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CAUSES OF DIVORCE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY FROM CENTRAL KERALA

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ABSTRACT: Divorce cases are increasing at an alarming rate in Kerala. Various reasons like Physical, psychological, &sexual abuse, addictions, adjustment problems can lead to divorce. **OBJECTIVES:** To find out the causes of divorce among the couples attending the family court, Kottayam, Kerala **METHODS:** A Descriptive study was conducted among 60 couples who have filed for divorce & were attending the counseling section in the Ettumanoor family court of Kottayam district, Kerala. Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire & analysis was done using SPSS 16.0 version. **RESULTS:** Mean age of males & females was [36.18+/-5.3years Vs 28.6+/- 5.3 years]. Mean duration of marriage was found to be [2.44+/- 1.8 years]. 79.1% were living in extended families. Majority belonged to middle & upper socioeconomic status. 11.6% of couples had love marriages. In 68.2% of cases wife initiated the divorce process. Issues of Adjustment of spouse with him (22.5%) and his parents (45.2%) were the reasons quoted by males while for females it was issues related with Alcoholism among husbands (48%) & Physical abuse (63.3%). Other major reasons quoted by both males & females was desertion and Neglect by spouse (21% Vs73.3%), Psychiatric disorders of spouse (20% vs10%), suspicious behavior of spouse (15% vs33%) & adultery (28.3% Vs 28.3%). **CONCLUSION:** Present study revealed that adjustment problems within the extended family, alcoholism & resulting physical abuse were the leading cause of divorce among the couples in Kerala. More Females were found to be initiating proceedings for divorce than males.
KEYWORDS: Divorce, Causes, Kerala, Kottayam.

INTRODUCTION: Marriage was considered to be a sacred ceremony in India from ancient times onwards. It was considered not only to be the union of two individuals rather it is considered the union of two families, cultures, societies and so on. Over the years the importance of marriage itself is seen to be diminishing and married couples are seeking divorce at a shockingly increasing rate.

Divorce or dissolution of marriage is the final termination of a marriage, canceling the legal duties and responsibilities entailed in nuptial contract and dissolving the bonds of matrimony between married persons. The divorce rate and the causes of divorce do vary in different countries and cultures. The divorce rate in India is still lowest among all the countries in the world[1] with a divorce rate of 1.1% as compared to Sweden – 54.9%, United States – 54.8% and Russia – 43.3%.[1]

Recent data shows that this scenario is fast changing and divorce rates are on an increase in India. A survey shows that over the past four years, the divorce rate in Delhi has almost doubled. Metro cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, and Chennai are also showing similar trends. Kerala, known to be the state with the highest literacy levels has experienced an increase of divorce rate by 350% in the last 10 years[1]. According to a report published by Deccan chronicle on 21/10/2014, Kerala leads with the highest divorce rates among states in the country.[2]

Recent data provided by the state government reveals that the state capital, Thiruvananthapuram, is the capital for divorce cases too and leads in no of cases of divorce recorded

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in any given district of the state. Of the 44, 236 cases filed in 16 family courts in the state, 6000 cases were from Trivandrum district alone. In Kottayam which is the place of the present study, had 2880 cases filed for divorce in the year 2013.[3]

Even while the data shows that the divorce cases are increasing, there is insufficient literature regarding the causes of divorce in Kerala. There is not enough data generated out of scientifically done studies on this topic in this area. The socio cultural background of the state and its people are different from other part of India. Literacy rate including the female literacy rate is high in Kerala. Thereby Women are able to attain a better socioeconomic status in Kerala compared to their brethren in other states. These factors can also influence the rate of divorce. The understanding of the causes is important so that sufficient measures can be taken from early stages to avoid instances and incidents of divorces in the future.

The present study aims to find out the causes of divorce among the couples who had filed for divorce in the family court of Ettumanoor, Kottayam district, Kerala.

METHODOLOGY:
Study Design: Descriptive study design.

Study Setting: Ettumanoor Family court in Kottayam district, which is one among the two family courts of Kottayam district, Kerala.

Study subjects: The Subjects of the study were the clients who had filed for divorce in the family court of Ettumanoor and attending the first counseling session in the court. Those who attended the counseling session without spouse, those who didn't give the consent were excluded from the study.

Sample Size: According to a study of the cases pending before courts, it was found that 40 per cent of the divorce cases were borne out of discords created by alcoholism[4]. Based on this data and using the formula $n = 4pq/L^2$, taking an absolute allowable error as 9, the minimum sample size for the present study was fixed to be 118.

