

# **A Psychological Perspective of Divorce among Muslim Community in Sri Lanka**

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## **Abstract:**

Islam highly discourages divorce and it is the most hateful thing in the sight of Allah. Recently, divorce has rapidly increased among Muslim Community in Sri Lanka. This descriptive study was conducted among 20 couple of divorcees at Akkaraipattu DS division of Ampara district in order to identify the impacts of divorce among Muslim divorced men and divorced women in psychological perspective with an application of Kessler's seven stage model of divorce. Interviews and observations were the primary data collection methods and articles, books, journals and websites were the secondary data collection methods used for this study. The study explored that divorce carries emotional difficulties among divorcees and psychological impact of divorce is more severe among divorced women than divorced men. Muslim divorced men try to regain emotional well-being through hard work, though Muslim divorced women remain in the same condition of mourning with mixture of feelings after their divorce.

**Keywords:** Divorce, Divorced Men, Divorced Women, Muslim, Community

## **1. Introduction**

Islam is a centralized religion and its teaching and guidance are neutral. Islam provides regulations to maintain stability in the society; every person is responsible for their own work and behaviour. Islam does not recommend human beings to live alone in this world; rather it gives importance for a family life. A single life style always creates weakness and barrier among human beings in doing their own duties, therefore Islam highly recommends family life that would help lead a happy life in this world. Allah created the first man, then for his support he created the woman, called "Adam and Hawwa" and he blessed them to live as husband and wife. According to the history marriage and family life were initiated by the creator Allah from the creation of first human being (Aroos, 2005). Islam considers family as a primary and essential unit of the social organization. It is the place where father, mother, children and relatives live happily and peacefully by sharing and caring each other. Family is very significant to fulfil the religious obligations. Through a good family, the individual life becomes more secure and healthier and it creates a better society. Islam is considered as a family oriented religion due to the importance that it has given to family life (Akram, 2011). In the view of Islamic religion, marriage

is certainly a sacred bond which brings a man and a woman together through features of the teaching of Al-Qur'an and Sunnah. Marriage is a permanent institution and it is prescribed by the creator Allah.

However, marriage has asserted on permanent character. Though, it does not mean that the marital contract is absolutely unbreakable. Islam recognizes the necessity of keeping the way open for its dissolution by divorce. In Islamic terminology the dissolution of marriage is called as Talaq (divorce). Islam emphasizes that both men and women have equal rights and opportunities to request for a divorce. The only difference is that a man divorces a woman while a woman demands a divorce from her husband (Sanoos, Irfan, & Mahfool, 2010). Islam does not approve divorce in a normal way; it is accepted in some critical situation. The prophet said that, "Of all things permitted by law," and "divorce is the most hateful in the sight of Allah" (Abu Daud, Sunan, xiii.3). Now this condition has slowly changed towards modernization and it leads to increase the divorce rate among Muslims. It is a matter of regret that the breakdown of religious values also contributes to the marital separation among Muslim married couples. The occurrence of divorce is being increased among Muslim Community in Sri Lanka. In the past, the grounds for the divorce among Muslims in Sri Lanka appeared to be more limited and it led to low percentage of divorce among Muslims. But now it has been changed, the number of divorce cases has increased rapidly among Muslims too. There are various reasons that contribute to this divorce among couples who promised to live together until their death. The Quazi Court (Islamic Court) data and Akkaraipattu DS division report are constantly indicating an increase in Muslim couples seeking help for marital crises and filing for divorce. Multiple and interconnecting factors have contributed to this rapid growth of divorce. Conflict between partners, low income and poverty, women labour migration, drug addiction, young age marriage, unemployment, distress and depression, extramarital affairs, Secularization trends, low religiosity, liberalization of norms, individualism, drawbacks in divorce laws, and qualities of Quazi (Islamic Judge) are the reasons behind the divorce among Muslims today (Wazeema & Jayathunga, 2017).

This marital separation between husband and wife highly impacts in every aspects of life. In the past divorce was rare and unusual among married couples. There was a considerable social pressure and obligation to stay married, even if it was not met the requirements of marriage. But, now divorce is related only with satisfaction of individuals. An increase in the incidence of divorce gives path to increase the psychological and social problems in human society. This separation between husband and wife highly impacts in every aspects of life. As divorce has insightful effects and it also damages the social institutions such as family, religion, school, law and government. Generally, the process of marital destruction results in in psychological, social and economic crises for the family and the society. Divorce has a thoughtful psychological effect on spouses at large. Several studies have shown that divorcees have a higher incidence of psychological problems such as depression, loneliness, anxiety, hostility (Jibril, 2014).

