

Original Article



# Effective Factors on Women's Social Exclusion After Divorce From the Viewpoint of Tehran Residents

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## Abstract

**Background:** Divorce is the most important factor in family disintegration. This study aimed to assess the perspectives of Tehran residents aged over 20 years on women's social exclusion after divorce and its related factors.

**Methods:** This descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out on the population over 20 years old in Tehran in September 2019. Due to the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic conditions, the Social Exclusion Questionnaire for Iranian Divorced Women was provided to the subjects online. Convenience sampling was applied until 400 questionnaires were completely received. Independent *t* test, one-way analysis of variance, multiple linear regressions, and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to investigate the relationship between social exclusion and demographic variables via SPSS (version 16) at the significance level of 0.05.

**Results:** The mean ± standard deviation of the age of participants was 37.82 ± 9.1 years. There was a significant relationship between social exclusion and employment status ( $P < 0.001$ ), education level ( $P < 0.001$ ), economic status ( $P < 0.001$ ), and marital status ( $P < 0.001$ ). Further, there was a significant correlation between social exclusion and age ( $P < 0.001$ ). The total average of economic dependence and discrimination based on marital status, terrifying, depriving, and damaging marital status were 4.19 ± 0.70, 4.0 ± 0.275, 3.80 ± 1.06, 3.75 ± 0.85, and 3.67 ± 0.94, respectively.

**Conclusion:** The economic dependence based on marital status had the highest impact on the social exclusion of divorced women based on the opinion of Tehran residents aged over 20.

**Keywords:** Social exclusion, Women, Divorce

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## Introduction

Divorce is the most important factor for the disintegration of a family as the fundamental part of a society (1). Global studies demonstrated an increase in divorce rates in the world (2,3). The highest divorce rate has been reported in the United States among industrialized nations so that out of two marriages one leads to divorce. Approximately 40% of all marriages would end in divorce in European countries (4). Likewise, the divorce rate has been increasing in Iran in recent years (5). The number of divorced women in Iran, among the population over ten years old (63.31%), has been reported twice more than men according to the latest census in 2016 (6). Two hundred forty-six thousand one hundred seventy-one divorce cases were registered in Iran in 2017 (7). Iran is currently the fourth country after the United States, Denmark, and Egypt for the number of registered divorces (8), and Tehran province has the highest number of registered divorces (31 733 cases) due to social and economic conditions (7,9). Divorce, a complex social phenomenon, is closely related to women's

health (10). Divorced women are the most vulnerable group in society, facing many problems and obstacles at individual and social levels, affecting their quality of life (11). The effects of divorce on women were more lasting than on men, and the quality of life of divorced women was reported to be significantly lower than that of non-divorced women (12,13). Divorced women had low independency, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, and purposefulness in life along with lower psychological comfort compared to other women (14). Divorced women also showed lower levels of mental health, cognitive emotion regulation, and adaptability than married women (15). Furthermore, divorced women were more exposed to high-risk behaviors (e.g., drug use and risky sexual relationships) as well as sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS and suffered from mental disorders due to economic and cultural poverty and lack of awareness compared to other women (16,17).

Other problems for divorced women included financial



pressures, society's distasteful attitude, social insecurity, prevalence of depression, and physical and mental disorders such as alcohol addiction, suicide, mental strength weakness, and social exclusion (8,13). Social exclusion is one of the determinants of social health and well-being, affecting people's health, especially people deprived of political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions and people exposed to more restrictions than other citizens (18-22). Social exclusion causes economic poverty, weakens human capabilities, and increases social problems. The spread of social exclusion will lead to the loss of goals, lack of enthusiasm in life, tendency to isolation, as well as mental and psychological problems such as depression and personality disorders (23,24).

The severity and type of social problems and injuries vary from person to person and group to group. Some age, gender, ethnicity, or immigrant groups are more exposed to social harm caused by social exclusion (25,26). Social exclusion in divorced women is due to the lack of equal job opportunities and social support, presence of financial problems and needs, economic dependence, exposure to high-risk behaviors, and distance from married women (27,28). Social exclusion is a complex and multidimensional variable affected by various variables and components. For example, Ashtari et al revealed that residential area is an important variable affecting social exclusion, explaining about 45% of variations in social exclusion (29).

