Conceptual Framework of Healthy Divorce in Iran: A Qualitative Study

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study aimed to develop and validate a culturally grounded, multidimensional conceptual framework of healthy divorce in Iran by identifying and prioritizing the biological, psychological, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual factors shaping the divorce process.

Methods and Materials: The study employed a qualitative, integrative design combining systematic literature review, qualitative content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and the fuzzy Delphi method. Participants included experts in family and divorce studies from psychology, social sciences, and social work, as well as married, divorcing, and divorced individuals selected through purposive sampling. Initial indicators were extracted from Persian and English literature and refined through expert consensus. Pairwise comparisons were conducted to calculate fuzzy weights for indicators within each dimension, followed by defuzzification to determine their relative importance. Thematic analysis was used to analyze interview data, and methodological triangulation ensured the credibility and rigor of findings.

Findings: The results indicated that healthy divorce is a dynamic outcome of interaction among six dimensions. Psychological factors showed the strongest influence, particularly psychological problems, hardiness, irrational beliefs, and differentiation of self. In the biological dimension, chronic physical illness, addiction, and sexual dissatisfaction were most salient. Social competence, moral–behavioral violence, and communication skills emerged as key social determinants. Cultural factors were dominated by adverse life events, family interference, and value differences. Ethical factors, especially lack of commitment and infidelity, held the highest weights overall. The spiritual dimension, although not weighted due to its single-indicator structure, functioned as a regulating conceptual component in the final model.

Conclusion: Healthy divorce in Iran should be understood not as the absence of conflict or a purely legal resolution, but as a multidimensional, ethically grounded, and culturally embedded process whose quality depends on the effective management of individual, relational, and contextual resources.

Keywords: Healthy divorce; multidimensional factors; qualitative research

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1.   Introduction

Divorce has increasingly become a salient social, psychological, and cultural phenomenon across societies, reflecting profound transformations in family structures, value systems, gender roles, and individual expectations of intimate relationships. In contemporary psychological and social science literature, divorce is no longer conceptualized solely as a legal rupture but rather as a complex life transition with multidimensional consequences for individuals, families, and broader social systems (Mortelmans, 2020; Sbarra & Whisman, 2022). Research consistently shows that divorce can simultaneously function as a source of psychological distress and as a potential pathway toward personal growth, well-being, and reorganization of life trajectories, depending on contextual, relational, and individual factors (Arcangeli & Ejova, 2025; Markoç, 2022). This duality has led scholars to move beyond deficit-oriented perspectives and to emphasize the conditions under which divorce processes can be managed in a healthier, more adaptive manner.

Within this evolving scholarly discourse, the concept of "healthy divorce" has emerged as an alternative framework that focuses on minimizing harm, preserving dignity, and facilitating post-divorce adjustment for all involved parties. Early clinical and systemic approaches highlighted the importance of therapeutic and mediation-based interventions in supporting constructive divorce processes, emphasizing cooperation, emotional regulation, and ethical responsibility (Walsh et al., 1995). Subsequent psychological research has expanded this view by examining how individual resources, relational patterns, and social contexts shape adjustment trajectories following separation (Çelik & Nazlı, 2025; Hald et al., 2022). Healthy divorce, therefore, does not imply the absence of conflict, but rather the presence of adaptive coping mechanisms, fair decision-making, and supportive environments that mitigate long-term psychological and social damage.

Psychological factors play a central role in shaping divorce experiences and outcomes. Empirical studies have demonstrated that psychological distress, including anxiety and depression, is highly prevalent during the post-divorce period, particularly when separations are accompanied by unresolved conflicts, economic strain, or custodial disputes (Arvidsson, 2025; Hald et al., 2022). At the same time, individual capacities such as differentiation of self, emotional regulation, and psychological hardiness significantly influence how individuals navigate separation

and reconstruct their identities and relationships afterward (Abdi, 2025; Moral et al., 2021). These findings underscore the importance of viewing divorce as a psychologically mediated process rather than a purely structural or legal event.

