

ANALYZING DIVORCE TRENDS CAUSES DURING AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC: A
COMPARATIVE GLOBAL AND TURKISH PERSPECTIVE¹Mehmet Meder¹Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Pamukkale, Denizli, Turkey.**Abstract**

This study examines the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath on divorce rates globally and in Turkey from a sociological perspective. The pandemic has significantly impacted family dynamics on a global scale due to social isolation, economic instability, and other factors that strain family relationships. This research, which employs quantitative and qualitative methods, comparatively analyzes data obtained from Turkey and other countries. Prominent theories in the literature (Family Systems Theory, Family Stress Model, and Ecological Systems Theory) provided a theoretical framework for the study. It clearly identified that the major causes for divorce in Turkey are economic factors, the absence of social support, and domestic violence, while in post-modernized Western countries, it is identified that individualism is stressed as the primary source. Therefore, the status of the economic and social support programs for improving family resistance during the pandemic conditions has been highlighted.

Keywords: COVID-19 Divorce trends, Family resilience, Pandemic-related divorce, Divorce in Turkey, Socio-economic factors.

I. Introduction

The year 2020, when we heard "stay at home" slogans from the beginning, was filled with extraordinary experiences for each of us. No society in modern history had ever encountered such a comprehensive crisis before. The need for working from home, children's schooling via the Internet, and the financial crisis left an indelible mark on familial life. As Prime, Wade, and Browne (2020) noted, quarantine, mandatory remote work, economic issues, and higher unemployment rates associated with the pandemic put high pressure on married couples. For instance, data from America demonstrates the severity of the problem. According to the latest data from the American Family Survey, the fact that divorce rates increased by 34% during the pandemic cannot be ignored. Of course, this is not just a simple number; it also explains people's labor, stress in the home environment, economic problems, and changes in living conditions.

Societal Impact and Family Structure

Family, one of the fundamental social structures, went through an extraordinary experience not only during the coronavirus pandemic but also after the pandemic. When evaluated in the context of Giddens's (1991) views on "late modernity," its unique pandemic process and the social consequences it produced have created a catalytic effect on the ongoing structural transformation of the family institution. Additionally, operationalization is completed with Bauman's (2000) concept of "liquid modernity," which helps us find our way in post-pandemic reality. From this perspective, changes in divorce rates worldwide and in Turkey after the pandemic have been associated with different sociocultural and economic factors.

Pre-Pandemic Trends

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, different divorce trends were observed globally. For example, divorce rates in the US, which had been declining from the 90s to the early 2010s, reached a stable level in the 2010s (Schweizer, 2020). As expected, rates were always high in countries where individual freedoms were particularly prominent, such as Scandinavian countries and England (Eurostat, 2020).

Turkish Perspective

Looking at the current data specific to Turkey, the divorce rate has increased in recent years, along with a series of factors such as urbanization and the increasing role of women in business life. According to the TURKSTAT report, the crude divorce rate, which was 1.41 per thousand in 2001, increased to 1.88 per thousand in 2019 (TURKSTAT, 2020). These factors include urbanization, rising education levels, increased female labor force participation, and individualization (Kavas & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2010).

II. Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations

We believe that examining theoretical concepts is necessary to understand the subject better and evaluate the research more comprehensively. Among these theoretical approaches, Family Systems Theory teaches us this: family is an open system consisting of interrelated subsystems, and stress in any of these subsystems can create a ripple effect on the entire family system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). From this perspective, economic instabilities and parenting obligations that increase during crisis periods such as pandemics can create stress in all family members regarding divorce risk factors (Lebow, 2020).

Family Stress Model Analysis

Another theoretical framework that we consider as the Family Stress Model explains how families cope with crises and the resources that affect this process. In this model, the impact of crises within the family depends on the family's ability and methods to handle the crisis, as well as their attitudes towards it (Hill, 1958; Patterson, 2002). While economic and emotional burdens increased during the pandemic process, divorce risk increased in some families, while in others, this process turned into a test that strengthened relationships. Additionally, it has emerged that the Family Stress Model is an appropriate explanatory model for understanding the effects of the pandemic in the field of divorce.

Extended Theoretical Framework

Ecological Systems Theory and Resilience Theory were also applied in this study. Ecological Systems Theory requires examining the extent to which various general contexts (families and their environments, institutions, cultures, communities, etc.) affect family functioning. According to Bronfenbrenner, the family is not a closed entity interacting with other environments but a structure in multiple interactions with economic factors, cultural values, and social support systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This perspective helps us understand how the macro-level effects of the COVID-19 pandemic affect micro-level dynamics for families. For example, according to data from Lebow, an economic difficulty brought by the pandemic and factors such as work-family balance disruptions have affected family conflicts (Lebow, 2020).

