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SOME SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS BEHIND THE PHENOMENON OF DIVORCE IN ALGERIA. A FIELD STUDY IN THE WILAYA OF M'SILA

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the economic and socio-cultural factors contributing to the phenomenon of divorce. Divorce has recently garnered significant attention from researchers and those interested in family issues, especially as Algerian society has witnessed a noticeable rise in various social phenomena, including divorce. Although divorce results in the dissolution of the marital relationship, it is closely linked to several contributing factors that have fueled its spread.

The study revealed findings that confirm the role of certain economic and socio-cultural factors in the occurrence of divorce. Among the key indicators identified were: the rising educational level of women, their entry into the labor market, financial independence, freedom in decision-making, the husband's unemployment, and interference from extended family members.

KEYWORDS

Economic Factors, Socio-Cultural Factors, Divorce, Family

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1. Introduction and Problem Statement:

Families are considered the fundamental units in the construction of societies and serve as the primary space for deep social interaction among individuals. These interactions directly affect social relationships and bonds. The stronger and more stable the family ties, the more cohesive, unified, and stable the society becomes. According to Khairi Khalil Al-Jumaili, the family is the organized human group responsible for ensuring societal stability and development. However, in today's world—particularly in Arab societies in general and Algerian society in particular—the family is facing numerous challenges that have contributed to the weakening of its structure, the dysfunction of its roles, and the disruption of its social fabric. Chief among these challenges are family disintegration in general and divorce in particular, which manifests in various forms and with significant consequences.

Divorce is a serious social phenomenon, and its severity lies in the impact it leaves on the family, especially the children. It is not a phenomenon that emerges by chance but rather the result of certain conditions, factors, and societal changes that have led to crises affecting different institutions and social levels. In recent years, divorce has rapidly spread in Algerian society and has come to threaten the very structure of families. This highlights the urgent need to identify the underlying causes of this phenomenon and to develop strategies—through the concerted efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations alike—to reduce family tensions, especially between spouses, and to preserve family cohesion and stability, ensuring its continuity and endurance.

In recent years, divorce rates have reached alarming levels, with an estimated rate of around 33%, and an average of 240 divorce cases recorded daily—amounting to approximately 87,600 cases in the year 2024 alone.

Based on the above, we pose the following general research question: Does the economic and socio-cultural context contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria?

From this general question, the following sub-questions emerge:

- Does the economic factor (e.g., women's entry into the labor market) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria?
- Do socio-cultural factors (e.g., the educational level between spouses) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria?

2. Hypotheses

General Hypothesis: Economic and socio-cultural factors contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria.

2.1 Sub-Hypotheses:

- Economic factors (such as women entering the workforce) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria.
- Socio-cultural factors (such as the educational level between spouses) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria.

1. Introduction and Research Problem:

The family is considered the basic unit in the structure of societies and the primary space for deep social interaction among its members. It directly affects social relationships and bonds: the stronger and more solid the familial relationships, the more stable and cohesive the society becomes. According to Khairi Khalil Al-Jumaili, the family is the organized human group responsible for societal stability and development. However, families today—especially in Arab societies in general, and Algerian society in particular—face several problems that have weakened their foundations and disrupted their functions and systems. Among the most serious issues are family disintegration in general and divorce in particular, which has grown in manifestations and consequences.

Divorce is a dangerous social phenomenon due to its profound impact on the family, especially on children. This phenomenon does not occur randomly; rather, it results from various conditions, factors, and societal changes that have created crises affecting different institutions and levels. In recent years, divorce has spread rapidly in Algerian society, posing a threat to its social fabric. Thus, identifying the factors leading to this phenomenon has become crucial, as has the development of a strategy involving joint efforts from both governmental and non-governmental organizations to reduce family tensions, particularly between spouses, and preserve family cohesion, stability, and continuity.

In recent years, divorce rates have reached unprecedented levels, with the divorce rate nearing 33%, equating to about 240 divorce cases per day—or approximately 87,600 cases in the year 2024.

Based on the above, we pose the following general question:

Does the economic and socio-cultural context contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria?