In spite of causes and consequences of divorce on individuals, family and society at large, there is no any adequate and inclusive study or comprehensive researches on psychological perspective of divorce among Muslim Community in Sri Lanka which refers to perceptions, self-reported feelings, experiences, depression and self-esteem of divorcees in their divorce process. Therefore, this research is conducted to analyse the divorce in psychological perspective among Muslim divorced couples in Sri Lanka in order to identify the emotional well-being of Muslim divorced men and women in a psychological perspective by applying Kessler's Seven Stage Model of Divorce.

### **1.1 Research Problem**

The universality of marriage does not attribute only to the concept of harmony but it also indicates a union of many sided persons. Marriage teaches the couples how to develop their reciprocal relations and roles, adapt with the conflicting facts of their personalities and encounter the challenges in conjugal life arisen from the ever changing social situations. But now there is no tolerance among married partners and they find way to escape from the marriage bonds, and choose divorce as their way. The rate of divorce is now increasing among the Muslim Community. Religion strictly suggests the way to lead a healthy life without any troubles, especially Islam highly emphasizes on the importance of marriage. Family life and bearing children are highly encouraged in the religion of Islamic. However, despite the immense disruptions that divorce requires the rising divorce rate in the Muslim Community in Akkaraipattu DS division illustrates that marriage is no longer considered a life-long commitment by many.

According to Akkaraipattu Divisional Secretariat Report of 2016, the number of divorces held in the last six years from 2010 to 2015 is recorded as follows. 63 divorces in 2010, 72 divorces in 2011, 57 divorces in 2012, and 53 divorces in 2013, in the year 2014, the amount of divorces have been increased up to 75 and 84 divorce cases were recorded in 2015 in the study area (Statistical Hand Book, Akkaraipattu DS division, 2014-2015). This is considered as a huge problem in the society, not only the divorcees are affected in this dissolution of marriage, but their loveable children, their parents, family and society too. The divorce becomes a serious threat as a communicable disease to the society; this disease should be cured before it gets serious and transmits to next generation. This divorce creates a number of issues in the future life of the divorcees. Both Muslim male and female divorcees suffer a lot in their divorce process, especially the divorced women after their divorce process. Therefore, this study is aimed to examine the emotional well-being of Muslim divorced women and Muslim divorced men in a psychological perspective by applying Kessler's seven stage model of divorce.

## **2. Review of Relevant Literature**

## **2.1 Conceptual Framework of Divorce**

All societies have a kind of family; it can be small or large, primitive or civilized, ancient or modern. The family is the oldest human institution which prepares the child for life in society and provides both child and adult with emotional support (Landis, 1975). Families originate with the uniting of individuals in marriage. It is established by the human society to control and regulate the sex life of man and closely connect with the institution of family. When wedlock has disintegrated into deadlock and when the relationship between the spouses is too bad to be cured, it leads to divorce. Divorce is a consequence of marital instability and a form of family disorganization (Acharya, 1998). Divorce is not a recent phenomenon, today all the media covers that it is a serious issue, new and modern trend, however divorce has a long way of history before Christianization. The improvement in the economy and women self-sufficiency also increases the divorce rate (Clarke, 2007). Though, all divorcees are willing to find the same final result called divorce by finishing the long term relationship between them.

The occurrences of divorce can be different according to the social classes of society. Abandonment, annulment, desertion, adultery, separation are the ways that long-lasting and different quarrels and conflicts may be dissolved but ended up by divorce that shields both couple as divorcee and quickens the sign of divorce irrespective of societies (Rahman, Giedraitis, & Akhtar, 2013). Divorce has a reflective effect on the partners, their children, and also on the society in large. Post-divorce life has number of adverse problems. The impacts of divorce on individuals are very grave and also people who have experienced divorce feel loneliness, depression, anxiety, hostility, incompetence, low work efficiency, suicidal feelings and intention (Schaefer, 2003).