Study Tool: Pre-tested, Semi structured interview schedule.

Ethical Concerns: Permission was obtained from the family court judge to conduct the study in the institution. Permission was obtained from the counselor of the family court to sit in the first joint counseling session of the couple. Consent was also obtained from each of the study participants.

Study Procedure: Permission was obtained from the family court judge & counselor in the family court. A pre-tested, validated questionnaire was prepared with the help of the counselor which collected information regarding socio demographic factors, reasons for separation, reasons quoted for divorce, who initiated the divorce process etc. Rapport was established & Preliminary information was collected from the couple during their first counseling section with the counselor. Second level interview was done by the researcher alone for both husband & wife separately.

Data Management: Data was coded and entered in Ms Excel worksheet and was analysed using SPSS 16.0 version**.** Mean and standard deviation was calculated for continuous variables. Counts and percentage was calculated for categorical variables.

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Association between categorical variables was tested using chi-square test. Association between continuous variable was tested using independent sample t test. Significance level was fixed at a p value of <0.05.

RESULTS: Information was collected from 60 couples. The socio demographic characters of the study population is depicted in table No-1.

Socio demographic variable		Male		Female		P value
		No	%	No	%	
Age group	21-30 years	8	13.3%	30	50%	0.001
	31-40years	39	65%	28	46.6%	
	41-50years	11	18.4%	1	1.7%	
	>50 years	2	3.3%	1	1.7%	
Education	Up to middle school	6	10%	1	0.02%	0.11
	High School	17	28.4%	11	20.06%	
	Up to plus two	15	25%	19	31.62%	
	College education	22	36.6%	29	48.3%	
Socio economic status	Lower	8	13.4 %	5	8.3%	0.23
	Middle	36	60%	42	70%	
	high	16	26.6%	13	21.7%	
Table 1: Socio demographic variables of study population						

Majority of the females were belonging to the age group of 20-30 years with a mean age of [28.6±5.3years]. Majority of the males were belonging to the age group of 31-40 with a mean age of [36.1 ±5.63years]. The divorce rate in the age group >50 years was only 1.3% among females & 3.2% among males. In Kerala most are educated at least to the high school level. The female literacy is also high in Kerala. The present study also agrees with this fact and the divorce rate is more among the people who were having college education in both the genders. 28 females (46.7%) were unemployed. Socio economic status was calculated separately for husbands & wives using Kuppuswami socioeconomic status scale based on their education, Occupation and income. Later the lower classes were clubbed together into one group & two middle class groups were clubbed into one group. The present study shows that the higher no of people who came for divorce were belonging to middle & high socio economic status as compared to lower socio economic status
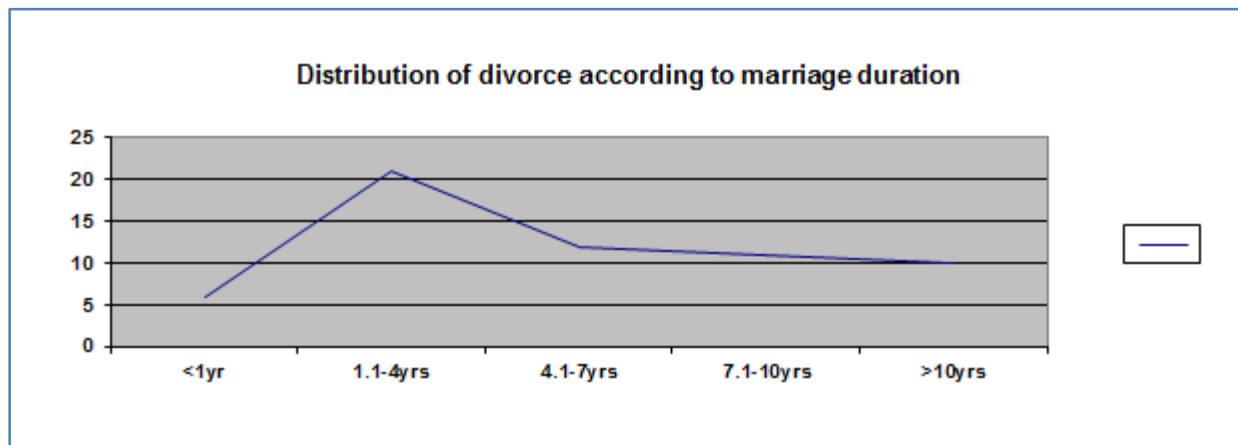
Socio- demographic variable		No.	percentage
Religion	Hindu	30	50%
	Christian	25	41.7%
	Muslim	3	5%
	Inter-cast marriage	2	3.3%
Family type	Nuclear	15	25%
	Extended	45	75%

