

# Analyzing the Phenomenon of Divorce from the Perspective of Expert Family Therapists: A Grounded Theory Sample

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the phenomenon of divorce from the perspective of expert family therapists.

**Method:** The research method was qualitative, based on grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). The research setting included all family therapists in the city of Isfahan in the year 2024, and the participants consisted of ten of the most prominent therapists who were purposefully selected. The research tool was interviews conducted in the form of focus groups. The collected data were analyzed using Charmaz's (2014) method: first, coding was carried out, followed by conceptualization. Then, during the process of integration, categories were extracted, and finally, the core categories were identified and the theory was formed.

**Results:** The results indicated that the phenomenon of divorce includes three main categories: (1) the reasons behind the occurrence of divorce: the activators of divorce causes, with categories such as changes in cultural and social structures and the prioritization of individuality over couplehood; (2) the nature of divorce causes: causes of divorce categorized as changes in family roles and authority, poor spouse selection, inappropriate communication, and individual problems; and (3) the process through which the causes interconnect: integrators of divorce causes (disturbance-power, disturbance-intimacy, and boundary disturbances).

**Conclusion:** Based on the findings, this study suggests that in order to reduce divorce, the activators of divorce cannot be ignored, as they render society more prone to facilitating the grounds for divorce rather than preserving family stability. Additionally, the identified causes of divorce indicate that many revolve around the philosophy of individualism. Therefore, society and societal discourse must reinforce the value of collectivism so that this value can function as a socio-psychological superstructure acting as a barrier to divorce.

**Keywords:** divorce, family therapists, experts, grounded theory.

## 1. Introduction

The family is the most fundamental social institution, initially intended to provide a secure environment for spouses and subsequently for their children so that, under the shelter of the psychological safety it offers, individuals may attain growth and development and raise healthy, effective children for society. However, today, this small institution faces significant challenges and diverse harms, both in its formation and in its preservation and continuity. These harms can create the groundwork for marital conflict and intensify it to such an extent that a marital life that begins with hope and love between the spouses ends in hatred and aversion, inflicting a severe psychological blow on the mental health of both the spouses and their children (Becvar et al., 2023; Boss, 2024).

Divorce represents the disintegration of the most important institution in human society, occurring at the hands of the very individuals who form and sustain the family. Although it is not a new phenomenon, its alarming prevalence today poses a major concern for those responsible for family affairs. Various factors contribute to the emergence of divorce, but it is more often a voluntary choice than an absolute necessity. In previous years, divorce was regarded as the last possible resort, considered only after all other avenues for improving marital life and resolving conflicts had failed. However, it is now increasingly viewed as the first solution to marital problems and conflicts (Alizadeh Akbari & Garzin Motaii, 2024; Cabilar & Yilmaz, 2022; Khatibi & Ali Khanipour, 2022; Moradi & Mirzaei, 2023; Soltanian et al., 2023).

In any case, divorce indicates that the family system was dysfunctional, weak, and disordered—one in which negative and unbalanced processes impeded the effective functioning of its members (Alavi et al., 2018). In a dysfunctional family system, members fail to communicate effectively, there is an emphasis on individual rather than spousal needs, coping mechanisms tend to be avoidant or emotion-focused, and members are unable to engage in constructive dialogue with one another (Cabilar & Yilmaz, 2022). Furthermore, one member may be prioritized over others, or some members may be neglected. Together, these factors result in a family that is unstable or inflexible, incapable of successfully navigating the challenges of life, ultimately descending into chaos (Abolhassan Tanhai & Aghajani Beigi, 2021).

