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Noora Lari & Maryam Al-Thani

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Divorce Legislation in the Arab Gulf: Trends and Educational Differentials

NOORA LARI  and MARYAM AL-THANI

Abstract: Traditionally, there have been internalized cultural values regarding family cohesion in the Arab region. However, as a result of modernization, rapid economic growth, and social transition, divorce rates have risen gradually over the past few years. This paper examines societal attitudes toward divorce predictors and the legislative response in Qatar, which has involved considerable initiatives to strengthen family cohesion. It highlights the various individual differences which lead to marital dissatisfaction and, ultimately, to divorce. The study uses original data from the sample of a 2019 national survey. In light of the legislation that aims to prevent the dissolution of marriage, the results suggest that sociodemographic patterns significantly contribute to divorce predictors. The study calls for urgent governmental responses in establishing premarital intervention as means to consider the changing impact of marital interactions and to mitigate the incidence of divorce in the Arab gulf.

Keywords: divorce, family, legislation, marital dissatisfaction, education

1 Introduction

The six countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) — Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman — have experienced profound social and economic transformations due to increased globalization, modernization, technological spread, and educational expansion over the past several years.¹ In the GCC countries (though to a lesser extent in Qatar), populations have increased due to a large inflow of foreign labor, especially since four of the six GCC countries are oil-exporting nations. This change in demographic composition has enhanced economic growth and development.

Furthermore, GCC countries have undergone unintentional social changes as a result of reduced child mortality rates, longer life expectancies, and higher female literacy rates and labor force participation.² Long-standing investigations have examined the relation between women's improved education, employment, and marital stability, the latter is based on marriage gains.³ Since the

Noora Lari is Research Assistant Professor at the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI), Qatar University, PO Box 2713, Doha, Qatar, n.lari@qu.edu.qa; **Maryam Al-Thani** is Senior Research Assistant at SESRI, Qatar University, PO Box 2713, Doha, Qatar, maralthani@qu.edu.qa.

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¹ Alharahsheh and Almeer, "Cross-National Marriage in Qatar", *Hawwa* 16 (2018), 170–204.

² De Bel-Air, Safar, and Destremau, "Marriage and Family in the Gulf Today: Storms over a Patriarchal Institution?", *Arabian Humanities* 10 (2018).

³ Sayer and Bianchi, "Women's Economic Independence and the Probability of Divorce: A Review and Reexamination", *Journal of Family Issues* 21.7 (2000), pp. 906–943.

values of men and women are mostly paternal, the advances in the status of women may contradict social norms, traditions, customs, and expectations.⁴

These changes have significantly affected family structures and marital stability and plagued the GCC region with high divorce rates. As a social institution, marriage assumes a range of core roles in society that differ across the jurisdictions of the Gulf countries, including Qatar. As in many societies, families in the Qatari context are responsible for instilling values, customs, norms, practices, and traditions in the next generation. As the most basic social entity, the family provides an opportunity for social integration, especially in the case of intermarriages, and thus promotes the peaceful coexistence of people of diverse ethnic, religious, social, racial, and cultural backgrounds.⁵ Marital stability refers to “intimacy, the frequency of differences between spouses, leisure time spent together, household activities, children and income sharing”.⁶ Stability also relies on happiness with the chosen approach to marital life, shared mutual values, decision-making, resolution of disagreements and disputes, and a strong friendship between spouses.⁷

In Qatar, family cohesion and strength are priorities of the government, which implements family-specific policies to support family cohesion and marital stability. The national development strategy considers the strength of the Qatari family to be a pillar of society. Given the importance of stable families and high fertility rates in Qatar’s national strategy, national efforts have sought to bolster family dynamics as means of reducing divorce rates. In this regard, considerable intergenerational cultural transformation, pre-marriage counseling, and educational programs are now compulsory for Qataris who are applying to the state Marriage Fund.⁸

Despite the significance of marriage and the family, cases of divorce are still present in the Arab Gulf region. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate trends of divorce in the GCC as well as their contributing factors. This paper extends prior research on the nature of attitudes toward divorce — both geographically and substantively — to the case of an Arab country with a particular focus on factors that cause divorce and divorce legislation in Qatar. To this end, the study uses original survey data and an embedded survey experiment to examine possible contributing causes of divorce while simultaneously adding to existing knowledge by establishing specific interventions that link legislation on divorce to minimization of marital conflicts and mechanisms for avoiding high divorce rates.

The study employs the Likelihood of Divorce measurement scale, which is a useful tool for exploring the interacting individual-level factors that are likely to cause divorce. A national representative sample was recruited to uncover hypothetical marital conflicts and issues, and participants were asked to specify the likelihood that they would end their marriages by divorce under specific circumstances. Their specific reasons for seeking divorce varied significantly according to the socioeconomic variables of gender, age, and educational attainment. The research also assesses the extent to which Qatar’s code of divorce legislation prevents the dissolution of marriages.

This paper addresses these inquiries by analyzing data from a face-to-face survey conducted in Qatar. The following section evaluates the existing literature and framework in relation to current divorce trends in both the international context and the Arab Gulf, and it reviews the divorce legislation in Qatar. Then, the next section outlines the method of the study, the mode

⁴ Al-Nasr, “Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Women and Misyar Marriage: Evolution and Progress in the Arabian Gulf”, *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 12.3 (2013), pp. 43–57.

⁵ Pourmovahed et al., “Deficiency of Self-Efficacy in Problem-Solving as a Contributory Factor in Family Instability: A Qualitative Study”, *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry* 13.1 (2018), pp. 32–39.

⁶ Jalovaara, “The Joint Effects of Marriage Partners’ Socioeconomic Positions on the Risk of Divorce”, *Demography* 40.1 (2003), p. 68.

⁷ Bani and Pate, “Dissolution of Marriage (Divorce) under Islamic Law”, *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization* 42 (2015), pp. 138–143.

⁸ Hukoomi Qatar e-Government, “Marriage Fund” (2020).

of data collection, and the analysis. The subsequent section presents and interprets the results of the study and compares them with those in the extant literature. Finally, the concluding section summarizes the main themes and recommends directions for future studies.

2 Context and literature review

The existing literature focuses on the causes and consequences of divorce, which is a major societal crisis that is highly prevalent at the global level.⁹ Several studies have explored the complexity of divorce from multiple perspectives, including structural and life course predictors of marital disruption, such as age, educational level, income, social class, race, and age at first marriage.¹⁰ Psychological research, in contrast, has mainly addressed the dimensions of marital interaction, such as conflict management,¹¹ or on personality characteristics, such as antisocial behavior or chronic negative affect.¹²

These studies have supplied valuable predictors and provisional reasons for divorce as determined on the basis of significant aspects of marital instability, conflict, and dissatisfaction.¹³ Marital instability has been described as a phase characterized by the breakdown of a marriage due to desertion, separation, or divorce and the individuals who are involved often have a later option to permanently separate. Previous research has produced a relatively clear understanding of the links between demographic and life course characteristics and divorce.¹⁴

Predicting factors that may increase the risk of divorce include marrying at an early age,¹⁵ living together before marriage,¹⁶ low religious participation,¹⁷ low education or income

⁹ Cooke et al., "Labor and Love: Wives' Employment and Divorce Risk in its Socio-Political Context", *Social Politics* 20.4 (2013), pp. 482–509; Dehkordi and Amiri, "Divorce: An International Multi-Dimensional Challenge", *International Journal of Epidemiologic Research* 5.2 (2018), pp. 64–66.

¹⁰ Bumpass et al., "The Impact of Family Background and Early Marital Factors on Marital Disruption", *Journal of Family Issues* 12.1 (1991), pp. 22–42; White, "Determinants of Divorce: A Review of Research in the Eighties", in Booth (ed.), *Contemporary Families: Looking Forward, Looking Back* (1991), pp. 141–149.

¹¹ Gottman, *What Predicts Divorce? The Relationship Between Marital Processes and Marital Outcomes* (1994).

¹² Leonard and Roberts, "Marital Aggression, Quality, and Stability in the First Year of Marriage: Findings from the Buffalo Newlywed Study", in Bradbury (ed.), *The Developmental Course of Marital Dysfunction* (1998), pp. 44–73.

¹³ Bumpass et al., "The Impact of Family Background"; Cleek and Pearson, "Perceived Causes of Divorce: An Analysis of Interrelationships", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47.1 (1985), pp. 179–183.; Conger et al., "Linking Economic Hardship to Marital Quality and Instability", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52.3 (1990), pp. 643–656; Johnson, Amoloza, and Booth, "Stability and Developmental Change in Marital Quality: A Three-Wave Panel Analysis", *Journal of Marriage the Family* 54.3 (1992), pp. 582–594.