This leads to the following sub-questions:

- Does the economic factor (e.g., women entering the labor market) contribute to the divorce phenomenon in Algeria?
- Does the socio-cultural factor (e.g., educational level differences between spouses) contribute to the divorce phenomenon in Algeria?

2. Hypotheses:

General Hypothesis: Economic and socio-cultural factors contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria.

Sub-Hypotheses:

- Economic factors (such as women entering the labor market) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria.
- Socio-cultural factors (such as differences in educational levels between spouses) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria.

First: Definition of Concepts

1. **The Concept of Family:** The nuclear family is defined as a small group composed of a husband, wife, and their underage children, operating as an independent unit from the rest of the local community. This specific form of family is among the most important features of modern industrial society because it reflects individualism as seen in property rights, ideas, and social laws concerning happiness and individual fulfillment (Al-Qassas, 2008, p.21).

Abdel-Wahed Wafi views the family as the first natural and social environment for the individual. It is based on terms accepted by collective consciousness and governed by rules chosen by societies. The family system in any given nation is closely linked to its beliefs, history, customs, and the systems it follows in politics, economics, and law (Wafi, 1966, p.4).

In modern terms, the family consists of the husband, wife, and their children—what is known as the nuclear family. Due to its small size, primary relationships are centered around the spousal bond rather than kinship ties. These relationships emphasize individual decision-making and a noticeable degree of independence from familial control, making it the prevailing model today.

2. **Economic Factors:** The economic factor is crucial both in forming families and in increasing divorce rates. It directly impacts the stability and health of marital life. A low economic status implies the family's failure to achieve financial stability, which leads to frequent disputes and ultimately divorce. A declining standard of living, high cost of living, and limited income all burden the husband and prevent him from meeting even basic family needs (Moussa, 1998, p.54).

3. **Socio-Cultural Factors:** These include educational and cultural levels. Women today play a significant societal role, having gained access to education and enhanced their social standing. They achieve personal fulfillment either through employment or further education. However, many husbands expect their wives to abandon these pursuits in favor of household responsibilities and child-rearing. Some women prefer divorce over giving up education or work, viewing these as forms of empowerment and equality. The resulting contrasting aspirations between spouses contribute to marital discord (Hassan, 2000, p.19).

4. **Divorce:** Divorce is a form of complete family breakdown and the collapse of the familial unit. It involves the dissolution of social roles within the family, ultimately causing a permanent split between spouses. Consequently, the child is raised by only one parent. This happens when marital conflicts intensify beyond repair (Kassal, 1986, p.25).

5. Operational Definitions of Study Variables:

- **Economic Factors (Women's Entry into the Labor Market):** In the current study, this refers to the material dimension of women's employment, including salary and financial returns, and how this affects women's financial independence and interaction patterns within the family.

- **Socio-Cultural Factors (Educational Level between Spouses):** In this study, it refers to differences in academic and cultural qualifications between the husband and wife.

Second: The Reality of Divorce in Algerian Society

The divorce phenomenon has become more prominent in Algeria since the beginning of the 21st century. It has rapidly spread, threatening both the family unit and society. Demographic statistics from the National Office of Statistics reveal alarming figures: divorce cases increased from 76,000 in 2021 to 84,000 in 2022, then to 93,000 in 2023, and reached 87,600 in 2024—accounting for 33% of marriages, or about 240 cases per day.

Third: Economic Factors Behind Divorce

1. Factors Accompanying Women's Entry into the Workforce: Many researchers believe that women's employment outside the home is one of the most significant contributors to divorce. Employment provides women with their own financial resources, reducing their dependence on their husbands. It also enhances their social standing and sense of freedom and self-worth. Working women become more willing to engage in discussions regarding marital rights and family matters. These discussions—whether with their spouses or with male colleagues at work—shape their attitudes and behavior. Employment, especially after childbirth, often complicates the balance between work and home responsibilities, leading to tension and potential divorce (Khashab, 1985, p.343).

2. Women's Financial Independence and Income Improvement: The economic motive is among the strongest reasons women seek employment outside the home. Most married women cite economic necessity—rising living costs and household expenses—as their primary reason for working. This is particularly evident in low-income families. According to the thesis of Sania Khalil Ahmed, the rising cost of living was a direct reason that drove women to enter the workforce (Kamilia, 1984, p.269).