III. Methodology

Research Design

In this research, we aimed to examine the effects of the pandemic on divorce rates using both quantitative and qualitative methods with an inside-out approach. This study used both quantitative and qualitative research approaches that allowed us to analyze research questions from a different perspective and increased the reliability of research findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Data Analysis Framework

Quantitative data provides a general and comprehensive answer to our research questions (Glesne, 2014). Quantitative findings illustrate the usefulness of big picture envisioning and how and why of the numerical findings of the impact of the divorce pandemic from Patton (2014). Cognitive data gives valuable information, especially if one wants to look at the effects of tough economic conditions and loneliness in families at the time of divorce.

Research Limitations

Quantitative data analysis allowed us to use qualitative data as well and produce a comprehensive view of the state of divorces during the pandemic. Accordingly, there may be

some limitations in TURKSTAT data specific to Turkey due to factors that may arise in data collection processes under pandemic conditions. For example, the decrease or delay in court cases of married women who want to divorce due to restrictions taken to control the spread of COVID-19 may be reflected in the data (Şen & Bütün, 2021).

Research Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data Sources

Statistical Data

Information about divorce rates and causes specific to Turkey was compiled from TURKSTAT 2021/2022 reports (TURKSTAT, 2023). Reports and articles from OECD and WHO constituted primary source data for basic international comparisons. OECD pointed to media reports indicating that divorce rates in various countries increased by 15-25% during the COVID-19 period (OECD, 2021). From WHO, information on social effect of COVID19 shows pressure that the pandemic placed on the family systems (World Health Organization, 2021).

Academic Literature

In order to determine the factors leading to marriage dissolution, several empirical research studies and survey data analyzing the trends in divorce rates in the course of and after the pandemic process were reviewed. For example, American researchers Carlson, Petts, and Pepin (2020) examined the impact of economic problems and online time spent at home on divorce and obtained valuable findings. Results obtained from this dataset provide a general overview of the reasons that sustain divorce in countries with different levels of economic development and heterogeneous cultural values.

Sample Selection

The sample of this research consists of countries with different socioeconomic and cultural characteristics that experienced changes in divorce rates during the pandemic process, including the USA, China, Italy, and Turkey.

IV. Findings

Global Divorce Trends

Research shows that divorce rates increased in many countries during the pandemic process. As mentioned in the US study cited above, there was a significant increase in divorce applications during the pandemic period (American Family Survey, 2021). The most common reasons for this increase include economic difficulties, unemployment, pressures arising from caring for young children, and stressful new living conditions where couples were forced to spend most of their time together. According to Carlson, Petts, and Pepin (2020), the economic impact of the pandemic caused stress and created conflict between couples, leading to increased divorce demands.

Regional Analysis

Like many other countries, China also saw a sharp increase in divorce rates during the pandemic process. In regions with high population density, such as Shanghai, divorce rates increased due to COVID-19-related social isolation and economic depression; there was a high demand for divorce applications after restrictions were lifted (ThinkChina 2022). A similar pattern was observed in European countries. Particularly in Italy and Spain, divorce rates during the pandemic period are claimed to be between twenty and thirty percent (Eurostat, 2024), this situation is attributed to the stress created by isolation, financial instability, and lack of social contacts.

Cultural and Economic Factors

Therefore, when examining global divorce trends, it is seen that divorces depend on each country's culture and economy. Consequently, while high divorce rates are maintained in countries where individualistic culture is dominant, such as Scandinavian countries and the United Kingdom, lower divorce rates are seen in Southern European countries.

Table 1. Increase in Divorce Rates After Pandemic in Turkey and Worldwide (%)

Year	Turkey	USA	China	Germany
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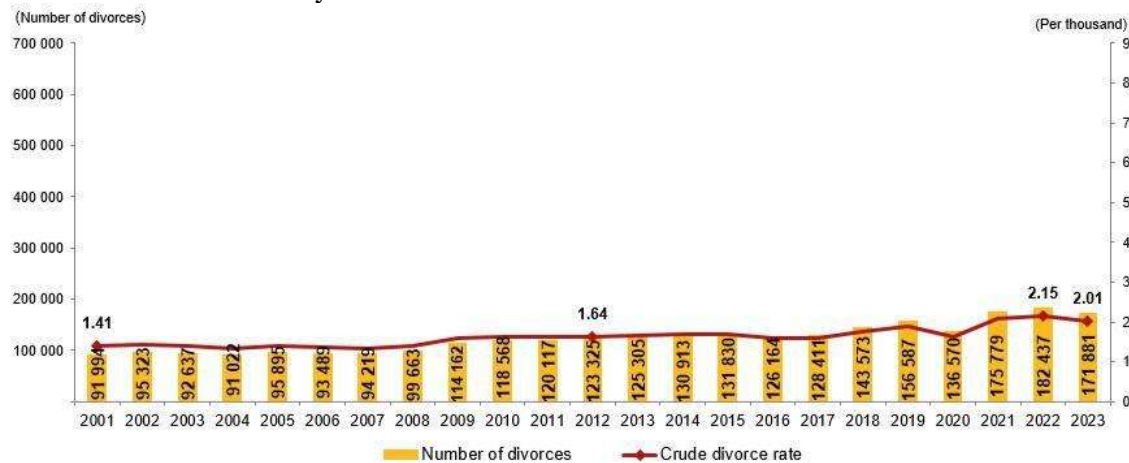
2021	12	25	20	15
2022	14	35	22	18
2023	9	28	18	10

