

# Comparison of family environment among divorced and non-divorced women

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this research was to compare the family environment among divorced and non-divorced women in Tehran. The statistical population was women that who had referred to the family court and non-divorced women in Tehran. The available sampling method was applied (30 divorced and 30 non-divorced women). The divorced and non-divorced women were matched in age, education and residence. The participants completed family environment questionnaire. MANOVA test was used for analyzing of data. The result showed that the conflict and independence in divorced women are significantly higher than non-divorced women; while non-divorced women were more expressiveness and Active Recreational Orientation than divorced women.

**Keywords:** Family environment; Divorced women; Non-divorced women; conflict; independence; expressiveness; Active Recreational Orientation.

## INTRODUCTION

Every developing community encounters various obstacles in its historical evolution each one of which in turn causes the recession of this development. The widespread social damage is one of the obstacles which lead to the loss of many human capitals (Rahmatullahi, 2006). Worldwide social developments in the last decades have caused changes, challenges, issues and a variety of new needs within the family system, and during this period, families have been increasingly threatened due to numerous complex causes and factors. When the functions of a family, such as social, cognitive and emotional functions are damaged one after another; the family members will gradually lose their sense of satisfaction. A gradual decrease in family satisfaction first leads to psychological dissociation, then, a social dissociation and eventually to a legal event which is called divorce (Amato, 2001). Today, divorce is considered the most important threat to the family foundation, and identifying the factors both affecting it and caused by it is one of the mental health priorities (Ghotbi et al., 2003). The mental health of the generations in a community depends on providing the family's mental health as a center full of love and peace for growth of the talents any harm to which will have a bad effect on the future generation and lead the community to the larger difficulties and problems (Kameli, 2007; Farjad, 2009). According to the statistics of different countries, between 10 and 30 percent of marriages lead to divorce (Milanifar, 2003) and the number of children of divorce in America has grown to seven times its number from 1900 to 1972 (Kenniston, 1977). According to the reports of Registration Department in America in 1988, annually, more than a million children experience divorce, half of which are under 18 years of age (Saulter & Lugalia, 1998). Iran's latest statistics indicate a rise in divorce and now Iran is ranked fourth in the world in terms of divorce statistics. Unfortunately, in Iran, divorce has grown by 8.8

percent in 2010; which means that 124 thousand and 741 cases have been divorced in the first 11 months of the last year; while only one percent has been married (Iran's divorce statistics, 2010). The experts believe the main problems are united to cause an incident called divorce. These problems can be generally socioeconomic, personal, psychological and family factors (Kameli, 2007). From 1938, when the first research on the marriage was released by a psychologist called Lewis Terman (Gottman & Levenson, 2000) until now, many subjects have been presented by professionals on the process of marriage and divorce and the route man and woman pass in their marital life. Today, several theories, models and approaches have been proposed regarding the predictions of the marital relationship failure or success (Shokrkon et al., 2006). According to social exchange theory, a person will stay in a relationship when its inner appeals are stronger than its external ones (Rahmatullahi, 2006). The behavioral theory of marriage emphasizes the exchange of specific interpersonal behaviors. According to this theory, positive and rewarding behaviors elevate the overall evaluation of marriage, while negative and punitive behaviors are harmful (Shokrkon et al., 2006). Another influential theoretical approaches regarding marriage return, is attachment theory (Shokrkon et al., 2006), which believes that the nature of intimate relationships (mother-child), determines the nature of one's intimate relationships throughout their life. According to Durkheim (1990), the stronger the collective conscience is, the more acute the public anger against anarchy will be. Weakening the collective conscience, the negative values which are attributed to divorce will be reduced and the divorced community will not be regarded as social outcasts, therefore, the rate of divorce will be increasing (Sotoudeh & Bahari, 2007).

Financial problems, inflation, costliness and economic difficulties as one of the most important factors associated with divorce (Storasli & Makman, 1990; Miller et al., 2003). Financial pressure has devastating effects on the level of stress and is shown as mental health decline. Also, financial difficulties lead to marital dissatisfaction, and increase hostile and problematic behaviors in both couples (Westman et al., 2004). Conducting a study on the financial conditions and physical health of divorced women, showed that divorced women are experiencing higher levels of severe financial pressure as well as higher rate of poor health self-assessment than married women (Wickrama et al., 2006). A high percentage of low-income class consists of divorcees (Bowman, 2007). Being divorcee and middle-aged is an important predictor of quality of life (Dunning et al., 2006). The studies show that domestic violence such as vituperation, affront, violation of dignity, insult, reproach, ingratitude (Akbari & Mina, 2011), lack of love in life, disputes over power, communication problems, irrational expectations, life cycle-related problems, division of labor and roles (Miller et al., 2003), marriage at low age, forced marriage (Larson & Holman, 1994; Banijamali et al., 2004), disgruntle, jealousy, addiction (Zargar & NeshatDoust, 2007), lack of the ability to solve problems, sexual physical, and psychological abuse, interventions of the couples' families, and the spouse's mental disease (Amato & Stacy, 1997; Ghotbi et al., 2003), are direct related to divorce.