Differentiation of self, as conceptualized within family systems theory, has been identified as a particularly salient psychological construct in divorce research. Individuals with higher levels of differentiation are better able to maintain emotional autonomy while remaining connected to significant others, which facilitates more constructive conflict resolution and emotional adjustment during separation (Abdi, 2025; Moral et al., 2021). Similarly, emotional intelligence and resilience-related traits such as hardiness and hope contribute to adaptive coping and reduced psychological symptomatology in the aftermath of divorce (Agustini, 2020; Jarwan & Al-Frehat, 2020). These psychological resources form a critical foundation for conceptualizing healthy divorce processes.

Beyond individual psychology, social and relational factors substantially shape divorce trajectories. Patterns of communication, moral–behavioral violence, and relational competence have been shown to predict both the likelihood of divorce and the quality of post-divorce adjustment (Ghorishi et al., 2014; Lo et al., 2024). Poor communication skills and chronic relational hostility not only intensify marital breakdown but also complicate co-parenting relationships and prolong emotional distress after separation. Conversely, social competence and constructive interaction styles can buffer the negative effects of divorce and facilitate more cooperative post-divorce arrangements (Markoç, 2022). These findings highlight the embeddedness of divorce within relational systems rather than isolated individual experiences.

Socioeconomic conditions represent another critical dimension in divorce research. Economic strain has been repeatedly identified as both a predictor and a consequence of marital dissolution, with disproportionate impacts on women and children (Harsoyo & Darmawan, 2023; Mortelmans, 2020). Divorce often leads to reduced household income, housing instability, and long-term economic vulnerability, which in turn exacerbate psychological stress and limit access to supportive resources (Sbarra & Whisman, 2022). At the same time, parental education and socioeconomic status shape children's post-divorce outcomes, particularly in relation to educational attainment and social mobility (Guetto et al., 2022). These interconnections suggest that healthy divorce cannot be

adequately understood without integrating economic and structural considerations.

Cultural values and normative frameworks further condition how divorce is experienced, interpreted, and managed. Cross-cultural research indicates that societal attitudes toward marriage, divorce, and family obligations significantly influence both the prevalence of divorce and individual adjustment processes (Mentser & Sagiv, 2025; Myranika et al., 2024). Cultural value orientations, including individualism, collectivism, and moral norms surrounding commitment and family cohesion, interact with personal values to predict divorce-related behaviors and evaluations (Mentser & Sagiv, 2025). In more collectivist or family-centered contexts, divorce may carry heightened stigma and moral scrutiny, thereby intensifying psychological distress and social isolation for divorced individuals.

The Iranian context provides a particularly important setting for examining healthy divorce due to its unique intersection of cultural, religious, legal, and social dynamics. While divorce rates in Iran have increased over recent decades, research suggests that this trend is accompanied by significant transformations in family values, marital expectations, and gender roles (Abbasi & Rezapour, 2025; Kalantari et al., 2011). Systematic reviews of Iranian studies indicate that shifts in attitudes toward marriage and divorce are influenced by modernization, economic pressures, and changing interpersonal norms, while traditional moral and familial expectations continue to exert strong influence (Abbasi & Rezapour, 2025). This coexistence of change and continuity creates a complex landscape in which divorce is both increasingly common and socially contested.

Empirical studies conducted in Iran have identified a wide range of factors associated with marital breakdown, including economic hardship, sexual dissatisfaction, emotional divorce, interference of extended family, and value incongruence between spouses (Faizi, 2023; Ghorishi et al., 2014; Jarwan & Al-Frehat, 2020). Sexual dissatisfaction, in particular, has emerged as a salient yet often under-discussed contributor to divorce, reflecting broader challenges related to communication, intimacy, and cultural taboos (Faizi, 2023). These findings reinforce the need for culturally sensitive frameworks that address both explicit and implicit dimensions of marital and post-marital experiences.

