

# Indian Journal of Psychological Science

*Internationally*

*Indexed, Refereed and Peer Reviewed*

## Editor

Dr. Roshan Lal

Professor of Psychology University  
of Delhi-110007

UGC –CARE LIST:

**UGC Approved: Emerging Sources Citation Index: WoS**

<https://mjl.clarivate.com/search-results?issn=0976-9218>

# I J P S



The official organ of:

**National Association of Psychological Science (Regd.)**

[www.napsindia.org](http://www.napsindia.org) Email: [managingeditorijps@gmail.com](mailto:managingeditorijps@gmail.com), Phone: 9417882789

*Aneesh T<sup>1</sup>, Sujata Sriram<sup>2</sup>*

## Attempting An Understanding of Divorce: An Exploratory Study From Kerala India

Aneesh T<sup>1</sup>, Sujata Sriram<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*Divorce is a painful personal experience, which has a lasting impact. As a phenomenon, it is difficult and humiliating; and the divorced couple often faces stigma and several acute problems at personal and social levels. This paper tries to understand some of the reasons for divorce in Kerala, India, which has faced an increase in the rate of divorce over the last few decades. This paper is drawn from a larger study of families who have experienced divorce. It explores the reasons for divorce in contemporary Kerala. Data was derived from interviews with 20 custodial parents (15 mothers and 5 fathers), 11 noncustodial parents (eight fathers and three mothers), and 20 adolescent children (11 girls and 9 boys). The adolescents were in the age range of 12 to 17 years at the time of the study. Thematic analysis of the data showed that over-involvement of families of origin, domestic violence, substance abuse, and out-of-marriage relationships, were the main causes of their divorce. The intersectionality of gender, education, and occupation emerged through the data. The data for this paper is drawn from a larger study; ethical clearance was obtained from the Institute Review Board (IRB).*

*Keywords: Divorce; Kerala, Causative factors; Stigma*

### About the authors

<sup>1</sup>*Clinical Psychologist, Institute Counselling Service, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK)*

<sup>2</sup>*Professor, School of Human Ecology, Tata Institute of Social Sciences – Mumbai*

*Paper Received: 22-01-2025*

*Paper Accepted: 30-03-2025*

*Paper Published: 30-07-2025*

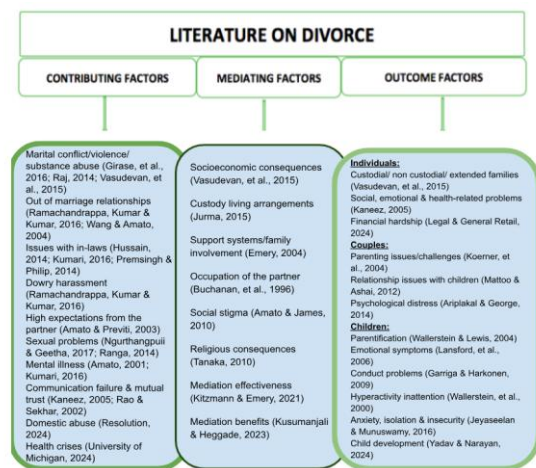
### Introduction

Marriage is a primary institution in almost every society. It is an important life event for individuals, and results in the formation of a couple. Couples living and working in cities and metropolitan areas are exposed to more economic and relationship options, which may prompt them to break out of unsatisfactory or unequal marriages (Premsingh & Philip, 2014). Divorce can be a life-transforming experience for the family as a whole, for children, the couple, and the family beyond the nuclear unit. Research on divorce over the years has found that

children who experience the divorce of their parents are at a higher risk for a wide range of negative consequences; with the risk being two to three higher as compared to children who have not been exposed to divorce. Divorce has repercussions on children's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and psychological realms (Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001; Gindes, 1998; Harold, Aitken, & Shelton, 2007).

Literature on divorce if examined from the stress-diathesis model can be categorized into contributing factors, mediating factors, and outcome factors.

Aneesh T<sup>1</sup>, Sujata Sriram<sup>2</sup>



**Figure – 1 shows how some of the literature on divorce can be categorized.**

**The Present Scenario in Kerala**

Today, there is a significant flux in Indian society, and the institution of family is no longer inviolable, with divorce rates on the rise. The divorce cases in the last decade provide insight into the magnitude of this issue. In 2005-06, the number of divorce cases was 8,456; this increased to 9,775 in 2006-07, 9,937 in 2007-08, 11,194 in 2008-09, 11,600 in 2009-10, and 24,815 in 2010-11. Divorce rates surged from 18,500 in 2014 to 19,028 in 2015. The total number of family dispute cases registered in the courts reached 51,153 in 2015, according to the Kerala High Court (Kerala High Court, 2015). In recent years, divorce petitions in Kerala have seen a significant increase. Data from the *Journal of Polity and Society* indicates that divorce petitions filed in family courts rose by 40%, from 19,233 in 2016 to 26,976 in 2022 (University of Kerala, 2025). Ernakulam district reported the highest number of divorce petitions in 2022, with 3,536 cases, followed by Thiruvananthapuram with 3,282 cases. Kasaragod had the lowest, with 848 petitions (Onmanorama, 2025).