As a result, the husband often finds himself playing both parental roles, while young children bear the burden of self-care.

3. Low Household Living Standards:

Unemployment and financial irresponsibility among husbands cause a sense of failure within the family. This casts a heavy shadow on the economic reality of the household. Losing a job does not only mean a loss of income—it often leads to a complete breakdown in life structure, resulting in frustration and persistent familial conflict. In such cases, the husband may become dependent on his wife's income, which further complicates the relationship (Al-Moussawi, 2012, p.132).

Many Algerian families live in poverty due to a mismatch between the active working population and available job opportunities. Under these difficult circumstances, conflicts intensify, leading to frequent disputes between spouses that often end in divorce as an alternative solution.

Fourth: Socio-Cultural Factors Behind the Phenomenon of Divorce in Algeria

1. Emergence of the Nuclear Family:

The changes experienced by society have led to the predominance of the nuclear family model. As a result, individual responsibilities have increased, and the traditional authority structures that characterized extended families have diminished. Parents are now solely responsible for making decisions, and their conscious and unconscious goals, perceptions, and personal tendencies significantly influence their parenting styles. The social and economic pressures and transformations experienced by society—and felt daily by parents—are reflected in their attitudes toward child-rearing (Al-Kattani, 2000, p.48).

The emergence of the nuclear family has granted children a greater degree of freedom, which has significantly contributed to the expansion of their social networks. However, this freedom also means that children are more exposed to marginalization and deviance. This highlights the advantages of the extended family structure, particularly regarding parenting methods, shared responsibilities, teaching children social interaction, encouraging respect for others' opinions, and working toward personal goals within the broader goals of the community.

2. Role Conflict:

Social factors have a major impact on divorce rates because the relationship between spouses is a social one that depends on a balance between rights and duties. This balance also extends to expenditures and responsibilities. Any imbalance in giving and receiving, or in duties and rights, threatens the marital relationship and may lead to divorce. These social factors manifest in various forms, such as lack of mutual understanding and harmony between spouses, which results in frequent problems and continuous disputes filled with criticism and blame. These tensions reflect a severe state of unrest within the family. A lack of compatibility and harmony between spouses is a significant cause of divorce. It is rare to find couples who are perfectly aligned in personality, emotional connection, academic background, or intellectual compatibility. However, a minimum level of similarity is necessary for a successful marriage (Al-Maleh, 1997, p.25).

From this imbalance, problems and conflicts begin to arise. The wife may begin to express her dissatisfaction with her husband to her friends and family, who usually take her side and encourage a confrontational attitude. They may emphasize that it is her right to have her husband participate in all aspects of her life, replacing affection and compassion in the relationship with conflict and discord.

3. Interference of Families in Resolving Marital Conflicts:

There are other factors intertwined with the previously mentioned ones—social, economic, psychological, and cultural—that fall outside the usual boundaries. This raises the question: do families succeed in resolving marital conflicts? Many couples are forced to live with extended family for various reasons, most notably economic hardship. However, this situation often affects marital stability, as it can cause tension and conflict between the spouses and the husband's mother, relatives, or family members.

Most marital problems are initially minor and simple, but interference from parents and relatives tends to escalate these issues, making them harder to resolve. As a result, the home becomes a battlefield of conflict, and matters become more complicated with family involvement, often leading to divorce (Al-Iraqi, 2006, p.72).

Fifth: The Exploratory Study

After identifying the research tool—namely the **Psychological Burnout Scale Questionnaire**—the researchers tested it in the field through an exploratory study conducted on a sample of divorced men and women. A total of 20 divorcees were selected to evaluate the tool's relevance to the intended objectives (i.e., the validity of the tool) and its appropriateness for the sample's level, as well as to verify the clarity of the items.

Research Methodology

The choice of a specific research method depends on the nature of the topic under investigation. Given the research problem addressed in this study, and due to the nature of our research topic, we adopted the descriptive method as it is the most appropriate approach for this type of study.

