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Divorce: Social Menace or Blessing

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Abstract

The divorce rate has increased globally in the last few decades, generating a debate among social and religious activists, scholars, policymakers, and the general public regarding its impact on society. This research explores whether the increase in the number of divorces is viewed as a menace to society or a blessing. To provide a comprehensive analysis, the study examines sociological theories, and statistical data, whereas qualitative insights from a review of previous literature and interviews of targeted folk. Findings of the study indicate that divorce leads to significant emotional and financial stress but it also provides an opportunity to disengage from dysfunctional relationships. The outcomes for children are mixed including a decrease in conflict and emotional consequences. The study suggests that the increasing divorce rate should neither be condemned nor celebrated unilaterally. Rather, it should be counted as a re-evaluation of the family and the marriage itself. The study recommends the formulation of policies to lessen the adverse effects. In conclusion, the increasing divorce rate is a multilayered issue with both adverse and beneficial outcomes. Understanding its complexities is crucial for developing balanced perspectives and sustainable policies that support individual and societal well-being.

Keywords: Divorce, Separation, Family Support, Children Grooming, Emotional and Financial Stress.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the divorce ratio has increased significantly all over the world. Divorce has evolved from a rare occurrence to a common happening in modern societies (Grenz, 1990). This drift is evident in the increasing divorce rates globally, this has also generated extensive debates among policymakers, scholars, and society. This research paper endeavours to explore the causes of the rising divorce ratio and to find its impact that has a dual nature, both as a social menace and a blessing for the parties. Divorce has become an increasing aspect of modern society though it's a phenomenon normally stigmatized and considered a personal private matter. The dissolution of marriage used to be considered a holy bond that cannot be dissolved, is now a common occurrence, sparking intense debate and discussion. Some people consider the increasing rate of divorces as a social menace, disturbing

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family structures and contributing to various societal problems. Critics argue that increasing divorce ratio leads to negative outcomes for children, family bindings, economic instability, and emotional distress for the involved persons. These consequences are presumed to undermine the social fabric, promoting a culture of transitoriness and diminishing the sacredness of marriage. The other school of thought argues that an increasing divorce rate can also be taken as a blessing for society. Divorce reflects societal progress in terms of gender equality and individual rights (Cummings, 2002). Following this point of view, the rapid rise in divorces signifies the destruction of tyrannical norms that historically trapped individuals in hopeless and sometimes unmannerly marriages. It suggests a growing acceptance of self-actualization, empowering individuals to seek healthier and more sustaining relationships.

On one hand, divorce is often viewed as a social menace, eroding the fabric of traditional family values and contributing to a host of negative consequences, including emotional trauma, financial instability, and decreased social cohesion. Critics argue that the increasing divorce rate is a symptom of a broader societal decay, reflective of a growing disregard for commitment, responsibility, and the well-being of children. On the other hand, divorce can also be seen as a blessing, offering a means of escape from unhappy, abusive, or unfulfilling marriages, and providing individuals with a second chance at happiness, personal growth, and self-actualization (Scott et al., 2013). Proponents argue that divorce can be a liberating experience, allowing individuals to break free from suffocating relationships and forge new, healthier connections. Considering the different views of the common people in society the debate could be whether divorce can be called a social menace or a blessing, since the impact of divorce has both positive and negative, depending on individual and family circumstances and social frameworks. Divorce if considered a social stigma; can lead to emotional distress and financial instability (Emery, 2013). However, the other view is that it can also provide deliverance with affluence to personal growth, and positive transformation for both the parties and families.

The purpose of the present research is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the rising divorce rates by examining the multifaceted reasons behind it and its diverse impacts on society. By examining the negative and positive dimensions of increasing divorces, the research pursues to offer a balanced perspective that exceeds simplistic categorizations. Through a combination of sociological theories, case studies, statistical analysis, and the interview of targeted folks; this study endeavours to contribute to the ongoing discourse on whether the increasing occurrence of divorce should be considered as a social menace or a blessing for society. In addition, this research study endeavours to sightsee the complex and multifaceted nature of divorce, examining its disadvantageous effects on individuals and society, and its potential benefits and liberating consequences. Further, the research seeks to navigate the complex and contentious issue of divorce, exploring the nuances and contradictions

surrounding divorce. A deep study and analysis of some important social theories were taken into account to strengthen the study. These theories include life course theory, structural functionalism, family systems theory, feminist theory, conflict theory, attachment theory, and social exchange theory. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical data, this study aims to provide a balanced and informed perspective on the impact of divorce on individuals, families, and society as a whole. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study provides a profound understanding of the complex impacts of divorce, revealing both positive and negative consequences, and also devises strategies for justifying its negative effects while capitalizing on its potential benefits.

