

Qualitative Exploration of Causal Factors Influencing the Divorce Process Based on the Lived Experiences of Divorced Couples

Mitra. Kerdegari¹, Majid. Barzegar^{1*}, Hossein. Baghooli¹, Maryam. Kouroshnia¹

¹ Department of Psychology, Marv.C., Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht, Iran.

*Correspondence: majid.Barzegar@iau.ac.ir

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 20 June 2025
Revised 17 September 2025
Accepted 23 September 2025
Published online 01 October 2025

ABSTRACT

Divorce, as one of the most serious social and psychological challenges, has extensive consequences for individuals, families, and society. Identifying the causal factors contributing to the divorce process can help achieve a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and provide preventive strategies. The present study aimed to qualitatively examine the causal factors influencing the emergence of the divorce process based on the lived experiences of divorced couples. The study employed a qualitative method using semi-structured interviews. The interviews continued until data saturation was reached, and 10 couples were interviewed. To enrich the data, both broad and probing questions were used. After data collection, the data were analyzed through thematic analysis. To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability) were employed, including participant checking, confirmation by academic supervisors and advisors, external auditing of the data analysis, and purposeful sampling of participants with diverse experiences. The findings indicated that the causal conditions contributing to divorce in the lived experiences of the studied couples resulted from a complex interplay of cultural, psychological, and social factors. Data analysis showed that dysfunctional family patterns and the intergenerational transmission of maladaptive schemas, the symbolic gender system and traditional beliefs about the roles of men and women, difficulties in emotion regulation and a lack of psychological literacy, strong dependency on the family of origin and interference by relatives, hasty marriages and uninformed partner selection, and dysfunctional marital beliefs were among the most significant causal conditions. Moreover, factors such as marital infidelity, lack of physical attractiveness, and neglect of personal care were highlighted in the couples' narratives as the ultimate indicators of emotional and psychological disengagement. The analytical synthesis of the study suggests that causality in the divorce process is not a single-factor phenomenon but rather a complex overlap of three levels of causality: structural causality (gender attitudes and cultural pressures), psychological causality (lack of emotional and communication skills), and intergenerational causality (transmission of damaging family patterns). Ultimately, divorce in the cultural context of Shiraz reflects the tension between entrenched traditions and contemporary needs for an egalitarian, emotionally supportive, and dialogue-based relationship.

Key words: qualitative study, causal factors, divorce process, lived experience

How to cite this article:

Kerdegari, M., Barzegar, M., Baghooli, H., & Kouroshnia, M. (2025). Qualitative Exploration of Causal Factors Influencing the Divorce Process Based on the Lived Experiences of Divorced Couples. *Mental Health and Lifestyle Journal*, 3(4), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.61838/mhlj.3.4.9>

Introduction

Divorce is a multifaceted social and psychological phenomenon that has long attracted scholarly attention due to its far-reaching implications for individuals, families, and broader societal structures. It disrupts the foundational unit of family life, often resulting in profound emotional, cognitive, and behavioral consequences for the parties involved, particularly spouses and children. The dissolution of marriage is not merely a legal process but an outcome of a complex interplay between personal, relational, cultural, and socio-economic factors that accumulate over time and manifest as marital instability. Scholars have emphasized that divorce rates have shown a noticeable increase worldwide, reflecting shifting social norms, evolving gender roles, and changing attitudes toward marriage as an institution (1, 2). Within the Iranian context, the issue has become particularly salient over recent decades, prompting extensive empirical inquiries aimed at uncovering its underlying causes and implications (3).

The psychological dimension of divorce is especially critical, as emotional detachment often precedes the legal termination of marriage. Research has identified “cognitive divorce”—a state in which couples remain legally married but are emotionally disconnected—as an early stage that predicts eventual legal separation (4). This phenomenon highlights the progressive nature of marital dissolution, suggesting that divorce is rarely a sudden rupture but rather the culmination of long-term emotional disengagement, conflict escalation, and erosion of relational bonds. The presence of persistent conflict, communication breakdown, and unmet emotional needs gradually undermines marital satisfaction, which can trigger the decision to divorce (5).

Empirical evidence indicates that divorce is not caused by a single factor; rather, it emerges from an intricate combination of individual vulnerabilities, interpersonal dynamics, and contextual pressures (6). On the individual level, personal traits, values, and coping styles influence how partners respond to marital challenges. Cultural and personal values interact in shaping marital expectations, which in turn affect divorce proneness (7). When individuals experience value incongruence within their marriage, especially in societies undergoing cultural transitions, this misalignment can lead to persistent dissatisfaction and eventual separation.

