Identifying the Sociological Dimensions of Emotional Divorce and Typology of its Types in Tehran

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A r t i c l e   I n f o

A B S T R A C T

Objective: This study aims to identify the sociological dimensions and typology of emotional divorce in Tehran.

Methods and Materials: The study employs a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological strategy. The statistical population includes couples aged between 25 to 40 years. Using purposive sampling, 21 participants were selected based on theoretical saturation. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews. For data analysis, open coding and axial coding processes were used to extract relevant structures and indicators. The reliability of the coding process was ensured through re-coding and high levels of agreement.

Findings: The research identified four main categories of emotional divorce, encompassing 14 initial codes and 55 semantic codes. The primary dimensions identified include compulsory living, lack of emotional behavior towards the spouse, emotional void, and changes in emotional relationships. Additionally, six types of emotional divorce were identified: lack of emotional support, communicative divorce, sexual divorce, reduced empathy, attentional divorce, and respect divorce. These types were derived from a detailed analysis of 82 semantic codes collected from the interview data.

Conclusion: Emotional divorce is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with profound and long-lasting effects on family and social relationships. The study underscores the importance of considering sociological factors in mitigating the negative impacts of emotional divorce. The findings suggest that appropriate training in communication and emotional management skills can significantly reduce the likelihood of emotional divorce. These insights are valuable for family counselors, psychologists, and policymakers in developing effective strategies and policies to enhance marital quality and prevent emotional divorce.

Keywords: Emotional divorce, Sociological dimensions, Typology, Qualitative research, Tehran, Marital relationships, Communication skills, Family counseling.

1. Introduction

Human interactions begin with social interactions. These interactions are reciprocal and lead to the formation of societal groups; therefore, interaction is a necessary condition for the existence of groups, especially family groups, which have strong connections and emotional elements. Hence, the family is recognized as the primary institution of education and the oldest and most natural nucleus in human history, and no substitute has been found for it so far (Navabinejad et al., 2024). Marriage, as the foundation of family formation, is a milestone in the life cycle. It is also a pivotal aspect of an individual's life, connecting two people as spouses and significantly influencing their performance, including social, emotional, cultural, and economic well-being (Golmohammadi & Alimardani, 2022; Jarwan & Al-frehat, 2020). Any disruption in marriage directly affects the family and, consequently, the entire society. One of the processes of divorce is emotional divorce (Rasheed et al., 2021; Rashid et al., 2019). The issue of emotional divorce is an interdisciplinary topic, which, in the field of psychology, explores the reasons and factors leading to it among couples, and in the field of sociology, evaluates its consequences for the family and society. In Iran, this issue increasingly reveals its unpleasant face day by day. Alongside the prevalence of formal divorce, emotional divorce, despite its hidden nature within families, has weakened the foundations of family and marital life (Rasheed et al., 2021). Currently, divorce has significant economic, social, and psychological consequences for individuals. According to national registry statistics in 2021, the growth rate of divorce in Iran was about 3.6% compared to 2019. In other words, for every three marriages registered in 2020, one divorce was also registered, with a marriage-to-divorce ratio of 3:1, and most of these divorces were among couples who had been married for 1 to 5 years (Bagheri et al., 2022; Mahmoudpour et al., 2021).

It is evident that official divorce statistics do not fully reflect the failure of couples in their marriages, as a larger number of divorces pertain to emotional divorces. It can be estimated that the number of emotional separations may be twice the number of official divorces, implying silent lives and empty families where men and women live together coldly without ever seeking legal separation. Studying divorce, which jeopardizes family relationships and subsequently affects societal relationships, seems crucial (Golmohammadi & Alimardani, 2022; Jarwan & Al-frehat,

2020; Mahmoudpour et al., 2021; Shirzadi et al., 2021). Many studies on emotional divorce, both domestically and internationally, have examined the influential factors (Arbabzadeh et al., 2022; Barzoki et al., 2015; Mirzadeh Koohshahi et al., 2019; Rashid et al., 2019; Sahebihagh et al., 2018) and its consequences (Dehghani-Nash & colleagues, 2019; Roshani, 2010). However, no research has addressed the phenomenon of emotional divorce from a sociological perspective and typology of its types.

