



A comparative study of socio-demographic characteristics of divorced women and married women in Kano, northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Divorce remains a significant global psychosocial challenge, with particularly profound implications in developing nations. The complex interplay of socio-demographic, economic, and cultural factors contributes to marital dissolution, especially in northern Nigeria's unique social context.

Aim: To identify the differences in socio-demographic characteristics between divorced and married women in Kano, northern Nigeria, exploring factors associated with divorce.

Methods: A comparative cross-sectional study was conducted among 150 divorced women from the Association of Divorced and Widows of Kano State and 150 age-matched married women from Sayyida Khadija Islamiyya School. Participants were recruited using systematic sampling. Socio-demographic data was collected and analyzed using SPSS version 16.

Results: The mean ages of the divorced and married participants were 35.02 years (SD±13.41) and 33.63 years (SD±9.24) respectively, while the age range of the participants was 15 to 60 years. In univariate analysis, having western education less than secondary school level (O.R 1.6; 1.0 – 2.5), having Islamic education less than 4 years (O.R 3.9; 2.1 – 7.1), early age at first marriage (O.R 1.6; 1.1 – 2.5), having fewer number of living children (O.R 1.7; 1.1 – 2.7), higher amount of monthly income (O.R 2.5; 1.5 – 3.8), having young husband (O.R 2.5; 1.2 – 5.2), and having sexual satisfaction with the husband (O.R 3.5; 1.8 – 6.6) were all positively associated with a divorced status. Key distinguishing factors between divorced and married women included: lower levels of western and Islamic education, younger age at first marriage, fewer living children, higher monthly income, and lower sexual satisfaction. Multivariable analysis revealed that western education below secondary level and sexual dissatisfaction were the most significant predictors of divorce status.

Conclusions: The study highlights the complex interactions between education, age, economic status, and marital satisfaction in determining divorce risks, particularly in the context of northern Nigerian society. There is need for all relevant stakeholders to be aware of these risk factors in order to reduce the rate of divorce in northern Nigeria.

Keywords: Divorce, socio-demographic characteristics, northern Nigeria.

Introduction

Divorce continues to be a major source of psychosocial burden for couples globally. This burden continues to rise despite ordinances and laws regulating marriage. Divorce has been rated as one of the most stressful

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life events with a large general impact on the life of those who experience it.¹⁻³ It has been reported in various studies that such stress can contribute to various psychiatric illnesses like depression, anxiety, and substance dependence.⁴ Furthermore, the socioeconomic and psychosocial wellbeing of women who are divorced have become increasingly

deplorable in society. The situation is worse in developing nations with their unique social, cultural and economic milieu, which at times ignores the basic human rights of this vulnerable section of society.⁴

Some of the factors associated with increase in the rates of divorce include economic problems, education, age at marriage, infertility, sexual dissatisfaction, length of marriage, social class, residence, second marriage, and religion.⁵⁻⁷ A person's age at marriage is apparently the one factor that seems to clearly predict the chance of divorce. Schoen made a careful analysis of the 1969 registration of divorces and annulments in the state of California.⁸ The age limits were reported as 18-29 years for men, and 16-27 years for women. The results showed that persons who married at a young age are much more likely to divorce.

Other factors behind increase in the rates of divorce include economic problems, infertility, age at marriage, sexual dissatisfaction, length of engagement, length of marriage, premarital birth, race, parental divorce, social class, education, personality, psychopathology, thinking about divorce, re-marriage, and religion.⁵⁻⁷ These factors are not well-studied, particularly among the population of women in Kano, northern Nigeria. We therefore aimed to identify the differences in socio-demographic characteristics between divorced women and married women in Kano, northern Nigeria.