Note. Data compiled from: TURKSTAT, 2023; Westrick-Payne, 2022; Chamadia, 2020

Pandemic Impact Analysis

Various stress factors created by the pandemic process have affected family structure to a certain extent. In survey studies, economic problems, psychological issues, financial burdens created by spending long periods together, and child-rearing responsibilities are considered the main causes of divorce. As Prime, Wade, and Browne (2020) stated in their studies, the pandemic negatively affected people's well-being, increasing aggression between couples and causing divorce rates to rise.

Divorce Trends in Turkey 6.1 Statistical Overview



According to current data from TURKSTAT (<https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Marriage-and-Divorce-Statistics-2023-53707>), we can observe the change in divorce rates in Turkey between 2018-2022. Divorce rates showed a significant increase during the pandemic period and followed a gradual stabilization as economic conditions began to improve.

Economic Factors

Increasing unemployment rates and decreasing income levels during the pandemic period in Turkey are other reasons contributing to increased divorce rates. Gündüz and Yıldız (2021) discuss that economic losses caused by the pandemic elevated stress levels among family members, leading to divorces. According to statistics provided by TURKSTAT (2023), divorce rates after the pandemic were higher in metropolitan areas compared to rural areas, and financial problems were among the fundamental factors in divorce decisions.

Socioeconomic Impact

The increasing unemployment and decreasing income levels during the pandemic period in Turkey have affected changes in divorce rates. Financial problems stand out in the divorce process, and due to these problems, low-income couples are at higher risk of divorce compared to other couples (Sahinalp, M., 2024). According to TURKSTAT's 2020 data, financial problems contribute 40% to the divorce rate. Couples already in low-income groups have become especially aware of increasing economic demands.

Regional Variations

The pandemic period emerged as a period where economic difficulties negatively affected stress levels within families. It is reported that deepening unemployment rates and livelihood difficulties in large cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir affected the increase in divorce rates during the pandemic process. In cultures where family sets high standards, such as the Turkish culture, economic factors consequently assume the roles of predictors that define divorce.

Post-Pandemic Analysis 7.1 Turkish Divorce Trends

It should be pointed out that the rates of divorce in Turkey have risen in the period after the pandemic. According to TURKSTAT data, while the number of divorces rose to 175,779 in 2021, this figure reached 180,954 in 2022 (TURKSTAT, 2023). This increase is attributed to accumulated and unresolved cases during the pandemic period and post-pandemic economic difficulties experienced by couples.

Contributing Factors

Many couples filed for divorce due to inflation increases experienced in Turkey in the post-pandemic period, rising school dropout rates and related unemployment rates, and a general decline in household income. Engin, and Demir (2022) suggested that the post-pandemic economic crisis intensified disagreements between couples, leading to higher divorce rates. The increase in domestic violence complaints in Turkey after the pandemic has caused many couples to prefer divorce (Şahinalp, Mehmet S., 2024).

Comparative Analysis 8.1 Global Trends

The results of our study show that high post-pandemic divorce rates have become a global trend observed in many countries. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Chamadia (2020) shows that the pandemic increased divorce rates between 10% and 20%. Similarly, Manning and Payne (2021) reported a 30% increase in divorce applications in the United States during the pandemic process.

Regional Variations

However, some studies have shown that divorce rates remained high or even decreased during the pandemic period in some countries. This suggests that the pandemic affected divorce rates differently in different countries. For example, González-Val and Marcén (2022) reveal that divorce rates did not increase sharply during the pandemic in some European countries. Researchers explain this situation by examining factors such as countries' socioeconomic systems and cultural beliefs.

Turkish Context

Findings related to Turkey show a similar trend to those in other national studies. For example, empirical data obtained by Sahinalp, M. (2022) shows that divorces increased between 20% and 25% in Turkey during the pandemic process. Additionally, research found that financial distress and pressure experienced within the family due to COVID-19 caused more divorces in Turkey.