¹⁴ Bloom, Niles, and Tatcher, "Sources of Marital Dissatisfaction Among Newly Separated Persons", *Journal of Family Issues* 6.3 (1985), pp. 359–373; Thompson and Walker, "Gender in Families: Women and Men in Marriage, Work, and Parenthood", in Booth (ed.), *Contemporary Families: Looking Forward, Looking Back* (1991), pp. 76–102; Wang and Amato, "Predictors of Divorce Adjustment: Stressors, Resources, and Definitions", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62.3 (2000), pp. 655–668; White, "Determinants of Divorce".

¹⁵ Booth and Edwards, "Age at Marriage and Marital Instability", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47.1 (1985), pp. 67–75; Bumpass et al., "The Impact of Family Background"

¹⁶ Axinn and Thornton, "The Relationship Between Cohabitation and Divorce: Selectivity or Causal Influence", *Demography* 29.3 (1992), pp. 357–374; Booth and Johnson, "Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Success", *Journal of Family Issues* 9.2 (1988), pp. 255–272.

¹⁷ Thomas and Cornwall, "Religion and Family in the 1980s: Discovery And Development", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52.4 (1990), pp. 983–992.

level,¹⁸ the context of a second rather than a first marriage,¹⁹ and the experience of parental divorce as a child.²⁰ Despite contradictory findings, some studies have illustrated that the employment and income of women increase their consideration of divorce as well²¹ as the likelihood that their marriage will end in divorce.²²

Researchers have developed several theoretical frameworks to explain divorce. For example, the social exchange theory (SET) postulates that interactive exchange is based on the costs and benefits that are derived from social relationships; accordingly, the primary purpose of entering into a relationship is to maximize benefits while minimizing costs.²³ The parties who are engaged in the relationship must be willing to abide by the guiding “rules” of exchange. Similarly, married couples expect the least amount of marital conflict, high spousal compatibility, an absence of physical harm, and augmented support for one another.²⁴ In the case of a judicial process, divorce may be granted or denied based on the prevailing evidence. A marriage breakup can be executed through the judicial process, as applicable within different jurisdictions, when one of the spouses engages in a serious offense, including acts of desertion, cruelty, or adultery, against the other partner.²⁵

Prior studies have indicated that factors of socioeconomic status (SES), which is usually measured in terms of education and income, facilitate marital success and marital conflict and are inversely associated with the high risk of divorce.²⁶ Individuals may hold especially high standards for marriage and expect to receive substantial degrees of emotional support, companionship, and personal fulfillment from their spouses. Because of these high standards, relationship problems may quickly trigger thoughts of divorce among these individuals. The stress that is generated by economic hardship intensify disagreements over finances, induce irritability in spouses, and decrease expressions of emotional support.²⁷

According to Kitson,²⁸ after experiencing a divorce, high-SES individuals were more likely to complain about a lack of communication, changes in interests or values, incompatibility, and the self-centeredness of their ex-spouse. In contrast, low-SES individuals more frequently complained about physical abuse, spending excessive amounts of time out of the house with friends,

¹⁸ Martin and Bumpass, “Recent Trends in Marital Disruption”, *Demography* 26.1 (1989), pp. 37–51.

¹⁹ Martin and Bumpass, “Recent Trends in Marital Disruption”; White and Booth, “The Quality and Stability of Remarriages: The Role of Stepchildren”, *American Sociological Review* 50.5 (1985), pp. 689–698.

²⁰ Bumpass et al., “The Impact of Family Background”; McLanahan and Bumpass, “Intergenerational Consequences of Marital Disruption”, *American Journal of Sociology* 94.1 (1988), pp. 130–152.

²¹ Booth et al., “Women, Outside Employment, and Marital Instability”, *American Journal of Sociology* 90.3 (1984), pp. 567–583.

²² Spitze and South, “Women’s Employment, Time Expenditure, and Divorce”, *Journal of Family Issues* 6 (1985), pp. 307–329.

²³ Cropanzano et al., “Social Exchange Theory: A Critical Review with Theoretical Remedies”, *Academy of Management Annals* 11.1 (2017), pp. 479–516.; Cropanzano and Mitchell, “Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review”, *Journal of Management* 31.6 (2005), pp. 874–900; Varzaneh et al., “A Theoretical Framework of Divorcing Couples Experience”, *Journal of Research and Health* 6.3 (2016), pp. 362–372.

²⁴ Varzaneh et al., “Theoretical Framework of Divorcing Couples Experience”.

²⁵ Jamil, “An Analysis of Irretrievable Breakdown of Marriage as a Ground for Divorce”, *Law Mantra Online Monthly Journal* 3.1 (2015).

²⁶ Conger et al., “Linking Economic Hardship to Marital Quality”; Voydanoff, “Economic Distress and Family Relations: A Review of the Eighties”, in Booth (ed.), *Contemporary Families: Looking Forward, Looking Back* (1991), pp. 429–45; White, “Determinants of Divorce”.

²⁷ Conger et al., “Linking Economic Hardship to Marital Quality”.

²⁸ Kitson and Holmes, *Portrait of Divorce: Adjustment to Marital Breakdown* (1992).

neglect of household duties, gambling, criminal activities, financial problems, and employment problems. Similarly, Levinger has found that low-SES divorced individuals referenced financial problems, physical abuse, and drinking, whereas high-SES divorced individuals highlighted a lack of love and excessive demands from their spouses.²⁹ Goode has indicated that high-status divorcees tended to report personality problems and conflict over values as reasons for divorce, whereas their low-status counterparts tended to cite insufficient economic support from the former spouse.³⁰

2.1 Divorce trends in the Arab Gulf

Since the discovery of oil and the onset of prosperity due to its financial revenue, the effects of rapid economic development, and modernization, GCC societies have undergone pronounced socioeconomic changes, and such transformations have directly altered cultural factors that shape both marriage and familial cohesion and instability. Gulf families maintain close familial ties and a strong sense of tradition.³¹ However, because of the effects of rapid socio-economic changes, the model of the extended family started to diminish in the 1970s, and the more persistent model became the nuclear family, which consists of two parents and their children.³²

Arab Gulf states are being affected by an upward trend in divorce rates. Several studies indicated that the divorce rate has increased dramatically across the Arab Gulf states over the last decade.³³ To some extent, the growing divorce trends have been the result of socioeconomic modernization, denting the cohesion of the family unit and performing as divorce predictors,³⁴ such as the wide access to education opportunities, participation of women in the workforce and delayed age of first marriage, following trends elsewhere in the world.³⁵ Socioeconomic modernization in the GCC countries also means that there is an increasing spectrum of gender equality, manifested in the fact that the age gap between males and females entering marriage is decreasing.³⁶

El-Haddad argues that in order to assess the factors related to the onset of divorce,³⁷ it is important to bear in mind the influence that extended relatives have on the constitution of the family structure in the GCC countries. The factors associated to the onset of divorce need to be examined by referring to the fact that the family is constituted, by and large, according to the same nuclear structure that is to be found in a Western family. However, this nuclear structure is profoundly affected by the presence of extended family. Moreover, although family units still

²⁹ Levinger, "Sources of Marital Dissatisfaction among Applicants for Divorce", *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 36.5 (1966), pp. 803–807.

³⁰ Goode, *Women in Divorce* (1956).

³¹ Al-Munajjed, "Divorce in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries: Risks and Implications", unpublished report, *Ideation Center Insight*, Dubai (2010).

³² Al-Issa, *Al-mutjama' Al-Qatarī: dirāsa taḥlīlīya li-malāmiḥ al-taghyīr al-ijtimā'ī* (1982).

³³ Al-Awadhi, "Divorce and Its Impact on the UAE Society", *Gulf News*, 1 October 2007; El-Haddad, "Major Trends Affecting Families in the Gulf Countries", paper for Bahrain University College of Arts Social Science Dept (2003); De Bel-Air, Safar, and Destremau, "Marriage and Family in the Gulf Today"; Shawky, Saleh, and Al-Awadhi, "The Effects of Sociodemographic Characteristics on Divorce Rates in Oman: Spatial Modelling of Marital Separations", *The Professional Geographer* 72.2 (2020), pp. 1–15; Sidiya, "Divorce Rates Increase in GCC Countries", *Arab News*, 5 November 2010.

