# Psychosocial Factors as Predictors of Couples' Intention to Divorce: The Case of Dilla Town, SNNPRS

Tademe Zula Biramo

Lecturer, Institute of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Dilla University

E-mail- zulatademe@gmail.com

Dilla, Ethiopia

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the Psychosocial Factors as Predictors of Couples' Intention to Divorce in Dilla town. In doing so, descriptive cross-sectional research design was employed. Data were produced from 64 participants (i.e., 30 male and 34 female) couples who appealed in Dilla court to conclude their relationship through divorce. Sample was selected through simple random sampling technique. Questionnaire, document analysis and key informant interview protocols were utilized as data gathering tools. Data analysis was conducted through regression analysis and thematic content analysis. The results confirmed that lack of commitment; communication skills and deprived skill to challenge life demands were major factors. Particularly, lack of commitment demonstrated more influence on couple's decision to indulge into divorce followed by poor communication skills and economic challenges. As to demographic variable, females/wives were more tend to initiate divorce decision than males/husbands. Moreover, couples from early adulthood were more prone to initiate divorce than couples from middle adulthood and above. Thus, the policy makers, court workers, psychologists, religious leaders, elders, women and children affairs bureaus, NGO's and other concerned bodies should focus on promoting healthy marital life.

**Keywords**: Psychosocial Factors/Predictors, Intention to Divorce and Couples.

## 1. Introduction

Of all social systems and structures, the family has undergone changes in many aspects. One of such change is increasing rate of divorce. This rise in divorce rate has been predicted to disintegrate the family institution and the foundations of society. The fundamental unit of all societies is the family. The family is responsible for the care and up-bringing of all children. It is a cohesive unit which ideally provides economic, social and psychological security to all its members. Formation of the family is basically through marriage. In light of the roles identified for family to play, if marriages are being disrupted more often by divorce, the family could then be said to be undergoing some serious crisis (Moore, 1994).

Marriage is a social union or legal contract that establishes rights and obligations between the spouses, spouses and their children, and the spouses and their in-laws. The institution of marriage was traditionally a union between a man and a woman. Depending on the values and norms of the society, there are different forms of arrangements to start family life (Haviland et al, 2013). Regardless of all efforts made by the community and state to protect marriage and family from dissolution, divorce is unavoidable reality for many families. The agreement of spouses or a petition for divorce is the outcome of malfunction of family for various personal, situational, social or cultural and psychological factors. Divorce is considered as the ending of a marriage. Divorce or dissolution, on the other hand is a legislatively created and judicially administered process that legally terminates a marriage without consideration of viability of the marriage by one or both of the spouse and permits both to remarry (Ambert, 2009).

Regarding the prevalence rate of divorce, various studies with sufficient evidences exist and reveal; for instance, study of Hawkins and Fackrell (2009) confirmed that 40-60 percent of all marriages in the United States terminate in divorce. To add, as to Amato and Previt (2003), in USA couples who engaging in the marriage for the first time continue to face a 50% chance of divorce during their life time. A study by Reniers (2003) on three district areas of Malawi combined 45 percent of the all marriages end in divorce within 20 years and life table probabilities of divorce in Malawi range from 40 to 60 percent, where as 32 percent in Cote d'Ivoire, 33 percent in Ghana and 14 percent in Nigeria (Brandon, 1990 : Akuamoah, 2013: Reniers , 2003). In Ethiopia, approximately 45 percent of all first marriages end in divorce within 30 years (Tilson & Larsen, 2000) which is approximately equivalent with that of USA.

Amato's extensive researches into marriage and divorce include studying indicates different reasons people have to divorce like infidelity, drinking or drug abuse, physical or mental abuse, weak relationship, lack of openness to each other, not meeting family obligations, incompatibilities, employment status, educational level, loss of love, etc. (Amato, 2010). According to White and Lynn (1990) as quoted in Mehari (2013), the most usual underlying causes behind intention to divorce from women perspective were barrenness, husbands beating,

ill-treatment, double marriage, lying, dishonesty, adultery, exerting too much control over them and their activities, forced intersexual course, homesickness, and age (Mehari, 2013). In addition, the chance of being divorced varies widely depending on economic, demographic and behavioral factors. Divorce is often more common for those with less education, partly because people with less education usually marry younger and tend to be less financially stable than those who are college graduates (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007).