Ethical and moral considerations constitute another essential, yet relatively under-theorized, component of healthy divorce. Legal and moral scholarship emphasizes that divorce processes are embedded within normative debates about responsibility, fault, commitment, and justice (Ajayi, 2016; Libson, 2018). From this perspective, behaviors such as infidelity, dishonesty, and neglect of relational obligations not only precipitate marital dissolution but also shape the moral climate of the divorce process itself. Ethical approaches to divorce advocate for accountability, fairness, and the protection of vulnerable parties, particularly children, as core elements of a healthy separation (Ajayi, 2016; Burhanuddin et al., 2025).

Recent applied research has increasingly focused on interventions and policies aimed at promoting healthier divorce outcomes. Post-divorce adjustment programs, life skills training, and counseling interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in improving psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and adaptive coping among divorced individuals (Çelik & Nazlı, 2025; Solgi et al., 2024). In parallel, legal and procedural approaches emphasizing peaceful resolution, mediation, and rights-based frameworks have been proposed as mechanisms for reducing conflict and long-term harm (Burhanuddin et al., 2025; Myranika et al., 2024). These developments point to the practical relevance of conceptual models that can inform intervention design and policy formulation.

Despite the growing body of international and Iranian research on divorce, several gaps remain. Much of the existing literature focuses on causes or consequences of divorce in isolation, rather than examining the interactive processes through which biological, psychological, social, cultural, and ethical factors jointly shape divorce experiences. Moreover, there is a relative lack of integrative, culturally grounded frameworks that explicitly conceptualize "healthy divorce" as a multidimensional construct within the Iranian context (Ayadi et al., 2025; Behtoei et al., 2025). Addressing this gap requires qualitative, theory-building approaches capable of capturing the lived experiences of individuals and the interpretive frameworks of experts.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to contribute to the literature by developing a comprehensive, culturally informed conceptual framework of healthy divorce in Iran that integrates biological, psychological, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, drawing on expert perspectives and empirical evidence from divorced and divorcing individuals, with the ultimate aim of clarifying the multidimensional determinants and processes that characterize healthy divorce experiences in the Iranian context.

2. Methods and Materials

This qualitative study was conducted using an integrative approach based on documentary studies, the fuzzy Delphi method, and field interviews. In the expert section, the population consisted of specialists in the fields of family and divorce from psychology, social sciences, and social work, holding an academic rank of at least associate professor. Using purposive and voluntary sampling, 10 experts were selected to evaluate and refine the initial model. In the field phase, in order to identify couples on the verge of divorce, the Emotional Divorce Questionnaire developed by Mohammadi, Jokar Kamalabadi, and Golestaneh (2015) was administered to 25 couples. From this group, 10 well-functioning couples, 7 couples on the verge of divorce, and 3 divorced couples were selected through purposive sampling, and one individual from each couple participated in a semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted at a collaborating psychology clinic, and the data were collected with an emphasis on participants' informational richness and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis to extract the main patterns and components related to the conceptual framework of healthy divorce.

The inclusion criteria for experts included holding a doctoral degree in fields related to family and marriage, active engagement in clinical practice, education, or research, a minimum of five years of professional experience, accessibility, and willingness to cooperate. The inclusion criteria for couples included being legally married for well-functioning and at-risk couples, as well as individuals who were divorced at the time of the interview, the presence of at least one partner in the interview session, completion of the Emotional Divorce Questionnaire by both partners, and confirmation by the clinic psychologist that the couple was experiencing marital distress or was on the verge of divorce.