³⁴ Kamrava, *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (2015).

³⁵ Quentin Morton, *Masters of the Pearl: A History of Qatar* (2020).

³⁶ James-Hawkins, Qutteina, and Yount, "The Patriarchal Bargain in a Context of Rapid Changes to Normative Gender Roles: Young Arab Women's Role Conflict in Qatar", *Sex Roles* 77.3 (2017), pp. 155–168.

³⁷ El-Haddad, "Major Trends Affecting Families in the Gulf Countries".

tend to be relatively big compared to Western countries, the number of children produced by married couples has decreased significantly in the last few years in the Arab gulf. Birth rates have declined as a result of access to family planning strategies as well as changing socio-cultural values.

Anser refers divorce rates to the adoption of many Western values.³⁸ The age of globalization has increased access to cultural values that are foreign to Arab Gulf society. In addition, the significant rise in living standards has produced many beneficial effects on GCC citizens. However, there is less emphasis on stable social relations. This state of affairs has led to an increase in individualistic values, which are then reflected in growing divorce rates. This social phenomenon has been entrenched by the erosion of traditional gender roles, which entails that women are likely to balance family with a growing presence in the world of work.

Divorce patterns are associated with a variety of complex contributing factors, such as cultural changes, female education and labor participation, age at first marriage, social support for divorced women, men's economic status, and religious principles.³⁹ In addition, several studies have highlighted the complexity of reasons for divorce in the Arab Gulf societies, which include an avoidance of parenting duties, economic problems and debt, poor work-family balance, and domestic abuse.⁴⁰

In a study by Abdul Jalil and Sibai,⁴¹ a random sample of divorced Saudi women was collected to investigate factors that affect the divorce rate among Saudi families. The results reveal that social factors, such as a lack of awareness of spouses regarding the rights and obligations in marriage, parental and family interference in the spouses' affairs, disparity in the couple's ages, and differences in education level and social class, contributed to the incidence of divorce. In addition, in an attempt to understand the causes of divorce in Kuwaiti society, Althaguib has conducted research that examined eight reasons for divorce. The most prominent reasons were ill treatment of one's spouse, sexual problems, and issues concerning interaction between spouses.⁴²

In another study in Kuwait, Al Jaradhawi and Ghulom have found that the causes of divorce were related to poor compatibility of spouses due to the distinct natures of the sexes, differing views and moods, a substantial age gap, and sexual incompatibility.⁴³ Divorce is more likely to occur amongst young people, rather than the members of the old generation, which are more traditionally-minded. Research in Kuwait has also identified the age factors and insufficient knowledge of potential couples as major reason for divorce. The study found that only 28% of divorced women had the opportunity to get to know their husbands before their engagement, and they became acquainted through work, college, school, or their neighborhood.⁴⁴

³⁸ Anser, "Divorce in the Arab Gulf Countries", in Abela and Walker (ed.), *Contemporary Issues in Family Studies: Global Perspectives on Partnerships, Parenting and Support in a Changing World* (2014), pp. 59–73.

³⁹ Kenney-Noziska and Lowenstein, "Play Therapy with Children of Divorce: A Prescriptive Approach", in Crenshaw and Stewart (eds.), *Play Therapy: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice* (2015), pp. 290–303; Barutçu and Demir, "Breakup Adjustment in Young Adulthood", *Journal of Counseling and Development* 93.1 (2015), pp. 38–44.

⁴⁰ Anser, "Divorce in the Arab Gulf Countries"; Al-Munajjed, "Divorce in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries" (2010); Mustafa, "High Divorce Rate to Get Government Investigation", *The National*, 31 December 2009.

⁴¹ Abdul Jalil and Sibai, "Al-'awāmil al-mu'aththirāt fī mu'addalāt al-ṭalāq fī al-'usar al-Sa'ūdiyya, dirāsa taḥlīliyya ladā 'ayyinat al-muṭlaqāt al-'āmilāt fī jāmi'at al-malik 'Abd al-'Azīz", MA thesis (2006).

⁴² Althaguib, "Asbāb al-itlāq fī al-mujtama' al-Kuwaitī: dirāsa midāniyya", *Journal of Social Sciences, Kuwait* 24.7 (1996), pp. 53–72.

⁴³ Al-Jaradhawi and Ghulom, "Muṭlaqāt saghīrāt fī al-mujtama' al-Kuwaitī" (1996).

⁴⁴ Al-Nasr, "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Women and Misyar Marriage: Evolution and Progress in the Arabian Gulf", pp. 43–57.

Moreover, the higher level of education attained by women and men in the GCC countries means that they will be given more priority to promoting their careers, which may sometimes clash with family obligations. Gravningen et al. have observed that low compatibility between couples may culminate in destroyed spousal relationships.⁴⁵ Entering into and sustaining a marriage necessitates foregoing some expressed and unexplained individual social, economic, religious, and economic differences.⁴⁶ Men's economic status is another factor that contributes to a potential marital breakup.⁴⁷

Traditionally, most societies assume that the husband ought to provide the desired material resources, and failure to do so is grounds for divorce.⁴⁸ Similarly, in Jordan, studies by Barhoum, Al-Qaisi and Al Majali, and Al-Ghazwi have examined causes of divorce.⁴⁹ Their findings reveal that parental involvement in children's lives, a lack of consensus between spouses, low marital awareness, and inadequate knowledge and communication skills were the primary causes of divorce alongside marriage at a young age and short-term engagements.

There are also several reasons why people might seek to get a divorce, which is governed according to Islamic law. This means that divorce is also likely to occur between men and second/third spouses in some cases. Most crucially, there is a growing awareness in the GCC at large about gender equality issues, which is bolstered by the growing level of interaction with the wider world, which is the product of the age of globalization. In this context, women are less likely to put with domestic violence and restrictions to her freedom. Several studies have established other physiological factors and physical or marital violence, husband abuse, negligence, jealousy and suspicion, and intervention by parents or other relatives as causes of high rates of divorce.⁵⁰ In combination with patriarchal practices, divorce is regarded as taboo in a conservative society, which creates an over-dependency on the man and facilitates domestic violence.⁵¹ A study by Human Rights Watch aimed to not only raise awareness of the relevance of reporting domestic abuse but also dissipate social perceptions and stigmas that prevent Qatari women from reporting these incidents or seeking divorce.⁵²

According to Article 16 (1) (c) of Qatar Family Law, a man has legitimate grounds for legally divorcing his wife when he has a physical or mental illness that is incurable or serious. Severe mental illness is present in disorders that may lead to an incapacity to work successfully or fulfill marital obligations; these outcomes imply insufficient capacity to work or meet the wife's needs,

⁴⁵ Gravningen et al., "Reported Reasons for Breakdown of Marriage and Cohabitation in Britain: Findings from the Third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3)", *PLoS ONE* 12.3 (2017).

⁴⁶ Kasapoğlu and Yabanigül, "Marital Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction: The Mediating Effect of Spirituality", *Spiritual Psychology and Counseling* 3.2 (2018), pp. 177–195.

⁴⁷ Kenney-Noziska and Lowenstein, "Play Therapy with Children of Divorce"; Vasudevan et al., "Causes of Divorce: A Descriptive Study from Central Kerala", *Journal of Evolution of Medical and Dental Sciences* 4.20 (2015), pp. 3418–3426.

⁴⁸ Cox and Demmitt, *Human Intimacy: Marriage, the Family, and Its Meaning*, 11th edn (2013).

⁴⁹ Barhoum, "Women's Social Status and Divorce in Jordan", *Journal of Social Sciences* 17.1 (1985), pp. 7–37; Al-Qaisi and Al Majali, "Asbāb al-itlāq fi muḥāfaẓat al-karak – al-'Urdun: dirāsa midāniya" (2000), pp. 174–212; and Al-Ghazwi, "Social and Economic Causes of Divorce in the North of Jordan: A Field Study in the Governorate of Irbid", *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* 34 (2007), pp. 66–83.

⁵⁰ Al-Gharaibeh and Bromfield, "An Analysis of Divorce Cases in the United Arab Emirates: A Rising Trend", *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 53.6 (2012), pp. 436–52.

⁵¹ Al-Nasr, "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Women and Misyar Marriage: Evolution and Progress in the Arabian Gulf", pp. 43–57; Human Rights Watch, "Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man", 16 March 2020.