This rise in divorce cases has been attributed to various factors, including

*Aneesh T<sup>1</sup>, Sujata Sriram<sup>2</sup>*

extramarital relationships, dowry disputes, cruelty, domestic violence, sexual incapacity, childlessness, substance abuse, educational disparities, and communication gaps (University of Kerala, 2025). Sociologists suggest that this upward trend may be linked to a shift toward individual choices over traditional social obligations, along with the decline of joint families in favor of nuclear households (Onmanorama, 2025). Moreover, the enactment of The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act in 2019, which criminalized the practice of instant triple talaq, has led to a 96% reduction in divorce rates among Muslims, as reported by Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan (New Indian Express, 2023). This legislative change has significantly benefited women and children within the community. These developments highlight the evolving dynamics of marital relationships in Kerala, reflecting broader societal changes and the impact of legislative measures on family structures.

In Kerala, divorce is still taboo and is looked upon as a social stigma, especially for women who take the step for divorce. Contemporary Kerala society is in the process of rapid socio-economic change, migration of people, invasion of urban consumer culture, increasing rates of industrialization, and stressors in occupation. Occupational stressors in the IT field have impacted family organizations and attitudes toward marriage and divorce. These life scenarios eventually disturb the stability of marriage and family organization and have put marital adjustment to serious stressors and strain (Raj, 2014).

Recent studies have highlighted various dimensions of divorce and its implications in Kerala. Cherian (2016) examined the role

of changing gender roles and economic independence among women as significant factors contributing to the increasing divorce rates. George and Thomas (2018) emphasized that rapid urbanization and exposure to global lifestyles have led to shifting perceptions of marriage, particularly among the younger generation. Joseph and Kurian (2017) identified that high levels of occupational stress among IT professionals often result in strained marital relationships, thereby increasing the likelihood of separation. Nair (2019) explored the social stigma surrounding divorced women, focusing on how societal judgments often impede their reintegration into social and professional spaces. Singh and Mathews (2020) shed light on how migration for employment disrupts family dynamics, leading to emotional distance and communication breakdowns between partners. Together, these studies underscore the complex interplay of cultural, economic, and occupational factors influencing marital stability in Kerala, calling for a deeper understanding of these socio-cultural shifts. The present study is an attempt to understand the phenomenon of divorce on empirical grounds in the socio-cultural context of Kerala.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Problem**

There is an accelerating growth in the divorce rate in Kerala and there is some research that has paved the way to understand the consequences of divorce. However, there are gaps in the literature regarding the causes of divorce on children and families. In this scenario, the present study enables an understanding of the causes of divorce.

### **Research Objective**

How do adolescents and their parents perceive the reasons for the divorce?

### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative exploratory research design to explore insights into the behavior, opinions, beliefs, knowledge, and values regarding divorce. Most studies on divorce in the West have used quantitative methods. In this study, qualitative methods were used to explore the causes of divorce in families from a phenomenological point of view, allowing the voices of the participants to be heard.

### **Sample for the Study**

The study's universe was Ernakulam city, the commercial capital of Kerala, where divorce cases have tremendously increased recently. The researcher chose the district of Ernakulam because of its ease of access. The family court in Ernakulam was established in 1992.

### **Data Collection**

The data of the study were collected from the respondents through the help of advocates, principal counselors working in the Family Court, Child Welfare Committees in the district, and mental health professionals working on family problems. Each of the participants was contacted personally by the researcher and once consent was obtained, the place and time for interviews were fixed with each family. Families were identified based on the following criteria:

- (a) Divorce was finalized between 2011 and 2016.
- (b) At least one son or daughter (the target adolescent) was currently between 12 and 17 years of age. Adolescents above 11 years of

age may be able to verbalize the issues more clearly than younger children.

Exclusion criteria for participation in individual interviews:

The researcher excluded all children younger than 12 and adolescents older than 17 from participation in the individual interviews. Further exclusion criteria were mental retardation, psychotic disorders, or neurological or neuropsychological factors that impeded the capacity of the child to answer interview questions.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared and used to collect data from adolescents, and custodial and noncustodial parents. An interview guide was constructed which covered domains to be explored. There were separate interviews for the custodial and noncustodial parents, and adolescents, with certain distinct questions. However, the broad domains examined for both parents and adolescents were the same, as both families' and adolescents' views on the same matter were required. The tools used for the study were a socio-demographic data sheet, a Semi-structured interview schedule for adolescents, a Semi-structured interview schedule for Custodial parents, Semi-structured interview schedule for Non-Custodial parents.

### **Socio-Demographic Details of the Participants**

Families who had undergone divorce were the main focus of the study. These families consisting of custodial and non-custodial parents, along with adolescent children were the respondents.

A total of 28 custodial parents were interviewed, who fulfilled the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Of these 28, data from

twenty interviews were analyzed. Of the twenty custodial parents, there were fifteen mothers and five fathers. The ages of these individuals ranged from thirty-eight to fifty-one years. They had been divorced for two to five years at the time when the study was done. Eleven of the custodial parents (1 - men, 10 - women) had petitioned for divorce, while in the other nine cases (4 - men, 5 - women), the petition was filed by the spouse.

There were eleven non-custodial parents, eight fathers, and three mothers, who were interviewed for the study. The age range of these respondents was thirty-three to fifty-two years.