Materials and methods

This was a comparative cross-sectional study conducted among women in Kano, northern Nigeria. Divorced women were recruited from the facility of Association of Divorced and Widows in Kano (widows excluded), while the married women were recruited from Sayyida Khadija Islamiyya School. The Association of Divorced and Widows provides services to divorced women from Kano metropolis and the neighboring local government areas. The association has about 5247 registered members comprising divorced and widowers mainly from Kano metropolis. Sayyida Khadija Islamiyya School has about 250 students who are married and have various educational levels ranging from informal education to those with formal education (primary, secondary, and tertiary). It offers formal Islamic education and doctrines to its students irrespective of their previous academic study. The study included

women who were either divorced or married, and excluded those who were widowed. The sample size was calculated from formula for determining samples for grouped experiments with proportions and correlations as measures of interest (Fleiss formula). We recruited 150 divorced women and equal number of age-matched married women. Data was collected using Sociodemographic and divorce related factors questionnaire, GHQ-12, and Mini International Neuropsychiatric interview questionnaire. For the divorced women, a simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants that were interviewed. Having selected the participants from the divorced women, a list of married women at the comparator study site was drawn and they were selected using sampling frame and matched to the divorced women earlier selected. Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Science version 16 (SPSS version 16). Prior to the conduct of the study, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Committee of Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital before the commencement of the study (Approval number: AKTH/MAC/SUB/12A/P3/VI/1159; Date: 17th June, 2013). Updated ethical approval was obtained from Health Research Ethics Committee of the Kano state Ministry of Health (Approval Number: NHREC/17/03/2018; Date: 25th November, 2024). Informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

Results

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic distribution of the participants. The mean ages of the divorced and married participants were 35.02 years (SD±13.41) and 33.63 years (SD±9.24) respectively, while the age range of the participants was 15 to 60 years. The predominant religious affiliation of the participants was Islam, with about 9 out of every 10 participants belonging to the Hausa ethnic group. There were more employed divorced participants compared to the married in a ratio of 1 to 0.8 but employment status was not statistically significant ($p = .08$). Overall, participants who were still in marriage were statistically better educated in Western education ($p = 0.04$), and married to more men with Western education ($p < .001$). Participants with lower level of Islamic education were more likely to be divorced compared to those with higher level of Islamic education ($p < .001$). Majority of the married

participants experienced sexual satisfaction with their husbands compared to the divorced participants ($p < .001$).

Younger age at first marriage, fewer number of living children, having a husband that was young, and

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (n=300)

Variables	Marital Status		Total (%)	test statistics	P
	Divorced n (%)	Married n (%)			
Age (years)					
15-20	9 (47.4)	10 (52.6)	19 (6.3)	.20	.84
21-26	32 (52.5)	29 (47.5)	61 (20.3)		
27-32	25 (45.5)	30 (54.5)	55 (18.3)		
33-38	41 (52.6)	37 (47.4)	78 (26.0)		
39-44	23 (51.1)	22 (48.9)	45 (15.0)		
>45	20 (47.6)	22 (52.4)	42 (14.0)		
Ethnicity				0.05	.82
Hausa	140 (50.2)	139 (49.8)	279 (93)		
Others ^o	10 (47.6)	11 (52.4)	21 (7)		
Employment status				3.07	.08
Employed	71 (55.9)	56 (44.1)	127 (42)		
Unemployed	79 (45.7)	94 (54.3)	173 (58)		
Educational status					
Western				13.55	.004*
None	67 (63.8)	38 (36.2)	105 (35.0)		
Primary	37 (42.0)	51 (58.0)	88 (29.3)		
Secondary	31 (39.7)	47 (60.3)	78 (26.0)		
Tertiary	15 (51.7)	14 (48.3)	29 (9.7)		
Islamic (Years)					
NONE	3 (100.0)	0	3 (1.0)	33.20	<.001*
1-3	49 (73.1)	18 (26.9)	67 (22.3)		
4-6	98 (45.4)	118 (54.6)	216 (72.0)		
>6	0	14 (100)	14 (4.7)		
Age at first marriage (Years)				34.43	<.001*
<15	43 (81.1)	10 (18.9)	53 (17.7)		
15-21	77 (39.9)	116 (60.1)	193 (64.3)		
22-27	24 (66.7)	12 (33.3)	36 (12.0)		
28+	6 (33.3)	12 (66.7)	18 (6.0)		
Duration of Marriage (years)				.77	.68
<5 years	42 (49.4)	43 (50.6)	85 (28.3)		
5-10 years	33 (55.0)	27 (45.0)	60 (20)		
>10 years	75 (48.4)	80 (51.6)	155 (51.7)		
No of living Children				15.23	<.001*
NONE	42 (71.2)	17 (28.8)	59 (19.7)		
1-4	62 (49.2)	64 (50.8)	126 (42.0)		
>4	46 (40.0)	69 (60.0)	115 (38.3)		
Average monthly income (naira)				20.23	<.001*
<5000	71 (41.0)	102 (59.0)	173 (57.7)		
5000-9000	51 (62.2)	31 (37.8)	82 (27.3)		
10000-20000	8 (40.0)	12 (60.0)	20 (6.7)		
>20000	20 (80.0)	5 (20.0)	25 (8.3)		
Age of Husband (years)				23.83	<.001*
<30	22 (75.9)	7 (24.1)	29 (9.7)		
30-49	109 (54.2)	92 (45.8)	201 (67.0)		
50+	19 (27.1)	51 (72.9)	70 (23.3)		
Husband's Ethnicity				0.90	.34
Hausas	132 (49.1)	137 (50.9)	269 (89.7)		
Others**	18 (58.1)	13 (41.9)	31 (10.3)		
Husband's Education				7.41	<.001*
None	61 (61.0)	39 (39.0)	100 (33.3)		
Primary	10 (47.6)	11 (52.4)	21 (7.0)		
Secondary	37 (45.1)	45 (54.9)	82 (27.3)		
Tertiary	42 (43.3)	55 (56.7)	97 (32.3)		
Sexual satisfaction with Husband				15.79	<.001*
Not satisfied	42 (73.7)	15 (26.3)	57 (19.0)		
Satisfied	108 (44.4)	135 (55.6)	243 (81.0)		

