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الملتقى العلمي الوطني: ظاهرة الطلاق في المجتمع الجزائري "التحديات والحلول"

الإسم: محمد رضا. اللقب: بوقدورة.

الرتبة العلمية: طالب دكتوراه.

الشخص: علم الاجتماع الجريمة والانحراف.

الجامعة: مولود معمرى - تizi وزو.

الهاتف الشخصي: 0552746416

البريد الإلكتروني: [mohamed.ridha-bouguedoura@ummto.dz](mailto:mohamed.ridha-bouguedoura@ummto.dz)

محور المداخلة: عوامل ظهور و انتشار ظاهرة الطلاق في المجتمع الجزائري.

# Factors Behind the Spread of Divorce in Algeria

## الملخص

تُعدّ ظاهرة الطلاق من الظواهر الاجتماعية المتنامية في المجتمع الجزائري، خاصة خلال العقد الأخير، حيث تشير الإحصائيات المسجلة إلى تزايد ملحوظ يدعو إلى ضرورة التوقف عند هذه الظاهرة ودراستها بشكل عميق. وذلك بالنظر إلى ما تخلفه من آثار وتداعيات سلبية على مختلف الأصعدة الفردية والأسرية والمجتمعية. وتهدف هذه الدراسة النظرية إلى تسلیط الضوء على أبرز الأسباب الكامنة وراء تفشي ظاهرة الطلاق في الجزائر، من خلال التركيز على العوامل السوسيو-ثقافية والاقتصادية، إلى جانب بعض الجوانب القانونية ذات الصلة.

## Abstract

Recently, Algeria has faced numerous challenges across various levels of society. As a result, these challenges have had a significant impact on our social structure and the stability of society. One of the most serious social issues that we face is the phenomenon of divorce. It is a social disorder that threatens society and particularly the family as a social institution. We've tried in this theoretical research to analyze the phenomenon of divorce from a sociological perspective, focusing on the socio-cultural factors and economic challenges. All of these factors and reasons can help us better understand the phenomenon of divorce.

## Introduction

The family has long stood as a fundamental pillar in the structure of society. Recognized as the smallest organized social unit, it plays a central role across various social institutions (Fort, 1818). Because of its multifaceted functions—including reproduction, socialization, emotional support, economic contribution, regulation of sexual behavior, and the maintenance of social order—the family is often regarded as the cornerstone of social organization.

Despite its significance, the family unit is not immune to disruption. Among the most pressing challenges it faces is the rising incidence of conflict and marital dissolution, particularly through divorce. Divorce, as the formal termination of a marital relationship, not only alters personal lives but also mirrors and shapes broader social dynamics such as shifting norms, changing gender roles, economic pressures, and evolving cultural values.

In the Algerian context, the growing prevalence of divorce highlights an emerging trend with important social implications. According to data from the National Office of Statistics (ONS), the number of divorce cases increased from 62,000 in 2016 to 93,000 in 2023, with the divorce rate rising from 17.40% to 33.52% (see table). These figures signal a shift in family patterns that merits closer sociological examination. To understand the root causes of this development, it is essential to approach the phenomenon of divorce through a sociological lens—one that considers the interplay of socioeconomic conditions and cultural transformations influencing marital stability in contemporary Algeria.

❖ **Table: Divorce Trends in Algeria Over the Last Ten Years.**

year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
(in thousands) divorce cases	57461	60844	59909	62128	65637	65690	65967	66791	76201	84072	93402
Crude divorce rate (%)	1.50	1.56	1.50	1.52	1.57	1.54	1.52	1.50	1.70	1.84	2.02
Divorce rate (%)	14.81	15.75	16.23	17.42	19.32	19.80	20.92	23.47	24.20	29.44	33.52

- **divorce cases (in thousands):** The number of divorce cases is expressed in units of one thousand
- **Crude divorce rate (%) :** the number of divorces per 1,000 people in the total population in a given year.
- **Divorce rate (%) :** the percentage of marriages that end in divorce within a given period, usually one year.

❖ **Conceptual Framework of Divorce.**

○ **Legal Definition**

Divorce, as defined by Article 48 of Algerian law, is the legal dissolution of a marriage contract. It can occur at the husband's discretion, with the mutual consent of both spouses, or at the request of the wife, in accordance with the stipulations outlined in Articles 53 and 54 of this law.

