

## COVID-19 impact on divorce and family dynamics in the social media age

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted divorce rates and family dynamics worldwide, presenting unprecedented challenges for couples and families. This rapid review paper aims to investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on marriage relationships and family well-being in the social media age. Employing a rapid review methodology, existing literature on the influence of COVID-19 on divorce rates, family dynamics, and social media was synthesized. Key factors such as socioeconomic disparities, cultural norms, and access to support services were identified as drivers of variations in divorce rates and family dynamics during the pandemic. The study revealed a range of stressors faced by families, including increased financial strain, housing insecurity, and changes in communication patterns. Recommendations were made for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to collaborate on developing guidelines to support families in the post-pandemic recovery phase. By understanding the complex interplay of factors influencing marriage and family dynamics during crises, specific measures can be implemented to build resilience, promote positive outcomes, and enhance the well-being of families. This study serves as a call to action to prioritize family support and intervention programs to help families navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Divorce, Family dynamics, Lockdown, Marriage, Relationship, Separation, Social media

### 1. Introduction

Relationships are made stronger in groups or units, and psychologically there is a need in every human being to feel loved, cherished, and understood despite the situation. There is no better platform for that expression than the family. Human beings tilt to either of two options at some point in their life, isolation or intimacy, most times it is Intimacy (Bimha & Chadwick, 2016). The requirement of intimacy is, people who we can commit to and share our innermost desires with, persons that can make us feel safe, and not necessarily the general notion of intimacy as sexual relations (Gillies, 2003).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about enormous stress and change to many facets of society, with a significant impact on the institution of marriage (Goldberg et al., 2021). The period of the pandemic brought several challenges for relationships, putting unprecedented strain on couples and families due to the lockdowns, economic hardship, and elevated stress levels, as a result, divorce rates increased globally (Goldberg et al., 2021). There was an increase in financial challenges, ranging from job losses, and renegotiation of financial support obligations.

Understanding the complex connection between COVID-19 and its impact on divorce and family dynamics is critical not only for understanding the broader societal implications but also for influencing support systems and interventions to help people manage the aftermath of the pandemic. This paper investigates the impact of COVID-19 on divorce and family dynamics, looking into the economic, social, and psychological variables that contributed to altering the landscape of marital partnerships and family relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic

## **2. Research aim, objectives and questions**

### ***Main aim***

This study aims to investigate and understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced divorce rates and family dynamics globally.

### ***Research objectives***

- a. To examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on divorce rates and trends globally.
- b. To investigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on family dynamics, including changes in communication patterns, conflict resolution strategies, and overall satisfaction within marital and familial relationships.
- c. To identify factors contributing to variations in divorce rates and family dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic, including socio-economic factors, cultural norms, and access to support services.

### ***Research questions***

- a. How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced divorce rates and trends globally, and what socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors contribute to these changes?
- b. What are the primary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on family dynamics, including communication patterns, conflict resolution strategies, and overall satisfaction within marital and familial relationships?
- c. What factors contribute to variations in divorce rates and family dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how do socio-economic factors, cultural norms, and access to support services influence these outcomes across different populations and regions?

## **3. Methodology**

This study will employ a rapid review research methodology to put together existing research on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted divorce rates and family dynamics. Rapid reviews are ideal for time-sensitive research areas because they simplify the search process and focus on key studies (Hamel et al., 2021). A comprehensive search of electronic databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and Google Scholar was carried out. Relevant studies were identified using appropriate keyword phrases such as "COVID-19," "pandemic," "divorce rates," "family dynamics," "communication patterns," and "conflict resolution".

### ***Inclusion criteria***

Studies were selected if they had been published in peer-reviewed journals, or preprint repositories and provided information about the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on divorce rates and family dynamics. The search was restricted to studies published in English and undertaken since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The titles and abstracts of retrieved publications were reviewed to determine their relevance to the study issues. Studies that matched the inclusion criteria were chosen for a full-text review.

The full-text articles of selected studies were evaluated to establish their suitability for inclusion in the rapid review. Studies that offered useful data on divorce rates, family communication patterns, conflict resolution mechanisms, and general marital and familial happiness during the pandemic were included. New studies were identified using snowballing techniques, which involved reviewing the reference lists of included publications to find new relevant research that had not been captured in the first database search.