Review of the Literature

Due to the increasing divorce rate in recent years, many changes in family life have been observed. One of the most critical challenges is that children experience parental divorce and this has given rise to studies that seek answers to the questions of what the possible long-term and short-term effects of divorce on children may be (Sirvanli-Ozen, D. 2005). Kleinsorge & Covitz (2012) in their study found that divorce affects children irrespective of ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic background. Almost one out of two of all first marriages end with divorce in America, with over 1 million children being affected every year. Kim (2011) proposes a three-stage estimation model to examine the effect of divorce on the development of children's cognitive skills and he found that negative effects of divorce influence children's skills and traits at or before the beginning of the dissolution process.

According to Kingsbury & Scanzoni (1993) structural functionalism considers society as a complex system with various parts working together to promote stability, sustainability, and social order. While Lane (1994) in her study gives a different perspective; according to which the family is a key social foundation for performing essential functions of socializing children, providing emotional support to the entire family, and regulating sensual behaviour. Treviño (2017) mentions that divorce is considered as a disruption to these functions, possibly leading to social instability. However, structural functionalists also acknowledge that in some cases, divorce can be functional by removing dysfunctional family units.

According to Jackson (1993) conflict theory, engrained in Karl Marx's works, views social structures and relationships through the lens of inequality and power. According to Baron (1986) this theory views that family structures often reflect wider social conflicts, related to social status, gender, and race. Esteban et al. (2012) argued that divorce can be seen as an outcome of these conflicts, where individuals in general and women in particular, may find to seek to escape oppressive or unequal marital relationships. Conflict theory explains how divorce can be an instrument for changing and challenging unequal power distribution within the family.

In a previous study Fearon, & Roisman (2017), discussed “Attachment theory”, and explains that it was originally developed by John Bowlby, and explores how early relationships with caregivers influence individuals' patterns of attachment and behaviour in adult relationships. According to Shaver & Mikulincer (2009) Secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles can affect marital satisfaction and stability. the study (Johnson, 2019), concludes that divorce can be influenced by these attachment patterns, as individuals with insecure attachment styles may struggle with relationship maintenance and conflict resolution.

In their previous study (Carter, & Fuller, 2015), concluded that “Symbolic interactionism” focuses on the subjective meanings and everyday interactions that individuals assign to their experiences. Another study (Carter, & Fuller, 2016), found that within this framework, marriage, and divorce are seen as socially constructed processes that are influenced by the meanings and interpretations that individuals and society attach to them. In a study (Dennis, & Martin, 2005), explained that this theory emphasizes how personal identity and societal norms shape and are shaped by marital and divorce behaviours, including how individuals perceive and manage the dissolution of their marriages.

In their study Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005), proposed that social exchange theory suggests that human relationships, including marriage, are formed and maintained based on the costs and benefits associated with them. People seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs in their relationships. Cook, Cheshire, Rice, and Nakagawa (2013), found that divorce occurs when the perceived costs of remaining in the marriage outweigh the benefits. In their study Cropanzano et al. (2017), concluded that this theory helps explain why individuals may choose to leave marriages that no longer provide sufficient emotional, financial, or social rewards.

Theoretical Background

Social Theories on Family Binding

Some useful and valuable theories have been presented in the past to facilitate finding the real causes of social issues. Some of those theories related to social issues and family binding were studied. These theories present various perspectives on the dynamics of family binding and divorce, thus helping to understand the multifaceted nature of marital relationships and the dissolution or suspension.

Life Course Theory

Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe (2003) in their previous study examined "Life course theory” and explained how individuals' lives are shaped by social, historical, and cultural contexts. Similarly, Elder (1998) explains how transitions, such as marriage and divorce, are influenced by societal trends and individual lifestyles. In a study

Mayer (2009), emphasizes the sequence of life, certain timing, and events, thus suggesting that divorce may be more likely at certain stages of life or under specific social circumstances.

Family Systems Theory

In a study Rothbaum et al. (2002), explained that "Family systems theory" counts the family as a unified system where each member's behaviour affects the entire family and system. The study Prest & Protinsky (1993), finds that divorce is a process that impacts the entire family, and not only the couple. The previous study of Kerr (1981), mentions that Family Systems theory highlights the importance of understanding the roles, boundaries, and communication designs within the family system. It also suggests that changes in the family system, such as divorce, require the family to adapt and reorganize to maintain stability.

