DETERMINANTS OF DIVORCE AMONG WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

Siti Farhanah binti Md Sam¹, Puzziawati Ab Ghani²
Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam¹,²
farhanah_mdsam@yahoo.com.my¹; puzzi@tmsk.uitm.edu.my²

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of divorce has become a major concern for both demographers and individuals. Surprisingly, the developed and developing nations illustrate a rather similar trend of divorce. Many studies concerning divorce had been conducted especially in the West to investigate the pattern of divorce as well factors that are related to divorce. However, there is not much research work on divorce in Malaysia. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the divorce trend at the macro level based on the data provided by the Department of Islamic Development Board and National Registration Department of Malaysia. Based on the trend analysis, it demonstrates that the divorce rate in Malaysia has been rising during a period of 17 years from 1995 to 2010. In addition, the trend of divorce between Muslim and non-Muslim couples display a divergent pattern especially during the economic downturn. At the micro level, the Fourth Malaysian Population and Family Survey (MPFS IV) data obtained from the National Population and Family Development Board was utilized to identify the determinants of divorce among women in Peninsular Malaysia. The results based on Cox-Regression analysis show that age, age at marriage, the number of marriages and the existence of children are the significant factors that are related to divorce. Besides, irreconcilable differences, imprudent husbands and the meddling in-laws family are the reasons why couples end their marriages, as found from the MPFS IV data.
INTRODUCTION

Divorce or the dissolution of marriage is defined as an ultimate legal separation of married couples under the civil or religious court. It gives the right to a spouse to remarry after the divorce case has been settled (United Nation, 2011). An increasing incidence of divorce all over the world has drawn greater attention to the demographers.

A research done by Levitan and Belous (1981) stated that the World War II has become an important turning point in the participation of female work force as 57% of women involved in the labour market during the war because of the demand of employment. After the war ended, the American households showed a strong tendency towards enhancing their consumption in terms of goods and services. Hence, many married women joined the work industry to maintain these growing trends of consumption.

The high percentage of divorce that the world is facing, to a certain extent, is said to be related to a high entry of women in the labour force. Becker (1991) (as cited in Anderson and Hansen, 2010) claimed that women’s involvement in the work force is significant to the drastic increase of divorce rate in the 70’s and 80’s. This is due to women spending more time at work place rather than doing the housework that makes them less efficient in handling house chores. Moreover, a study done by Liu and Vikat (2004) indicates the involvement of marital dissolution is directly proportional to the percentage of divorce.

Malaysia is also facing the problem of divorce when the rate of divorce has risen for about 105% during the period of 8 years from 2002-2009 reported by Emmanuel Kiat, a researcher from HELP University (Simon, 2010). The Department of Islamic Development Board (JAKIM) revealed the latest statistics in 2010 that on average 77 Muslim couples dissolve their marriage every day. This implies that three married couples get divorced in every one hour (Kosmo, October 19, 2011). In 2009, JAKIM also disclosed that one divorce case was registered within every 15 minutes (Kaos, 2011).

JAKIM had also reported in 2011 that 21% out of 651,851 Muslim couples who got married between 2005 and 2010 had already ended their marriages within 5 years of marriage. This is proven by a research done by JAKIM that one-third of nuptial ends their marriage during the first five years of their marriage. Young married couples between the age of 31-35 years old are the
cohort who have the highest divorce rate compared to other age cohorts (Utusan Malaysia, December 29, 2011).

A number of researches have also been carried out to identify the determinants that can lead to divorce. The past studies have shown that the age at marriage, level of education, the existence of children and place of residence are among the significant factors that contribute to the risk of marital dissolution.

It seems like the event of divorce is inevitable as the world is moving towards globalization in this 21st century. The view of public towards divorce and divorcees has been shifting as individuals are more open minded and ponder that divorce is the best decision to get out from a problematic marriage for a better happy life in the future rather than being imprisoned in a miserable marriage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS (METHODOLOGY)

This study is based on secondary data obtained from the Department of Islamic Development Board (JAKIM), the National Registration Department of Malaysia (JPN) and the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN).