The importance of this study stems from the importance of society to the family; as long as marriage exists, differences and crises will exist (Jarwan & Al-frehat, 2020). Therefore, further research in this area is necessary. In the present study, an attempt is made to examine this concept from various angles as much as possible and, considering the expressed opinions and views, address the issue. By identifying the dimensions of emotional divorce and providing appropriate tools for identifying couples experiencing emotional divorce, it is possible to prevent formal divorce (Mirzadeh Koohshahi et al., 2019) and hinder the increasing rate of social harms. This research aims to initially inform families, relevant authorities, and media and provide solutions scientifically, and by typology of emotional divorce, examine it from different angles to take an effective step in reducing and resolving this phenomenon.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study utilizes a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological strategy to explore the sociological dimensions and typology of emotional divorce in Tehran. The study's statistical population includes couples aged between 25 to 40 years. The sampling method employed is purposive sampling, selecting individuals who have experienced or are experiencing emotional divorce. The sample size was determined by theoretical saturation, resulting in the selection of 21 participants. The study aims to gather in-depth insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives on emotional divorce.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews. This method allows for the collection of rich, detailed data while providing the flexibility to explore participants' responses in depth. Each interview was

designed to capture the participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings regarding emotional divorce. The interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached, ensuring that no new information was being obtained from additional interviews. To maintain consistency and reliability, a set of guiding questions was used, though the interviewer had the freedom to probe further based on participants' responses. The interviews were recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

2.2.2. *Perceived Stress*

2.3. *Data analysis*

The data analysis process involved several stages to ensure thorough and accurate interpretation of the collected data. The transcribed interviews were first coded using an open coding technique to identify key themes and patterns. To calculate reliability, several interviews were selected and re-coded after a 15-day interval. The consistency of the coding was assessed by comparing the identified codes in the two phases for each interview, ensuring high levels of agreement. Following open coding, axial coding was employed to connect related themes and establish relationships between different codes. Finally, selective

coding was used to integrate and refine the core themes, providing a comprehensive understanding of the sociological dimensions and typology of emotional divorce. The analysis was guided by the phenomenological approach, focusing on capturing the essence of participants' lived experiences.

3. Findings and Results

To analyze the qualitative data, specific processes such as open coding and axial coding were used, and ultimately, structures and indicators related to the research were extracted.

Question 1: What are the main dimensions of emotional divorce?

To answer this question, the interview texts were studied, and open and axial codes were identified.

Based on the codes and statements obtained in this step, initial concepts were formed. In this section, information was collected from interviews with 21 individuals. Four categories were derived from the results of the analysis, which included 14 initial codes and 55 semantic codes. These results are presented separately in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of Axial Coding Related to the Dimensions of the Emotional Divorce Variable

Initial Codes	Categories	Axial Code
Lack of emotional support	Change in emotional relationships	Emotional divorce
Lack of sharing feelings		
Unwillingness to cooperate		
Indifference towards each other		
Decreased communication		
Unfavorable emotional relationship	Lack of emotional behavior towards spouse	
Unmet expectations		
Unmet sexual needs		
Lack of happiness	Compulsory living	
Lack of showing interest		
Lack of choice		
Decreased empathy	Emotional void	
Decreased attention		
Lack of respect		

Question 2: What are the types of emotional divorce?

To answer this question, the interview texts were studied. The analysis of the information at this step was also based on the theoretical coding method, and six types of divorce were identified under the titles of lack of emotional support, communicative divorce, sexual divorce, reduced empathy, attentional divorce, and respect divorce, which included 82

semantic codes. 26 semantic codes for lack of emotional support, 11 semantic codes for communicative divorce, 7 semantic codes for sexual divorce, 22 semantic codes for reduced empathy, 7 semantic codes for attentional divorce, and 9 semantic codes for respect divorce were identified.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this research show that emotional divorce is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon composed of various stages. The consequences of emotional divorce indicate that this phenomenon not only has deep and long-lasting effects on family relationships but also significantly influences social life. Therefore, paying attention to sociological factors can be effective in reducing the negative impacts of emotional divorce.