According to Stevenson & Wolfers (2007) as quoted in descriptive survey study by Boitel & Mirtcheva (2015) confirmed and states that a 10% point difference between college graduates and those with less than a college education in the probability of a first marriage surviving to age 45 (Boitel & Mirtcheva, 2015). Another study conducted by Bumpass and Sweet (1970) as cited in Boitel & Mirtcheva (2015), found that enhancing and raising rates of marital stability as education of the husband and the wife increased.

Age is also another factor believed to weigh heavily within the stability of a marriage. The age of a couple during the marriage has often been thought of as a leading cause of instability. The younger the couple when they marry, the more likely they are to become divorced at some point, but the marriage becomes more stable as couples grow older (Boitel & Mirtcheva, 2015). One study shows that 50% of all first marriages, in which the spouses marry before the age of 20, end in divorce within 10 years (Cohen, 2018).

Religious differences are thought to be closely related to differences in basic world views and values, which can result in marital issues. In regard to religious intermarriage, conflicting values and beliefs are likely to appear, especially when religious backgrounds are highly different. The religious affiliation of children has also been discussed as a particularly likely source of marital instability (Bumpass & Sweet, 1970) as quoted in Boitel & Mirtcheva (2015). Correspondingly, according to another finding of Bumpass and Sweet (1970), among intra-religious marriages, Jewish couples had the lowest levels of instability, Protestant couples had the highest, and Catholics had intermediate levels (Boitel & Mirtcheva, 2015).

However, divorce has pervasive weakening effects on the family (Fagan & Churchill, 2012). Thus, it is one of the major troubles that affect the family system. Marriage does not only serve to satisfy the fundamental biological need of sexual gratification through a socially acceptable way but also helps the individual to achieve a higher level of personality maturation (Gottman, 1993). But, the increasing acceptance of divorce has dramatically altered the marriage situation which is acknowledged by different researchers.

The direct implication of divorce is disruption of family function to fulfill the basic social and psychological needs of its members. Divorce has psychological, economic and social impacts on the divorcees and their children. Divorce is more emotionally devastating than losing a job, equal as experiencing a major illness, and somewhat less devastating than a spouse's death. Besides, divorce involves the loss of social and economic capital as a result of the loss of household income, residential mobility and contact with the non-custodial parents (Mehari, 2013). There is a high negative influence of divorce on the life of women like in the country Ethiopia as they have had lower participation and status in education and employment. Thus, women severely affected in their overall aspects of development such as economically, psychologically, physically and socially which make the post-divorce adjustment difficult for them (Daniel, 1994).

Although studies/evidences on divorce or the dissolution of marriage have been prominent in the various literatures especially in the area of impacts of divorce, there is an existence of gaps or limitations in the determining factors of divorce and couples' intention to divorce so far. Psychosocial factors especially commitment, communication, family interference, friend interference, sexual satisfaction and economy as predictors of couples' intention to conduct divorce have been undermined, and underestimated by many researchers and researches conducted so far on the issues of assessing the predicting factors of couples' intention to divorce are limited in number, especially in Ethiopia, specifically in the present study area. In addition to, as a personal observation and experience of the current researcher, currently the divorce cases are almost high in number in courts. Thus this issue also made the present researcher more motivated to further explore the predicting factors behind the case. Therefore, in order to generate further information and contribute to knowledge on divorce facts and significant predicting factors responsible for it as to fulfill the research gaps, this current study was conducted out to examine multivariate variables (commitment, communication, family interference, friend interference, sexual satisfaction and economy) as predictors of couples' intention to divorce among couples applied to court in order to end their marriage at Dilla town.

Thus, this study addressed the following basic research questions.