## **4. The family**

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development believes that the task facing us in adulthood is isolation versus intimacy (Syed & McLean, 2017). Cohen and Strong (2020) explained the family system as the primary foundation for love and affection, personal validation, trust, and self-disclosure, its formation is meant to give this basic foundation to all members of the unit, thereby raising the importance level of the family to a new high (Posel & Rudwick, 2013). A family can also consist of single-parent or two-parent families, with its strengths and weaknesses, each family has its similarities and differences attached to them which can either keep them in unity or can bring in a separation where necessary (Ford-Gilboe, 2000).

### **4.1. The role of the family in gender progression**

Understanding the dynamics of gender progression within the family structure is crucial in exploring its impact on children's development, particularly in cases of single-parent or divorced families. Research suggests that the presence or absence of certain family members, particularly fathers, can significantly influence the progression and development of both boys and girls (Madhavan et al., 2008).

- ✓ **Single-parent or divorced families:** Families with only one parent or divorced parents may face significant obstacles in gender progression. According to studies, children from these families may undergo undesirable changes, such as antisocial conduct. This is especially noticeable in households without a father role (Endendijk et al., 2018).
- ✓ **Absence of a father figure:** Physical absence occurs when the father is not present in the family owing to circumstances such as separation, divorce, single parenthood, or death. When sons are raised in single-parent households headed by moms, or daughters are raised in homes without a father role, their character development could be harmed (Endendijk et al., 2018). The absence of a father figure, whether physical or emotional, can lead to developmental abnormalities in children in the form of socialization, character formation, as well as their emotional well-being (Madhavan et al., 2008).
- ✓ **Emotional absence:** This has to do with the lack of emotional connection a child feels as a result of being separated from a parent, whether the father or the mother. This emotional separation can have a great impact on a child's self-esteem, sense of identity, and overall psychological health (Patel & Mavungu, 2016).
- ✓ **Fatherhood and motherhood roles:** The fatherhood and motherhood roles are not necessarily characterized by biological ties; they also include those social duties that men and women take on to care for their offspring (Madhavan et al., 2008). Positive fatherhood or motherhood roles within the

family structure can provide effective support, as well as a sense of direction for children as they grow through their gender development (Madhavan et al., 2008).

Family structures have a significant role to play when it comes to shaping gender progression, with the emotional and physical presence of the parents, the fathers in particular is an important factor in the child's development.

#### **4.2. Divorce and COVID-19 pandemic**

The institution of marriage has been subject to various societal, personal, and economic influences, with divorce playing a huge role in its dynamics. According to Patel and Mavungu (2016), divorce is regarded as a process of legal dissolution of one's marriage by a court or any other institution that is capable of handling such dissolutions. The process of divorce puts not only the children at a disadvantage but also the partners involved (Gillies, 2003). However, amongst the complex factors driving divorce rates, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a new and unprecedented force, actively changing family dynamics and relationships (Ford-Gilboe, 2000)

The coronavirus pandemic also known as COVID-19 was caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which emerged as a dreaded health crisis globally, challenging a lot of systems like the economic and healthcare systems worldwide (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). COVID-19 is defined as an acute illness that has to do with the respiratory organs, with several symptoms leading to death (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). In South Africa, one of the swift plans that was adopted by the South African government was the lockdown of the international airports, social distancing, and restriction of movements. These policies, while necessary for public health, had a significant impact on everyday living, particularly family dynamics and marriage relationships. The COVID-19 pandemic had a series of impacts on the family which was both positive and negative.

#### **4.3. COVID-19 and its impact on divorce and family dynamics**

Based on past research, COVID-19 positively helped many families to spend more time together and created more family bonding (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The children were brought closer to the parents or guardians, as well as being able to express themselves emotionally and otherwise to the parents or guardians. The guardians had ample time to look into the behavioral tendencies of the children and correct or improve on areas that needed improvement. General communication in the family was impacted. Relationships and family bonds were also strengthened. However, in addition to the positive features, the pandemic revealed and aggravated existing family divides. For couples who were already fighting or thinking about divorce, the stress and uncertainty caused by the pandemic exacerbated their problems (Endendijk, et al., 2018). Financial insecurity, job loss, and caregiving responsibilities in the middle of a global crisis added stress to the already fragile relationships, prompting some couples to reevaluate their marriages (Endendijk et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the pandemic's influence stretched beyond couples to their children, whose lives were disrupted by the unexpected alteration of routines and social relationships. Navigating custody agreements and visitation plans for children of divorced or separated parents got more difficult as lockdowns and travel restrictions were implemented. The inability to spend time with parents who do not have custody or extended family members added to feelings of loneliness and uncertainty, aggravating the psychological impact of the pandemic. The following research questions will assist in comprehending the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on divorce and family dynamics.

