

Divorce and Social Transformation: Understanding the Role of Community and Family Institutions..

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Abstract

The study highlights the significant role institutions play in shaping positive youth outcomes. Nearly 70% of respondents reported that institutional programs enhanced their education and career prospects, while 54% noted a reduction in risky or anti-social behaviours due to their participation. Community-based initiatives—such as training, mentoring, and awareness programs—further strengthened participants' sense of social and civic responsibility. These efforts not only benefited the youth directly but also shifted community attitudes toward greater recognition of young people's social contributions. Overall, the evidence suggests that collaboration among institutions can foster youth development while reducing social risks. By promoting discipline, awareness, and active community involvement, institutions help drive gradual yet meaningful social change. Expanding youth diversion programs and strengthening inter-institutional partnerships can further advance inclusive and sustainable social development.

About 60% of study participants reported the absence of effective communication and the presence of informal or economic stressors as major causes of conflict within marriages. In regard to the absence of informal familial mediation or formal counselling services, 45% of participants reported this as a major cause as well. Additionally, supportive interventions from familial elders, counselling services, or community groups were reported to help individuals manage the post-divorce psychosocial stress. Support from these systems not only reduced post-divorce psychosocial stress but also helped reduce stigma and enabled families and community groups to discuss the problems constructively. The study suggests that community and familial issues should be seen as a response to changing social systems, as the community and familial systems provide guidance and support to individuals to help them cope with the psychosocial stress associated with these changes. Strengthening community and familial systems, coupled with supportive counselling, may help individuals develop socially acceptable psychosocial stress and conflict-relief mechanisms...

Keywords: Divorce, Social Transformation, Family Institutions, Community Support, Changing Family Structure.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the oldest and most important social institutions, providing a framework for family formation, social stability, and the transmission of cultural values. Traditionally, marriage has been viewed as a lifelong commitment, particularly in societies such as India where family relationships are deeply rooted in social, cultural, and religious traditions. However, the process of social transformation brought about by modernization, urbanization, globalization, technological advancements, and changing gender roles has significantly influenced marital relationships. As a result, divorce has become an increasingly visible social phenomenon worldwide.

Divorce is the legal dissolution of a marriage and reflects not only a personal decision but also broader social changes. The rising participation of women in education and employment, increasing economic independence, greater awareness of individual rights, and changing attitudes toward marriage have contributed to shifts in family structures and marital expectations. While divorce rates in India remain relatively low compared to many Western countries, the number of divorce and separation cases has shown a gradual increase, particularly in urban areas. According to the Census 2011, more than 1.3 million Indians reported being divorced, while millions more were separated, indicating changing patterns in family life and marital relationships. Family and community institutions play a crucial role in shaping marital stability and responses to marital conflict. On the other hand, AI carries the potential to harm certain individuals and groups, posing risks to fundamental rights and undermining reasonable expectations. These negative impacts may, in some cases, outweigh the substantial economic gains and broader societal benefits that AI promises (Gorowara, et al, 2026).

Traditionally, joint families, kinship networks, religious organizations, and local communities acted as mechanisms for social support, conflict resolution, and marital counseling. These institutions often helped couples manage disputes and maintain family cohesion. However, social transformation has weakened some traditional support systems, especially in urban and industrialized settings, leading to greater reliance on formal legal and counseling services. At the same time, community and family institutions continue to influence the experience and outcomes of divorce. Supportive families can provide emotional, financial, and social assistance during marital crises, while community organizations and counseling centers can facilitate reconciliation or help individuals cope with separation. Conversely, social stigma, family pressure, and rigid cultural expectations may intensify marital tensions and complicate the divorce process. This study examines divorce as a product of social transformation and explores the role of community and family institutions in influencing marital stability and family change. By analyzing the interaction between changing social conditions and traditional support systems, the study seeks to understand how families and communities adapt to the growing reality of divorce in contemporary society. The findings will contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with family transformation in the modern era.

Research Objectives

- To examine the relationship between social transformation and the increasing incidence of divorce.
- To analyze the role of family institutions in maintaining marital stability and resolving marital conflicts.
- To investigate the influence of community institutions on divorce-related decisions and outcomes.
- To identify the major social, economic, and cultural factors contributing to marital dissolution.
- To assess the impact of divorce on individuals, families, and society.
- To suggest measures for strengthening family and community support systems to address marital conflicts effectively.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design to examine the relationship between divorce and social transformation, with particular emphasis on the role of community and family institutions. A descriptive approach is appropriate because the study seeks to understand and explain the social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors influencing divorce in contemporary society. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth exploration of changing family structures, marital relationships, and community responses to marital dissolution.

Nature of the Study

This study is exploratory and analytical in nature. It investigates how social transformation, including modernization, urbanization, industrialization, globalization, changing gender roles, and increasing individualism, has influenced the institution of marriage and the occurrence of divorce. The study further analyzes how family and community institutions respond to these changes and their impact on marital stability.

Sources of Data

The study is based entirely on secondary data.

Secondary Sources

- Data have been collected from:
- Books related to family sociology, marriage, divorce, and social change.
- National and international research journals.
- Government reports and publications.
- Census of India reports.
- National Family Health Survey (NFHS) reports.