Feminist Theory

According to Ferguson (2017) feminist theory examines how gender inequalities and patriarchal structures influence family functioning. Dietz (2003) highlights how traditional gender roles and power imbalance can lead to displeasure and inequality within a family by encouraging individuals, especially women, to seek divorce to escape oppressive and unfair situations. According to Gross (2013), this theory supports and promotes equality and empowerment within familial relationships.

Research Methodology

Data Collection and Analysis

A mixed-methods approach is applied to conduct the study that further investigates the impacts of divorce on individuals and society. The quantitative component includes a survey conducted by designing a self-administered questionnaire to collect data from 350 respondents, aged 25-50, who had experienced divorce or some of their close family members experienced divorce. The survey included standardized scales to assess emotional well-being, financial stability, social support, and personal growth. Data Analysis was carried out, and descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were used to examine relationships between variables.

The qualitative components included semi-structured interviews with 40 participants who had experienced divorce or some of their close relatives had experienced a divorce. Participants were purposively selected from the survey sample to represent diverse demographic and experiential backgrounds. Interviews explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings associated with divorce. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns, themes, and meanings in the data. Mixed-methods

integration was done, and quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of divorce.

Results

Quantitative Findings

- Emotional Well-being: Divorce was associated with significant emotional distress, with about 70% of participants reporting symptoms of depression and anxiety.

- Financial Stability: Divorce led to financial instability, with about 70% of participants experiencing a decline in income and 30% struggling with debt.

- Social Support: Participants reported a significant loss of social support, with 50% experiencing social isolation and 30% feeling disconnected from friends and family, the remaining 20% were also not experiencing happy family or social life.

- Personal Growth: Despite challenges, 40% of participants reported experiencing personal growth and positive transformation following divorce.

Qualitative Findings

Four themes emerged as a result of thematic Analysis:

- Loss and Grief: Participants experienced intense emotional pain and loss.

- Liberation and Freedom: Divorce brought a sense of liberation and freedom from unhappy marriages.

- Personal Growth and Transformation: The participants reported positive variation in their confidence, self-awareness, and resilience.

- Social Stigma and Support: Participants faced social stigma and struggled to find supportive networks.

Data Triangulation

Quantitative and qualitative findings reveal a complex picture of the impacts of divorce. Some of the participants value the positive impacts of divorce whereas some termed it as more negative. In either case, the participants validated the findings, ensuring accuracy and authenticity.

Divorce is neither solely a social menace nor a blessing. Instead, it has both positive and negative consequences, depending on individual circumstances and social contexts. While divorce can lead to emotional distress, financial instability, and social stigma, it can also provide liberation, personal growth, and positive transformation.

Major Causes of Divorce in Pakistan

Pakistan is a male-dominated society where multiple factors contribute to the rising ratio of divorce. These factors include economic, social, cultural, and personal issues contributing to the rising divorce rates in Pakistani society. To address these fundamental causes comprehensive approaches are needed, including social services, financial and economic support, legal reforms, and to support affected individuals and families.

Economic Crunch

In his concluding study Bendall (2010), finds that the most significant contributors to marital disharmony in Pakistan are financial instability and economic burdens. Economic adversities can be stressful for relationships, further leading to conflicts and maybe finally separations. In Pakistan high unemployment rates and low-income levels aggravate these issues. Further, it is difficult for the couples to maintain a sustainable living environment and manage household expenses.

Social and Cultural Obligations

Forced and early marriages are still common in many parts of Pakistan, especially in rural areas. Keeping family traditions and tribal customs the elders decide the marriage and most of the time they don't ask for the consent of the boy and girl. In a study (Symer & Hofland, 1982) found that extra supervision, and lacking in essential requirements and understanding lead to dissatisfaction and aggravate conflict sooner or later. Social obligations to conform to tradition are also an important factor in creating friction, especially when couples struggle to meet expectations.

Mental Health Issues

Mental health issues are linked with economic and social problems, often worsened by the stresses of daily life, and can lead to marital collapses. Hancock (2002), in his research finds that anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues can put stress on relationships, mainly when one or both partners are unable to seek or access appropriate support and mental health treatment.