Twenty-three adolescents were interviewed for the study, and data from twenty participants was analyzed for the study. The adolescents were in the age range of twelve to seventeen years. There were eleven girls and nine boys. Their parents had been divorced for periods of two to five years. All adolescents were in school, from 7<sup>th</sup> std. to 12<sup>th</sup> std. Five adolescents lived with their fathers, and fifteen lived with their mothers. In the case of custody arrangements, the father was the custodial parent for four girl children and one male child. Mothers were custodial parents for seven female children and eight male children.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher acquired permission from the custodial and noncustodial parents who participated in the research. For participation in an individual interview, an informed consent form was signed by all adolescents and their guardians. The research proposal was presented to the Institute Review Board (IRB) for consideration of ethics.

### Data Analysis

Data was analyzed qualitatively based on the research objectives. The research aimed to capture the unique and common voices of the participants of the study. To bring out the inconsistencies and similarities thematic analysis was chosen as the data analysis method. The process began with transcription. The interviews were translated into English from Malayalam and manually transcribed simultaneously. The nonverbal nuances from the interviews were also transferred to the transcripts.

### Findings

The main reasons for divorce according to the study could be attributed to family-of-origin issues, out-of-marriage relationships, domestic violence, substance abuse, and psychological problems.

The participants in the present study had been divorced for two to five years and while divorce had impacted their daily life, they had rarely gone back to examine their divorce experience. When questions were asked about their divorced life, they were introspective about the experiences they had. Most of them conveyed that they were articulating these aspects for the first time in their life, after the divorce, in such a way.

### The Reasons for Divorce

When couples were asked about the reasons for seeking a divorce, multiple causes were mentioned and the main reasons for divorce were organized as Personal, Interpersonal, and Social levels. Talking about their divorce in the present, some years after the event, meant that they were able to introspect about the possible causes that led to the breakup of the marriage. The reasons for filing for divorce were diverse, and a

scrutiny of the data from the interviews is discussed here.

### Alcohol and Substance Use

Alcoholism of a partner was reported as one of the primary causes of divorce. Alcohol-induced quarrels among the couple's subsystem within the family contributed to the filing of the divorce. Many participants shared that there were problems in the family due to the use of alcohol and other drugs. Most of the family members tried to hide the prospective husband's alcohol and substance use from the bride, before marriage. This finding emerged from different participants. According to the Nirmala<sup>1</sup>, a custodial mother,

*...in their family, they all drink in the evening and will have quarrels with each other. They are three siblings. Each of his brothers and his father will drink every day. It was not acceptable for me. I am scared of seeing that. My husband was also drinking. After my marriage only, I came to know about this.*

A drunkard and his family were outcasts in society and women believed that an alcohol-addicted person could never lead a responsible life, or be a good model to his children. The women feared that the child would follow the drinking behavior pattern of the father. This contributed to the decision to not live with the alcoholic husband, for the wellbeing of their children. Anila, a custodial mother, working as a government teacher explained that,

*He was always drunk, and boozed; that was known to everyone and it was a great humiliation in my school quarters where I was*

---

<sup>1</sup> All names used are pseudonyms, to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

*residing and among my colleagues in the school. I thought that if my child is growing up with his father, I know he will become like his father, as a drunkard at the beginning of the age of 16. So, I don't need him to spoil his life. The father might not be able to correct him. He is not useful to me and to my child.*

Alcohol problems were related to increased rates of marital violence, poor communication, and feelings of marital distress that led to a greater risk of divorce. From the observations of the participants being married to an alcoholic had independent possible effects on subsequent divorce and/or separation.

### **Sexual Incompatibility**

There were problems in marital life due to the sexual incompatibility of the couple. Lack of sexual interest and excessive libido created marital distress within the family. Different studies have observed that hypersexual behavior is a problem that causes considerable distress in one's life and marital relationship. Mazur and Booth (1998) noted that in men high levels of endogenous testosterone seemed to inspire sexual behavior and tended to come into conflict with a harmonious marriage (Rosenberg, Carnes, & O'Connor, 2014). Addiction to porn sites on the internet, long travel to work, job stress, sedentary lifestyle, and changes in sleep patterns have repercussions on the sex drive and erectile dysfunction which cause marital distress in relationships. Sexual dissatisfaction causes problems in couple bonding.

Men complained about women not meeting their sexual needs in marital life. Siby, a non-custodial father, said that *"she was less interested in sexual life. She is very passive*

*Aneesh T<sup>1</sup>, Sujata Sriram<sup>2</sup>*

*and I never got satisfaction with her. She had lots of fear always in doing the sex".* Padman, another noncustodial father, said that *"she was very particular about her sexual life. If I tell her my sexual interest at night, she will not entertain me and she casually told me many times to masturbate by myself".*

The women shared similar complaints as men regarding their sexual needs in marital life. Jimi, a custodial mother, said; *"No one ever forced me for a divorce. Main issue was mine, that is lack of interest in sexual activities".* According to Anila, a custodial mother, *"He had lots of sexual urges and it was not in the normal way. After watching the porn movies, he was compelled to act like that. So, I was not able to adjust with him in my sexual life".* Shahanaz, who was a custodial mother, said, *"He had sexual aberrations. He was a sadist and he made me more painful as he could during the sexual intercourse. In sexual life, he was totally an abnormal man. I suffered physically a lot".*

### **Difficulties in Adjusting**

It was found among some of the couples that there were issues and difficulties in the transition from the nuclear family to the joint family. The change in the different traditions, value systems, and customs of the families, and its particularities were not accepted by the partners. The social relationships and their interactions among the different family members were different from those of the nuclear family they had come from. For few of the couples could not accept the personality of the mother-in-law or the father-in-law. Aakash a custodial father, stated that,

*If I am talking about her family, that is something entirely different*

*from the family atmosphere. I can't accept that. After this divorce, I got a challenging attitude towards my wife. Her family doesn't have any order in their life. I can't accept her family and their background.*

Most of the time this involvement consisted of negative remarks about the partner and his/her family. Education played a major role in changes in families from the extended type to the nuclear type. With the advent of urbanization and modernization, younger generations were turning away from the joint family form. The family was cut down in size; the educated sections of the Kerala population have moved away from the joint family system which restricted the freedom of the individual and suppressed individuality (Michael, 2015).