Negative Emotional Expression was assessed using the Emotional Expressiveness Questionnaire developed by King and Emmons in 1990. This scale contains 19 items and three subscales: positive emotional expression, intimacy expression, and negative emotional expression. In the current study, only the negative emotional expression subscale was used. The original response format is a seven-point Likert scale ranging from completely agree to completely disagree; however, for the purpose of facilitating comprehension, the scale was modified to a five-point format. Scoring follows a Likert procedure in which higher scores represent greater emotional expressiveness. Certain items are reverse-scored to control for response bias. Total scores range from 19 to 95. King and Emmons reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.70 for the total scale and 0.75, 0.79, and 0.93 for the positive, intimacy, and negative emotion subscales, respectively. In Iranian validation studies, Rafiei-Nia reported alpha coefficients of 0.90 for the total scale and 0.95, 0.59, and 0.98 for the three subscales, indicating strong internal consistency. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.83, confirming acceptable reliability for the instrument.

In the qualitative phase of the study, a literature review and content analysis were first conducted using databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar, examining Persian and English sources, including articles and theses related to healthy divorce, in order to extract criteria and categories influencing healthy divorce and to develop an initial conceptual model. Subsequently, using the fuzzy Delphi method and interviews with experts in the field of family and divorce, along with the inclusion of frequently recurring factors identified in review articles, the indicators affecting healthy divorce were identified. Based on the factors confirmed by experts, a questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions were developed and reviewed in consultative sessions with the supervisor and advisor to ensure content validity and adequacy and to achieve consensus on the questions. In the next stage, as part of a pilot study, these interviews were conducted by the researcher with 10 married couples reporting marital satisfaction and 10 couples on the verge of divorce or post-divorce, and the criteria and categories influencing healthy divorce were extracted from their responses. Subsequently, to assess the convergence or divergence between the study population and expert opinions, more than 18 review articles were examined, and over 84 related factors were identified, all of which were converted into questionnaire items. Data were analyzed at each stage, and the number of interview sessions continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. In addition, the study's credibility was enhanced through multi-perspective triangulation, based on categories extracted from expert interviews, couple interviews, and findings from previous research, ultimately leading to the development of the final qualitative model of healthy divorce. Prior to each interview, informed consent was obtained from participants, and the study objectives, reasons for audio recording, and confidentiality of information were explained. Interview durations ranged from 45 to 75

minutes, and the data were analyzed concurrently to extract the core criteria and patterns of healthy divorce.

3. Findings and Results

After identifying the criterion indicators—namely biological factors, psychological factors, social factors, cultural factors, and ethical factors—the research variables were operationalized. To determine the weights of the various parameters, survey forms containing all identified parameters were prepared and distributed to experts for completion. In the second stage, based on the initial results of expert opinions, pairwise comparison matrices were calculated. Following the administration of the surveys and evaluation of the results, all obtained data were used to construct the main pairwise comparison matrix of the parameters. Subsequently, in order to defuzzify the indicator weights, the geometric mean of the components of the fuzzy numbers corresponding to parameter weights was calculated according to the specified formula, thereby expressing the parameter weights as crisp values.

Table 1

Defuzzification of Parameter Weights for the Biological Factors Variable

Biological Indicators	Fuzzy Weight (l)	Fuzzy Weight (m)	Fuzzy Weight (u)	Defuzzified Weight
Acute and chronic physical illness	0.0744	0.1901	0.7453	0.219232
Sexual relationship dissatisfaction	0.0604	0.1752	0.6054	0.185732
Addiction	0.0701	0.1915	0.6918	0.210203
Infertility	0.0251	0.1550	0.5040	0.125088
Disability	0.0309	0.1428	0.4240	0.123248
Obesity	0.0309	0.1454	0.4568	0.127094

The findings of the fuzzy analysis of influential indicators showed that within the biological factors dimension, acute and chronic physical illness had the highest importance with a defuzzified weight of 0.219232. This was followed by addiction with a weight of 0.210203 and sexual relationship dissatisfaction with a weight of 0.185732. The mean weight of the indicators in this dimension was 0.1651. Accordingly, infertility, disability, and obesity—whose weights were below the mean—were removed from subsequent stages of the study; however, sexual relationship dissatisfaction was retained in the final model due to its above-average weight and expert confirmation.