V. Discussion**Theoretical Framework Analysis**

With the data obtained from this study, we see that the assumptions of the Family Systems Theory and Family Stress Model are valid in explaining divorce reasons during and after the pandemic period. According to the Family Systems Theory, as suggested by Kerr and Bowen (1988), the scaled amount of interaction between a family and all its subsystems is reciprocal. When evaluating pandemic effects, authors have defined this as a factor affecting family stress levels, especially the marriage subsystem, and increasing the probability of divorce. The results revealed the conclusion reached by the Family Systems Theory and proved its suitability for pandemic application.

Stress Model Implications

Second is the Family Stress Model, which emphasizes how much capacity families have to manage these crises and their abilities to cope with stress (Patterson, 2002). Research using this model shows that the stress burden on families increased due to economic restrictions and objectification triggered by the pandemic situation. When economic problems, parenting responsibilities, or couple disagreements and differences hindered family participation and interdependence, divorce possibilities emerged (Lebow, 2020; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2021). However, it has been noted that some families managed to manage this period as a crisis; this situation again points to the use of resilience resources mentioned in the Family Stress Model.

Cultural and Economic Factors

Finally, we also determine how the pandemic's impact on divorce varies across socioeconomic status and culture. While financial problems, inadequate social support, and traditional family model deterrents stand out as fundamental features in Turkey, individualization and economic liberation in the West are among the factors that facilitate divorce. Thus, while literature analysis identifies the main reason for making divorce decisions in Turkey as the combined effects of economic crisis and social pressures, it has revealed that factors such as flexibility of norms and the presence of state support make divorce decisions easier in Western countries.

VI. Conclusion

The COVID- 19 pandemic has left profound and lasting effects on the family structures of modern societies. In this study, changes in divorce rates during and after the pandemic period in Turkey and different countries were addressed with a comparative approach. Results revealed that economic factors and lack of social support affected divorce trends in Turkey differently than in Western countries. While individualization and liberalized family structures in the West made divorce an easier solution, economic crises, and cultural norms in Turkey increased families' stress burden but kept divorce rates at relatively lower levels.

Policy Implications

The pandemic again proves the need for state initiatives and social protection measures. Improved economic and psychological supports are required to enhance the families' ability to deal with adversities where psychological support remains extremely small such as in Turkish case. However, the introduction of policies on how to discourage domestic violence and enhance public sensitization could go a long way in curtailing divorce incidences.

Future Directions

The findings of this study point to the necessity of comprehensive and sustainable social policies to create more resilient family structures in the face of similar crises in the future. This study has also enabled us to formulate recommendations for the post-pandemic period. Accordingly, we think that the recommendations we will give below are necessary for conducting this or a similar process healthily and for ensuring that society and family health are at least not affected too much.

VII. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are presented to reduce divorce rates and protect family structure during and after the pandemic period:

Economic Support Programs

Strengthening economic support programs is crucial, especially increasing in the economic struggles of the pandemic period for cases of divorce. As such, programs of state subsidies and aids during periods of economic hardships are of definite value to families; unemployment compensation and rent subsidies. These kinds of programs are helpful, particularly in areas that do not avail sufficient financial backing, such as Turkey; they relieve families from heavy costs and help to diminish the rates of divorce.

Psychological Support Services

Expanding psychological counseling and family therapy services is essential. It is remembered that many relationships came under stress and experienced conflicts during the COVID-19 process. Increasing access to psychological counseling and family therapy should help establish healthier family communication and discourage divorce decisions. Such services provided by the state at lower cost or sometimes free can help prevent conflicts arising from family unity disruption by enabling couples to receive this support.

Domestic Violence Prevention

Strengthening policies against domestic violence is crucial. The presence of children is still a factor in lowering the divorce rate, as well as increased rates of domestic violence

during the COVID- 19 pandemic. The enhancement of legal standards against women's rights violations in their own homes and the increase of social support for women in that process can lead to a decrease in domestic violence and divorce.

Social Awareness Initiatives

Conducting awareness studies on the importance of family unity in society through education and media can help develop social solidarity and maintain better family relationships during crisis periods. Education and awareness studies emphasizing the role of family and family communication in society can help couples maintain better and healthier relationships during crisis periods. In this sense, education and awareness studies conducted, especially through media and education, can help develop social solidarity.

Future Policy Development

In addition to these recommendations, developing policies aimed at protecting family structure in the post-pandemic process and producing supportive solutions to problems faced by couples will be beneficial. The findings of the general study indicate that the state needs to involve itself in the process to strengthen family resources during crisis periods like pandemics.

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