○ **Sociological definition**

As we belong to the social sciences, we cannot separate phenomena from their societal context. We also need a definition from a sociological perspective. We can say that divorce is the severing of the social and biological bond between a man and a woman who form the core of a family, disrupting the foundation of their social relationships. When this bond is broken, certain relationships and obligations cease to exist, while others may remain intact. (Bouguerra, 2008). Also Divorce can be seen as a liberation from traditional family constraints. (raymond boudon, 2005).

❖ **Social theories of divorce.**

○ **Functionalist perspective :**

anything—be it a living being, a social entity, an individual, a small group, a formal organization, or an entire society—can be viewed as a system or structure. This system consists of interconnected parts, each linked to the others. Every system has essential needs that must be met ; otherwise, it will either collapse or undergo significant transformation. In this view,

the system must continually strive to maintain equilibrium, with each part performing a function that supports the stability of the whole. However, a component can also be dysfunctional, meaning it disrupts the system's balance rather than contributing to it. (naim, 2006).

According to emile durkhiem The family is one of the most important social institutions in society. (Bynder, 2015) because of the various social, psychological, and economic roles it plays within society, both in terms of social structure and human interaction.

From the perspective of functional analysis, the family can be seen as a social system that must meet specific needs to remain viable and continue fulfilling its social function. If these needs—whether emotional, economic, or social—are not met, the family is likely to experience fractures and instability, often manifesting as divorce or other forms of separation.

The functionalist theory can help us understand divorce as a form of family disorganization. By examining the structural factors that may lead couples, or one partner, to seek a divorce, we can consider both subjective and individual reasons influenced by their social environment. These factors may include economic difficulties, as well as cultural, emotional, societal, political, and religious differences. Additionally, we can explore broader structural changes, particularly those related to social change, urbanization, industrialization, and technology. It's also important to consider the role of legal systems and courts, which provide resources and facilities for those seeking a divorce. (hassan, 2015)

- **Interactionism**

emerged from the view that human behavior is shaped through the exchange of social symbols between individuals. At its core, the theory posits that the mind and the self are not innate traits but are socially constructed through interaction. This development occurs through continuous processes of communication and symbolic interpretation, whereby individuals actively present themselves to others. The symbols used in these interactions—such as language, gestures, and expressions—are rich with multiple meanings that shape how individuals perceive one another and interpret the world around them. (williams, 2013)

An individual's awareness of social norms and role expectations fosters a sense of commitment to the group they belong to, whether on an individual or societal level. Social

actors navigate these expectations in various social contexts, influenced by both societal norms and their own self-perception. Interactionism focuses on analyzing social issues, such as the central relationships that form patterns of authority, the processes of communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and the various ways people interact within families, including aspects of marriage and divorce.. (mohamed al abd alah, 2016).

- **feminism**

The feminist perspective has changed a lot, especially in criminology and deviance, similar to how feminist ideas have influenced literature, art, and politics. This view focuses on the challenges women face throughout their lives in a society where patriarchy, chivalry, and sexism are common. These social issues form a core part of the different approaches used to study various topics related to feminism. (williams, 2013) When it comes to divorce, analysts examine the effects on women and children by considering two significant differences between men and women during divorce: their financial prospects and their perceptions of their relationship with their children. The feminist critique of divorce policy, although varying in objectives, highlights how existing laws inadequately address these differences. (Carbone, 1994).

Patriarchy, or male-dominated power relations, is essential for understanding the phenomenon of divorce from a feminist perspective. This viewpoint argues that patriarchal authority prevails in society, often portraying women as domestic victims who require protection "for their own good." Consequently, women are treated as subordinate objects belonging to men. (williams, 2013)

- **Social exchange theory**

The theory of social exchange was developed in the late 1950s by George Homans and Peter Blau. This theory emerged as a response to prevalent theories such as functionalism and structuralism. Unlike these frameworks, which analyze social phenomena based on structural or functional factors, social exchange theory takes an interactionist perspective, focusing on the processes of giving and taking within social interactions. (hassan, 2015). Social actors

engage in behaviors that provide them benefits while avoiding pain. From this perspective, human life can be viewed through the lens of benefits and costs. (gharib, 2012).