Table 2

Defuzzification of Parameter Weights for the Psychological Factors Variable

Psychological Indicators	Fuzzy Weight (l)	Fuzzy Weight (m)	Fuzzy Weight (u)	Defuzzified Weight
Psychological problems	0.042247	0.090725	0.208062	0.092733
Differentiation of self	0.033542	0.080413	0.197710	0.081093
Emotional intelligence	0.039249	0.091378	0.208062	0.090703
Hardiness	0.036464	0.083622	0.189069	0.083227
Personality traits	0.036995	0.081575	0.186777	0.082605
Self-esteem	0.011665	0.041630	0.134136	0.040236
Resilience	0.032971	0.078445	0.195670	0.079691
Irrational beliefs	0.035314	0.083622	0.193298	0.082953
Sense of competence	0.036104	0.083024	0.184016	0.082011
Psychological capital	0.036464	0.083622	0.182690	0.082281
Hope	0.030528	0.084002	0.199683	0.080004
Problem solving	0.038011	0.081575	0.182690	0.082742
Attachment style	0.012072	0.036369	0.109920	0.036408

Within the psychological factors dimension, the results indicated that psychological problems had the highest defuzzified weight (0.092733). This was followed by hardiness (0.083227) and irrational beliefs (0.082953). The mean weight of the indicators in this dimension was calculated as 0.07667. Accordingly, self-esteem and attachment style—due to weights below the mean—were excluded from further analysis, while the remaining indicators were retained in the final model.

Table 3

Defuzzification of Parameter Weights for the Social Factors Variable

Social Indicators	Fuzzy Weight (l)	Fuzzy Weight (m)	Fuzzy Weight (u)	Defuzzified Weight
Social competence	0.073412	0.159414	0.449789	0.173954
Education	0.057113	0.146918	0.388652	0.148294
Moral–behavioral violence	0.064888	0.160563	0.435663	0.165572
History of divorce	0.022973	0.130019	0.332148	0.099736
Communication skills	0.064292	0.143316	0.418104	0.156764
Social support	0.024487	0.121960	0.332148	0.099731
Death of former spouse	0.057113	0.137810	0.388652	0.145164

In the social factors dimension, social competence showed the highest importance with a defuzzified weight of 0.173954, followed by moral–behavioral violence (0.165572) and communication skills (0.156764). The mean weight of this dimension was 0.141316. Accordingly, history of divorce and social support—whose weights were below the mean—were excluded from further analysis, while the remaining indicators were retained in the model due to their relatively higher importance.

Table 4

Defuzzification of Parameter Weights for the Cultural Factors Variable

Cultural Indicators	Fuzzy Weight (l)	Fuzzy Weight (m)	Fuzzy Weight (u)	Defuzzified Weight
Adverse life events	0.067856	0.163098	0.556812	0.183336
Economic factors	0.056791	0.150313	0.447234	0.156292
Interference of relatives and family	0.059977	0.164273	0.539325	0.174502
Lifestyle	0.026730	0.133024	0.351401	0.107707
Cultural value differences	0.059426	0.146628	0.501333	0.163471
Ethnicity	0.022634	0.124778	0.442339	0.107700
Dress code	0.024847	0.117886	0.303637	0.096168

In the cultural factors dimension, adverse life events had the highest defuzzified weight (0.183336), followed by interference of relatives and family (0.174502) and cultural value differences (0.163471). The mean weight of this dimension was calculated as 0.14131. Accordingly, lifestyle, ethnicity, and dress code—whose weights were below the mean—were removed from the final model.

