

Comparison of Anxiety, Depression and Stress and Emotional Self-Regulation in Normal and Divorced Women

¹Mohammad Reza Pirmoradi, ²Fatemeh Sadeghi Poya, ³Mana Tabatabaee Rad, ¹Fathemeh Veisy,

⁴Bahram Gheitarani, ⁴Reza Davoodi and ¹Shahrbanoo Ghahari

¹Department of Clinical Psychology, Center of Excellence in Psychiatry,
School of Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health,
Iran University of Medical Sciences (IUMS), Tehran, Iran

²Department of Psychology, Payame Noor Asalooieh University, Asalooieh, Iran

³Department of Sociology,

⁴Department of Psychology, Islamic of Azad University, Tonekaboon, Iran

Abstract: Because of stressful conditions, divorced women are vulnerable of psychiatric problems. The main purpose of this study is to compare anxiety, depression, stress and emotion self-regulation in divorced and normal women. The present study is a kind of analytical-comparative research and statistical population consists of all divorced women of Tehran referred to several counseling centers by 2015. From these women, 42 women were volunteered to participate in the study. Inclusion criterion was having divorce history for at least 2 years. The individuals were compared to 38 married women with no history of divorce in terms of anxiety, depression and stress and emotion self-regulation. All samples fulfilled depression, anxiety, stress and emotion regulation questionnaires. To compare depression, anxiety and emotion self-regulation between two groups of normal and divorced women, parametric independent t-test and Mann-Whitney nonparametric test has been applied. The data analyzed by SPSS22. Obtained results showed that there is significant difference between normal and divorced women in terms of emotion self-regulation ($p = 0.005$). However, no significant difference was observed in scores of depression, anxiety and stress in two groups. Emotion dysregulation is a severe problem in divorced women.

Key words: Depression, anxiety, stress, emotion-regulation, divorced women

INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a complicated social-mental phenomenon that can affect individuals and the family and is exactly a multifactor and multidimensional phenomenon. Destructive impacts of divorce are observable in social dimensions and are along with abundant outcomes in field of physical, emotional and mental health (Gahler, 2006). Rate of divorce varies in different countries and varies from one culture to another. The process of emergence of divorce is increasing in Iran and the increasing process has been changed into a social problem over the years (Jerskey *et al.*, 2010). Many factors play a critical role in divorce including economic, cultural, social, legal and psychological factors. Individual and psychological factors play important role in emergence of divorce.

Divorce is the effect of a severe marital conflict and end of some marriages. More than half of couples

involved in marital problems and refer to counseling centers to solve the conflicts get divorce (Otaghsara and Hasankola, 2010). Evidences have shown that today, about half of marriages end in divorce. After divorce, about 65% of women and 70% of men marry again and 50% of people with second marriage get divorce again (Young, 2007).

Divorce as a social and mental problem can result in emergence of many different issues and sometimes, it can pave the way for emergence of many other social damages in individual and social level and can endanger mental health of children of divorce and conduct them toward criminal actions (Animasahun, 2014). On the other hand, divorced women with no household are more vulnerable than other women (Mandemakers *et al.*, 2010) so that, divorced women are more exposed to mental, social and physical damages such as anxiety, depression, suicide and heart diseases than married women (Godfrin and Heeringen, 2010). Divorce can affect mental health of

Corresponding Author: Mohammad Reza Pirmoradi, Department of Clinical Psychology, Center of Excellence in Psychiatry, School of Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health, Iran University of Medical Sciences (IUMS), Tehran, Iran

individuals and pave the way for mental health problems (Beasley *et al.*, 2003). Among effects of divorce on women, one can refer to social frustration, loneliness, depression and isolation that can affect quality of life and their performance (Aluoja *et al.*, 2004).

One emotional result of divorce is depression. Depression is one of the most common mental disorders. Some studies have demonstrated that depression in divorced women is more than married women (Jang *et al.*, 2009; Turner, 2006). Scholars believe that inefficient marriage can result in depression (Heene *et al.*, 2003).