### **Financial Independence of the Women**

It was observed that money shaped the risk of divorce. Economic independence of the couple especially of females and adjustment problems can intensify the thought of separation. Akhilesh, a noncustodial father, spoke about his wife Anaya, *“she has a lot of money from her job and her parents were also ready to give her any amount of money. That made her proud and was not able to adjust to her in the family”*. Anila, a custodial mother shared that,

*I was earning more than enough for myself and I didn't ask for any money from my husband after the marriage. I was teaching in higher secondary, he was in the upper primary level. Because I was earning more money than him and I was not degrading him, I expected equality and respect towards me. But he was not having that mentality and that was difficult for me to continue and adjust further in that relationship.*

Modern women may be more aware of gender differences and the rights and obligations in the family as well as in society. So, she may not tolerate it when faced with a marriage that infringes on freedom, equality, etc. She may opt for divorce rather than continuing in an unhappy marriage (Vasudevan et al. 2015). Becker, Landes, and Michael (1977) found that a rise in expected female earnings increased the probability of divorce. When a woman's earnings became a larger portion of total family income, the likelihood of divorce increased (Bremmer & Kesselring, 2004).

### **Unrealistic Expectations**

According to psychologist Albert Ellis, we tend to live according to our belief systems. These are the things we hold to be true about the world, ourselves, relationships with other people, and so on. False, high, and unrealistic expectations from life or partner roles were also reasons for failed marriages among young couples. In intimate relationships, the couple gives the standards for how to treat their partner, as well as how they expect to be treated by their partner. In effect, the belief systems of the couple are part of the mindset that they bring to a relationship (Ariplackal & George, 2014). Some spouses enter marriages with high expectations, but they get disillusioned years into the relationship. Most couples entered marriage with positive expectations about their partner and their future together. Positive expectations have important benefits, they allow them to think positively about their partner, and that leads to better interactions and better feelings toward each other. Young couples have been consistently shown to have higher divorce rates due to their lower (psychological and socioeconomic) maturity, potentially

unreasonable expectations, and a shorter search that led to an unstable match or the better outside options (alternative partners) these partners might face (Lyngstad & Jalovaara, 2010). Expectations are also problematic when we use them as a measuring rod that guides our emotions.

Recent research provides further insight into how expectations influence marital outcomes. Thomas and Jacob (2016) noted that unrealistic expectations often stem from idealized portrayals of relationships in media, which shape individuals' views of their partners and roles. Kapadia and Singh (2019) found that the gap between expectations and reality is one of the leading causes of dissatisfaction in the early years of marriage, especially among urban couples. Additionally, Samuelson and Ray (2018) highlighted that communication deficits aggravate the impact of unrealistic expectations, as couples struggle to address their differences effectively. Puri and Desai (2020) observed that cultural norms, particularly in collectivist societies, amplify these pressures, as young couples often try to balance individual needs with familial and societal expectations. On the other hand, Murphy and O'Connor (2021) showed that managing expectations through pre-marital counseling significantly improved marital satisfaction and stability. Together, these studies underscore the need for awareness and realistic goal-setting in intimate relationships to foster healthier marital dynamics.

### Everyday Conflicts

Family conflict is defined as being involved in serious arguments with parents, witnessing a serious argument, or witnessing

physical violence in their home where an adult is involved (Bowlus & Seitz, 2006). Adolescents had experienced the conflicts between their parents but were unaware of the reasons behind the conflict and the divorce. The adolescents perceived the incident of divorce very differently from the parents. To the parents, the reason for the split was obvious; But it was not so for the adolescents. One day the parents were at home, mostly getting on fine, maybe a bit of bickering, or a bit of a sour atmosphere, but not the end of the world. The next day they had split up. Adolescents were sensitive to the quality of interactions between their parents. When adolescents witnessed their parents' conflicts, it could have long-term effects on the adolescent's development (Amato, 2000, 2005). When parents constantly had conflicts they created an environment where their adolescents did not feel safe. Previous studies have reported that ending a conflicted marriage would be better for the adolescents' as well as the parents' well-being (Amato, 2000; Harold & Conger, 1997). Gyothsana, a 14-year-old adolescent girl shared that;

*There were fights among my parents but I am not sure of why they started fighting each other. I was not involved in the fights. My father almost every time was outside of the family. The conflict was for unknown reasons, so I didn't ask about them. The conflict was initiated by my mother. My mother used to say that my father had some relations with another woman. My Father was doing physical violence towards my mother.*

Adolescents experience extreme stress when one parent hurts the other physically and/or emotionally when there is verbal aggression

(Bowlus & Seitz, 2006). Inzu, an adolescent boy of 13 said;

*When my parents were together, my father used to verbally abuse my mother. If my mom got a small fever, then my father did not take her to the hospital. I was so tense and had sorrow all the time. My uncles were taking care of my mother. Father used to go with his friends and based on money issues there were fights between father and mother.*

The adolescents responded to the conflicts and the emotional reactions with fear, anger, and sadness. The conflict affected the adolescent's sense of security in their relationship with each parent and the relationship between the parents (Cummings & Davies, 2010). It was seen that when the parents expressed and managed conflict, then the adolescents made sense of and understood inter-parental conflict.