Various family therapy theories have sought to explain family dysfunction and, ultimately, the occurrence of divorce by identifying specific familial impairments. For

example, psychodynamic theories emphasize insecure attachments, maladaptive defense mechanisms, dysfunctional family legacies, anxiety-inducing emotional systems, and intergenerational transmission. Systemic theories focus on ineffective communication systems, lack of power hierarchies, hidden family rules, maladaptive ways of handling couple conflicts such as triangulation and collusion, contradictory communication messages, and failure to perform family roles—all of which are regarded as contributors to divorce (Becvar et al., 2023). Ultimately, the survival and continuity of the family depend on effective structures, flexible boundaries, a functioning power hierarchy, self-differentiation ability, awareness of past intergenerational dysfunctional rules, and the ability to adapt to current circumstances. From a sociological perspective, social exchange theory also suggests that personal benefit and a combination of economic and psychological needs are essential for the family's survival. If the balance between these elements is disturbed and individual interests dominate collective interests, the family begins to disintegrate (Boss, 2024). Additionally, studies have indicated that if a family fails to adhere to the timing and sequencing of events and deviates from familial norms, it will eventually collapse (Khayyat Ghiyasi et al., 2010).

To date, numerous studies have explored the causes of divorce within the context of Iranian society. For example, Abazari and Barati Ahmadabadi (2017) demonstrated that emotional divorce mediates the relationship between psychological and sexual divorce (Abazari & Barati Ahmadabadi, 2017). Shahriari and Navah (2022) identified the normalization of love, shifting desires in fantasies, the emergence of dual love, self-directed fantasies, and the transition to hegemonic femininity as contributing factors (Shahriari & Navah, 2022). Balali et al. (2019) listed inadequate knowledge, emotional and impulsive decision-making, lack of interest, and lack of attractiveness as key factors (Balali et al., 2019). Ghorayshi et al. (2014), in a study conducted in the city of Saqqez, identified three categories of factors—situational, interactive, and consequential—as important in the formation of divorce (Ghorayshi et al., 2014). Moradi and Mirzaei (2023) found that divorce seekers perceive divorce in three ways: a path to liberation, an endpoint, and a form of realistic acceptance (Moradi & Mirzaei, 2023). Khatibi and Ali Khanipour (2022) argued that pleasant perceptions of post-divorce events significantly influence the initiation and formation of divorce (Khatibi & Ali Khanipour, 2022). Dehghani and Yousefi (2019) demonstrated that personality traits and the

way individuals spend their leisure time also play roles in the emergence of divorce (Dehghani Sheshdehd & Yousefi, 2019).

Nevertheless, as of the writing of this manuscript, no published article based on grounded theory has investigated the causes of divorce in the city of Isfahan, according to a review of academic databases. Such a theory could not only identify the causes of divorce but also illuminate its underlying mechanisms. In other words, it could explain why these causes arise and, ultimately, what processes integrate these causes into a unified force that results in divorce—thus clarifying the nature of these processes. Furthermore, this theory could organize the insights and experiences of family therapists, transforming this valuable scientific and experiential knowledge into an academic document. Therefore, such a theory could raise numerous questions in this field related to divorce prevention and family improvement. Accordingly, this study pursued this objective using the qualitative research tradition and Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory method to examine the phenomenon of divorce in the city of Isfahan from the perspective of expert family therapists. What is this phenomenon?

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study was conducted on the perspectives of expert family therapists in the city of Isfahan to explain the phenomenon of divorce from the viewpoint of this group, within the framework of social constructivism. The exploratory nature of the research emphasized participants' perceptions (expert family therapists) and the kind of

information that could clarify the reasons for the occurrence of divorce. It was assumed that family therapists, due to their clinical experiences with divorce-seeking individuals, are aware of a set of multiple realities influenced by family, social, economic contexts, and other belief systems that can contribute to divorce. This study aimed to explore the underlying mechanisms of this psychological, familial, and social event by closely examining these experiences.

To achieve this aim, the constructivist grounded theory method developed by Charmaz (2014) was employed. The core of this model lies in accepting subjectivity and acknowledging the active role of the researcher in constructing and interpreting data through a dynamic process with participants and the data. In other words, the researcher is not an objective and independent observer but rather a part of the reality co-constructed in the research process. It should be noted that the participating family therapists were key informants in this study, who allowed their experiences regarding divorce and its causes to be extracted through interviews.