Abdul and Bifulco (2011) have demonstrated that among Muslim women, divorced mothers are more depressed than other mothers and they experience more stressful events than non-divorced mothers.

Breslau *et al.* (2011) have found that divorce is in positive correlation with psychological disorders such as specific phobia, depression and alcohol abuse.

Lorenz *et al.* (1997) have conducted a study on short-term and long-term effects of divorce on divorced women and found that divorced women show higher levels of stress and mental disorders 1 year after divorce and show higher levels of mental disorders after 1 decade (Hafarian *et al.*, 2009). Depression is the most common type of psychological disorder that is along with relapse (Gahler, 2006). Amount of prevalence of depression in singles, widows and divorced people is more than married people and in women is 2-3 times more than men (Dehghan *et al.*, 2012).

Otaghsara and Hasankola (2010) have conducted a study and found that divorced and normal women have significant difference in terms of depression so that 70% of divorced women suffered from major depression.

Divorce is a stressful phenomenon and can make divorced people vulnerable against physical and mental disorders such as depression and anxiety and stress (Farahnaz *et al.*, 2010; Hmiadi *et al.*, 2012). Stress can affect mental health through different ways and is along with psychological disorders. Moreover, stress can affect physical health and can be along with cardiovascular diseases and problems related to the endocrine and immune systems.

Experience of divorce can be considered as a threat to fundamental needs and can lead to anxiety as a natural reaction to crisis situations. In families of divorce, doubled anxiety is dominated and fear of feeling rejected, changes in living conditions, embarrassment, guilt, worrying about the next separation and persistent fear of

the unknown next problem could be resulted from anxiety (Millar, 2006). Studies have demonstrated that depression, anxiety and schizophrenic thoughts in divorced women are more than non-divorced women.

Emotion regulation refers to ability to regulate negative and positive emotions, adjusting and expressing them in healthy manner. The assumption is that inability to regulate emotions is the infrastructural mechanism of mood and anxiety disorders. Review of Fourth Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders shows that 52% of psychological disorders are resulted from defect in emotion regulation (Yazd *et al.*, 2008). In other words, problem in emotion regulation refers to a key component in mental pathology of many mental disorders such as borderline personality disorder, major depression, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety and social anxiety (Gahler, 2006).

It seems that people use positive and negative strategies of cognitive emotion regulation under stressful conditions of life and proper use of the strategies can affect their adaptability (Samani *et al.*, 2011). Management and ability of emotion regulation is one of the psychological abilities and is correlated to mental well-being. People with high ability in field of emotion regulation have higher mental health and better coping ability.

According to negative effects of divorce on individuals, especially divorced women, the present study has been conducted with the aim of comparing anxiety, depression, stress and emotion self-regulation between divorced and normal women.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is an analytical-comparative research. Statistical population consists of consists of all divorced women of Tehran referred to several counseling centers in by 2015. From these women, 42 women were volunteered to participate in the study. Inclusion criterion was having divorce history for at least 2 years. The individuals were compared to 38 married women with no history of divorce in terms of anxiety, depression and stress and emotion self-regulation. All samples fulfilled depression, anxiety, stress and emotion regulation questionnaires. To compare emotion self-regulation between two groups of normal and divorced women, parametric independent t-test was used and to compare depression, anxiety and stress between normal and divorced groups, U Mann-Whitney nonparametric test has been applied and for purpose of data analysis, SPSS22 is used.

Instrument:

Demographic questionnaire: The researcher-made questionnaire included some items including age, education level, job and economic status, number of children and history of divorce in family.