Religious institutions make a sharp distinction between the intelligible worlds of every day human life. Religion has been a major source of comfort, of salvation that delivers the human society from the difficulties of the life. According to Islam divorce is the last option for husband and wife when there is no option left. If there is no urgent need for release from the marriage-tie, the divorce is haram (forbidden) for every Muslims (Sanoos, Irfan, & Mahfool, 2010). Reconciliation is highly expected among spouses than divorce in Islam, Islam does not allow divorce easily, and there should be a number of attempts to solve the differences and problems between the partners. Valid reasons are essential to file a divorce case in the Islamic Court. Before going to court to file the divorce case, Islam gives some advices to the couples to compromise and fix their problems. If all the approaches fail, and the problem continues between the spouses, then only divorce could be considered (Akram, 2011).

## **2.2 Previous Studies on Divorce**

Kamarudin (1993) did a comparative study on divorce among Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia with special reference to the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, the theme of this paper is a comparison of the law, practice and procedure relating to divorce among Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia (Kamarudin , 1993). Acharya (1998) wrote an article based on sociological analysis of divorce: A case study from Pokhara, Nepal. This study focused different social order and racial groups living in Pokhara city of Nepal. The study found that, the major reasons of marital disruptions are economic hardship, cruelty, mal adjustment in sex, infertility of wife, imbalance among educational, economic and social status, and high expectations of spouses (Acharya, 1998). Alam, Saha, and Ginneken (2000) carried demographic research on the Determinants of Divorce in a Traditional Muslim Community in Bangladesh. This research found the effects on the risks of divorce among couples prior marital status and social and demographic characteristics. They found that groom's and bride's low socio-economic status, women's inferior condition in the family, spouses' previous marital disruptions, illiteracy, and marriage at early stage early have increased the chances of divorce and also the likelihoods of divorce were much higher if there was no birth in the preceding six months (Alam, Saha, & Ginneken, 2000).

Mohammadi and Tafti (2014) presented a study that deals with the causes of divorce in Islamic Republic of Iran. They found the main cause of divorce in Yazd, Iran and they exposed that the following are the contributed factors of divorce such as type of jobs, number of jobs, previous marital history and working hours per day (Mohammadi & Tafti, 2014). Jibril (2014) investigated the psychosocial and economic consequences of divorce among the Muslim community in Gondar city administration of Ethiopia. The findings of the study exposed that financial problems to access health services, problems in housing, poor access to food; downward social mobility, changes in role, problems in social interaction, depression and low self-confidence are the foremost psychosocial and economic impacts of divorce among Muslim divorced individuals (Jibril, 2014). Mohammadi and Tafti (2014) presented another study on socio economic factors affecting divorce in Islamic Republic of Iran (Yazd). This study exposed that education, addiction, monthly income and numbers of children are most important factors affecting the divorce. This study recommended that families before marriage should consider major conditions such as psychology, personality, culture, economy, matches among boys and girls, getting enough advice on choosing a partner to avoid divorce to a certain extend (Mohammadi & Tafti, 2014).

### **3. Methodology**

Marital destruction is highly increasing among the Muslim community in Sri Lanka; this explorative study was conducted among Muslim divorcees who got divorce in 2015 in Akkaraipattu DS division. Akkaraipattu DS division is located in the Ampara district in Sri Lanka which comprises 09 small villages and 28 GN Divisions. The Akkaraipattu DS division includes Akkaraipattu Municipal Council which covers 5.07km<sup>2</sup> with 23 GN divisions of Akkaraipattu and 5 GN divisions from the Pradeshiya Sabha area. Three ethnic groups are surviving peacefully and majority of them are Muslims (99.53%)

and other minorities are Hindus and Buddhists, who are dwelling during the last several decades (Statistical Hand Book, Akkaraipattu DS division, 2014-2015). Sampling is the main fact that can determine the achievements of a study. Normally, the study population is very large, complex to handle and making a census or a complete enumeration of all the observations in the population impractical or impossible. The sample usually represents a subset of small size. Purposive sample method is employed for this study to collect data, especially selecting one year (2015) and the sample size is 20 couples of divorcees.

Data is a collection of facts, figures, information and other relevant materials. The source of data can be classified as primary data and secondary data. This classification depends on the nature of the data and mode of collection. In order to achieve the main and other specific objectives of the study, both primary and secondary data collection methods were applied to this study. The needed information was gathered under the primary data collection methods such as interviews with 20 divorced women and 20 divorced men and observations were conducted to get more detailed information. Main sources of secondary data were Quazi court (Islamic court) records at first hand identifying the full address of divorcee and respective lawyers involved in the cases. DS office records and reports about divorce cases, religious books (Al-Quran and Al-Hadees) were also used for this study to identify the religious teachings related with divorce. As well as other sources like journals, articles, annual report, publications, and website were also cited to get more details.