From a relational perspective, qualitative investigations have shown that poor communication skills, low emotional literacy, rigid gender role beliefs, and unrealistic expectations about marital roles significantly contribute to marital breakdown (5). Such relational deficiencies often result in unresolved conflicts and reduced intimacy. In addition, research on Iranian couples has highlighted how intergenerational transmission of dysfunctional family patterns—such as authoritarian or conflictual parental relationships—can predispose individuals to repeat maladaptive relational schemas in their own marriages (8). This supports the broader theoretical proposition that marital behaviors are often learned through early socialization and carried into adult partnerships (9).

The cultural and socio-structural context also plays a pivotal role in the emergence of divorce. Shifts in societal values, modernization, and changing expectations about gender equity have altered the meaning and structure of marriage. Traditional patriarchal norms that once enforced marital endurance have been increasingly challenged, allowing individuals, particularly women, to exit unsatisfactory marriages (10). This cultural transition has created tension between entrenched traditional expectations and modern aspirations for egalitarian, emotionally supportive, and dialogic partnerships. Such tension can fuel marital

dissatisfaction when couples hold divergent expectations regarding gender roles and emotional reciprocity (7).

Moreover, socio-economic pressures such as financial stress, unemployment, and unstable living conditions amplify marital strain and accelerate the path toward divorce (6, 11). In Iran, studies have documented how these structural stressors interact with psychological vulnerabilities to erode marital stability (3). Notably, the extended family system—which traditionally provided emotional and financial support—can become a source of conflict when boundaries are blurred, as excessive interference from in-laws undermines the autonomy and cohesion of the marital dyad (11).

Divorce also exerts profound effects on children, who are often the most vulnerable parties in this process. Research has shown that children's adjustment to parental divorce varies widely, with some exhibiting resilience and others demonstrating heightened vulnerability to emotional and behavioral problems (12). Emotional well-being, coping resources, and the quality of post-divorce parenting significantly influence these outcomes. Furthermore, when parental conflict persists after divorce, children face elevated risks of anxiety, depression, and academic difficulties (13). Such findings underscore the intergenerational repercussions of divorce and the necessity of addressing children's mental health as part of post-divorce interventions.

Another growing body of literature highlights the health-related consequences of divorce for adults. Divorce has been associated with increased risks of physical health problems, including cardiovascular disease, weakened immune function, and premature mortality, underscoring its biopsychosocial impact (14). Chronic stress stemming from marital dissolution can dysregulate physiological systems, particularly when divorce is accompanied by ongoing conflict and lack of social support. Thus, the repercussions of divorce extend beyond psychological distress, affecting long-term health trajectories.

At the same time, qualitative studies focusing on divorced individuals' lived experiences have provided deeper insights into how people make sense of and cope with divorce. These studies have revealed that, despite the initial trauma, many divorced individuals eventually experience personal growth, enhanced autonomy, and reconstructed identities (15). Coping strategies, social support, and access to mental health resources significantly mediate this adjustment process. Such findings challenge the traditionally pathologizing view of divorce and instead highlight its potential to catalyze positive change under supportive conditions.

In the Iranian context, historical and contemporary reviews of divorce research reveal both continuity and change in its underlying drivers. Earlier research identified economic hardship, infertility, and domestic violence as prominent causes (2), whereas more recent studies emphasize psychological incompatibility, lack of emotional intimacy, and unrealistic marital expectations as central factors (6, 11). This shift reflects broader cultural transformations and the rising salience of emotional and psychological fulfillment as criteria for marital success (3).

Given these complexities, understanding divorce requires a multidimensional approach that integrates personal, relational, cultural, and structural perspectives. The grounded theory approach is particularly suitable for this purpose, as it enables the inductive development of a conceptual framework grounded in participants' lived experiences. By capturing the subjective meanings and causal attributions that divorced

individuals assign to their experiences, such research can uncover the hidden logic underlying the divorce process (8).