test statistic † χ^2 for categorical variables and t test for continuous variables

* Statistically Significant at $p < 0.05$;

^o= Others include 3 Igbo's, 4 Yoruba's and 4 minority ethnic group;

**=Others include 5 Igbo's, 5 Yoruba's and 8 minority ethnic group

Table 2: Multivariate Analysis of Socio-demographic Variables that indicate significant difference between Divorced and married participants

Variable	Odds ratio		p
	Crude(95% C.I)	Adjusted(95% C.I)	
Western education (less than Secondary)	1.6 (1.0 - 2.5)	2.1 (1.1 - 4.1)	0.04*
Islamic education (less than 4 years)	3.9 (2.1 - 7.1)	1.7 (1.0 - 3.0)	0.07
Age at first marriage (18 years or less)	1.6 (1.1 - 2.5)	1.2 (.6 - 2.4)	0.53
Number of living children <4	1.7 (1.1 - 2.7)	1.4 (.8 - 2.5)	0.25
Average monthly income >5,000 naira	2.5 (1.5 - 3.8)	1.1 (.6 - 1.7)	0.86
Husbands age <30 years	2.5 (1.2 - 5.2)	.9 (.4 - 2.0)	0.84
Having sexual satisfaction with husband	3.5 (1.8 - 6.6)	4.0 (2.0 - 8.0)	<.001*

C.I= Confidence interval

*=statistically significant at $p < .05$

having higher average monthly income were all found to be commoner among the divorced compared to the married participants (each having $p < .001$). More of the divorced participants lived alone, and had no children at all when compared to their married counterparts.

Table 2 shows simultaneous multivariate analysis of sociodemographic variables which was done using the following variables: western education, Islamic education, age at first marriage, number of living children, average monthly income, age of husband and sexual satisfaction with husband. In univariate analysis, having western education less than secondary school level (O.R 1.6; 1.0 – 2.5), having Islamic education less than 4 years (O.R 3.9; 2.1 – 7.1), early age at first marriage (O.R 1.6; 1.1 – 2.5), having fewer number of living children (O.R 1.7; 1.1 – 2.7), higher amount of monthly income (O.R 2.5; 1.5 – 3.8), having young husband (O.R 2.5; 1.2 – 5.2), and having sexual satisfaction with the husband (O.R 3.5; 1.8 – 6.6) were all positively associated with a divorced status. After adjustment for Western Education, Islamic Education, Age at first marriage, Number of living children, Average monthly income, Age of husband and sexual satisfaction with husband, having Western education less than Secondary school (OR=2.1; 1.1 - 4.1) $p = .04$, and sexual satisfaction with husband (OR=4.0; 2.0-8.0) $p < .001$ distinguished the sociodemographic profiles of divorced and married participants.