Social Norms and Customs

In recent past social attitudes towards marriage and divorce have significantly changed. The study Prest & Protinsky (1993), reveals that there is a rising acceptance of divorce as a solution to unwanted and unhappy marriages. Increasing awareness of individual fundamental rights and gender equality has also played a significant role in empowering people, particularly women, to break away from unfulfilling or abusive relationships.

Domestic Violence

According to Gonalons-Pons & Gangl (2021) find that domestic violence remains a pervasive issue in Pakistan especially in rural and underdeveloped areas, at the same time cities are not out of this dilemma. Many women seek divorces as a means of escape who are victims of physical and emotional abuse. Adding to the problem and making it more complicated is the lack of effective legal and social support for victims, these further complicate the situation, often leaving divorce as the only viable option for safety and well-being.

Effective Communication

Effective communication is vital for maintaining strong relationships. In many cases, couples linger on with poor communication skills, thus leading to increasing misunderstandings and unresolved conflicts that eventually end with divorce (Hoffman & Duncan, 1988).

Unfaithfulness

Unfaithfulness, Infidelity, and extramarital affairs also play significant roles in divorce. Suspicion and betrayal resulting from Unfaithfulness can irreparably damage relationships and can lead to seeking legal separation (Damota, 2019).

Divorce: A Menace

Divorce is not considered a suitable option in Pakistan due to its numerous negative effects on individuals and society. These effects are multi-layered and significantly affect emotional, social, and economic aspects of life. Addressing the negative impacts of divorce, requires inclusive family support systems, legal reforms, economic empowerment, mental health services, and societal changes to reduce the stigma linked with divorce. Below are listed some important and usual impacts of divorce.

Psychological and Emotional Effects

Divorce can lead to substantial psychological and emotional distress for both partners. This may include feelings of disappointment, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. The stigma associated with divorce in Pakistan can worsen these feelings, and that may further lead to social isolation and psychological issues.

Impact on Children

The study (Demo, & Acock, 1988), reveals that due to divorce, children are often the most affected. They may undergo feelings of abandonment, sadness, and confusion. Studies on very subject reveal that children of divorced parents are more likely to face behavioural problems, academic challenges, and emotional difficulties. The family distraction often leads to a lack of stability and a lack of sense of security for the children.

Economic Hardship

Another significant impact of divorce is economic instability, especially for females. Usually, women in Pakistan don't have the financial independence or skillset needed to support themselves in case of divorce. This economic dependency generally increases poverty and limits access to resources for divorced women and their children.

Social Stigma

In their study (Cline, D. W., & Westman, J. C. 1971), found that despite changing mindsets and attitudes, divorce is still considered as a social stigma in many parts of Pakistan. Divorced individuals, particularly women, may face discrimination and reduced social placement. This stigma can harm and limit their social interactions and opportunities for personal growth or remarriage.

Forfeiture of Social Sustenance

Losing mutual friends and social support is a common phenomenon in divorced individuals. This loss further leads to loneliness and emotional distress. In his study Damota (2019), finds that the divorcees may face challenges to rebuild their social network independently.

Legal Challenges

The legal process of divorce in Pakistan is complicated, and lengthy and involves heavy legal fees and multiple time appearances in the court. This is challenging for women particularly, those who generally face additional barricades in accessing legal representation and finding the judicial system (Peterson, Leigh & Day, 1984).

Impact on Extended Family

Divorce also has a strained relationship within the extended family. The dissolution of a marriage leads to conflicts and partitions within families in a society where family ties are critical. This separation affects not only the immediate family members but also the broader affiliated network.

Domestic Violence

In their study (Abbey, C., & Dallos, R. 2004), explained that in some cases, the divorce process of divorce can trigger or increase domestic violence. Women looking for divorce from rude relationships may face increased threats and violence from their spouses or in-laws, and even in some cases from their blood relatives, thus making the process more unsafe and traumatic (Mohsina & Tahira, 2021).

Divorce: A Blessing

While often considered a negative act, divorce in Pakistan can also have numerous positive effects. These positive impacts can effectively contribute to social progress, personal well-being, and individual empowerment. By identifying and recognizing these positive aspects, society can support individuals in a better way who are going through divorce. Society can also put efforts towards creating an environment that promotes healthy and respectful relationships.

Emotional and Psychological Relief

A study by Damota (2019), reveals that discontinuing an unhappy or deadly marriage life can bring significant emotional and psychological relief to both or either of the parties. Generally, Individuals often experience a sense of liberation and reduced stress, which can lead to better overall mental health and well-being. After a stressful or disrespectful marriage, divorce can allow people to focus on personal growth and happiness.