Comparing the results of the present research with the prior study conducted by Golmohammadi and Alimardani (2022), the present research focuses on the sociological aspects of the phenomenon of emotional divorce and the typology of its types in Tehran. Both studies refer to the impact of changes in emotional behavior towards the spouse (sexual satisfaction) as important factors in the occurrence of emotional divorce in society. While the present research is more focused on the typology of emotional divorce types in Tehran, Golmohammadi and Alimardani's research is more focused on examining the relationship between sexual satisfaction and the likelihood of emotional divorce among couples seeking counseling (Golmohammadi & Alimardani, 2022).

Comparing the results of the present research with the study conducted by Mirzadeh Koohshahi and colleagues (2019), a similarity can be observed. Both studies have shown that the dimensions of emotional divorce include compulsory living, lack of emotional behavior towards the spouse, and emotional void (Mirzadeh Koohshahi et al., 2019). However, in the present study, in addition to these dimensions, the dimension of change in emotional relationships has also been identified as another dimension of emotional divorce.

Given the results obtained in this research, it is inevitable to examine all social, cultural, emotional, and structural aspects of emotional divorce, especially in Tehran. Understanding the factors influencing the occurrence of emotional divorce and its sociological impacts is important. These results can not only help family counselors and psychologists provide the best strategies to prevent emotional divorce and improve marital quality but also play a crucial role for policymakers in developing policies and laws related to marriage and divorce. This research also shows that providing appropriate training to enhance couples' skills in managing communication and resolving emotional problems can be used as an effective strategy to reduce the likelihood of emotional divorce in society.

This study contributes to the literature on emotional divorce in several ways:

First, this study contributes to theory development by identifying the dimensions of emotional divorce. Previous research had identified some of the dimensions (Mirzadeh Koohshahi et al., 2019) as important, but the present study also considers the dimension of change in emotional relationships.

Second, based on the review of past research and qualitative analysis, this study expands the dimensions of emotional divorce. These findings are also expected to be generalizable to similar cities in Iran, such as Isfahan, Mashhad, and others.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Based on the results obtained, the following suggestions are provided:

Designing and implementing educational and awareness programs aimed at strengthening marital communication and increasing individuals' awareness of the destructive impacts of social and cultural pressures on marital life can be beneficial.

Teaching couples communication skills, including understanding each other's needs and desires and learning better ways to express emotions and attitudes, can help improve marital communication and reduce tensions.

Teaching anger and tension management skills to couples can help reduce anger and leakage of negative emotions and prevent emotional divorce through promoting constructive interactions.

Training couples on developing appropriate conflict resolution strategies when facing problems and differences can reduce the continuity of tensions and the likelihood of divorce.

Creating spaces for counseling and support to strengthen skills for managing social pressures and coping with their negative impacts can help couples confidently face social challenges.

Encouraging the acceptance of positive social changes can help reduce tensions and conflicts in marital relationships. Individuals can use these changes to improve and strengthen their emotional relationships.

Arranging brief and quality times for couples to spend together can help strengthen emotional and sexual connections. Creating opportunities for emotional interactions and comfort with each other can reduce the likelihood of emotional divorce.

Like other studies, this research also faced limitations, which are mentioned below:

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The sample size in the present research is not large enough, so the results should be interpreted with caution regarding the generalization of the findings.

The present research was only conducted in Tehran, which may mean that the results are not generalizable to other regions.

This research was conducted during a specific period, so the final results may not match current conditions.

Limitations in access to appropriate tools may negatively impact the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the results.

For future research on emotional divorce, the following suggestions are offered:

Conducting comparative research in other cities of Iran with similar characteristics to Tehran to correlate geographical factors with the occurrence of emotional divorce.

Comparing the results of the present study with similar research in other cities or regions of Iran and analyzing the differences and similarities in the results.

Examining and prioritizing the various dimensions of emotional divorce and identifying the main factors contributing to this phenomenon.

Comparing the results of the present study on emotional divorce with related research on formal divorce to identify differences and similarities.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

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

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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