Discussion

This study identified the the differences in socio-demographic characteristics between divorced

and married women in Kano, northern Nigeria. The most predominant ethnic group of the study is Hausa. This finding is not surprising considering that the study took place in Kano, the most populous city in Northern Nigeria.⁹ The presence of other Nigerian ethnic groups in the study is an indication of the cosmopolitan nature of Kano. This may not be unconnected with Kano being one of the major centers of commerce in Nigeria. Participants who were divorced were found to be of younger age groups compared to those who were still in marriage. Similarly, spouses of men of younger age were more likely to be divorced. This is in consonance with previous studies that demonstrated higher prevalence of divorce among younger age group.⁸ Early age of girls' marriage is common in northern part of Nigeria and highest in North-western zone.¹⁰ The Population Council Report showed that 78% of girls in North-western Nigeria were married before the age of 18 years.¹¹ Younger women may not be able to cope with the stress of marriage, nor meet their husband's expectations. On the contrary, older age at first marriage was reported to be associated with higher levels of self-arranged marriages and mutual understanding among the couples, and has been thought to be a good way of reducing divorce rates.^{11,12} Women with lower level of western and/or Islamic education were more likely to be divorced compared to those with higher levels of education. In addition, those who married husbands with low levels of education were more likely to be divorced. So higher levels of education provide the couples with better chances of reconciliation, dialogue and access to sound reasoning which will promote marital harmony and sense of responsibility within the marriage; the latter two conditions have been suggested as good antidotes for divorce.⁵⁻⁷ Divorce was more common among women with no children, or those with fewer number of children. One of the key motivators for marriage in Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular, is procreation. When couples find themselves unable to meet this goal, they may decide to break up particularly when all efforts to conceive fail. Moreover, a study by Okonofua showed that in Nigeria, women are often threatened with divorce if they are unable to conceive.¹⁴ According to Adegoke, this is so because Africans believe that "marriage without biological children is a great calamity".¹⁵ He further opined that childbearing soon after marriage is desired, and birth of a child after marriage

"signifies a degree of spousal satisfaction which is conducive to marital stability". Infertility, both primary and secondary, is a recognized risk factor for divorce.⁵⁻⁷

The current study found positive relationship between high economic status and divorce (a novel finding). Women with higher earning power would seem more likely to feel more empowered, independent of their husbands, and in some cases might be the breadwinners of the family. All these might lead to frequent quarrels that would ultimately lead to marriage breakup. More so, if she feels no obligation to decent and respectful conduct towards the husband and it is so perceived, the chances of divorce will be high.

Participants who did not have sexual satisfaction with their husbands were more likely to be divorced compared to those who felt sexually satisfied by their husbands. This is in line with previous studies that showed that sexual dissatisfaction can lead to divorce.⁵⁻⁷ In Islam, like in other religions and cultures, premarital sex is forbidden. Hence, after marriage sex becomes a priority and when the couples cannot satisfy their partners the marriage could easily end up in divorce.¹⁶

No association was found between duration of marriage and divorce. This contradicts previous studies which demonstrated higher rate of divorce at the early years of marriage.^{17,18} It is possible that those who divorced early in marriage were least represented here because they were still withdrawn and yet to overcome their emotional conflicts. More so, after such traumatic incident, they may relocate for some time.

This study did not find any association between unemployment and divorce. This contradicts previous studies that showed unemployed women were more likely to be divorced.¹⁹⁻²¹ The difference might be due to the fact that majority of the employed women in the present study were petty traders with very low level of income. Hence being employed did not offer them any advantage over their unemployed counterparts. This is similar to the 2008 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) indicating 38.6% of women in Kano to be unemployed (though reference is outdated but still valid).¹³

Conclusions: The study highlights the complex interactions between education, age, economic status, and marital satisfaction in determining divorce risks, particularly in the context of northern Nigerian

society. Socio-demographic characteristics significantly influence marital stability, with education and sexual satisfaction emerging as critical factors in marital outcomes. It is therefore important for families, social workers, mental health professionals and the policy makers to be made aware of these risk factors for divorce in order to develop strategies to reduce the high rate of divorce in northern Nigeria.

NB: No competing Interest

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