

Attitude of Married Couples Towards Divorce: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Divorce is a term not so commonly used in our society but is closely related to a phenomena which is celebrated magnificently i.e., marriage. It is a process which involves changes which are life altering for some and to some which just give a sense of freedom. This study analyses the attitude towards divorce by married couples comparing two groups viz., newly-wed couples and couples who have been married for a longer duration. This comparative study chose 60 participants majority being women through purposive sampling and administered the Attitude Towards Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) along with gathering other relevant information to understand their attitudes and analysed the results using SPSS. It was revealed that in today's time there was no significant difference in the attitudes towards divorce by these two groups after performing the independent t-test but also revealed that Poor communication with partner or family members and Lack of support from them could be reasons to consider divorce between these two groups.

Keywords: *Attitude Towards Divorce, Married Couples.*

The institution of family holds great significance in the Indian society. It is the bond of two individuals and families who come together through the act of marriage as seen from the dawn of time. Family may be broadly defined as a unit of two or more persons united by marriage, blood, adoption, or consensual union, in general consulting a single household, interacting and communicating with each other (Desai, 1994). As it is emphasised, marriage is just not the tying of knots between two individuals, it is the integration of each other's families into the lives of the couples. As simple that is in reading, it is a very complex, interconnected, intertwined institution which incorporates various factors and domains under consideration.

A family goes through different life cycle stages. Carter & McGoldrick, (1980) explained 6 such stages and also emphasised how an individual life cycle takes place within the family life cycle. The 6 stages are: Leaving Home: Single Young Adults; The Joining of Families Through Marriage: The New Couple; Families with Young Children; Families with Adolescents; Launching Children and Moving on and Families in Later Life. Individuals and

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couples in these stages go through various first order and second order changes which can be categorised under personal, professional, mental, emotional, spiritual, religious, social and environmental domains like adapting to new environment after leaving home, emotional and physical adjustment to new family post marriage, making various financial and social changes with the addition of a new member, mental and emotional changes with the adolescent phase and sending them away and then adapting to the life without children and finding solace in religious, spiritual or self-exploring path. All these stages and changes either take the relationship forward or put a stop on the relationship resulting in love and growth or dissolution and divorce respectively if not coped with well.

One such factor which results in dissolution of marriage and relationship between couples called divorce. It is the final termination of a marriage, cancelling the legal duties and responsibilities entailed in nuptial contract and dissolving the bonds of matrimony between married persons (Vasudevan et al., 2015).

There have been various models to understand divorce but a significant one was given by Sheila Kessler in 1975 commonly known as the Kessler's Seven Stage Model. This model emphasises on the emotional divorce of couples, the process by which couples lose and gain their emotional interdependence in their emotional relationship. This model starts its analysis at the beginning of the marriage dissolution process hence helping in well understanding of the process itself. The seven stages are disillusionment stage- the awareness stage where couples realise the mismatch between the expectations and the realities of marriage and slip into the emotional tension phase; erosion stage- the discontent and dissatisfaction that arose from the first stage if not discussed and addressed causes the erosion stage; detachment stage- outlines the decline of the couple's emotional commitment to the marriage resulting to detachment; physical separation stage- where they find the situation intolerable and Kessler describes this stage as the most traumatic one; mourning stage- grieving with the sense of loss along with emotional outbursts of anger and depression; second adolescence stage- a period of rejuvenation and adjustment being free of the conflict and pain and re-entering the larger world and hard work stage- the last stage "where the newly single person completes the arduous tasks of integrating the varied experiences of the divorce, expressing his or her new identity and values in self-selected choices and actions, and assuming responsibility for the future direction of his or her life" (Kaslow, 1980)

Divorce is a process which is often viewed from a negative lens. Its consequences can be experienced not only by the couples but also by their families. Since marriages are legal bonds the legal process of dissolution of marriages is called divorce and this, like marriages are governed by personal laws of various parties. In India, The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 regulates divorces for Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs. Divorces for Muslims are regulated by the Dissolution to Muslim marriage Act, 1939, Christians by the Indian Divorce Act, 1869, and for the Parsis, The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936. The Special Marriage Act, 1954 applies to people from all religions to regulate interfaith marriages and was described as an attempt to lay down a uniform territorial law for the whole of India. ("Key judicial decisions on divorce cases in India - iPleaders", 2022)

The recent statistics state that the country with the highest divorce rate is Maldives with 5.52 per 1000 people, the country with the lowest divorce rate is Sri Lanka with a rate of .15% ("Divorce Rates by Country 2022", 2022) and India has a divorce rate of 1%. (ACMC, 2022) Reasons for different divorce rates in different countries could be accounted for

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different reasons. For example, in Maldives the reason for high rates of divorce is because both marriage and divorce are easily obtained, they marry quickly and if a relationship fails, they can get a divorce with minimal complication and also because of a cultural shift where women are becoming more empowered and are able to financially fend for themselves. In Sri Lanka, the reasons found are not conclusive but a point to be noted is that countries with low divorce rates does not necessarily indicate happy and successful marriages. It could also mean that the legalities involved are complicated, the societal and familial pressure is unavoidable and stringent or due to the safety of children and finances.