Reports from the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Publications of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and World Bank.

Newspapers, magazines, and credible online sources.

Published case studies related to divorce and family institutions.

Sampling Technique

Since the study is based on secondary data, purposive sampling has been used for selecting relevant literature, reports, and case studies. Sources were selected based on their relevance, authenticity, reliability, and contribution to understanding divorce and social transformation.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

1. Émile Durkheim's Social Change Theory

Émile Durkheim viewed society as a dynamic system that continuously evolves over time. According to his theory, social change occurs when traditional norms, values, and institutions are transformed due to modernization, industrialization, and urbanization. In the context of divorce, social transformation has altered people's attitudes toward marriage and family life. As societies become more individualistic and less dependent on traditional social controls, divorce becomes more socially acceptable. Thus, increasing divorce rates can be understood as a consequence of broader social changes affecting family institutions.

2. Talcott Parsons' Structural Functional Theory

Talcott Parsons considered the family a fundamental social institution that performs essential functions such as socialization, emotional support, and social stability. According to Structural Functional Theory, every institution contributes to maintaining social order. Divorce may occur when family members fail to fulfill their expected roles and responsibilities, leading to dysfunction within the family system. Social transformation can weaken traditional family structures, creating challenges that affect marital stability and increase the likelihood of divorce.

3. Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory focuses on gender inequality and power relations within society and the family. Feminist scholars argue that traditional marriages often place women in subordinate positions. Increased access to education, employment, and legal rights has empowered women to challenge unequal relationships and leave abusive or unsatisfactory marriages. From a feminist perspective, rising divorce rates may reflect women's growing autonomy and their ability to make independent decisions regarding their personal lives.

Discussion and Analysis

1. Social Causes of Divorce

Several social factors contribute to divorce in modern society. Changing social values, increased individualism, lack of communication, domestic conflicts, infidelity, and reduced family support systems often lead to marital breakdown. The transition from joint families to nuclear families has also reduced traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution, making couples more vulnerable to separation.

2. Economic Causes of Divorce

Economic factors play a significant role in marital stability. Financial stress, unemployment, debt, unequal income distribution, and disagreements over financial management can create tension between spouses. At the same time, economic independence, particularly among women, has made it easier for individuals to leave unhappy or abusive marriages, contributing to rising divorce rates.

3. Cultural Transformation

Cultural changes have significantly influenced marriage and family relationships. Modern societies increasingly emphasize personal happiness, self-fulfillment, and individual choice. Traditional beliefs that viewed marriage as a lifelong and unbreakable institution have gradually weakened. Media influence, exposure to global cultures, and changing social norms have increased acceptance of divorce as a legitimate solution to marital problems.

4. Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is one of the most important factors influencing contemporary divorce patterns. Higher levels of education, employment opportunities, financial independence, and legal awareness have enhanced women's decision-making power within families. While empowerment has improved gender equality, it has also enabled women to exit marriages characterized by violence, discrimination, or dissatisfaction. Therefore, rising divorce rates may reflect both social progress and changing expectations within marriage.

5. Urbanization and Globalization

Urbanization and globalization have transformed family life by increasing mobility, changing lifestyles, and exposing individuals to diverse cultural values. Urban living often involves demanding work schedules, migration, and reduced interaction with extended family members. Globalization has further promoted ideas of personal freedom, gender equality, and individual rights. These changes have influenced marital expectations and contributed to shifts in attitudes toward divorce and family relationships.

Impact of Divorce on Individuals and Society

Divorce has far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, and society as a whole. For the individuals involved, divorce often brings emotional, psychological, and financial challenges. Many divorced individuals experience feelings of stress, anxiety, loneliness, and uncertainty about their future. The end of a marital relationship may also affect self-esteem and social relationships. In many societies, particularly in traditional communities, divorced individuals may face social stigma and discrimination, which can further increase emotional distress. Financial difficulties are also common, especially when one spouse was economically dependent on the other before the divorce.

The impact of divorce extends beyond the couple and significantly affects children and other family members. Children of divorced parents may experience emotional insecurity, behavioral problems, academic difficulties, and challenges in social adjustment. The absence of one parent in daily life can affect a child's emotional and psychological development. At the societal level, increasing divorce rates contribute to changes in family structures, social relationships, and community dynamics. While divorce may provide an escape from unhealthy or abusive relationships, it also highlights the need for stronger support systems to help individuals and families adapt to changing social realities.

Role of Family Institutions in Marital Stability

Family institutions have traditionally served as the foundation of social life and play a vital role in maintaining marital stability. Family members often provide emotional support, guidance, advice, and practical assistance to couples facing difficulties in their marital relationships. In traditional societies, the joint family system acted as an important mechanism for conflict resolution, where elders and relatives mediated disputes and encouraged reconciliation between spouses. Such support systems helped maintain family unity and reduced the likelihood of divorce.

However, social transformation has significantly altered family structures and relationships. The growing prevalence of nuclear families, urban migration, and changing lifestyles have reduced the influence of extended family networks. Despite these changes, family institutions continue to play an important role in promoting healthy relationships and providing support during marital crises. Families that encourage communication, mutual respect, understanding, and emotional support contribute positively to marital satisfaction and stability. Therefore, strengthening family relationships remains essential for reducing marital conflicts and promoting family well-being in contemporary society.