The studies have shown that an individual's psychiatric pathology could reflect their unhealthy schema. These negative and incongruous schemata, which are caused by childhood experiences, can play the role of the core of the personality disorders and many axis I disorders among spouses, because initial incompatible schemata cause conflicts and will lead to divorce and separation, if timely services are not applied (Segal, 1990; Young, 1990; Ball & Cecero, 2001; Amanollahi Fard, 2005; Shokrkon et al., 2006; Jill & Michel, 2008; Yousefi et al., 2010). The more difference in personality characteristics, attachment styles, the age and education difference between spouses and the less is the couple's social skills, level of acquaintance and income, the higher the failure prediction of marital relations will be (Kurdek, 1993; Bouchard et al., 1999; Mollazadeh et al., 2002; Amanollahi Fard, 2005; Shokrkon et al., 2006). The family performance has an important role in divorce; i.e. the longer duration of marriage does not necessarily guarantee the marital life survival, but the level of education has a more effective role in family survival. If the couples' family performance is disturbed in 4 aspects of problem solving, affective participation relationship and general efficiency, the marital life will be more likely to collapse. Besides, having child cannot be a

powerful factor to avoid divorce, but the effectiveness of the various aspects of family performance can preserve marital life (Bahari & Saberi, 2004).

Given that divorce can be followed by short-term or long-term effects, the studies show that divorced women suffer from psychological distress-depression (Zahiroddin & Khodayifar, 2003) suspicion, mood instability, anxiety, obsession, fear, (Rouillon & Martineau, 1997; Bahrami et al., 2010), mental disorders (Sadock & Sadock, 2003; Haffarian et al., 2009), severe insomnia (Hajak, 2001), heart disease, hypertension, psychosomatic disorders, drug abuse (Khoshnevisan et al., 2010), aggression and suicide (KhojasteMehr, 2005; Bahrami et al., 2010) more than normal women.

## **METHOD**

### **STATISTICAL POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD**

The present study's sample included 30 divorced women who were selected through convenience sampling method provided that 24 months are passed from the issuance of their final decision who had referred to the Family Court in Tehran for after-divorce issues such as (dowry verdict enforcement, child custody, etc.) and 30 non-divorced women in Tehran who normally lived with their husbands and were similar to divorced women in terms of age, education and social situation.

#### **Instrument**

The family environment questionnaire was designed by Moss and Moss (1994) to measure social environment of family, and contains 90 "correct – incorrect" questions and 10 subscales. These subscales measure three aspects of family relationship, including Cohesion, expressiveness and conflict; the aspect of the personal (or target-based) growth of family, including independence, achievement orientation, intellectual-cultural orientation, active-recreational orientation and moral-religious emphasis; and the aspect of family system survival, including the organization and control. The aspects of family relationship and family system survival represent the inner function of the family; while the aspect of the personal growth of family indicates a relationship between the family and a larger community (Moos & Moos, 1994). The family environment questionnaire helps to measure a person's entire family environment and how these aspects can affect a person's character and mental health (Farokhzad, 2008). In the research conducted on the American group, the reliability of its subscales through retest method can be measured between 52% and 91% with 2, 4, 12-month interval, (Mollasharifi et al., 2005). In the research conducted on a group of Iranian families living in Tehran, the reliability is measured 56 percent to 79 percent for 10 subscales through Cronbach's alpha method and has been in the range between 63 percent and 83 percent through retest method with interval of 1.5 months. The total scale reliability in this study is calculated 67% through Cronbach's alpha (Mollasharifi et al., 2005). The reliability coefficient of this test has been calculated for 10 subscales among which, the lowest value, which is 68 percent, is related to independence subscale and the highest value, which is 86 percent, is related to Cohesion subscale. This shows that the questionnaire and its subscales have a desirable reliability (Farokhzad, 2008). In the diagnostic validity, the mean difference between normal and problematic groups has been compared through independent t-test the result of which has been significant in all subscales except "achievement orientation" and "organization" ones (Mollasharifi et al., 2005).