For this purpose, the researcher used purposive homogeneous sampling. Accordingly, based on entry criteria, the researcher sought family therapists reputed for their knowledge and expertise in the field or for teaching family therapy. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were as follows: at least five years of experience in practicing or teaching family therapy (or both); endorsement by two qualified psychology professionals as experts; willingness to participate in interviews; and willingness to provide detailed answers. Exclusion criteria included lack of interest in the field of divorce and inability to recall responses based on knowledge and experience.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Participant Characteristics*

Code	Age	Education	Occupation	Number of Children
1	42	PhD	Family Therapist	10
2	40	PhD	Family Therapist	10
3	47	PhD	Family Therapist	8
4	50	PhD	Family Therapist	20
5	43	PhD	Welfare Organization Employee	17
6	44	PhD	Welfare Organization Employee	12
7	49	PhD	Educational Consultant	24
8	40	PhD	Educational Consultant	24
9	50	PhD	Educational Consultant	23
10	53	PhD	University Faculty	22
11	55	PhD	University Faculty	22
12	60	PhD	Ministry of Education Employee	21

## 2.2. Instrument

To collect data, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and follow-up probes were used to encourage participants to share in-depth experiences. The interviews were conducted in the form of a focus group. All selected experts were invited to a single session in which they provided their expert views on the interview questions and engaged in discussion. With consent, their voices were recorded. The interview questions were designed in a coherent structure in consultation with academic advisors. Interviews began with broad and open questions focusing on their perceptions of divorce. Throughout the interview, probing questions (e.g., “Can you elaborate on that?” or “Could you clarify your point?”) were used to obtain more meaningful data. The interview session lasted four hours, including a break. The interview location was pre-arranged with participants and held at the Isfahan Welfare Organization. After obtaining informed consent and explaining the study’s purpose, the researcher assured participants that the information provided and their identities would remain strictly confidential and that integrity in reporting interview content would be maintained. Participants were also assured that the recorded conversations would be deleted after data analysis was complete.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in the following stages:

According to Charmaz, the interviews were first reviewed line by line and coded. The goal at this stage was to produce short, data-near, and abstract codes. The second stage involved axial coding, where initial codes from each interview were grouped, and those with high analytical value were identified. Codes that appeared frequently and were more relevant to the research questions were prioritized. The aim of this stage was to generate theoretical categories by synthesizing and analyzing broader units within a conceptual

framework. The inductive nature of the constructivist grounded theory approach emerged at this point, allowing constant comparative analysis across participants’ responses to facilitate validation and comparison of generated data. Through integrating multiple layers of meaning and action, axial codes with high conceptual value were promoted to the level of categories. As the categories formed, the analysis moved toward conceptual abstraction. According to Charmaz (2014), this stage involved identifying and linking common themes and patterns. By the end of this stage, the conceptual categories had been extracted.

After analyzing the data and completing the conceptual categories, the researchers conducted a second review of the literature, enabling them to develop their categories and theory based on the results and existing theories.

To ensure the validity of the findings, after the final interpretation of the data, several participants reviewed and confirmed the final results. Additionally, a family therapy specialist and faculty member outside the research team who had expertise in qualitative research supervised the entire process—from data collection to analysis and interpretation—and confirmed the research’s methodological integrity. Another criterion for evaluating the trustworthiness of the findings was the transferability of extracted concepts, ensuring they could be judged externally. This was achieved through the final diagram and confirmation by three family therapy experts from both university and non-university settings. Thus, based on these approaches, triangulation was performed in three ways, and the study’s rigor was confirmed.

## 3. Findings and Results

The findings addressed the central research question: What dimensions characterize the phenomenon of divorce? The results of the grounded theory analysis using Charmaz’s method (2014) revealed that this theory explains three dimensions of the phenomenon of divorce:

**Table 2**

*Dimensions, Categories, and Axial Codes of the Grounded Theory on the Causes of Divorce*

Theoretical Category	Category	Axial Codes (Conceptual Codes)
Activators (How) of the Causes of Divorce	Changes in Cultural and Social Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formation of premarital intimate relationships</li> <li>- Acceptance of cross-gender friendships before marriage</li> <li>- Mismatch between youths’ expectations and socioeconomic conditions</li> <li>- Prioritizing education and career over family</li> <li>- Changing views toward starting and maintaining family life</li> <li>- Viewing divorce as an effective coping strategy</li> <li>- Shifting from family-oriented to individualistic values</li> </ul>