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ):

The questionnaires a 36 item instrument consisting 9 subscales including self-blame, other-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, putting into perspective, positive refocusing, positive reappraisal, acceptance and planning. Each subscale can measure a specific strategy of cognitive strategies. Each subscale includes 4 items. Items are measured on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 ((almost) never) to 5 ((almost) always). Individual subscale scores are obtained by summing up the scores belonging to the particular subscale (ranging from 4-20). The higher the subscale score, the more a specific cognitive strategy is used.

In regard with measurement of test's psychometric information, Garnefski and coauthors have reported reliability of the test respectively to 91.0, 87.0 and 93.0 using Cronbach alpha.

In study of Besharat, psychometric specifications of this form including the internal consistency, test-retest reliability, content validity, convergent validity and discriminate have been reported in desirable level. Moreover, Besharat (2009) has reported cronbach alpha coefficients for the subscales from 67-89% in a sample of general population (n = 368; 197 women and 171 men). Correlation coefficients between scores of some participants in the study (43 women and 36 men) have been estimated from r = 57-76% in two times with interval of 2-4 weeks for subscales of the questionnaire.

Obtained results from study of Hosseini *et al.* (2010) have also showed that 9 subscales of Persian version of the questionnaire have shown good internal consistency and range of cronbach alpha was obtained from 76-92%. Values of items and total values of adjusted and unadjusted subscales were correlated significantly (r = 46-75%) and correlation coefficient value of retest (51-77%) showed stability of scales.

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Acale (DASS-21):

The DASS 21 is a 21 item self-report questionnaire designed to measure the severity of a range of symptoms common to both Depression and Anxiety. In completing the DASS, the individual is required to indicate the presence of a symptom over the previous week. Each item is scored from 0(did not apply to me at all over the last week) to 3 (applied to me very much or most of the time over the past week). This form is validated by Sahebi for Iranian Population.

Levyband and Levyband have worked on a 717-member sample of students and has estimated the

correlation in clinical samples using Beck's depression inventory with DASS scale (r = 4%). Crawford and Henry have also studied a 1771-member sample in England and have compared this instrument with two other instruments related to depression and anxiety and reported reliability of this questionnaire with cronbach alpha to 95% for depression, to 90% for anxiety and to 93% for stress and has reported total value of 97%. In Iran, the cronbach alpha is reported to 94% for depression, to 92% for anxiety and to 82% for stress by Moradi Panah.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic information of divorced and normal women is presented in Table 1. Mean age range of the sample is equal to 41.73 with standard deviation of 65.9. Out of 80 sample individuals, 42 women had experience of divorce (N1= 42) and 38 women had no experience of divorce (N2 = 38).

In order to test normality of data distribution in studied sample, first Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used and the results of this test showed that obtained scores for CERQ have had normal distribution although, total score of DASS and each subscale have not shown normal distribution. Therefore, to compare cognitive emotion regulation between two groups of divorced and normal women, parametric independent t-test is used and to compare depression, stress and anxiety between the two groups, U-Mann Whitney nonparametric test is used.

Evaluation of obtained results show in Table 2 shows that mean differences and standard deviation of both normal and divorced groups in terms of total value of cognitive emotion regulation is obtained to 6.58±2.28.

Table 1: Demographic information

Variables	Number	Percent
Education		
PhD	2	5.2
MA	13	35.8
BA	31	3.7
Post-diploma	3	38.3
Diploma	29	16
Below diploma	2	5.2
Not reported	1	2.1
Job		
Housewife	40	49.4
Employed	37	46.9
Not reported	3	3.7
History of divorce in family		
Have	17	21
Have not	52	64.2
Not reported	11	13.6

Table 2: Summary of obtained results from independent t-test and differential values for cognitive emotion regulation in divorced and normal women

Variables	SD±Mean	t-value	p-values
Cognitive emotion regulation	6.58±2.28	2.88	0.005

Table 3: U-Mann Whitney test to compare depression, anxiety and stress in normal and divorced women

Variables	SD±mean	U	p-values
Total value	19.06±13.49	688	0.29
Depression	6.03±5.04	727	0.49
Anxiety	5.09±4.35	690	0.29
Stress	7.92±4.98	660	0.18

Independent t-test (2.88) has also shown that the difference between two groups is significant statistically in alpha level of 0.01. Hence, it could be mentioned in probability level of 0.99 that there is significant difference between normal and divorced women in terms of cognitive emotion regulation ($p = 0.005$).