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No. of children	Nil	19	31.7%
	one	26	43.3%
	two	12	20%
	Three or more	3	5%
Marriage Duration	<1year	6	10%
	1.1-4years	21	35%
	4.1-7years	12	20%
	7.1 -10 years	11	18.3%
	>10years	10	16.7%
Table 2: Socio demographic characteristics of 60 couples			

50% of the couples were belonging to Hindu religion. 75% of couples were living with in-laws and remaining 25% were staying alone. Two couples had inter-cast marriage. 12% of couples had love marriage.19 couples had no children when they approached court for divorce while 26 couples had single child. The median duration of marriage was (5±5.1years). the minimum duration stayed together was 5 months and maximum duration stayed was 29years.

Distribution of divorce according to marriage duration

60% of females& 66.7% of males were having the opinion that they had a happy married life for less than one year. Only 10 % of females 22% of males felt that their married life was happy for more than 2 years. Mean duration of separation for the couple before approaching the court for divorce was (10months ± 19.2) with a range of 96 months.

There was a great disparity between the husbands and wives regarding the views for reasons of their divorce. Table Three shows the reasons for divorce according to their view. These reasons were elicited during the personal interview with the husband and wife separately in a strict confidential manner. These reasons were very different from the reasons they quoted for divorce in the court. The major reasons quoted by the females were Physical abuse, alcoholism, adjustment problems with the in-laws and neglect by the husband. According to the males the major problems were Lack of adjustment of wife with him and his parents, adultery etc. Many of them told more than one reason.

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Reasons	Male		Female		P value
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Adultery of the spouse	17	28.3%	17	28.3%	1.00
Physical Abuse	2	3.3%	38	63.3%	0.001
Sexual abuse	0	0	10	16.7%	0.001
Desertion & Neglect	3	5%	17	28.3%	0.001
Alcoholism	0	0	29	48.3%	0.001
Lack of adjustment	34	56.7%	2	3.3%	0.001
In-laws	12	20%	32	53.3%	0.001
Not accepting In laws	27	45%	0	0	0.001
Over attachment to own parents	10	16.7%	0	0	0.001
Suspicious nature of the spouse	9	15%	20	33.3%	0.01
Financial reasons	7	11.7%	10	16.7%	0.3
Psychological disorders	12	20%	6	10%	0.1
Chronic diseases	0	0	2	3.3%	0.24
Sexual dissatisfaction	0	0	4	6.7%	0.05
Over usage of Social media	0	0	2	3.3%	0.24
Table 3: Reasons for divorce according to the view of the study population					

The reasons given in the court for divorce were different from what the investigator could elicit during the personal interviews. The reasons given in the court were influenced by the advocates, relatives and the so called well-wishers. These grounds were generally strong grounds which may be different from the truth. The common grounds which were given by the study population in the court as the grounds for divorce are shown in table-4.

Reasons	Male		Female		P value
	No	Percentage	No	Percentage	
Adultery	4	6.7%	11	18.3%	0.1
Cruelty	1	1.7%	34	56.7%	0.001
Psychological Disorders	8	13.3%	6	10%	0.38
Chronic diseases	0	0	1	1.7%	0.5
Alcoholism	0	0	24	40%	0.001
Desertion/Neglect By the spouse	9	15	35	58.3%	0.001
Lack of adjustment	5	8.3	2	3.3%	0.24
Table 4: Grounds for divorce given in the court					

Major reasons quoted by the females were Cruelty, desertion & alcoholism while the reasons quoted by males were Psychological disorders & desertion.

56.6 % [34/60] of divorce were initiated by wives. 26.7% [16/60] were initiated by husbands. 10[16.7%] were initiated jointly.

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DISCUSSION: The present study reveals that the divorce is happening during the initial period of marriage. It is more in the age group of 21-30 years for females & 31-40 years for males. Divorce cases were more among the population who had college education. It is also high among middle & upper class population than lower social class. Majority of the couples who applied for divorce were staying with husband's parents. 45% of divorces happened within four years of the marriage. But 60% of females & 67% of males were of the opinion that they had a happy married life for less than one year. Due to various social pressures and for the children, the couples were trying to live together till the divorce, in Kerala.