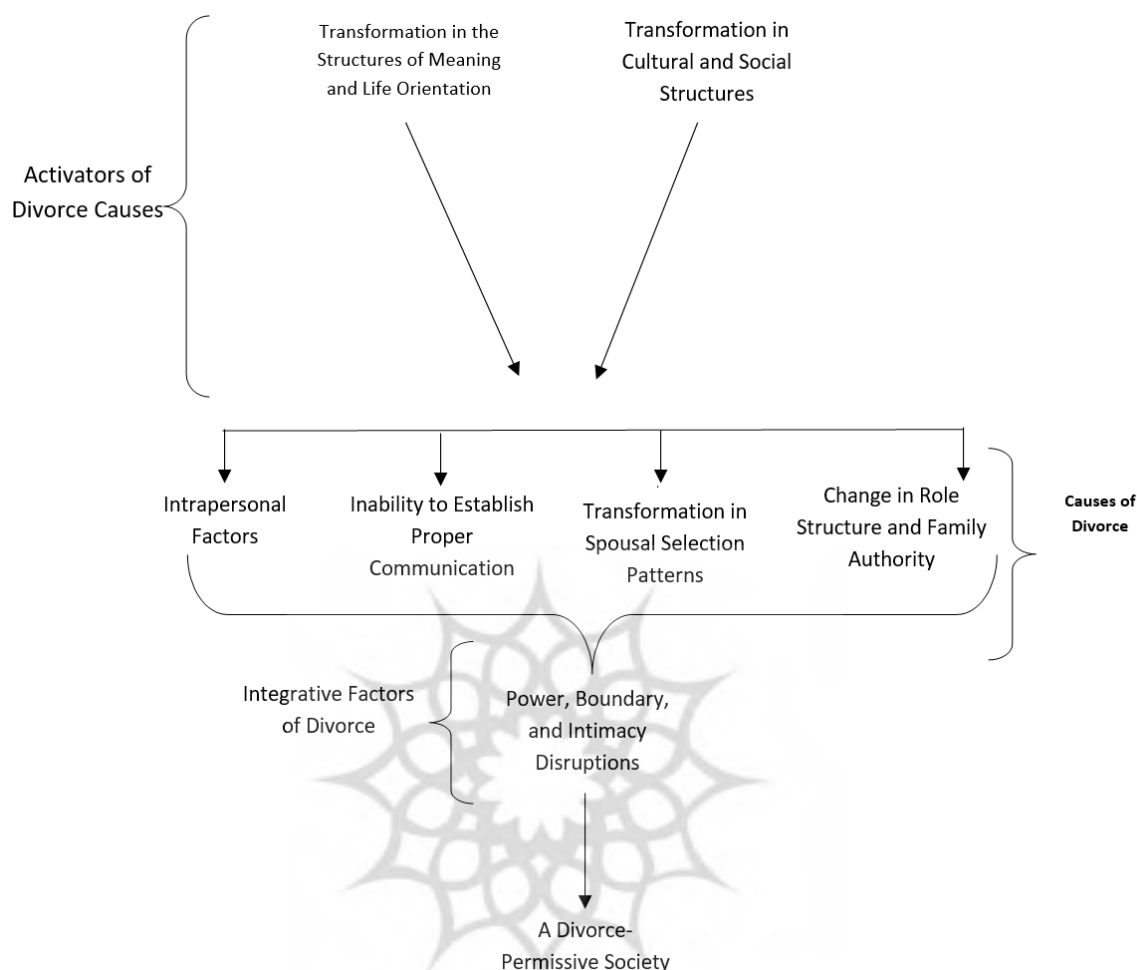
Nature (What) of the Causes of Divorce	Individualism Over Couplehood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prioritizing personal development</li> <li>- Inability to sustain long-term relationships</li> <li>- Inability to compromise with others</li> <li>- Viewing couplehood as a means for individuality</li> <li>- Valuing personal development over physical connection</li> <li>- Conflicting personal and family goals</li> <li>- Viewing family as a tool for success</li> <li>- Seeking individual pleasures over shared family experiences</li> <li>- Decline in childbearing priority</li> <li>- Lack of foresight about divorce outcomes</li> </ul>
	Weak Marital Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotionally driven spouse selection</li> <li>- Choosing a partner without family approval</li> <li>- Disregarding traditional marital safeguards</li> <li>- New laws and terms easing divorce</li> <li>- Emotion-based early relationship management</li> <li>- Poor partner assessment</li> <li>- Marrying without acceptance of long-term commitments</li> </ul>
	Changes in Family Structure and Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rejection of gendered roles</li> <li>- Failure to meet life cycle duties</li> <li>- Poor synchronization in family responsibilities</li> <li>- Lack of mutual service between partners</li> <li>- Inability to share or accept power</li> <li>- Power imbalances</li> <li>- Childlessness for various reasons</li> <li>- Conflicting expectations threatening family authority</li> </ul>
	Inadequate Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coalition against the spouse</li> <li>- Infidelity</li> <li>- Prioritizing others over the spouse</li> <li>- Triangulation to reduce anxiety</li> <li>- Poor balance of enmeshment and detachment</li> <li>- Weak individual skills</li> <li>- Ethical deficiencies</li> <li>- Dismissing extramarital relationships</li> <li>- Poor relationship with in-laws</li> </ul>
	Individual Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Behavioral and non-behavioral addictions</li> <li>- Insecure attachment</li> <li>- Irresponsibility</li> <li>- Excessive entitlement</li> <li>- Inflexibility in preferences</li> <li>- Lack of gratitude, compassion, and empathy</li> <li>- Unpreparedness for family duties</li> </ul>
Integrating Factors (How the Causes Connect)	Power Disruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Power struggles</li> <li>- Inability to prevent external interference</li> </ul>
	Boundary Disruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not recognizing each other as experts in specific matters</li> <li>- Using control tactics</li> <li>- Disregarding expert counseling</li> <li>- Living with no privacy ("glass house")</li> <li>- Family/friend interference</li> <li>- Avoidance instead of problem-solving</li> <li>- Rigid boundaries</li> <li>- Prioritizing education/career over relationship</li> </ul>
	Intimacy Disruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of self-disclosure</li> <li>- Emotionally anxious atmosphere</li> <li>- Ignoring physical and emotional needs</li> <li>- Disrespecting sensitivities</li> <li>- Breach of confidentiality</li> <li>- Loss of shared interests</li> <li>- Growing differences</li> <li>- Focus on flaws</li> <li>- Hatred coupled with hope for a better future</li> </ul>