There are two types of data analytical methods; they are qualitative data analysis and quantitative data analysis. In accordance to this study, collected data were analysed by using the above both methods. The qualitative analysis method was mainly used because analytical part is related with the descriptive outcomes. After collecting data, there was a need to process the data and present it in an efficient way that can be easily understood and easily utilized. The collected data were summarized and presented in descriptive way by using various forms of data presentation such as texts and figures in an appropriate and attractive manner.

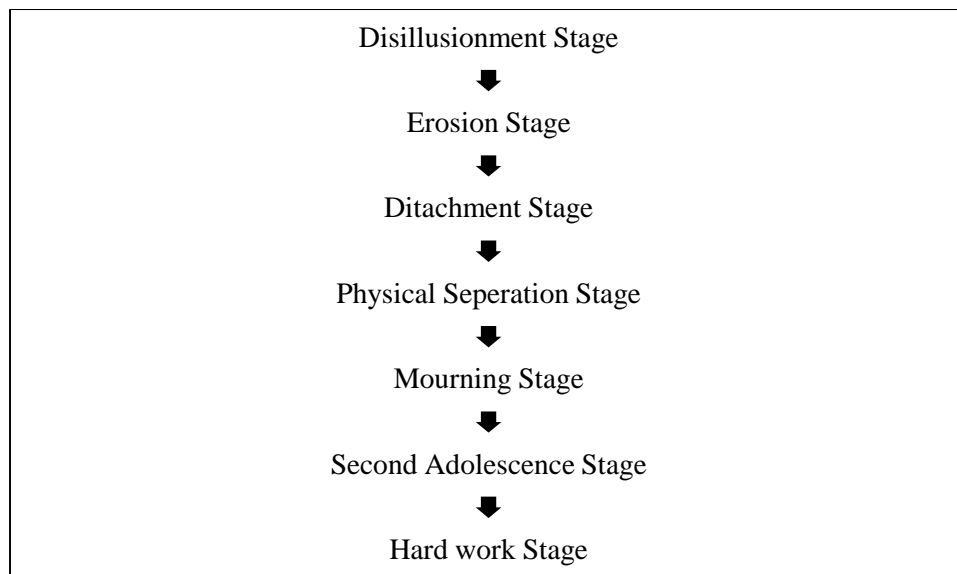
#### **4. Results and Discussion**

Divorce associates with the psychological emotions of the divorcees; here the couples deal the divorce with psychological aspects. The number of professionals and scholars discussed the psychological perspective of divorce through the stages of divorce to explain the emotional and psychological well-being of the divorcees. This study mainly focused on one of the important model which was developed by Dr. Sheila Kessler called as seven stages of divorce. A model is the representation of a system or process and helps think about the concept and this model gives the idea of complicated objects or events and it's important to develop precise theories. Kessler's model talks about the divorce from the earlier point in the process of marital termination and provides a greater understanding of the divorce process itself. The study has applied Kessler's seven stage model of divorce to find Muslim divorcees'

psychological condition through the whole process of divorce. Kessler's model describes the seven stages of divorce as disillusionment stage, erosion stage, detachment stage, physical separation stage, mourning stage, second adolescence stage and hard work stage.

The first stage of Kessler's model is "disillusionment". At this stage a new thought comes in the mind of one of the spouses or within both of them. The couple starts awareness that their expectation of marriage is a failure and the partner has some faults related with the marital life. The spouses fall in emotional tension here. The second stage of the Kessler's model is "erosion". The disappointment and fault finding reduce the love and affection among the partners. Actually in this stage they can't find what may go wrong or what to say. The disillusionment is shown at this stage verbally and through behaviours against each other, like destructive interactions, fighting, finding new interest; avoiding each other and their responsibilities. The third stage of Kessler's model is "detachment". In this stage the couples become detached to each other and isolation continues. Couples talk a little and do not share personal things; the life becomes bored and minimizes the verbal conflict here. The fourth stage of this model is "Physical separation". This stage occurs when the marriage is no longer tolerable. Here one of the partners moves out to a new place. Loneliness, fear, feeling of failure, finding a new place to live or re-joining with parents are the outcomes of this stage. Financial and social independence also occur. Reconciliation is usually improbable here. At this stage legal divorce occurs and often both parties consult the lawyer (Kaslow, 1980).