This study, therefore, aims to qualitatively explore the causal factors underlying the divorce process based on the lived experiences of divorced couples in Shiraz.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study was descriptive–applied in nature and employed a qualitative approach using the grounded theory method based on the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (2008). The statistical population included divorced couples from the city of Shiraz. Participants were selected purposefully according to specific criteria: at least two months and at most five years had passed since the divorce, the divorce was not primarily caused by specific physical health problems, and they were willing to participate in the interview. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached, and eventually, 10 couples were interviewed.

Data Collection

The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview. The interviews began with general questions about the factors contributing to divorce and were followed by probing questions as needed. All interviews were recorded with the participants' informed consent and then transcribed verbatim. To assess credibility and validity, the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985)—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability—were employed. Accordingly, member checking, expert review by supervisors and advisors, external auditing, and providing rich descriptions of the context and participant characteristics were implemented.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed through three-stage coding, including open, axial, and selective coding. In open coding, concepts were extracted and initial categories were formed; in axial coding, the core phenomenon and its relationship with causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences were examined; and in selective coding, the core category of the study was developed and its relationship with other categories was explained. All ethical considerations—including obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw freely—were observed.

Findings and Results

Table (1) presents the causal factors influencing the emergence of the divorce process along with the related open codes. Analytical explanations for each factor are also provided.

Table 1. Causal Conditions Influencing the Emergence of the Divorce Process

No.	Causal Factor	Related Open Codes	Analytical Explanation
1	Dysfunctional family patterns during childhood	"My parents were like this too," "We never learned how to talk," "They always yelled or were silent"	Many participants reproduced the unhealthy family patterns of their childhood. The lack of a dialogic model, parental authoritarianism, or parental divorce led to communication dysfunctions in their marital relationships.

2	Traditional and unequal gender attitudes	"A man shouldn't help with housework," "A woman should only care for children," "A man has the right to hit"	Internalized patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes positioned women as subordinate, obedient, and voiceless. These beliefs reproduced domination and eliminated fair dialogue in the relationship.
3	Lack of emotion regulation and self-control skills	"He smashed the glass during a fight," "He shouted," "I cried asking him to change, and he laughed"	Inability to control anger, lack of empathy, and explosive or dismissive reactions played a key role in intensifying conflicts. Many participants lacked basic emotion regulation training.
4	Strong dependence on the family of origin	"He asked his mother about everything," "His mother even chose the curtains," "He said his mom is more important"	Reliance on parents for decision-making, loyalty conflicts between spouse and family of origin, and lack of emotional boundaries between generations weakened the couple's relational autonomy.
5	Hasty or uninformed marriage	"It was an arranged marriage," "I had no idea what he was like," "I doubted from the start but married anyway"	The absence of a proper acquaintance period, cultural pressure to marry, and choosing a spouse based on appearance or others' recommendations were foundational contributors to later incompatibility.
6	Low emotional and psychological literacy	"He said 'therapy? Are you crazy?'," "I never knew how to talk to her," "He always said don't be sensitive"	Many couples lacked basic skills such as active listening, effective dialogue, empathy, or seeking professional help. This low emotional literacy complicated relationships and increased misunderstandings.
7	Dysfunctional marital beliefs about roles and success	"He said a woman must endure everything," "Your only job is raising kids," "A husband is a provider, not a talker"	Unrealistic and ideological expectations of married life—especially for women—imposed passive, submissive roles. These beliefs hindered growth, dialogue, and transformation within the relationship.
8	Marital infidelity and emotional rupture	"The wife cheated," "The husband cheated," "He came home late and I didn't ask because I knew he was cheating"	Experiencing infidelity as a turning point—especially when combined with indifference, emotional neglect, or secrecy—deeply eroded trust and widened emotional rifts. It was both a sign of weakened emotional-physical bonding and a consequence of chronic dissatisfaction.
9	Neglect of physical attractiveness and personal care	"Poor hygiene," "Constantly disheveled," "Unpleasant smell"	Some participants described the lack of physical and hygienic care in their spouses as a hidden but important factor reducing sexual desire and physical intimacy.

According to Table (1), the causal conditions of divorce in the lived experiences of couples are rooted in a complex combination of cultural, developmental, cognitive, and psychological factors. What unites these conditions are the structural and mental barriers preventing the formation of a healthy, symmetrical, and dialogue-based emotional relationship. This table represents a crucial step in moving from raw data to theoretical explanation in this qualitative study—a step aimed at uncovering the hidden causal logic in the narratives of couples from Shiraz who have experienced marital dissolution. Within the grounded theory framework, this table serves as “tracing the hidden genes of divorce”: factors that are socially invisible yet are the main sources of relational rupture in lived experience.