### **Involvement of Family of Origin**

Marriage entails the formation of a new sub-system; relationships between the couple are affected by patterns of enmeshed relations of family members. There was a lack of personal space for the couple in the family and there was over-involvement from extended family members concerning all decision-making processes, which increased the confusion and noise levels in the family system. Pearly, a custodial mother spoke at length about her husband's family and the experiences that she faced. She said,

*His elder brother has full authority and is the prominent person for the final decision in his family. On the first day of marriage itself, my husband's sister, who was divorced from her husband, sent her daughter with us to sleep, but the husband's brother refused.*

The feeling was that Pearly felt alienated in the new family, where the ways of functioning were different from what she was accustomed to. Family interference has been cited as the second most common divorce factor in a study in Iran (Khajastehmehr & Takrimi, 2009) and in India (Ramachandrappa, 2012). Most of the participants expressed the opinion that marital breakdown occurred due to the over-involvement of family members from both families.

Recent studies shed light on how family involvement impacts marital stability. Johnson and Green (2018) identified that excessive parental interference often stems from deeply ingrained cultural norms that promote collective family decision-making over individual autonomy. Sharma and Nair (2020) found that couples experiencing frequent interference reported higher levels of marital dissatisfaction, primarily due to an inability to establish independent boundaries. Patel and Singh (2019) argued that over-involvement often inhibits couples from developing effective problem-solving skills, as decisions are externally dictated rather than internally negotiated. On the other hand, Kaur and Das (2021) emphasized the importance of culturally sensitive counseling to help couples navigate family dynamics without severing ties. Kim and Park (2017) highlighted a correlation between enmeshment and reduced emotional intimacy, as couples become preoccupied with fulfilling family expectations rather than nurturing their relationship. Together, these studies suggest that while maintaining ties with the family of origin is important, creating a balanced and respectful boundary is crucial for marital stability. Over-involvement of

parents with their children can create serious difficulties for all family members. Couples whose parents are over-involved may not experience and learn normal family roles. The early stages of marriage are the hardest, as it is a time when the newlyweds must create boundaries and begin separating from their family of origin, to form a stable couple subsystem. However, couples resist creating boundaries with their families, mostly their parents, possibly because they do not want to hurt their parents' feelings, and they must be willing to actively engage and join their partner's family.

### **Domestic Violence**

It is generally seen during the interviews that there were different ways in which the women experienced physical and mental abuse and became victims of domestic violence. Most of the women spoke about incidents in which physical abuse was mentioned. Along with that, there were issues of verbal abuse. There were substance use issues that paved the way for physical and verbal abuse among the couple. Often, a woman was compelled to initiate divorce due to domestic violence inflicted by the husband and his family. A majority of women encountered physical abuse. Nirmala, a custodial mother, divorced for four years, who was running a catering service shared that;

*My husband was physically attacking me, so I came back to my home without taking anything from him. After drinking, if he doesn't taste the food, he will pour the curry on my face. He became more violent. Once he beat me so much, then I left the house; I complained to the police regarding that. During my second pregnancy, he physically attacked me and there*

*was a head injury. There are many incidents in which he has abused me physically.*

Adolescents were witness to some of the physical fights between their parents and they struggled to manage the distress issues, and at the same time, they did not know that their parents would get divorced from each other. Ruksana, at 13, spoke of her parent's conflicts, "*there were issues in our family, and the father was physically attacking the mother*". On most of the occasions, the sufferers were the adult women. Adolescent children unanimously agreed that the father used to abuse the mother. Interestingly no male respondent in the study reported that he was a victim of domestic violence.

### **Out of Marriage Relationships**

Out-of-marriage relationships and infidelity were one of the factors for divorce, emerging from the interviews with the adult participants. Research indicates that fidelity is a significant contributor to a healthy marriage (Amato & Previti, 2003; Fan & Lui, 2014). Spousal infidelity was perceived as one of the primary factors for divorce by both men and women in this study. Different authors have asserted that commitment or honest behavior is one of the essential components to sustaining the marital bond (Fan & Lui, 2014; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). Jimi, a custodial mother said;

*It is all associated with his cunningness to get married to another woman that he attributed to me to the outside marital relationship and he is settled now. Married to the same woman to whom he had a secret affair and now he has a daughter.*

Shahanaz, a custodial mother, had a different experience with her husband, she said that,

*He came back from the Gulf and every day after drinking he used to fight with me regarding this (extra-marital relationship). He has doubts about my younger children, and he told me sometimes before that my younger child is not mine. Once, he pushed my younger child into the wall...*

As she related the experience, she broke down and cried. In this case, the out-of-marriage relationship was an allegation against the woman, and ultimately led to divorce. Seema, a custodial mother, from a nuclear family, had similar experiences as Shahanaz about allegations of an out-of-marriage relationship in her marital life. Once the couple identified that one of the partners had some extramarital issues then doubts arose. Doubt in relationships leads to problems in intimacy, communication, and other values in family life. Research indicates that extramarital affairs may have severe negative impacts on marital satisfaction (Tuttle & Davis, 2015).