Personal Safety and Freedom

Divorce can be a means of escaping insulting and oppressive relationships for many people, particularly women. After divorce individuals especially, females get an opportunity to live a safer, healthier life free from emotional abuse and domestic violence. This can have significant and improved mental and physical health (Halligan, Chang & Knox, 2014).

Opportunity for Personal Growth

Kleinsorge & Covitz (2012) explains in their study that divorce may help provide individuals the opportunity to rediscover themselves and pursue personal objectives

that were previously neglected. It also allows for personal development and self-reflection, thus enabling individuals to build a more fulfilling life of their own choice.

Economic Empowerment

Initially, divorce can lead to economic hardship however, it can also be a substance for economic empowerment. This can lead to greater financial independence and long-term economic stability. Women, in particular, may be motivated to enhance their education and seek job training, and employment to support themselves and their children (Mendoza et al., 2019).

Opportunity for Gender Equality

Challenging traditional gender customs and rules is not easy, however, divorce can be a step towards gender equality by challenging traditional customs that support the male gender in Pakistan generally (Pantelis, Bonotis & Kandri, 2015). Their study found that divorce can also empower women to stand up against injustice and inequality in the system and society. It can lead to a societal drift towards respecting and recognizing women's rights and autonomy.

Legal and Social Awareness

Considering the increasing divorce rates, society also considers bringing improvement in legal and social systems and creating greater awareness amongst the masses. It focuses on the need for better legal frameworks to support divorced individuals. Hidayat & Mahmudah (2022), in their study finds that divorce may also lead to restructurings of society and rules that provide better protection, especially for women and children.

Encouragement of Healthy Relationships

Divorce helps and encourages individuals and society to value healthy, relationships over unwillingly maintaining or adhering to traditional norms. It promotes the awareness that mutual respect and personal happiness are dominant in any relationship.

Improved Relationships

Kleinsorge & Covitz (2012) in their study finds that stress-free and away from the conflict of a troubled marriage, individuals can spend more time and energy fostering positive and supportive relationships. Ending a dysfunctional marriage can lead to better relationships with children and other family members.

Reduction in Negative Role Models

Mendoza et al. (2019) finds that divorce can remove the stressful and contaminated environment, thus further leading to healthier emotional development and satisfied relationships.

Conclusion

Divorce in Pakistani society is generally considered as a stigma shifting from one stressful life to another. Divorce, however, also sighs relief to the parties who were tied up unwillingly to a relationship. The increasing divorce rate is a multifaceted subject that evades simple classification as either a menace or a blessing. Through the extensive analysis conducted in this study, it is evident that the consequences of divorce are far-reaching and complex. The consequences influence individuals, families, and society. As far as the negative impact of divorce is concerned, the consequences are far-reaching and deeply impacted. Emotional disorder, financial indecision, and long-term psychological impact on children and the couple are observed. Children from divorced families also generally undergo a sense of failure, their academic performance is also affected negatively, and they express behavioral issues. The couple and adults also experience social stigma, economic destitution, and mental health challenges after divorce. These adversative consequences also disturb the need for financial and family support systems. These adverse challenges need personality and psychological counselling, legal support, and financial backing to help individuals come to normal life.

Divorce does not have negative impacts only but can also have some positive impacts. After a disturbed life it can be an escape for the individuals from the rude, fruitless, or dysfunctional relationships. It also allows for enhancing psychological and emotional well-being, while it also gives a new path for personal growth, autonomy, and the opportunity to track improved relationships in the future. In some cases, divorce recognizes and validates individual independence, personal happiness, and contentment. The social impacts of increasing divorce rates are complex. Traditionally divorce is considered negative and presents an ugly image of family dissolution. However, the positive face gives another perspective suggesting a drift towards considering the individual well-being and mutual respect instead linger on with marriage at all costs. This social drift gives space to re-evaluate social values and norms.

To conclude it would be appropriate to say that, the increasing divorce rate should not be viewed in dual terms of social menace or blessing for the couple or family. Rather, divorce echoes broader social changes highlighting the need to understand social, family, and individual dynamics. By accepting both the challenges and opportunities presented by divorce, society can support affected people in a better way. Thus, in this way, society can adopt supporting environments where healthy relationships can

flourish. To provide moral support to the couple and families; society to develop balanced policies and active support systems to further help address the multifaceted nature of divorce. Society should also ensure that individuals and families are prepared and equipped to handle its complexities with resilience and optimism.

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