In the case of spouses or couples, the success of their relationship often depends on the process of social exchange. This means considering what each partner does for the other and weighing the benefits and costs of their interactions. In other words, the healthier the social exchange—based on mutual duties and rights—the stronger the marriage and relationship will be.

- ❖ **The different factors contributing to the phenomenon of divorce in Algerian society.**

Discussing the phenomenon of divorce is a complex issue from a sociological perspective. Divorce is influenced by various factors, including cultural, economic, and social reasons. In this essay, we will explore the common causes and factors that contribute to divorce as a social phenomenon.

- ❖ **Socio-cultural factors**

- **The socio cultural difference between spouses**

Many studies indicate that cultural gaps and societal differences between couples can lead to divorce or separation, Marriage between individuals of the same social origin or class can significantly influence the success of a relationship. We can use Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus to clarify our discussion. The term "habitus" refers to the internalized aspects of class conditions and the influences they impose on individuals. To understand this concept, it's important to define the objective class—essentially, a group of individuals who share similar living conditions. These shared conditions lead to comparable influences, resulting in uniform systems of dispositions that generate similar behaviors among the members of the class (Bouraieu, 1984)., differences in culture and social perceptions between spouses from different classes often reflect deep disparities in tendencies, views, tastes, and preferences. These differences can lead to disputes and conflicts, ultimately resulting in the dissolution of the marriage. On the other hand, similarity in social origins can indicate a level of compatibility,

particularly in intellectual matters, which may contribute to a more successful marriage and help prevent divorce. (bouhafsa soumia, 2023).

A study on divorce in Algeria highlights that differences in beliefs and preferences between spouses, or between one spouse and the family of the other, are significant factors leading to divorce. This often stems from poor choices made by one partner, or in some cases, both. Consequently, conflicts and feelings of alienation tend to intensify over time, ultimately resulting in separation. (alali, 2009).

The age difference of 10 to 20 years between couples can lead to differences in values and intellectual perspectives, as they belong to different generations. This disparity can create conflicting views and perceptions of life in general. (malika, 2025)

- **Labor of women**

The fact that women now have access to education, compared to the past, has empowered them to become more aware of their rights and responsibilities. This newfound awareness has encouraged many women to step outside traditional roles as housewives and pursue opportunities to work in the labor force and contribute to their communities. (hafidha, 2024). This statement is particularly contradictory to the general mentality of men, who belong to a cultural system that imposes social norms and religious values regarding the role of women in society, especially within the family.

A study conducted on the rising divorce rate in Algerian society between 2013 and 2023 in the city of Batna shows that most divorce cases occurred among young men and women with higher educational levels, as well as among working women. During the initial stages of getting to know each other, a woman often clings to her job or position. She may hope that her husband will eventually change his mind about her career during their marriage. Unfortunately, this change rarely occurs. As a result of her insistence on maintaining her professional role, many relationships may ultimately end in divorce. In such cases, the woman often chooses to prioritize her career over submitting to traditional gender roles expected by her partner. (alkamel, 2024)

This conflict between women and men highlights the disruption of social roles, particularly regarding women, and illustrates the impact of modernity on contemporary society, along with its effect on traditional values, norms, and perceptions. Women's participation in the workforce represents a form of social liberation from the constraints of patriarchy and traditional norms.

- **Interference from relatives in marital relationships.**

Interference from family and relatives in marital affairs is one of the most significant causes of divorce. Despite the changes that have occurred within the Algerian family structure—specifically the shift from an extended family model to a nuclear model, where newlyweds establish their own home separate from their parents—family interference in marital matters still manifests in various ways (malika, 2025) :Family interference from both sides causes problems by spreading false rumors. - This leads to unrest and encourages actions against the community. - Some incite people to leave their life partners for misleading reasons and hidden motives.

This leads us to consider that Algerian individuals, as social beings, continue to have strong ties to their families when thinking about their future and personal goals. Even if they live independently, they still belong to the family structure. This connection can sometimes contribute to family-related issues, such as divorce. Couples often encounter challenges in their marriage due to a separation from their families. This struggle isn't solely about starting anew; it also involves the difficulty of letting go of established customs, traditions, and habits. These aspects are not easily changed in a short period. A husband interacts not just with his wife, but with his entire social network. This factor intertwines with housing, which is seen as one of the primary contributors to divorce. (bouhafsa soumia, 2023).