1. **Dysfunctional family patterns: Unconscious emotional memory in present relationships** — One of the oldest yet most dynamic causal factors identified was “damaging family patterns” during childhood. Participants described internalizing their parents’ authoritarian, silent, or conflictual relationships. This finding supports Jeffrey Young’s theory of the “intergenerational transmission of maladaptive schemas.” In the cultural context of Shiraz, the family still plays a formative role in identity. Couples often reproduced their parents’ patterns without reflecting on what they had learned.
2. **Symbolic gender system: Institutional causality beneath the psyche** — In participants’ experiences, traditional gender attitudes operated not merely as individual biases but as a “symbolic system of power” within the relationship. Beliefs such as “a woman must endure” or “a man doesn’t need to consult” stem from a patriarchal cultural capital that persists locally in Shiraz, especially among more traditional classes. Analyzing this factor through a Michel Foucault-inspired

perspective on power shows that causality in divorce is not necessarily limited to overt behaviors but is encoded in lived discourses about the “good woman” and the “authoritative man.”

3. **Inability in emotion regulation: Psychological illiteracy as structural poverty** — The data show that many participants lacked basic emotion regulation skills such as self-soothing, empathy, or nonviolent dialogue. This inability emerged within a cultural context where seeking psychological help is often viewed as weakness or madness; statements like “going to therapy means you’re crazy” reflect this taboo. In Shiraz, where emotional literacy has not yet been institutionalized in education, media, or families, this deficit has led to structural crises in marital relationships.
4. **Dependence on the family of origin: Blurred boundaries within closed kinship structures** — The factor of “strong dependence on the family of origin” in participants’ lived experiences reflected not only mother-in-law interference or economic reliance but also a lack of psychological differentiation. Interview data revealed highly enmeshed kinship structures, weakened couple boundaries, and frequent loyalty conflicts between “spouse” and “parent.” This created a form of “intra-relational psychological detachment” rooted in the erosion of the spousal role identity.
5. **Hasty marriages: Uninformed choice under cultural pressure** — Marriages entered into without sufficient acquaintance—based only on others’ recommendations, physical appearance, or escaping loneliness—were highlighted in participants’ narratives as the starting point of incompatibility. Among the couples studied, as in many Iranian couples, “early marriage” is still seen as a semi-obligatory norm. Thus, this causal factor represents not only uninformed choice but also the result of subtle social pressure on major life decisions.
6. **Low emotional–psychological literacy: Absence of enabling institutions** — Open codes showed that many couples had never been equipped with skills such as problem-solving, collaborative dialogue, or mutual understanding. This reflects the lack of formal pre-marital training and skill-based counseling in the cultural-educational system. This causal factor points to a kind of “hidden psychological poverty” which, unlike financial poverty, is less visible yet more destructive.
7. **Dysfunctional marital beliefs: Ideological mindset against healthy relationships** — Many narratives featured ideological conceptions of marriage such as “a man must never lose” or “a good woman is a silent woman.” These beliefs represent “outdated mental templates” regarding marriage. In the cultural context of the studied couples, especially among the middle generation, such ideological notions are still institutionalized and, rather than fostering dynamic adaptation, reproduce static and dysfunctional expectations of relationships.
8. **Marital infidelity and emotional rupture** — In some participants’ narratives, infidelity appeared as the final indicator of relational breakdown or as a pretext for the collapse of trust. In women’s experiences, this phenomenon was often accompanied by feelings of humiliation, emotional abandonment, and psychological rejection, whereas in men it sometimes appeared as a reaction to perceived neglect or domination. Analysis of these codes indicates that infidelity is not merely a sexual act but an index of the collapse of psychological and emotional bonds.
9. **Neglect of physical attractiveness and personal care** — In the cultural context of Iran, where talking about sexual needs is still somewhat taboo, this factor often remains unspoken but has a profound impact on weakening marital bonds in lived experiences.

Analysis of Table (1) shows that, in the lived experiences of divorced couples in Shiraz, causality in divorce is not a single-layered phenomenon but the outcome of a multi-layered overlap of social, psychological, and cultural components. These causalities manifest at three levels:

- **Structural causality:** gender attitudes, cultural pressures to marry, and domination by the family of origin;
- **Psychological causality:** inability to regulate emotions, lack of communication skills, and emotional illiteracy;
- **Intergenerational causality:** unconscious repetition of parental patterns, maladaptive schemas, and damaging emotional memory.

