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Investigating the Lived Experience of Women Sought a Divorce due to the Interference of the Spouse's family: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Abstract

The interference of the spouse's family in the couple's married life has long been a significant source of conflict. Persistent and repeated interference from either the husband or wife's family can lead to decreased marital satisfaction and an increased likelihood of divorce. This study explored the impact of interference on marital conflict and divorce, focusing on the experiences of 10 women who sought divorce due to such interference. Using a qualitative psychological descriptive phenomenological method, data were collected through semi-structured interviews until saturation was achieved. The collected data were analyzed using the five-step method proposed by Giorgi. The analysis provided 10 key aspects of interference: 1) Communication with family and friends, 2) Decisions regarding childbearing and child-rearing, 3) Financial management, 4) Personal attire, 5) Residential choices, 6) Right to education and employment, 7) Privacy within the marriage, 8) Escalation of marital conflicts, 9) Dowry and wedding arrangements, and 10) Promotion of marital separation. These findings provided valuable insights for counselors and psychologists, enhanced the perception of family dynamics, and aided in the development of more effective intervention strategies in marital counseling. Furthermore, the study underscored the importance of considering socio-cultural factors in addressing marital conflicts.

Introduction

When people get married, the relationship quality with their spouse's family significantly affects their marriage (Cevheroğlu & Tutarel-Kışlak, 2023). Even if couples are geographically far from the original family, the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and interactive patterns of the original family can affect different aspects of their lives (Montazeri, 2022). The interference of families and the surrounding people, especially the mother-in-law, is one of the causes of marital conflicts (Goldstein, 2015). Research conducted on couples applying for divorce in Iran shows that the interference of the spouse's family is one of the most important factors predicting the dissolution of marital life (Mohsenzadeh et al, 2011). Many couples do not know the difference between support and interference; the spouse's family members think that they have the right to interfere in the life of their sister, brother, and children because they want his or her well-being. Thus, they allow themselves to offer any support, compassion, and kindness they think is appropriate and necessary. However, couples interpret this type of support as interference; they do not accept any kind of interference, even benevolent one. However, it is possible that the mother-in-law, for example, considers her behavior as a motherly role as a guide for the daughter-in-law, a supporter of her son, and a caregiver for her grandson (Dixit et al., 2022) .

On the one hand, in Iranian culture, the role of families in couples' relationships is fundamental and important (Zahrakar et al., 2022), and many interactions provide the basis for effectiveness. Due to the small number of studies conducted and the insufficiency of the qualitative phenomenological studies which examine the spouse's family interference, conducting research studies in this field is significant. Therefore, this research study examined the lived experience of women applying for divorce due to the interference of the husband's family.

Methodology

The design of the current research study was qualitative. It was implemented using the psychological descriptive phenomenology method. The participants included 10 women who had experienced interference of their husbands' families and applied for divorce in Khuzestan province in 2023. They were selected using the purposive sampling method. In addition, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The duration of the interview sessions varied between 40 and 60 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed with the consent of the participants and were analyzed using Giorgi's five-step method. With regard to reliability, four criteria of credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability were used.

Results

The data analysis led to the identification of 10 constituents in the lived experience of women who sought a divorce due to the interference of the husband's family. They included communication with the family members and friends, children and the way of raising them, expenses, clothing, place of residence, education and employment, couple's privacy, intensification of marital conflicts, dowry and marriage preparations, and encouraging the spouse to separate.

Conclusion

The participants believed that the husband's family was involved in the type and extent of the couple's relationship with the wife's family, and their pressure hurt the couple's life. The participants stated that the husband's family interfered with the number and time of having children, choosing the name of the children and the way of raising their children, which caused pressure and stress. Their family members even forced them to divorce or have a second wife (Naab et al., 2019). The interference of the spouse's family in raising children was discussed as one of the important issues that cause conflict between the family of origin and the couple (Cheraghi et al., 2015B). Moreover, the participants stated that their spouse's family interfered with their expenses, which played a major role in their decision to separate. This finding is also in line with other research studies (e.g., Hoseini Nejad, 2017) which addressed the effect of the family's interference in the financial affairs of the couples.

In addition, the women who applied for divorce complained that their husbands' families objected to their clothing following old thoughts and traditions. Moreover, the participants of this research study reported that one of the reasons why they filed for divorce was the issue that the spouse's family played the first role in determining

their place of residence. Cheraghi et al. (2015a) showed that the presence of the spouse's family in the couple's house was one of the issues that caused conflicts in the marital life.

The participants advocated that their husbands prevented them from working and continuing their education due to the pressure from their families. The influence of the spouse's family in the spouse's decisions was one of the issues that caused conflict in the marital life (Cheraghi et al., 2015a). Furthermore, women applying for divorce stated that their husband's family did not respect their privacy. The constant feeling of ownership of the families towards the children and the intense emotional conflicts between them could violate the marital boundaries of the children, caused discomfort to the bride or groom, and weakened their relationships with the spouse's family (Cheraghi et al., 2015a).

The participants stated that when marital disputes occurred, their husband's family led to the intensification of the disputes. Men who have little differentiation may involve their family in their marital issues; it causes problems between couples and disrupts their relationship with their spouse's family (Haws & Mallinckrodt, 1998). Moreover, the participants reported that they disagreed with the husband's family regarding marriage preparations, such as the purchase of dowry; in this process, the wife's family was the final decision maker. These interferences at the beginning of the marital life had great negative effects on the consistency of the marital life. The findings of this research showed that when couples faced conflicts, the interference of the husband's family aggravated the problems and made them unsolvable.

All participants were divorced. Thus, the emotional conditions of the response time were one of the limitations that could negatively affect the transfer of the experiences. Therefore, precautions should be taken. It is suggested that this research be conducted in men's population as well as other contexts to consider gender and cultural differences. It is also suggested that researchers examine the family's interference in stable marriages.

Conflict of interest

This study was a part of a master's thesis on family counseling of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, and it was carried out with the financial support of the Vice-Chancellor of Research and Technology of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz.

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