- **Role of social media**

In essence, human behavior revolves around communication, and one of the key advancements that has made communication easier is technology. It has enabled us to connect with people around the world quickly and at a low cost. Technology also aids in solving

problems and fosters interaction among individuals and various communities. However, it's important to acknowledge that technology has had both positive and negative impacts. (Idham, 2024). According to the statement by the Minister of Solidarity, Family, and Women's Affairs, the widespread use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Snapchat significantly affects family cohesion and stability. (meriem aissat, 2023).

According to a group of researchers analyzing the most common factors that can threaten intimate relationships and potentially lead to divorce, several key themes emerged. Among these were jealousy between partners and the use of social media for sexting or flirtatious interactions, as individuals often engage in romantic or suggestive conversations online due to the ease of connecting with many people, including those of the opposite sex. Additionally, the number of social media accounts a person maintains was found to influence the level of commitment in a relationship. Social media also plays a role in promoting infidelity, as it provides opportunities for partners to connect with strangers, increasing the risk of unfaithful behavior. (nathasya mohd kamal, 2023)

#### ❖ **Economic factors**

##### ○ **The Impact of Economic Independence and Gender Roles on Divorce Decisions**

Social exchange theory suggests that the decision to end a marriage often stems from an imbalance in the exchange process and an unequal distribution of rewards. When one spouse feels they are contributing more than they are receiving in return, and the perceived benefits no longer justify the effort, they may choose to terminate the relationship. Similarly, the economic model of marriage and divorce argues that separation is likely to occur following unexpected shocks—particularly when the perceived value of remaining in the marriage drops below that of separating. This outcome is influenced by factors such as the availability of unilateral divorce and the broader legal framework governing divorce. Furthermore, this perspective intersects with feminist theories on "gendered labor," highlighting that in societies with traditional gender norms, women who out-earn their husbands may be viewed as deviating from expected gender roles, making them more susceptible to marital breakdown. (salah, 2022)

The economic model of marriage and divorce suggests that as women become more economically independent through participation in the labor market, their reliance on traditional family structures decreases, and the financial benefits they receive from marriage diminish. As a result, women who are financially independent are more likely to leave unsatisfying or unhappy marriages. This view aligns with the cultural and economic equivalence perspective, which holds that job stability in men tends to lower the likelihood of divorce, whereas job stability in women is associated with a higher likelihood of marital dissolution. (salah, 2022).

- **Unemployment and financial insecurity**

The socio-economic conditions a country faces—such as economic hardships and rapid demographic growth—present significant challenges to its social fabric. Among the most pressing of these is unemployment and financial insecurity, both of which have a direct impact on family stability. One of the key elements in a family's ability to fulfill its responsibilities toward its members is the provision of basic material needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Meeting these needs requires a stable and reliable income. Without a consistent source of financial support, the family struggles to carry out these duties, leading to conditions of poverty, poor health, and inadequate housing. (abas, 2012). The economic crisis, marked by rising prices and increasing poverty, significantly affects marital life. When spouses are unable to meet the financial demands of daily living, it often leads to constant stress and recurring conflicts. Over time, this financial strain can weaken the marital bond and contribute to the breakdown of the relationship, potentially resulting in the collapse of married life. (ben amor samia, 2016).

Algeria is among the countries facing significant economic challenges. According to the World Bank Group, the overall unemployment rate in 2024 was estimated at 12.7%, with a notably higher rate of 25.4% among women and 29.3% among youth aged 15 to 24. Such statistics and the sharp rise in unemployment rates can have a significant impact on divorce rates, particularly given that the data highlights a high percentage of unemployed youth. This demographic is often at the early stages of forming families, and economic instability can undermine marital stability from the outset.

