one year tend to have greater marital success than those who have known each other for a shorter period. On the other hand, couples with engagements lasting longer than 27 months tend to divorce between the second and seventh years of marriage. As a result, engagements shorter than 12 months and longer than 27 months are more likely to end in divorce. However, it is important to note that

divorce is a multifactorial event and is not determined by this factor alone.

The health consequences of marital dissolution are well known, but limited research has explored how health issues may contribute to the risk of marital breakdown. Karraker and Latham (17), in support of our findings, reported a positive association between chronic illnesses and the intention to divorce. Recent studies on younger couples have found that husbands' — but not wives' — work-limiting health conditions are associated with increased divorce risk. This may reflect the greater societal emphasis on male employment earlier in the life course. Chronic illnesses can impair a family's working capacity, reduce income, undermine economic stability, and cause disruptions in sexual relationships between partners.

Consistent with our findings, McDaniel et al. (18) and Scott et al. (19) likewise concluded that both sexual and virtual infidelity are significantly associated with stronger intentions to divorce. Infidelity not only has a destructive impact on marital relationships — often leading to separation or divorce — but also negatively affects the emotional well-being of partners, increasing depressive symptoms and lowering self-esteem.

Moreover, Collins et al. (20) and Salvatore et al. (10) reported that drug abuse was a contributing factor to divorce, which was not significant in the present study. This discrepancy may be due to underreporting of substance use by participants in our study. Gigy and Kelly (21) identified a substantial association between divorce and lifestyle. As confirmed in our study, a correlation between luxurious lifestyles and divorce was observed. The influence and assimilation of Western customs and traditions in our society have contributed to the rising divorce rate among Iranian families. The industrialization of life for both women and men has led to elevated expectations, excessive demands, and increased diversity of needs, paving the way for

disagreements and separation. Ghiasi et al. (12) and Hoseini et al. (2) emphasized that interference by original families was associated with divorce in newly married couples. Family interference in the lives of couples is one of the most critical factors leading to the collapse of marital life and eventual divorce. How couples manage and confront such interference is a persistent concern. While families may act with good intentions, their involvement often produces negative effects on the couple's relationship, which can lead to separation and divorce. In contrast to the findings of Doherty et al. (11), no significant correlation was found between violence, neglect of mutual responsibilities, and divorce in the present study. In marital relationships, mutual responsibility and cooperation are fundamental principles that help sustain a healthy and solid foundation. Disobedience, defined as the failure of one spouse to fulfill marital duties, can have significant legal and social consequences. Furthermore, and contrary to the findings of Barikani et al. (22), no association was found between emotional issues and divorce in our study. Emotional divorce occurs when couples remain together physically but lack a positive or constructive emotional connection, which can undermine the stability of the marriage. Due to the low social acceptance of formal divorce in Iranian society, emotional divorce is relatively common in some families. A decline in emotional expression and connection may signify emotional insufficiency, which in turn can threaten the integrity and continuity of the family system.

We also found an association between parsimony and non-payment of alimony and divorce among those who had been married for less than two years; however, no other studies were identified that assessed these specific factors. When one partner is stingy, a deep emotional rift may develop between them. This situation can foster feelings of comparison and dissatisfaction, potentially leading to thoughts of divorce.

Sexual satisfaction has been shown to predict lower levels of marital conflict. Shakerian et al. (23) found an association between sexual satisfaction and divorce; however, such a relationship was not confirmed in the present study. Although gambling is illegal in Iran, it was found to be associated with divorce in our univariate analysis and in the findings of Black et al. (24). Excessive gambling, even when initially pursued as

a leisure activity, can escalate into an addiction that consumes significant amounts of time and money. Gamblers may neglect essential responsibilities — including financial and family obligations — thereby destabilizing the marriage. The psychological and emotional strain of gambling addiction can breed mistrust, deceit, and resentment within the relationship, ultimately leading to marital breakdown.

Furthermore, our study showed that discriminatory behavior by men toward their wives' families could contribute to divorce. This finding is consistent with another study that concluded conflict behaviors are predictors of divorce (25).

5.1. Conclusions

Personal factors, economic status, cultural-familial conditions, and social context were, respectively, the main determinants of intention to divorce among newly married individuals. Therefore, enhancing marriage literacy and empowering single individuals to address these issues — at an early age, before marriage, and especially during the initial months after marriage — is of utmost importance.

5.2. Limitations

Although this study is one of the few comprehensive investigations assessing significant determinants of intention to divorce among young newly married individuals, it has several limitations. Notably, the study was not conducted with interviewees and their spouses as couples, nor as a pair-based survey. Moreover, we were unable to reach the calculated sample size for each gender due to substantial challenges, including lack of cooperation, the emotional and logistical difficulties faced by divorcing individuals, and limited support from judiciary counseling centers, which only reluctantly permitted interviews with referred cases. These constraints reduced the generalizability of our findings. Therefore, future studies should aim to include a larger sample size and assess both spouses simultaneously to provide a more complete understanding of the factors influencing divorce.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material(s) is available [here](#) [To read supplementary materials, please refer to the journal website and open PDF/HTML].

Footnotes

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Conflict of Interests Statement: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability: The dataset presented in the study is available on request from the corresponding author during submission or after its publication. The data are not publicly available due to the keeping the confidentiality of the divorce data in our university and also our center.

Ethical Approval: The study protocol conformed to the ethical guidelines of the 1975 Declaration of Helsinki as reflected in a prior approval by the Ethics Committee of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences (SUMS), Shiraz, Iran, with the registered number: [IR.SUMS.REC.1397.015](#).

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