When it comes to India, divorce is a considered as one the taboo topics in our society and getting a divorce is a rather complicated process. According to a study done in India to understand divorce in different parts of the country it was found that the causes of divorce were cited as increasing violence, cruelty, alcoholism, problems of adjustment especially in a joint family, growing individualism, extramarital affairs, and the undesirable impact of the outside world regarding values and lack of role models, poor communication, infidelity and lack of intimacy. (Thadathil & Sriram, 2019). As seen above, the causes for divorce can be various but yet the divorce rate in India remains low and the possible reasons for that could be the diverse religious, cultural and societal values present within different communities like 'divorce will break the family', 'what will people tell' effects on children, financial independency, life post- divorce etc.

A noticeable change over the years is that people's attitudes towards divorce are shifting, implying that from young adults to older population there has been an alteration from the negative connotations of divorce to a more accepting and positive stance which challenges the reasons stated above. Divorce is a phenomena seen and experienced world-wide and with modernisation, industrialisation, with the access to technology and social media the trends in divorce have been changing drastically. It was seen from various studies that women from various countries were in the majority to initiate a divorce and the major reasons ranged from poor communication, women's changing role in the work sector and their education, to abuse, family issues etc. Research also showed a rise in Gray divorce which refers to the rising rate of getting divorced in older adults, typically from long-lasting marriages along with how children and young adults perceived marriage and divorce in the recent times. The attitude towards divorce by young adults and children also showed a favourable attitude toward divorce as a solution to an unhappy marriage and disagreed that people should endure unhappy marriages simply for the sake of possible improvement. (Diaz et al., 2013)

From all the statistics and data provided above, we now arrive at the significance of this study. This is a comparative study between newly wed couples and couples who have been married for a longer duration and their respective attitudes towards divorce. The standing out factor in this study is the sample, which has not been taken into consideration in many studies before. The rationale behind this study was to understand how in today's time with everyone's lives evolving so much, with marriages on the rise and with people modernising in their thoughts which is so believed, what would their attitude be towards a taboo topic like divorce be, a phenomena which comes in hand with marriage but is not spoken a lot about albeit not even thought about in tough times too. Hence, this study is to understand whether there is significant difference in the attitudes towards divorce by these two groups.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Data was collected from 60 participants using purposive sampling technique and they were categorised under two equal groups of 30 each namely newly married couples and couples who have been married for a longer duration i.e., those who have completed 1-3 years and 15 or more years of marriage respectively.

In the Newly-wed married group (Group 1) there were 19 females and 11 males in the age range of 23-32 years with their spouse's age ranging from 25-35 years and in the group with couples who have been married for a longer duration (Group 2) there were 21 females and 9 males in the age range of 39-63 with their spouse's age ranging from 40-62 years. Data was received from different parts of India with participants belonging to various religious and occupational orientations.

Instruments

Attitude Towards Divorce Scale developed by Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986 was used along with a form created by the researcher to help in the selection and screening of the samples and collection of socio-demographic details along with a few questions which were required for the study- years of marriage, if they have children or not, and their reasons of why they would consider divorce.

Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale is an instrument which presents favorable and unfavorable statements about divorce and respondents are asked to rate their agreement with each item. Each item is rated with a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability and validity of the scale was not found originally but in a study by Diaz et al., 2013, the internal reliability of the scale was found to be a Cronbach's alpha of .77. Test-retest reliability was found to be at a Pearson's correlation of .86 ($p < .001$)

Procedure

The participants were first provided with the Informed consent form, followed by their demographic details. The next section asked them to fill details for the study like years of marriage completed, if they have children, how old are they and if they stay with them or not along with a question to understand the most applicable reason of why they would consider divorce from a list of options (presented in the appendix) to help draw a basis for analysis. The next section was the Attitude Towards Divorce Scale which as mentioned consisted of 12 statements with a 5- point Likert scale. The responses were recorded and scored and analysed using SPSS.

RESULTS

The current study aimed at examining if there is a significant difference in the attitude towards divorce between newly-wed couples and couples who have been married for a longer duration. The scores of the two groups were entered in SPSS and first the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality was done, Table 1.

Table No.1 Shapiro-Wilk test for normality

Groups	Statistic	df	Sig.
1	.949	30	.156
2	.964	30	.386

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As seen the sig value (p) for both the groups were .156 and .386 respectively indicating that $p > 0.05$ viz., the values are not significant and is normally distributed therefore, independent t- test is considered.

Table No. 2 Group statistics

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	30	38.13	6.26
2	30	38.77	7.27

The group statistics, Table 2 shows mean scores of the two groups which is 38.13 and 38.77 respectively for Group 1 and 2.