2. Study Population and Sample

The study population consists of a number of divorced men and women from the Wilaya of M'sila. The research sample includes 60 divorced individuals (both men and women), who were selected intentionally (purposive sampling) to suit the research objectives.

3. Research Fields

3.1 Spatial Field of the Study: The fieldwork for this research was conducted with a number of divorced individuals residing in the Wilaya of M'sila.

3.2 Temporal Field of the Study: The research was carried out between the end of February 2024 and mid-April 2024

4. Data Collection Tool

The researchers used a questionnaire designed specifically for the purposes of this study. The questionnaire consists of **14 items** that address two key dimensions: **economic factors** (specifically, women's participation in the labor force), and **socio-cultural factors** (namely, the educational level between spouses).

Table 1. Distribution of Questionnaire Items by Dimensions

Dimension	Items Covered	Total Items
Economic Factors (Women's Employment)	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7	7 Items
Socio-Cultural Factors (Educational Disparity)	8 – 9 – 10 – 11 – 12 – 13 – 14	7 Items
Total		14 Items

Source: Prepared by the researchers – SPSS21 Output

5. Psychometric Properties

5.1 Instrument Validity

The original scale demonstrated a good level of validity. Maslach and Jackson (1981) calculated the **discriminant validity** of the scale, and the results showed that the instrument was capable of distinguishing between different categories of workers experiencing either low or high levels of burnout.

To assess the validity of the current questionnaire, **Pearson's correlation coefficient** was calculated between each dimension and the total score of the questionnaire. The table below shows the correlation values:

Table 2. Correlation Between Each Dimension and the Total Questionnaire Score

Questionnaire Dimensions	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Economic Factors (Women's Employment)	0.784	0.01
Socio-Cultural Factors (Educational Level Between Spouses)	0.759	0.01

Source: Prepared by the researchers – SPSS21 Output

The data in the table above indicate that all correlation coefficients between the dimensions of the questionnaire and the total score are statistically significant at the **0.01 level ($\alpha = 0.01$)**. The correlation values (0.784 and 0.759) confirm the internal consistency and homogeneity of the questionnaire.

5.2 Instrument Reliability

To assess internal consistency, **Cronbach's Alpha coefficient** was calculated for the questionnaire. The result obtained is as follows:

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for the Burnout Scale and Its Sub-Dimensions

Questionnaire Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Economic Factors (Women's Employment)	0.718	7
Socio-Cultural Factors (Educational Level Between Spouses)	0.704	7

Source: Prepared by the researchers – SPSS21 Output

As shown in the table above, all Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the questionnaire dimensions are high, ranging between **0.704 and 0.718**. This indicates strong reliability, making the instrument suitable for application in the main study.

6. Study Design and Statistical Processing

The following statistical methods were used in the present study:

- Data analysis was carried out using the **SPSS** software.
- **Cronbach's Alpha** was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire.
- **Pearson's Correlation Coefficient** was used to measure the validity of the items.
- **Chi-Square Test (χ^2)** was used to assess goodness of fit.

1. First Axis: Characteristics of the Sample

Table 4. Gender Distribution of the Sample

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	10	33.33%
Female	20	66.66%
Total	30	100%

It is clear from **Table 04** that the number of male participants is **10** (33.33%), while the number of female participants is **20** (66.66%).

Table 5. Age Distribution of the Sample

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Under 20 years	18	60%
From 21 to 30 years	6	20%
Over 31 years	6	20%
Total	30	10

As shown in **Table 05**, the number of participants under 20 years old is **18** (60%), those aged between 21 and 30 years are **6** (20%), and those over 31 years old are also **6** (20%).

Table 6. Cross-Tabulation Between Gender and Age

Gender	Under 20 Years	21–30 Years	Over 31 Years	Total
Male	5	2	3	10
Female	13	4	3	20
Total	18	6	6	30

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS output

2. Hypothesis One: Economic factors (women working outside the home) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria.