- **The Housing Problem and Its Impact on Family Instability**

Housing can be considered one of the fundamental pillars in building a society and, more broadly, a nation. It is closely linked to urbanization and reflects broader socio-economic developments. Stable and adequate housing provides individuals and families with a sense of security and calm, contributing to social cohesion. Moreover, it helps prevent displacement and constant relocation, which can disrupt both personal and community stability. The complete absence of housing represents a serious social issue. Without a home, individuals are more likely to experience deep frustration, social alienation, and a lack of belonging. This condition can lead to instability and increase the likelihood of unpredictable or socially disruptive behaviors. A home is not just a physical shelter, but a fundamental source of psychological security and social identity. (Jalb, 2021)

A study on the causes of divorce in Algeria "bechar" shows that 69% of divorced individuals were living with their extended family, while 63% of them expressed a preference for living in an independent home. These statistics suggest that cohabitation with extended family or the lack of independent housing is among the contributing factors to marital breakdown. (saoudi abd al-kareem, 2017)

- ❖ **Legal factors**

Law is a system of rules that guides how people behave in society, and a special authority makes sure these rules are followed by punishing those who break them. (mansour, 2010) From the definition of law, we can understand that it plays a crucial role in society and in maintaining social control. Law contributes to the stability of the social system, ensures security, and creates a balance between individual needs and societal obligations. It especially helps regulate the relationship between personal desires and the rules that must be respected, particularly in contexts marked by competition and conflict. (mansour, 2010)

Divorce, as a social event situated within a broader social context, reflects a form of conflict—typically between couples. It should be guided by legal frameworks and organized

through a set of rules to maintain the stability of relationships and society as a whole. Moreover, it aims to preserve the rights of individuals, all of which is addressed within family law—a collection of legal provisions that regulate all matters related to the family.

From a sociological perspective, legal systems—particularly family and divorce laws—can sometimes produce structural obstacles that hinder effective conflict resolution or restrict individual agency. In the context of divorce, these obstacles may include rigid procedures, gender-biased legislation, or unequal access to legal support. Even legal interpretations intended to adapt the law to evolving social realities may, at times, reflect dominant cultural or institutional biases, thereby reinforcing existing social inequalities rather than alleviating them.

- **The increase of khul' in Algerian society**

Divorce by khul' is addressed in Article 54 of the Algerian Family Law, which allows a wife to initiate divorce without her husband's consent, in return for financial compensation. Following the 2005 amendment to Article 54 of the Algerian Family Law, the husband's consent is no longer required for a wife to obtain a divorce through khul' in exchange for financial compensation. Although this consent was not explicitly stated in the law before, it was commonly enforced by the judiciary. The amendment has led to a noticeable rise in divorce cases, prompting calls for the legislator to reconsider Article 54 by imposing stricter conditions and limiting divorce to serious, irreconcilable cases rather than trivial reasons (dhabih, 2018)

- **Judicial reasons**

In Algerian law, *khula*—a divorce initiated by the wife—requires her to pay financial compensation to the husband. However, this amount is relatively low, often around 60,000 DZD, and is usually less than the original dowry. As a result, many women find it easy to afford and are not discouraged from seeking divorce. In some cases, the amount paid for *khula* is indirectly returned to the wife through post-divorce obligations like maintenance, child custody housing, or even higher compensation from the husband. This has led to a rise in *khula* cases, as many women no longer see it as a financial loss but rather as a convenient way to exit the marriage—sometimes for trivial reasons. (dhabih, 2018)

## Resume

In light of the discussion, it is clear that the phenomenon of divorce in Algerian society is no longer merely a personal or individual matter, but rather a reflection of deep transformations affecting the social, cultural, economic, and legal structures of society. The evidence shows that divorce results from a complex interplay of factors, including socio-cultural differences between spouses, shifting gender roles—especially regarding women's empowerment—economic pressures, family interference, and the negative influence of modern technology, particularly social media. Furthermore, although legal reforms have enhanced women's access to divorce, they have sometimes unintentionally facilitated separation rather than regulating it under balanced conditions.

Therefore, understanding divorce as a multifaceted social phenomenon requires a comprehensive, multidimensional approach that considers the new dynamics within Algerian families. This approach must strike a balance between individual empowerment and the protection of family stability. Addressing the growing rates of divorce will not be achieved through legislation alone but also through economic support, cultural awareness, family counseling, and a re-evaluation of the values and expectations surrounding marriage and divorce in the context of contemporary social change.

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