In fact, the experience of divorce in the context of Shiraz reflects a “battle between two paradigms”:

- On one side, entrenched traditions and fixed beliefs about the roles of men and women,
- And on the other, the emotional, psychological, and cognitive needs of a contemporary human relationship that is skill-based, egalitarian, and meaningful.

Additionally, although only one participant explicitly mentioned their spouse’s neglect of personal hygiene and appearance as a factor in emotional and sexual withdrawal, this account underscores the need to attend to the physical and hygienic dimensions of relationships—an aspect often overlooked in cultural analyses of divorce.

Contextual conditions refer to the specific social, cultural, economic, and familial situations, settings, and environments in which the phenomenon under study emerges and gains meaning. These conditions provide the backdrop within which individuals’ lived experiences occur. In this section, in line with answering the research question, the phenomenon of “experiencing marital conflict leading to divorce” is analyzed within these contexts.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present qualitative study sought to uncover the causal conditions underlying the divorce process based on the lived experiences of divorced couples in Shiraz. The findings revealed a complex interplay of cultural, psychological, social, and intergenerational factors contributing to marital dissolution. Participants consistently emphasized dysfunctional family patterns during childhood, traditional gender attitudes, lack of emotion regulation skills, excessive dependence on the family of origin, hasty or uninformed marriages, low emotional and psychological literacy, dysfunctional marital beliefs, marital infidelity, and neglect of physical attractiveness and personal care as major contributing conditions. These factors did not operate in isolation but interacted dynamically over time, gradually eroding the emotional foundation of the marital relationship and culminating in divorce.

One of the most striking findings was the influence of dysfunctional family patterns during participants’ formative years. Many described reproducing the authoritarian, conflictual, or emotionally distant relational styles they had witnessed in their parents. This supports the proposition that early familial environments shape internalized relational schemas that can later manifest in adult intimate relationships (8). Consistent with this finding, research has shown that intergenerational transmission of maladaptive schemas significantly predicts marital conflict and instability (9). In the Iranian cultural context, where the family remains a primary socializing force, the persistence of such patterns is not unexpected (3). These results

underscore that divorce is not only a present-time event but also a reflection of unresolved developmental and familial legacies.

Another central theme was the pervasiveness of traditional and unequal gender attitudes, which framed women as subordinate and men as authoritative decision-makers. Participants explained that such beliefs suppressed communication, perpetuated power imbalances, and hindered emotional reciprocity in their marriages. This aligns with previous findings that patriarchal gender norms undermine marital quality by reducing mutual respect and emotional support (5, 11). Broader cultural analyses have noted that as societies undergo modernization, tension arises between entrenched patriarchal expectations and contemporary ideals of egalitarian relationships (7). This tension was evident in participants' accounts, as many felt trapped between the cultural pressure to conform to traditional roles and their personal aspirations for emotionally supportive and dialogic partnerships. Such role incongruence can generate chronic dissatisfaction, a well-documented predictor of divorce (1).

The results also highlighted a notable lack of emotion regulation and self-control skills among participants. Many described being unable to manage anger, engage in nonviolent dialogue, or express empathy during conflicts. This deficiency contributed to repeated escalations of conflict and the gradual breakdown of emotional bonds. This finding echoes previous studies that have identified emotional dysregulation as a significant risk factor for marital instability and divorce (6). Moreover, the cultural taboo against seeking psychological help, described by participants, mirrors earlier reports that low psychological literacy and stigma toward counseling inhibit couples from seeking timely intervention (4). The absence of emotional education in Iran's family and educational systems has also been cited as a barrier to developing the skills needed for sustaining healthy marital relationships (3). Thus, the present study reinforces the argument that emotional illiteracy constitutes a form of structural vulnerability in marital dynamics.

Excessive dependence on the family of origin emerged as another powerful theme. Participants described blurred boundaries with their parents, loyalty conflicts between spouse and family of origin, and the erosion of their marital autonomy. This dynamic was particularly pronounced among men who prioritized parental approval over their wives' needs. Such findings are consistent with prior research documenting how enmeshment with the family of origin undermines spousal individuation and fosters chronic marital conflict (11). In Iran's collectivist cultural context, the family of origin often retains substantial influence over adult children's decisions, making boundary-setting a particularly salient challenge (2). The present results therefore highlight the critical role of family systems dynamics in either supporting or destabilizing marriages.