Assessment of obtained results from U-Mann Whitney test ($U = 688$) and mean value and sd of 19.06 ± 13.49 showed that the difference between the two groups is not significant statistically and in sig level of 0.05 with confidence level of 95%, H_0 is confirmed and H_1 based on different values of depression, anxiety and stress between two studied groups is rejected ($p = 0.29$). Therefore, there is no significant difference between normal and divorced women in terms of depression, anxiety, stress and total value of depression, anxiety and stress (Table 3).

$p = 0/29, N_2 = 38, N_1 = 42, U = 688$

$p_1 = 0/49, N_2 = 38, N_1 = 42, U = 727$

$p_2 = 0/29, N_2 = 38, N_1 = 42, U = 690$

$p_3 = 0/18, N_2 = 38, N_1 = 42, U = 660$

- H_1 : There is significant difference between divorced and normal women in terms of emotion regulation

Obtained results in Table 2 showed that there is significant difference between normal and divorced women in terms of emotion regulation. Hence, H_0 is rejected and alternative Hypothesis (H_1) is confirmed. In short, it could be mentioned that divorced women face problems in regard with emotion regulation compared to normal women and this result has been in consistence with findings of Abdi, Ghasempoor and Jafari Nadoshan. Obtained results show that emotion in improper style and in unadjusted context can lead to mental damage and affect life of people for long time. Werner and Gross and studies of Aldeo and colleagues have shown that Rumination, suppression, prevention of problem-solving as inefficient strategies of cognitive emotion regulation can have most effect among other dimensions of emotion regulation on mental disorders. Moreover, the studies have shown that depression and anxiety disorders are significantly correlated to inefficient cognitive emotion regulation (Khanzadeh *et al.*, 2012).

- H_2 : There is significant difference between divorced and normal women in terms of anxiety, stress and depression

Obtained results from U-Mann Whitney (Table 3) showed that there is no significant difference between two groups in terms of depression, stress and anxiety and the result has been in consistence with findings of Vakili *et al.* (2010) and Dahlen and Janson (2003) although, the results have not been in consistence with findings of Khan Mohammadi and Yaghoobi. They have conducted a study on divorced and normal women and have found that there was significant difference between them in terms of depression so that 70% of divorced women suffered from major depression.

In regard with explaining the above mentioned results, it could be mentioned that although divorce is mostly a mourn process that can affect mental health and mental security, it can also have some negative consequences such as lack of suitable social position, financial problems and lack of social support network such as married friends that can lead to depression and other mental disorders after divorce (Kordtemini, 2011). However, having good personal relationships network, having academic education, having job and desirable economic position having ability good coping mechanism (KHosravi *et al.*, 2014) having child and hope for future can affect reduction of depression in divorced women (Zehtab and Salemi, 2012).

Assessment of demographic information in Table 1 showed that 88.6% individuals had academic education; 46.6% were employed and mean age range of the individuals has been equal to 41.73 that can be the most effective factors in reduction of depression, anxiety and stress. Some similar studies have also shown that the more the factors such as Lack of guilt and rejection, positive self-evaluation, the confidence and the ability to control their own and the environment, the favorable economic situation, the desire to divorce and other factors are existed in individuals, the less depression and anxiety they would have against the problems (Yazd *et al.*, 2008).

Evaluation of obtained results in Table 3 showed that there is no significant difference between divorced and normal women in terms of anxiety and stress and the result has not been in consistence with findings of Lorenz *et al.* (1997), Popoola and Ilugbo (2010) and Jong-Meyer *et al.* (2009). These results have demonstrated that divorced women experience higher levels of stressful events compared to normal women. However, as studied samples were educated, it could be found that they were under effect of results of divorce less than others.