⁵² Human Rights Watch, "Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man"; Independent Group of Concerned Citizens, "Qatar Shadow Report", report submitted to the CEDAW Committee for the 57th Session (2015).

which are legally binding requirements within a marriage.⁵³ The impacts of mental health factors on female divorce applicants been investigated.⁵⁴ This research involved a cross-sectional study of a convenience sample of 434 women who applied for divorce in 2013 in the Ahvaz legal medicine department. The data were obtained through a questionnaire on divorce factors and the Standard Questionnaire on Symptoms checklist 25 (SCL-25). The findings demonstrate a significant connection between the mental health of the female divorce applications and the social, lifestyle, communication, family, and individual factors.

Problems with mental health can manifest in a range of forms and vary in the extent of their severity. According to Sharma et al., “severe mental illness results in disruption of behavior and may result in disability and inability to function satisfactorily and meet the obligations of marriage”.⁵⁵ Less extreme, a man has legitimate grounds for legally divorcing his wife when he has a physical or mental illness that is incurable or serious mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, disordered eating, phobias, or alcoholism, may not prompt partners to seek divorce. However, the presence of a severe mental illness often leads spouses to end their marriage under certain circumstances in which the spouse jeopardizes the protection of the children or is incapable of sustaining a marriage due to impacts on reasoning, temperament, or capabilities.

Several GCC authorities have expressed concern about the increase in divorce rates which promoted an important factor that needs to be taken into consideration which is premarital intervention as an indicator of whether divorce is likely to occur at a latter stage. Premarital intervention is likely to look at the potential causes of conflict between males and females and to ensure that the couple shares a similar outlook on the life that they are about to share.⁵⁶ According to Mustafa,⁵⁷ the UAE government has responded to this concern by establishing government programs, such as communication skills seminars and remediation programs, to mitigate the incidence of divorce.⁵⁸ However, there are gaps in knowledge regarding the governmental responses and legislation about divorce predictors in Qatar. The following sections address these knowledge gaps to clarify causes of divorce and explore the mechanics of implementing programs that aim to reduce the divorce rate in Qatari society and the GCC states.

2.2 Divorce legislation and trends: the case of Qatar

Qatari society is primarily founded on Islamic culture and religion. As a Muslim-majority country, most processes, including those of marriage and divorce, are controlled by the Sharia court (Islamic court) and Sharia law (Muslim law). The codes of Qatar Family Law 22 of 2006 cover a wide range of issues that are considered to be within the jurisdiction of family law, including marriage and divorce, issues that arise within and after marriage, and rules

⁵³ Musawah, “Musawah Overview Table on Muslim Family Laws and Practices: Jordan”, submission to the CEDAW Committee for the 66th Session (2017).

⁵⁴ Jalili et al., “The Relationship Between Factors Related to Divorce Request and Mental Health Among Divorce Applicant Women Referred to Legal Medicine Organization in Ahvaz, Iran”, *Journal of Family and Reproductive Health* 11.3 (2017), pp. 128–137.

⁵⁵ Sharma, Reddy, and Kamath, “Marriage, Mental Illness and Law”, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 57.6 (2015), pp. S339.

⁵⁶ Markman et al., “A Randomized Clinical Trial of the Effectiveness of Premarital Intervention: Moderators of Divorce Outcomes”, *Journal of Family Psychology* 27.1 (2013), pp. 165–172

⁵⁷ Mustafa, “High Divorce Rate to Get Government Investigation”.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

governing children.⁵⁹ The Constitution of 2004 acknowledges Sharia as “a main source of legislation”, and the government describes Islamic law as “the moral foundation of Qatari culture”. However, because of policies that have diminished the tribal structure of Gulf societies, eroded traditional forms of authority, and introduced new gender norms, the rate of divorce is also increasing in Qatar.

In 2018, a statistical report on marriage and divorce rates by the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS) has indicated a decrease in the marriage rate per 1,000 individuals aged 15 years and older in the population between 2011 and 2017.⁶⁰ Among males, the rate decreased from 25.3% in 2011 to 23.9% in 2017, while that of females decreased from 24.2% in 2011 to 21.4% in 2017. The decline in marriage rates can be attributed to the high cost of marriage as well as the rise in both education levels and labor market participation among women. **Figure 1** presents the divorce cases in Qatar in terms of the general rates for males and females in the period from 2010 to 2019.

Figure 1 illustrates that the divorce rate among Qatari citizens declined from 8.8% in 2011 to 6.9% in 2017 for Qatari women with an annual decline of 4.1%. For men, the divorce rate decreased from 10% in 2011 to 8.6% in 2017 with an annual decline of 2.5%. Interestingly, the divorce rate is highest among the younger generation. The report indicates that divorce rates were highest among Qatari spouses in the age group of 20–29 years, who accounted for 40.8% of total Qatari divorce cases, followed by spouses aged 30–39 years, who comprised 32.5% of divorces.

As per Article 106 of the Qatari Family Law 22 of 2006, a marriage can be dissolved only if the divorce is expressed in the Islamic Formula of Divorce.⁶¹ Although the legal system in Qatar does not explicitly encourage divorce, it provides multiple well-defined articles under which a marriage contract can be dissolved and clearly defines cases in which divorce can be initiated by the wife or the husband. There are three main types of divorce: revocable divorce, divorce against compensation, and major or minor irrevocable divorce. Under Article 112 of the Qatar Family Law, spouses can rescind a divorce request up to three times. This allowance could be perceived as a way of discouraging divorce by granting the divorce applicants two opportunities to call off or revoke a divorce.

Furthermore, under Article 118 of the Qatar Family Law, a divorce against compensation takes place when the wife has commenced the divorce proceedings.⁶² However, the right of women to enter into a divorce is significantly restricted compared to that of men. Under Sharia law, there are two justifications for granting divorce to a wife: if her husband cannot satisfy her needs for living, including food and shelter, or her husband has had no sexual relationship with her for more than three months. Thus, women must contend with legal and financial challenges, while men can easily divorce their spouses. In certain instances, a woman has to pay for her dowry and marriage costs, which leads to other consequences post-divorce, such as the need to make financial arrangements and adjust to a new living style.⁶³ In addition, if she has a child who is seven years of age or older, she must surrender custody, and any younger children must be transferred to their father once they reach seven years of age.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Welchman, “First Time Family Law Codifications in Three Gulf States”, *International Survey of Family Law* (2010), pp. 163–178.

⁶⁰ Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, *Marriage & Divorce in the State of Qatar 2017* (2018).

⁶¹ Becher et al., “Positive Parenting and Parental Conflict: Contributions to Resilient Coparenting During Divorce”, *Family Relations* 68.1 (2019), pp. 150–164.

⁶² Becher et al., “Positive Parenting and Parental Conflict”.

⁶³ Anser, “Divorce in the Arab Gulf Countries”, p. 60.

⁶⁴ Bani and Pate, “Dissolution of Marriage (Divorce) under Islamic Law”.

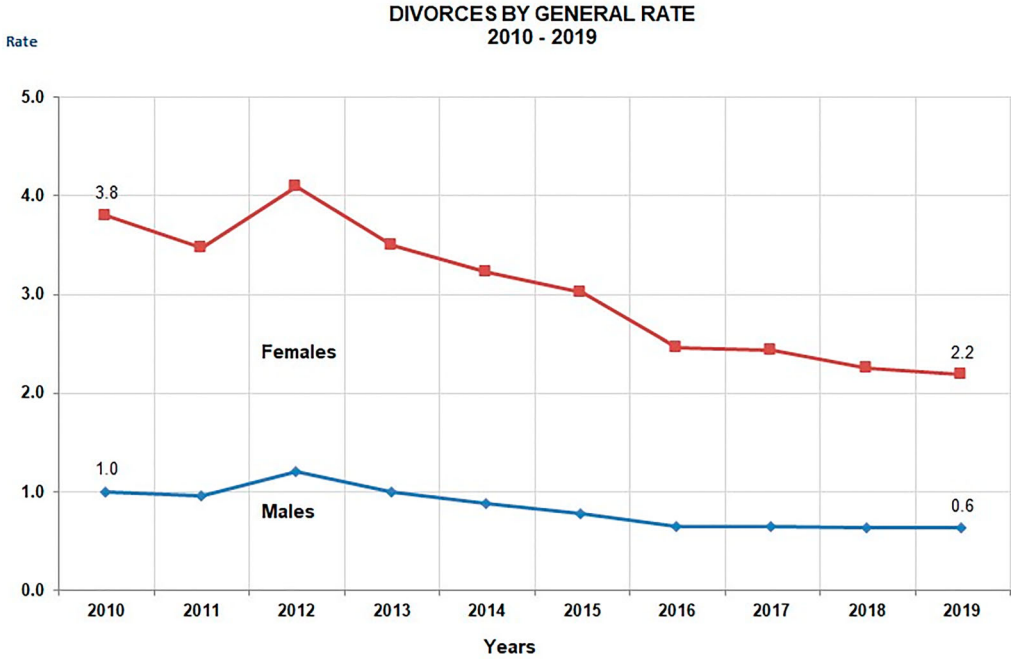


Figure 1: Divorces by general rate, 2010–19

Source: Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, “Vital Statistics Annual Bulletin Marriage and Divorces in 2019” (2020).