## **RESULTS**

As shown in table 1, the mean and median values for divorced and non-divorced women are closed. Also, the mean of cohesion, conflict and independence in divorced women is more than non-divorced women and expressiveness, achievement-orientation, intellectual cultural-orientation,

moral religious-orientation, organization and control of non-divorced women are more than divorced women in the study.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of under study variables in non-divorced and divorced women

| Variables                         | Divorced |       | Non-divorced |       |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-------|--------------|-------|
|                                   | Mean     | SD    | Mean         | SD    |
| Cohesion                          | 13/166   | 2/704 | 12/96        | 1/917 |
| Expressiveness                    | 12/53    | 1/382 | 13/79        | 1/91  |
| Conflict                          | 15/03    | 2/428 | 13/34        | 1/89  |
| Independence                      | 13/83    | 1/782 | 12/689       | 1/168 |
| Achievement Orientation           | 13/433   | 1/406 | 13/827       | 1/983 |
| Intellectual Cultural Orientation | 13/56    | 1/612 | 13/586       | 1/296 |
| Active Recreational Orientation   | 12/9     | 1/881 | 13/931       | 1/602 |
| Moral Religious Emphasis          | 12/733   | 1/595 | 13/37        | 1/424 |
| Organization                      | 12/066   | 2/303 | 13/10        | 2/04  |
| Control                           | 13/2     | 1/71  | 13/37        | 1/293 |

According to the table 2, F values and significance levels in conflict subscale, it can be said that there is a significant difference between conflict among the divorced women and non-divorced women. From the higher mean in divorced women than non-divorced women, it can be concluded that the conflict among divorced women is significantly higher than that of non-divorced women. In addition, the value of F and significant level of independence show that independence among divorced women is more than non-divorced women. In the aspect of expressiveness, F value and the significance level (8.743 and 0.005) show that the level of expressiveness in non-divorced women is higher than divorced women. In the aspect of being energetic, F value and the significance level show there is a significant difference between the aspect of being energetic between divorced women and non-divorced women, and the mean of non-divorced women in this variable is more than divorced women.

Table 2. Test results of MANOVA test of the difference between divorced and non-divorced women in the subtests related to family environment scale

| Sources                           | SS     | df | MS     | F     | Sig   |
|-----------------------------------|--------|----|--------|-------|-------|
| Cohesion                          | 0/597  | 1  | 0/597  | 0/108 | 0/744 |
| Expressiveness                    | 11/401 | 1  | 11/401 | 8/743 | 0/005 |
| Conflict                          | 42/041 | 1  | 42/041 | 8/826 | 0/004 |
| Independence                      | 19/287 | 1  | 19/287 | 8/433 | 0/005 |
| Achievement Orientation           | 2/292  | 1  | 2/292  | 0/780 | 0/381 |
| Intellectual Cultural Orientation | 0/006  | 1  | 0/006  | 0/003 | 0/959 |
| Active Recreational Orientation   | 15/675 | 1  | 15/675 | 5/118 | 0/028 |
| Moral Religious Emphasis          | 6/153  | 1  | 6/153  | 2/684 | 0/107 |
| Organization                      | 15/850 | 1  | 15/850 | 3/339 | 0/073 |
| Control                           | 0/474  | 1  | 0/474  | 0/205 | 0/652 |

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results showed that the family of divorced women is different from the family of non-divorced women in aspects of expressiveness, conflict, independence, and energetic active-recreational orientation among which the mean of non-divorced women was more than divorced women in subscales of expressiveness and energetic active-recreational orientation and the mean of divorced women was more than non-divorced women in subscales of conflict and independence. In addition, the lowest mean among divorced women was related to the Cohesion subscale.

Expressiveness is an area in which the family members are encouraged to act honestly and express their feelings directly, and is concerned with the way of establishment of communication and interaction between the family members. According to the social exchange theory, a person

stays in a relationship when its inner appeals are stronger than its external ones (Rahmatullahi, 2006).

Moreover, the behavioral theory about marriage emphasizes the exchange of specific interpersonal behaviors. The behavioral theory of marriage emphasizes the exchange of specific interpersonal behaviors. According to this theory, positive or rewarding behaviors elevate the overall evaluation of marriage, while negative or punitive behaviors are harmful (Shokrkon et al., 2006). The results of this study suggest that non-divorced women are more encouraged by their family members to express their feelings and have less communication problems with their husbands than divorced women. The possibility of the marriage reaching a dead end and resulting in divorce can be predicted by analyzing the couple's relationship (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). The result of the study conducted by Banijamali et al. (2004) is consistent with the above findings, suggesting that the couple's expression of emotions along with their consensus and assistance in this regard affects their marital life and relationship satisfaction and the more agreement exist in this regard, the warmer and more intimate relationship between couples will be established (Banijamali et al., 2004). Also, the results of this study are consistent with the results of researches that regard poor communication skills as one of the factors associated with divorce (Miller et al., 2001; Wishman & Courtange, 2003; Chilling et al., 2003; Ronnan & Dreer, 2004; KhojasteMehr, 2005; Atkins et al., 2005; Hansson & lund, 2006; Shokrkon et al., 2006; Meshki et al., 2011). The results of a longitudinal study showed that one of the strong predictors of divorce is communication patterns between couples and the lack of positive messages during daily discussions (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). Also, the findings of a research on the Australian couples that considered verbal disputes the main indicator of conflicts between couples are consistent with the present study (Krichler et al., 2001). They are also consistent with the results of studies that suggesting emotional awareness and ability to identify and express emotions play an essential role in the quality of marital satisfaction (Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Waldinger et al., 2004; Dunham, 2008; Ghaderi et al., 2009; Khosravi et al., 2011). They are also consistent with the results of Ameri (2003), who regards communication problems as one of the main components of the conflict between couples (Ameri et al., 2003).