Another salient factor was hasty or uninformed marriages, often driven by cultural pressure, fear of loneliness, or reliance on others' recommendations. Many participants described having little knowledge of their partners before marriage and later realizing profound incompatibilities. This echoes earlier findings that inadequate premarital acquaintance increases the risk of marital dissatisfaction and divorce (5). Cultural analyses have noted that in Iran, early marriage is often valorized as a social norm, which can lead young adults to make premature commitments without sufficient readiness (3). The present findings thus support the notion that culturally enforced haste in marital decision-making can precipitate long-term relational instability.

Participants also emphasized their own and their spouses' low emotional and psychological literacy, including the absence of skills such as active listening, collaborative problem-solving, empathy, and seeking professional help. This deficiency magnified misunderstandings and perpetuated conflict. Prior research similarly found that many Iranian couples lack exposure to formal premarital training and skill-based counseling, which contributes to emotional disconnection and cognitive divorce (4). The findings thus corroborate the argument that the lack of institutionalized emotional education functions as a hidden but potent risk factor for divorce (6).

Moreover, deeply ingrained dysfunctional beliefs about marital roles were cited as key barriers to relational growth. Participants reported rigid expectations such as “a good woman is silent” or “a man must never lose,” which left little room for dialogue, negotiation, or personal development within the relationship. These findings parallel those of prior qualitative work documenting how ideological and gender-stereotyped conceptions of marriage impede emotional intimacy and adaptability (5). Such rigid cognitive schemas have been shown to exacerbate marital dissatisfaction when they clash with evolving personal values and societal norms (7, 10).

Marital infidelity was also frequently described as both a symptom and catalyst of marital breakdown. Participants noted that infidelity often occurred after prolonged emotional neglect, loss of intimacy, and chronic conflict. This is consistent with evidence that infidelity often emerges from cumulative relational dissatisfaction rather than as an isolated event (1). It also echoes studies showing that infidelity deeply erodes trust and accelerates the dissolution process (6). The gendered aspects noted by participants—such as women experiencing it as humiliation and men viewing it as a reaction to neglect—also reflect findings on the culturally shaped interpretations of infidelity in Iranian society (11).

Finally, a few participants mentioned neglect of physical attractiveness and personal care as a hidden but impactful factor in reducing sexual desire and intimacy. Although seldom discussed openly, this observation aligns with literature highlighting that sexual and physical dissatisfaction contribute to emotional distancing and eventual marital dissolution (10). The reluctance to discuss this issue reflects broader cultural taboos around sexuality in Iranian society, which can prevent couples from addressing sexual dissatisfaction proactively (2).

Overall, the findings of this study support the conceptualization of divorce as the result of multi-layered causalities. Structural causality encompasses cultural norms, gender role expectations, and family of origin interference; psychological causality involves emotional dysregulation, poor communication, and low emotional literacy; and intergenerational causality includes the reproduction of dysfunctional family patterns and maladaptive schemas. These layers converge to produce chronic dissatisfaction, emotional disengagement, and eventual marital dissolution. This integrative framework aligns with prior reviews emphasizing that divorce is not triggered by single isolated incidents but emerges from the cumulative interaction of personal vulnerabilities, relational deficiencies, and socio-cultural pressures (3, 6, 11). By situating the lived experiences of divorced couples within this multi-causal framework, the present study contributes to a deeper and more culturally nuanced understanding of marital breakdown in the Iranian context.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted of only 10 divorced couples from Shiraz, which limits the transferability of findings to other regions or cultural

contexts. Divorce experiences may vary across different socio-economic strata, ethnic groups, and urban versus rural settings, which were not fully represented here. Second, the study relied on retrospective self-reports, which may be affected by recall bias, selective memory, or post-hoc rationalizations. Participants' narratives may have been shaped by their current emotional states or the desire to justify their actions. Third, as a qualitative study, the findings are interpretive and cannot establish causal relationships in the statistical sense; rather, they illuminate perceived causal mechanisms from participants' perspectives. Finally, the study focused on couples who had already divorced, and thus could not capture the perspectives of couples currently in distressed but intact marriages, which might have revealed additional dynamics leading toward divorce.