The fifth stage of Kessler's model is, "mourning". After the physical separation of the spouses, the divorced person experiences a sense of feelings such as mourning due to the loss of partner, loss of dream, emotions like anger, depression, sadness, guilt, fear, hope, rejection. The sixth stage of this model is "second adolescence" and is often called as a new life stage. We can expect a shift from past to future life, new interest, new clothes, new looks, new career, eager to find love again. This is a time of transformation in which the divorced partner feels free from the conflict and pain which exploited them in the previous emotional stage. The divorcee regains his position in the community and converts the mind into other side, like education, travel, hobbies, etc. and behaves like a teenager again. The final stage of Kessler's model is "Hard work". The divorcee at this stage overcomes his emotional feelings, emerges as a strong person from the broken relationship, finds good friends, has reasonable plans for future and no longer worries about the past life though it is hard, and gets ready to move on to something better than the past. The successful end of this stage needs self-confidence and elasticity (Kaslow, 1980). It is described in figure 1 clearly as follows.



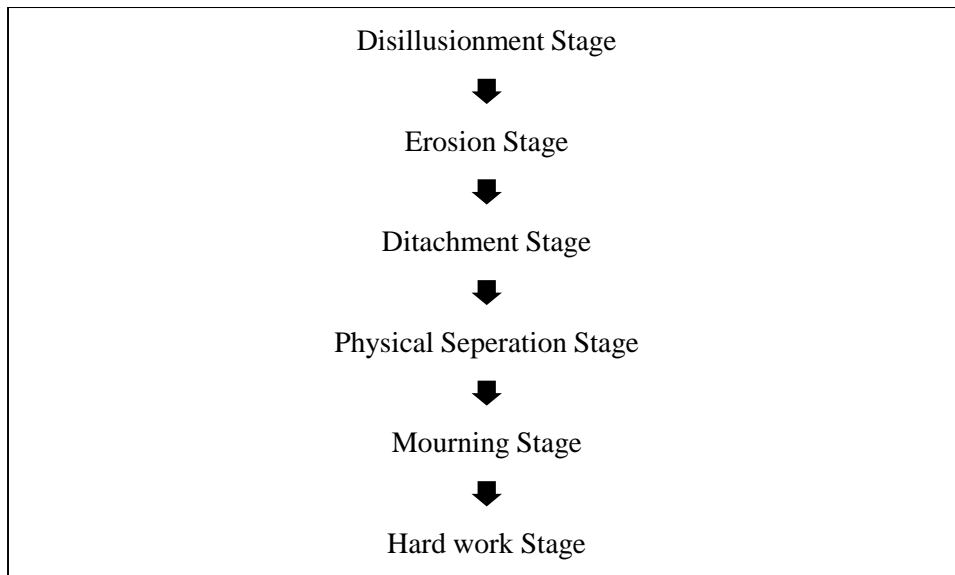
**Figure 1: Kessler's Seven Stage Model**

Source: Kaslow, 1980

The above mentioned all stages are not static, it will differ person to person to their construction of personality, and coping strategy. Some divorcees skip some stages, and directly move to another one, some slide quickly through the all stages, however some stuck in some stages. Divorce is a terrible and unbearable incident to most of the divorcees. On the other hand some quickly understand the reality of current life and overcome their problems. This model is reasonably applicable to the divorced population in the study area. The personality, religion, culture and society have played a considerable role to pass and go through these seven stages. By applying this model, the study explored that there is a difference between Muslim divorced men and women in passing the stages of Kessler's seven stage model of divorce. It can be discussed separately as follows.