Table 5

*Defuzzification of Parameter Weights for the Ethical Factors Variable*

Ethical Indicators	Fuzzy Weight (l)	Fuzzy Weight (m)	Fuzzy Weight (u)	Defuzzified Weight
Lack of commitment to the relationship and infidelity	0.2223	0.3414	0.5480	0.3465
Crime and delinquency	0.1875	0.3147	0.4979	0.3086
Dishonesty	0.2176	0.3439	0.5480	0.3448

Finally, within the ethical factors dimension, lack of commitment to the relationship and infidelity received the highest defuzzified weight (0.3465), followed by dishonesty (0.3448) and crime and delinquency (0.3086). The mean weight of this dimension was 0.333. Accordingly, crime and delinquency—due to its weight being below the mean—was excluded from the continuation of the research process, and the remaining two indicators were retained as the most important components of this dimension in the final model.

It should be noted that the spiritual dimension, despite being present in both the initial and final conceptual models, was not entered into the fuzzy Delphi process and defuzzification of weights due to being a single-variable construct and the impossibility of conducting pairwise comparisons. Accordingly, it was retained as a regulating conceptual dimension in the final model.

Figure 1

Final Research Model
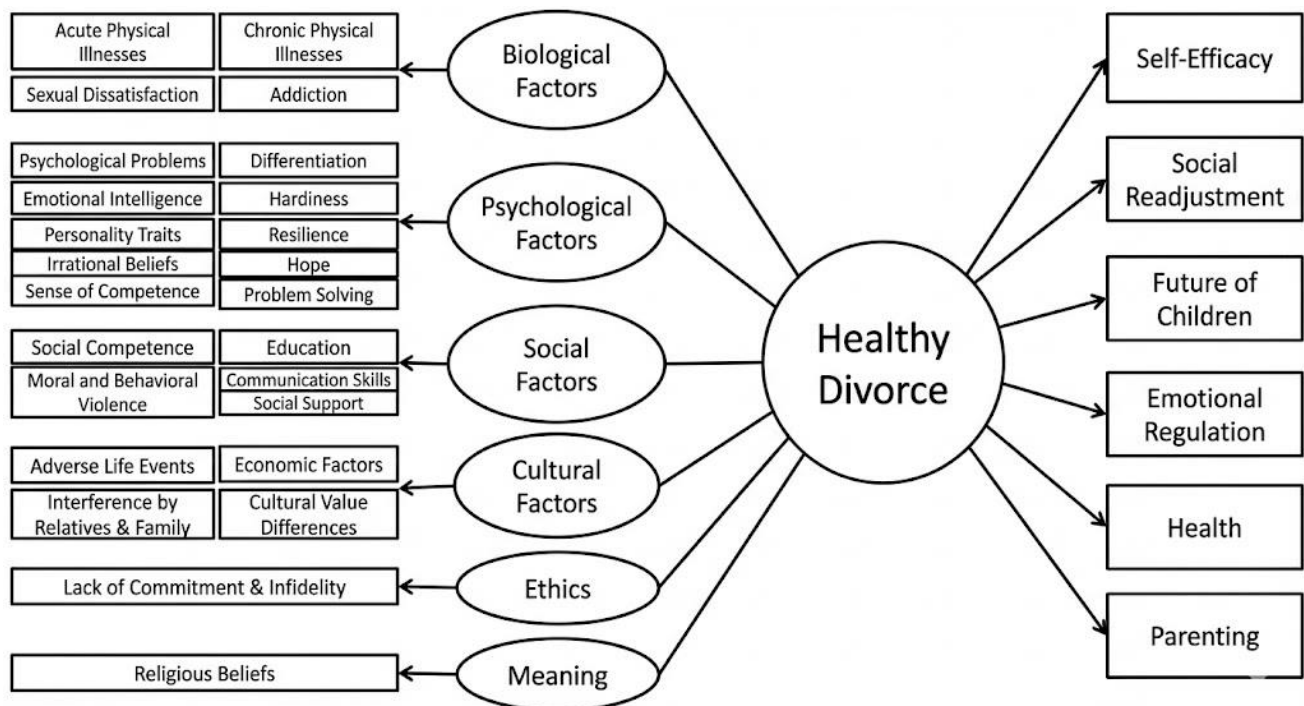
4. Discussion

The findings of the present study provide a comprehensive, multidimensional understanding of healthy divorce by empirically validating a model that integrates biological, psychological, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. Consistent with contemporary divorce research, the results indicate that healthy divorce should not be conceptualized as the absence of conflict or merely the successful completion of legal procedures, but rather as a dynamic process shaped by interacting personal, relational, and contextual factors (Mortelmans, 2020; Sbarra & Whisman, 2022). The weighting results derived from the fuzzy Delphi analysis further clarify the relative importance of specific indicators within each dimension, thereby offering a nuanced picture of how different domains contribute to healthier divorce trajectories.

Within the biological dimension, acute and chronic physical illness and addiction emerged as the most influential indicators. This finding aligns with evidence demonstrating that physical health problems and substance use significantly strain marital relationships and complicate adjustment during and after divorce (Cosco et al., 2019; Sbarra & Whisman, 2022). Chronic illness often introduces