As presented in Table 2, the grounded theory of the phenomenon of divorce from the perspective of expert family therapists consists of three main categories: (1) Reasons Behind the Causes of Divorce—the activators, with subcategories including changes in cultural and social structures and individualism over couplehood; (2) Nature of the Causes of Divorce—with subcategories including

changes in family roles and authority, weak marital foundations, inadequate communication, and individual issues; and (3) Process of Divorce Formation—the integrators of causes, including power disruption, intimacy disruption, and boundary disruption. The following sections explain each dimension and its subcategories in detail.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Model of the Causes of Divorce*



The theoretical category “*Reasons Behind the Causes of Divorce*” refers to the activators of divorce causes. This was one of the core categories in the grounded theory, indicating that before the actual causes of divorce occur, a contextual background is formed that facilitates the emergence and development of these causes. This dimension included two subcategories. The first was “*Changes in Cultural and Social Structures*”, which showed that shifts in societal and cultural norms have enabled the causes of divorce to surface and flourish. While in the past, cultural norms stigmatized divorce, contemporary culture increasingly accepts it as a legitimate and natural event. One family therapist stated: “The shift in values plays a major role in preparing the ground for divorce. For example, it’s common to hear advice like ‘enjoy the moment’ instead of valuing foresight. Everyone now thinks it’s all about immediate pleasure. Whatever happens in the future doesn’t matter; being happy

now is the only thing that counts. This value system encourages hedonism.”