Table 7. Economic Factors (Women Working Outside the Home) Contributing to Divorce in Algeria

Statement	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Total	Calculated χ^2	Sig. Value	Significance Level	df	Statistical Decision
	Number	Number	Number	30				2	
	%	%	%	100%					
Family income level affects the stability of the marital relationship	3	7	20		15.80	0.000	0.05	2	Significant
(10%)	(23.3%)	(66.7%)							
Women's income contributes to increasing their financial independence	4	8	18		10.40	0.006	0.05	2	Significant
(13.3%)	(26.7%)	(60%)							
Women's absence from home due to work affects emotional communication and support between spouses	3	7	20		15.80	0.000	0.05	2	Significant
(10%)	(23.3%)	(66.7%)							
Women working affects divorce more in high-income families compared to low-income families	3	10	17		9.80	0.007	0.05	2	Significant
(10%)	(33.3%)	(56.7%)							
Husbands feel financial pressure as a reason for separation	4	6	20		15.20	0.001	0.05	2	Significant
(13.3%)	(20%)	(66.7%)							

The role of culture and traditions in influencing the impact of women working on divorce	3	7	20		15.80	0.000	0.05	2	Significant
(10%)	(23.3%)	(66.7%)							
Social support (family and friends) contributes to the woman's decision to work	1	9	20		18.20	0.000	0.05	2	Significant
(3.3%)	(30%)	(66.7%)							

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS outputs

From **Table 07**, it is clear that most of the respondents answered "Always," with the number of individuals ranging between 17 and 20 (56.6% to 66.7%). The second most frequent response was "Sometimes," with individuals ranging between 6 and 10 (20% to 33.3%), and lastly, those who answered "Rarely" ranged between 1 and 4 individuals (3.3% to 13.3%). The calculated chi-square values ranged between 9.80 and 18.20, and the significance (sig.) values ranged between 0.000 and 0.007, all of which are below the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that economic factors (women working outside the home) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeri. Thus, the first hypothesis is confirmed.

4. Hypothesis Two: Socio-cultural factors (educational level between spouses) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria.

Table 8. Socio-Cultural Factors (Educational Level Between Spouses) Contributing to Divorce in Algeria

Statement	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Total	Calculated χ^2	Sig. Value	Significance Level	df	Statistical Decision
	Number	Number	Number	30				2	
	%	%	%	100%					
Lack of educational level causes misunderstandings between spouses	3	6	21		18.60	0.000	0.05	2	Significant
Educational level affects communication skills between spouses	3	7	20		15.80	0.000	0.05	2	Significant
Educated spouses tend to have different expectations from marriage compared to less educated spouses	6	6	18		9.60	0.008	0.05	2	Significant

Educational level affects financial decision-making in marriage	1	11	18		14.60	0.001	0.05	2	Significant
Educational level affects individuals' ability to make independent decisions in marriage	3	4	23		25.40	0.000	0.05	2	Significant
Educated spouses tend to accept divorce as an option more than less educated spouses	4	5	21		18.20	0.000	0.05	2	Significant
Educational level affects social pressures related to marriage that may lead to divorce	4	8	18		10.40	0.006	0.05	2	Significant

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on SPSS output

It is clear from **Table 08** that the analysis of responses shows most respondents answered "**Always**", with numbers ranging between 18 and 23 individuals (60% to 76.7%). The next most frequent answer was "**Sometimes**" with numbers between 4 and 11 individuals (13.3% to 36.7%), followed by "**Rarely**" with numbers between 1 and 4 individuals (3.3% to 13.3%). The calculated chi-square values ranged from 9.60 to 25.40, and the significance values ranged from 0.000 to 0.008, all of which are below the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis stating that socio-cultural factors (educational level between spouses) contribute to the phenomenon of divorce in Algeria. Hence, the second hypothesis is confirmed.

Conclusions

Divorce, as one of the major social phenomena, represents a genuine threat to both the family and society. It is among the manifestations of social disintegration that are witnessing a rapid increase within Algerian society.

In this context, the present study sought to investigate the economic and socio-cultural factors contributing to the phenomenon of divorce. The findings revealed several key results, particularly highlighting the significant role of economic factors in the spread of divorce, including the decline in families' living standards and the entry of women into paid employment.

As for the socio-cultural factors, they were primarily represented by the educational disparity between spouses, as well as the emergence of role conflict within the family—especially noticeable with the rise in women's educational levels and their integration into the labor market.

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