CONCLUSION

To discriminate the mentioned results, it could be mentioned that change in cultural attitude to divorce at the societies, preparation for divorce in new generation,

having children, advanced age range, high quality of life, cultural and personality factors having job and income, education and other factors are factors that can reduce depression, stress and anxiety resulted from divorce. On the other hand, cognitive self-regulation can be result of divorce and inability in field of self-regulation can lead to stress and marital conflicts and finally, divorce.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Researchers would like to appreciate all respected people helped us to fulfill the project.

REFERENCES

- Abdul, K.N. and A. Bifulco, 2011. Vulnerability life events and depression amongst Moslem Malaysian women: Comparing those married and those divorced or separated. *Soci. Psychiatry Psychiatric Epidemiol.*, 46: 853-862.
- Aluoja, A., M. Leinsalu, J. Shlik, V. Vasar and K. Luuk, 2004. Symptoms of depression in the Estonian population: Prevalence, socio demographic correlates and social adjustment. *J. affective disorders*, 78: 27-35.
- Animasahun, R.A., 2014. Marital conflict divorce and single parenthood as predictors of adolescent's antisocial behavior in Ibadan. *Br. J. Educ. Soc. Behav. Sci.*, 4: 592-602.
- Beasley, M., T. Thompson and J. Davidson, 2003. Resilience in response to life stress: The effects of coping style and cognitive hardiness. *Person. Ind. Diff.*, 34: 77-95.
- Breslau, J., E. Miller, R. Jin, N.A. Sampson and J. Alonso *et al.*, 2011. A multinational study of mental disorders, marriage and divorce. *Acta Psychiatrica Scand.*, 124: 474-486.
- Dahlen, I. and C. Janson, 2002. Anxiety and depression are related to the outcome of emergency treatment in patients with obstructive pulmonary disease. *Chest J.*, 122: 1633-1637.
- Dehghan, A., L. Ghavami, F. Ghahramani, M.R. Bazrafshan and S. Namavar, 2012. Prevalence of depression and its relation with their performance in Larestan rural health workers in 2010. *J. Rafsanjan Univ. Med. Sci.*, 11: 79-84.
- Farahnaz, B., M. Sudani and Z.M. Mehrabi, 2010. Examining the effectiveness of Gestalt therapy on self-esteem, depression and loneliness, depressed divorced women. *Women Psychol. Soc. Stud.*, 8: 129-145.
- Gahler, M., 2006. To divorce is to die a bit: A longitudinal study of marital disrupt and psychological distress among Swedish women and men. *J. Counseling Therapy Couples Families*, 14: 372-82.
- Godfrin, K.A. and C. van Heeringen, 2010. The effects of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy on recurrence of depressive episodes, mental health and quality of life: A randomized controlled study. *Behav. Res. Therapy*, 48: 738-746.
- Gratz, K.L. and L. Roemer, 2004. Multidimensional assessment of emotion regulation and dysregulation: Development, factor structure and initial validation of the difficulties in emotion regulation scale. *J. Psychopathol. Behav. Assess.*, 26: 41-54.
- Hafarian, L, A. Aghayi, M.B. Kajbaf and M. Kamkar, 2009. Comparing quality of life (its dimensions) in divorced and non-divorced women in the city of Shiraz and its relationship with demographic characteristics. *Knowl. Res. J. Appl. Psychol. Islamic Azad Univ. Khou拉斯gan*, 41: 64-86.
- Heene, E., A. Buysse and P. Oost, 2003. A categorical and dimensional perspective on depression within a nonclinical sample of couples. *Family Process*, 42: 133-149.
- Hmiadi, N., K. Bashildeh, M. Eydebaygi and Z. Dehghanizadeh, 2012. The effectiveness of religion orientation of CBT psychotherapy on depression's widow. *J. Counseling Family Psychotherapy*, 1: 54-64.
- Hosseini, F., A. Pakize and Z. Salari, 2014. The role of early maladaptive schemas and difficulties in emotion regulation in students' anxiety. *J. Behav. Sci.*, 7: 297-305.
- Jang, S.N., I. Kawachi, J. Chang, K. Boo and H.G. Shin *et al.*, 2009. Marital status, gender and depression: Analysis of the baseline survey of the Korean Longitudinal Study of Ageing (KLoSA). *Soc. Sci. Med.*, 69: 1608-1615.
- Jerskey, B.A., M.S. Panizzon, K.C. Jacobson, M.C. Neale and M.D. Grant *et al.*, 2010. Marriage and divorce: A genetic perspective. *Personality Individual Differences*, 49: 473-478.
- Jong-Meyer, R., B. Beck and K. Riede, 2009. Relationships between rumination, worry, intolerance of uncertainty and metacognitive beliefs. *Personality Individual Differences*, 46: 547-551.
- Khanzadeh, M., M. Saeediyan, M. Hosseinchari and F. Edrissi, 2012. Factor structure and psychometric properties of difficulties in emotional regulation scale. *Int. J. Behav. Sci.*, 6: 87-96.
- Khosravi, M., P. Sabahi and A. Nazeri, 2014. Effectiveness of communication skills training in reducing loneliness and depression divorced women. *Bimonthly Sci. Res. J. Daneshvar Pezeshki, Shahed Univ.*, 112: 1-11.