The second subcategory was “*Individualism Over Couplehood*”, indicating that today, personal growth and self-development are often considered more important by young people than having a spouse or family. When individuals value couplehood, they are willing to forgo some of their individual desires to preserve the marital relationship. In contrast, in the individualism mindset, even if someone marries or seeks marriage, it is often seen as a vehicle for achieving personal growth. In this regard, a family therapist explained: “Their own goals and self-interest are so important to them that their behavior communicates: ‘I want you for myself and my goals. If you align with me, we can continue; otherwise, we part ways.’”

The second theoretical category was “*The Nature of the Causes of Divorce*,” which included four subcategories. The first was “*Changes in Family Structure and Authority*,”

showing that over recent years, there has been a general decline in the authority and importance of the family unit. Unlike wealth, fame, scientific advancement, and personal achievements, the family no longer holds a central position in society. Marriages are increasingly delayed into late adulthood or early middle age—a stage in life when childbearing becomes challenging. Children, who can bring shared goals, joy, sorrow, and deeper connection between spouses, are increasingly being excluded. As one family therapist stated: “Nowadays, some people even make it a condition before marriage that they don’t want children. I’ve seen this be a major predictor of divorce. When someone doesn’t want to have children, it often means they don’t want to invest in the power of the family. In contrast, the desire for children indicates a willingness to continue the relationship—it shows planning and purpose.”

Another subcategory in this dimension was “*Inability to Establish Healthy Communication*,” indicating that couples often lack the knowledge and skills needed to form and maintain effective communication. A family therapist noted: “Many people think communication skills just mean assertiveness, conflict resolution, or saying no. Yes, those skills are necessary—but not sufficient. It’s more about how and when to apply them in family settings. More importantly, it’s about having ethical foundations for communication. Those virtues enable healthy interactions.” Another therapist added: “Good relationships start with self-sacrifice, not self-interest or entitlement. Some couples try to use communication skills for personal gain instead of family benefit. That’s what leads to triangulation and even infidelity in families.”

Another subcategory was “*Intrapersonal Problems*,” which highlighted personal traits and behaviors that pose a serious risk to marital stability and increase the likelihood of divorce. These issues included maladaptive personality traits and behaviors. One therapist remarked: “Family life requires a certain level of self-mastery. You need to be able to avoid some behaviors and engage in others. For example, any kind of addiction is dangerous. Insecure attachment makes spouses overly controlling, creating an anxious and unsafe atmosphere. Or when someone lacks gratitude, constantly complains, or is overly critical, the family becomes a place of tension instead of comfort.”

The third major theoretical category was “*How the Causes of Divorce Occur*,” which refers to the integrating factors that unify the previously separate causes of divorce into a single trajectory leading to marital dissolution. These integrators push families to the brink of chaos and collapse,

culminating in divorce. One subcategory was “*Power Disruption*,” which demonstrated that the causes of divorce prevent the establishment of clear hierarchies and balanced power dynamics. Power struggles escalate, and couples struggle to manage external interference. A therapist explained: “As marital conflicts rise and triangulation occurs, one or both spouses can no longer prevent outsiders from interfering in their relationship.”

Another subcategory was “*Boundary Disruption*,” indicating that divorce-related causes disturb previously flexible boundaries, pushing them toward chaos or rigidity. This renders family interaction rules ineffective. One therapist explained: “Anxious spouses often initiate triangulation, which leads to boundary disruption. Secrets are no longer kept, and communication problems become difficult to resolve. Issues like infidelity and forming alliances against a partner or even against their child arise. These dynamics create boundary crises, making it much harder to resolve marital issues.”

The final subcategory was “*Intimacy Disruption*,” where instead of experiencing love and connection, couples grow to hate and avoid one another. Divorce-related causes foster negative emotions more than positive ones in the relationship. A therapist stated: “Marital conflicts that create the causes of divorce highlight differences, reduce similarities, and increase emotional sensitivity. Couples stop experiencing mutual joy and instead get stuck in negativity.”