#### **4.4. Social media role in family dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Social networking sites (platforms) have become an important tool for establishing support networks. For example, families joined online communities that focused on parenting, mental health, and coping skills, which

helped them feel connected throughout their time of solitude. A study discovered that online support groups help lessen feelings of loneliness, as well as promote mental health (Seabrook, Kern & Rickard, 2016). Social media support was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on all parts of human life, including family dynamics and divorce rates (Pouradeli, Ahmadiania & Rezaeian, 2024). The pandemic's forced isolation and economic uncertainty produced a unique environment that put many relationships to the test. The widespread use of social media has exacerbated these dynamics, boosting both positive and negative interactions among family members. It can be said that divorce rates rose dramatically as a result of the pandemic. According to studies, the stress and strain of lockdown measures, as well as financial difficulty and job losses, have all contributed to marital strife and, eventually, separation or divorce (Rodrigues, Silva & Franco, 2023).

Furthermore, forced confinement revealed previously hidden difficulties within partnerships. As a magnifying glass, the pandemic highlighted the shortcomings and increased tensions that were already present but probably hidden following a busy life schedule (Goldberg, Allen & Smith, 2021; Sheely & Arbogast, 2021). Relations between families before and following the pandemic were greatly affected either positively or negatively by social media (Çakır, 2024). It has made relationships and interactions easier, but it has also brought up new challenges. Feelings of inferiority and resentment can arise from continuously comparing one's own life with the perfected portrayals of others on social media. In addition, the ease of contact over the Internet might promote the dissemination of false information and damaging materials, which could damage familial relationships (Tasnim, Hossain & Mazumder, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an extensive effect on rates of divorce and the dynamics of families (Pouradeli et al., 2024). It is essential to comprehend the long-term implications of these shifts as society confronts the aftermath of the pandemic and comes prepared with ways to help people and their families handle the shifting dynamics. Families shared essential details about the pandemic, including health precautions and teaching resources, over social media. Disinformation has nevertheless flourished as a result of this rapid transmission, which could inspire fear and anxiety (Cinelli, Quattrociocchi, Galeazzi, Valensise, Brugnoli, Schmidt & Scala, 2020). The difficulty lies in identifying reputable sources amid the cacophony.

## **5. Analysis of the research questions**

### **5.1. How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced divorce rates and trends globally, and what socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors contribute to these changes?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on divorce rates worldwide. According to Hoehn-Velasco et al. (2023), divorce rates increased during the pandemic due to increased stress and time spent together as a result of lockdown measures. However, some factors influence high divorce rates.

#### *Social and economic factors*

- ✓ **Unemployment and financial stress:** Studies have regularly found a link between economic insecurity and disagreements between spouses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread job losses and economic downturns caused further financial hardship within homes, resulting in increased tensions and conflicts among partners (Hoehn-Velasco, et al., 2023).
- ✓ **Housing instability:** The inability to meet mortgage or rent payments due to job loss or reduced income caused many couples to experience housing instability, which adds stress to relationships, marriages and may lead to divorce (Endendijk et al., 2018).

### *Cultural factors*

- ✓ **Perceptions towards marriage and divorce:** Cultural conventions and ideals around marriage and divorce differ greatly between societies. Individuals in cultures where marriage is highly valued and divorce is stigmatized may be less likely to seek divorce despite marital troubles (Ghaznavi et al., 2022). In contrast, in societies where divorce is more socially accepted, spouses may be more willing to end their marriages during times of difficulty (Ghaznavi et al., 2022).
- ✓ **Religious beliefs:** Adherence to conservative religious principles has been linked to decreased divorce rates due to the sanctity attached to marriage vows (Ghaznavi et al., 2022).