A divorced woman is entitled to compensation if she has no fault whatsoever, and the husband is solely to blame for the divorce. In a study by James-Hawkins et al. (2017),⁶⁵ young women feared divorce, were uncertain about customary family safety nets, and thus desired financial independence so they would be able to support themselves if they were left alone later in life due to divorce. Given the emphasis on tradition and the family in the Arab world, where divorced women are subject to stigmatization and have limited options available, some scholars view the rise in divorce rates as an urgent social emergency. According to Yassari (2016), the divorce legislation in Qatar does discourage divorce to some extent, as a husband has the ultimate right to rescind a divorce application and return to his wife.⁶⁶ As Figure 2 indicates, in 2019, 57.4% of divorces cases among Qatari nationals were revocable.

Under Article 116, if a divorce is revocable, the court allows the husband to reconcile with his wife within three months.⁶⁷ Most husbands will refrain from wronging their wives or engaging in actions that may prompt a divorce filing, as such outcome would negatively impact their financial status, as per Article 115 in Qatari Family Law. Additionally, under Article 122, the divorce court can appoint two arbitrators to reconcile a couple. The process is limited to six months, the court can execute a separation order between the husband and wife only after the reconciliation period expires.

⁶⁵ James-Hawkins, Qutteina, and Yount, “The Patriarchal Bargain in a Context of Rapid Changes”.

⁶⁶ Yassari, “Divorce in Egypt: Between Law in the Books and Law in Action”, in Yassari (ed.), *Changing God’s Law* (2016), pp. 193–215.

⁶⁷ Becher et al., “Positive Parenting and Parental Conflict”.

**QATARIS DIVORCES BY TYPE OF DIVORCE
2019**

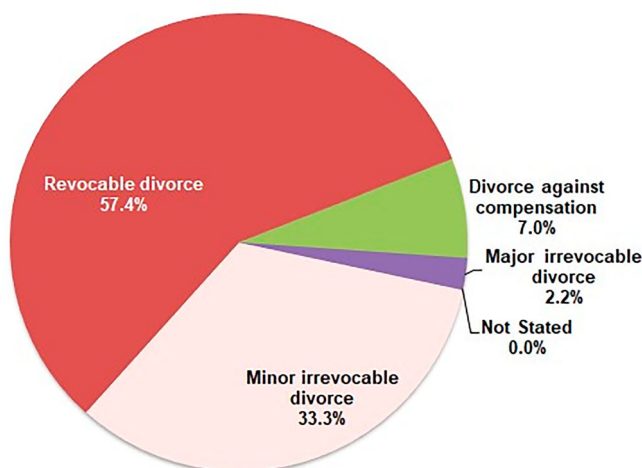


Figure 2: Qatari divorces by type of divorce in 2019

Source: Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, “Vital Statistics Annual Bulletin Marriage and Divorces in 2019” (2020).

The court is supportive of the reconciliatory process between separated spouses and approaches reconciliation as a means of curtailing and preventing issues of potential divorce. Qatar provides couples with a generous allowance in order to start a family, which is subject to the conditionality of receiving counselling geared towards emphasizing the importance of family as a pillar of society. Alimony payments are only in effect for three months, after which the husband is not required to render any monetary support to his wife. As per Article 114, three months after the divorce filing, an immediate judicial order is implemented with regard to alimony, child support, child visitation, and child custody, which affects the husband’s financial status.

2.3 Socio-demographic patterns and divorce in Qatari society

As the previous section has indicated, several socio-demographic factors contribute to seeking a divorce, including the duration of the marriage, the ages of the spouses, and differences between their educational, intellectual, and social backgrounds. In Qatar, the divorce rate was highest among Qatari wives aged 20–29 years, who accounted for 55.3% of the total divorces, followed by the age groups 30–39 years and 40–49 years, with rates of 25.4% and 12%, respectively.⁶⁸ Divorces that occurred during the first five years of the marriage or before consummation amounted to 69.5% of total divorces; in contrast, divorces in which the spouses had been married more than 20 years accounted for the lowest percentage of the total divorces. These figures indicate that most divorce cases occurred either during the first five years of marriage

⁶⁸ Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, *Marriage & Divorce in the State of Qatar 2017* (2018).

or before the period of consummation, which explains the increase in minor irrevocable divorces and revocable divorces.

The MDPS report also conveys an increase in the percentage of divorces in which the spouses had been married for between five and nine years. Such increase in these cases, which represented 14% of total divorces in 2017, evidences that the length of a marriage is a predictor of divorce, wherein the risk of divorce is higher during the first years of the marriage but decreases over time. This observation might suggest that couples who are married for longer durations tend to pursue alternative family conflict resolution mechanisms rather than divorce in order to avert social shame. Accordingly, divorces were most prevalent among the 20–24 years age group for Qatari women and the 25–29 years age group for Qatari men.⁶⁹

Most marriages in the GCC, including in Qatar, are arranged,⁷⁰ which may contribute to a series of pragmatic issues that can be highly stressful and frustrating for couples and, in turn, lead them to seek divorce after a short period of marriage.⁷¹ An educational disparity between the spouses is another factor that appears to contribute to divorce, especially since education level has been associated with the ability to secure employment opportunities.

Overall, in the analysis of divorce rates in relation to education level, the statistical report specifies that the highest percentage of Qatari divorcees were secondary school graduates, who were female and male in 379 (56.3%) and 469 (59.7%) cases, respectively.⁷² Figure 3 displays the divorce cases in 2019 in terms of the education status of the wife and the husband according to the following categories: illiterate, read and write, primary school, preparatory school, secondary school, post-secondary school, and university level and above.

The next section outlines the data and methods of the present study as well as the mode of data collection and the analysis. It also compares the results of this study to insights from existing statistics and literature.

3 Empirical analysis

This section presents the results of the survey experiment, which aimed to investigate the subjective reasons for seeking divorce under certain circumstances. The survey data were collected in 2019 from a convenience sample of Qatari citizen respondents ($n = 803$). Respondent recruitment used Qatar's administrative zones for stratification, and a comprehensive and proportionately stratified sampling framework was devised to select households at random. Individuals were selected as survey respondents through software randomization, and their gender was pre-specified.

Table I displays the demographic characteristics of the sample. In terms of gender, 49.4% of the respondents were women, and 50.6% were men. The average age was 41.5 for both genders. Around one-quarter of the respondents were above the age of 50 (25.4%), and a similar proportion were between 18 and 30 years of age (24.8%). The majority of the respondents were married (68.5%) and held a university degree or higher (46.7%), and around one-quarter had completed secondary school (26.6%). More than half of the respondents were employed (55.3%), and nearly three-quarters (70.3%) had a monthly income of more than \$11,200.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Al-Nasr, "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Women and Misyar Marriage: Evolution and Progress in the Arabian Gulf", pp. 43–57.

⁷¹ Dehkordi and Amiri, "Divorce: An International Multi-Dimensional Challenge"; Akhtar, "Contemporary Issues in Marriage Law and Practice in Qatar", *Hawwa* (2020), pp. 124–158.

⁷² Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, "Vital Statistics Annual Bulletin Marriage and Divorces in 2019" (2020).