A time series data from 1998 to 2010 on marriage and divorce were provided by the Department of Islamic Development Board (JAKIM) and the National Registration Department of Malaysia (JPN). These data comprise the statistics on marriage and divorce cases for both Muslim and non-Muslim couples together with the number of divorce cases according to the states in Malaysia. This macro level data is needed to explore the general pattern of divorce in the country and this will give an indication of the real situation of the national’s marriage institution. Hence, trend analysis is applied to observe the present pattern of divorce in Malaysia for both Muslim and non-Muslim married couples.

A pooled dataset of MPFS 41 from the Fourth Malaysian Population and Family Survey (MPFS IV) obtained from the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) was utilized to indentify the significant predictor variables that lead to divorce. The respondents in this survey were women in their childbearing age between 15 to 49 years old that live in Peninsular Malaysia. Cox-Regression / Proportional Hazard model was employed to investigate the covariates that are significant to the divorce. The covariates are ethnicity, age at marriage, age, presence of children,
location, level of education and the frequency of marriages while the dependent variables are marital status and survival time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trend of Divorce

Figure 1 shows the graph of divorce rate in Malaysia between Muslim and non-Muslim couples for the period of 17 years from 1995 to 2010. From the graph, it shows that the rate of divorce increases over the period of time. It is also obvious that the rate of divorce among Muslim couples is steadily higher compared to those non-Muslim couples. This has in fact becoming a hot issue in the country as 80% of the total divorce cases in Malaysia are among Muslim couples (The Star, 2010), whereas Muslims only make up 61.3% of the total population in Malaysia. On the other hand, the rate of divorce among non-Muslim couples fluctuates between the years 2000 and 2009.

![Divorce Rate in Malaysia 1995-2010](image)

Figure 1: Divorce rate in Malaysia from 1995 to 2010

*Source:* National Registration Department of Malaysia and Department of Islamic Development
Table 1 shows the rate of divorce for both Muslim and non-Muslim couples from 1995 to 2010. From the table, the rate of divorce for Muslim illustrates a stable increase from 1998 to 1999 and from 2008 to 2009. Though, the rate of divorce for non-Muslim depicts a sharp fall from 1998 to 1999 and from 2008 to 2009. Malaysia encountered a bad economic crisis during these two phases of time from 1998 to 1999 and from 2008 to 2009. Hence, the rate of divorce for Muslim and non-Muslim married couples represents contradict pattern especially during recession. Literature reviews also prove that recession gives an effect to the stability of one’s marriage. Unfortunately, the divorce rate for non-Muslim is increasing sharply from 2009 to 2010.

Table 1: Divorce rate for Muslim and non-Muslim couples in Malaysia (1995-2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Muslim Marriage</th>
<th>Muslim Divorce</th>
<th>Muslim Divorce Rate</th>
<th>Non-Muslim Marriage</th>
<th>Non-Muslim Divorce</th>
<th>Non-Muslim Divorce Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>106399</td>
<td>11474</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>65082</td>
<td>1233</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>104616</td>
<td>11053</td>
<td>10.57</td>
<td>64670</td>
<td>1038</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>81779</td>
<td>10668</td>
<td>13.04</td>
<td>65360</td>
<td>2372</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>92768</td>
<td>13317</td>
<td>14.36</td>
<td>59060</td>
<td>2322</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>81651</td>
<td>12172</td>
<td>14.91</td>
<td>62313</td>
<td>1096</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>94055</td>
<td>13605</td>
<td>14.46</td>
<td>61290</td>
<td>1613</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>91664</td>
<td>13403</td>
<td>14.62</td>
<td>55017</td>
<td>3238</td>
<td>5.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>97824</td>
<td>13937</td>
<td>14.25</td>
<td>59228</td>
<td>3793</td>
<td>6.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>102062</td>
<td>15488</td>
<td>15.18</td>
<td>59387</td>
<td>3318</td>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>112262</td>
<td>16702</td>
<td>14.88</td>
<td>50089</td>
<td>3291</td>
<td>6.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>116337</td>
<td>17749</td>
<td>15.26</td>
<td>52877</td>
<td>3804</td>
<td>7.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>116366</td>
<td>19955</td>
<td>17.15</td>
<td>64084</td>
<td>5747</td>
<td>8.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>133448</td>
<td>21140</td>
<td>15.84</td>
<td>55723</td>
<td>4335</td>
<td>7.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>131053</td>
<td>22800</td>
<td>17.40</td>
<td>59676</td>
<td>3633</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>135436</td>
<td>27891</td>
<td>20.59</td>
<td>60957</td>
<td>2938</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>135548</td>
<td>28035</td>
<td>20.68</td>
<td>60505</td>
<td>8561</td>
<td>14.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Registration Department of Malaysia and Department of Islamic Development