The subscale of energetic active-recreational orientation refers to the level of participation in social and recreational activities the high mean of which among non-divorced women and the low mean of which among divorced women with regard to the research literature suggest that financial acquisition leads to the consideration of recreational issues and social participation and economic weakness is one of the problems divorced families are encountering (Ghotbi et al., 2003; Thorsyen & Julia, 2008). Family members' participation has a direct and significant relationship with the women's social participation and in the family of divorced women; the level of family members' participation is much lower than that of non-divorced women (Yazdanpanah & Samadiyan, 2008). Also, in addition to financial problems and pressure which bear due to playing the role of a mother by themselves, divorced women also encounter other pressures such as bad attitude and treatment by the society and the people around (KhojasteMehr, 2005). Therefore, the level of social participation and performing recreational activities in them is less than non-divorced women.

Independence is an area in which family members have courage, self-efficiency and the power to decide. The results of this study showed that the mean of divorced women in this subscale is more than non-divorced women. Given the research literature (Banijamali et al., 2004; Shokrkon et al., 2006; Nabavi & Ahmadi, 2008), the risk of marital dissolution in the college-educated women is more than women who have diplomas degrees or lower. This means that by increase of education, especially higher education, women will become more aware of their rights and even their duties and responsibilities and intend to get their own rights and play appropriate roles. At the same time, higher education often leads to financial independence and consequently increases the power of decision. Many current problems of families are caused by the society's transition phase from traditional to modern structure and increase of women's education, employment and financial

independence and changes in social structure of families have changed the role of women in family and society (Ahmadi, 2008). There is a significant correlation between marital satisfaction and the power structure in the family and that marital satisfaction decreases by increase of the power of women in the family (ZolfagharPour et al., 2004).

Conflict subscale is the level of explicitness against anger, aggression and conflict between family members. Marital conflict is arising from inconsistencies between the couple's needs and the ways to meet them, the difference in expectations, self-importance, behavioral schemata and irresponsible behavior towards marital relationship and marriage (Sharf, 1996; Glaser, 1998; Glaser, 2000). The conflict process occurs when either parties to the relationship feels that the opposite side suppresses some of his/her favorite issues (Greeff & Bruyne, 2000; Afkhami et al., 2007). According to the theory of Interests, the more independent are women economically, the more likely men will be to resort to violence in order to repay and compensate for the labor market problems and their own frustration over the fact that the women have become the main breadwinner (Resko, 2007). Women being legally, socially and financially equal with men can highly affect the husband giving up his abuse (Saai Arasi & Niknejad, 2010). The low scores of non-divorced women indicate that gender and family structure in society as well as women's economic dependence and insufficiency of justice system are primary barriers which won't allow women to leave an abusive husband. However, women who have lived less than 10 years with an abuser, hope that their husband will change his behavior and hopefulness prevents the woman from leaving the abuser. Also, women who have lived over 10 years with a violent person, hope that the violent person will reduce his abuse. But, the women has no such hope, are likely to leave the abuser (Bowker, 1993; Barnett, 2001; Rabbani & Javadian, 2007). One of the decision women make when facing their husband's violence is the decision to leave their abusive husband (Belknop, 1999). Main predictor of divorce and marital dissatisfaction is not financial problems, lack of sexual attraction or lack of love, but it is the way couples manage their conflict during inconsistencies and the methods by which they can communicate with each other (Beshkar, 2008; Sodani et al., 2010).

It represents that the low mean of Cohesionsubscale in divorced women compared to non-divorced women is accordant to the definition of Gehring et al. (2001), who believe that Cohesiongenerally refers to the links or the emotional attachments which is established between family members (Gehring et al., 2001). Hence, we can say that it is the amount of commitment, help and support of each members of the family towards another. Emotional attachment in the family of divorced women is less than non-divorced women. The couple can act in their own interaction in a way that the groundwork will be provided for the sense of affinity and belonging for both sides. Otherwise, the sense of affinity will be disturbed (Banijamali et al., 2004). In the end, according to the study results, we can say that "the family system is a living organism whose health and ability to perform tasks is affected by the health of all its members. Besides, in the family as a system, the focus is on the relationship between the elements not the elements per se" (Bahari & Saberi, 2004).

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