### *Environmental factors*

- ✓ **Lockdown measures and social isolation:** Many couples were confined for extended periods as a result of lockdown procedures put in place to combat COVID-19. Forced cohabitation in confined spaces has worsened pre-existing marital conflicts and played a role in escalating divorce rates (Tepeli Temiz & Elsharnouby, 2022).
- ✓ **Disruptions to daily routines:** The disruption of everyday routines, such as work, school, and social activities, has affected marital relationships. Couples spending more time at home worsened existing challenges, resulting in a breakdown in communication and more disputes (Tepeli Temiz & Elsharnouby, 2022). By investigating the intersection of socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors, we could gain a thorough picture of how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced divorce rates and trends around the world. These variables interact in intricate ways to influence people's decisions about marriage and divorce during times of crisis.

## **5.2. What are the primary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on family dynamics, including communication patterns, conflict resolution strategies, and overall satisfaction within marital and familial relationships?**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on family dynamics, especially communication patterns, conflict resolution, and overall satisfaction.

### *Communication patterns*

With physical distance mechanisms in place, families increased dependence on digital communication platforms such as video calls, social media messaging apps, and social networks to stay close to extended family members and friends (Bellani & Vignoli, 2022). This move to virtual communication disrupted traditional family interactions and created new issues, such as digital exhaustion and privacy concerns (Bellani & Vignoli, 2022).

- ✓ **Changes in communication frequency and content:** The pandemic caused families to reconsider their communication patterns, with some going through greater communication frequency as they navigate uncertainty together, while others may struggle to maintain open lines of communication amid increased stress and anxiety (Bellani & Vignoli, 2022).

### *Adaptation resilience methods*

Families were forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to modify their methods of conflict management to meet new challenges. The methods involve; practicing attentive listening, compassion (empathy), and togetherness to solve differences peacefully (Kubb & Foran, 2020).

- ✓ **Greater demand on solving problems abilities:** The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic provided families with unanticipated barriers, including financial challenges, homeschooling, and caregiver duties. In light of this, possessing excellent problem-solving abilities has become essential for navigating beyond these obstacles and preserving family harmony. (Velasco, Hoehn & others, 2023).

*Overall being satisfied with family and marriage ties*

- ✓ **Increased stress, and anxiety:** Family members had greater amounts of stress as a consequence of the pandemic's unpredictability in addition to concerns regarding their well-being, livelihood, and future (Kubb & Foran, 2020). This increased stress and anxiety may result in a negative impact on marriages and lower satisfaction with family life overall.
- ✓ **Interference in everyday calendars:** Relations between families were altered as a result of interruptions with work, education, and social events. While certain households welcomed the opportunity to spend extra time together, others may have discovered it hard to adjust to the lack of schedule and routine, which resulted in dissatisfaction and arguments (Kubb & Foran, 2020). Through an analysis of the main consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on family dynamics, such as alterations to communication techniques, techniques for resolving conflicts, and general satisfaction in marital and family associations. The research provided comprehensive lessons on how households dealt with the pandemic's obstacles and pinpointed parts that may require assistance and intervention.

**5.3. What variables affected the dynamics of families and rates of divorce drastically during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as how socioeconomic factors, cultural norms, and the availability of support services affect these results in various populations and geographical areas?**

*Socioeconomics factors*

- ✓ **Earnings inequality:** The rate of divorce and dynamics within families are greatly affected by inequalities in income and wealth. Studies show that low-income people are more likely to experience financial difficulties, which increases their vulnerability to divorce (Endendijk, et al., 2018).
- ✓ **Participating in financial aid programs:** Affordable financial aid programs, like unemployment insurance, small business support, and stimulus programs, could lower divorce rates and help families overcome the financial difficulties imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Lebow, 2020).

**Job stability:** The interactions of families are greatly influenced by security and steady employment. Although individuals who are unemployed or have unsure jobs may experience higher levels of anxiety and stress in their marriages, those with stable employment are more likely to cope with financial difficulties and maintain healthy relationships (Hoehn-Velasco et al., 2023).

*Cultural customs and principles*

- ✓ **Views on divorce:** People's decisions about marriage as well as divorce can be influenced by customs and views regarding divorce, which vary greatly among countries. People living in nations where divorce is stigmatized or frowned upon may be less likely to seek a divorce, even when they experience difficulties with their marriages (Mkperedem et al., 2022).
- ✓ **Roles of gender:** Conventional gender norms and expectations in marriage can have a bearing on rates of divorce and the dynamics of families. Individuals who are constrained by traditional obligations and desire greater freedom and autonomy might see a rise in divorce rates in communities with strong gender norms (Mkperedem et al., 2022).