1. Which of the psychosocial factors (commitment, communication, family interference, friend interference, sexual satisfaction and economy) influence couples' intention to divorce in the study area?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference regarding couples' intention towards divorce across selected socio-demographic variables among sample respondents?
3. What is the practice of intention towards divorce in Dilla town?

## 1.1. Objectives of the Study
### 1.1.1 General Objective of the Study
The general objective of this study was to examine psychosocial factors as predictors of couples' intention to divorce among couples applied to court for divorce in the study site.
### 1.1.2 Specific Objectives of the Study
More specifically, the present study was proposed:

1.  To test the influence of commitment, communication, family interference, friend interference, sexual satisfaction and economic factors on the couples' intention to divorce in the study site.
2.  To explore whether there is any statistical difference across selected socio-demographic variables (sex, age and place of origin) and couples' intention towards divorce in the study site.
3.  To explain the practice of intention towards divorce in Dilla town.

## 2. Materials and Methods
In this part of the study, the research design, study site, study population, the sample and sampling techniques, the instruments and procedures of data collection and methods of data analysis are presented as follow.

### 2.1 Population of the Study
The study was undertaken in Dilla town court in Gedeo Zone. The target population of the study was all married couples in disagreements but not divorced or widowed and age above 15 years, who able to respond to the questions in the study tools and give informed consent to participate in the research. As data secured from record office of the court reveals, the total number of individual couples applied to court for divorce from March 1, 2017 up to May 27, 2018 were 202 in number, of which 41 were males and the remaining 161 were females.

### 2.2 Sample and Sampling Techniques
The researcher used Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling determination table (as cited in Yekoyealem, 2005) to determine the sampling size and used a total of 71(64 sample) and (7 non-response rate) individual couples as participants of the study from total population by using simple random probability sampling technique through lottery method.

### 2.3 Data Collecting Methods
The data was gleaned by using self-report questionnaires that were intended to assess psychosocial factors such as commitment, communication, sexual satisfaction, family interference, friend interference and economy which can decide couples' intention to divorce. The questionnaire contains a commitment section, communication section, sexual satisfaction section, family and friend interference section and economy section towards couples' intention to divorce.

Couples rated themselves on a 5-point Likert scale from **1** – Strongly Disagree (SD) to **5** - Strongly Agree (SA). The questionnaire was developed or constructed by the researcher and the content validity of the items was checked by the present researcher before the assessment. The items were also cross checked and reviewed by measurement and evaluation experts in to test the validity.

**Table 3.1:** Cronbach's Alpha for each field of the questionnaire

| Question categories | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Intention to divorce | 12 | 0.91 |
| Commitment | 8 | 0.92 |
| Communication | 8 | 0.90 |
| Sexual satisfaction | 8 | 0.88 |
| Family interference | 8 | 0.96 |
| Friend interference | 8 | 0.93 |
| Economy | 9 | 0.89 |
| **Entire items = 61** | | **0.87** |

### 2.4 Methods of Data Analysis
After data collection, data cleaning was made to reject substantially incomplete once. Regarding quantitative data collected, the process of coding items was done that is converting responses to numbers for the data entry. In addition, organizing close ended and structured information was done to analyze the contents. Then, data entry and analysis were made using computer based software Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 20 data processing program.

During data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. As descriptive statistics percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation whereas, regarding inferential statistics part, t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression model were used to answer the aforementioned

research questions.

## 3. Results

The central purpose of this study was to assess determinants of couples' intention to divorce among couples applied to court for divorce in Dilla town. A total of 71 questionnaires were distributed across sample respondents in the study area. Of which 64 questionnaires were completed, retrieved and fully returned. The rest were not returned or fully responded as a result, the response rate was 90.1 %. In doing so, findings secured via quantitative approach presented head to head with that of qualitative approaches.

Thus, in this study, the researcher used multiple regression analysis, in which tests have been made to examine whether one or more independent variables influence the variation on dependent variable. The functional relationship between variables in this study is therefore, the intention to divorce is a function of commitment, communication, sexual satisfaction, family interference, friend interference and economic factors. However, to show how well the model containing those of six explanatory variables actually explains the variations in the dependent variable, i.e. determining factors of the intention to divorce, it is necessary to test it through goodness of fit statistic.