### **Lack of Emotional Attachment Between the Couple**

Attachment is the strong bond that develops first between parent and child, and later in peer and romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Research on attachment between couples has yielded conflicting results in divorce. Aleena, a Non-custodial mother, said “*Later only I understood that he was not giving me any concern as a wife. Later only he said to me that he had an affair with a woman*”. Some couples had a good amount of emotional attachment or closeness to other persons before marriage. But after marriage that is seen reduced but

some maintained the same closeness to the other person and that created issues in the present marital life and the attachments of the couple. In marital life, the couple's attachment was directly correlated with self-reported and observed marital quality (Alexandrov, Cowan, & Cowan, 2005). Jarnecke and South (2013) showed that there was a significant relationship between romantic attachment orientations in the intergenerational transmission of marital satisfaction. Vinayan, Noncustodial father divorced four years ago, stated that;

*This divorce issue was mainly out of not understanding each other correctly. She didn't know me well. So, the problem started there. She was having her problems. She had a job because of that her confidence level was high.*

Different attachment styles among couples were associated with the quality of marital relationships and it seems that divorcing couples had a different pattern of attachment and marital satisfaction.

### **Financial Problems**

Financial worries and pressures were the big challenges to the newly wedded couple, some of the couples shared that most of their arguments were about money. There was mention of household debts, shopaholic spouses, and spouses who refused to work. In cases where spouses went beyond budgets, and financial stress was a source of conflict in the family, the couple's relationship became worse. Differences in money management styles between two partners could ruin a marriage. Many participants found issues in who had control over finances when one partner was the main source of income. Some believed that the earner had the right to decide how and

when the money was spent. A spouse who did not work outside the home would probably feel differently since he or she managed the household and would best know what was needed and when. Financial matters were included or used against partners. Rahamath a custodial mother, who worked as a teacher expressed that,

*After marriage, they mostly depended on the dowry that I gave for their daily needs. They were saying the dowry was not that much enough. They started verbal as well as physical abuse and emotional abuse towards me. Their only interest was money.*

Another important observation came from the data related to problems faced by women with dowry or 'Sthreedhan'. The husband's family members always made comments about the money that they received from the wife's family during the wedding. Based on the Sthreedhanam issue, problems arose in the family. That created stress in the couple's relationship.

### **The Secrecy of Divorce**

The causes of divorce may be kept hidden from the adolescents by the parents. Sometimes the children came to know about their parents' divorce after the event, often from their relatives. It was easier to consider that their parents were separated, rather than being divorced. At the same time, the adolescents did not want to reveal the divorce or separation to others, such as their peer group. Shakir, an adolescent boy, of 17, whose parents had been divorced for four years, conveyed with lots of frustration that;

*We don't know much about the causes of our parent's separation. Before this incident also there were months in which we came to our*

*mother's home and after that, we again went back to the father's home through the intervention of the Mahallu committee (an administrative body of the elected members of the Muslim Mosque).*

The parents expressed fear about revealing the events or the causes of divorce to their children and often the children got the information about the difficulties of their parents from family members. The real reasons were hidden from the adolescents as it remained a stigma within society. Recent research highlights the long-term psychological and emotional effects of secrecy surrounding divorce on adolescents. Thompson and James (2018) noted that when children are excluded from discussions about their parents' divorce, they often experience confusion, anxiety, and a sense of betrayal. Patel and Ramesh (2020) argued that the cultural stigma associated with divorce often forces parents to downplay or conceal the circumstances, which deprives children of the opportunity to process the event openly. According to Sun and Li (2019), the lack of communication between parents and children regarding divorce significantly impacts adolescents' ability to trust others in future relationships. On the other hand, Sharma and Kapoor (2021) emphasized that involving adolescents in age-appropriate discussions about divorce fosters resilience and helps mitigate feelings of abandonment. Additionally, Cruz and Edwards (2017) found that children who learn about their parents' divorce through external sources, such as relatives or community members, are more likely to develop misconceptions about the causes and outcomes of the separation. These studies underscore the importance of open communication and

culturally sensitive approaches to addressing the challenges faced by adolescents in the context of divorce.

### **The Power Struggle/Structure**

Families are much like tiny nations, each family has a financial structure, social structure, and a power structure. In modern families, the younger members of the newly wedded couples tend to make a run for 'power' on a regular basis. When there are power struggles within the family then they observe an urge in the couple for power control over the other. Lindahl and Malik (1999) suggest that husbands' dominant and controlling behaviors may take on a negative, coercive quality across families when the partner's needs are not met in the marriage. No wonder couples get so stressed. This systemic change was not easy to adapt easily by the partners, and was expressed by Nesiya, a custodial mother, who was a housewife,

*I had to do all the jobs in the family, we were living in a joint family. I was totally tired. My husband did not care for me. He always wanted a good dress and he used to go outside. My mother-in-law was very strict and jealous also. In their family, they have an attitude that if a man gets married to a woman, then onwards it is the duty of the woman to do every work in the family.*

The study has observed that there was a psychological tendency in both men and women to dominate and control each other, and that caused a marital power struggle and subsequently, marital distress. Many of the male participants or the female member's husband, who had been witnessing his father as the leader of his family of origin tended to be the leader or to dominate the new

couple system. At the same time, the female participant or the male member's wife, who had been observing her mother as the leader showed a tendency to behave like her mother such as making her own decisions, tendency to lead, and self-determining activities in the new couple system.