### ***Accessing support services***

It was essential for anyone who suffered divorce or psychological distress during the pandemic to have a choice of therapy, counseling, and psychological support programs. Disparities in access to such treatments, however, especially among people with limited resources, could worsen marital problems and raise the number of divorces (Lebow, 2020).

Legal assistance or mediators assist spouses solve problems such as spousal support, financial distribution, and custody of children in a way that works for both parties. However, inequalities in obtaining legal support may prevent individuals from getting a divorce or reaching agreeable divorce plans (Tepeli Temiz & Elsharnouby, 2022). It can comprehend the intricate interactions between individuals, interpersonal, and fundamental factors that shape marital and familial relationships throughout times of trouble by examining the broad spectrum of factors that contributed to variations in the rate of divorce and the dynamics of families during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as socioeconomic factors, cultural norms, and access to support services.

## **6. Contributions of the study**

This research extends to an already comprehensive examination of how the global COVID-19 pandemic has impacted divorce rates and relationships between families. By integrating a body of prior research, it demonstrates the intricate relationships between social, cultural, and environmental elements and the well-being of families and marriages in moments of crisis. Considering the importance of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on family life, this study offers relevant insights into the difficulties faced by families as well as the variables driving shifts in divorce rates and the dynamics of families. To help promote practice, policy, and future research, it gives recent information utilizing a rapid review technique.

The outcomes of this research will have important effects on practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders in family support and intervention programs. By investigating significant factors that affect the dynamics of family and divorce rates, programs that can assist families after the pandemic can be developed.

## **7. Recommendations**

It is suggested that immediately following a health crisis like an epidemic or pandemic, authorities should give attention to initiatives that offer access to mental health, legal, and emotional support services for divorced individuals and families. This may mean giving less fortunate individuals access to Internet healthcare and expanding funding for local help programs.

The effects of stressors associated with the pandemic can be mitigated by family-focused therapies that increase resilience and assist with coping skills. Couples are urged to take advantage of workshops, educational programs, and internet-based tools to assist families resolve disputes, handling stress, and sharing information more effectively. Resolving fundamental socioeconomic status inequalities is required to enhance the well-being of families as well as decrease the number of divorce. For the benefit of individuals and families who are experiencing financial difficulties, lawmakers ought to pass policies like debt relief schemes, mortgage aid, and unemployment benefits.

Authorities should set a high value on providing families with ongoing assistance to help them confront all the challenges related to recovery and adaptation, since the pandemic may have long-term repercussions. This can be necessary to undertake continuous investments in local resources, mental healthcare, and welfare services so that families receive the support they need to prosper. Institutions can work together to aid families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by carrying out these recommendations while capitalizing on the results of the research, which will foster resilience and help breed healthy families and marital relations.

## 8. Conclusion

This study presented the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on divorce and family dynamics worldwide through a rapid review technique. By collecting an array of previously published literature, the researchers gained an extensive understanding of the different impacts of social, cultural, and environmental factors on marriage and the health of families during times of health crisis. The findings of this research highlight the enormous challenges families face when they deal with the outbreak's disruptions and uncertainty. The family must adapt to new conditions and deal with issues that weren't encountered prior, including rising expenses and insecure family relations, plus adjustments to ways of communication and ways to resolve disputes.

This research additionally showed significant variations in divorce rates and the dynamics of families. The terms socioeconomic differences, cultural norms, and the accessibility of assistance have been identified as the main causes of these inequalities. This underlines the necessity to take particular steps to address the fundamental causes of disparities while giving individuals who are less privileged more power. Moving ahead, all parties involved, practitioners, and policymakers have to collaborate to create full guidelines that will aid families in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowing the intricate relationships among many factors affecting family life and marriage demands focused interventions that will improve flexibility, produce positive results, and improve the well-being of families.

This study now acts as an appeal for action regarding immediate attention to encourage family wellness throughout and following the COVID-19 pandemic. By coordinated efforts and dedication to helping families, humanity may recover from this crisis with increased trust and collaboration, ensuring families have the means to cope with difficulties.

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