**Table 4.4:** Summary of linear regression coefficient of IV and DV of the study

|  | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 67.970 | 6 | 11.328 | 4.291 | .001[b] |
| Residual | 150.468 | 58 | 2.640 |  |  |
| Total | 218.38 | 64 |  |  |  |

a.  **Dependent Variable**: Intention to divorce
b.  **Predictors**: (Constant): Commitment, Communication, Sexual satisfaction, Family
    interference, Friend interference and Economic factors.

Table 4.4, summarizes the information about the variation of the dependent variable explained by the existing model used for this study and the residual that indicates the variation of the dependent variable that are not captured by the model. It is observed that the independent variables give a significant effect on the dependent variable, where F-value is 4.291 with a p-value of less than 0.05 (i.e. p<0.000) indicating that, over all, the model used for the study is significantly good enough in explaining the variation on the dependent variable.

To ensure the statistical adequacy of the model, the goodness of fit can also be measured by the square of the correlation coefficient also called $R^2$.

**Table 4.5:** Goodness of fit through R Square

| Model | R | R square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Err |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .676 | .816 | .710 | .62868 |

**Predictors**: (Constant): Commitment, Communication, Sexual satisfaction, Family interference, Friend interference and Economic factors.

As shown in the Table above, both $R^2$ and adjusted $R^2$ measure the fitness of the model i.e. they measure the proportion of the variation in dependent variable explained by the model. However, since adjusted $R^2$ is the modification for the limitation of $R^2$, the value of the adjusted $R^2$ is considered to measure the fitness of the model. Thus, the value of adjusted $R^2$ (0.71), indicates the independent variables in the model are explaining 71% variation on the dependent variable. Thus, we can understand that the model of the study is providing a good fit to the data. This outcome empirically indicates that the independent variables such as: commitment, communication, sexual satisfaction, family interference, friend interference and economic factors are the major determinants of couples' intention to divorce in the study.

Table 4.6 below shows the results of the regression model. The result reveals that, Sexual satisfaction, Family and friend interference were insignificant whereas, there is a significant relationship between commitment, communication and economic factors and the intention to divorce among the research participants.

**Table 4.6:** Regression analysis of factors related to intention to divorce

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **B** | **Std. Error** | **Beta** | | |
| **(Constant)** | **8.593** | **1.638** | | **5.247** | **.000** |
| Commitment | -1.478 | .514 | -.688 | -2.874 | **.006*** |
| Communication | 1.148 | .339 | .708 | 3.38 | **.001*** |
| Sexual Satisfaction | .361 | .373 | .199 | .968 | .337 |
| Family Interference | -.505 | .327 | .203 | -1.545 | .128 |
| Friend Interference | -.374 | .324 | -.178 | -1.155 | .253 |
| Economic factors | 1.150 | .336 | .705 | 3.36 | **.002*** |

* Refers to statistically significant results

a. *Dependent Variable: Intention to divorce*

b. *Predictors: (Constant): Commitment, Communication, Sexual satisfaction, Family interference, Friend interference and Economic factors.*

As shown in Table 4.6, of six explanatory variables tested in this study, commitment (p-value = 0.006), communication (p-value=0.001) and economic factors (p-value=0.002 were statistically significant at 5 percent or lower. The result implies that commitment, communication and economic factor are the determining factors that trigger couples' to divorce in the study. Also the key informants stated that lack of clear communication, openness and lack of fidelity, bad habits of partner, drinking of alcohol or addiction, gap of resource management, barrenness were the major determinants of couples' intention to divorce.

**Table 4.7:** Summary of independent sample t-test comparing sex of respondents and intention towards divorce

| Dependent variable | Sex | N | Mean | S.D. | S.E. | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Couples' intention towards divorce | Male | 30 | 4.7603 | 1.11398 | .11619 | 3.37 | **.013** |
| | Female | 34 | 3.4169 | 2.40057 | .16663 | | |

As revealed on Table 4.7, statistical mean differences are observed in the couples' intention towards divorce between males and females; t-test: [t (64) = 3.37, P = 0.013]. That is to say, the mean of males (M=4.7603, S.D= 1.11398) is significantly greater than that of females (M=3.4169, S.D= 2.40057). So, there is statistical mean difference in couples' intention towards divorce because of many determining factors (determinants) of divorce intention among males and females in their marriage life. The result implies that husband and wife have no equal (the same) intention or determination towards divorce.