long-term caregiving burdens and emotional exhaustion, which may erode relational satisfaction and coping capacity. Similarly, addiction has been repeatedly identified as a destabilizing factor in marital systems, contributing to conflict escalation and ethical breaches that undermine trust. The relative importance assigned to sexual dissatisfaction is also consistent with Iranian and international studies highlighting unmet sexual needs as a critical yet culturally sensitive predictor of marital breakdown (Faizi, 2023; Ghorishi et al., 2014). The exclusion of infertility, disability, and obesity at later stages suggests that, although relevant, these factors may exert more indirect or context-dependent effects on healthy divorce processes.

Psychological factors constituted one of the most central dimensions in the final model, with psychological problems, hardiness, irrational beliefs, and differentiation of self receiving the highest weights. This pattern strongly supports prior research emphasizing the centrality of mental health in divorce adjustment (Çelik & Nazlı, 2025; Hald et al., 2022). Psychological distress, particularly anxiety and depression, has been shown to intensify during divorce transitions, especially in the presence of unresolved conflict or economic stress. At the same time, individual strengths such as psychological hardiness and resilience facilitate adaptive

coping and emotional regulation, enabling individuals to navigate separation more constructively (Agustini, 2020; Jarwan & Al-Frehat, 2020). The prominence of irrational beliefs further underscores the cognitive dimension of divorce adjustment, suggesting that maladaptive interpretations and rigid expectations may exacerbate emotional suffering and impede healthy decision-making. These findings are in line with studies demonstrating that cognitive restructuring and emotion-focused interventions improve post-divorce adjustment and life satisfaction (Çelik & Nazlı, 2025; Solgi et al., 2024).

The social dimension of the model highlighted social competence, moral–behavioral violence, and communication skills as key determinants of healthy divorce. This result reinforces the relational embeddedness of divorce processes, emphasizing that the quality of interpersonal interactions both before and after separation plays a decisive role in outcomes (Lo et al., 2024; Markoç, 2022). High social competence and effective communication facilitate negotiation, co-parenting, and conflict management, thereby reducing prolonged hostility and psychological harm. Conversely, moral–behavioral violence reflects patterns of emotional abuse, disrespect, and coercive interaction that undermine the possibility of constructive separation. The exclusion of social support as a core indicator in later stages does not negate its importance, but suggests that its effects may be mediated through more proximal relational competencies, a finding that is consistent with systems-oriented perspectives on family functioning (Lo et al., 2024).