Considering the effect of social exclusion along with various aspects of life including physical and mental health (30), this study was conducted to assess the views of residents over 20 years old in Tehran about the social exclusion of women after divorce and its related factors. It is hoped that the results of this study provide information on the social exclusion of divorced women to experts in the field of psychology and women studies and to provide a suitable basis for effective expert intervention.

## Materials and Methods

This descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out on the residents of Tehran, Iran, aged over 20 years from September 7 to 22, 2019. Tehran was considered a good representative of Iranian society as a metropolis with more than 8 600 000 population along with cultural, social, economic, and demographic diversities (31). The minimum sample size was 400 people according to a 95% confidence level, the estimation accuracy of 0.05 (d), and the standard deviation of 0.5 based on the pilot study (8). The questionnaires were provided to the participants online due to the epidemic conditions of coronavirus disease 2019. The convenience sampling was carried out among Tehran residents (residents of Tehran were confirmed by announcing a fixed telephone number) aged over 20 who did not have a history of drug addiction, using neuropsychiatric drugs, and referring to a psychiatrist or psychologist. Finally, 400 completed questionnaires were received.

Data were collected through the Social Exclusion

Questionnaire for Iranian Divorced Women developed by Zarei et al (8). The questionnaire included two sections: demographic characteristics (age, gender, marital status, employment status, level of education, and economic situation) and social exclusion. Social exclusion due to divorce includes 37 items with five dimensions of discrimination based on marital status (12 items), economic dependence based on marital status (7 items), depriving marital status (12 items), damaging marital status (4 items), and terrifying marital status (2 items). The answers were scored by a 5-point Likert scale including "totally agree" (5 points), "agree" (4 points), "no opinion" (3 points), "disagree" (2 points), and "totally disagree" (1 point). The option of "totally agree" in all items means a higher sense of social exclusion, and there is no reversal or coding in the items. The total score of the instrument was calculated using the average scores of all dimensions and the average scores of items in each dimension ranging from one to five. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire and dimensions were 0.87 and 0.70-0.88, respectively, and Intraclass correlation coefficient for the whole questionnaire was 0.85, indicating a good to excellent index (8).

After approving the research plan and obtaining an ethical license from the ethics committee of Tarbiat Modares University (IR.MODARES.REC.1398.038), an online call was sent through WhatsApp, Telegram, and Instagram social networks, and people were asked to send a message through the announced contact number if they were willing to participate and met the inclusion criteria. Then, the online questionnaire link was sent to the eligible candidates (2000 links), and they were informed to fill out the questionnaire within a maximum of 10 minutes. Due to the voluntary participation in the study, there was no follow-up, and failure to fill out the questionnaire was considered as reluctance to continue cooperation. In total, out of 2000 forwarded questionnaires, 400 were completed while 1600 were not responded. Descriptive data were reported using frequency, mean, and standard deviation at a significance level of 0.05 within SPSS software (version 16). Independent t-test (for comparing two variables), one-way analysis of variance (for comparing more than two variables), multiple linear regressions, and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to investigate the relationship between social exclusion and demographic variables.

## Results

The average age of the subjects was  $37.82 \pm 9.1$  years within the age range of 20 to 58, and most of them (80.3%) were female. It was found that 48.5% of the subjects were part-time employers, and 42.3% had medium economic status. According to Table 1, there was a significant relationship between social exclusion and employment status ( $P < 0.001$ ), level of education ( $P < 0.001$ ), economic status ( $P < 0.001$ ), and marital status ( $P < 0.001$ ), as well as a significant correlation with age ( $P < 0.001$ ).