**Table 4.8:** Summary of independent sample t-test comparing place of origin of respondents and intention towards divorce

| Dependent variable | Place of origin | N | Mean | S.D. | S.E. | T | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Couples' intention towards divorce | Rural | 21 | 6.410 | .882 | .22846 | 11.3 | **.014** |
| | Urban | 43 | 7.536 | .879 | .09981 | | |

As revealed on Table 4.8 above, statistical differences are observed in the mean score of couples' intention towards divorce between those who came from rural areas (Mean= 6.910, S.D= .882) and urban areas comers (Mean= 7.536, S.D= .879). To add, an independent t-test showed that there is statistically significant difference between both rural and urban comers: [t (64) = 11.3, P > 0.014]. This indicates that both rural and urban comers have different levels of determination (intention) towards divorce. In other words, there is statistical mean difference in couples' intention towards divorce because of place of origin among couples.

**Table 4.9:** A Summary Table of One-Way ANOVA to differences in couples' intention to divorce and age categories

| Dependent Variable | Age | Descriptive Statistics | | | DF | | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | N | Mean | S.D | B/n.G | W/n.G | | |
| Couples' intention towards divorce | 18-22 years | 22 | 4.2103 | 2.46388 | 26.745 | 690.11 | 5.082 | **.003** |
| | 23-27 years | 21 | 3.5747 | 2.82221 | | | | |
| | 28 & above | 21 | 2.2411 | .66660 | | | | |
| | **Total** | **64** | **3.4171** | **2.64686** | | | | |

P<0.05, two-tailed

As it is depicted on Table 4.9 above, there is a difference in the mean of couples' intention to divorce and age categories. That means, the mean for 18-22 years old (M = 4.21) is greater than from the mean of 23-27 years old (M =3.57) and also the mean of 28 & above years old (M =2.24) is less than from the mean of 23-27 years old (M =3.57). Cognizant of this fact, the F-ratio for the between age categories difference is significant: [F (5.082) = 26.745, P < .05]. In other words, age categories of the respondents are significant with couples'

intention to divorce. Furthermore, HSD post hoc test revealed that the p-value for couples whose age between 18-22 years and 23-27 years is 0.007, between 23-27 and 28 & above years is 0.218 and between 18-22 and 28 & above years is 0.002. This means that, the average age of couples whose age between 18-22 years and 23-27 years and couples whose age between 18-22 and 28 & above years were significantly different. However, couples whose age between 23-27 and 28 & above years were not significantly different.

**Findings from the key informants' interview for practice of divorce intention in the study town**
Key informants especially judges and prosecutors responded/informed that *"the divorce level is increasing swiftly or almost high in number from time to time, year to year in the court in the given city because of an ample amount of reasons such as infidelity, lack of clear communication(discussion with each other), private problems, low(weak) commitment, drug abuse, gap of resource management, lack of accountability and responsibility in the family, lack of children, lack of knowledge or awareness regarding marital life, etc."* Regarding developmental stages of divorcing couples, key participants stated that, *"most of couples who come to initiate divorce process in the court are youth, early adulthood and immature in their age but some are adults."* Thus, this immaturity of couples in line with their marriage is may also lead them to the divorcing process and are more likely to get divorced.