Figure 2 shows the total number of divorce cases in Malaysia according to states from 1998 to 2010. From the figure, it is reported that Selangor has the highest number of registered divorce
cases in Malaysia compared to other states as the state is heavily populated with a population size of 5.46 million. However, Federal Territory of Labuan has the lowest number of divorce cases as it is one of the least populated states in Malaysia with almost 87,000 peoples (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). Besides that, 315 non-Muslim couples have registered their divorce between 1998 and 2010. In short, it can be concluded that the growth number of divorce cases in Malaysia can be attributed by a large number of people reside in any one location.

![Figure 4.3: Divorce in Malaysia according to States (1998-2010)](image)

Source: National Registration Department of Malaysia and Department of Islamic Development

**Determinants of Divorce**

The descriptive analysis based on the MPFS IV data shows that 98% of the 3,572 women surveyed were still married and the rest (2%) were divorcees. On average, the respondents were 36 years old and were married at the age of 22 years old. More than half (55%) of the respondents lived in the rural area and the rest lived in the urban area. Majority (70%) of the respondents were Malaysians
and had received secondary education. Based on the survey, most women had only married once in their life, while 3.6% and 0.4% remarried for the second and third time respectively and only one woman had remarried for the fourth time. It is also identified that on the average the women’s marriage survival time 15 years.

Based on the results from survival analysis, the distribution of survival function for categorical variables indicates that the number of marriages and the presence of children have a large effect to the survival of marriage over time since the clear width between the groups. The Log-Rank test revealed that the number of marriages, the presence of children and age at marriage are significant factors in predicting the survival time of marriage with p-value of <0.0001.

The Cox-Regression analysis was employed to identify the significant factors that can affect the survival time of marriage. The results of Omnibus Test shows the model is significant ($\chi^2=103.01$, p-value <0.0001) which indicates that at least one of the covariates are significant in contributing to the risk of divorce. The -2 Log Likelihood is 978.811($\chi^2=61.934$, p-value <0.0001) which indicates that there is an improvement in the fitness of the model after adding the covariates. The small value of standard error indicates no multi-collinearity exists in this study. From the analysis, four out of seven variables are found to be significant at 5% significance level, which are the number of marriages, the presence of children, age of women and age at marriage. After removing the non-significant variables from the model, the final estimated regression model is

$$h(t|X) = h_0(t) \exp(z)$$

where

$$z = 0.988 \times \text{Number of Marriages} + 1.085 \times \text{Presence of Children} - 0.048 \times \text{Age} + 0.117 \times \text{Age at Marriage}$$

Holding other variables constant, for every remarriage, the risk of getting divorce is almost three times higher compared to those who stick to their marriage. That means women who remarry are more likely to have a higher risk towards marriage dissolution.

Holding other variables constant, for every additional child in the family, the hazard of marriage is three times lower compared to those couples with no children. In short, the presence of children can give an impact to the survival of marriage where childless couples are more prone to divorce
compared to those couples with children. In short, children helps in bringing stability within the marriage institution.

According to age, there is no great significant difference between young women and older women in the survival of marriage since \( \exp(B) = 0.956 \sim 1 \). In conclusion, regardless of their age, either younger or older female, they share the same possibility of dissolution of marriage when entering the marriage institution.

While for variable age at marriage, for every one year delay in marriage, the risk of exposure to divorce for women is equal to 1.118 \sim 1.12. This shows that among women who married later, they are 1.12 times more likely to exposure to the divorce hazard compared to those who were married earlier than them.
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