### **Divorce as a Learned Social Reality**

There were patterns of divorce seen in the families of the participants of the study. In some of the cases, the parents of the respondents were also separated and they were living separate lives. This was copied or modeled by their children. It became explicit during the interviews. The experience of the divorcees or the learning from the relatives of the divorced helped or motivated the couple's decision to divorce. Literature has shown that parental divorce was associated with a higher rate of divorce among offspring (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Segrin, Taylor, & Altman, 2005); similar patterns were seen in the present study as well. In reflecting on his wife, Anil, a custodial father, from a joint family shared his experience; "my father-in-law himself has three extramarital relationships, once mother-in-law questioned him but he handled with power and force. In my case, I can't do it with my wife because she has more power than me".

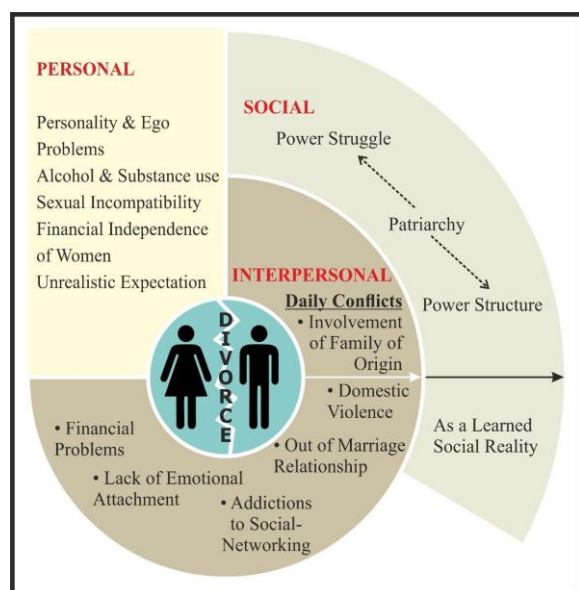
Some patterns of interaction were learned from the family of origin and were repeated in the couple's family. The couple was able to recall it after the divorce experience and were able to make meaning out of it. Vinayan noncustodial father, divorced for four years said;

*Father was not given much importance in that family. Mother was controlling the whole family.*

*And I think she learned that character from her mother and the same copied to her life. Sometimes I felt that her mother may be the reason for the problems. Her mother might have told me many bad things about me. There was over-involvement of her mother in our family life.*

The couple learned from their family of origin how to solve issues of marital life which contributed to the divorce

**Conclusion**



**Figure – 1 shows the important reasons for the divorce as explored in the study**

The study documented a range of reasons for divorce based on responses from 51 participants, including 20 custodial parents, 11 noncustodial parents, and 20 adolescents, all from various regions of the Kerala state. Figure 1 consolidates these reasons into three categories: Personal, Interpersonal, and Social domains. The findings underscore that divorce is seldom attributable to a single cause; rather, it emerges from a complex interaction of multiple factors that together lead to marital dissolution. The research underscores the multifaceted nature of divorce, describing it

as a complex social phenomenon influenced by personal behaviors, relational conflicts, and broader societal factors. Addressing the challenges associated with divorce requires a comprehensive, layered approach, emphasizing collaboration among policymakers, mental health professionals, and community stakeholders. By adopting such an approach, society can better understand and mitigate the adverse effects of divorce on individuals and families. Researchers have emphasized the multidimensional aspects of divorce in contemporary contexts. Kumar and Das (2021) identified that psychological stress and unresolved trauma in one or both partners are leading contributors to marital discord. Lee and Kim (2022) found that lack of emotional intimacy and ineffective conflict resolution are major interpersonal factors that contribute to divorce. Patel and Nair (2023) highlighted the evolving role of societal perceptions, where modern influences on traditional marriages create significant relational stress. Sharma and Kapoor (2020) emphasized the economic empowerment of individuals as a factor that disrupts power dynamics in marriages, challenging traditional gender roles. Additionally, Mehta and Varghese (2024) proposed that family-focused interventions and mediation services could significantly reduce divorce rates by promoting healthier communication and problem-solving strategies among couples. These findings underline the importance of addressing divorce as a complex interplay of personal, interpersonal, and social factors, requiring tailored interventions to support affected families.