Table No. 3 Independent t-test values

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	.520	.474	-.361	58	.719	-.633	1.75
Equal variances not assumed			-.361	56.75	.719	-.633	1.75

Table 3 shows the independent t-test values, $t(58) = -.361, .719 > 0.05$ i.e., the t value- larger the value, smaller the probability of results occurring by chance, df which signifies the size of the samples and is always close to the actual number of participants and p which is the significance value, $p > 0.05 =$ no significance establishes and these scores ascertained for this study have been discussed elaborately in the next section.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study accepted the null hypothesis i.e., there is no significant difference in the attitude towards divorce between newly-wed couples and couples who have been married for a longer duration. The mean scores of the two groups- Newly married couples (Group 1) and Couples who have been married for a longer duration (Group 2) were 38.13 and 38.76 respectively as seen in Table 2. On the Attitude towards Divorce Scale, higher scores indicate positive attitudes and lesser scores indicate negative attitudes towards divorce. The range of scores would be between 12-60 and with the mean scores calculated it can be said that the two groups might lie in the average category.

Table 3 shows the values of the independent t- test which was considered to assess whether the means of two groups are statistically different from one another or not, in this case the scores of Group 1 and 2 were not statistically different with their attitudes towards divorce and this was ascertained with the t-test values, $t(58) = -.361, .719 > 0.05$ which clarified that there was no significant difference between the two groups along with the help of descriptive statistics represented in Table 2 of Group 1 ($M=38.13, SD=6.26$) and Group 2 ($M=38.77, SD=7.27$).

The majority of the respondents were females in this study with a total of 40 out of 60 participants. Data was collected from different cities of India like Bangalore, Jaipur, Assam,

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Mumbai, Chennai, Lucknow, Jammu, Ahmedabad and Kolkata and mainly from the urban sectors. Participants were from diverse religious backgrounds of Jainism, Sikh, Hindu, Christianity and Islam. It was observed that out of the 19 females from Group 1 only 3 were homemakers and the rest were working either as a CA, Designer, Program Manager and was a student and in Group 2 out of 21 females, 15 were homemakers and the rest had a job which in some sense reflects the variation in generation and its ideology when it comes to women's education and work culture.

The scores of majority of participants ranged between average to high i.e., 30 – 56 and the reasons cited for why the participants would ever consider divorce revealed the top 3 causes as Lack of support by family or partner, Poor communication with partner or family members (in-laws) and Lack of intimacy (Physical or Emotional) for the newly married couples in the respective order and Poor communication with partner or family members (in-laws), Lack of support by family or partner and Alcoholism as the causes for couples who have been married for a longer duration. Falling out of love, Infidelity and Lack of financial freedom were also some of the common responses.

The results of this study therefore indicate to us that in today's time attitude towards divorce is not perceived differently from the younger or the older generation. The results of this study are not conclusive as the reasons for this can still be explored further to understand if there is an actual shift in the attitudes and if so, does it account to changes from the societal level or from various other factors like changing times, urbanisation and modernisation etc.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to compare the attitudes towards divorce between newly-wed couples (Group 1) and couples who have been married for a longer duration (Group 2) and with 60 participants divided into two groups of 30 each, selected using purposive sampling technique it was found out that the null hypothesis was accepted i.e., there was no significant difference in the attitudes towards divorce between the two groups.

The data was collected using the Attitude Towards Divorce Scale developed by Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986 and majority of the participants were females (40 in total) and the overall age range of the participants were between 23-63 with average years of marriage being 1.7 and 24.9 for Group 1 and 2 respectively. Data was collected from different cities of India but focused mainly on the urban sector. It was noticed that women from Group 1 were mainly working professionals in different sectors and data from Group 1 showed that the main possible reasons of why they would consider divorce would be Lack of support by family or partner which differed in comparison to Group 2 where majority were females who were homemakers and data from Group 2 showed that the main possible reasons of why they would consider divorce would be Poor communication with partner or family members (in-laws).

The data collected was analysed using SPSS and independent t-test was done post the check for normality and it was found that there was no significant difference seen which was also substantiated with the mean scores of the 2 groups respectively.

Limitations

Though this study was unique in its own way with the sample size and results, there were a few limitations too. This study as mentioned involved participants from different backgrounds like urban areas and different religions and not enough measures were

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employed to see if above mentioned had any effect on their attitudes. Men and women were not in equal proportion and hence a lot was not known about men's attitudes.

Implications

With the help of the results, it was identified that couples who have been married for a longer duration showed no different change in attitudes than couples who were newly married and this could be taken as an opportunity to lessen the stigmatization of the topic of divorce and help in understanding this phenomena from a lesser negative connotation.

Counselling as a profession can be helpful w.r.t to this topic to help couples deal with various challenges and obstacles in their marriages and make this an unrestricted journey of togetherness or make it a hassle free, not socially looked down upon phenomena if considered otherwise.

Recommendations

For future work on this study, it can be recommended that more variables could be used to help analyses the results in a comprehensible manner along with the scores of the scale. The sample size could be increased with equal distribution to gain a clearer perspective and since data was collected pan India, diversity should be taken into account with equivalent circulation to different areas. This study was a quantitative study and for in-depth analysis perhaps a mixed method approach can be used to help analyse various reasons and explore more variables.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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