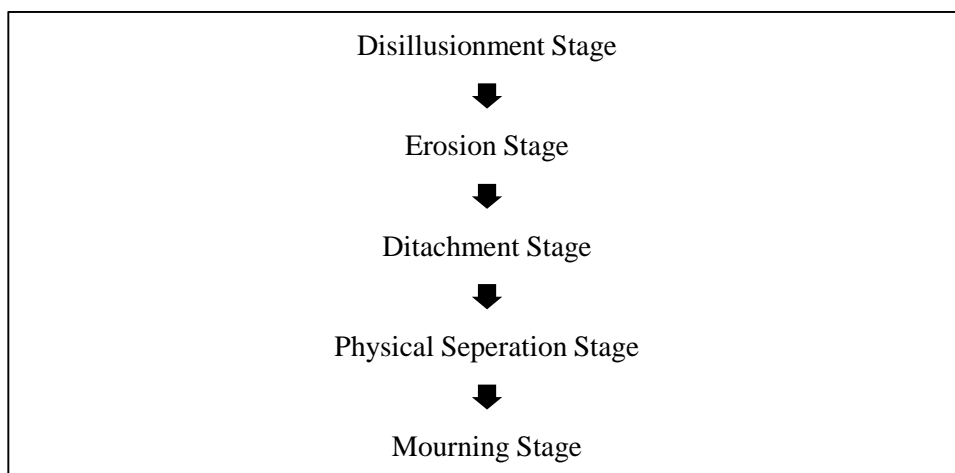
Muslim divorced men passed the first five stages such as disillusionment stage, erosion stage, detachment stage, physical separation stage and mourning stage and then they skipped the stage of second adolescence, and moved to the final stage of hard work stage. Through the interview and observation the research has shown that the Muslim divorced men after the mourning stage moved to the hard work stage, without behaving like a second adolescence. And reported that, they have never behaved like a teenager again and their first life is over, they are worried about it, but remain as the same person of the past. After some period, they have moved to the hard work stage. Now the divorced men are having a healthy adjustment and movement towards a better life and have a reasonable plan for their future life too. The following figure 2 describes the path of divorce stages of Muslim divorced men which they undergo.





**Figure 2: Divorce stages of Muslim men**

Moving to the condition of Muslim divorced women in the study area, their situation is a very worried one. The Muslim women have passed only the first four stages such as disillusionment stage, erosion stage, detachment stage and physical separation stage and, stuck in the fifth stage of mourning stage. According to the Kessler's model, the Muslim divorced women in the study area have never passed the mourning stage. But they are still suffering in the fifth stage, and they are trapped in it. The divorced women are often worried about their life and they have mixture of feelings, such as sadness, anger, frustration, hope and hatred towards the opposite sex. The study found that the Muslim women are stuck in the mourning stage in their divorce. When compared to divorced men, divorced women suffer more. Majority of the women in the study area are not remarried and the responsibility of child rearing is given to them and, they often fall in poverty. The following figure 3 describes the path of divorce stages of Muslim divorced women which they undergo.



**Figure 3: Divorce stages of Muslim women**

Divorce is the soul shaking experience to both divorced men and divorced women. It is the second stressor after death of a partner. Through the application of Kessler's seven stage model, the study found that both Muslim divorced men and women suffer a lot emotionally due to their divorce process. They are psychologically impacted by the decision of divorce. Compared to Muslim divorced men, Muslim divorced women suffer a lot in their divorce process. Due to personality and capacity, Muslim divorced men pass the first five stages of divorce and they move on to the final stage of hard work and Muslim divorced women are stuck in the fifth stage called as mourning stage and suffer very much psychologically after their divorce process.

## **5. Conclusion**

The contribution of family institution is primary to the social transformation process than the other institutions. Family is a part of the social body and it is the basic ingredient of the society. Divorce has rapidly increased among Muslims in Sri Lanka in the recent past. Though the divorce is accepted in Islamic religion, it is strictly an avoidable one. Multiple interconnecting factors and reasons have contributed to the divorce among the Muslim couples. Compared with divorced men, the divorced women pay a lion of costs of consequences due to their divorce. Multiple and interconnecting factors have been contributing to this divorce among Muslims. Both divorced men and women are negatively impacted emotionally, financially and physically due to their divorce process. This study attempted to analyse the divorce in psychological perspective among divorcees in order to exemplify the emotional well-being of divorcees with the application of Kessler's seven stage model (disillusionment stage, erosion stage, detachment stage, physical separation stage, mourning stage, second adolescence stage and hard work stages). The men divorcees passed the first five stages and they skipped the sixth stage and directly moved to the final of hard work stage. The female divorcees in the study area only passed the four stages and they got stuck in the fifth stage of mourning stage and they worried about their divorce with having mixture of feelings. To shape the social and psychological behaviours such as socialization, civilization, cultural maintenance, labour improvement, the contribution of marriage and family are important. In this way maintaining the family structure, preserving the long term durability of the family life and preventing the divorce are necessary. Immediately the appropriate actions should be taken to address this social problem to preserve the marriage and family life which assist spouses to diminish the risk of divorce and attain a sustaining, long-lasting, healthy association between them.

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