Role of Community Institutions in Addressing Divorce

Community institutions play a significant role in addressing marital conflicts and supporting individuals affected by divorce. These institutions include religious organizations, counseling centers, social welfare agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), mediation services, and community support groups. They provide counseling, guidance, emotional support, and conflict-resolution mechanisms that help couples manage disagreements and improve communication. In many cases, community-based interventions have successfully prevented unnecessary divorces by promoting reconciliation and mutual understanding between spouses.

In addition to supporting reconciliation, community institutions also assist individuals who have already experienced divorce. Counseling services help divorced individuals cope with emotional stress and psychological challenges, while support groups provide opportunities for social interaction and encouragement. Community organizations may also offer legal guidance, financial assistance, and rehabilitation programs for vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children. As social transformation continues to reshape family life, the role of community institutions becomes increasingly important in promoting social stability, family well-being, and the successful adaptation of individuals to changing social conditions.

Case Study 1: Urbanization and Rising Divorce in Metropolitan Cities

In major Indian cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, increasing urbanization has led to significant changes in family structures. The shift from joint families to nuclear families has reduced traditional support systems. Many couples face work-related stress, long working hours, and limited family support, contributing to marital conflicts. Studies indicate that divorce petitions have increased considerably in metropolitan family courts over the last decade. This case highlights how social transformation and urban lifestyles influence marital stability.

Case Study 2: Community Mediation and Marital Reconciliation in Karnataka

A notable example of community and institutional intervention was observed during a National Lok Adalat in Karnataka, where several couples seeking divorce chose reconciliation after receiving counseling and mediation support. The involvement of legal authorities, counselors, and community representatives helped resolve misunderstandings and encouraged couples to continue their marriages. This case demonstrates the positive role that community institutions can play in reducing divorce and strengthening family relationships.

Case Study 3: Women's Empowerment and Divorce Decisions

The increasing participation of women in education and employment has transformed traditional gender roles within families. In many cases, economically independent women are more capable of leaving abusive or unhealthy marriages. For example, studies conducted in urban India have shown that educated working women are more likely to seek legal remedies in cases of domestic violence and marital dissatisfaction. This case illustrates how social transformation can empower individuals while simultaneously contributing to changing patterns of marriage and divorce. The selected case studies provide a comprehensive understanding of how social transformation affects marital relationships and how family and community institutions respond to these changes. The combination of literature review and case study analysis enables a deeper examination of the social dynamics surrounding divorce in contemporary society. On the other hand, the transition holds particular significance in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, where the development of foundational knowledge, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills is paramount (Singh, Deepali et al, 2025).

Findings

The study revealed several important findings regarding the relationship between divorce, social transformation, and the role of family and community institutions:

Social transformation has significantly influenced marital relationships and family structures in contemporary society.

Urbanization, industrialization, and globalization have contributed to changing attitudes toward marriage and divorce, making divorce more socially acceptable than in the past.

The shift from joint families to nuclear families has reduced traditional support systems that previously helped couples resolve marital conflicts.

Economic stress, unemployment, financial disagreements, and changing economic roles within families are major factors contributing to marital instability.

Women's education, employment, and economic independence have increased their ability to make independent decisions regarding marriage and divorce.

Cultural changes emphasizing individual freedom, personal satisfaction, and self-fulfillment have altered traditional perceptions of marriage as a lifelong institution.

Family institutions continue to play a crucial role in providing emotional, social, and financial support during marital crises.

Community institutions such as counseling centers, mediation services, religious organizations, and support groups can help prevent unnecessary divorces and promote reconciliation.

Divorce has significant social, psychological, and economic consequences for spouses, children, and extended family members.

Effective communication, mutual respect, counseling services, and community support can strengthen marital relationships and reduce the likelihood of divorce.

Conclusion

The study concludes that divorce is not merely a personal or legal issue but a social phenomenon closely linked to broader processes of social transformation. Changes in social values, family structures, gender roles, economic conditions, and cultural norms have significantly influenced marital relationships and contributed to changing divorce patterns.

The research demonstrates that modernization, urbanization, globalization, and women's empowerment have transformed traditional family systems and altered expectations within marriage. While these changes have promoted individual freedom and gender equality, they have also created new challenges for marital stability.

Family and community institutions remain important sources of support despite the ongoing transformation of social structures. Strong family relationships, community-based mediation, counseling services, and social support networks can play a vital role in addressing marital conflicts and promoting family well-being.

The study further highlights that divorce should be understood within its broader social context rather than viewed solely as an individual failure. A balanced approach that respects individual rights while strengthening family and community support mechanisms is essential for addressing the challenges associated with divorce in contemporary society.

Ultimately, the future of family life depends on the ability of social institutions to adapt to changing realities while continuing to provide stability, support, and guidance to individuals and families. Strengthening communication, promoting gender equality, and expanding access to counseling and mediation services can contribute to healthier marital relationships and a more supportive social environment.

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