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the phenomenon of divorce using the grounded theory method based on the insights of expert family therapists. Ten expert family therapists participated in the study, and their perspectives were analyzed using Charmaz’s grounded theory methodology. The results revealed three major dimensions of the grounded theory: divorce activators, the causes of divorce, and integrative factors that combine these causes into a final outcome—divorce.

In terms of alignment and divergence with other studies, to date, no research has specifically employed grounded theory to examine the causes of divorce, making direct comparisons difficult. However, several prior studies have addressed divorce causes individually. For instance, Abazari and Barati Ahmadabadi (2017) found that emotional divorce mediates the relationship between psychological and sexual divorce (Abazari & Barati Ahmadabadi, 2017). Shahriari and Navah (2022) identified factors such as the routinization

of love, shifts in desire and fantasy, the emergence of dual love and self-centered fantasies, and transitions toward hegemonic femininity (Shahriari & Navah, 2022). Balali et al. (2019) cited poor cognitive awareness, emotional and immature decisions, lack of attraction, and disinterest as key contributors (Balali et al., 2019). Ghorayshi et al. (2014) categorized divorce causes in the city of Saqqez into conditional, interactive, and consequential dimensions (Ghorayshi et al., 2014). Moradi and Mirzaei (2023) classified divorce meanings among applicants into liberation, endpoint, and realistic acceptance (Moradi & Mirzaei, 2023). Khatibi and Khanipour (2022) pointed to idealized post-divorce expectations as contributing to divorce formation (Khatibi & Ali Khanipour, 2022). Dehghani and Yousefi (2019) highlighted personality traits and leisure activities as influential factors (Dehghani Sheshdehd & Yousefi, 2019).

Interpreting these findings, the first category—Reasons Behind the Causes of Divorce, or activators—reveals that the causes of divorce stem from deeper signifiers embedded in powerful social discourses. This dimension comprised two categories: Changes in Cultural and Social Structures, with codes such as acceptance of cross-gender friendships before marriage, mismatch between youth expectations and socio-economic realities, prioritizing education and career over family, altered perceptions of marriage, and viewing divorce as a legitimate coping mechanism. Family therapists believed that such behaviors, endorsed by modern and postmodern societies, facilitate the pathway to divorce. Research suggests that the mediating mechanism here is a shift toward hedonism, ease-seeking, and romantic idealism (Firdaus et al., 2021), replacing family values with pleasure-centered ideals (Mączka, 2021), thus predisposing society to divorce even before marriage (Abolhassan Tanhai & Aghajani Beigi, 2021).

The second category under activators was Individualism Over Couplehood, with conceptual codes such as the replacement of family values with individual values, prioritizing personal growth, inability to tolerate others long-term, unwillingness to forgive partners or family, viewing marriage as a path to self-fulfillment, goal conflicts between personal and family values, and declining interest in childbearing. These codes indicate that a shift from collectivist to individualist values leads individuals to treat marriage and family as secondary to personal desires and ambitions (Ogihara, 2017). In this mindset, collectivist values endure only if they serve individualist goals (Alexy,

2020), enabling a culture that supports divorce-prone decisions (Allen & Hawkins, 2017).

The second major dimension of the grounded theory was the Causes of Divorce, which emerged from the activators. It included four categories:

Weak Marital Foundations, with codes such as emotional partner selection, lack of family approval, neglect of protective traditions, new laws and conditions easing divorce, emotional mismanagement in early stages, and failure to grasp long-term marital responsibilities. These reflect cognitive, behavioral, or emotional errors in initial partner selection, which weaken marital foundations and ultimately become root causes for separation (Bahonar et al., 2020). Faulty initial selection reflects poor decision-making capacity, impulse control, and emotional regulation (Kavehei Sedeh et al., 2022), as well as personality traits that impair accurate perception of others (Alizadeh Akbari & Garzin Motaii, 2024). Immature partner selection may also signal emotional immaturity (Mansournejad et al., 2013). Therapists did not treat this solely as an individual issue but as a socioculturally shaped phenomenon.