According to a study conducted by George kurian et al[5] majority of the divorcees were young. According to David Montoya[6] women who marry before the age of 18 have a high rate of divorce and they have a 48% chance of divorce within the first year of marriage. According to S. Nambi women who had more opportunities for education, training and employment can become more self-dependent and self-confident, which can lead to adjustment problems and divorce.[7] According to Grace Bahalen Mundu et al educated women have higher chances of divorce than the Illiterate ones.[8]

According to Choudhary J. N women's level of education and high economic status were motivating factors for filing the petition in the court.[9]

In the present study there is a disagreement between the couples regarding the causes of divorce. According to the males the major reasons for the separation were lack of adjustment in married life, problem of wives with his parents & over attachment to wives with her own parents. According to the females major reasons were alcohol addiction, in-laws, desertion by the husband, abuse etc.

The fear or laziness of youth to take the responsibilities of family is becoming more and more significant. Even though they get married it is very difficult for the couple to adjust with each other. Since the no. of children is less, each child, male or female is special in Kerala families. Parents are ready to satisfy all the needs of children irrespective of their economic power. When they enter in marital bond they expect the same consideration from their spouse and the family of the spouse.

Urbanization and blind imitation of a Western lifestyle are said to be the main reasons for the high divorce rate in Kerala. Economic independence of the couple especially of females and adjustment problems can intensify the thought of separation. Modern woman is more aware of her sexuality and rights. So she may not tolerate when faced with marital problems. She opts for divorce rather than continue in an unhappy marriage.

Joint family can magnify or diminish the disputes among the couples. Most of the females were of the opinion that even when the issues between the couple are trivial it was aggregated by the relatives especially the in-laws. Alcoholism can be the starting point of the process of divorce. Alcoholism can lead to domestic violence in all forms, health problems, financial crisis and finally to divorce. Two of the females even reported the addiction to social network as the cause of divorce. This factor can be a major cause for divorce in coming years.

According to a recent survey of 191 CDFA professionals from across North America, the three leading causes of divorce were "basic incompatibility" (43%), "infidelity" (28%), and "money issues" (22%). Emotional and/or physical abuse and addiction and/or alcoholism issues were also contributing to divorce in a small extent.[10]

Shanavas. S[3] in his article named 'Till Divorce do us part' reported that the Counsellors of family court believe that the rising trend of divorces could be caused by an array of obvious factors,

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ranging from dowry harassment, domestic violence and alcoholism to extra-marital affairs, mental stress, emotional incompatibility, religious differences and adjustment problems with in-laws. But no matter what it is that leads to a couple divorcing each other, every problem in the book is linked to the sweeping social changes that Kerala has seen in recent years. He also reported that the growing economic independence of women has given them the power to break free from marriages. Addictions like drugs, drinks and late-night parties etc can lead to divorces. According to Ramachandrappa. S the real reason for divorce in many cases is lack of understanding and communication between the spouses.[11]

The reasons given in the court are very different from the actual reasons revealed by the couple during the personal interview with the researcher. The couples were forced to give the reasons by which they can complete the process of divorce as early as possible. These reasons were chosen with the help of advocates, family members and other societal groups. These fabricated reasons created more damage in the lives of the couples during the proceedings at family court.

Another finding in the present study was that more than 50% of divorces were initiated by the wife. Another 16.7% of divorces were initiated jointly. A study at Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) reveals that in twenty-four percent out of the total sample, both the partners jointly filed divorce petitions by their mutual consent. It shows that spouses are longing for relief from their turbulent marital life.[5] Studies conducted by Siganporia et al[12] and Thakur et al[13] revealed that even women in the last few decades are increasingly taking the initiative as petitioners to approach the courts for divorce. It shows that divorce is now less of a stigma and couples as well as society are accepting this. This shows the changing attitudes towards divorce.

The researcher could spend only one session with the clients during which the data was elicited. It would have been better if more sessions are spent with them, so that the rapport with the clients would have been improved & the data revealed will be truer. A qualitative component of data collection could have been also improved the quality of data.

CONCLUSION: The present study reveals that the divorce rate in Kerala is increasing at an alarming rate. Most of the cases are initiated due to the lack of understanding and communication among the couples. Alcoholism and the resultant violence and financial crisis are also contributing to this new social evil. Most of these reasons can be avoided by correct life skill education, family education, and premarital counseling. Parents, teachers, religious institution etc can contribute immensely to this issue. The relatives especially the in-laws on both sides should consider the newly wedded as a new distinct family and should encourage them to take responsibilities and to resolve the conflict between them by themselves. The society should not encourage the divorce unless it is an absolute necessity.

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