## 4.   Discussions
Divorce is one of the most devastating life situations that bring about massive life change to individuals that causes hardships and suffering regardless of who they are or what circumstances they are in. Hence, for some divorced women life turns out to be more difficult and the situation gets worse particularly if they have to support their families. Therefore, divorce disrupts the lives of people psychologically, socially, emotionally and economically. On the other hand, even if divorce is a family crisis as well as a personal one, it also results in various beneficial factors; by terminating stressful and traumatic life situations and other related problems it successfully brings opportunities for development (Tilson & Larson, 2000). As the results reveal in Table 4.6 that, of six explanatory variables tested in this study, commitment (p-value = 0.006), communication (p-value=0.001) and economic factors (p-value=0.002 were statistically significant at 5 percent or lower. Whereas, independent variables such as, sexual satisfaction, family interference and friend interference were statistically not significant. Thus, the result implies that commitment, communication and economic factor are the determining factors that trigger couples' to divorce in the study. This findings had been supported by Henry and Miller (as cited in Khan, 2013) found that values, communication, commitment, financial problems, decision-making and emotional intimacy had the strongest impact on marital satisfaction in midlife. It also consistent to findings or information obtained from key informants reveals that psychological factors such as commitment, communication, and willingness to share an opinion with each other and economical issues are the most influential determinants to lead the couples to divorce process. In sum, the present study reveals that couples' decision to divorce is affected by psychological factors such as commitment, communication, and willingness to share an opinion with each other and economical related issues among couples in study site.

In order to check whether there was difference among selected demographic variables and couples' intention towards divorce among couples; independent sample t-test for sex/gender and place of origin and one-way ANOVA for age were computed.

Thus, the results of this study indicate that there is statistical mean difference in the couples' intention towards divorce between males and females; t-test: [t (64) = 3.37, P = 0.013]. That is to say, the mean of males (M=4.7603, S.D= 1.11398) is significantly greater than that of females (M=3.4169, S.D= 2.40057). So, there is statistical mean difference in couples' intention towards divorce because of many determining factors (determinants) of divorce intention among males and females in their marriage life. There is also statistical difference observed in the mean score of couples' intention towards divorce between those who came from rural areas (Mean= 6.910, S.D= .882) and urban areas comers (Mean= 7.536, S.D= .879). To add, an independent t-test showed that there is statistically significant difference between both rural and urban comers: [t (64) = 11.3, P > 0.014]. This indicates that both rural and urban comers have different levels of decision (intention) towards divorce. In other words, there is statistical mean difference in couples' intention towards divorce because of place of origin among couples. Regarding age, a one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference in the mean of couples' intention (decision) towards divorce and age categories. That means, the mean for 18-22 years old (M = 4.21) is greater than from the mean of 23-27 years old (M =3.57) and also the mean of 28 & above years old (M =2.24) is less than from the mean of 23-27 years old (M =3.57). Cognizant of this fact, the F-ratio for the between age categories difference is significant: [F (5.082) = 26.745, P < .05]. In other words, age categories of the respondents are significant with couples' intention (decision) to divorce.

However, in the case of sex and couples' intention to divorce in line with different determinant factors, the findings of the present study seem inconsistent to findings by Akuamoah (2013), found that the proportion of female respondents who have intention to divorce were about twice (6.5%) more than the proportion of male

respondents (4.3%) in the sample study because of economical or financial dependency of majority females on males. But, in the line with age and couples' intention to divorce in line with different determinant factors, the present study seems to concise with the study conducted by Adegoke (2010) and Booth and Edwards who found out in their studies that couples who marry at early ages are more likely to divorce than those who married at later ages; the supported argument was that, at younger ages, couples lack the ability to communicate smoothly, make a commitment, bring sexual happiness, indentify social supports and take complex decisions concerning marital issues.

## 5. Conclusion

This study concluded that independent variables (commitment, communication, sexual satisfaction, family and friend's interference and economic factors) and dependent variable, i.e. couples' intention to divorce so that, commitment, communication and economic factors were able to determine couples' intention towards divorce. This indicates that there are a number of factors that determine the intention towards divorce among couples but commitment, communication and economic factors are the significant and major determinants of divorce intention among couples and move couples towards divorce.

## 6. Recommendation

The policy makers, court workers, psychologists, religious leaders, elders, couples themselves, women and children affairs bureaus, NGO's and other concerned bodies should focus on promoting healthy marital life and minimizing potential harms of marital conflicts or crises, and intention to divorce on individuals and the community at large.

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