Changes in Family Structure and Authority, indicating that the family, in its current form, lacks the influence and authority it once had. Codes included rejection of gendered roles, failure to meet developmental tasks, temporal-functional mismatch in responsibilities, lack of reciprocal support, unbalanced power dynamics, voluntary childlessness, and expectations that conflict with family preservation. These suggest that internal dynamics are increasingly in opposition to family survival. Preserving authority thus requires acceptance of gender roles, generational progression, increased shared responsibilities through childbearing, and reduced conflicting expectations (Padash et al., 2022).

Inadequate Communication, emphasizing the central role of communication in family stability. When the family's communication system is dysfunctional, conflict rather than cohesion dominates. Codes included alliance against the spouse, infidelity, prioritizing others over the spouse, triangulation, imbalance between enmeshment and detachment, lack of personal and ethical skills, downplaying extramarital contact, and poor relationships with in-laws. These highlight the centrality of communication failure in marital breakdown and its root in individual deficiencies.

Intrapersonal Problems, showing that pre-marital individual issues increase the likelihood of divorce. Codes included behavioral and non-behavioral addictions, insecure attachment, irresponsibility, entitlement, inflexibility in



adapting preferences, lack of gratitude, compassion and empathy, and poor readiness or motivation for family roles. Similar findings were supported by prior studies (Alavi et al., 2018; Kordzangeneh, 2023) which noted that intrapersonal vulnerabilities permeate marital dynamics and exacerbate relational dysfunction.

The final theoretical category was the Integrative Factors of Divorce Causes, showing that the presence of causes alone does not lead to divorce unless they are unified by integrative mechanisms. Codes included power struggles, inability to block external interference, refusal to acknowledge partner expertise, use of coercion for control, dismissal of counseling, lack of privacy ("glass house"), family and friend interference, preference for avoidance over problem-solving, rigid boundaries, prioritizing career over the spouse, lack of self-disclosure, emotionally anxious environments, neglect of psychological and physical needs, disrespect for sensitivities, violation of confidentiality, loss of shared interests, growing differences, focus on flaws, and hatred accompanied by hope for a better life. These reflect a state of power chaos, which destabilizes family boundaries, undermines intimacy, and replaces mutual responsiveness with emotional neglect (Soltanian et al., 2023). Consequently, rather than supporting each other's well-being, partners become sources of suffering (Padash et al., 2022).

This study demonstrates that, based on the grounded theory framework, divorce activators cannot be ignored in any effort to reduce divorce. These activators shape a society more oriented toward divorce than toward family preservation. Moreover, the causes of divorce are deeply embedded in an individualistic philosophy, which calls for reinforcing collectivist values in society and discourse. These values may serve as socio-psychological superstructures that act as a protective barrier against divorce.

Another key implication of the study is that in family therapy, treatment should begin from the deepest layer—the integrative factors. Some scholars suggest that the best starting point in divorce therapy is boundary regulation (Padash et al., 2022). By restructuring boundaries, power and intimacy can be restored. Consequently, issues such as triangulation, infidelity, alliances, lack of privacy, secrecy breaches, and third-party interference can be addressed. Trust between spouses improves, power struggles diminish, and positive emotions begin to replace negative ones—allowing couples to care for their families despite opposing forces.

## 5. Suggestions and Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study is that the findings were not validated by divorced men and women as a knowledgeable and directly affected population, which could have enriched the data through firsthand experiential insights. Additionally, the sample consisted solely of expert family therapists from one city, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other social or cultural contexts. The use of a single qualitative method—constructivist grounded theory—also restricts the scope of triangulation with alternative data sources or methodological approaches. Furthermore, potential biases related to participants' theoretical orientations or clinical experiences may have influenced the interpretation of divorce causes.

It is recommended that future research incorporate the perspectives of divorced individuals, both male and female, to enhance the ecological validity and contextual depth of findings. Expanding the geographic scope of the sample to include diverse regions and sociocultural backgrounds would improve the generalizability of the theoretical model. In addition, the use of mixed-methods approaches—combining qualitative and quantitative data—could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to divorce. Finally, family therapists and counselors are encouraged to apply the grounded theory model developed in this study to create targeted intervention strategies for couples at risk of divorce, particularly focusing on modifying integrative factors such as boundary regulation, power balance, and emotional intimacy.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

## Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

## Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

## Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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