Cultural factors also played a significant role in shaping healthy divorce, with adverse life events, family interference, and cultural value differences emerging as the most influential indicators. These results are particularly salient in the Iranian context, where extended family involvement and collective norms continue to shape marital and post-marital experiences (Abbasi & Rezapour, 2025; Kalantari et al., 2011). Adverse life events such as economic crises, bereavement, or forced migration can destabilize family systems and accelerate marital breakdown, while simultaneously complicating post-divorce adjustment. Family interference reflects the dual role of kin networks as sources of support and conflict, a dynamic that has been widely documented in qualitative studies of Iranian couples (Behtoei et al., 2025; Ghorishi et al., 2014). Cultural value differences further highlight the interaction between personal expectations and broader normative frameworks, echoing cross-cultural research demonstrating that

misalignment between individual and societal values predicts divorce and post-divorce dissatisfaction (Mentser & Sagiv, 2025; Myranika et al., 2024).

The ethical dimension of the model was dominated by lack of commitment and infidelity, followed closely by dishonesty. These findings resonate strongly with moral and legal analyses of divorce, which emphasize trust, responsibility, and ethical conduct as central to both marital stability and healthy separation (Ajayi, 2016; Libson, 2018). Infidelity and chronic dishonesty not only precipitate marital dissolution but also shape the emotional tone and moral climate of the divorce process, influencing perceptions of fairness, blame, and legitimacy. The relative exclusion of crime and delinquency in later stages suggests that, while serious, such behaviors may represent extreme cases rather than core components of everyday divorce experiences. Nonetheless, the prominence of ethical indicators underscores the importance of integrating moral considerations into psychological and legal approaches to divorce (Burhanuddin et al., 2025).

An important conceptual contribution of this study is the retention of the spiritual dimension as a regulating construct despite its exclusion from the fuzzy weighting process. This decision reflects both methodological constraints and theoretical considerations. In many cultural contexts, including Iran, spirituality and religious meaning systems play a crucial role in how individuals interpret suffering, responsibility, and reconciliation (Abbasi & Rezapour, 2025; Ayadi et al., 2025). While not directly comparable through pairwise weighting, spirituality may shape coping strategies, ethical orientations, and acceptance of divorce outcomes, thereby indirectly influencing all other dimensions. This finding supports calls for culturally grounded models that move beyond purely psychological or economic explanations of divorce.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the alignment of the present findings with international and Iranian literature suggests strong external validity for the proposed model. By integrating evidence from psychology, sociology, economics, law, and cultural studies, the model responds to critiques that existing divorce research remains fragmented and overly discipline-specific (Mortelmans, 2020; Sbarra & Whisman, 2022). The results also complement intervention-oriented studies demonstrating that multidimensional approaches— combining psychological support, skills training, ethical

guidance, and legal mediation—are most effective in promoting healthier divorce outcomes (Çelik & Nazlı, 2025; Walsh et al., 1995). In this sense, the present study advances the literature by offering an empirically grounded framework capable of informing both theory and practice in the field of divorce and family studies.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative and expert-based nature of the fuzzy Delphi method limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations, particularly outside the Iranian cultural context. Second, although efforts were made to include diverse expert perspectives and couple experiences, the sample size remained relatively small, which may have constrained the range of identified indicators. Third, the reliance on self-reported experiences in interviews may have introduced recall bias or social desirability effects, especially given the sensitive nature of divorce-related topics.

Future studies are encouraged to empirically test the proposed conceptual model using quantitative designs and larger, more diverse samples. Longitudinal research could further clarify how the relative importance of biological, psychological, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual factors changes over time during and after divorce. Comparative cross-cultural studies would also be valuable in examining the extent to which the identified dimensions and indicators generalize to other sociocultural settings or require contextual adaptation. Additionally, future research could focus on developing and validating indigenous measurement instruments based on the present framework.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the need for integrated, multidisciplinary approaches to divorce intervention and policymaking. Practitioners should move beyond narrow legal or therapeutic models and address psychological skills, relational competencies, ethical responsibility, and cultural context simultaneously. Family courts, counseling centers, and social services may benefit from using the proposed framework to design assessment tools, preventive programs, and post-divorce support services that promote dignity, cooperation, and long-term well-being for all parties involved.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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