In addition, the average age of social exclusion was  $3.93 \pm 1.65$ . The mean total score of economic dependence based on marital status was  $4.19 \pm 0.70$ , while the total scores of discrimination based on marital status, terrifying, depriving, and damaging marital status were  $4.0 \pm 0.75$ ,  $3.80 \pm 1.06$ ,  $3.75 \pm 0.85$ , and  $3.67 \pm 0.94$ , respectively.

Due to the establishment of regression preconditions, variables with significant differences were entered into the regression model (Table 2).

## Discussion

This study aimed to assess the social exclusion of post-divorce women and its related factors. The results of data analysis indicated that the economic dependence based on marital status had the highest average among the five dimensions of social exclusion, which is inconsistent with the study conducted by Ghadimi et al (32). This contradiction can be attributed to the differences in the

target population of the two studies. In Ghadimi and colleagues' study, the target population was divorced women in Rasht, Iran. In small cities such as Rasht, society's view about divorced women is more unpleasant than views of Tehran residents due to socio-cultural differences, leading to the lack of acceptance and understanding of women, labeling them as a widow, and higher exclusion related to status-based discrimination (32). However, participants in the study reported a higher understanding of social exclusion in the area of economic dependence. Given that divorced women do not have adequate job opportunities and support (33), unemployment and financial problems were among the most important problems facing divorced women (1). For this reason, participants reported a greater understanding of exclusion in the realm of economic dependence based on marital status.

The lower scores of social exclusion were observed in the subjects with temporary employment status and primary

**Table 1.** Frequency of the Subjects and Results of Comparison of People's Opinion Scores on Social Exclusion due to Divorce Based on Demographic Characteristics

Parameters		No. (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Test Result
Gender	Female	321 (80.3)	3.95	0.64	$t = -1.563$ $P = 0.119$
	Man	79 (19.8)	3.83	0.68	
Employment status	Employed	26 (10.4)	4.33	0.50	$F = 49.346$ $P < 0.001$
	Part time job	194 (48.5)	3.64	0.61	
	Unemployed	102 (25.5)	4.07	0.64	
Education	Primary	173 (43.3)	3.81	0.65	$F = 7.147$ $P < 0.001$
	High school	86 (21.5)	4.15	0.55	
	Diploma	95 (23.8)	4.03	0.7	
	University	46 (11.5)	3.78	0.61	
Economic situation	Poor	70 (17.5)	4.23	0.51	$F = 0.1736$ $P < 0.001$
	Medium	169 (42.3)	3.68	0.63	
	Good	121 (30.3)	4.03	0.64	
	Excellent	40 (10)	4.15	0.65	
Marital status	Single	56 (14)	3.65	0.66	$F = 17.73$ $P < 0.001$
	Married	124 (31)	3.76	0.61	
	divorced	220 (55)	4.1	0.62	
Age (y)	Mean $\pm$ Standard deviation		$37.82 \pm 9.1$		$r = 0.217$ $P < 0.001$

**Table 2.** Results of Linear Regression of Factors Affecting the Social Exclusion of Women

		Coefficient	Standard Coefficient	Test Statistics	P Value	Assurance Distance	
						Low Limit	Upper Line
Employment status	Employed	0.201	0.173	1.925	0.056	-0.006	0.408
	Part-time job	-0.315	-0.144	-2.097	0.038	-0.612	-0.018
	Unemployed			Reference category			
Education	Primary	0.013	0.009	0.081	0.936	-0.314	0.341
	High school	-0.049	-0.041	-0.327	0.744	-0.349	0.250
	Diploma	-0.0071	-0.059	-0.515	0.608	-0.345	0.202
	College education			Reference category			
Economic status	Poor	-0.053	-0.042	-0.355	0.723	-0.349	0.243
	Medium	-0.264	-0.176	-1,580	0.116	-0.595	0.066
	Good	0.103	0.087	0.708	0.480	-0.185	0.391
	Excellent			Reference category			