DIVORCES BY EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WIFE AND HUSBAND
2019

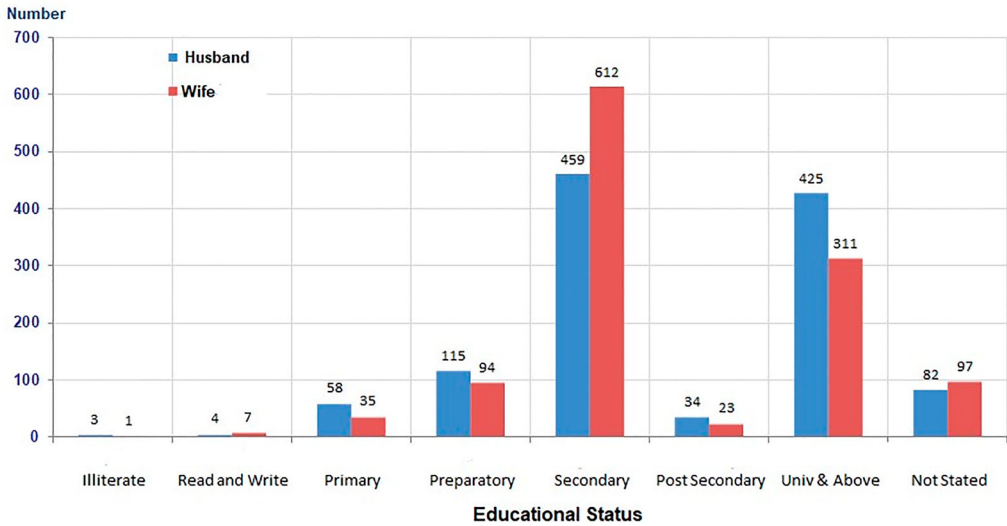


Figure 3: Divorces by educational status of wife and husband in 2019

Source: Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, “Vital Statistics Annual Bulletin Marriage and Divorces in 2019” (2020).

To understand more about the particular factors that contribute to seeking divorce, respondents were asked in an experimental task to consider hypothetical situations and predictors of divorce in certain situations. They used the Likelihood of Divorce Scale (see Appendix) to indicate the likelihood that they would view divorce as an option under the prevailing circumstances of family dynamics within Arab Gulf societies. Participants responded to a 17-item checklist expressing the perceived reasons for divorce by using the following five-point Likert scale: extremely likely (1), somewhat likely (2), not sure (3), somewhat unlikely (4), and extremely unlikely (5).

The experiment noted that it is essential to develop training and educational programs for married couples to reduce the divorce rates in Qatar. The participants were asked to identify

Table I: Baseline demographic characteristics

VARIABLES	N (%)
Age (Mean, SD) (in years) * Age (in years)* >50 >40–50 >30–40 18–30	(41.5, 13.7) 193 (25.4) 175 (23.0) 204 (26.8) 189 (24.8)
Gender Male Female	406 (50.6) 397 (49.4)
Marital status Never married Currently married Divorced/separated/widowed	184 (22.9) 550 (68.5) 69 (8.6)
Education status** Never attended any school Primary school Secondary school Higher education (Diploma/university degree)	42 (5.3) 155 (19.4) 212 (26.6) 388 (46.7)
Employment status*** Employed Not employed	443 (55.3) 358 (44.7)
Monthly income**** <\$4,300 \$4,300–\$8,400 \$8,400–\$11,200 >11,200	24 (4.0) 87 (14.5) 67 (11.2) 422 (70.3)

* Data available for 761 subjects. ** Data available for 797 subjects. *** Data available for 801 subjects. **** Data available for 600 subjects.

the most important reasons that some married people request divorces in Qatar. Never-married participants were presented with the same marital circumstances but were instructed to imagine that “they have been married for 2 years and do not yet have children”. While controlling for the selection risk of divorce, a number of the most influential factors should be investigated, including “growing apart”, “physical violence”, “lack of respect and appreciation”, “personality differences”, “spend time with friends outside”, “financial problems/issues”, “demeaning and insulting”, “incapable of handling responsibility”, “not happy in marriage”, “sexual problems”, “intervening by in-laws”, “disagreement regarding what to spending money on”, “infertility”, “alcohol/drug problems”, “mental problems”, “frequent arguments/fighting”, and “unfaithfulness/infidelity”.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire were measured by calculating the Cronbach’s alpha and corrected item scale correlation (see Table II). The correlation matrix of each pair of variables had a scale of 0 to 1, where a number near 1 was more significant. According to this matrix, there was no multicollinearity between the items (i.e. all coefficients were lower than ± 0.90) indicating that each item on the scale was sufficiently correlated with the total score. The scale reliability coefficient 0.9117 was the Cronbach’s alpha for the two subscales. The residual association did not exceed 0.1 for any item, which signifies that the items were unique, did not overlap, and each addressed a distinct problem.

The questionnaire was programmed into a Computer-assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) system using BLAISE software. After the data collection, all individual interviews were merged and saved in a single BLAISE data file. The dataset was then cleaned, coded, and saved in STATA format for statistical analysis. An analytical descriptive approach was adopted to calculate the means, standard deviations, marginal effects, and predicted probabilities while controlling for explanatory variables.

The structural validity was evaluated by creating an index factor analysis via principle axis factoring, and varimax rotation. A scree plot was generated to calculate the number of variables.

Table II: Results of the reliability analysis

RESULTS OF THE RELIABILITY ANALYSIS			
ITEM		Corrected item total correlation	Cronbach’s Alpha, if item deleted
X1	Growing apart	0.462	0.911
X2	Physical violence	0.468	0.910
X3	Lack of respect and appreciation	0.631	0.906
X4	Personality differences	0.575	0.907
X5	Spend time with friends outside	0.579	0.907
X6	Financial problems/issues	0.608	0.906
X7	Demeaning and insulting	0.683	0.904
X8	Incapable of handling responsibility	0.676	0.904
X9	Not happy in marriage	0.686	0.904
X10	Sexual problems	0.451	0.918
X11	Intervenes from in-laws	0.660	0.905
X12	Disagreement on Money spent	0.652	0.905
X13	Infertility	0.597	0.906
X14	Alcohol/drug problems	0.627	0.906
X15	Mental problems	0.634	0.905
X16	Frequent argument/fighting	0.700	0.904
X17	Unfaithfulness/infidelity	0.594	0.907

Table III: The KMO and Bartlett's tests for likelihood of divorce

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.932
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	6733.746
	Difference	136
	Significance	.000

A linear regression analysis was used to find the relationship between variables, and the mean scores of the two factors of divorce were contrasted between gender, age, and educational attainment variables. Factorability was assessed via the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity to determine the divorce associated likelihood with the metric scale <1 and $p < 0.05$. The KMO and Bartlett's tests revealed that the questionnaire was optimal for factor analysis. Table III shows that the KMO sample adequacy score was 0.932 and the Bartlett's test yielded a p-value less than .05.

3.1 Factor analysis output I: total variance explained

Table IV displays the total amount of explained variance by principal axis factoring. It was perceived that the Eigenvalue reflects the cumulative sum of variation that a given principal component is described, and an eigenvalue exceeding 1 signified qualification as a factor. Therefore, the first component (X1) accounts for the most volatility, while the last component (X17) accounts for the least. According to the loading factor in Table IV, the variable X1 had a maximum variance of 44.3%. The X2 and X3 variables followed with 9.6% and 6.3%, respectively. The maximum percentage of variation among the first three factors conveys a highly efficient result of the current analysis.

As a result, the eigenvalues decrease sharply after component five and onwards. The sharp decline between components 1–4 and components 5–17 implies that our queries are underpinned by four variables. The amount of explained variance was lower than the recommended value of 54.009%, which may be due to the extraction of only two factors. Since we extracted an equal number of components and products, the Initial Eigenvalues column is the same as the Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings column.

3.2 Factor analysis output II: scree plot

The eigenvalues (quality scores) were visualized with a scree map. The scree plot in Figure 1 was referenced to verify the questionnaire's two-factor existence. The first four elements had eigenvalues above 1. The line remains almost consistent after the second factor, which represents that each subsequent component contributed an increasingly smaller percentage of the total variance.

3.3 Factor analysis output III: communalities

To gain insight into the particular factors that contribute to seeking divorce, two components were extracted using theory principal axis factoring and varimax rotation. These variables were labeled Factor 1 (F1) and Factor 2 (F2) in Table V. According to the loading factor, the majority of the questions were assigned to F1, while the remainder were assigned to F2. All 17 items had a factor loading of greater than 0.30.

Communality (h^2) is a definition of common variance that ranges from 0 to 1. Values closer to 1 suggest that extracted factors explain more of the variance of an individual item. If the initial

Table IV: Total of variance explained

FACTOR	INITIAL EIGENVALUES		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
X1	7.544	44.374	44.374
X2	1.638	9.635	54.009
X3	1.082	6.363	60.372
X4	0.872	5.127	65.499
X5	0.731	4.297	69.796
X6	0.673	3.962	73.758
X7	0.621	3.653	77.411
X8	0.542	3.190	80.601
X9	0.466	2.741	83.343
X10	0.442	2.601	85.944
X11	0.424	2.491	88.435
X12	0.388	2.282	90.717
X13	0.353	2.076	92.793
X14	0.350	2.061	94.854
X15	0.310	1.826	96.680
X16	0.286	1.680	98.360
X17	0.279	1.640	100.000

Note: Extraction method = principal axis factoring. When factors are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

value is less than 0.3, it is considered a factor. An estimate of all the general and specific factors (except for X10, sexual problems) had a degree of variation of less than 0.3, which is extremely low. This exception implies that the independent variable X10 is a mixture of multiple characteristics and has a quantified range of 0.252 to 0.218.