## REFERENCES

1. Alexandrov, E. O., Cowan, P. A., & Cowan, C. P. (2005). Couple attachment and the quality of marital relationships: Method and concept in the validation of the new couple attachment interview and coding system. *Attachment & Human Development*, 7, 123–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616730500134928>
2. Amato, P. R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62(6), 1269–1287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01269.x>
3. Amato, P. R. (2001). Children of divorce in the 1990s: An update of Amato and Keith (1991) meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15(3), 355–370. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.15.3.355>
4. Amato, P. R. (2005). The impact of family formation changes on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. *The Future of Children*, 15(2), 75–96. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2005.0012>
5. Amato, P. R., & DeBoer, D. D. (2001). The transmission of marital instability across generations: Relationship skills or commitment to marriage? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(4), 1038–1051. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.01038.x>
6. Amato, P. R., & James, S. (2010). Divorce in Europe and the United States: Commonalities and differences across nations. *Family Science*, 1(1), 2–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19424620903381583>
7. Amato, P. R., & Previti, D. (2003). People's reasons for divorcing: Gender, social class, the life course, and adjustment. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24(5), 602–626. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X03254507>
8. Ariplackal, J., & George, M. (2014). Unrealistic expectations in marriage: A psychological perspective. *Indian Journal of Social Psychology*, 48(2), 120–130.
9. Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Loss*. New York: Basic Books.
10. Bremmer, D., & Kesselring, R. (2004). Divorce and female labor force participation: Evidence from time-series data and cointegration. *Atlantic Economic Journal*, 32(3), 175–190. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02299436>
11. Buchanan, C. M., Maccoby, E. E., & Dornbusch, S. M. (1996). *Adolescents after divorce*. Harvard University Press.
12. Cherian, P. (2016). Divorce trends in Kerala: A socio-cultural analysis. *Indian Journal of Family Studies*, 21(4), 67–80.
13. Cruz, M., & Edwards, P. (2017). Adolescent adjustment in divorced families: The role of communication and transparency. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 32(2), 123–136. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000325>
14. Harold, G. T., & Conger, R. (1997). Marital conflict and adolescent distress: The role of adolescent awareness. *Child Development*, 68(2), 333–350. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131853>
15. Joseph, K. J., & Kurian, R. (2017). Occupational stress and its influence on

- marital satisfaction among IT professionals in Kerala. *South Asian Journal of Psychology*, 9(2), 34–49.
16. Kapadia, S., & Singh, R. (2019). Media influence on expectations in relationships: A study of Indian young adults. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 22(1), 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12311>
  17. Kaur, R., & Das, A. (2021). Addressing family dynamics through culturally sensitive marital counseling in India. *Asian Journal of Psychology and Counseling*, 15(1), 34–49.
  18. Kerala High Court. (2015). *Family dispute cases registered in the courts of Kerala*. Kerala High Court.
  19. Kitzmann, K. M., & Emery, R. E. (2021). The effectiveness of mediation in family disputes: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 35(4), 567–580.
  20. Kusumanjali, M., & Heggade, O. D. (2023). Benefits of mediation in divorce settlements: A socio-legal perspective. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 64(2), 112–128.
  21. Lee, H., & Kim, J. (2022). Emotional intimacy and conflict resolution in marital satisfaction: A cross-cultural analysis. *International Journal of Social Psychology*, 38(4), 12–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2021.1972331>
  22. Legal & General Retail. (2024). *Financial hardship and divorce: Economic consequences for families*. Legal & General Reports.
  23. Mehta, P., & Varghese, R. (2024). Family-centered interventions in reducing divorce rates: A review. *Indian Journal of Family Studies*, 20(1), 34–49.
  24. Murphy, D., & O'Connor, S. (2021). The role of pre-marital counseling in managing expectations in marriage. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 47(2), 278–294. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12453>
  25. New Indian Express. (2023, July 13). Since the triple talaq law, the divorce rate among Muslims down by 96 percent: Kerala Guv Arif Mohammad Khan. *The New Indian Express*. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2023/jul/13/since-triple-talaq-law-divorce-rate-among-muslims-down-by-96-per-cent-kerala-guv-arif-mohd-khan-2594498.html>
  26. Onmanorama. (2025, January 15). Kerala divorce rates rise, family dispute cases up. *Onmanorama*. [https://www.onmanorama.com/lifestyle/news/2025/01/15/kerala-divorce-rates-rise-seven-years-study.html?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.onmanorama.com/lifestyle/news/2025/01/15/kerala-divorce-rates-rise-seven-years-study.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
  27. Patel, S., & Das, A. (2020). Cultural influences on marital expectations and their psychological impacts. *South Asian Journal of Psychology*, 13(2), 41–55.
  28. Patel, S., & Nair, R. (2023). Shifting societal norms and their impact on marital stability in India. *South Asian Psychological Review*, 19(3), 56–70.
  29. Resolution. (2024). *Domestic abuse and its impact on relationships*. Resolution Publications.
  30. Samuelson, L., & Ray, P. (2018). Communication as a moderator in expectation-reality conflicts in marriage. *International Journal of Relationship Studies*, 10(1), 56–68.
  31. Sharma, M., & Nair, S. (2020). The dynamics of family involvement in

- Indian marriages: Challenges and interventions. *South Asian Journal of Family Studies*, 18(4), 91–107.
32. Singh, R., & Mathews, J. (2020). Migration and its effects on family dynamics in Kerala. *Asian Journal of Migration Studies*, 13(1), 41–59.
  33. Sun, H., & Li, W. (2019). Long-term effects of divorce secrecy on adolescent emotional health. *International Journal of Adolescent Psychology*, 11(2), 45–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622920.2018.1562289>
  34. University of Kerala. (2025). *Journal of Polity and Society*. University of Kerala.
  35. University of Michigan. (2024). *Health crises and marital stability: A longitudinal study*. University of Michigan Press.
  36. Yadav, S., & Narayan, R. (2024). Child development outcomes in post-divorce families. *Child Development Research*, 50(1), 45-67.