education level. This result is confirmed by other studies (29,32,34). Ghadimi et al (32) and Ashtari Mehrjardi et al (29) reported a higher average of social exclusion in people with primary education levels and temporary and part-time employment status. This inconsistency can be due to the difference in characteristics of statistical samples (the sampling of the present study was convenient), and due to the use of online data gathering. Furthermore, it is possible that the majority of people included in the study were people with low literacy and had a lower understanding of social exclusion than others. Moreover, the average score of the subjects with good economic status was lower than that of people with poor and excellent economic status, which in this regard, the present study is consistent with some studies (32, 34). Ghadimi et al (32) and Ghotbi et al (34) reported a higher understanding of social exclusion in people with excellent and poor economic status compared to people with good economic status. According to the learned helplessness theory, when a person experiences multiple failures and an inability to control the situation, she/he accepts defeat in advance in subsequent situations despite the possibility of success. Decreased activity is observed when efforts to gain control are unsuccessful, which means lack of motivation and persistent reluctance. It is manifested in the form of a decrease in positive psychological characteristics, causing adaptability to the needs and threats of life (35) and creating a cognitive barrier for illiterate people with poor socioeconomic status. On the other hand, people with an excellent economic situation had a high level of education and a higher understanding of social exclusion.

In the present study, age had a significant correlation with social exclusion so that the average social exclusion increased with increasing age. In other words, older people had a higher understanding of social exclusion than younger people, which contradicted the findings of Ghadimi et al (32) and Ashtari Mehrjardi et al (29). It seems that people's experience and perception of social exclusion increased in older subjects than younger ones.

The average score of social exclusion in divorced subjects was higher than that of single and married ones. Further, the average score of social exclusion in people who had a temporary marriage or remarriage was higher than that of others. According to some studies (14,15,36-38), divorced people or people who remarried or temporarily married experienced more physical, mental, and social problems due to their different living conditions compared to other people, so they rated higher social exclusion.

As previously noted, social exclusion is a complex and multidimensional variable measured through various variables and components; accordingly, this phenomenon is affected by some variables (29). According to the results, the variable of the number of children (having one child) had the greatest effect on social exclusion from the point of view of Tehran residents. In contrast, Ashtari Mehrjardi et al (29) stated that the area of residence had a considerable impact on social exclusion. In other words, Ashtari et

al found that people living in the southern part of the city had more social exclusion than people living in the northern part of the city. This result is not far from the mind considering the poor economic situation and welfare deprivation of residents in the south of the city.

There is no significant relationship between the means of social exclusion and gender, while Ashtari Mehrjardi et al (29) found a significant relationship between gender and social exclusion rate; therefore, less social exclusion was reported in men than in women. In other words, men reported less understanding of social exclusion than women. According to the theory of vulnerability and stress, women experience more stress than men, highlighting the gender roles of women in the family as the source of this difference. Men and women shape their behaviors and attitudes in the context of gender roles, and these roles are formed, especially for girls from an early age, and they are passively planned for their gender destiny (35). Likewise, the reason for reporting more social exclusion in women by Ashtari et al may be related to the differences in gender roles.

One of limitations of this study was the lack of sufficient studies on the relationship between divorce and social exclusion, so there are little studies to compare the results. In addition, the lack of easy access to divorced women and frequent follow-ups to complete the online questionnaire are the main limitations of the present study. It is suggested to investigate the psychological causes of social exclusion in women. It is also suggested to replicate the same study in other cities of Iran and compare the similarities and differences between the results of those studies with the findings of this study.

## Conclusion

Economic dependence based on marital status had the highest impact on the social exclusion of divorced women from perspectives of residents aged over 20 in Tehran.

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## Authors' Contribution

AKY (first author): Introduction writer/original researcher (30%); FZ (second author): Methodologist/statistical analyst/introduction writer/discussion writer/original researcher (30%); SN (third author): Methodologist/introduction writer/discussion and writer/original researcher (20%); AH (Forth author): Methodologist/original researcher (10%); RM (fifth author): Methodologist/statistical analyst (10%).

## Conflict of Interests

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

## Ethical Permissions

The Ethics Committee of Tarbiat Modares University approved the research protocol (IR.TMU.REC.1398.038).

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