- Kordtemini, B., 2011. The role of marriage in health of shahed,s family in Tehran and Sistanbalochstan. Master Thesis, Psychology Faculty, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. pp: 54-73.
- Lorenz, F.O., R.L. Simons, R.D. Conger, G.H.Jr. Elder and C. Johnson *et al.*, 1997. Married and recently divorced mothers' stressful events and distress: Tracing change across time. *J. Marriage Family*, 59: 219-232.
- Mandemakers, J.J., C.W. Monden and M. Kalmijn, 2010. Are the effects of divorce on psychological distress modified by family background?. *Adv. Life Course Res.*, 15: 27-40.
- Millar, P., 2006. Anxiety in children of divorce. *Whitman J. Psychol.*, 10: 36-39.
- Otaghsara, A.K. and G.Y. Hasankola, 2010. P01-51-Depressed mood in divorced and undivorced women. *Eur. Psychiatry*, 25: 1-271.
- Popoola, B.I. and E.A. Ilugbo, 2010. Personality traits as predictors of stress among female teachers in Osun State Teaching Service. *Edo J. Counselling*, 3: 173-188.
- Samani, S., S.N. Sohrabi and S.S. Mansori, 2011. Mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation for parenting style and emotional disturbances. *J. Psychol. Methods Models*, 1: 120-131.
- Turner, H.A., 2006. Stress social resources and depression among never-married and divorced rural mothers. *Rural Sociol.*, 71: 479-504.
- Vakili, M., E.S.H. Farsani, S.M.H. Hossein and T.M.H. Dehghani, 2010. Prevalence of depression and its related factors among truck drivers in Yazd Province-2008. *Iran Occup. Health*, 6: 69-76.
- Yazd, K.H., N. Mansori, Z.A. Mohammadi and A.Z. Ahmad, 2008. The relation of inclination and guilt feeling of divorce on stress, depression and anxiety of those are to divorce in Esfahan and Arak. *J. Family Res.*, 4: 263-275.
- Young, J.E., 2007. Early Maladaptive Schemas in Chronic Depression. In: *Chronic Depression*, Riso, L.P. (Ed.). Guilford Press, New York, pp: 41-58.
- Zehtab, N.A. and S. Salemi, 2012. The effectiveness of life skills training on anxiety of divorced women. *J. Women Culture Al-Zahra Univ.*, 13: 85-93.