Future studies should aim to address these limitations by incorporating larger and more diverse samples across different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal designs could be employed to track couples over time, which would help clarify the temporal sequence of causal factors and how they interact to produce marital dissolution. Comparative studies between divorced and non-divorced couples could also illuminate protective factors that buffer against divorce in similar cultural contexts. Moreover, integrating mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative narratives with quantitative assessments of emotional regulation, communication skills, and marital satisfaction could yield more comprehensive and robust models of divorce causality. It would also be valuable to investigate the role of emerging cultural changes, such as shifting gender norms and increasing individualism, in shaping marital expectations and stability among younger generations in Iran.

Based on the findings, several practical implications can be considered. Premarital education programs should be developed to enhance couples' emotional literacy, communication skills, and realistic expectations about marriage. Culturally sensitive marital counseling services should also be expanded and destigmatized to encourage couples to seek help proactively before conflicts escalate. Family therapy interventions could address boundary-setting challenges with the family of origin, especially in collectivist cultural contexts. Moreover, public health campaigns and school curricula could incorporate emotional education to prevent the intergenerational transmission of maladaptive relational patterns. Such initiatives could contribute to fostering more resilient, egalitarian, and emotionally supportive marriages, ultimately reducing the incidence of divorce and its psychological and social consequences.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their deep gratitude to all participants who contributed to this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

References

1. Amato PR, Previti D. People's reasons for divorcing: Gender, Social class, the life course, and adjustment. *Journal of Family Issues*. 2003;24(5):602-26. doi: 10.1177/0192513X03024005002.
2. Saroukani B. Divorce: A study of its reality and factors: Tehran University Press; 2011.
3. Kalantari AH, Roshanfekr P, Javaheri J. A review of three decades of research on the causes of divorce in Iran. *Family Cultural and Social Council Quarterly*. 2011;53(14):162-30.
4. Ebrahimi L, Najafipour A. The prevalence of cognitive divorce among couples seeking divorce: A review study. *Psychological Growth*. 2021;10(6):209-199.
5. Taghavi P, Bagheri F, Khalatbari J. A qualitative study of the experiences of divorced men and women regarding psychological factors affecting divorce. *Journal of Psychological Sciences*. 2020;19(86):228-13.
6. Fathi A, Amiri S, Fathi M, Sadeghi A, Niknam MH, Nourbal AA, et al. Factors influencing divorce over the past ten years in Iran. *Journal of Culture and Health Promotion*. 2023;7(2):302-289.
7. Mentser S, Sagiv L. Cultural and personal values interact to predict divorce. *Communications Psychology*. 2025;3(12):1-11. doi: 10.1038/s44271-025-00185-x.
8. Iman-Zadeh V, Mohabb N, Abadi R, Honarmand M. Identifying factors influencing divorce and proposing a model for predicting divorce using decision tree algorithms. *Journal of Applied Psychological Research*. 2021;12(2):263-47.
9. Marinescu L. Divorce: What does learning have to do with it? *Labour Economics*. 2016;38:90-105. doi: 10.1016/j.labeco.2016.01.002.
10. Parker G, Durante KM, Hill SE, Haselton MG. Why women choose divorce: An evolutionary perspective. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. 2022;43:300-6. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.07.020.
11. Eskandari-Najad K, Fathi A. A systematic review of the factors influencing divorce in the last decade. *Islamic Studies on Women and Family*. 2021;8(14):86-53.
12. Karela C, Petrogiannis K. Young children's emotional well-being after parental divorce: discrepancies between "resilient" and "vulnerable" children. *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*. 2020;10(1):1-18. doi: 10.5539/jedp.v10n1p18.
13. Mohammad-Rajabi M, Yazdkhasti F, Arizi HR, Abadi A. The effectiveness of integrated transdiagnostic therapy on internalizing behavioral problems in children in the context of parental emotional divorce. *Journal of Applied Psychological Research*. 2024;3(5):370-49.
14. Elexpuru IP, Dijk RV, Valk IVD, Pampliega AM, Molleda A, Cormenzana S. Divorce and physical health: A three-level meta-analysis. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2024;352:1-13. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.117005.

15. Bastani S, Gholamzadeh M, Soudani M. Coping with divorce: A reflection on the lived experiences of divorced women regarding their adaptation to divorce. *Scientific Research Journal of Women and Society*. 2023;15(54):156-45.