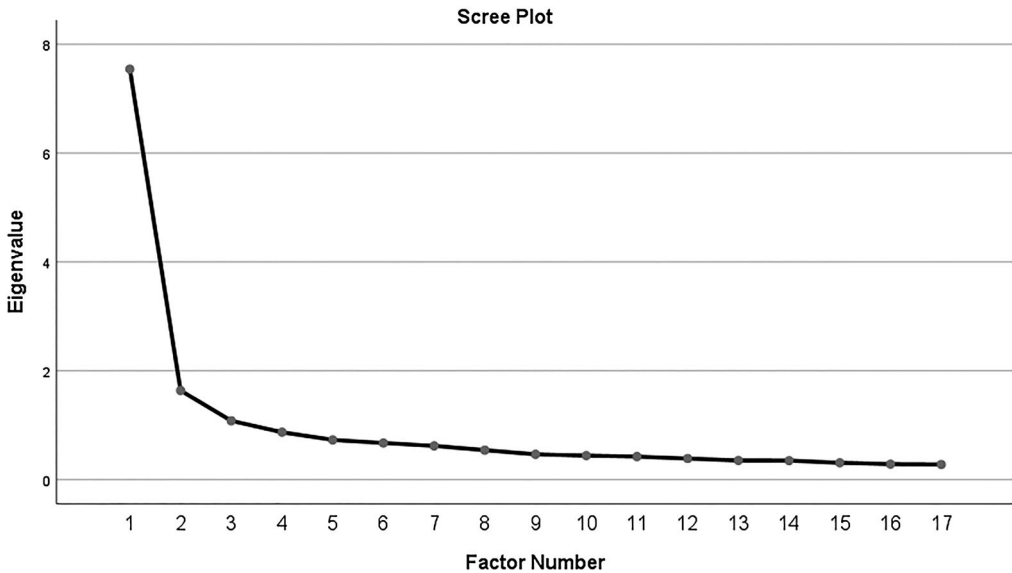


Figure 4: Scree plot for likelihood of divorce

Table V: Principal axis factoring analysis

ITEM		COMMUNALITIES: VARIABLES	
		Initial (F1)	Extraction (F2)
X1	Growing apart	0.338	0.313
X2	Physical violence	0.417	0.509
X3	Lack of respect and appreciation	0.519	0.607
X4	Personality differences	0.461	0.501
X5	Spend time with friends outside	0.525	0.557
X6	Financial problems/issues	0.567	0.646
X7	Demeaning and insulting	0.557	0.579
X8	Incapable of handling responsibility	0.548	0.529
X9	Not happy in marriage	0.557	0.502
X10	Sexual problems	0.252	0.218
X11	Intervenes from in-laws	0.489	0.490
X12	Disagreement on Money spent	0.562	0.637
X13	Infertility	0.422	0.440
X14	Alcohol/drug problems	0.601	0.669
X15	Mental problems	0.496	0.517
X16	Frequent argument/fighting	0.557	0.591
X17	Unfaithfulness/infidelity	0.527	0.581

Table VI: Gender as likelihood of divorce predictor

GENDER	COEF.	STD. ERR.	T	P > T	95% CONF.	INTERVAL
Likelihood of Divorce	0.001336	0.0019622	-0.68	0.496	0.0051877	0.0025157
	4.041229	0.0865406	46.70	0.000	3.871354	4.211103

3.4 Divorce predictors based on sociodemographic factors

The specific reasons for seeking divorce varied considerably in relation to the socioeconomic variables of gender, age, and educational attainment. The Likelihood of Divorce values were computed in a scale to find the mean value of all 17 items. Then, a regression analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the likelihood of divorce and the sociodemographic factors of the respondents. In Table VI, the p-value is less than 0.05, which indicates a significant relationship between gender and likelihood of divorce.

In this study, younger generations were more likely to pursue a divorce. For both married and unmarried respondents, the desire to seek a divorce declined as age increased. Yıldırım and Demir have cited concerns about younger generations pursuing divorce;⁷³ in contrast, older generations have experienced marital difficulties and dispute resolution as adults. The existing literature has likewise evidenced that spousal differences that emerged in the process of “drifting apart” may have led to spousal acrimony and eventual breakups.⁷⁴ Unfaithfulness was identified as a particularly strong basis for divorce among the study sample. Most of the respondents stated that they would divorce their partner if they were “unfaithful” to them. However, older individuals were less likely than younger participants to divorce their spouses

⁷³ Barutçu and Demir, “Breakup Adjustment in Young Adulthood”.

⁷⁴ Kenney-Noziska and Lowenstein, “Play Therapy with Children of Divorce”.

because of infidelity. Nevertheless, per the postulations of the fault theory of divorce rulings against matrimonial offenses, infidelity permits a couple to resort to divorce.⁷⁵

The findings also indicate that education level was positively correlated with the subjective divorce predictors under certain marital circumstances. Specifically, participants with less education were less likely to seek divorce in cases of non-appealing and unsatisfying marriages. In addition, participants who were young and educated were more likely to seek a divorce in cases of sex-related marital issues or an unhappy marriage. Additionally, filing for divorce on the basis of mental health problems was positively correlated with education level. The correlation between divorce and mental health factors is in line with previous studies, which have reported that a mentally ill person has a heightened risk of engaging in frequent quarrels with their spouse and a low ability to amicably and soundly resolve any marital issues.⁷⁶ When a person is mentally challenged, they are limited in what they can contribute to empowering their family or fulfilling their needs.

4 Toward interventions to resolve marital conflicts in the Arab Gulf

Recent sociodemographic changes may exert pressure on family dynamics and marital relationships and eventually increase the incidence of divorce across local GCC communities, according to literature on the Arab Gulf states.⁷⁷ This section introduces a conceptual framework that reconciles the empirical findings on the main perceived reasons for seeking divorce and the adoption of effective therapy interventions as means to resolve marital conflicts and avoid the negative impacts of divorce on women, children, and households. In this study, the understanding of how to mitigate divorce seeking is applicable to the establishment of family models and interventions in conservative societies in the Arab Gulf region. The legislative framework of family law in Qatar presents the option of a reconciliatory process between separated spouses, which explains why revocable divorces among Qatari nationals accounted for 57.4% of cases in 2019 (see Figure 2).

Nonetheless, empirical evidence calls for more attention from local authorities and policy-makers to establish government agencies that offer national programs and expand interventions regarding family cohesion, marital stability, and problem-solving skills. Spouses can avoid conflict, disagreements, and marital distress, enhance their relationship skills, and lower their risk of encountering future relational problems that lead to divorce by engaging in effective prevention and recovery programs for young generations.⁷⁸ Pairs of social support capabilities predicted marital outcomes two years apart to a stronger degree than conflict-management capabilities.⁷⁹ These findings reflect the efficacy of recovery programs for reducing divorce protocols among the current generations.

⁷⁵ Salah, "Divorce on the Rise in Qatar: A Report on the Study of GSDP 2009", *Alraya* (2009).

⁷⁶ Jalili et al., "The Relationship Between Factors Related to Divorce Request and Mental Health Among Divorce Applicant Women Referred to Legal Medicine Organization in Ahvaz, Iran"; Sharma, Reddy, and Kamath, "Marriage, Mental Illness and Law".

⁷⁷ Bani and Pate, "Dissolution of Marriage (Divorce) under Islamic Law".

⁷⁸ Bertoni and Bodenmann, "Satisfied and Dissatisfied Couples: Positive and Negative Dimensions, Conflict Styles, and Relationships with Family of Origin", *European Psychologist* 15.3 (2010), pp. 175–184; Fincham and Beach, "Marriage in the New Millennium: A Decade in Review", *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72.3 (2010), pp. 630–649; Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically-based Marital Therapy* (1999); Kline et al., "Understanding Couple Conflict", *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, in Vangelisti and Perlman (eds) (2006), pp. 445–462.

⁷⁹ Sullivan et al., "Social Support in Marriage: Translating Research into Practical Applications for Clinicians", *The Family Journal* 6.4 (1998), pp. 263–271.

The empirical evidence reveals spatial patterns and varying effects of sociodemographic variables on seeking divorce. Findings from the experiment reflect that most of the items focused “growing apart”, “physical violence”, “lack of respect and appreciation”, and “sexual problems” as subjective reasons for divorce. These subjective causes relate to emotional and relational issues, such as emotional abuse or infidelity by the spouse, and vary according to socioeconomic factors. Young Qataris were more likely to seek divorce compared to older generations. In addition, the score was significantly higher among women than men and among highly educated individuals.

Likewise, the spatial model conveyed the strength of age, employment status, and education level in predicting divorce. Factor analysis revealed nine dimensions underlying the checklist responses to seeking divorce. The most frequently cited factors were “unmet emotional needs/growing apart”, “lifestyle differences or boredom with the marriage”, and “high-conflict, demeaning relationships”. The results are robustly supported by the SET theoretical framework, which asserts that human relationships exist within a context of success of social exchanges, which is heavily dependent on the ability to maximize benefits while minimizing potential costs. On this basis, marriages must provide optimal marital satisfaction for couples.⁸⁰

According to a statistical report, the highest number of divorces occurred among younger age groups.⁸¹ As noted earlier in relation to previous research, the duration of a marriage is a predictor of divorce. Young couples who lack marital satisfaction experience a role strain that makes them more likely to end an unsatisfying marriage. Statistically significant individual-level differences were found; for instance, several divorce predictors are related to educational differences (e.g. financial hardship, failure to manage family-related responsibilities, frequent conflict in spousal relationships, sex-related matters, unhappy marriages, and mental health problems). For educated participants in such types of marriage, benefits are minimized, while potential costs are maximized; therefore, divorce is predicted. The results also reveal that younger generations tend to pursue divorce under the conditions of growing apart, personality differences, and unfaithfulness.

Educational attainment is considered an economic opportunity facilitator across various jurisdictions. In so doing, Individuals with high educational attainment are able to cater to a range of family responsibilities, such as settling bills. Among the study sample, the ability to manage family-related responsibilities increased with advancements in education level. In view of documented evidence, financial hardship is a significant cause of familial separations.⁸² In regard to these findings, Al-Nasr has acknowledged a rise in the number of divorce cases in Qatar that relate to educational incompatibility.⁸³ A recent statistical report highlights an increase in the number of female university graduates who are entering marriages with male secondary school dropouts in Qatar.⁸⁴ A higher education level equips a person to secure a higher-paying job and, hence, reduces their reliance on their spouse, which may make them more likely to seek divorce in the case of an unsatisfactory marriage.

⁸⁰ Cropanzano and Mitchell, “Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review”; Varzaneh et al., “A Theoretical Framework of Divorcing Couples Experience”.

⁸¹ Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, *Marriage & Divorce in the State of Qatar 2017* (2018).

⁸² Al-Nasr, “Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Women and Misyar Marriage: Evolution and Progress in the Arabian Gulf”, pp. 43–57.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, “Vital Statistics Annual Bulletin Marriage and Divorces in 2019” (2020).

According to Welchman,⁸⁵ the legislative codes on divorce in the UAE and Bahrain are less generous than the Qatari codes because they depend on the financial circumstances of the husband. In contrast, the Qatari code offers entitlement to compensation for every woman who is divorced by her husband, which can be interpreted as a means of discouraging husbands from seeking divorce. For instance, the court can grant a divorced women a court residence (custody) for her child's records, finances, transport, and, occasionally, education and medical care.⁸⁶ This stipulation might prevent husbands from pursuing divorce, as it implies a financial risk due to compensation matters in the enforcement of court rulings. However, husbands tend to neglect their spouses or possibly enact physical and psychological abuse so that their wife will initiate the divorce and surrender her assets, which circumvents the requirement of compensation for the wife.

Meanwhile, a woman who requests separation from her husband is deemed ineligible for financial assistance or compensation, which can be financially and emotionally devastating. In addition, various legislations have dictated criteria for valid grounds for seeking divorce. According to Welchman,⁸⁷ the UAE family law codification states that divorce occurs by declaration from the husband and is documented by the judge, while the Qatari and Bahraini laws use the same wording but with the added requirement that the couple must attempt reconciliation prior to the court hearing the husband's divorce pronouncement. As indicated, the instrument of intervention is likely to affect the incidence of divorce, as mediation is likely to prevent the breakdown of the family structure.⁸⁸

5 Conclusion

This research provides a framework for exploring the perceived causes of divorce seeking in Qatari society via a valid and reliable tool. By integrating findings from the primary data, which were gathered by using the Likelihood of Divorce measurement scale, along with findings from the existing literature, this study offers insights into changing sociodemographic trends that contribute to the heightened divorce rate in Qatar, as a case study of the Arab Gulf, and within the jurisdiction of family law. The expansion of early interventions that aim to mitigate marital conflicts would eventually decrease the divorce rates across the GCC region, since the raise in divorce rates raised questions about the jurisdictional decisions of family law courts.

Based on the statistical outlook, some major family dynamics and divorce fluctuations are apparent in Qatari society. Correlates between the individual-level factors reflect considerable diversity among the study population and have implications for legal and mental health practices. In addition, several key subjective determinants would influence potential divorce issues and significantly contribute to marital breakups. Nonetheless, financial constraints, as influenced by educational qualifications, emerged as a potential risk factor for divorce. Furthermore, the factor of age appeared to relate to divorce, as younger couples presented a higher risk of divorce compared to older couples. Finally, the presence of mental health problems also contributed to the potential of divorce among the research sample.

Few studies have measured the subjective causes of divorce or addressed the jurisdiction of Qatari family law, which could be informative for family scholars in other Arab Gulf states. To

⁸⁵ Welchman, "First Time Family Law Codifications in Three Gulf States".

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man".

⁸⁷ Welchman, "First Time Family Law Codifications in Three Gulf States".

⁸⁸ Al-Ammari and Romanowski, "The Impact of Globalisation on Society and Culture in Qatar", *Per-tanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 24.4 (2016), pp. 1535–1556.

the best of our knowledge, the current study is the first to investigate and model patterns of divorce rates in Qatar at a subnational scale. Despite the significant results, this research presents methodological and theoretical limitations. For instance, the analysis was limited by low availability of data to explore several reasons for divorce trends across GCC populations. Further research might utilize other non-hypothetical measurements or secondary data sources to produce additional modeling and analyses of divorce patterns. It is imperative for future studies to stay on pace with the dynamics of divorce, as the ongoing social, economic, and political changes in the Arab Gulf will naturally lead to further changes in family dynamics in societies in the region.

ORCID

Noora Lari  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6583-8678>

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Appendix

Likelihood of Divorce Scale: Interview Questionnaire

Section 1: Demographics

1. *Gender*

2. *Age*

3. *Are you never married, currently married, separated, divorced, or widowed?*

1. Never Married
2. Currently Married
3. Separated
4. Divorced
5. Widowed

4. *What is the highest level of education you have completed?*

1. Never Attended any School
2. Primary Years (1–6 Years)
3. Preparatory (7–9 Years)
4. Vocational (after Preparatory but not Secondary)
5. Secondary (10–12)
6. Diploma (after Secondary but not University)
7. University Graduate
8. Master's Degree
9. PhD.

5. *Are you currently employed? 1. Yes 2. No*

Section 2: Likelihood of Divorce Scale

In order to develop training/educational programs for married couples as ways to reduce the divorce rates in the State of Qatar, it is essential to identify the most important reasons why some married people ask for divorce. [Interviewer Instruction: for Never-married people, Read the following “Imagine that you have been Married for 2 years and Do not have Children yet”] Now I would like to read some of the reasons why married people ask for divorce. For each reason, please state the likelihood that you would ask for divorce for each of the following reasons:

1. Growing apart
2. Physical violence
3. Lack of respect and appreciation
4. Personality differences
5. Spend time with friends outside
6. Financial problems/issues
7. Demeaning and insulting
8. Incapable of handling responsibility
9. Not happy in marriage
10. Sexual problems
11. Intervening by in-laws
12. Disagreement regarding what to spending money on
13. Infertility
14. Alcohol/drug problems
15. Mental problems
16. Frequent argument/fighting
17. Unfaithfulness/infidelity

Response Options

1. Extremely likely
2. Somewhat likely
3. Not sure
4. Somewhat unlikely
5. Extremely unlikely